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Boycotting Chick-fil-A: A tale of Religion, Politics and Consumption

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Buycotting Chick-fil-A: A tale of religion, politics and consumption

by

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Boycotting Chick-fil-A: A tale of religion, politics and consumption

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has been approved for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

In the summer of 2012, the Chick-fil-A controversy took over the media. At its center was an article featuring Dan Cathy, COO of Chick-fil-A and accusations of homophobia. This controversy broadened to include activist on both sides and incorporate a wide range of activist tools. Through a case study of this controversy, a few items are made obvious. The most prominent is that boycotting is no longer likely to be a successful mode of activism. Rather buycotting, using purchasing power to reward companies, is likely to become the dominate mode of activism moving forward. More broadly, in this thesis I develop that consumerism is a space for identity building and interaction in our society. I intend that consumption generates a space for negotiation of meaning and values within a consumer society. This is a space through which consumers can make reflective choices about companies and actions that they support or oppose. Within this case, there were clear instances of both individual and communal identity construction and narrative building, as well as negotiation between political and religious narratives. Consumer action allowed people to express their support or disdain for Chick-fil-A's stance on same-sex marriage. This has highlighted the fact that economic action is integral to activism within a consumer society.

Hannon, Victoria Leigh

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Thesis directed by Professor Nabil Echchaibi

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Introduction

In the summer of 2012, a controversy, which combined a hot button political issue, religion, personal freedom and consumerism, overtook the media. At the epicenter of this media storm was Dan Cathy, COO of Chick-fil-A, and an interview that he gave to the *Biblical Recorder*, a North Carolina Baptist newspaper. (These events will be examined more in-depth in chapter two.) This event points to the comingling of social spheres thought to be entirely discrete within classical idealizations of modernity, that is politics, religion and consumption, and it says something about the moment in which it happened. Modern media, and political and social circumstances enabled this event and it likely would have developed differently, or not at all, if any one of the spheres had been different.

In this thesis I will develop the idea that through consumer activity individuals negotiate and express deeply held religious and political beliefs. In particular, I intend that consumption is a generative space in which individuals can express religious belief within modernity. This will be achieved through a case study of the Chick-fil-A controversy, looking at media coverage and the use of social media. I will, in particular, focus on Facebook, as it provides a space for expressing individual ideas and reactions rather than replicating institutional ones. Within this context, I am interested in action and expression more than in belief, as I cannot say anything about people that did not take some form of action. The primary mode of negotiation evident within this case study is buycotting. Buycotting is essentially the inverse of boycotting, where individuals increase the consumption of goods which represent something that they agree with rather than decreasing consumption of a good that they disagree with.

I am approaching this thesis with a few assumptions. The first is that religion takes place outside of the boundaries marked by religious traditions. Beyond the broader implications of

religious identity, religion inhabits a special place within the United States. According to the 2012 survey from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 79% of adult Americans self-identify as religiously affiliated, with 73% identifying as Christian. (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012) The non-religious have been on a slow, but steady rise since the 1970s, however the majority still identifies as Christian. However, a little under half, 44% of respondents in 2007, stated that they had switched the religious affiliation that they had grown up with. (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008) This points to a vibrant and active religious marketplace that is in constant motion.

This religious marketplace is fluid, allowing for change and movement. Additionally, there is a great deal of individualization present within the market, with individuals shopping around and selecting values and practices that resonate with them and then creating hybridized religious experiences. It is, therefore, necessary we accept that, within our society, it is impossible to confine religion to traditional functions or institutions. We must also allow for the fact that religious meaning can be extracted from non-religious sources. By this, I mean that non-religious sources, such as fictional works or secular philosophy, may be a source from which someone finds meaning. More importantly for this work is that fluid religiosity then influences actions outside of the purely religious.

The second assumption is that for at least a portion of consumers, consumption is mediated through religious belief and values. This is supported by a 2011 telephone survey which found that over thirty percent of American consumers would be more likely to support a "company that manages its business according to Christian principles" and/or that "embraces and promotes the Christian faith" (Barna Group, 2011). (This harkens to boycotting, as consumers would buy from "Christian" companies rather than not buy from "secular" ones.) It is important

to note that, within American public space, the spheres of religion, politics and consumption are not, and have never been, entirely separate. Religion is integral to identity building, an idea that will be explored in more depth in chapter three, and is therefore implicated in all human activity. As a pillar of personal identity, religion continues to operate as a core driver of cultural production, even within a seemingly secular society. Through lived religion, we can see religious consumption as being in continuity with the past, rather than seeing this consumption as something new, as something created out of the industrial revolution.

Rather than arguing that this event represents something entirely new, I would like to position this as a power shift in existent phenomenon. That is to say that people made religiously and politically informed purchasing decisions in the past. However, in this case we see a prevalence of buycotting and a dearth of boycotting action, which I posit is the direction in which activism is moving. Previously boycotting was the favored tool of an activist, and on several occasions has successfully been implemented to penalize companies whose actions ran counter to the desires of a group of people. However, this case highlights an ongoing shift from boycotting to buycotting, from penalizing to rewarding. This case represents the first large scale buycott to receive national attention and draws additional attention to the cases which have been going on for years in a more defused fashion, movements such as those in support of hybrid cars and organic foods. I will argue, ultimately, that this mode of activism can be both more accessible for people and more successful within modern society than boycotting could be. On a practical level, these two modes would appear functionally equivalent; that is to say, at the core of both boycotting and buycotting is the concept that buying from one company over another in support of their ideology is a valid mode of effecting change. However, the key differences,

which present a pivotal nuance, is the intent of the consumer and the available options. This will be explored more fully within the body of this work.

Moving forward, it is important to note that the focus will be on Christian evangelicals within an American context, while the general form of interaction between consumption, politics and religion should be similar regardless of context, the specifics of this case are embedded in American religiosity.

Rise and Negotiation of Consumer Culture

Consumption plays a central role in the events of the Chick-fil-A controversy. It began for most people through media consumption and concluded with a decision to either increase or decrease consumption of Chick-fil-A. People's experiences of these events were mediated through consumption of the media. It is therefore necessary to understand this through the lens of consumer culture.

Let's begin with a few definitions.

For the purpose of this work, consumption will simply be the act of consuming a good. I have attempted to use this term in a neutral form, independent of the negative connotations connected to it by critics of consumer culture. This is done to move towards a discourse that allows for consumption to be a mode, and the dominant one, through which people interact with the larger society. By defining the item of consumption as a good, rather than specifying what is being consumed, it is my intent to leave it open to both material and immaterial goods. Nestor Garcia Canclini takes this a step further:

Consumption is the ensemble of sociocultural processes in which the appropriation and use of products takes place. This characterization leads us to

understand our acts of consumption as something that goes beyond individual attitudes explored in market survey" (Canclini, 2001, p. 38).

Mass consumption creates consumer culture, that is the culture in which consumers are created and shaped through the activities of cultural engineers, such as marketing firms and media. These entities influence the tastes and desires of consumers through creation and maintenance of cultural and brand narratives. These narratives are not the totality through which individuals understand commodities, or their own position, but they do orient consumers and provide unified frameworks that consumers can draw from (Holt, 2002).

Embedding meaning into commodities, those both material and immaterial, creates these unified frameworks. Commodification, which strips products of inherent meaning and allows an alternative meaning to be attached, is enabled through the process of embedding meaning. This turns them into commodities. Classically, commodities are products intended for trade within a market, particularly a capitalist market. Using Carl Marx as a starting point, commodities can be understood as the products of commodified labor. That is, products that are isolated from the labor that went into their creation through the fog of the market (Jackson, 1999). Deprived of inherent meaning, external meaning can be connected to these products. Within a consumer society, advertisers often direct the reattachment of meaning, though, as we will see, it is a negotiated reattachment that can be hijacked by consumers.

Consumer culture is often credited with getting its start in the industrial revolution, when parity products made wide spread consumption possible. It must be noted that consumer desire predates the industrial revolution. However, prior to the industrial revolution, that desire was forced to go unfulfilled due to a lack of product availability and prohibitive cost. The industrial revolution also marked the advent of the newspaper as the first truly mass media, which, in hand

with parity products, led to the creation of advertising as something resembling that which we know today (Tungate, 2007). The introduction of advertising on a large scale was necessary as products that could have previously derived value through superior craftsmanship or availability became identical and equally obtainable. Advertising provided differentiation and reattachment of meaning for goods that had been commodified. Commodification affects both material and cultural goods, making them free-floating signifiers. This separates goods from the context in which they were created, allowing individuals to apply meaning and value as they see fit (Miller, 2009).

Industrialization also led to several structural changes, including urbanization, transition of the home from a center of production to one of consumption and increased dependence on wages.¹ These structural changes, in turn, can be credited with the creation of consumers, though they are not responsible for the desires that produce consumers. The desire for things, and the willingness to base an identity on what one has, is endemic to humanity; industrialization simply gave people the ability to act on their desires.

Large-scale consequences came with industrialization, though these are presented as more or less importantly by different thinkers.² One of the consequences put forward is consumer dissatisfaction. The argument for this is that a hallmark of consumer culture is always being unhappy with what you have, wanting something more, something newer, something else. For the most part, it is not believed to be greed that drives this dissatisfaction, not that consumers want to have everything, but that the value resides in the act of buying, not the act of having. Once an individual owns something, they need to buy more to continue to achieve meaning. "What really characterizes consumer culture is not attachment to things but detachment.

¹ These points are expanded on in Vincent Miller's *Consuming Religion* (2009, Continuum)

² Most of these consequences, such as the environmental ones, fall outside of the purview of this work.

People do not hoard money, they spend it. People do not cling to things; they discard them and buy other things" (Cavanaugh, 2008, p. 34). Here things are collected not out of greed for stuff, but out of a desire for meaning. Through commodification, meaning is stripped, and through branding, it is re-attached. However, within this argument, it is a false reattachment, which is predicated not on inherent value, but on idea construction. Once the commodity has been bought, meaning once again disappears, forcing consumers to continue their search for meaning (Cavanaugh, 2008).

Counter to this claim of false meaning, and ultimately to claims of consumer dissatisfaction, some research has suggested that consumers take an active part in shaping the meaning of the goods that they consume (Jackson, 1999). This research refutes the role of people as simple receivers for goods. Rather, it positions reception as a complex negotiation between received meaning and local (and individual) circumstance. "[T]he significance that is attached to specific commodities differs markedly from one place to another according to their contexts of production and consumption" (Jackson, 1999, p. 104). The meaning that I derive from an item is likely markedly different than the meaning that someone else of a different background or life stage would derive.

This puts into question a large part of the narrative surrounding commodification. If individuals actively negotiate meaning, it necessarily follows that all meaning is not received. Rather, consumers have multiple meanings available and select or create their own. This would indicate that meaning is not intrinsically tied to goods, but rather predicated on our relationship to goods. If meaning is based on relationships, then it would not follow that goods lose all meaning once we own them. For instance, I have both a working and a leisure relationship with

my computer and it holds great importance within my life. Because of this I have no need to obtain the meaning which is somehow connected with another computer.

Mediation as negotiative practice

As briefly touched on previously, I am starting with the assumption that religion exists outside the bounds of traditional hierarchies. Taking this a step further, I believe that the only time that religion matters is when it is in action - that is, when it is being negotiated by practitioners. This centering of religion on the practice of individuals and how they negotiate religion in daily life has become known, theoretically, as lived religion. This is based on an understanding that individuals negotiate practice within their culture and circumstance, rather than practice being an unadulterated representation of what religious authorities say it should be. This is positioned as a counter to popular religion, which has "come to signify the space that emerged between official or learned Christianity and profane (or 'pagan') culture." (Hall D. , 1997, p. viii) Much like popular religion, the concept of lived religion attributes autonomy to the laity, but lived religion lacks the dichotomy that inevitably arises in discussion of popular religion between high and low or institutional and folk. Rather it focuses on practice as inhabiting a space between institutional regulation and resistance, as something fluid that depends on individuals. (Hall D. , 1997) Because this places practice at the center, I believe it will neatly side step any issues of authenticity, as there is no "pure" religion to point to as authentic. This focus on practice, on individual action, leads to a focus on negotiation, on mediation.

This understanding of religion as mediated has been reflected and expanded upon in media studies. "[T]o understand [religion's] role in social and cultural life, we must understand it as expressed, practiced, and experienced" (Hoover, 2002, p. 27). Along with this understanding

of religion as something situated within a cultural context, the culturalist movement notes a changing understanding of religion to be broader and more inclusive, to operate outside of traditional institutional frameworks. Within this culturalist approach, descriptions of reality are seen as constructed through mediation, bringing with them individual interpretations of reality rather than some objective truth. Media, rather than perpetuating the transmission model, represents the location where "construction, negotiation and reconstruction of cultural meaning takes place in an ongoing process of maintenance and change of cultural structures, relationships, meanings and values" (Horsfield, *Media*, 2007, p. 112). This leads towards an understanding that media act as "'mediators' that shape and effect the content which they transmit, rather than merely acting as tools of transmission or 'intermediaries'" (Meyer, *Mediation and immediacy: sensational forms, semiotic ideologies and questions of the medium*, 2011, p. 28). That is not to say that movement through a medium represents the totality of mediation, rather the medium is a space in which meaning can be created and negotiated. This positions the media as coconstitutive of meaning, as meaning is derived through mediation.³

Modes of mediation are not universal but, like the case of lived religion, situated within a cultural context. In *A Mediated Religion*, Horsfield and Teusner select the medium of print and highlight how mediation creates different expressions of Christianity. "Every expression of Christianity, every experience of spirituality, every Christian idea, is a mediated phenomenon. It is mediated in its generation, in its construction and in its dissemination" (p. 279). Through mediation, Christianity is imparted with particular aspects and logics that are embedded in the medium. "[I]t nuances that contest with other mediations of the same faith (though deciding which different mediations are the 'same' faith or a different faith is in itself a political exercise)"

³ This understanding of mediation is in line with James Carey's ritual model, which both Meyer and Horsfield draw from.

(p. 279). As with lived religion, a theological or abstract, or authorized, interpretation is rejected in favor of one in which Christianity is seen as a creation of negotiation between spirituality and life demands, constraints and context, both from which it arose and that in which it is being embodied at any given moment. "These different contexts result in immense diversity and difference, even within a singular religion such as Christianity, a diversity that at times includes self-contradictions that can never be fully integrated without dishonestly denying the reality of difference" (2007, p. 280).

Media, in Horsfield and Teusner's view, represent just one factor that shapes culture and the addition of more or new media incorporates rather than replacing what came before. Therefore, within this project I will not be looking at dualities such as new media against traditional media, as they are equally embedded in daily life. Rather, my focus will be on meaning making for different groups. The experience online must be studied as an embedded facet of life rather than looking at it as something separate, belonging to its own box. As noted by Heidi Campbell, changes offline have mirrored those percolated through the Internet. "Online technology use and choices cannot be easily disembedded from offline context." (Campbell, 2012, p. 65) I would take this a step further to state that for a portion of Americans, separating the use of new media from daily life experience would be impossible. However, an understanding must be cultivated that takes the idea of "media" beyond the technologies of traditional or new media, replacing it with an understanding of media as all things that behave as mediators.⁴ Within this framework, media should be understood as "sites where construction, negotiation and reconstruction of cultural meaning takes place in an ongoing process of

⁴ Given our work with third spaces, it is inevitable that I will consider this in terms of spaces. The idea which I would like to embrace is that mediation generates a social and cognitive space in which individuals and groups can negotiate meaning. (Carey, 1992)

maintenance and change of cultural structures, relationships, meanings and values." (Horsfield, Media, 2007, p. 113)

Chapter outline

Moving forward, I will use the Chick-fil-A controversy to establish consumption as a space for mediation of religious and political belief within modern society. To do this, in chapter one, I will first establish the context that gave rise to the controversy. I will start by exploring the development of Chick-fil-A, then move to the political context in which this controversy took place. This chapter will finish with a look at the media context.

In chapter two I will document the genealogy of the controversy, giving a narrative of events and highlighting media activity. Very little, if any, analysis will take place within the body of the case study. Rather, I will simply present the case, first with an overview of events and then with a look at how the news media fit in and then of the social media use. (A simple timeline can be found in Appendix A.) I will close out the chapter with some initial reflections.

In chapter three, I will look at the connection between consumerism and identity creation, on both an individual and communal level. Within this chapter, I will develop the issue of identity; first, I will provide an exploration of how individual identity is formed and the role that consumption plays in that formation. Then, I will turn towards communal identity. To finish off this chapter, I will focus on applying this to the specifics of the Chick-fil-A case study. This chapter, along with the following one, constitute the main body of my analysis.

In chapter four, I will look at consumption as a tool of activism. This will first be achieved by looking at the relationship between religion and politics and then at the connection

between activism and consumption. As I will show, this activism takes place in a consumer frame. From there, I will move to political consumerism, and virtual solidarity.

In the final chapter, I will tie all of this together to show that consumerism, while not always consciously motivated by an activist inclination, can be. I will also argue for the ongoing emergence of new tactics of activism focused on buycotting rather than more traditional modes of activism. These new tactics have operated under the radar for several years, but the Chick-fil-A Controversy has brought them to public attention.

Chapter 1: Context

Chick-fil-A through the years

Chick-fil-A started as a chicken sandwich at the Dwarf Grill, Truett Cathy's first restaurant, which he opened with his brother in 1946. The sandwich sold better than any of the other entrees, but it was more time consuming to prepare and cost more. That changed in the early 1960s when a new pressure fryer, the "Henny Penny," came onto the market, allowing chicken to be cooked much faster. Additionally, Cathy developed a contract with Goode Brothers Poultry to buy the chicken pieces that were too large to be sold to airlines (Grem, 2011). In 1967, the first Chick-fil-A opened in the food court of Greenbriar Mall, in Atlanta.

Throughout the next three decades, Chick-fil-A expanded as a chain, focusing on an all-mall model of expansion. The opening of Chick-fil-A coincided with the advent of the mall as the center of American capitalism. With the end of segregation, many businesses elected to abandon urban centers in favor of relocation to the suburbs, where economic standing and car ownership could determine access (Grem, 2011). This helped to encourage the growth of suburban areas. Chick-fil-A was one of the first fast food restaurants to operate out of shopping malls, allowing shoppers access to cheap fast food while shopping. This in turn lengthened the time that shoppers could, and would, spend at the mall.

In the 1970s and '80s, closing on Sunday became "a corporate creed intended to mark Chick-fil-A as an upstanding corporate citizen and teach valuable lessons to a nation that Cathy deemed to be in need of entrepreneurial revival and moral renewal" (Grem, 2011, p. 298). Before this they were still closed on Sunday, but so was everyone else. This incorporation of closing was made in response to a cultural shift that allowed for stores to be open on Sunday, either through

normalizing it as a behavior or removing laws to the contrary. "Restrictions were used to protect employees, small businesses, family values and religious norms. However, longer working hours, the entry of more women to the labour market and changes in consumption habits, on the one hand, and competition between entrepreneurs, on the other hand, created demands to extend the hours of retail activity, including the weekends" (Shamir & Ben-Porat, 2007, p. 79). The opening of commercial business on Sunday was problematic for Cathy, and he took a stance against it, despite the fact that it presented a high sales cost, as Sunday was the busiest day of the week. His stance was vindicated, as Chick-fil-A continued to perform as well, or better, than their competition that was open seven days a week. This was held up as proof that they were doing God's will, Cathy stating that it was a "self-evident formula God has given us for success" (Grem, 2011, p. 299).

In the 1990s, Chick-fil-A made a move away from their mall-only model towards opening stand-alone stores or stores in strip malls. Concurrent with this, they started a campaign for community support, since they would no longer have a ready supply of potential customers provided through association. Like its fast food competitors, much of this campaign targeted local schools. However, Cathy also started the "Core Essentials" program, a program designed to "give teachers and parents the necessary tools to educate elementary-age children about character and values." As a reward for success in the program, Chick-fil-A provided coupons for free kids meals. Another part of this campaign was the creation of family friendly environments, which included both food and family entertainment. "We believe a positive experience will lead these children to become lifelong customers of Chick-fil-A" (Grem, 2011, p. 305).

The company's Christian identity helped to develop community support and to set them apart from their competition. Christian families and local churches liked that Chick-fil-A closed

on Sundays.⁵ As already shown, Chick-fil-A was active in local communities, with stores responsible for being active with churches and schools in their area. In hiring, Chick-fil-A has traditionally favored workers with "different backgrounds"; roughly ten percent of employees are home schooled and the company prefers to target high achievers who intend to go to college as employees. This has led to a relatively stable work force, with between twenty and one hundred percent turnover annually, in an industry that averages 300%.

Turning toward corporate policy, since its founding, Chick-fil-A has been a Christian company, though most of the explicit integration of Christian values came during the 1970s and '80s. "[A]s Chick-fil-A expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, various corporate politics, rituals and initiatives revealed Cathy's endeavor to make his company a Christian company and, by extension, an active participant in defining and defending relatively conservative stances on work, faith, and family" (Grem, 2011, p. 298). As with closing on Sunday, the non-implementation before that seems to be more because it was not necessary to put it into policy - either because the company was too small or because Christianity was de facto. "Chick-fil-A actively drew its corporate policies from this religious perspective, it openly courted the support of Christian churches, and it regularly supported Christian events. Chick-fil-A also allowed room for activities like morning devotionals and prayer meetings, often led by executives or local operators" (Grem, 2011, p. 307).

Religion and Politics in America

The most popular anecdote about the relationship between religion and politics within the US is the story of President John F. Kennedy, who had to make express statements that his

⁵ This was commented on in several Facebook comments, with people noting that it provided opportunities for families to explain to their children why Sunday was special.

loyalty to the Catholic Church would not make the US beholden to the Vatican if he was elected. As of late, the trend has been to point to President Barak Obama, who got elected and re-elected under belief that he might be a closet Muslim or a black Christian radical, and Mitt Romney, whose Mormon faith may have affected his performance in both the 2008 and 2012 elections. (Gonzalez, 2012) However, the relationship between religion and politics goes much deeper than presidential elections. Religion has always been tied up with government: what is an acceptable form and role of government, what is and is not proper behavior for the governed. Since its inception, Christianity has been involved in debates establishing civil authority as valid or invalid.

Within Christianity, there has always been an impetus for political action. Some have seen the New Testament itself as a call for revolution. Others point to St. Augustine's idea that good Christians participate in civic activities. Within an American frame, the narrative is that pilgrims left England in search of religious freedom, engraining at the core of American values the idea that good Christians do not put up with tyranny. Throughout our history, this idea has been reified, as Christianity and Christian communities played a major part in one social movement after another: abolition, temperance, civil rights. It should be noted that progressive Christians spearheaded a large number of these movements.

Despite all of that, growing secularism and the events of the 1960s and '70s led to a resurgence of conservatism, led by the Christian right and the Moral Majority. "[T]hough many people were unprepared for the contemporary conservative resurgence, it was predictable to anyone who had observed with real curiosity, rather than ironic condescension, what conservative religious women were doing" (Kintz, 1997, p. 2). Founded in 1979 by Jerry Falwell, a Southern Baptist televangelist, and Paul Weyrich, a Catholic, the Moral Majority was

oriented towards political action, with the express desire to get conservatives involved on issues they felt were important. The narrative demanding action, as with many conservative organizations before and since, was one of a nation in decline, a nation in need of moral restoration (Gonzalez, 2012). Due to financial hardship, they dissolved in 1989, but they did so with the declaration that their goal had been achieved.

When the Moral Majority dissolved, it didn't take the Christian right with it. The goals remained in a more diffused frame. Rather than a single organization being representative of people's fear of moral decline, a political party - the Republican Party - picked up the feeling. This focused on taking up a position against changing "conceptions of gender roles and sexual identities" (Vaggione, 2005, p. 233). Through this, conservatives, and their political party have been

essentialized as the pro-life, anti-gay-marriage party. Democrats become the pro-gay marriage pro-choice party. These divides have been constant in terms of religiosity level. In other words, the more religious an individual is, the more likely he is to be pro-life and anti-gay marriage. In the 1980s these became party issues when each party adopted the identities mentioned above (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 575).

Some have framed this as a move against modernity or democracy, that by clinging to tradition, conservatives are necessarily rejecting some aspect of progress. This is contributed, in part, to a conceptual connection between modernity (and democracy) and secularism.

However, this inverse is often true. To remain relevant and present within the national dialog, conservatives have needed to use the tools of modernity. "These religious groups *react*

and organize against what they perceive as the crisis of the family generated by modernity and globalization. Yet, paradoxically, they in turn also become global and modern. Even if their articulations are merely strategic, they are nonetheless legitimate components of democratic politics" (Vaggione, 2005, p. 238). Through taking a stand against what they see as attacks on family and traditional roles, conservatives necessarily adopt new forms of political action to regain the power seemingly lost by religious groups in modernity. "Religious groups, for example, can attempt to use their purchasing power to reshape the secularizing public sphere and re-enforce traditional values" (Shamir & Ben-Porat, 2007, p. 75). Additionally, many of the traditionalist that are interacting in this case do not appear to be advocating for a rejection of modernity so much as an embracing of an alternative modernity which incorporates traditional values with the fruits of modernity, namely capitalism and technology, as will become more obvious in chapter two.

At the time of the Chick-fil-A Controversy, the country was in the middle of a presidential election between incumbent President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. A core issue in the election was same-sex marriage, as one candidate had taken a pro-gay marriage stance on the issue in May 2012 and the other had been governor of Massachusetts when it was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. While same-sex marriage was not a core issue to either campaign, other politicians and talking heads made sure that it continued to be a core issue to the platforms of each party. The issue had been polarized as pitting God's will against civil equality, many conservatives seemingly believing that their stance on same-sex marriage is a matter of following divine imperatives, that the Lord had given directions on how life should be ordered.⁶

⁶ There is an ongoing debate about the validity of religiously based arguments within political discourse. Stephen Carter (*The Culture of Disbelief*, 1993) and Richard Rorty (*Religion as Conversation-stopper*, 1994) represent a good starting place to enter this debate. Both agree that it would be impossible to separate religious belief from

The converse argument is that in a secular multicultural society, the will of one god is not enough to justify civil inequality. "The majority of Americans who self-identify as religious are against same-sex marriages. Yet one must note that younger generations are more open to gay marriage and abortion" (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 576). This was made clear in the 2012 election (Calmes, 2012), with three states voting to legalize same-sex marriage and another one rejecting a ban on same-sex marriage.

Media Landscape and Effect

The Chick-fil-A controversy occurred during a transitional phase in the global media landscape. The internet and social media have created a fragmented and personalized media ecosystem, with the focus on creating tailored experiences for consumers. This has led to the decline of traditional media, such as newspapers and television news. Increasingly, Americans are getting their news from social media rather than print or cable sources (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2012). This drop in consumption has led to budget cuts. This has in turn been reflected in the quality of journalism available.

Interestingly, while viewership of CNN and MSNBC has dropped significantly, by eight and four percent respectively, viewership of Fox News has remained consistently around a fifth of the population since 2002 (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2012). This is an important finding, as Fox represents the only self-described conservative voice in mainstream media. This has led to the creation of a narrative within Fox, and within the conservative base,

political belief, but argue on the role of religious arguments within the political sphere. The root non-separation, however, has created what some have termed a theolegal democracy, where "theology becomes a political commodity" (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 571). Implicit in this is the fact that not only do people vote based on their religious outlook, but that politicians in turn cater to that religious outlook to maintain power.

that they are constantly under attack from the liberal media. At its core, this is an issue of people feeling alienated from the mainstream.

Alienation is a side effect of modernization. This rises out of the breakdown of extended kinship networks, the movement of production from the home to the factory, the rise of single family homes and the degeneration of traditional social networks. "Expanding bureaucratic organization and role specialization... is tending to produce a heterogeneous, atomized, impersonal mass society. The breakdown of extended kinship and stable community ties leaves individuals without meaningful and binding social relationships" (Olsen, 1965, p. 200). In recent years, this has taken the form of a general estrangement from society, or, more specifically from social institutions. "External social conditions are extremely important in producing these feelings, but alienation occurs only when a person consciously experiences discomfort or discontent in his social relationships. Because of inadequate or undesirable ties with his social world, the alienated person feels cut off or separated from society." (Olsen, 1965, p. 202)

Alienation affects some more than others. Because a large part of alienation is isolation from others, those that go through alternative venues for social connection, such as online games or social media, tend to be effected less by alienation than those that are left to depend on traditional venues of socialization.⁷ Here, alternative institutions and communities take the place of traditional ones. (Hampton, Goulet, Ja Her, & Rainie, 2009) Groups, like conservatives, that feel that their interests are being ignored, or are under attack, are more likely to identify as feeling alienated. (Weakliem & Borch, 2006)

⁷ The findings of Olsen, 1965, found higher levels of alienations among Democrats. More recent studies have found that alienation among political parties fluctuate as administrations change, that democrats are more alienated under Republican administrations and vice versa. (Weakliem & Borch, 2006)

Despite feeling alienated from mainstream media, the religious conservative voice is four times as prominent as that of religious progressives (Gonzalez, 2012). This is due to conservatives producing more effective TV spots. "The media has contributed to this stereotype, overwhelmingly placing conservative or professed Republican leaders as the voice of religious citizens in this country" (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 574). This likely fails to provide any comfort or feelings of reintegration, as they are still perceived by conservatives to be represented far behind secular voices and are open to derision. This leads to a portrayal of religious Republicans pitted against secular Democrats, reinforcing the narrative of religion being under attack and of Republican values being Christian values. This leads to the perception that the United States is deeply divided, as extremely polarized views are given attention and moderates are ignored (despite most of the country being politically moderate). "[A]lienation may intensify political conflict and make it more difficult to arrive at mutually acceptable compromises... Thus, increased levels of alienation may help to explain a number of important features of American politics in the last few decades" (Weakliem & Borch, 2006, p. 416).

This focus on the extremes is a consequence of smaller consumption of traditional news sources; this is part of the media's turn towards tabloidization.⁸ By this, I mean an increased focus on news that sells, often sensationalized or superficial, done in the style of tabloids in hopes to compete with alternative sources. "Editors find these stories easy, cheap, *and* popular. In a competitive, digital environment in which news organizations struggle to maintain independence and profit levels, the cheap, easy popular story often wins out over expensive, difficult and less popular ones. Pages of news space and hours of news time can be filled without ever having to assign a reporter, as news outlets simply feed off each other." (Bird, 2009, p. 44)

⁸ That is not to say that celebrity news and fluff pieces would not be on the rise independent of the internet, as 24 hour news stations would still have to fill time.

This has become increasingly obvious in recent years, as many news programs have shifted from focusing on delivering current events to providing a small number of individuals opinion's on current events (Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2009).

These strongly opinionated personalities are presented as defending their side, which represents all that is right and proper, in a culture war. These culture wars are often framed as good, righteous people taking a stand against the degradation of society or against an existing injustice (as in the case of abortion and same-sex marriage). "By the attribution to others of subject positions that run counter to the professed belief systems of their intended audience and using impoliteness and confrontation to undermine any possible positive features associated with them, the hosts reinforce the version of the story the audience believed in without creating any dissonance." (Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, p. 294) This damages the audience's perception of the other group, broadening the ideological gap between them. This gap is already large without any prodding from the media. "[T]he culture wars are primarily about the ways in which political controversies tend to be rooted in competing normative universes" (Dodds, 2012, p. 276). Despite wide differences, it is rarely "grass-roots populism" that drives the culture wars. Rather, they are driven by media personalities and politicians for personal gain, either in terms of ratings or votes (Dodds, 2012).

Chapter 2: Chick-fil-A Controversy

Methods

I have narrowed the focus of this research to a four-week span, starting July 16, 2012 and ending August 13, 2012. I did this to simplify analysis, as stories concerning the controversy continue to appear as late as May 2013. Additionally, the body of the controversy took place in that span, as you will see in the breakdown of events. Within this time frame, I reconstructed a narrative of events based on news stories from online news sources and social media posts from Facebook. As some of the posts involved had over fifty thousand comments, a full analysis of the comments was not possible. Due to the structuring of Facebook, in which the latest comments are shown and earlier comments can only be seen by asking for it in sets of fifty, it was not possible to ascertain the earliest responses to some of the posts. Rather, in all cases I either looked at all comments or the last two hundred, which means that some of the comments fall outside of the month long frame that I intended to focus on.

I decided on a chronological approach to the controversy, looking at how the story unfolded, from the initial point of impact and spiraling from there. Initially, it was a simple matter to look at coverage from all sources, but within a week of the story breaking, the sources were too numerous and most of it was on small, peripheral websites. I narrowed my focus to the websites of major news outlets such as NBC, CNN and Fox. I observed several video clips on this issue. However, the bulk of the media content analyzed was print stories either intended for the websites of these agencies or originally printed in a paper publication. Due to this, the articles reflected fewer partisan opinions than if the content was drawn from broadcasts and were more centered on factual events. This caused a significant amount of overlap in the news stories, with few deviations.

For this reason, I sifted my primary focus from the news stories to the comments section, where possible, and social media responses. Social media activity offered a richer body of data for analysis, as it represented people's negotiation within the controversy rather than an institutional response. Facebook was selected as my primary source of social media data as it has a relatively stable structure which is applied across the site and posts have longevity. While expanding to other social media platforms would have offered a more varied account and interactions, both time and structural limitations disallowed for that. Venues such as Twitter, which has limited database access and little in the way of stable structure, or YouTube, where communities are more dispersed, were considered, but ultimately unable to be incorporated into this analysis. On Facebook, I selected three pages to focus on, Chick-fil-A, Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day and Boycott Chick-fil-A, because of their prominence within the course of the controversy. I then performed a textual analysis of both the posts and a selection of the comments on each post. Through the textual analysis, I looked qualitatively for items that denoted individual stance and attitude towards the controversy, towards the other members using the space, and towards those who were not engaged.

The Chick-fil-A Controversy

This controversy started with a comment that Chick-fil-A President and COO Dan Cathy made in an interview with the *Biblical Recorder*, a North Carolina Baptist newspaper. The interview was first published online on July 2, 2012 and ran in the July 7 print issue. The statement, often taken out of context, came after a discussion of the company's charitable work, specifically concerning marriage workshops and ministry:

Some have opposed the company's support of the traditional family. "Well, guilty as charged," said Cathy when asked about this opposition. "We are very much

supportive of the family - the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give God thanks for that" (Blume, 2012).

The interview was picked up on July 16 by the *Baptist Press* and run with only minor grammatical changes. Within a few days, articles had surfaced on internet news sites with headlines like "It's official: Chick-fil-A COO Dan Cathy comes out as antigay" (Garcia, 2012), "Is Chick-fil-A anti-gay marriage? 'Guilty as charged,' leader says" (Hsu, 2012), "Chick-fil-A's anti-gay-marriage confession: Bad for business?" (The Week, 2012). It should be noted, given the nature of this controversy, that gay marriage and homosexuality are not mentioned at all in the initial article. Additionally, the reporter who wrote the initial story, who is also the editor of the *Biblical Recorder*, stated in a radio interview on July 19 that:

Many of those reports "turned [the original story] into a negative," said Blume, adding the term "anti-gay" never came up in the June interview while Cathy was speaking in the Raleigh area.

"He was not saying 'guilty as charged anti-gay,'" Blume added. "[Cathy] never even brought up that subject. Everything he stated was on the positive side ... He never stated anything negative." (Hendricks, 2012)

A month prior, Cathy had made a statement on the Ken Coleman Show, a syndicated radio talk show, that he thinks "we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at him and say, 'We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage.'" (Severson, Chick-fil-A Thrust Back Into Spotlight on Gay Rights, 2012). This interview and others were quickly pulled into the conversation, as were Chick-fil-A's contributions to WinShape, a

charitable organization founded by S. Truett Cathy, which made secondary contributions to The Family Research Council and Exodus International, both of which have been tagged as anti-gay by gay rights activists (Equality Matters, 2012).

A firestorm was sparked within social media almost as soon as the second set of articles appeared. (It should be noted that until the article was picked up on July 16, it was entirely uncommented upon.) Some posters showed support while others pledged a boycott. Celebrity personalities came out on one side or the other (mostly against Chick-fil-A) and prompted more media attention (ABC News, 2012). In response, Chick-fil-A stated, via Facebook, on July 19, 2012 that they treat every person with respect and dignity and plan to leave the policy debate over gay marriage to the government and political arena.

Despite that intent, politicians were quick to continue Chick-fil-A's involvement. First, the mayor of Boston, Thomas Menino, said on July 20 that he would not allow Chick-fil-A to open in his city. Spurred by Alderman Proco Moreno, who made a similar statement on July 25, Chicago mayor, Rahm Emanuel followed on July 26. On the same day, San Francisco mayor, Edwin Lee, stated that he “strongly recommends” that Chick-fil-A not try to open a store near his town. The mayors were subsequently informed by the ACLU and several law professors that it would be a blatant violation of the first amendment to ban Chick-fil-A from their cities for Cathy's statement (McClelland, 2012).

In reaction to these events, Mike Huckabee began to organize Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day through his Facebook page in mid-July (Flock, 2012). This was both in response to the negative attention that Cathy's statement garnered and to the actions of the mayors. The event was held on August 1 and was a huge success, seeing record setting sales (Bingham, 2012b). A

counter event was planned, a "kiss in" protest, to occur a few days after the Appreciation Day, but it drew far fewer participants (Williams, Vives, & Xia, 2012).

At this point there was a lull in activity, and the controversy faded from the general public consciousness. This lull served as a natural stopping point for my analysis, as there was a clear loss of interest on the part of most of the populace. Despite that, the controversy was briefly revived on September 19 by Alderman Moreno of Chicago stating that the pro-same-sex marriage lobby had won and Chick-fil-A had changed their stance. There then proceeded to be a week of he said, she said before Dan Cathy firmly stated that he had not changed anything. This entire episode seems to be an attempt on the part of Moreno to save face when he was forced to allow Chick-fil-A to build after stating he would not and is less important than the prior month of the controversy.

News Coverage

Activist websites performed the bulk of the initial coverage for this event; right after the initial news story was published on the *Baptist Press*. Smaller, local and/or independent news sources picked up the story, though for the most part their stories were based off of the secondary publications. By the time they were picked up by major networks, it was divorced from the original article almost entirely. Perhaps that accounts for the fact that majority of articles concerning this topic are examples of bad journalism, either containing factual mistakes or blatant misrepresentations.

The most common mistakes include mislabeling Dan Cathy as CEO (rather than COO) of Chick-fil-A and attributing the initial article to the *Baptist Press* and dating it as such. These are relatively irrelevant factual errors, but more significant ones were made often. The largest

misrepresentations occurred in articles labeling Cathy as "anti-gay" which included statements made by Cathy at other times and through different media outlets as if they were made to the *Biblical Recorder* article. Beyond the mistakes that were made, the general tones of the articles were also similar. The coverage falls into two general modes, those that are very antagonistic towards Chick-fil-A, treating the topic with derision or disdain, and those that attempt to be a bit more balanced, treating the story as if it were just another news story, only reporting on it when it was pertinent.

The articles had few comments, with several articles having none, either due to lack of commenter interest or because comments were not enabled. The comments that appeared were surprisingly well written and nuanced, relative to the social media posts. Likely due to demographic differences, behaviors that were embraced, or at least accepted, in social media (flaming, profanity, personal attacks) were immediately reprimanded when they came up in the comments on news sites, with statements to the effect of: "That is not how rational adults handle disagreement." The conversation tended to focus on issues related to this controversy: sin, civil rights, freedom of speech, and religion. It took a conversational tone, but was inclusive, with different posters responding to those that came before but without much direct back and forth between posters.

Within the comments, there was an unexpected amount of media critique, with commenters taking a stand against journalists putting words in Cathy's mouth or misrepresenting the situation.

The fellow said he supports the traditional family... The fellow did not say he was opposed to gay marriage. It isn't even mentioned. Does your media analysis

consist of filling in the blanks and putting your words into the mouths of others?
(Economart, Forbes).⁹

Several users commented on the issue of freedom of speech and the failure of the media to cover the issue fairly:

It is about Freedom of Speech and I have not heard one news affiliate state that. Each of us is entitled to freedom of choice and freedom of speech. This is America not a dictatorship. I hardly see how a Mayor can just ban something from the community he works for without putting it to a vote (8/2, Shurtime, abcnews.com).

As previously noted, the author of the original story echoed this discontent with the way that the story had been covered in mainstream media. These comments were singular, in that there was a handful observable, but that they only appeared in the comment sections of news stories.

In a move that was less singular, several of the comments for the news stories focused on the fact that this was not a wise business move or that they would have rather all businesses stay out of politics. This was a sentiment that was echoed throughout social media.

I frequented a gas station nearby that suddenly sprouted political lawn signs on the boulevard. I haven't been back since and I probably won't go back.

It doesn't make sense for a business owner to be red or blue when the people are all green \$\$\$\$. Keep your religion in church and your politics in the voting booth or risk losing customers who disagree with you. (July 26, 10:54, Minnpost, RC)

⁹ For all quotes, especially those pulled from social media, I want to stress that spelling and grammar mistakes are taken as is from the source and have not been corrected to maintain authenticity of the quote.

Social media

I focused my analysis on the Facebook page of Chick-fil-A, the event page for Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day and the community page for Boycott Chick-fil-A. Each of these pages catered to a different community and there did not appear to be much active crossover in user activity; individuals who were active on one page were not observed on the others.

However, there were several similarities in the treatment of the space across the three pages. At its core, this was a space purposefully constructed for sharing opinions and expressing thoughts to friends. However, it had been, in a sense, repurposed as a space to connect with those that you share an opinion with or to engage with those holding opposing opinions. Each of these pages represent a public space in which anyone with a Facebook account could join in public discourse, though only in the comment sections as posting ability was held solely by page owners and moderators. In all three instances there was a degree of individuals treating the comments on a given post like a forum thread, where people could hold continuous conversations and could get to know each other.

There was no real barrier to entry, but the conversations themselves were insular. This was most evident in the case of the Chick-fil-A page, where in some cases over a hundred comments would be posted in under an hour by a handful of people in direct conversation. Another similarity, which is seen across all of these pages, is the use of profanity and personal insults, with many commenters making personal attacks on those who disagreed with them. All of these pages also had broad statements as to what a Christian is or is not, using (and misusing) a mixture of scripture from both Old and New Testament to back up their arguments.

Chick-fil-A's Facebook page:

Chick-fil-A's corporate page was created on August 7, 2008. Within my timeframe, they made six posts, all in July, only three of which pertain, even indirectly, to the ongoing controversy. They are as follows:

July 19; 242,281 likes; 52,717 comments; 16,410 shares

The Chick-fil-A culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity and respect – regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 Restaurants run by independent Owner/Operators. Going forward, our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and political arena.

Chick-fil-A is a family-owned and family-led company serving the communities in which it operates. From the day Truett Cathy started the company, he began applying biblically-based principles to managing his business. For example, we believe that closing on Sundays, operating debt-free and devoting a percentage of our profits back to our communities are what make us a stronger company and Chick-fil-A family.

Our mission is simple: to serve great food, provide genuine hospitality and have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A.

July 25; 94,737 likes; 27,777 comments; 11,599 shares

Hey Fans, thanks for being supportive. There is a lot of misinformation out there. The latest is we have been accused of impersonating a teenager with a fake Facebook profile. We want you to know we would never do anything like that and this claim is 100% false. Please share with this with your friends.

July 27; 49,201 likes; 59,665 comments; 6,085 shares

Hey Fans. Another rumor related to Chick-fil-A that is currently in the media is related to the Jim Henson Kid's Meal prizes. We want to set the facts straight. Chick-fil-A made the choice to voluntarily withdraw the Jim Henson Kid's Meal puppets for potential safety concerns for our customers on Thursday, July 19. On July 20, Chick-fil-A was notified of the Jim Henson Company's decision to no longer partner with us on future endeavors.

Activity on these posts died down, with the most comments being posted within days of each post. However, the activity continued at a slower pace for several months, with the most recent comment being posted on February 6 (as of February 13, 2013). Comments on each of these posts ranged from supportive, statements like "i completely agree with both CFA and chris and i will stand by CFA and for wt they beleave n"(Aug. 23, 11:19, ZD), to incendiary, such as "you did not voluntarily choose anything. the Henson company saw you for the vile, hate-supporting bigots you really are and broke partnership with you. not surprising, as your food sucks and your company leadership sucks. CLUCK OFF!" (Sept. 20, 9:42, CP). Some fell into the middle and were significantly more neutral,¹⁰ statements such as "Never eating here ever again. <3"(Aug 26, 12:19, DB)

However, the majority of the comments that I had a chance to look at had very little to do with Chick-fil-A directly, instead they centered on items of religion or politics which were tangentially related: items like Barack Obama's stance on gay marriage or what is necessary for salvation. A large part of it was also conversational, posters asking about each other's life or wishing others goodnight (harkening to a community). There were a large number of repeat posters, often with four or five posters making up the bulk of the conversation for a few hours, treating the comment section like an forum thread.

¹⁰ By neutral, here I intend that the comments were neither condemning and hateful nor loving and supportive.

As the group that was using the comment section changed throughout the day, the level of the conversation fluctuated. In the instance of the July 27 comments, the first hundred were made up of a superficial argument about religion, with an obvious troll (at the end of the conversation he made a comment about taking up a persona) and two others positioned against a self-professed Christian. The next morning, a new group was using the section as the space for conversation and the conversation was a bit more nuanced concerning Obama's stance on gay marriage and suitability as a candidate against Mitt Romney. The second group marked a much more mature dialog, where differences were often left unresolved with statements of having to agree to disagree. There was also an instance of a member of the former (seemingly younger) group tattling to a member of the second about the actions of another member. This seems to suggest a limited hierarchy, but more research would be needed to say much else.

When the conversation did focus on the main thrust of the controversy, it was littered with mostly neutral comments like:

let me tell you how I believe . I honestly believe that a man and a woman are supposed to get married not the other way around but I'm not going to judge other people for making the decision to be gay I understand and I respect your decision I might not agree with your decision but I'm not going to hate you for it cause in in god will judge us . chick fillet a month or so ago expressed their opinion on gay marriage they never said I hated them but just that they didn't believe in it . is it a crime to have an opinion now ? don't punish chick fillet for having an opinion . yes I believe that a man and woman supposed to be together so that doesn't mean I'm not gonna love gays the same way . all this crap that's going on is stupid and it needs to stop (Aug. 23, 12:57, SUW)

and

^ "god will judge us " - not everyone believes in your god or his "rules."

Thankfully we still have religious freedom in this country... for now anyways.

^ "that doesn't mean I'm not gonna love gays the same way ." - I find supporting

legislation that denies them equal treatment under the law very judgmental and

not at all loving, but that's just me. ^ "is it a crime to have an opinion now ?" -

Nope! Cathy spoke freely, which is his absolute right. Others are speaking freely

in response, which is their absolute right. No crimes, none (Aug. 23, 1:05, LW)

These comments represent the general feel of conversation, which was much more mild than on other venues. This is likely due to moderator activity on Facebook; some of the comments were missing, though it is entirely unclear if the user, Chick-fil-A or a profanity filter, removed them. The comments that remain tend to be conversational, usually in direct response to previous comments. It was not uncommon for people to indicate what they were replying to through use of a person's name or through quotes from previous posts.

Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day event page:

This event was started by Mike Huckabee to promote Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day (which he made up) and encourage support of Chick-fil-A. The earliest post on the event page is dated July 22.¹¹ 672,407 people RSVP'ed as going, with another 64,449 saying maybe. An additional 3,194,391 people were invited but did not respond. The following statement serves as the description of the event:

¹¹ The posts on the page are in non-chronological order; this post resides in the middle of the newsfeed.

I have been incensed at the vitriolic assaults on the Chick Fil-A company because the CEO, Dan Cathy, made comments recently in which he affirmed his view that the Biblical view of marriage should be upheld. The Cathy family, led by Chick Fil-A founder Truett Cathy, are a wonderful Christian family who are committed to operating the company with Biblical principles and whose story is the true American success story. Starting at age 46 Truett Cathy built Chick Fil-A into a \$4 billion a year enterprise with over 1600 stores. At 91, he is still active in the company, but his son Dan runs it day to day as CEO. It's a great American story that is being smeared by vicious hate speech and intolerant bigotry from the left.

The Chick Fil-A company refuses to open on Sundays so that their employees can go to church if they wish. Despite the pressure from malls, airports, and the business world to open on Sundays, they still don't. They treat customers and employees with respect and dignity.

I ask you to join me in speaking out on Wednesday, August 1 "Chick Fil-A Appreciation Day." No one is being asked to make signs, speeches, or openly demonstrate. The goal is simple: Let's affirm a business that operates on Christian principles and whose executives are willing to take a stand for the Godly values we espouse by simply showing up and eating at Chick Fil-A on Wednesday, August 1. Too often, those on the left make corporate statements to show support for same sex marriage, abortion, or profanity, but if Christians affirm traditional values, we're considered homophobic, fundamentalists, hate-mongers, and intolerant. This effort is not being launched by the Chick Fil-A company

and no one from the company or family is involved in proposing or promoting it. There's no need for anyone to be angry or engage in a verbal battle. Simply affirm appreciation for a company run by Christian principles by showing up on Wednesday, August 1 or by participating online – tweeting your support or sending a message on Facebook.

PLEASE RSVP IF YOU PLAN ON PARTICIPATING AT A CHICK FIL-A OR ONLINE.

Of the 39 posts on the event page, 36 are within my timeframe. Huckabee initiated all of the posts and 21 thanked various people or organizations for promoting the event. Only eight of the posts do not include links to external content and those are comprised mostly of reminders to get Chick-fil-A or site maintenance (the site was down for several hours on July 24). Comments on the posts range from a few dozen to over fifteen thousand.¹²

The comments on this page are a lot more heated, and personal than on Chick-fil-A's page. A lot of statements were present that echoed the following:

"Fuck you gay hating christians ALL!!! Proud to be an atheist faith in god is like a virus, so why would i respect it, the line between good and evil gets blurred once infected, the truth you neglect it, your dogma rejected, the only faith i need is in the scientific method! The bible is unimpressive wicked and incoherent, sense there is no proof of a devil you shouldn't fear'em, sense there is no proof of a god you shouldn't praise it, if your curious about evolution, science explains it! Im

¹² On the community page which is associated with this event, Huckabee warns that the profanity filter had to be set to strong, thus deleting some comments.

sure that you would find the truth is far more amazing yet you wouldn't trade that knowledge the boring story of creation! When actions are required, praying is just delaying the inevitable your doing zilch and that outcome is mensurable its literary sitting on your ass or taking a nap while some one you love is fucked up need you help bad, how the fuck can you justify the genocide and pain cased by your code there must be something missing in your brain!! Proud to be an atheist and not a homophobic, selfish, arrogant, ignorant, like all christians are!!" (Aug 2, 1:45, AC)

and

"Non Christians, and true christian be glad knowing that when these folk die of cardiac arrst from the grease, or diabetes from the sodas... they will meet their maker knowing full well that they used their religion as an instrument of oppression and hate. Forget them, they care not what they do."(Aug. 1, 5:06, NC)

The comments here tended to be much longer than those on Chick-fil-A's page. They also tended to come in blocks, with the same person posting several comments in quick succession (in some cases filling two screens before the next poster commented). Additionally, some commentors would post the same message repeatedly, and across posts. By this, I mean that some people would post the same comment, often in the form of a poem, on several posts at the same time and then spam it, posting the same content four or five times in a row. While these posts were also treated like an forum thread, as in the case of Chick-fil-A's page, the attitude on these comments was not conversational as much as confrontational. Something of note is that this is the only place that I observed a discussion over whether this is about traditional values or free speech, with the idea that it has to be one or the other.

On August 1, the date of Chick-fil-A Appreciation day, the comments took a more direct, communal tone, moving away from discussion towards shared stories and experiences. Within these stories, commentors reveled in long lines and long waits, comparing (ridiculous) drives to get to the nearest Chick-fil-A: "I drove 30 minutes to get to my closest Chic-Fil-A, and waited an hour in the long lines. Glad I did. Defend and protect our Constitution and freedom of speech, and stand to what you believe in" (Aug. 1, 1:32, DM) Or in how many people they bought food for "Bought lunch for 12 people today at Chick Fil A.....fabulous LONG LINES !!!!!!!!" (Aug 1, 2:03, GMM)

For some people, the controversy boiled down to a question of funding. That is to say that it moved beyond an issue of freedom of speech or religion when Chick-fil-A began donating to "anti-gay organizations." From this perspective, first amendment rights end where actions begin, or at least financial ones. This highlights the centrality of the market.

It's fine if you don't support gay people and all that, but if you're putting 2 million+ dollars into organizations that just bash, and promote hate, that's crossing the line. You can say you don't like something yeah that's fine people wouldn't have cared, but promoting hate is really not the brightest thing for such a large company based around christianity. Doesn't it say you're supposed to love everybody or something in the bible? Then why hate people for being different?
(Aug 2, 1:13, CM)

An issue that I will come back to later, which was shown most prominently within the comments for this page, is the question of different interpretations of Christianity. Many commentors stated that they stood behind Chick-fil-A because Cathy stood for Christian values and upheld God's word. However, many others questioned this interpretation of scripture, calling

on people to be real Christians: "Focus on the Family is an idiot hate group. Wake up. Be a real Christian and try loving your neighbor for one second" (July 31, 8:30, PJ) Others called for upholding the entire Bible rather than cherry picking:

"If you truly want to call yourselves Christians, then you should live by the entire bible. We are sinning. Those who divorce. The bible promotes rape and the stoning of non virgins on their wedding day. All you so called Christians are extremely ridiculous. I grew up in a very Christian home and being a homosexual doesn't make me any less a person. If you were Christian, you would not do that to other. How bout read the whole bible and live by the whole bible if you truly want to be a Christian. Until then, you are honestly all jus idiots. You don't have to give my family rights. We've obviously stayed strong and overcame more than Christians traditional families ever could. So you can all continue smoking, drinking & cussing until Sunday when the church doors open. Dumbasses" (July 30, 9:41, TC)

Another idea that came up in the debate was the idea that boycotting Chick-fil-A was a waste of time, unless one also boycotted all companies which had different views or gave money to organizations which had different views. This generally took the shape of:

"@Leah I guess you are going to have to research every single company or organization that receives your money in some way. Like maybe you will need to stop buying gas from companies that deal with OPEC. They are known for funding the execution of homosexuals. I don't believe Chick-fil-a does that. But I guarantee your money has funded this in some way. If you boycott one, you beter boycott them all. Or should we wait for the media to arrive so liberals will

actually care? I don't hate homosexuals, or anyone for that matter. I DO love my right to free speech and to exercise my religion!" (Aug. 1, 10:17, MCS)

*Boycott Chick-fil-A page.*¹³

This community was founded on July 1, according to the Facebook page. They joined Facebook and created this page on July 19, though their earliest post is dated July 10.¹⁴ For the timeframe we are looking at, they made 19 posts. There are 17,210 page likes, which is the action that the about text ask you to take to pledge your boycott. That text is significantly shorter than the one of Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day and is as follows:

Chick-fil-A has donated more than \$5 million to anti-gay causes since 2003, including more than \$2 million in 2010 alone: <http://thkpr.gs/Oe4yxv>

"Like" if you pledge to NOT eat at Chick-fil-A until they stop their anti-LGBT crusade.

The posts on this page were very image heavy, with almost all of them containing external media. It included a lot of discursive political consumerism (more on that in chapter four), that is to say, images meant to be both amusing and politically empowering. Examples of these images can be found in Appendix B. Of the 20 posts within my timeframe, 19 contain links or media from external sources. 14 of those posts included a request to like or share the post, with four of them stating that you should do so to inform your friends of the issues and get them involved. Unlike the other two pages, which dedicated a few post to actually addressing the issues, all of the posts on this page were meant to build up the boycott and encourage people to take part, and continue to take part. Despite that, they had significantly fewer comments than those on the other two sites, most posts having less than 200 comments. There was also significantly more

¹³ There are two pages with this title, the one that I looked at was the more populace one at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-Chick-fil-A/139397049531586?fref=ts>

¹⁴ However, the first comment is not dated until July 19. It is possible that this is a technical glitch.

profanity, perhaps due to different filter settings. Unlike the other two pages, here profanity was most often used by supporters of Chick-fil-A.

"Amelia, so you know...Chick-fil-a makes their money they can Fucking spend it how they please u socialist fucktard. I bet your one of the Obama born progressive mind fucked retards. If you wanna donate to the little fucks across the seas go for it, but maybe some of you turds can think for yourself and realize that AMERICA HAS A STARVING POPULATION TOO!!! We should probably take care of our own prior to another countries" (July 19, 9:03, AB)

Despite the increased use of profanity, perhaps ironically, the discussion tended to be more moderate, and elevated intellectually, than on the other pages:

"Ramy, we just want equal rights from a legal perspective. I certainly support your right to belong to a church, and for that church to believe as it wishes, and even be tax exempt, especially when it spends it's money in charitable ways (which is why churches are tax exempt - they are not for profit charities). However, when a church spends money to sway government (i.e. Mormon church spending millions to support prop. 8 in California), then that church is treading on my rights, and in my opinion, is no longer just a religious establishment, but has also become a lobbyist / PAC. In other words, your church can marry who it likes, as long as it isn't telling the govt who can legally marry. Women's rights, The civil rights movement - where would they be if they had been put to a popular vote? The bible has far more instructions on how women and slaves should behave than homosexuality, and we've certainly disregarded those for modern living" (July 20, 5:33, MH)

The comments on these posts tended to be much more episodic than on the other two pages, with a large number of comments in response to a single previous comment. It was not unusual in these comments for four or five people to respond to one comment and then the discussion be over. This is in direct opposition to most of the dialog on other pages.

Additionally, there were significantly more statements along the lines of "I've been boycotting forever" or "I've never eaten there" or "We don't have a Chick-fil-A, I support the boycott."

"Crap-Fil-A makes toxic food created from the suffering and deaths of millions of living creatures. Being a vegan, that was reason enough for me to not support them, but now that I know that they also contribute to furthering a cause that oppresses and dehumanizes a group of people, I am ready to actively boycott them and spread the word regarding their homophobia." July 26, 2:21, TEB)

These statements don't lend themselves to further discussion or to enthusiasm in the boycotting base because they implicate an inaction on the part of the people pledging boycott. If someone can't eat at Chick-fil-A, their pledging to boycott is pointless and difficult to pull a community together around. Overall, there was a lukewarm response to the boycott, especially after mayors step in.

"I fully support boycotts by private citizens, but government officials trying to ban or block Chick Fil A is counterproductive. It sends the wrong message - that the government can discriminate based on beliefs, opinions and personality. Just because the company is owned by an ignorant, bigoted jerk is no reason for the state to step in and deny the right of the franchises. No more than it is the right of

the state or of people like Dan Cathy to try and deny homosexuals the equal right to marriage.

We as private individuals need to be the ones refusing to step foot in a restaurant and speaking out publicly, vehemently about their policy of hate and intolerance. But because the opposing side is using disgusting, cheap methods I have no reason to lower ourselves or our ideals. Our morals and ethics are better than that. Let's do this the right way, be the better men/women and see how fast they have a "change of heart" when their next quarterly report shows a significant dip in profits!" (July 26, 3:20, BSK)

Analysis

In the next two chapters, I will offer a deeper analysis of selected aspects of this case, focusing on identity, community and activism. Before that, however, I will highlight a couple of issues that are relatively minor to my argument, but which must be noted as part of this case.

One of the issues concerns truth and how much the truth mattered in this case. For a lot of people, the facts of the case were filtered through several layers of external interpretation, independent of the original article. They saw headlines like "Chick-fil-Gay" (Stein, 2012) or "Is Chick-fil-A anti-gay marriage? 'Guilty as Charged,' leader says" (Hsu, 2012) and that shaped their stance on what occurred.¹⁵ People trusted the news story that they initially read or the post they saw via social media, without questioning the validity of the statements made. For most, once the controversy really started going, the debate over gay marriage or personal rights

¹⁵ A number of online articles bandied about the statistic that 44% of those getting news online only read headlines, but the study that they cited is no longer available online and has come under fire for methodological problems.

superseded the need to verify any of the facts. Here, the tabloidization overpowers any concern with journalistic reliability, as emotional appeals and scare tactics pull in audiences. "News audiences pick and choose stories that they want to believe, from a seemingly endless supply of information from which to assemble their own version of reality" (Bird, 2009, p. 46).

This leads to truthiness taking the place of the truth. That is to say, what people believe is the truth, or what they want to be the truth, becomes significantly more important than the actual events that led up to the controversy. This concept of truthiness must be delineated from that of negotiated understand or creation of personal reality, as it is based entirely on what one wants to be true rather than any interpretation of factual events. (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009) Through the creation of believable fictions that "feel right" to the target audience various media created this controversy.

The second issue has to do with whether this was a branding move or a representation of brand continuity, both for Chick-fil-A and for others that jumped onto the controversy. This issue was brought up several times in the media that I looked at and at each point the connotation was that any action taken as branding was in some way deceitful. However, any action taken by those discussed herein could be seen as branding. I would like to stress that I do not intend that actions done with the intention of branding as in any way inauthentic. Rather, I intend branding, especially the personal branding which was most prevalent in this case, to be shorthand for reflexive identity construction. Therefore, the nuance that I am attempting to identify here is not concerned with authenticity of action. Rather, I am pointing to whether participation within this controversy was an intentional branding experience or if it was simply the continuing and acting on an identity which was already established. (The issue of authenticity is outside the scope of this work, though it would present an interesting venue for future study.)

For Chick-fil-A, given both their history and the venue through which the initial article was published, I firmly believe that this was a case of brand continuity. That is to say, Dan Cathy expressed his views without the intention that it would turn into a large media spectacle.¹⁶ As a privately owned corporation, Chick-fil-A has no shareholders who they need to make happy. They are family owned, so the only person that Cathy has to answer to is his father, Truett Cathy, founder and CEO. Additionally, the likelihood of the story being picked up was exceedingly small, if this was done as a branding move, then it would have, at least, appeared on the company's website. Instead, once the article was picked up and people started to be offended, Chick-fil-A attempted to distance themselves from the fallout, highlighting their policies of non-discrimination without retracting or apologizing for Cathy's statements. Likewise, when they necessity arose, Cathy stood by his initial statements and denied changing his stance. This seems to be a clear example of brand continuity.

However, the same cannot be said for others that participated in the controversy. Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, itself, appears to be as much about building the brand of Mike Huckabee as supporting Chick-fil-A. The two items coincide nicely, as Huckabee is branded as an ultra conservative, being both a commentator for Fox News and a Southern Baptist minister. He presents himself within the narrative of defender of Christian/American values, coming from a school of thought that sees the two as intertwined. However, his part in the controversy also got his name out there, making him relevant on the national scale in a way that he has not been since the 2008 presidential primaries.

¹⁶ Within the initial article, more space is dedicated to the Chick-fil-A Bowl, formerly the Peach Bowl, an annual college football game held between a team from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and Southeastern Conference (SEC), than to marriage, which was a total of 145 words (Blume, 2012).

Once Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day was established, it became the "in" thing for conservative politicians and pundits to participate. It became, briefly, a litmus test for if someone was really conservative, if they really supported Biblical values or just gave them lip service. In this way, participation became a badge of membership. The same cannot be said for liberal participation in banning Chick-fil-A, or even in boycotting. However, the actions of the handful that did is no less of a branding move. To say, as Rahm Emanuel did, that "Chick-fil-A's values are not Chicago values," (Martin, 2012) is to first create a picture of what Chicago values are and then cast yourself in the role of protector of those values.

Beyond the personal branding seen above, there are clear instances of identity creation and maintenance at both the communal and individual level. This identity, which is drawn from personal belief, is then taken and expressed through consumer action. In the next chapter, I will say more about the role of identity creation within this controversy.

Chapter 3: Identity

Consumption as Symbol of Individual Identity

Nestor Garcia Canclini, in Consumers and Citizens, states that identity is a narrated construct (89). This highlights several important points: foremost is that identity is neither intrinsic nor fixed. Rather, identity is fluid and ever changing, depending on both internal and external factors. It is not as simple as "I am an American," or "I am a modern woman," but more complex, combining competing identifiers. Those identifiers are not always complementary, sometimes representing direct contradictions. The second point which this highlights is the narrative nature of identity. It is not flat or marked by a single point. Rather it is the story which we construct for ourselves about who we are. And it is ongoing. The story continues to be constructed as experience gets added in and new ideas get introduced and adopted or rejected. This lends itself to fluidity and changing experience as people are forced to negotiate meaning and contradictory decisions or personality traits. Within modern society, individuals are constantly constructing an identity, not just who they are, but who it is that they project to the world. Individuals are a brand and have to be worried about internal consistency, so that who they project to the world remains consistent and desirable. The idea of "managing your brand" has only gotten more pervasive with the advent of social media.

Throughout this work I have made reference to identity creation and the role that material goods play in that process. To begin developing this issue, we have to accept that material items have a role in the creation of the conceptual worlds in which people operate. This is predicated on the belief that material items, and by extension material culture, matter. "If culture is a full range of thoughts, feelings, objects, words and products that human beings use to construct and maintain the life-worlds in which they exist, material culture is any aspect of the world-making

activity that happens in material form. That means things, but also includes the feelings, values, fears and obsessions that inform one's understanding and use of things" (Morgan, 2008, p. 228).

A large part of this identity construction is now performed in regards to consumption. Things now represent an outward projection of our narrative; they declare "I see myself in a certain way," often associated with brand images. "[I]t should be obvious that as we come under the logic of world competitiveness, as we watch television and inform ourselves electronically, use computer systems for many everyday activities, identities based on local traditions are reformulated according to 'cultural engineering'" (Canclini, 2001, p. 96). Material goods play a key role in building that identity and consumer culture "constructs every person as the author of his or her own identity, expressed aesthetically through the consumption and display of commodities." (Miller, 2009, p. 29) Consumption makes a statement about who you are on a basic level, if you are an eggplant person or a rutabaga one, Mac or PC. Consumption identifies your core values and beliefs (wearing a headscarf, abstaining from meat, watching Fox News). It is this kind of consumption - an external marker of internal beliefs - that we see in the Chick-fil-A case, especially concerning the boycott. What and how an individual consumes not only builds an image of who they are, but how others should interact with them. This consumption builds an identity and places an individual within a pre-conceptualized community, at the same time serving as an external declaration of belief (I believe X) and as a communal marker (I am a member of X community). Consumption, therefore, provides the venue through which religious individuals can outwardly declare their beliefs.

Consumers must be assumed to be grounded in temporal and topographical context rather than being conceptualized as a universal figure. "(As) documented in numerous comparative studies, peoples' opinions, attitudes, values, and sentiments differ vastly across time and space...

In addition people's own conceptions of what it means and implies to be a consumer varies, and hence, the relevance of the reported attitudes and values to their subjective experiences as consumers." (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007, pp. 471-472) As individual consumers change, their personal style will also change, opening some communal formations while closing others.

Consumption as Marker of Communal Identity

As we have seen, individual identity is constructed and the projection thereof is reflexive. Taking this a step further, communal identity is built out of an internal desire to connect with other people who have the same projected attributes. This takes it beyond saying that I as an individual dislike rutabagas, to say that I am a member of a collective that dislikes rutabagas.¹⁷ It allows an individual to be easily identified and connected to an outward identifier, building on their projected identity. People want to be associated with a given cause, creating communities around that cause. Communal identity is more complex than this, however.

Brigit Meyer offers a framework through which to look at communal identity. Aesthetic formations can roughly be equated with imagined communities, but it builds on the concept. Aesthetic is pulled from the Aristotelian idea of the term, "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, 2009, p. 6). This addition of experiential knowledge is part of a scholarly shift away from the imagined (symbolic) to the visceral and material. The change of community to formation is an attempt to move away from the idea of community as a fixed entity, instead indicating both a formation as a social entity and as a process, to highlight the performative

¹⁷ Here I am speaking of internally conceived communities rather than externally defined ones, although all communities would have aspects of both.

aspect of community (Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, 2009).

This shift in focus reorients us to the sensual components of mediation.

Moreover, this renewed form of aesthetic inquiry intends to inform us how humans connect with others, form groups and communities, and share identities, according to the meaning and value they place on images, symbols, sounds and objects that are shared among them. Here Meyer states her preference to refer to such groups as 'aesthetic formations', in that social identities are not static, but constantly shaped by the fluid exchange of symbols and meanings. Communities are formations in that they are both entities and processes (Teusner, 2010, p. 112).

Consumption as a marker of belonging only works because there is a shared knowledge of the sign associated with different signifiers, common consumption norms. These norms provide the language through which communication can take place, but also provide regulations for that communications. They regulate which signifiers can be connected with a given sign and the proper way in which it should be interpreted. "What matters for them is not so much that everyone agrees with or always follows them, but that they simply exist to define meaning" (Cosgel & Minkler, 2004, p. 344). The norms provide a frame of reference such that consumers can immediately act on the signifier and assume that others will associate the same signifier. In the case of Chick-fil-A, this means that the sign (chicken sandwich, cows that can't spell) took on one of a limited number of signifiers (homophobia, freedom of speech/religion, bigotry, religious values) and that others who shared similar consumption norms would interpret the correct signifier. Different communities had different norms surrounding the same sign and membership dictated the proper interpretation. More than just a shared interpretive framework, these norms prompt a reaction, creating shared sentiment and mode of interaction.

This idea of consumption norms fits well with Birgit Meyer's conceptualization of a shared aesthetic style and offers an explanation of how people could be part of aesthetic formations which are in opposition, yet share signifiers. For instance, people on each side of the issue cited Christian values as the reason for their stance, pointing to a different perception of those values. Aesthetic styles are the "forming form" through which collective sentiment is achieved (Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, 2009). More than prompting a shared idea, they prompt a shared behavior, in our case action or inaction concerning Chick-fil-A, and shared membership in an aesthetic formation. Aesthetic formations change as people move in and out, both in makeup and in evolving values. This highlights the fluidity of community and of individuals.

Identity within the Chick-fil-A Controversy

Within the case of the Chick-fil-A controversy, taking part in the Chick-fil-A boycott became an outward sign of being a true Christian, for some people.¹⁸ The connection between being a proper Christian and some outward sign can be traced back to the Calvinist concept of predestination, that is that some people have been granted salvation and others damnation. Theologically, it is impossible to know who is a member of the elect, those that were chosen for salvation, however, the idea rose that through outward signs you could ascertain a person's state of salvation. "And, if any troubled soul inquired how he could be sure that he was numbered among the elect, the answer was ready. He had been called out of Romanism by the Spirit of God, and that fact was all-sufficient evidence that he was led by the Spirit and included among the elect whose salvation was sure" (Fenn, 1909, p. 339). Signs of election was later broadened to include items such living a "Godly lifestyle" and distancing oneself from "worldly concerns."

¹⁸ There were groups associated with the boycott who presented boycotting as the only action possible for true Christians, but this was a minority view.

However, in recent decades, the idea of outward signs of salvation has taken on a much more worldly tinge, equating material actions and prosperity with salvation.

There have been many people who accept capitalism as "part of human nature, a natural order, the common destiny of global humankind, an extension of human creativity and the basis for liberty that is favoured by God" (Thomas, 2009, p. 61). Many of these interpret the institutions of capitalism themselves as anointed by the Lord. Conservative Christians are among those most likely to subscribe to this interpretation. The prosperity gospel, which preaches that if you are faithful, God will bless you with material wealth, reifies the market economy as intrinsically linked to God's plan and part of the route to salvation. This means that "[w]hat God is doing is often seen as expressed in sales figures, or the numbers attending a festival or indeed a local church" (Ward, 2012, p. 28). This is especially poignant in the case of the Chick-fil-A controversy, as Dan Cathy, and his father before him, often point to the success of Chick-fil-A as proof that they are doing the Lord's work and operating according to divine will.

Beyond the market itself, goods take on religious meaning. There are two sorts of goods in action here. First, there are religious goods, items that are created for the express purpose of being religious, things such as Veggie Tales or the Passion of the Christ. These goods are explicitly religious and act as an immediate badge of belonging within religious communities. They are intended to build and affirm belief and through their consumption, individuals can reaffirm their own identities. The second sort of good, and the one that I am specifically looking at in this work, are those which are created for secular consumption, which are then imbued with religious qualities and meaning. Through personal or communal meaning making, brands can take on meaning associated with the company that produces them or with their common use. Examples of this are abundant and fluid, as individuals will interpret meaning differently, but

could include donuts as an extension of Sunday service or BBQ chicken as embodying church potlucks. Even media, especially social media, could fit into this category. "[T]he market is turned into a powerful discursive terrain where commodities not only embody but also mediate religious ideals and qualities" (Echchaibi, 2012, p. 33).

Businesses like Chick-fil-A and Forever 21 straddle the line between these two types of goods. Their products are non-religious, but company creeds imbue purchases with Christian meaning. Within this case, Chick-fil-A takes on the meaning of traditional values. This assumption of religious value can create protest brands, which endeavor to make a political statement, but which are also imbued with "reverent quality and transform a trivial act of consumption into a committed act of faith" (Echchaibi, 2012, p. 32). External narratives, mostly constructed by the media, equated being devoutly Christian with support of Chick-fil-A.

Within the context of this case, two primary communities were created: those that supported Chick-fil-A and those that did not. Each one could be further broken down and nuanced based on individual inclination, some of them inhabiting contested space, such as those that disagreed with the stance taken, but who supported Dan Cathy's right to take that stance. Within the case of the Chick-fil-A controversy, there were several cases of disputed meaning. The most prominent was the dispute of what signifier to assign to Chick-fil-A; were they Christian, homophobic, standing for tradition, or hate, or God's will. Even within the subsection of people supporting Chick-fil-A, there is a dispute as to why they should be supported, because of traditional values or because of first amendment rights. The second string of dispute, which received significantly less attention,¹⁹ was the dispute over what it meant to be a Christian, or even an evangelical Christian. The progressive Christians argue "that there are two manners in

¹⁹ As noted on page 20, conservative Christians receive four times as much media attention as progressive ones. (Gonzalez, 2012)

which religion functions in US public life: the notion that God is on the side of the US and the questioning of whether we are on the side of God. The latter evokes a healthier humility and accountability" (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 576). The progressive view usually boils down to an interpretation of Christ's ultimate message requiring that all men treat each other with love, seen in this case as affording equal rights, whereas the conservatives point to passages within the Bible commanding particular moral actions.

Whichever aesthetic formation we look at here, the basis of shared norms remain. For this controversy, the media, and media personalities, played a major role in establishing these norms, as they established the primary narrative. Social media finalized the norms by facilitating the distribution of media artifacts, mostly images, which in turn solidified the styles for different formations. For the buycotters, this means that consuming Chick-fil-A and encouraging others to do the same took on religious significances as it was evangelizing for their deeply held beliefs and seen as a rejection of liberal ideologies.

Chapter 4: Consumer Activism

There are several forms of activism present in the Chick-fil-A controversy, and it is unlikely that any controversy moving forward will not also include aspects of these different modes. The most prevalent, however, is buycotting, which I am presenting not as a new phenomenon, but as one which is transitioning from the periphery to be the dominate mode of activism. There are other cases of buycotting that have been going on for years, but they haven't gained the media attention of the Chick-fil-A case. As discussed in the previous chapter, buycotting is a form of identity building, both individual and communal, which is both formative and confirmative. Here we are going to move into the sphere of political action, but at its core, political action is as much an extension of identity as consumption, and in this case is the same.

Role of Religion in Political Activism

Regardless of the reasons, which are discussed in chapter one, the fact of the matter is that the religious right has been a driving force in American politics since the 1970s. This has lead to a great deal of social science research focused on how religious affiliation affects civic engagement (Beyerlein & Chaves, 2003). Many of these findings can be linked to the function of churches as institutions that disseminate information: in the form of voter guides, registration drives and protest organizers. Additionally, churches generate social capital and create translocal networks (Greenberg, 2000). By this, I mean that they provide not only opinion leaders to direct decision-making, but they also provide outlets for engagement, creating a shared space and enabling outreach. "Religious institutions are part of the network of associations that bolster democratic governance, as well as generate challenges to dominant groups and discourses" (Greenberg, 2000, p. 380). The active role of religious institutions in politics is important for this case, as many conservative Christians feel alienated from mainstream society.

Churches as political entities are most potent when a concrete link is created between the idea of living a Christian life and political agendas. "Religious leaders make connections between faith and political goals by impressing members with a sense that they should participate in politics as part of the criteria of living 'like a Christian'" (Greenberg, 2000, p. 381). The link between living as a proper Christian and politics goes beyond the church, however, when media outlets like Fox likewise frame a particular side of an issue as key to living a Christian life, or when a Christian entity, such as Chick-fil-A, is perceived as under attack. Many, if not all, of these conservative entities argue that Christian voices need to be more prevalent in politics and that secularists are corrupting the system (Greenberg, 2000).

Despite the obvious role that religious communities play, they are less influential than personal religious beliefs, which can be correlated to communities, but are not absolute matches. Religious belief has concrete influences on an individual's behavior, going beyond denominational inclinations or religious activity. Studies, such as that done in 2011 by Robyn Driskell and Larry Lyon, have found that different beliefs, like belief in an active God, prayer healings or literal interpretation of the Bible, can be directly correlated to the amount of civic engagement of an individual. This is extremely complex and nuanced, as beliefs that may be held concurrently, such as belief in the power of prayer and in an active God, have been found to affect engagement in opposite ways. It is important to note that these beliefs compete for prominence and effect on a personal level rather than a denominational one. It is not the case that we can say all of X denomination takes a specific stance on an issue. Denominational division no longer marks the religious divide, rather the division is now represented by how religious a given individual is. "Supporting the importance of intensive religious behavior is the finding that for civic engagement and political participation, activities such as attending choir practice or prayer

meetings or doing committee work matter more than simply attending a worship service" (Driskell & Lyon, 2011, p. 400).²⁰

In the case of the Chick-fil-A controversy, there is a combination of church congregations acting in unison to support Chick-fil-A, and individuals acting under the direction of other authorities, such as Mike Huckabee (or more generally conservative media). In a sense, the media provides the same political functions as the church, disseminating information and rallying action. Chick-fil-A adds the religious aspects that may have been missing from media coverage on its own. Chick-fil-A, as a commercial social enterprise, provides the moral backing for the creation of an ideological religious organization. "A relatively recent movement among Christians is the Business as Mission (BAM) movement. Business as Mission organizations manage for the "triple bottom line" of performing social good, having a financial motivation, and embracing a spiritual mission" (Alderson, 2012, p. 114). As was established in chapter one, Chick-fil-A has been focused on being an example of corporate citizenship and of the benefits of operating under biblical guidelines since early in its history.

What this controversy highlights is that even when there is an explicitly religious mission, action takes the form of consumer activity. Action within consumer society must take the form of consumption, either as an increase or decrease in consumption of a given good, or with the goal to transform the consumption of others. As with other activist movements which primarily utilize boycotting, consumption takes a front seat, but is combined with efforts to change how others view the product.

Consumerism as Political Action

²⁰ This focus on engagement meshes well with the findings of the most recent Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life report, which found that people that identified as rarely attending religious services were more willing to drop affiliation than in the past ("Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults have no religious affiliation, 2012).

Within consumer culture, commodities take on the meaning that branding gives them (Apple products are hip and artsy, Smart Cars are cute and fun, JetBlue is the classy airline). Rather than consuming the product, consumers consume these labels, as they are structurally approved: "[The] bulk of mundane consumption is normally outside the area for reflective choice" (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007, p. 478). Despite that, a reflexive choice is still being made to purchase one item over another. Even without reflection, one is choosing to participate in consumption rather than to abstain, and to consume product X over product Y. Agency is being exercised and in some cases consumption can be moved to inhabiting a reflective space.

A subset of consumerism, which is by necessity reflective and which pertains to this case, is political consumerism. This takes consumption a step further than the everyday, making it not just a choice between products due to something mundane, like price difference or brand loyalty, but taking it to the level of political action with the goal of effecting change (or maintenance of the status quo in face of change). "Political consumerism means doing politics *through* the market. It does not eliminate individual economic choice, but utilizes it to achieve political objectives" (Holzer, 2006, p. 406).

While it is individual agency which enables political consumerism, as individuals must choose to take part, the power to effect change (to sanction or reward a company) is only achievable in collective action. An individual can reward a company by purchasing from them or punish them by threatening to purchase from a competitor or abstaining from purchasing altogether, but the individual makes very little difference to corporations. Through the imbrication of both political and economic logics, consumers can transform individual choice into collective action, allowing them to demand a change, and in some cases achieve one

(Holzer, 2006). There are three forms of political consumerism which inhabit the toolbox of most activists, all of which appear in this case: boycott, buycott and discursive.

Beginning with the third, as it frames the other two, "discursive political consumerism uses communicative actions to take advantage of the market vulnerabilities that have risen in late capitalist market niches to create consumer awareness and change global corporate enterprises" (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008, p. 751). This form targets opinions at the wider public sphere, aiming to damage brand image rather than directly harming earnings. Using "noneconomic tools," in the form of social media campaigns, petitions, press releases and the generation of negative earned media, individuals effected not only the brand image, but also the frame with which the media covered events related to this brand and the styles of aesthetic formations. Discursive consumerism is a direct attack on the meaning associated with a brand.

In the Chick-fil-A Controversy, the discourse initially took the form of negative framing from media personnel with the jump from religious press to the secular. This move was also marked by a shift in the articles from a positive portrayal of Chick-fil-A as a company to a negative portrayal of Dan Cathy and by extension the company. As the controversy progressed, individuals took it upon themselves to make branded attacks in the form of social media posts and image editing. (Examples of these, pulled from a Google image search, can be found in Appendix C.) As commodities are themselves devoid of meaning, empty signifiers, it is possible for signs to be attached to them and then perpetuated through continuation of media tropes. "For many, it comes down to this: Eating at Chick-fil-A supports heterosexual marriage and religious freedom. Refusing to eat there supports same-sex marriage and equality" (Severson & Brown, A day for chicken sandwiches as proxy in a cultural debate, 2012). Within this discourse, the sign is contested. Some saw the chicken sandwich as representative of homophobia and bigotry while

others saw it as a symbol of freedom and Christian values. Most of the actual activity in this series of events took place in this discursive space.

In contrast, little actual activity occurred in the space of the attempted boycott, which is the classic example of political consumerism. In a boycott consumers reject goods or services which are either themselves derived through objectionable practices or which come from a company that has objectionable values or practices. In the case of a boycott, consumers have two choices - abstinence from consumption or going to a competitor. Most successful boycotts have, historically, been large scale and united people around a single identifying issue and been directed at a single source (the Montgomery Bus Boycott, most notably). For the most part, boycotts are called for and organized by activist groups. However, in the case of Chick-fil-A while there were activist groups calling for a boycott, no concerted effort appears to have been made to present a united front or organize. (Some of this could have been due to too many activist organizations wanting to take credit for a boycott.) Additionally, many of the organizations that were involved in this boycott are LGBT groups that are also boycotting The Salvation Army, Target, Best Buy and the Boy Scouts, providing a long list for consumers to remember.

In *Boycott or Buycott? Understanding political consumerism*, Lisa Neilson states that boycotts "are a common element of activist campaigns, the types of activities that aim to gain media attention in order to negatively impact the reputation of a target firm" (2012). The media serves to inform and motivate boycotters through a show of others who are participating and an affirmation that a movement exists, providing both information and motivation for individuals to take part. This also provides a sense of diffused aesthetic formation, allowing an individual to know that they are part of something larger. In this case, media coverage frames what is

essentially individual choice "as collective action, potentially motivating participation either because boycotters would interpret the participation of others as normative behavior, or because the participation of others would provide reassurance of a boycott's efficacy" (Neilson, 2012, p. 216). However, little attention was given to boycott efforts in this case. Individuals made pledges through social media and to traditional media that they would no longer patronize Chick-fil-A (spurred by a few celebrities making those statements). Since a concerted effort to organize was not successfully made, it is impossible to determine the number of people who intended to boycott or if they actually affected a change in their dining habits.²¹ Lack of media coverage for the boycott itself and lack of organization likely contributed to each other.

Counter to the media necessary in boycotts, buycotts are motivated through "involvement in voluntary associations," where information is spread through word-of-mouth and motivation is provided through social connections. As such, buycotts are easier to spread on social media and local networks, like church groups or service organizations. Including things like labeling movements (organic, free-ranged, free trade, made in America), buycotts have tended to attract far less immediate media attention. "The implication is that social capital may not only influence buycotting by making information accessible via associations, but also by increasing the likelihood of that information being acted upon" (Neilson, 2012, p. 216). Unlike a boycott, which is predicated on denial, a buycott is centered on consumption of certain goods, either based on label (such as organic or free trade) or brand (such as Chick-fil-A), which has been approved of. Buycotting is less aggressive, as it is based on continued consumption and support of a product rather than on denial and opposition. Despite the financial benefit that this brings to companies,

²¹ Several people noted that they had never been to Chick-fil-A or that they hadn't been in a while, but were still intending to boycott (Stein, 2012). It seems to me that this is not actually a boycott as there is no removal of support for the company and no action on the part of the consumer.

as we will see in the Chick-fil-A case, boycotts are not always supported by the corporation that it favors (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008).

Starting with general affirmations that people were going to continue to eat at Chick-fil-A, via social media, this boycott took a socially prominent role as "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day." The event was organized by Mike Huckabee on Facebook via an event page, with an opening statement, which can be found in chapter two. The same statement was also posted on Huckabee's website, with an RSVP form. 673,273 people had RSVPed as attending on Facebook (as of 12/2/12), with another 64,537 listed as maybe attending. (Numbers from Huckabee's site are unavailable.) The event created an estimated 29.9 percent hike in sales for franchisees but was not promoted by the company (Norman, 2012). Chick-fil-A made no statement leading up to the event and gave no statement following it other than to say that it saw record breaking sales and would not be releasing exact numbers (Bingham, 2012b).

Unlike most boycotts, this one received a great deal of immediate news coverage, likely due to the influence of media personalities and the larger implications of the controversy. Reports of lines circling parking lots and backing up traffic abound, as do stories of several hour waits (Roberts, 2012; Bingham, 2012a; Bingham, 2012b). People who were interviewed verified that the reason for their support was shared values, as well as support for the first amendment. A lot of the interviews given highlight peoples' right to believe what they want, but that the individual giving the interview agreed with Cathy. However, there were several individuals interviewed who simply claimed to "support the food" (Bingham, 2012a).

These two major forms of activism, boycotting and buycotting, form a dialectic. Boycotting is electing to not buy from a company which you disagree with, while buycotting is purchasing from a company which you support. On one level, they are the same as they both use

consumer activity in hopes of getting companies to comply with your desires. Boycotting offers an individual the choice of abstaining from consuming an item (not eating fast food) or consuming something produced by a competitor of the company that one is boycotting (eating at McDonalds). Buycotting, likewise offers an individual two choices; solely increasing consumption (stopping by for an afternoon snack) or transferring consumption from a competitor (eating at Chick-fil-A rather than McDonalds). As most long term budgets are fixed and there are a wide variety of alternatives, purchase transference tends to be the ultimate end of both of these modes. Therefore, both have aspects of the other and for the most part, boycotting will mean, necessarily buycotting to a lesser degree. The inverse is also true. The key nuance is therefore going to reside in the intent of the action: is an individual seeking to punish a company or reward it.

The Inaction of Virtual Solidarity

A consequence of the media/consumer configuration in which the Chick-fil-A controversy occurred is virtual solidarity.²² That is to say that these configurations allows for "catharsis of the political sentiments" (Miller, 2009, p. 76). Simply by taking a side, or locating themselves through an aesthetic style, the consumer can relate to people that are taking a more active response, providing them with the moral satisfaction of political action without the need to actually take part. This assuages any guilt that the person may have about not taking an active stance.

All areas of political consumerism can be subject to virtual solidarity. It is simple for a consumer to boycott if they do not regularly eat at a Chick-fil-A. As we saw in chapter two, a lot of people pledging to take part in a boycott stated that they had been boycotting for years or had

²² I do not differentiate between virtual solidarity and slacktivism, using them interchangeably.

never eaten at a Chick-fil-A. This means that their activism is entirely on an intellectual level, without any practical change in their behavior or consequence to Chick-fil-A.

On the other side, buycotting is equally simple if you eat Chick-fil-A every Tuesday. There was significantly less of this behavior evident in the case study, but that is likely given the nature of the product. There were a lot of calls to the effect of "I love Chick-fil-A and eat there relatively often," but no one eats fried chicken every day, and there is a social stigma about eating/feeding your family fast food too often (often enough to make the kind of statement necessary for evidence of slacktivism on this end). A much milder form of slacktivism can be found in statements like "I like Chick-fil-A and will continue to eat there." This suggests support but fails to pledge change of any sort, creating a kind of neutral statement. Additionally, both sides of the dialectic contain the possibility for consumers to pledge a change and then not follow through.²³

In the case of discursive consumerism, it seems to me that virtual solidarity operates at a lower level. Rather than crafting attacks or supports of a brand, slacktivist share or like the work of others. Likewise, social media has made it simple to take part in discursive political consumerism, as all it takes is hitting the "Share" button. "The virtual becomes a substitute for concrete political solidarity" (Miller, 2009, p. 76). This is a kind of effortless activism that requires no real skill other than the basic ability to use a computer.

²³ I cannot say too much about the occurrence of this, as many of the numbers are not available.

Conclusion

I have spent the body of this work moving toward the conclusion that consumerism is a space for identity building and interaction in our society. I intend that consumption generates a space for negotiation of meaning and values within a consumer society. This is a space through which consumers can make reflective choices about companies and actions that they support or oppose. These conclusions were enabled through a case study of the Chick-fil-A controversy which took place in the summer of 2012. Within this case, there were clear instances of both individual and communal identity construction and narrative building, as well as negotiation between political and religious narratives. Consumer action allowed people to express their support or distain for Chick-fil-A's stance on same-sex marriage. This has highlighted the fact that economic action is integral to activism within a consumer society. However, all economic action is not done out of a desire for activist expression. I would caution against reading political resistance or support out of an individual's choice of pasta based on an assumption that they are making an activist statement. Despite that, their choice is always tied up in their identity and in the construction thereof. Do they see themselves as a person who eats pasta? White or whole wheat, spaghetti or rotini? Is there a brand that they like best or do they just select the cheapest option? These things contribute to a statement about who they are, and who they see themselves as.

Activist inclination and consumer choice, however, do get tied up in events like the Chick-fil-A Controversy. In these cases personal identity compelled people to take a stand, both born out of and constantly generating a communal identity. Even those that were not compelled to take an actual action, those that participated in political discursive consumerism or virtual

solidarity, identified with a communal identity. (In some cases, that communal identity was just of those who didn't care one way or another.)

Beyond Chick-fil-A

Moving beyond this one case study, there are several implications for future consumer behavior. The first is that boycotts are likely to continue on a downward slope. That is to say, boycotts are likely to lessen in both intensity and viability as a tool for effecting change. As the media enables consumers to become overwhelmed with things to be offended over, it is unlikely that any one event is going to be enough to generate a sustained boycott. As we saw in the Chick-fil-A case, outrage was generated by the media and dependent on the media to sustain itself. Rather than sustained boycotts, increased levels of virtual solidarity saw brand image take a hit without much actualized effect. Likewise, one of the only reasons that any boycott could have succeeded in this case is that Chick-fil-A is a single, independent company which produces final products.²⁴ Additionally, new media does not lend itself to a central, unified effort. Rather, being defused and lending itself to the creation of hundreds of different communities, it limits the ability of participants to perceive that they are part of a larger group activity, hindering any large scale efforts to boycott which are not centered in a physical community. Boycotting is not an activity that is visibly present, and boycotts have depended on the media to reinforce that other people are taking part. Present media configurations do not lend to this, as it would require continuous reminders and coverage.

On the flip side, boycotting is likely to increase, as it takes very little additional effort and is ultimately seen as a social positive. (That is, it is seen as socially positive to consume and

²⁴ This is opposed to a company like Monsanto, which I recently saw a call to boycott, which would also necessitate a boycott of over 100 other companies, including Kraft, General Mills, Unilever and Procter and Gamble, who use Monsanto products within their own.

negative to abstain from consumption.) Additionally, it is much easier for the political pundits and media personalities to point a large group of their followers in the same direction for one day, as with the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, than to maintain an on-going effort. It is also, a visible effort; one that allows participants to perceive their community and connect with each other. At the core of why buycotting is on the up, however, is that it is simply easier to buy something that you would not normally buy than to abstain from something that you would normally consume, as one requires an you to deny yourself while the other does not.

Implicit in buycotting are aspects of boycott. What I mean by this is that if you buy organic, you are necessarily not buying non-organic. However, unlike a classic boycott, where the intention is to stop consumption of X, in buycotting there is a transference of consumption between goods with the intention is to increase consumption of Y. Within the case of Chick-fil-A, this transference occurred between Chick-fil-A and other lunch options. Transference of buying power is necessary in a sustained boycott, as daily budgets tend to be fixed. Already, we can point to increasingly successful buycotting movements, such as organic food and hybrid cars, which are continually gaining cultural acceptance. In both of these examples, individuals are able to transfer their purchasing power from the products that they would normally buy to products that are more in line with who they see themselves as.

Buycotting offers a mode of resistance within modern society which does not lessen an individual's participation in daily life. This can be articulated through statements to the effect of "I will increase consumption of this product because it supports something I believe in." This does not at first seem to be a resistive statement. However, the resistance is located within the discarding of the first product, which is not seen as in line with the individual's worldview. Through buycotting, activism is reoriented as an action within the confines of the market rather

than an action which is, on some level, a rejection of the market. This positions activism as an activity which people are familiar with, and with which they can relate. Ideally, this will make activism more accessible to individuals, which seems to hold true in the cases of hybrid cars and organic food. For the most part, these two movements have not been embraced due to monetary concerns, but because of individuals seeing them as the morally superior choice and therefore as a confirmation of them as moral beings.

It is especially important for religious subjects to take note of this shift, as they have often been at the center of successful activism. This changes the tools that are available for use, and the methods of activism. Rather than saying, "don't buy x because it runs counter to our beliefs," organizers will need to address activism from the other end, presenting it as "buy y because they support our values." Additionally, this acceptance of boycotting represents an acceptance of the market as a valid space for religious negotiation. That is to say, a negotiation of values takes place within this mode which requires that values are represented through willingness to consume. Boycotting also promises to be especially useful for religious individuals, as they often have a readily available network of local social capital in the form of church organizations.

A key factor which makes the Chick-fil-A Controversy so important, is that it is not the first boycott, or even the most successful one. However, it represents one of the first focused, large scale boycotts. Other boycotts have taken the forms of defused movements which are located at the periphery of society and are exclusive. Cases like organic food or hybrid cars fail to include those without the disposable income to take part. However, Chick-fil-A is equally as affordable as most other fast-food options and the controversy is based on a cause that most Americans can relate to in some aspect. Additionally, it was organized in a very public space

rather than being supported through niche markets. That is to say, the Chick-fil-A Controversy brought to the fore of public dialog something which had been happening under the radar for years.

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Appendix A - Timeline

- ❖ July 2 – Interview published in The Biblical Recorder (ran in the July 7 print issue)
 - Headline: “Guilty as charged,” Dan Cathy says of Chick-fil-A’s stand on faith, family values
- ❖ July 2: Equality Matters release a study on Chick-fil-A financial contributions based on 2010 tax returns; Focuses on WinShape secondary donations to “anti-gay” organizations
- ❖ July 16: Biblical Recorder story reposted in the Baptist Press with minor grammatical change
 - Related articles quickly surface on major news networks/websites – most with “anti-gay” headlines
- ❖ July 18: Kevin Coleman interview with Dan Cathy, which aired June 16, first pulled in by smaller online news sources/blogs; Picked up by major networks/sites a few days later
 - Cathy states that we are inviting God’s judgment by saying that we know better than him what constitutes a marriage and I pray God’s mercy on a generation which has such an arrogant, prideful attitude
- ❖ July 20: Thomas Menino, Mayor of Boston, states that he will not allow Chick-fil-A to open franchises in his city
- ❖ July 25: Alderman Proco Moreno announces intention to block any more Chick-fil-A stores from Chicago (First store opened earlier this year)
- ❖ July 26: Mayor Rahm Emanuel (Chicago) supports Moreno’s stance
- ❖ July 26: San Francisco mayor, Edwin Lee , “strongly recommends” that Chick-fil-A not try to open a store near them
- ❖ July 26: Several pundits, law professors and the ACLU all make statements that blocking business permits based on political views is a violation of the first amendment
- ❖ End of July: Financial contributions brought back into conversation with scattered coverage

- ❖ August 1: Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day (organized by Mike Huckabee) sees record setting sales (an estimated 29.9 sales increase)
- ❖ August 3: “Kiss-in” - protest sees significantly lower than anticipated turn out
- ❖ Sept. 19: Chicago alderman Moreno makes statement that he had secured an agreement from Chick-fil-A to stop donating to organizations that oppose gay marriage
- ❖ Sept. 19: The Civil Rights Agenda claims to have seen the letter and that it states that WinShape will take a closer look at organizations that they donate to and not support organizations with a political agenda.
- ❖ Sept. 20: Chick-fil-A reaffirms statements made July 19 (via Facebook) that they treat all people with respect, honor and dignity and that they intend to abstain from political and social debate
- ❖ Sept. 21: Anthony Martinez (Director of Civil Rights Agenda) express concern over lack of confirmation on the part of Chick-fil-A that any meetings or agreements had taken place
- ❖ Sept. 21: Dan Cathy denies any change of policy or concessions
- ❖ Sept. 23: Moreno demands that Cathy make a statement on whether his company will uphold the agreement that his executives made
- ❖ Sept. 24: Cathy states that they never agreed to change their stance on gay marriage
- ❖ Sept. 24: Moreno releases letter dated January 31

Appendix B - Selection of Images from Boycott Chick-fil-A page on Facebook

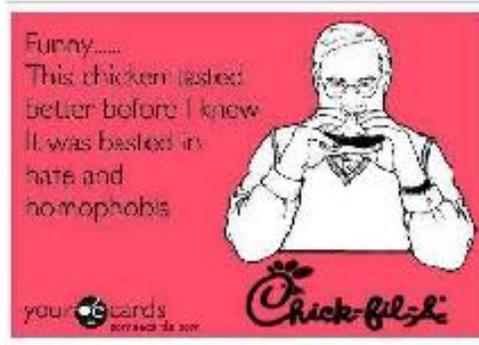


Figure 1 July 19 post



Figure 2 July 19 post

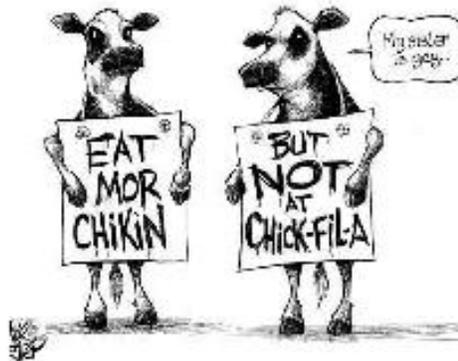


Figure 3 July 19 post



Figure 4 July 20 post

Appendix C: Discursive Political Consumerism gathered via Google Image search

Let's ask the Christian owner of a restaurant chain that isn't open on Sunday his view on gay marriage and act surprised and outraged when we don't like his answer.




Saying you don't support gay marriage is free speech.



Not paying millions to keep it illegal isn't speech, it's oppression.





We didn't invent freedom of speech we just like to exercise our right to use it!



It is not hatred to say what you think, it is hateful to accuse others of homophobia when that is a blatant lie!

The right to say what you think is just that a right, to deny that freedom is Fascist!

*Support Freedom of Speech in America
Because
Supporting Family Values
Is Not Hate Speech*



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