Encountering an American Self: Study Abroad and National Identity

NADINE DOLBY

Introduction

American undergraduates are often enticed to study abroad by the promise that they will have the experience of a lifetime and the experience of the world. For example, one American university attracts participants by claiming that “studying abroad promotes cross-cultural understanding,”1 broadens your worldview, and prepares you for your future. Another university promises that “overseas study is the most effective and dramatic experience you can have to broaden your international and intercultural awareness.”2 Encountering another world, immersing oneself in the daily practices of other people, sometimes living and speaking in another language, and learning how others view the world are all touted as the benefits of studying abroad. However, it is also evident, as Brown University’s Office of International Program’s suggests, that study abroad provides the opportunity to reflect on “the awareness of the values and way of life of your own country, your own place in that country, and its place in the world.”3 Thus, study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself—particularly one’s national identity—in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self.4

This article examines the study abroad experiences of a group of Ameri...
ican undergraduates enrolled at a large research university in the Midwest. In this article, I discuss the ways that these students negotiate an “American” identity within the context of their study abroad experiences in Australia in 2001. I argue that this “encounter with an American self” is the most significant component of these students’ experiences in Australia. As I will demonstrate, American national identity is neither simply discarded nor strengthened, but is riddled with contradictions, as it is actively encountered and constructed outside of the physical borders of the United States. As Craig Calhoun argues, national membership is not “a choice between thick but irrationally inherited identities on the one hand and thin but rationally achieved ones on the other.” Thus, the choice is not solely between a “thick,” ethnocentric, exclusionary American identity, and a “thin” universal identity that is detached from affiliation. Instead, students (to differing degrees, and in differing ways) often simultaneously embrace a national and a “postnational” identity: affirming and often displaying membership in a nation and a national imaginary, while at the same time questioning the assumed equivalence of state and nation. These issues became particularly significant in the context of this study, as the return interviews with the American students occurred (obviously, quite unexpectedly) in the immediate aftermath of the attacks of September 11.

This research contributes to attempts to redefine and strengthen the relevance of comparative education to renewing commitments to democracy and the public good, within the constantly changing dynamics of the local, the nation-state, and the global. At the core of these conversations is the question of how citizenship and national identity can be shifted away from exclusionary discourses and practices to ones that are more open and inclusive. Such questions are particularly important at a time when “citizenship” and the assumed link between a citizen and a nation are being challenged by multiple reformulations of citizenship, both practically and theoretically.

In the balance of this article, I will first discuss study abroad in the

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5 “American” is a problematic, though unavoidable, word that will appear frequently in this article. First, let me note that though “America” can, and does, encompass more than the United States, there is no easy, adjectival form of “United States,” and thus “American” will be used in that manner here. Second, I distinguish between the “United States” as a state formation and “America” as a national, and, as I argue, postnational formation that is not wholly in the control nor the domain of those who are citizens of the United States. Thus, “United States” and “America” are used very deliberately and are not used interchangeably.

6 The research discussed here is part of a larger, comparative project that analyzes how both American and Australian undergraduates reconstruct national identities through their experiences of study abroad.


9 Space precludes an extensive discussion of these issues. For development of the changing notions of citizenship and democracy, see my essay, “Popular Culture and Democratic Citizenship,” Harvard Educational Review 73, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 238–84.
American context. I then provide background on the students who participated in this study, briefly review the relevant literature on national identities, and describe the post–September 11, 2001, context that framed the return interviews—upon which I base the majority of the arguments I make in this article. I then present three linked arguments about the ways in which the Americans students in this study negotiated their national identity. First, I argue that students’ national identities shifted from a passive to active identification during their stay in Australia and that they became cognizant that others, outside the United States, are also authors—people who actively construct, form, and influence—of America. Second, I demonstrate how students reacted to this new understanding of America, drawing on James Clifford’s ideas of identity as property as well as Lauren Berlant’s notion of “infantile citizenship.” Finally, I explore how some students recognized, examined, and reconciled the fissures between state and nation—between the “United States” and “America”—that emerge through their conversations and other experiences in Australia. In conclusion, I suggest that despite renewed nationalist fervor in the United States, these students’ encounters with their “American” selves point to the possibilities of understanding America as a postnational formation that is grounded in multiplicity and openness, not singularity and closure.

Study Abroad in the American Context

Though the actual numbers of American students studying abroad is still limited, since 1991–92 the number has more than doubled from 71,154 students to 160,920 in 2001–2. While Europe remains the most popular destination for students (63 percent), other regions of the world, including Australia, are increasingly popular. For example, 9,456 American students studied abroad in Australia in 2001–2, an increase of 17 percent over the previous year. Additionally, 50 percent of college bound high school seniors indicate interest in studying abroad.

Study abroad, of course, is one small aspect of global movement in a world that appears to be constantly in motion: refugees, immigrants, the international jet set, road warriors, and tourists dominate the reality of international travel. Yet, study abroad’s significance lies not in its current num-

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11 All statistics were obtained from Institute of International Education, Open Doors 2003 (New York: Institute of International Education, 2003). Note that the data are not broken down by students’ citizenship for the year reported; thus, it is possible that some outgoing “American” students are not U.S. nationals. However, as the number of nonnational undergraduates studying at U.S. universities is still relatively small (compared, e.g., to Australia), it is doubtful that such students are a large percentage of the total.

bers, but in its growing popularity on American university and college campuses, and its symbolic place in many universities' and colleges' new commitments to preparing students for life in an increasingly globalized world. As Graufurd Goodwin and Michael Nachl's 1991 study of the international experience of U.S. faculty documents, the internationalization of U.S. campuses is weak. More recently, the American Council on Education's report similarly suggests the urgent need for further efforts in this area. And last year NAFSA: Association of International Educators recommended that the federal government fund fellowships that would triple the number of American students who study abroad. 13 That study abroad can potentially shape the future identity and position of the United States in the world is also underscored by Patricia Harrison, the State Department's assistant secretary for educational and cultural affairs, who commented: "Some feared that in the wake of 9/11 young Americans would shrink from international experiences, and pursue only domestic options. But as the new Open Doors report shows, more students are studying abroad than ever before, a sign that young Americans clearly recognize the crucial role they will play in leading our nation into a world even more connected than it is today."

While there may be limits to the ways and extent that institutions can internationalize the domestic experience on campuses, study abroad opportunities are virtually limitless, and provide students with perspectives that cannot be duplicated at home.

Despite the growth in the numbers of U.S. students studying abroad, and study abroad's increasingly common place in U.S. universities' globalizing rhetoric, actual research on study abroad participants is quite limited. Much of the available research focuses on language acquisition, academic outcomes of study abroad, and reflections on personal growth and change. 15 To help


15 The leading journals in the field of study abroad are Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, the Journal of Studies in International Education (published by the Association for Studies in International Education), and International Educator (published by NAFSA: Association of International Educators). Though largely oriented to practitioners, they also publish research-based literature, in addition to personal reflections on study abroad. See, e.g., Elizabeth Shammon, "Reflections on the Meaning of Study Abroad," Frontiers 1 (Fall 1995); Richard Jurask, Howard Lamson, and Patricia O'Maley, "Ethnographic Learning While Studying Abroad," Frontiers 2 (Fall 1996); and Brian Whalen, "Learning Outside the Home Culture: An Anatomy and Ecology of Memory," Frontiers 2 (Fall 1996) (all available at http://www.frontiersjournal.com [accessed February 16, 2003]). See also Barbara F. Freid, ed., Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995); Kenneth
fill this gap, in this study I examine how the study abroad experience shapes students’ perceptions of their national identity. I argue that, despite the rhetoric that focuses attention on students’ encounter with “the other” and the subsequent increase in cultural competency and understanding, in actuality students’ primary encounter during the study abroad experience is with themselves as national and global actors.

The Study: Background and Methodology

In this article, I will discuss data collected from a group of students (all American citizens or residents) enrolled at a large, research university in the United States, which I will refer to as “University of the Midwest.” Students participating in the research all studied abroad in Australia during the spring semester 2001. They were interviewed in person twice: in November–December 2000, before their study abroad experience, and in fall 2001 (September–November) after they returned. Students were also e-mailed midway through their stay in Australia and were asked to reflect on their early experiences there. In total, 26 students were interviewed in November–December 2000, and 22 (20 citizens and 2 residents of the United States) completed both interviews; 19 of the 26 participated in the e-mail interview.

Students who participated in this study had a wide array of majors, including finance, environmental science, marketing, psychology, biology, and engineering. Of the 26 original participants, 6 were male and 20 female, which is not unusual given that more women than men participate in study abroad programs. In 2001–2, for example, 64.9 percent of American study abroad students were women. With the exception of three students (two of whom were born outside of the United States), all of the students were white. Nationally, 82.9 percent of American students who study abroad are Caucasian. Most of the students—17 out of 26—had previous international experience, though this fact requires some clarification. For most of the students, “international” experience consisted of going to Cancun on spring


16 As 91 percent of American students study abroad for one semester or less, the length of the program on which this study focused is not atypical.

17 One student moved out of state on her return to the United States, and three additional students could not be contacted for follow-up interviews.

18 It is undoubtedly true that students’ race affected their experiences in Australia, though that discussion is beyond the scope of this article, and is only noted as relevant. Certainly, as most American students were white, their experiences in Australia were easier—in some ways—than those of many international students in Australia who are predominantly Asian. For a review of issues of race and nation in Australia, see Natine Dolby, “Race, Nation, State: Multiculturalism in Australia,” Arena Magazine 45 (February–March 2000): 48–51.
break or a short trip to Canada or London. A few had traveled with high school groups on chaperoned trips, and a few had spent more extended time periods (1 month or so) traveling in Europe. Only the two women born outside of the United States (one in India, one in Iraq) and the one woman with family in Thailand had spent significant time outside of the United States. With rare exceptions (Ted, discussed in this article, is one of those exceptions) students who had traveled outside of the United States had not had significant enough experiences, or time abroad, to be able to reflect about their national identity in that context.

I should also note that the American students studied abroad in locations throughout Australia, including Perth, Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. Thus, they did not participate together in one program, but enrolled as either study abroad or exchange students in universities throughout Australia.19

The data discussed in this article are derived (with limited and noted exceptions) from the return interviews. My analysis is qualitative and interpretive, and is concerned with understanding how students construct meaning from their experience, particularly in the context of the discourse of an increasingly globalized world.20 I do not claim here to measure or evaluate students’ national identity before and after a study abroad experience: such an approach and analysis is better suited to large-scale, quantitative research.21 As such, I do not focus on charting the movement of individual students, but of reflecting on how students interpret the world, and their place in it, after they return from Australia. Therefore, my approach to analysis emphasizes students’ own interpretations of their experiences, within a critical framework that is sociologically driven and contextual.22 Thus, little of the “before” (interview) or “during” (e-mail) data are discussed in this article. The before and during communications were used to identify general trends and areas of discussion to pursue during the return interviews, and (critically, for qualitative inquiry) to establish ongoing relationships with students.

19 As Fazal Rizvi has observed, while in U.S. terms the students in this study would be considered middle class, in global terms, this study contributes to mapping the movement of elites (in conversation).
20 Considering the small size of the sample, and the limits of research conducted by one individual, I cannot, and do not, attempt to make broad claims about the impact of study abroad on national identity. Instead, my objective in this research is to identify and begin to discuss critical, though largely uninvestigated questions about the relationship between study abroad and nation. While such issues are central to the burgeoning literature on globalization and identity, study abroad, to date, has not been a significant site of research on this topic.
21 Similarly, I do not claim that the interpretation I present here can be generalized to American students studying in countries other than Australia. Certainly there is an element of “self-selection” in the study abroad process, and students who are attracted to study abroad in Australia may demonstrate certain traits that may be absent in students who choose to study abroad in countries that bear less outward resemblance to the United States or whose major language is not English. Such issues warrant future study.
22 See, e.g., Catherine Cornbleth, *Hearing America’s Youth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003). See also Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth, Identity, and Popular Culture in South Africa* (n. 4 above), particularly the appendix, which discusses methodology.
In the return interviews, students were asked to discuss their time abroad; important and/or challenging experiences; differences they noted; what it was like to be an American abroad; what cultural/national influences they observed in Australia; what they learned about Australian culture/history/politics; if they looked at the United States differently while in or since leaving Australia; and if/how they had changed in other ways, among other questions. Readers should also note that the return interviews, which form the basis of this study, were conducted in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001. My interviews began on September 13 and concluded mid-November. Given this circumstance, I also asked students, toward the end of the interview, if they felt that their perspectives on September 11 had been shaped/changed by their experience abroad. While the exact conditions of the return interviews (particularly the early ones) were unusual, they also provided an unexpected window into how the study abroad experience frames and shapes the meaning of the American nation, and national identity, in the twenty-first century.

National Identities in Global Context

National identities are profoundly invested in the mythology of space and territoriality, of inventing, drawing, and policing lines that separate people from one another in a world where the nation-state is the fundamental political unit. As Benedict has argued, nations were originally created through the vehicle of print media, which allows individuals who are geographically dispersed to imagine themselves linked by an affinity to an abstract, imagined entity—the nation. As Arjun Appadurai asserts, “The modern nation-state . . . is a quintessential cultural product, a product of the collective imagination.” Such identities are sustained through the rituals of patriotism, and “invented traditions,” which, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, sustain the fabric of the nation. Such invented traditions include (in the United States) such rituals as national holidays; the Pledge of Allegiance, the ceremonial raising, lowering, and displaying of the flag; and the singing of the national anthem at sporting events, among others. Contemporary nations have the additional

(and perhaps considerably more influential) resources of the electronic media, which can be mobilized to create solidarities in times of crisis. For example, in September 2001, the electronic media nurtured patriotic bonds between the “American heartland” and New York City, forcefully overriding negative sentiments about New York City’s relationship with the rest of the United States.25

The borders of nation-states are inherently unstable. For example, borders can be porous (as between the United States and Canada, particularly before September 11, 2001), extremely rigid and tension-filled (as between North and South Korea), or a combination of the two. Additionally, the internal composition of the nation is constantly changing and often contested. For example, nation-states are deluged with refugees and immigrants (legal and illegal), and indigenous peoples claim the very soil of the nation. The rupture of difference undermines the imagined cohesion. Diasporic communities throughout the world—in major cities and small towns—have also given rise to “postnational” formations: nations that go beyond and complicate the political boundaries of states.26 And, the media’s (particularly the electronic media’s) influence on the formation of national identities is not straightforward: the explosion in information technology has also created opportunities for Americans to have access to multiple mediums that may disturb or undercut the suturing of national identities. For example, Americans have immediate entrée to the perspectives of news organizations, government officials, nongovernmental organizations, and private individuals throughout the world, including sources (such as Al-Jazeera—now available in an English language Web site and soon available in English language broadcast) that seriously destabilize the hegemonic (and largely homogeneous) perspectives of American media.27

All of the above developments have led scholars to question the significance of national identities: Are they still relevant? Should they be? Martha Nussbaum, for example, has advocated a cosmopolitan identity that is premised on a common human bond that transcends nation-states.28 However, others have suggested that such abstract ties—ties that exist solely on the human level—are unobtainable. As a substitute for such abstract ties, Guttmann examines the contemporary possibilities for affiliation beyond the na-


tion. She notes that there is no solid, definitive global polity to which people can promise allegiance.\textsuperscript{29} For example, the United Nations does not attempt such a project, and other international bodies (such as the World Trade Organization) have inspired individual, human solidarity only in opposition to their purposes and mandates (though corporate and state elites, among others, have been inspired to promise allegiance to the economic mandates and policies of such organizations). Bruce Robbins, though committed to the proliferation of cosmopolitan identities, is also skeptical of Nussbaum’s position. While Nussbaum suggests that one must eschew national loyalties to accept a universal, nonnational identity, Robbins’ conception of cosmopolitanism does not necessarily discard the significance of local attachments, instead attempting to promulgate identities that work simultaneously above and below the level of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{30} Arjun Appadurai similarly proposes that “new patriotisms” (such as the now defunct Queer Nation) evolve from multiple, local attachments, not floating, universal detachment.\textsuperscript{31} These “new patriotisms” are not attached to specific nation-states but to bonds that use the language of nationalism to inspire allegiance and solidarity, at the same time that they undercut the very premise of such identities.

Despite the proliferation of attempts to theorize beyond the nation, it is clear that nationalisms and national identities have not solely weakened: in some cases, they have persisted (the case of Palestinian nationhood), and in others, have been reinvigorated (the case of U.S. national identity in response to September 11, 2001).\textsuperscript{32} Much of the research on national identity has examined diasporic, immigrant, or refugee communities, the interaction of the “center” and the “periphery” and the implications of such interactions for “British” or “American” identities (for example), and the attempts by nation-states to reign in the proliferation of identities that can operate under its signs.\textsuperscript{33} Another strand of research focuses attention on the mobility of,

\textsuperscript{29} A. Gutmann, “Democratic Citizenship,” in Cohen, ed.
\textsuperscript{31} See Arjun Appadurai, “Patriotism and Its Futures,” Public Culture 5 (1993): 411–29. Appadurai’s “new patriotisms” imply that individuals will be (or are) free to choose their allegiances, despite (or in addition to) their citizenship by birth, in such states where birthright citizenship exists. However, as Bernard Yack discusses in the American context, making citizenship a proactive choice, rather than a birthright, may reduce tolerance for difference, as the need to declare political loyalty to the state would foster divisions. See B. Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation,” in Theorizing Nationalism, ed. Ronald Beiner (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).
in global terms, elites, who tend to move as tourists, as employees of multinational corporations, or for business opportunities. Within education, there is a growing body of research on the experiences of students who leave their home countries for education, particularly that of students from developing countries who travel to the “center” countries (Great Britain, Australia, the United States) for higher education. All of this movement suggests that though national identities are still relevant, viable, and in some cases, robust, they exist alongside a growing number of “postnational” identities, which are simultaneously local and global: for example, local movements to resist the imposition of World Bank “structural adjustment” in developing countries. Additionally, as Arjun Appadurai argues in the context of the United States, such postnational identities may involve disarticulating the assumed coevalness of “state” and “nation,” of the “United States” and “America.” What is challenged here is the presupposition, as Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort write, that “the state must appear as nation and the nation as ethnoculturally given and historically continuous.” Obscured in this equation is the idea of a “state” that is separate from a “nation.” In opposition to the imagined community of the nation, the state is, “a distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions in the name of popular interests or the general will.” Of course, the state, like other sites of power, is also a location of intense struggle and of


35 For example, see Fazal Roif, “International Education and the Production of the Global Imagination,” in Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives, ed. Nicholas Burbules and Carlos Torres (New York: Routledge, 2000). Such research is increasingly common in Australia, as it has become an extremely popular destination for international students, particularly from Asia. For discussion, see David Cohen, “Southward, Ho,” Chronicle of Higher Education 49, no. 21 (January 31, 2003): A40.


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scholarly analysis. For example, Raymond Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres suggest that there are four dominant theories of the state: liberal, liberal democratic, Marxist, and Weberian. While not discounting the power of the state and its influence, Appadurai argues that our convictions, beliefs, and affiliations—not our state citizenship—should define our actions and solidarities. He asserts, “Bounded territories could give way to diasporic networks, nations to transnationals, and patriotism itself could become plural, serial, contextual, and mobile.” Hedetoft and Hjort similarly claim that “where the age of nationalism and the nation-state demanded that the political and the prepolitical community, citizenship and ethnicity/identity be imagined as one, the postnational era threatens to disaggregate the two.”

“Postnational” also implies that the state—and certainly the United States—is no longer fully in control of its own national identity. While the “United States,” as a political entity, controls its borders, and domestic and foreign state policy, “America” as a concept is much more variable and dispersed. Lauren Berlant makes this distinction clear, “The subject who wants to avoid the melancholy insanity of the self-abstraction that is citizenship, and to resist the lure of self-overcoming the material political context in which she [or he] lives, must develop tactics for refusing the interarticulation, now four hundred years old, between the United States and America, the nation and utopia.” Such a move requires that we understand that the notion of “America”—a utopic democracy—is not solely the notion of those who live in the United States, but is part of the global imagination, the global yearning. While the “United States” exists as a relatively stable (if constantly in flux) state polity, “America” is not yet (nor will it ever be) a wholly shaped and lived idea. “America” blossoms throughout the globe, is reinvented every day through the movement of peoples in and out of its borders, is rearticulated and remade through the circulation of Hollywood movies and television, and symbolizes a cosmopolitan patriotism that is grounded more in a “loyalty to democracy” than a “loyalty to country.” This constant rearticulation of “America”—as a utopic ideal—exists alongside, and sometimes in spite of, the actions of the U.S. government and military. Such shifts, and the recognition of the postnational articulations of America, have important

38 Hedetoft and Hjort, p. xvi.
40 Abowitz (n. 25 above), p. 17.
implications for theories of citizenship and how we imagine and participate in democracies at multiple levels.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{September 11, 2001, as a Context for the Research}

September 11 provided an unexpected context for the return interviews with the American students. I began my interviews—as previously scheduled—on September 13 and continued to interview students through November. I do not assume, in this article, that September 11 caused students to understand or interpret their national identities in certain ways. First, the interviews spanned several months, and certainly the media and national discourse around September 11 shifted during this period. Second, and more critically, decades of theoretical and empirical scholarship—in multiple fields and disciplines of the humanities and social sciences—insist that individuals are not media “dupes” who mindlessly reproduce the messages imparted to them. I position myself with cultural studies theorists who attempt to understand the complexities of media production, circulation, and consumption, while focusing on the centrality of human agency, resistance, and rearticulation to interpreting the contemporary world.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, while September 11 provided a unique and arguably unprecedented context for conversations about national identity, I do not believe that, in any way, it predetermined students’ interpretations.

However, it is important to concede that the return interviews may have been quite different if they had taken place before September 11. I was aware that “nation” and “national identity” had a currency at that moment that potentially shaped the interviews, and the media discourse about September 11 was a critical backdrop. Within hours of the attacks, the American media had “packaged” the event—complete with music and graphics. And just as quickly, as Michael Apple observes, “the ruling pundits took charge of the public expression of what were the legitimate interpretations of the disaster.”\textsuperscript{45} The mainstream media quickly stifled dissenting and (in their definition) unpatriotic voices, and television screens were overrun with government officials, representatives of the military, victims, and the families of victims. Individuals and organizations who attempted to reframe the discussion and


\textsuperscript{44} For example, see Paul Willis, \textit{Common Culture} (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999). Though not specifically focused on media, a classic example of this approach is Paul Willis’s \textit{Learning to Labor} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). See also Nadine Dolby and Greg Dimitriadis, eds. (with Paul Willis), \textit{Learning to Labor in New Times} (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, in press). For more on my perspectives on agency, particularly in regards to youth, see Dolby, “Popular Culture and Democratic Practic.”

focus on the difficult questions of why the United States’ foreign policy might provoke such action were publicly attacked, as were those who protested against the U.S. war in Afghanistan or those who questioned state action against suspected “terrorists.”\textsuperscript{46} And the tragic events in New York City, Washington, D.C., and central Pennsylvania became fodder for social, political, and military agendas, an ongoing story that continues to this day. All of the above, as it unfolded through the waning months of 2001, became part of my data, as current events (whatever they were at that moment) weaved their way into students’ reflections on their American identity.

**Studying Abroad and Reconstructing National/Postnational Identity**

In the balance of this article, I will examine several aspects of national and postnational identity as reconstructed by the American students who studied in Australia. First, I argue that national identity shifts from a passive to an active identity in the global context. Just as whiteness studies have argued that “white” identities are often invisible in contexts where whiteness is accepted as the “norm,” an American identity is only invigorated in a situation where students become “other,” and are thus compelled to interrogate their national location.\textsuperscript{47} Second, American students become aware that they are not the sole authors of their assumed, national, “American” identity. Instead, they encounter a postnational reality, in which “Americanness” is constructed (or authored) as much outside, as inside, the physical borders of the state. I argue, following Ben Feinberg, that this encounter with a national self is not a necessary psychological passage, or that is intrinsic to the study abroad experience. Rather, as Feinberg suggests, the emphasis on “self”-discovery is heavily embedded in American cultural representations of travel as self-exploration, and thus it is not surprising that American stu-

\textsuperscript{46} See Dolby and Burbules, eds. (n. 32 above); see particularly, in that special issue, N. Dolby and N. Burbules, “Education and September 11: An Introduction,” and Abowitz. See also Apple.

\textsuperscript{47} Some may argue that Australia is not particularly “other,” or different from, the United States and thus students in this study did not necessarily experience the “othering” that they might experience in a nation-state, which is, for example, less economically prosperous. My data contradicts this. Overall, American students felt very strongly positioned as “other” in Australia (specifically in regards to national identity. I would suggest that most students did not feel racially “othered” as most were white, and thus in the racial majority in Australia). Furthermore, there is no logical reason to assume that resentment toward Americans will be stronger in a less economically developed nation. For example, while I have felt some hostility directed toward me as an American in Australia, I have experienced very little similar sentiment in both Ghana and South Africa—nations that are poorer. Citizens of poorer nations may have varying responses to Americans, simultaneously wanting their assistance and resenting their presence. In contrast, citizens of wealthier nations may feel more comfortable in asserting their “difference” from Americans and in fact may do so proudly. Certainly the history of political and military relationships between the United States and “country x” plays a role in determining this (though not completely—citizens do not always agree with their nation-state’s official policy toward the United States.) What these complications suggest is that the degree to which one feels “other” is not simply about similarities or dissimilarities in standard of living and language. Such questions obviously deserve further scrutiny, particularly in a comparative context. For discussions of whiteness as property, see essays in Kimberlé Crenshaw, ed., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1996).
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dents’ narratives of their study abroad experience reflects this culturally pro-
scribed discourse.\textsuperscript{48}

Although I do not develop the comparative aspect of my research in this article, my analysis of the data collected with Australian students suggests that their narrations of the importance of their study abroad experience is not focused on self-discovery, or an encounter with Australian identity. Instead, as I develop elsewhere, Australian students are more apt to position Australia as “home” and a refuge from the world, but do not use it as a lens through which to narrate their experiences.\textsuperscript{49}

For some students, the response to this destabilization of control over the marker “American” is, as James Clifford argues, to assert their American identity as a property right, and thus one that must be displayed to be affirmed.\textsuperscript{50} Others are more conflicted, and attempt to negotiate a national identity that concedes its power and centrality, and that is more open to internal and external influence, thus opening up possibilities for a postna-
tional identity grounded in a cosmopolitan patriotism.

Encountering America in Australia

Prior to traveling to Australia, national identity—that of being an Amer-
ican—was largely a passive fact for most of the American undergraduates in this study. For some students, like Chris, it was strange and difficult to rec-
ognize that she was the one who was different, that she was the outsider: “It’s weird to show up and be the one, I have the accent now, and everybody else speaks what they consider normal. And so it was weird at first because I didn’t want to open my mouth.”\textsuperscript{51} With the exceptions of two students, all of the Americans in the study are Americans by virtue of their birth in the United States, and thus it is not unusual or unexpected that they would not be accustomed to being in the minority. As most of the students (19 of the 22 who completed both interviews) were also white, and from predominantly white suburban and rural areas of the Midwest, they had little to no expe-
rience of being the one who is marked, who is outside of the “norm.”

The first challenge to their idea of an American identity came early, at the mandatory orientation meeting for all students traveling to Australia the following semester. As is customary at these meetings, nationals of the host country and former American study abroad participants are invited to briefly address the students on what to expect from their stay. Usually, these meetings are designed to address outgoing students’ concerns, and give them impor-


\textsuperscript{49} See Nadine Dolby, “Globalization, Identity, and Nation: Australian and American Undergraduates Abroad” (unpublished manuscript, Northern Illinois University, 2004).

\textsuperscript{50} Clifford, “Objects and Selves” (n. 10 above).

\textsuperscript{51} All names are pseudonyms.
tant logistical information. However, at this meeting (in November 2000), one of the invited Australian students commented, quite bluntly, that “Australians hate Americans.” While the study abroad advisor, and other professional members of the staff, attempted to tone down and smooth over her observations, the impact of the comment was significant, as outgoing students were surprised, puzzled, and alarmed by this (largely) new information. During our predeparture interview, Danielle commented, “Because I live in America, I don’t really understand how Americans are mean.” Danielle’s American identity was still passive at this point, and she interpreted the Australian woman’s comments through a psychological paradigm that privileges the interpersonal behavior of Americans vis-à-vis Australians. Sara was also unsure how to interpret this new information: “They said a group of Americans traveling together wouldn’t be perceived as well as one traveling alone. This just baffled me.” Ted, in contrast, had traveled to France previously and was aware that European attitudes about Americans might similarly permeate Australia. He argued that the “positive things” about the United States are rarely publicized and said that “they’re getting a lot of the negative stuff and sometimes when they hear something about America that’s bad, it kind of builds up on that negative impression.” While he knew this was an unlikely scenario, he confessed that “I also think that I’m a little bit, I guess, afraid if I get attacked by a bunch of angry protestors on campus or something like that.”

Although students were concerned about anti-American sentiments (and a few about anti-American actions), the markers of American corporate culture provided a sense of security and familiarity. They found themselves surrounded by American corporate and media culture, which for many was equally surprising. As Patti remembered: “I was surprised. I was shocked actually. The music’s the same, same TV shows, maybe a couple of seasons behind. Even my textbooks [were the same as in the U.S.]. So, I was surprised at how much of an influence the U.S. has.” Linda recalled: “I felt comfortable there because we’re driving into Wollongong, and we would see the Blockbuster on the left, and the Chili’s on the right.” Nancy similarly reflected on her first week in Australia: “I live in a small town off the coast and am

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52 Unfortunately, I was not there for the meeting, as I was living in Australia at the time, and my interviews were scheduled to begin the following week. Thus, I cannot reflect any further on what the Australian woman meant by her comment. The significance, however, is that virtually every student who participated in this study mentioned her comment during the predeparture interviews, which took place in December 2000. By the return interviews, the comment was largely forgotten and only came up rarely. I also discussed the incident with several members of the study abroad office at the University of the Midwest.

53 I had asked students about “Americanization” in the interviews before they left. Many needed an explanation of what exactly I meant by the term. Most took a decidedly equivocal stance, feeling that American influence was both positive and negative, though only one student mentioned military/political issues in connection to Americanization. For the most part, students seemed somewhat puzzled by the question, as it seemed obvious—from most of their perspectives—that the United States influenced the world, and this influence is largely uncontrollable.
surrounded by KFC, Lonestar, McDonald’s, and Burger King. I felt very much like I had transferred schools [within the U.S.] and not that I was studying abroad. I still had to remind myself that I was in another country."

Thus, these students encounter their American identity immediately, and in multiple ways: the manner in which they are personally received and treated as American, the ways that the United States as a state is perceived in the world, and the influence of American corporate culture in Australia. As I will discuss in the following section, they also discover that their national identity is not totally under their control, that, in fact, “America” is a post-national formation open to contestation.

**Authoring America**

Early in their stays, the American students began to realize that although they had given little thought to their national identities, others have. For many of them, this was a frustrating experience, as they confronted the way that the image of “America” was constructed and circulated outside of its borders. Almost all of the students commented on being teased at some point for being an American, an experience of “othering” that was previously unfamiliar. Linda recalled that “the tour bus drivers would make some comments about Americans on the sly. Or we’d pull up to a McDonald’s and they’d be, like, oh the American embassy. We’re, like, what are you guys talking about?” Keith remembered a similar incident: “We were on tours, and right away, we introduced ourselves, and the tour guide was, like, ‘Oh no, Americans.’ And then he announced it to the bus, ‘We got a bunch of Americans up here.’ You know, it just made us feel uncomfortable and stuff. And then Canadians, on the other hand, were the best because, like, they were so proud of their country and they wore Canadian flags on their backpacks. God forbid someone called them American, they’d raise hell.” Claire reported even harsher critiques: “I think just being an American that you get a lot of crap. Like sepo, as in septic tank. I did not refer to any other culture as something as degrading as a septic tank, and they think it’s funny.”

Julie quickly ran into the influence of American media culture: “Like, they asked us, have you ever met Jerry Springer? And we’re, like, I can’t believe you watch that crap.” While the media stereotypes were troubling to students, more irksome was the growing realization that, in some arenas, Australians (and in general, non-Americans) knew more about the United States, its history, and its foreign (and, in some cases, domestic) policy than they did. Ellen related an embarrassing incident at a bar, which also involved several of her classmates from University of the Midwest: “One of the girls had forgotten her ID, and the bouncer, he was, like, answer this one question: what day did JFK die? And I was, like, I had no idea. I couldn’t even tell him what decade. It was embarrassing.” Ellen told me that none of the four women
in the group could answer his question, and the bouncer finally had to inform
the American students of the significance of November 22, 1963.54

Karen began to realize that even though she is an American, her national
identity and her residence in U.S. territory does not guarantee that she
intrinsically knows more about the United States than others: “I saw how
much information that the rest of the world, or Australia specifically, gets
about us. Because they actually get a lot of information about what’s going
on here, and I felt almost disappointed that I didn’t know. It seemed like I
didn’t know as much stuff as some people knew about the United States.”
As students became aware of the negative sentiments that are often expressed
about the United States and Americans, they recognized that they had to
negotiate this perception, whether they agreed with it or not. In that way,
the Americans began to realize that they were not the sole authors or creators
of American identity—that though it is “their” national identity, it is not only
“imagined,” produced, or circulated within the United States. In fact, many
people around the world have a voice in producing what it means to be an
American, and sometimes Americans themselves are unable to respond, as
Julie was when she was pulled into discussions about the United States: “Well,
I listened to their reasoning and what not, and I don’t know, I suppose I
argued back, but it’s a little uncomfortable because I don’t know what to
say. Because I’m guilty of not knowing the things that they said that Americans
don’t know.” Through these discussions, Julie began to realize that although
in the United States she does not feel it is necessary to “know,” outside of
the United States this characteristic becomes problematic and a negative
attribute. But she was helpless to do much to counter it, as she conceded
the limitations of her position. Some of the students began to feel that simply
by opening their mouths and speaking, they became vulnerable to misun-
derstandings based on their American identities. In one extreme example,
Joe recalled: “We were taking our friend [a visiting American] down to Mar-
garet River [a holiday town on the West Coast]. And when a guy heard her
accent, he was yelling and screaming, ‘We got to arrest those damn Yankees.’
. . . We weren’t in the wrong at all. We didn’t do anything but talk American,
and offer to buy him a drink. . . . We bought him a drink and he threw it
in my buddy’s face.” While it may be difficult to fully believe that the students
did nothing to provoke this incident, it underscores the (potentially) con-
troversial and volatile nature of American identity outside of the United
States. Students became cognizant that they could not fully control others’

54 Ellen was so mortified by the incident that she recorded it, and the date of John F. Kennedy’s
assassination, in her travel journal. When she showed me the page of her travel journal, I noted that
she had indicated that the “correct” date of his assassination was November 4, 1963. When I told her
that the actual date was November 22, she could not remember whether she had written it down
incorrectly, or if the bouncer had given them misinformation. In any case, as Ellen did not know herself,
she and her friends were learning American history (right or wrong) from an Australian bouncer. On
American students’ lack of historical knowledge, see James Loewen, Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything
perceptions and reactions to encountering them, and the limits of their authorship of their “own” national self. “American” identity started to emerge not as a static thing produced on American soil, but a relational identity that is implicated in global politics and that is formed in pubs in Margaret River as much as at fraternity parties at University of the Midwest.

As I will discuss in the following section, many students reacted to this loss of authority through asserting their right to claim their own nation, and to display their own—albeit limited—sense of an American self.

**American Identity as Property**

For some of the American students, the realization that others potentially have strong, well-informed opinions about the United States was threatening, and they reacted through asserting their property rights. This defense took different modes, as students attempted to reconcile their general lack of knowledge about the United States with their fervent defense of both the state and the nation. Amy recalled an argument she had with a group of Germans and Australians on a bus: “[We were] talking about our government or something. And I’m not a government buff and don’t know enough about it, but I knew enough to know they weren’t right. . . . It’s a joke because my roommate and I would be, like, we were never, like, patriotic before we left but when we came back, we were a lot more. Just because you got used to defending your whole country for yourself over there.” Amy concedes that she is not a “government buff,” and that the Germans and Australians may actually know more of the facts about the United States than she does. This was a common admission from numerous students. Angela, for example, noted that “I’m unaware of what’s going on in our country half the time. . . . It’s just people are so concerned with their own lives and their own activities that they just don’t bother to think about other stuff.”

Despite this lack of knowledge about the United States, the critiques of the United States sparked what Lauren Berlant refers to as a “patriotic trace”—a vague, ungrounded, floating vestige of its opposite: a patriotism grounded in knowledge and information. Such a trace is evident in other students’ comments, for example, in April’s reflections on some of the conversations she had about the United States: “That can make you reevaluate the way you did things before and it makes you a stronger person. It makes you, by just having to reevaluate things, or rethink things, or seeing a different way, it makes you stronger in what you believe.” Sometimes students found themselves defending negative aspects of the United States, such as the amount of violence. For instance, Ted commented: “One of the big issues was definitely, like, violence in the U.S. I mean there’s just way more crime in the U.S. and so sometimes I kind of wanted to defend that. You know, like, hey, it’s not like that everywhere you go.” Because Ted could not explain the violence, and in reality had very little understanding of why the United
States is more violent than other countries, he was left in the awkward position of defending something he knows is not a positive feature of life in the United States. But he clung to the patriotic trace and to the necessity of defending it, despite the contradiction. Others, like Ellen, felt the need to defend the United States but knew that the patriotic trace they felt was not substantial grounds for an argument: "The whole conversation [about the environment and U.S. policy] made me think that, like, people do look at America like that, and then I'm a person representing [the U.S.]. That's pretty bad, because I don't know enough to have a response. I should be defending my country."

Clifford argues that identities that are conceived as property are only meaningful in display. As the American students became aware, and threatened by others' knowledge of the United States, and their (current and potential) authoring of "America," some felt compelled to defend the United States through display. For example, Joe is proud to "display" his American identity and admits that "I am a bit of a cocky American. I don't feel like that's a totally bad thing." Clifford's insights into the importance of the display of identity are also revealed in Joe's story an incident in a bar frequented by Joe and his group of American friends: "We had a big group of friends with us or whatever, that we had met there. And we were all singing songs and talking about different movies and stuff. And they [the Australians] were just offended and disgusted." There is of course no way to know whether the Australians were actually offended, and in fact, whether the others in the bar were necessarily all Australians. What is important about this incident is that Joe uses national identity to mark his and his friends' behavior and proudly flaunts it in an Australian bar.

Thus, some of the students who participated in this research exhibited what Lauren Berlant calls "infantile citizenship": a suturing of the nation and the state through a form of citizenship that blindly embraces the policies of the state, as a way of identifying with the nation. But for other students, the experience stimulated a contrasting set of ideas: these students allowed cracks to exist in the relationship between "state" and "nation," and they are able to see beyond the retention of the patriotic trace, and embrace a fuller, more contradictory national identity.

**Splitting State and Nation: Cracking Open “an American Self”**

Although closure and the refusal to question the tie between nation and state are constant themes among some of these American undergraduates,

55 The idea of the "display" of Americanness, and of American might and superiority, of course, is endemic to state discourse. For example, in his 2003 State of the Union address, George W. Bush bluntly declared the United States' right to act alone in military matters, without having the consent of other states: "Yet, the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others" (January 29, 2003).

56 Berlant, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship" (n. 10 above).
there were also others who struggled to make sense of their gradually evolving view that the “United States” as a political entity, and the idea of “America” may not be wholly coterminous. This split takes place in different ways. First, there were students who were embarrassed by the stereotypical image of “Americans” and actively worked to subvert it. To do this, they first questioned the United States’ position as a superpower and acknowledged to themselves that other ways of life, and other perspectives, were valid. For example, Linda reflects: “I had no idea that people had this view of Americans, that we thought that we were just so great and we just dominate and are in charge, [that] we’re very snotty and rude and get our way. And that was kind of a shock to me. So, the whole time I was there, I tried not to portray that image as much as I could because I think that’s sort of terrible.” Barbara relates a particularly significant turning point for her, when her mother and brother visited her in Perth:

So we’re sitting at dinner one night and this really nice family was talking to us in this restaurant in Perth. And the lady said, “God, I just love your accent to my brother.” And my mom pointed to her and goes, “you have the accent.” And they were, “oh yeah, the American way.” . . . I think I’d be more understanding when I go to different countries, not to be like the typical American, like, my way is the only way. You are the different one. And just, like, my mom would [say to the driver of] every taxi we took . . . : “How does it feel to drive on the wrong side of the road?” The driver got aggravated with that and said: “Maybe you drive on the wrong side of the road, get over it.” She just got really quiet, and I asked [the driver]: “Could you explain to me about cricket? I’m, like, I don’t really know much about cricket.”

For Barbara, this incident was quite meaningful, as she came to realize that the United States cannot—and should not—dictate what is “right” and “wrong,” even in the seemingly minor issues of accents and the side of the road on which one drives. The realization that the United States is not always right is an important step away from Berlant’s “infantile citizenship” and toward a full encounter with the complications of the American self.

For other students, this encounter occurred in charged political atmospheres. For example, April analyzed her reactions to a class discussion about twentieth-century world history: “Sometimes you want to just stand up and be, or say, you know, that’s not how it is. Or they’ll describe something about, like how America’s all about business and getting Coca-Cola everywhere you can. Just be, like, America’s not just about Coca-Cola. But sometimes, I think it’s an interesting perspective, and I’m [thinking]: . . . ‘Oh, I can see where you’re coming from; I can see why you think like that.’ Here, April was able to separate a critique of the United States from the idea of America and also conceded that others—those who are not American—have a right to question the United States’ aggressively capitalistic and expansionist economic policies. All of these students began to move away from Clifford’s paradigm—they become less concerned with claiming property rights to an American identity,
and more intrigued with understanding how others both question U.S. policy as well as author the dimensions of American identity.

For Ellen and Nancy, the experience made them realize that the obligations of citizenship are broad. Ellen commented on her new understanding: "I voted for Gore, and so once Bush became President, I kind of just stopped paying attention. But then I'm, like, well, that doesn't make sense. Just because I don't like who is president doesn't mean that I shouldn't pay attention to what is going on." Nancy stated that her responsibilities extended beyond the United States, that she also should have some knowledge of what was happening elsewhere in the world: "I think being in Australia has got me to think that there is a different world out there. I am more inclined to watch the news about different countries, where before I would have been, like, click, where's Friends, you know, let's watch something more pleasant." Whereas Friends represents an insular, contained world of American self-obsession, Nancy began to appreciate that there was a world beyond the United States, and its experiences and perspectives were not immaterial to her life.

Perhaps most dramatically, some students questioned the validity of the singular American perspective of what occurred in the immediate aftermath of September 11, when these interviews were conducted. For example, I asked Chloe, who is of Indian descent, about whether she now had a more global perspective because of her experience in Australia. She commented: "Tuesday's incident on the attack, I went to BBC, I went to the Times of India. Everybody would be [saying] I went to CNN . . . and I was discussing with my roommates yesterday that, OK, BBC is thinking that they're going to have this in London, and, they [her roommates] were, like, 'Oh really.' And that's when I realized, oh, OK, maybe it's just me because I went and saw it on BBC, that's why I know about it. Before this, I didn't bother. Maybe I wasn't aware. OK, I'll just go to CNN.com and that's it."57

Here, Chloe clearly made an attempt to decenter the dominant American perspective, represented through CNN. She recognized that people outside the United States tended to respond differently than those in the United States to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and that she could separate the politics of the state from the idea of the American nation. Ted similarly observed: "And there [are] a lot of reasons that a lot of countries don't like the U.S. You know, I mean, although I think it's completely wrong what happened, I mean, it's not justifiable, but it makes you understand why they do it." Like Chloe and others, Ted has discarded the need to cling to a closed national identity that is wholly sutured to the

57 I note that Chloe is of Indian descent here, as she had earlier commented that being in Australia had allowed her more access to news of India, where she was born. We had previously discussed the Times of India, which she again mentions in this quote. Readers should also note that in this particular situation, I did not specifically ask Chloe to comment on September 11, she made the connection herself.

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state. These reflections suggest that an American identity is not irretrievably shuttered and locked, but that it has the potential to be recast. It is of course possible that Ted and Chloë (and other students) came to these conclusions not because of their study abroad experience, but because of earlier socialization experiences or political affiliations. Certainly, many Americans who have not traveled abroad are, and can be, critical of government policies and actions. Yet, it is also possible that, for some students, the experience of leaving the United States for an extended period of time allows them to develop new, more complex perspectives on the world.

Conclusion: Remaking the American Self

Despite the rhetoric of study abroad, which foregrounds the importance of the “cross-cultural” experience, for most of the students participating in this study, the critical encounter of study abroad was with the “American” self. As discussed earlier, Feinberg’s analysis submits that students are so focused on their own experiences and their own realities that they become largely oblivious to the context in which they perform or display their identities. He cites numerous examples of the way that this narrative is intertwined into American culture through television shows such as Survivor and The Amazing Race, where the incredible richness and diversity of the world becomes a mere backdrop to the assertion of an American identity obsessed with itself.  

Despite the predominance of this narrative, there are important ways in which it is called into question in the context of study abroad. Most significantly, all students encountered the multiple articulations of “America” that exist around the globe and the disjuncture that exists between the “United States” and “America.” Though some refuse the possibilities of this in-between space and retreat to an infantile citizenship, others recognize the dangers of grounding an American self in a patriotic trace, a self that knows little, but is fervently attached to the policies of a state. Instead, they recognize the potentials of questioning those policies and understanding how “America” functions as a space of identification—of potential—for many around the world. Of course, this does not mean that Australians—or others—want to “become” Americans but that America is in itself a important diasporic node that is implicated in the production of identities across the globe—identities that people in the United States cannot fully control, nor imagine.

The idea of America has been embraced by peoples around the world. The immigrants who came to the United States recreated and remade an “America” that continues to evolve and become more open through the explosion of diasporic communities that exist simultaneously “here” and “there.” This movement continues despite recent policy shifts post-September 11, 2001,

Feinberg.
which have made the United States more closed—it is certainly more difficult to obtain a visa to live, travel, or study here, and in the long term these policies may have dramatic implications for the demographic makeup of the United States. Additionally, the United States’ most significant export is the idea of “America”—the dream of opportunity and of prosperity. It is an image that it sells through its movies and television, its fast food and its clothes, though this image has little direct connection to the economic and military domination by the United States that most people around the world detest. Recent polls by the Pew Research Center point to this contradiction: the world is quite enamored with “America” as an exporter of fantasies (movies, music, etc.) and identities that can be played with and manipulated at will, but less attracted to U.S. foreign policy.\footnote{Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “What the World Thinks in 2002,” http://www.people-press.org (accessed February 16, 2003). See also Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, Why Do People Hate America? (New York: Disinformation Company, 2002).}

Students abroad are confronted with the reality that for many, the United States is not a place to live, to become a citizen, to root. Rather, it is a place to live out the dreams of America. As Sara told me about the Australian students she met, “Some of them want to be film producers. A lot of them were just business-oriented people. And it was just that America was the place where they could make more money.”\footnote{Such a perspective is also produced and perpetuated even by Hollywood itself: in the recent movie The Guru an Indian man arrives in New York with his dreams of becoming a star. His rapid success (though not the one he hoped for) takes place wholly in the imaginary space of “America”—the polity of the United States is absent from the movie.}

In beginning to understand the multiple articulations of “America,” the contradictions of the “state” and the “nation,” and the ways in which an American self can be decented and remade, many of the students in this study began to embrace a nascent form of cosmopolitanism. This is not a cosmopolitanism that skims and dances through the sky, with few attachments to earth, but instead one that understands that “centers are everywhere and circumferences nowhere.”\footnote{Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, Carol Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Cosmopolitanisms,” Public Culture 12, no. 3 (2000): 577–89.} Most of the American students began their stay in Australia with an unreflexive understanding of what it was to be an “American,” and similarly only vague and incomplete knowledge of the United States as a state and a political actor both historically and in the contemporary world. Faced with this new reality, some retreat to what Calhoun terms a “thick” identity, one that conflates nation and state, and rallies around an ethnocentric nationalism. But none embraces what Calhoun terms a “thin” identity, suggesting that such a paradigm is largely unobtainable (even if desirable), perhaps particularly in the context of the post–September 11, 2001, United States.\footnote{See Craig Calhoun, “The Public Good as a Social and Cultural Project,” in Private Action and the Public Good, ed. Walter Powell and Elisabeth Clemens (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 20–85.}
Instead, what is possible, if not fully realized through these students’ experiences, is a postnational American identity, one that encounters and confronts itself in the context of the world, as part of a conversation, and as a participant in the human village. As this research suggests, study abroad is not simply a private good or individual experience. Instead, how students understand “America” has implications for future practices of citizenship. Citizens with an exclusionary, closed notion of the relationship between nation and state (Berlant’s infantile citizenship) may seek to create one type of world, while citizens who have a more open, inclusive, sense of citizenship may struggle to create another. Thus, the perspectives that students bring back with them are part of public discourse in the United States and have implications for the future of American democracy, the public good, and the constant renegotiation of the material and imaginative space that is America.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{63} As Craig Callouet suggests, the public good is not a fixed entity, but is constantly renegotiated within changing circumstances.