

Your Personal Economy: Rhetorics of <Investment> Citizenship in Financial Planning Commercials

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*This essay analyzes advertisements for financial planning firms who offer their services to guide citizens to financial security. It examines the relationship between the compulsion to invest and our understanding of citizenship in the 21st century. It argues that financial planning ads emphasize a mode of citizenship best characterized by the ideograph <investment>. To understand <investment> citizenship, this essay analyzes three ad campaigns: E*TRADE's famous commercials starring a baby recommending the company, Fidelity's "Turn Here" ads, and Prudential Financial's "Bring Your Challenges" ads starring Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert. It argues that the advertisements construct a representative picture of <investment> citizenship by casting financial planning as a mark of good citizenship. In doing so, the ads interpellate the citizen as both an independent "entrepreneur of himself or herself" and a financial infant—a novice helplessly dependent on the advisor for the right kind of help to construct a financial plan that will offer the greatest reward.*

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From the so-called Brexit vote to the Republican nomination of Donald Trump for President of the United States, recent events reinforce a longstanding fact about the international market economy: it is both intricate and turbulent. Billions of citizens around the world depend on the global economy, yet they are largely untrained in economics. How, then, do citizens in the 21st century make beneficial financial decisions? How can they navigate the economy to secure their financial future? One prominent answer is investment, where citizens pay money for a portion of a fund or stake in a company that they expect to sell later for a profit. Despite (possibly because of) economic uncertainty from events like the 2008 financial crisis, Brexit, etc., investment remains a central mechanism to secure one's financial future. We see this compulsion clearly in advertisements for financial planning firms who not only warn viewers against the danger of having too little money but also offer their services to help guide citizens to financial security. The ads have aired all over television and generated a great deal of discussion. For example, John Oliver did an extended commentary on financial planning on the June 12, 2016 episode of *Last Week Tonight*.

In a larger sense, however, the argument that citizens should invest implicates their sense of citizenship as well as their portfolios. With the abundance of television commercials asking citizens to secure their financial future by investing money and managing their portfolios, how do these ads affect our understanding of citizenship? I argue that financial planning advertisements emphasize a mode of citizenship best characterized by the ideograph <investment>. <Investment> citizenship is a combination of multidirectional capital flows (buying, selling, trading, etc.) and affective energies (attachment, investment, etc.) that compels citizens to manage their interests con-

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stantly in the present to yield positive returns in the future. The compulsion toward personal responsibility both connects citizens to and structures their relationships with strangers within a society.

To examine <investment> citizenship, I analyze three advertising campaigns for financial planning firms: E*TRADE's famous commercials starring a baby recommending the company, Fidelity's "Turn Here" ads, and Prudential Financial's "Bring Your Challenges" ads starring Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert. I argue that, taken together, the advertisements construct a representative picture of <investment> citizenship by casting financial planning as a mark of good citizenship. They emphasize this perspective by advocating an investor-financial advisor relationship structured in terms of what Michel Foucault calls pastoral power, in which the advisor guides the investor to financial salvation. Through this relationship, the ads interpellate the citizen as both an independent "entrepreneur of himself or herself"¹ and a financial infant—a novice helplessly dependent on the advisor for the right kind of help to construct a financial plan that will offer the greatest reward. In this essay, I situate an <investment> mode of citizenship within two contexts: rhetorical approaches to the ideograph and economic citizenship in the past century. I then examine the rhetorical implications of the ad campaigns.

Ideographs

Michael McGee's work on the ideograph in 1980 introduced not only a useful concept for rhetorical studies but also an argument for rhetoric as a bridge between ideology and materiality.² Ideographs are abstract, politically charged terms that can "account for the dual function of power" by identifying the ways that a single term not only establishes regimes of meaning but also proliferates throughout society. Ideographs such as <liberty>,³ <equality>,⁴ <life>, <choice>,⁵ and <family values>,⁶ act as a rhetorical shorthand for various ideological and cultural investments.⁷ McGee's

¹ Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Michel Foucault et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1–51.

² Michael Calvin McGee, "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64 (1980): 1–16.

³ McGee, "The 'Ideograph.'"

⁴ Celeste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African Word*, New Practices of Inquiry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit, "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal and Counter-Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision," *Communication Monographs* 57, no. 1 (1990): 5.

⁵ Sara Hayden, "Revitalizing the Debate between <Life> and <Choice>: The 2004 March for Women's Lives," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2009): 111–31, doi:10.1080/14791420902833189.

⁶ Dana L. Cloud, "The Rhetoric of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization of Social Responsibility," *Western Journal of Communication* 62, no. 4 (1998): 387–419.

⁷ Dana L. Cloud, "To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (2004): 285–306, doi:10.1080/0033563042000270726; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking 'the People' in the Young Lords' Church Offensive," February 2012; Joshua Ewalt, "A Colonialist Celebration of National <Heritage>: Verbal, Visual, and Landscape Ideographs at Homestead National Monument of America.," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 367–85, doi:10.1080/10570314.2011.586970; Davi Johnson, "Mapping the Meme: A Geographical Approach to Materialist Rhetorical Criticism," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2007): 27–50, doi:10.1080/14791420601138286; Bryan J. McCann, "Therapeutic and Material <Victim> Hood: Ideology and the Struggle for Meaning in the Illinois Death Penalty Controversy," *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2007): 382–401, doi:10.1080/14791420701632931.

analysis captures a function of language that is influential and multi-faceted without necessarily being anchored to the agency of a stable subject.

The ideograph itself has also stretched a bit. It has expanded into the realm of the visual in Janis Edwards and Carole Winkler's analysis of the recurring Iwo Jima image and Catherine Palczewski's discussion of anti-women's suffrage postcards from the turn of the twentieth century to note the way they constitute visual ideographs of <woman> and <man>.⁸ Additionally, some scholars have suggested supplementing ideographs with other theoretical constructs to extend their function. Kevin DeLuca adds "Laclau and Mouffe's subsequent theorizing of articulation, antagonism, and hegemony in order to explain how ideographs...are linked in certain synchronic structures and what conditions enable groups to challenge or even change a particular linking of ideographs."⁹ Articulation is a temporary connection of ideas, terms, concepts, traditions, etc. within a given moment.¹⁰ A logic of articulation focuses on rhetoric not as a rhetor's attempt to influence a specific audience but rather as a moment in which certain things connect with one another to produce an intelligible message.¹¹ The benefit of this connection is that the ideograph becomes an important element in constant, dynamic struggles while providing an analytical focal point for articulation. In other words, "ideographs are not philosophical abstractions but words that exist in real discourse"¹² because "they are *conditions* of the society into which each of us is born."¹³ Ultimately, connecting ideographs with a logic of articulation helps the rhetorical critic identify ideographs, trace their history, and analyze their use in discourse. <Investment> is a prominent example of the way that ideographs act as a focal point for articulation.

As a term with significant rhetorical force, <investment> functions in at least three ways. First, <investment> refers to the purchase of a product as a way of placing money into an account one hopes will grow in value, creating a profit called return on investment (ROI). Examples of such products include stocks, bonds, treasury bills, mutual funds, options, IRAs, 401Ks, commodity futures, and derivatives (such as mortgage-backed securities). Second, <investment> suggests that spending money (or another resource like material goods, time, or energy) connotes support for a person, company, entity, or country to help them grow and prosper. Investing money constitutes a form of patronage designed to express emotional and symbolic support in addition to financial support—a rhetorical statement of confidence in the success of an idea, person, or business. Third, <investment> extends beyond economics to a state of vestment—similar to interest and attachment that may exist between a subject and an object. Someone with a vested interest in something has not only a legal claim to resources or capital but also a desire for information about, involvement

⁸ Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler, "Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image in Editorial Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 3 (1997): 289–310; Catherine Palczewski, "The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Argument, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91 (2005): 365–94, doi:10.1080/00335630500488325.

⁹ Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 37; See also Darrel Enck-Wanzer's application of ideographs as a supplement to Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary. Enck-Wanzer, "Decolonizing Imaginaries."

¹⁰ See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London: Verso, 2001).

¹¹ See Barbara Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of Différance," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22, no. 2 (1989): 110–30.

¹² DeLuca, *Image Politics*, 43.

¹³ McGee, "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," 9. Emphasis in original.

with, and concern for an object.¹⁴ Larry Grossberg explains that <investment> “anchors people in particular experiences, practices, identities, meanings and pleasures.”¹⁵ Purchasing an investment product or expending time and energy toward the benefit of another entity produces a kind of vestment. Of course, these interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and they do not exhaust the rhetorical potential of <investment>, if for no other reason than that “the whole range of the meaning of an ideograph...cannot be known or wholly expressed.”¹⁶ The rhetorical force of <investment>, however, comes not just from its own invocation as a term but from its deployment as a modality of citizenship as well. <Investment> is not just a word invoked but a broad set of assumptions, guidelines, and values that structure citizenship.

<Investment> as Citizenship

Lauren Berlant calls citizenship, “a relation among strangers who learn to feel it as a common identity.”¹⁷ Additionally, Robert Asen argues that citizenship is less a legal qualification than a performance of public identity.¹⁸ These two perspectives on citizenship emerge from the wealth of scholarship on the term to reveal the way it interpellates subjects with certain rights, privileges, and obligations based on their connections to others in a social body.¹⁹ Indeed, the wealth of scholarship on this term shows the extent to which, as Lauren Berlant explains, “citizenship is the practical site of a theoretical existence, in that it allows for the reproduction of a variety of kinds of law in everyday life.”²⁰ Rather than simply retrace the steps of past studies, scholars benefit by

¹⁴ For a much more in depth treatment of the role of investment in the production and function of rhetoric, see Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 82.

¹⁶ Enck-Wanzer, “Decolonizing Imaginaries,” 4.

¹⁷ Lauren Berlant, “Citizenship,” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 37.

¹⁸ Robert Asen, “A Discourse Theory of Citizenship,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 2 (2004): 189–211.

¹⁹ Asen, “A Discourse Theory of Citizenship”; Robert Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand: Social Security and the Privatization Debates*, Rhetoric and Public Affairs Series (Michigan State University Press, 2009); Greg Dickinson, “Selling Democracy: Consumer Culture and Citizenship in the Wake of September 11,” *Southern Communication Journal* 70, no. 4 (2005): 271–84; Troy A. Murphy, “Romantic Democracy and the Rhetoric of Heroic Citizenship,” *Communication Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2003): 192–208; Ronald Walter Greene, “John Dewey’s Eloquent Citizen: Communication, Judgment, and Postmodern Capitalism,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 39, no. 3 (2003): 189; Melanie Loehwing, “Homelessness as the Unforgiving Minute of the Present: The Rhetorical Tenses of Democratic Citizenship,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96, no. 4 (2010): 380, doi:10.1080/00335630.2010.521171; Angela G. Ray and Cindy Koenig Richards, “Inventing Citizens, Imagining Gender Justice: The Suffrage Rhetoric of Virginia and Francis Minor,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 4 (2007): 375, doi:10.1080/00335630701449340; Megan Foley, “Voicing Terri Schiavo: Prosopopeic Citizenship in the Democratic Aporia between Sovereignty and Biopower,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (2010): 381, doi:10.1080/14791420.2010.523433; Megan Foley, “From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economy in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 4 (2012): 386–410, doi:10.1080/00335630.2012.714898; Michael A. Kaplan, *Friendship Fictions: The Rhetoric of Citizenship in the Liberal Imaginary* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010); Jennifer R. Mercieca, *Founding Fictions* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010); Susan Zaeske, “Signatures of Citizenship: The Rhetoric of Women’s Antislavery Petitions,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 2 (2002): 147–68; For an even more exhaustive look at the use of the term “citizenship” in rhetorical studies, see Kenneth Rufo and R. Jarrod Atchison, “From Circus to Fasces: The Disciplinary Politics of Citizen and Citizenship,” *Review of Communication* 11, no. 3 (2011): 193–215, doi:10.1080/15358593.2011.578255.

²⁰ Berlant, “Citizenship,” 38.

building on this work to investigate, for example, the relationship between citizenship and <investment> as both an activity and a mode of subjectivity.

Economics creates an important context for understanding and performing citizenship. In particular, the development of neoliberalism as a primary economic logic over the past forty years has been central to Western societies.²¹ Neoliberalism privileges economic concerns in every aspect of human life. It infinitely expands the reach of the economy both by compelling the state to reroute its social obligations through the protection and maintenance of free markets and by turning the market into a prism through which individual or collective bodies view their relationships with others. One example of this development is what Randy Martin calls the “financialization of daily life,” in which the language and logic of high finance act as templates for human activity to the point that one’s life revolves around economics.²²

Neoliberalism also affects citizenship in two ways. First, economics has increasingly become intertwined in the politics of citizenship. Lizabeth Cohen’s analysis of the rise of consumerism in the twentieth century notes the importance of consumption to Americans’ civic participation.²³ Second, as Saskia Sassen notes, economics affect the way that rights, privileges, and obligations connected with citizenship are understood and performed.²⁴ She explains that the relationship between citizenship and the economy is a two-way street in which each informs the way that subjects manage the other.²⁵ Her term for this relationship is economic citizenship. Neoliberalism becomes a mediating force between citizenship and the economy by grafting the logic of the latter onto the former. Consequently, as Aihwa Ong explains, neoliberalism “conceptually unsettles the notion of citizenship as a legal status rooted in a nation-state.”²⁶ Issues aligned with citizenship “are becoming disarticulated and rearticulated with forces set into motion by market forces.”²⁷ Citizenship is no longer simply a question of rights, privileges, and obligations one has in relation to the state or civil society. Neoliberal rhetorics construct the social terrain such that “the neoliberal subject is therefore not a citizen with claims on the state but a self-enterprising citizen-subject who is *obligated to become an ‘entrepreneur of himself or herself.’*”²⁸ In other words, the matrix of risk, option, and opportunity embedded in neoliberal rhetorics interpellates citizens as free from the overbearing apparatus of the state yet compelled to take care of themselves within the “free market.”

²¹ Jodi Dean, “Neoliberalism and Its Contradictions,” (Paper, 2013), http://www.academia.edu/1145526/Neoliberalism_and_its_contradictions.

²² Randy Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*, Labor in Crisis (Temple University Press, 2002).

²³ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

²⁴ Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control?: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²⁵ Sassen, *Losing Control?*, 33–4.

²⁶ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 6.

²⁷ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 6.

²⁸ Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 14, emphasis added; In this passage, Ong quotes from Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” 44; See also Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 41; Foucault makes a similar point about the concept of homo oeconomicus rather than about citizenship explicitly. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2010), 226, 270.

Economic citizenship in the United States after the Civil War has mainly featured the transition from the producer citizen to the consumer citizen. Prior to the twentieth century, the American economy transitioned from agrarian to industrial, and one's profession informed his/her identity. The contribution that one's employment made to the community and nation helped to construct citizens' economic power. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, increasing urbanization and industrialization shifted citizen identity. The consumer began to replace the producer as the primary economic citizen, and purchasing power eclipsed production power as a source of political influence. This trend accelerated during both the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. For example, Franklin Roosevelt observed in 1932 during his presidential campaign, "in the future we are going to think less about the producer and more about the consumer,"²⁹ acknowledging a profound shift in the relationship between economics and citizenship.

In the twentieth century, consumer citizenship took on numerous forms. At times, citizens consumed merely for the sake of owning and enjoying products with little or no concern for the implications of their actions. At other times, however, consumption yielded significant political influence, which some citizens used to ensure high quality products and reasonable prices. Such movements resulted in boycotts to put pressure on businesses to change their improper practices. After World War II, the self-oriented focus of consumerism merged with civic mindedness to establish a post-war orientation that solidified consumption as a civic duty and contributed to one of the greatest periods of economic growth in American history. Consumption during this period achieved two goals: personal lifestyle enhancement and national economic growth. The combination of these two accomplishments imbued consumption with a sense of social obligation related to citizenship; citizens were encouraged to buy various commodities, in part as a patriotic expression. Additionally, the influence of consumerism grew steadily throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and even began to blend with traditional political matters such as campaigns and elections.³⁰ Consumption even became a way for the nation to cope with the attacks of September 11, 2001.³¹

Since then, a couple of government policies have further entrenched the consumer citizen ethos. In 2010, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case *Citizens United v. FEC* that campaign laws could not restrict non-profit organizations from spending money to influence elections. Citizens—individually and collectively as political action committees—were legitimized as consumers buying influence in elections as a form of expression.³² Similarly, various reports have observed a pattern of consumer behavior in which consumers vote via their spending practices as a way of supporting or influencing corporate behavior, a useful metaphor for economists and social activists to describe the relationship between consumer purchasing decisions and business practices.³³ Dollar voting, as it is sometimes called, suggests a clear connection between

²⁹ Quoted in Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 24.

³⁰ This history is taken primarily from Lizabeth Cohen's overview of consumer citizenship in the 20th century. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; See also Benjamin R. Barber, *Con\$umed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2007); Andrew Benett, *Consumed: Rethinking Business in the Era of Mindful Spending* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

³¹ Dickinson, "Selling Democracy."

³² See Ron Greene's discussion of money/speech for an analysis of the rhetorical implications of this development. Ronald Walter Greene, "Rhetorical Capital: Communicative Labor, Money/Speech, and Neo-Liberal Governance," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4 (2007): 327–31, doi:10.1080/14791420701472866.

³³ Andrew Leonard, "Consumers Vote with Their Wallets," *Salon*, October 2008, http://www.salon.com/2008/10/15/retail_spending_depression/; StrategyOne, "Voting With Their Wallets: New Research Finds Younger Americans, Liberals and West Coast Consumers Most Likely to Report Boycotting and 'Buycotting' Based on Values," *PR News-Wire*, April 19, 2010, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/voting-with-their-wallets-new-research-finds->

consumption and citizenship. Additionally, the recent creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in 2011 rests on the assumption that citizens deserve legal protection as consumer citizens.

This expansion should not suggest, however, that consumer citizenship went unchallenged. In 1979, during a recession and an energy crisis, President Jimmy Carter delivered his most famous speech, “A Crisis of Confidence.” In it, he described the country’s energy troubles as symptoms of a deeper issue: the prominence of consumption. He said,

Too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.³⁴

The address challenged a longstanding assumption that personal consumption was an unqualified good. Additionally, recent groups have attempted to confront the trend in consumption by parodying popular advertising campaigns, promoting non-consumptive economic practices, or otherwise disrupting consumerist patterns of behavior.³⁵ These anti-consumerist actions have, however, been overwhelmed by the larger trend toward consumerism.

While public emphasis on consumer citizenship continues into the twenty-first century, the consumer mode of citizenship has also created the conditions for another economic mode of citizenship to emerge that supplements consumer citizenship: <investment> citizenship. Countless books, newspapers, magazines, television shows, podcasts, websites, and apps focus on helping citizens manage their money and strategize investments. Popular cable channels CNBC and Bloomberg offer economic news and investment advice. Various financial firms offer advice to citizens (for a nominal fee, of course), and they advertise their services all over television, print media, and the internet. Government officials and public advocates often refer to increased government spending in infrastructure or education as “investments.”³⁶ If consumer citizenship focuses on the purchase and use of a good or service, then an <investment> citizenship normalized by all these messages presumes an approach to citizenship as constant, intricate management of one’s life. In <investment>, the initial purchase is a buy-in. It attaches the investor to the object of investment in a relationship that involves buying, monitoring, holding, and selling, among other things. As a mode of citizenship, <investment> structures the citizen’s relationship to both the investment itself and society by producing a constant, vested interest in both. By itself, <investment> is not new to the American economic or rhetorical climate. Indeed, financial markets and other avenues for <investment> have existed almost as long as the United States has. What has

younger-americans-liberals-and-west-coast-consumers-most-likely-to-report-boycotting-and-buycoting-based-on-values-91533949.html; The Economist, “Voting with Your Trolley,” *The Economist*, December 7, 2006, <http://www.economist.com/node/8380592>.

³⁴ Jimmy Carter, “A Crisis of Confidence,” (Address to the Nation, July 15, 1979), <http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycartercrisisofconfidence.htm>.

³⁵ For a thorough discussion of culture jamming and its rhetorical implications, see Christine Harold, “Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 189–211.

³⁶ Justin Sink, “Obama’s \$300B infrastructure plan,” Text, *The Hill*, (February 26, 2014), <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/199275-obamas-300b-infrastructure-plan>; Cathy Finkler, “Arne Duncan: Education Is the Best Investment We Can Make,” *MSNBC*, May 29, 2013, <http://tv.msnbc.com/2013/05/29/arne-duncan-education-is-the-best-investment-we-can-make/>; James Rohr, “We Must Invest in Early Childhood Education,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/opinion/perspectives/james-e-rohr-we-must-invest-in-early-childhood-education-696485/>.

changed in recent decades is the extent to which <investment> has become not only a mechanism for obtaining profit but also an all-encompassing way of managing one's personal life and public commitments. I turn now to the case study in <investment> citizenship: advertisements for financial planning firms.

Ask Your Financial Advisor

The expansion of <investment> citizenship in the twenty-first century introduces a significant tension: citizens depend on financial markets for their economic subsistence, yet those markets are turbulent and esoteric. How does one unfamiliar with the complex nature of many investment products, let alone the intricacies of the market, “make money with money”?³⁷ For many, the answer comes in the form of a financial advisor. Advisors are experts paid to simplify financial market complexities for untrained investors.³⁸ For most of the twentieth century, financial brokers predominantly held this role, dispensing advice and executing trade orders on behalf of investors for a commission. With the advent of the internet and the proliferation of multi-mediated communication technologies, investor citizens can buy and sell any number of investment products through traditional brokers, websites, and apps on any interactive technological device. Advice, then, can come from various sources.

The advisor can be an individual on television providing financial instruction. In fact, CNBC, the financial cable channel of NBC, often touts itself as the channel with “the information and experience you need.” The two most prominent examples of the advisor on CNBC are Jim Cramer and Suze Orman. Both individuals write books, run websites, and host television shows in which they provide some form of financial advice. Orman has written several books including *The Money Class*; *The Money Book for the Young, Fabulous, & Broke*; *Women & Money*; *The Road to Wealth*; and *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*. On *The Suze Orman Show*, she takes callers who have financial problems, giving them advice on how best to navigate their situation. She also features a popular segment called “Can I Afford It?” in which callers tell her what they want to buy, how much money they have in savings, their assets, and their expenditures. Orman then either “denies” or “approves” the purchase. While Orman discusses the broader range of financial planning, Jim Cramer focuses his advice primarily on investing in the stock market. Cramer is the host of CNBC's daily show *Mad Money* and the founder of TheStreet.com, an internet website with news and advice on investing in the stock market. On his show, Cramer discusses financial news of the day and recommends stocks for his viewers to buy, hold, or sell. Both advisors have become famous for their expertise. Both individuals position themselves as experts whose job it is to guide investors to financial success.

Other advisors are less easily distilled into a single person. Investment firms provide financial advice on a corporate level by providing a greater range of tools and services than are available from an individual. Many of them provide online services including investment products, stock history, market analysis, and customized strategic advice to help investors manage their portfolio. While the direct services that these firms offer is instructive for understanding the specific elements of <investment> on a daily basis, the messages that these firms offer in advertisements to gain

³⁷ Greene, “Rhetorical Capital,” 329.

³⁸ For an in-depth treatment of expertise as a rhetorical construct, see E. Johanna Hartelius, *The Rhetoric of Expertise* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011).

customers speak to the function of the financial advisor in twenty-first century <investment> citizenship. Below, I will examine three advertising campaigns of financial planning firms: E*TRADE's baby ads, Fidelity's "Turn Here" ads, and Prudential's ads starring Daniel Gilbert.

*The E*TRADE Baby*

In their advertisements, many investment firms emphasize investors' need for expert help by contrasting the successful, guided investor from those going it alone. One prominent example of this rhetoric comes from the online financial firm E*TRADE. From 2010 to 2014, E*TRADE created one of the most popular advertising campaigns in recent memory featuring a male toddler in numerous situations explaining how E*TRADE advice and "analytics"³⁹ helped him save or make money.⁴⁰ At first, the so-called "E*TRADE Baby" (he is otherwise unnamed) speaks to a webcam on a computer as if he is making a video podcast (he is voiced by adult comedian Pete Holmes). The commercials begin to include other babies and even adults to whom he explains the value of seeking E*TRADE's services. Later, the commercials feature the baby in a high chair recommending the company to men at pivotal stages in their lives (e.g. wedding or the birth of a new child).

Collectively, the ads suggest a few things. First, the E*TRADE Baby is a quintessential example of what Lauren Berlant calls the infantile citizen.⁴¹ The infantile citizen is a public identity of the citizen that is "passive and overdependent" on the state's great power.⁴² In turn, the infant's vulnerability and subsequent faith in the state's benevolence acts as a model of subservient citizenship. The E*TRADE Baby functions as an infantile citizen in two ways: first, the star of the ads is actually an infant, and second, his unyielding faith in the advisor's ability to make him a profit mirrors the way that "the infantile citizen's faith in the nation... vitalizes a person's patriotic and practical attachment to the nation and to other citizens."⁴³ Placing the toddler as the central figure in the commercials infantilizes the investor citizen, turning him/her into a version of what Berlant calls a "prepolitical child" completely dependent on the generosity of the advisors at E*TRADE for financial subsistence.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the figure of the toddler places an emphasis on the future both because the figure of the infant is already aligned with future potential and because <investment> emphasizes the future potential of a return. In this sense, the toddler is the perfect figure of the investor-citizen. E*TRADE, by casting a toddler as the spokesbaby for the company, de-politicizes the economy and the compulsion of citizens to engage financial markets guided by the advisor's expertise. In this way, it produces "a new national public sphere around this past/future image of the good life in the United States."⁴⁵

Oddly, however, the E*TRADE Baby is also positioned as an advisor himself. He directs the audience and his interlocutors to the expertise available at E*TRADE. We can see this most clearly in the more recent commercials when the Baby meets with a man at the altar getting married and a man at the hospital right after the birth of his first child. Both men are anxious and worried about securing their financial future, and both men's fears are allayed when the Baby counsels them to seek the advice of the people at E*TRADE. The Baby, like a good advisor, is calm, unfazed by the

³⁹ The Baby uses "analytics" to refer to analysis of market data relating to the regulation of his portfolio.

⁴⁰ Many of the commercials can be seen here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsijvpYivVc>, accessed July 7, 2016.

⁴¹ See Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴² Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 27.

⁴³ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 27-28.

⁴⁴ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 219.

⁴⁵ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 219.

fear that grips the men. His faith in the benevolence of his own advisor spreads to the men he advises. Additionally, the Baby is confident and knowledgeable in the face of an uncertain market. The ads juxtapose his investment strategy with other adults, like his friend from another commercial, Frank, whose financial plan involves buying lottery tickets (that are, of course, losers). The Baby becomes an advisor by proxy, if only to guide innocent and ignorant citizens to the ultimate advisor, whom we never actually see in the ads. The E*TRADE Baby is a model infantile <investment> citizen. He not only places his entire financial life in the hands of E*TRADE's advice and guidance but he also recommends E*TRADE's services to others as a gesture of goodwill and selflessness. He identifies other citizens who are lost without an advisor and afraid of failing to secure their financial future. The ads do not show the Baby actually receiving advice or his particular investment actions, but he credits his success entirely to the advice he receives. The commercials depict his dependence on the advisor as taking charge of his future, and his suggestion that others follow his example turns an opportunity into an obligation. <Investment> citizens, however, cannot take control on their own; they must rely on a financial advisor.

Fidelity: Turn Here

While the E*TRADE Baby ads portray financial guidance as necessary for investor citizens, they do not show the guidance itself. Fidelity Investments' famous ad campaign, "Turn Here," depicts the investor-advisor relationship. The ads portray advice from the financial advisor as a green line on the ground like those shown in GPS systems to guide drivers to their destination. Before receiving guidance from the advisor, the investor is depicted as unsure and concerned about how to manage their money. Once s/he contacts the Fidelity advisor, the green line appears on the floor, and the main character must follow the line. The pathway guides the investor to a secure financial future. S/he goes forward with confidence, placing complete faith in the green line. Executive Vice President of Fidelity, Jim Speros, argued that the campaign "taps into a core insight—the need for help with investing their money throughout the various stages of their lives."⁴⁶ To take one example, in the initial ad, called "Turn Here,"⁴⁷ a man who has just started an account with Fidelity briefly strays from the green line to glance at an expensive new car nearby. His financial advisor shouts at him from a distance, "Stay on the line!" The two exchange a smile, and he returns to the path laid out for him by the line. The implication is clear: the advisor knows proper financial strategy better than the investor and has his/her best interests at heart. Successful financial actions require the guidance of the advisor. Within the realm of <investment> citizenship, the "civic obligation" of "economic self-discipline" often means seeking and following the guidance of the financial advisor.⁴⁸

The very name of the ad campaign's slogan, "Turn Here," encapsulates this sentiment quite well. The phrase resembles directions a GPS system gives when guiding a driver to a preset destination. The ads argue that much like the guidance that a GPS device can provide, Fidelity can provide financial direction to the investor-citizen for greatest financial reward. Additionally, the slogan asks investor-citizens to turn to Fidelity for advice, rather than rely either on their own

⁴⁶ Anne Marie Kelly, "Fidelity CMO Jim Speros on 'Turn Here' and Consumer Engagement in a Multi-Screen World," *Forbes*, February 7, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/annemariemkelly/2012/02/07/fidelity-cmo-jim-speros-on-turn-here-and-consumer-engagement-in-a-multi-screen-world/>.

⁴⁷ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7atn5Zj5hY>. Accessed July 8, 2016.

⁴⁸ Foley, "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions," 389.

navigational skills or another advisor. Only Fidelity, the ad claims, has the right combination of expertise and empathy to provide the best guidance for an investor-citizen.

The relationship between the investor citizen and the financial advisor in the ads takes the form of what Michel Foucault calls pastoral power. Foucault describes pastoral power as “salvation-oriented,” “individualizing,” and “linked with a production of...the truth of the individual himself (sic).”⁴⁹ Rather than a coercive form of power relations, pastoral power, based on Western Christianity, is “a power of care,” guided by a desire for citizen salvation, defined in terms of his or her subsistence.⁵⁰ Pastoral power involves both the citizen and an authority, previously a religious authority, but may be an expert or other secular authority who holds the promise of some form of salvation—previously understood in relation to the afterlife, but now includes security in this life.

Within the context of <investment> citizenship, the authority expresses concern for the citizen as an individual and uses his or her expertise to save the citizen from financial hardship. Financial advisors, whether they are television personalities or employees for an investment firm, express their expertise as both a benefit for and an obligation to investors. In the Fidelity commercials, advisors use their expertise for the benefit of the investor, not merely to earn a commission on the purchase of investment products. Like a shepherd caring for each sheep in a flock, the financial advisor ensures financial subsistence for each client. S/he provides guidance, information, and context to help investor-citizens plan their future. The alternative to this strategy for investor citizens, navigating the turbulent market alone, greatly increases the risk of financial failure, which is why these ads consider unguided investing a frightening enough prospect to be unthinkable. Such portrayals urge investor citizens to take control of their future by seeking guidance from the advisor.

A central element of the pastoral relationship between investor and advisor is the confession. Not only do the Fidelity commercials invoke a need to get financial help but in emphasizing the guidance of the advisor, they also suggest a need to confess two things. First, they must confess their ignorance of the labyrinthine market. They express their fear and uncertainty of the financial world, and thus they confess their need for guidance from a trusted financial advisor. This confession is rewarded with guidance from the expert, and the investor citizen submits to the advisor as a means of salvation. The creation and execution of a financial plan—including the purchase of investment products, saving money, and constantly re-calculating one’s financial situation in light of changing circumstances—acts as a means of salvation. Of course, the confession of ignorance and dependence is crucial for revealing the pastoral character of the relationship, for if investor citizens could save themselves, they would. The confession of ignorance breeds a form of dependence for independence—otherwise known as taking control of one’s future. Second, when seeking guidance, investor citizens must disclose their financial situations in painstaking detail: their savings, income, spending habits, debts, assets, etc. This process gives the advisor an accurate picture of citizens’ financial situation, so that s/he can construct the most effective plan for them. As the commercials make clear, one cannot simply make a plan based on inaccurate or incomplete infor-

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 333.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), 127 See also p. 126; Ronald Walter Greene, “Y Movies: Film and the Modernization of Pastoral Power,” *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2005): 20–36, doi:10.1080/1479142042000332125; Roger Deacon, “An Analytics of Power Relations: Foucault on the History of Discipline,” *History of the Human Sciences* 15, no. 1 (2002): 89–117.

mation because that would produce inaccurate directions. Both confessions are integral to the investor-advisor relationship, and they are necessary prerequisites for the investor-citizen's financial salvation.⁵¹

The Prudential Experiments

More recently, Prudential Financial released a series of ads starring Harvard Psychology professor Daniel Gilbert to illustrate the importance of planning for retirement.⁵² The advertisements, running from 2013 to 2016, show Gilbert outdoors conducting social experiments with various participants. The experiments produce visual evidence of the need to develop a financial plan for retirement. Experiments include asking people to write on a large board what they would most want to do as a profession, using ribbon to estimate the amount of money people thought they would need in retirement, and setting up gigantic dominoes to suggest that small actions can have large future consequences. The campaign's first ad, called "Stickers," emphasizes the extended length of time between the retirement age and citizens' life expectancy. In it, Gilbert, asks people to place a large blue sticker on a massive age chart to note the age of the oldest person they have known. By the end of the commercial, the majority of stickers are in the age range of 90-100. He then notes the disparity between the retirement age of 65 and 95 and asks viewers to consider their financial well-being for those years. The ad brings the future into the present by highlighting the length of time one may live in retirement. Citizens that wish to live comfortably during those years must manage their finances properly. Other advertisements similarly demonstrate both the need for investor citizens to plan for their retirement and the fact that too few begin that planning when they should.

The ad campaign combines infantile citizenship with pastoral power embedded in the investor-advisor relationship. Experiment participants learn not only that they have not done enough to secure a successful retirement but also that they have been ignorant of their obligation to take charge of their finances. They have been passive, and they must depend on help (ideally from Prudential) to retire comfortably. The ads position investor citizens as ignorant amateurs who experience an epiphany that they need to save and invest for retirement. The Prudential ad campaign "governs infantile citizens by exhorting them to grow up"⁵³ to secure their financial salvation. This call for maturity and responsibility is a hallmark of <investment> citizenship not only because it fits within neoliberal logics writ large but also because the compulsion for responsibility incorporates <investment> as vestment, as an interested attachment. Investor citizens take responsibility for their finances by both showing a vested interest in their future and by seeking out the kind of help they need from a financial advisor.

Taken together, the ad campaigns express <investment> citizenship by normalizing a social ethos centered on the ethical obligation to secure one's financial future. Proper investor citizens order their labor, leisure, and life around financial planning. This ethos differs from consumer citizenship because it extends beyond purchase and ownership that are central to consumption. <Investment>, as a modality of citizenship, concerns purchase, sale, ownership, value, timing, and the return on investment. Good citizens invest because to do so not only gives one the foundation

⁵¹ For a more thorough treatment of the role of confession in power relations, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 59–70.

⁵² Videos can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9716E0C4E88EACEC>. Accessed July 8, 2016.

⁵³ Foley, "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions," 389.

for a happy life but also shows genuine concern for one's family, one's nation, and future generations. In order to secure a positive future, citizens must pay attention to and perpetually manage various details of their lives. All citizens, the ads argue, owe it to their future selves, their families, and even other citizens to set out a plan and stick to it.

In an era where citizenship is guided as much by market forces as by the state, good <investment> citizenship means independence and thorough planning so that one does not depend on others for his or her financial security.⁵⁴ Citizens' obligations to provide for their future selves supplement their obligations to fellow citizens because, as Foucault explains, a crucial element of neoliberal logics involves the way that individual interest, "harmonizes spontaneously and as it were involuntarily with the will and interest of others."⁵⁵ From this perspective, <investment> becomes a civic obligation because it is the intersection of personal interest and collective good. The ad campaigns interpellate subjects as infantile citizens of the American economy through the figure of the financial advisor and posit <investment> as a precondition for their growth as proper economic citizens.

Conclusion

The rhetoric in the financial planning advertisements above certainly does not exhaust the plethora of financial messages broadcast into American popular culture, but it displays a central element of <investment> citizenship: the perpetual management of one's interests for future security. Because <investment> is dynamic, multidirectional, and constant, it presumes a more interactive relationship between investor and the object of investment than between consumer and product or service consumed. Not only can investment products vary greatly but also one's relationship with the investment product does not end with the initial purchase. An investor constantly manages his/her portfolio both to cultivate optimal financial security and to take responsibility like a good citizen. While investing and saving for retirement are certainly nothing new, the normalization and commercialization of <investment> through these advertisements compels citizens to take control by admitting a lack of control over their financial lives. In an era where 401Ks and other private retirement plans have replaced pensions, <investment> becomes an individual obligation with collective consequences.

Taken together, however, the campaigns concern more than finance. They speak to a broader paradigm that promotes a model of ideal citizenship based on a type of responsibility to one's future self, family, generations, etc. That model involves not just a series of strategies and policies to ensure a safe future but also an entire attitude of the investor: connected, interested, vested, mature, and educated about what is necessary to build a proper future. This paradigm is the core of <investment> citizenship. The dependence on a financial advisor, the building and management of a portfolio, and the work to build one's nest egg are all products of that paradigm. <Investment> models an ideal behavior for American citizens under the belief that independent citizens handling their own affairs ultimately produce a better nation than dependent citizens do.

⁵⁴ Foley, "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions," 389; Rose, "Foucault and Political Reason," 41; Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 29; Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 10–18.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 276.

This broader paradigm extends <investment> citizenship beyond what Randy Martin calls the “financialization of daily life.”⁵⁶ The financial concerns at issue in the advertising campaigns are symptoms of a larger message to citizens that no one will secure their retirement for them. They must do it themselves or end up alone and poor. From this perspective, citizens owe it to themselves to be independent, and if they do not know how, they should seek out proper guidance to become independent. The ads funnel that broader message into activities like saving, investing, and diversifying one’s portfolio. Beyond those actions, however, <investment> applies to an interest, investment, that is not limited to financial rewards. <Investment> citizenship cultivates an ethos of perpetual management that sees personal and collective success as both achievable and vulnerable. This paradigm views material goods, services, relationships, and even ideologies as potential investments, each with its own costs and benefits.

Finally, in all of its invocations, <investment> is a mode of citizenship, not merely an ideology or cultural trend. It is a way that members of a group (e.g. the nation) understand and express their membership in that group. The language of <investment> expands beyond mere economics to an entire paradigm of citizenship in part because it applies the logic of economics to political matters. A citizen may invest in the nation by voting, volunteering, planning for retirement, contributing to a presidential campaign, lobbying for or against a piece of legislation, buying American made products, or closely following current events, to take just a few examples. Good <investment> citizens take care of things in which they are vested, which demands constant attention to detail and a desire to maintain an interest in something beyond themselves. The interest that is central to <investment> citizenship produces new connections among people, which contributes to the constant definition and redefinition of the nation. Rhetorical scholars benefit by identifying expressions of <investment> citizenship, analyzing the particular investments they produce, and noting other investments that they exclude. Scholars that begin with the primary term in this expression, <investment>, are well positioned to notice the intertwining of personal life management with the publicness of citizenship in the 21st century.

⁵⁶ Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*.