

**A Modern Day War of Good Vs. Evil:
An Analysis of Selected State of the Union Addresses
Given By Former President George W. Bush**

**Katie Beran
Senior Capstone Project
Professor Russell Stone
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Abstract

During the Bush Administration, there was widespread infringement of our civil rights in the name of national security. The right to a fair trial under the law for all was disregarded while torture at Guantanamo Bay was sanctioned under the guise of the Patriot Act. As the self-proclaimed leading democracy in the world, these actions do not reflect American values. In order to analyze a contributing factor to the creation of a particular kind of blind patriotic culture that emboldened this violation of civil liberties, I performed a content analysis of selected State of the Union Addresses given by former President George W. Bush. I found two pervasive and significant patterns: a “good vs. evil” construct in which the United States is the morally superior actor to our innately evil enemies and the fear-based pattern of constructing the United States as imminently vulnerable to unprecedented attack. The data analysis and discussion of these patterns give insight into the basis for national support for two combat wars – The War on Terror and The Iraq War. My study concludes by shining a harsh light on the dangerous power of political rhetoric.

Concept

The new Obama administration has inherited a particularly diverse and challenging set of national issues. We are engaged in a crippling mortgage crisis that has impacted all aspects of our economy to the point of recession. Our image in the international community is severely tarnished. Our military is fighting a devastating war that, most would agree, was initially supported by the public under false pretenses. Finally, issues on the home front, such as education, health insurance, and poverty, were neglected financially in the name of national security by the former Bush administration. As the United States currently faces extraordinary problems both in terms of foreign relations and at home, it is instructive to be aware that these issues grew and developed over the eight years of the Bush watch.

During President Bush's reign, our nation stood by while the civil rights of American citizens were impeded by government policies and initiatives such as The Patriot Act. Men and women in the "land of the free" were denied fair trials in the name of national security, under the logic that the ends justify the means during the "War on Terror". Our country was responsible for torturing innocent people in Guantanamo Bay (United States Senate Committee of Armed Services 2008). As the self-proclaimed leading democracy in the world, this recent history is not reflective of the values of The United States. A phenomenon took place during the Bush Administration that allowed for these atrocities and human rights violations to become a reality without outrage among the public. Thus, in order to learn from our past, it is vital to understand the gradual development of the culture that was created in our country since the day of the September 11 attacks. One night, every year, the President of our country delivers a speech presenting the current status of our country ("State of the Union"). This speech strongly influences public opinion of the President and his job performance. An analysis of such an

important speech can give enormous insight into the actions, policies and performance of the governing administration, and can also give great insight into the culture of the general public who elected and re-elected President George Bush.

The United States claims to be the leading democracy in the world, built on a system of checks and balances. The purpose of this research is to provide a similar check on our government. Speeches that hold such enormous importance and power can be analyzed to better understand the actions of our government, the power that the government holds, and what the government is doing with that power. I believe that an analysis of three of President Bush's State of the Union Addresses "[provides] clues about the larger pictures and show the distortions of political rhetoric" (Johnson et. al. 2004: 173), while also allowing the reader of my study to have a more concrete idea of how to analyze and interpret political speeches in order to find the deeper meaning within. It will also facilitate the reader of my study to gain a better grasp on how political rhetoric affects them personally through reflecting back on their own lived experience during the time of each speech.

I examined the text using the analytical technique of standard induction. This research method focuses on analyzing the words in the text as they are and provides a textual analysis by putting the words of the address in perspective with larger discourses. I have chosen to focus my analysis on two major patterns. The first pattern I analyzed was the theme of "good verses evil" that resonates throughout the text of The State of the Union Addresses. The second pattern I chose to analyze was the pattern used by President Bush in constructing The United States as being imminently vulnerable to an attack by our enemies. Together, these patterns give insight into the national support for two major wars that took place during the Bush Administration: the War on Terror and the Iraq War.

Theory

It is important to explore the theory behind analyzing President Bush's State of the Union Addresses on two levels. First, one must explore why such a speech has the capacity to have such a profound effect on the American public. Second, it is important to identify the theories which contribute to the patterns found in the addresses.

Socialization is the clear theory at the forefront of this research. Socialization refers to "a process by which people develop their human capacities and acquire a unique personality and identity by which culture is passed from generation to generation" (Ferrante 2006: 598). As one of the most influential people on American society, the persona of the U.S. President holds great influence on the socialization of the American people. The information that the President reports to the American people during important speeches, and especially the main speech of the year (State of the Union), impacts and even molds the norms (rules that guide appropriate behavior) and values (shared conceptions of what is right) of American society. For instance, if the President stresses the importance of combat in a time of danger, he or she is socializing the American public to learn that combat is the answer to danger. In stark contrast, if the President were to emphasize non-violent approaches, Americans would become socialized to approach conflict in different ways. This precise difference may be brought about through a change in approach towards violence instituted by the new Obama Administration in contrast to the Bush Administration. In turn, as the State of the Union reflects both the values of the President himself and of what he believes should be the values of the American people, the speech has immense power to influence the socialization of all Americans – especially our youth who are more impressionable. As a result, it is important to illuminate and dissect those socialized values to which a President intends American citizens to aspire. Through careful analysis it

becomes clear that President Bush socialized Americans through his speeches to construct a specific identity for those who are enemies to the United States. In doing so, he simultaneously constructed the norms and values of American culture in stark opposition to our enemies, while at the same time also constructing taboos and mores (norms that are so vital that violating them results in severe consequences).

Since the State of the Union Addresses influence the socialization of the American people so heavily, it is critical to also explore the concept of conformity. Conformity guides much of the rationale for analyzing presidential speeches and is likewise relevant to the patterns found. Conformity can be defined as behaviors that uphold the standards of a group (Ferrante 2006). Because the President is such a valued person in American society, the points he stresses as important in his speeches influence what it means to conform properly to American society. As shown by the patterns found in President Bush's speeches, a clear pressure to conform to President Bush's idea of patriotism resonates throughout the addresses. For instance, because the President stresses combat and the importance of military defense, there is an innate pressure to conform to support military based war. In addition, there is a sense that if Americans do not conform to supporting this type of war that they are actually endangering other citizens in the process. This pressure to conform, which subtly originates through a striking of fear during the State of the Union Addresses, has the practical effect of being the basis for widespread support for the twin Bush combat programs: the War on Terror and the Iraq War.

It further helps to understand the impact of the addresses when looking at power and difference. Power refers to "the field in which relations among groups occurs, in which the key variable is the intensity of subordination, that is, the degree to which one group is able to consistently control the outcomes of interactions" (Brantley and Lengermann 2007: 2).

Difference refers to the fact that groups of people can be variously classified in terms of distinctive qualities. The relation between these two major concepts, power and differences, produces domination: the “pathological relationship between power and difference in which the fact of difference is used to justify the exercise of absolute control of superordinates over subordinates” (Brantley and Lengermann 2007: 2). Domination can only function in a society that has been conditioned to understand it as the norm, which is the case in American society. For instance, President Bush can construct an enemy that matches the physical profile of millions of people living in the United States, but because he is in power, through the use of fear, he is able to use difference to justify the domination and racial profiling of potential enemies. In his War on Terror, President Bush and his administration abused their power by accusing many innocent people of terrorism and not providing them a fair trial. The power that lies in the President’s words during the State of the Union Addresses provides a means to understand how such injustice can happen in a democracy.

Frederick Douglass, one of the African theorists, delivered a speech at Canandaigua, NY on August 4, 1857 where he said,

Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till [sic] they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

This theory is at the heart of the necessity to critically analyze President Bush’s State of the Union Addresses. It is important to understand the immense effect that important speeches have on the public in order to shine a light on the injustices that result from them. Both manifest and

latent consequences result from such a speech, so it is necessary to critically conduct an examination in order to identify those consequences. A President's power of influence within his speeches is enormous; it is vital to be ever vigilant in warning our citizenry of their overt and subtle negative effects. It is important to analyze those patterns found in the speeches of George W. Bush to illustrate how President Bush may have influenced oppression and discrimination in American society, as well as how he garnered support for two combat wars during his Presidency.

Literature Review

While there is an abundance of media and news articles dissecting each year's State of the Union Address by reporters and journalists, there is an incredibly small amount of scholarly literature analyzing it through the social sciences. Even less literature has been written about President George Bush's State of the Union Addresses, as they are so recent. In addition, no literature can be found that analyzes State of the Union Addresses through standard induction. The lack of attention paid to analyzing State of the Union Addresses in the social sciences is demonstrated by the articles found in this literature review. With only five articles found to be relevant and only four groups of scholars involved (with one pair of authors behind two selected research studies), it appears that this is not a common topic among researchers. This further demonstrates the importance of such a topic, as it is both innovative and necessary to better understanding the power the President holds. Most interestingly, all scholarly literature found that is relevant to the content analysis of State of the Union Addresses has taken place since 2003, signifying that there may be a growing interest (albeit still small) in the impact of political rhetoric among a select group of researchers.

In the last six years, two patterns of interest in specific research topics have emerged. Cummins (2008) and Hoffman and Howard (2003) (2004) explore the relationship between Presidential policy requests mentioned in State of the Union Addresses and the future success rate of passing such policies through Congress. Druckman and Holmes (2004) and Kaid, Trammell and Williams (2004) investigate the effect of the State of the Union Address on the opinions of the American public.

Cummins (2008) explores three policy areas in State of the Union Addresses from 1953 to 2000 and Presidents' subsequent positions on floor votes in Congress. Cummins' evidence found that there is a relationship between the expectations of success by the President concerning specific policies, what the President states in his speech regarding such policies and his future actions. If the President expected more success in one policy area (such as foreign relations), Cummins found no gap between the President's rhetoric and the President's policy actions. In contrast, when Presidents deemed themselves more likely to fail or face more confrontations (in policies relating to health and social welfare for instance), Cummins found a disconnect between their rhetoric and their actions.

Hoffman and Howard conducted similar studies in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, Hoffman and Howard analyzed twenty State of the Union Addresses through content analysis. They coded all instances of requests for congressional action and then tracked the action taken by Congress in the following year to measure the success of the President's chosen rhetoric. Their primary goal was to see if Presidents are successful in convincing Congress to enact the requests they make in State of the Union Addresses. They found that the Presidents' median success rate for their requests to Congress was 42.3 percent. They thus concluded that the Presidents' deliberative rhetoric was not successful with Congress. In a similar study in 2004, Hoffman and

Howard also looked for when the President “dons his chief legislator’s hat”, as defined by displaying re-election goals and making good public policy. In their second study, Hoffman and Howard found a gap between what the President can realistically accomplish in the rest of his term and what the public expects him to accomplish based on his State of the Union Address. They found a connection between when the President dons the hat of chief legislator in his State of the Union and the public’s belief that he will deliver solutions to policy problems. They also corroborated their conclusions from their previous study, stating that Congress more often than not does not pass legislation based on the President’s rhetoric in State of the Union Addresses.

Druckman and Holmes (2004) examined the relationship between the public’s approval rating of a President and presidential rhetoric in the State of the Union Address. Using the 2002 State of the Union Address, Druckman and Holmes combine content analysis with a national survey and a laboratory experiment. They specifically looked for the effect the President can have on his approval rating by priming the criteria that the public uses to base their approval evaluations on. They concluded that there is clear evidence that presidents have the capacity to utilize rhetoric in their State of the Union Addresses to influence their own approval ratings by priming precisely those issues at the forefront of Americans criteria for presidential approval at a given time.

Kaid, Trammell and Williams (2004) chose to analyze the 2003 State of the Union Address in order to explore the effect that it had on the American people in the face of routine terror alerts and an anticipated war in Iraq. Their study used an experimental survey design to test the effect of the State of the Union Address on a group of 120 respondents. They sought to measure the effects that the speech had on the public’s support for military action in Iraq. This study examined the 2003 State of the Union Address from multiple perspectives. In order to

ensure external validity, Kaid, Trammell and Williams compared national polling to their experimental findings. They concluded that President Bush's chosen rhetoric about Iraq in the 2003 Address had a powerful impact on the public's ability to justify the United States subsequent attack on Iraq.

Research Questions

1. How does President Bush construct the enemies of the United States?
2. How does President Bush construct the vulnerability to attack of the United States?

I chose to explore these two research questions, because they are recurring patterns in President Bush's State of the Union Addresses that give great insight into the impact of The Bush Administration. When I coded the data for different patterns, these two patterns stood out as having the greatest implications for our country. I chose to explore President Bush's construction of enemies, because his State of the Union Addresses came at pivotal times during which our nation was either entering into war or was at war. It is imperative to analyze his construction of enemies in order to conceptualize the people that our citizenry believed we were fighting against. Such an analysis brings about a greater understanding of the original support for the Iraq War, especially now that in retrospect it is generally understood to have been a mistake by the majority of Americans.

While simultaneously constructing an enemy, my research found that President Bush also constructed the United States as being imminently vulnerable to that enemy. This is quite remarkable, as it reveals that the President was actually preparing a nation to go to war. By

constructing a nation that was in danger, the President was able to strike fear in American citizens in order to obtain the necessary support for his agenda to wage war. The President did not only construct an enemy, but he also constructed a nation that had two choices: attack or be attacked. Presented under such circumstances, the average American was left with little choice but to give his or her wholehearted patriotic support to the Bush agenda.

Data Collection

Specifically, I analyzed three of President Bush's State of the Union Addresses – those which were delivered in 2002, 2003 and 2008. There are two reasons why I chose these specific addresses. First, they took place at the most pivotal times of the Bush Presidency in relation to the United States' position in the global landscape. The 2002 State of the Union Address was President Bush's first such address after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. The 2003 State of the Union immediately preceded the United States invasion of Iraq, marking the start of the War that has continued to the present day. The 2008 State of the Union is the most recent address, and the final (of the eight) State of the Union speeches given by President George W. Bush. This last speech was extremely important to his administration, as it was the final time that this President had the opportunity to address the American public in such a highly publicized and prolonged format. All of these State of the Union Addresses marked important messages given by this administration, whether addressing the public in a time of tragedy, preparing a nation for war, or presenting the final agenda of an administration as it entered the last months of an eight year reign.

This first line of reasoning behind choosing these specific speeches is compounded by the second reason – the approval ratings that precede each speech. The first speech marked the

highest approval rating the Bush administration ever had at 81% (“State of the Union: A Look Back” 2008), a 20% jump from the previous year, as the country was in a time of widespread unity and patriotism following the September 11 tragedy and rallied around the Bush administration. The next year saw the highest drop in approval rating, as it plunged from 81% to 59% (“State of the Union: A Look Back” 2008). The 2008 and final State of the Union marked the lowest approval rating of the Bush administration, as it had dropped consistently following the United States’ invasion of Iraq, and fell to a new low of 28% (Langer 2007) immediately preceding President Bush’s final State of the Union Address.

Through a simple search on the internet using the Google search engine, I located President Bush’s 2002, 2003 and 2008 State of the Union Addresses. They served as effective sources of data for this study by allowing me to gather the maximum amount of information regarding how the Bush administration constructed both the enemies of the United States and how vulnerable our country was to attack by such enemies during pivotal times in our history.

Methodology

The in-depth textual analysis of President George Bush’s selected State of the Union Addresses is based on the qualitative research method of standard induction. Standard induction is rooted in the idea that theory is developed through observations of the social world as it exists (Daly 2007). In regards to ontology, standard induction views reality as being socially constructed. Thus, when participating in inductive analysis, the researcher must do her or his best to suspend any assumptions or preconceived notions about the data being observed in order to keep the findings as pure and accurate as possible (Daly 2007). “The goal of induction is to

come to an understanding of a phenomenon through observation and inquiry. In its most simple terms, induction is the scientific process of building theoretical explanation on the basis of repeated observation of particular circumstances” (Daly 2007: 45). This may also be understood as moving from the “bottom up”, from smaller interactions to larger social processes (Fox and Miller).

I will utilize a specific form of inductive analysis known as “grounded theory”.

Grounded theory is an epistemological approach that was developed by Barnet G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in 1967. The grounded theory approach develops theories from observations, rather than going into a study with a set theory and proving it through observations (Charmaz 2007). This can begin with line-by-line coding of the data, as employed in my study. Next, the codes can be translated into patterns or theories that are extrapolated from the most common codes. Grounded theory methods can be dichotomized into two forms: constructivist and objectivist (Charmaz 2007). The constructivist approach sees the world as fluid and places priority on the process of the study, seeing both the data and the analysis as a function of the researcher and the researcher’s relationship to that data (Charmaz 2007). The objectivist approach, however, sees the world as being an objective truth, with potential right and wrong theories to be drawn from such a truth. “Constructivist grounded theorists acknowledge that they *define* what is happening in the data. Objectivist grounded theorists assume they *discover* what is happening in the data” (Charmaz 2001: 684).

This study takes a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Thus, all of the methods and patterns employed in this study are a means for understanding the data, rather than a concrete fact that can be objectively derived by any individual viewing the data. That is, while participating in inductive analysis I viewed the data in this study as constructing different

meanings and actions, and attempted to analyze what this implies for the bigger picture of our social and political world. The assumption in this method is that multiple realities exist (Charmaz 2001), and the emphasis, in turn, is not on objectively stating facts, but rather on focusing on how meaning and action are constructed in the first place to create the multiple realities that are understood to exist.

In more explicit terms, I first coded the data for patterns by literally reading it multiple times and pulling out quotes in the text to illustrate the recurring patterns. The quotes I pulled out ranged from one sentence to extremely lengthy paragraphs (3 words – 282 words). I began by focusing on international issues (rather than domestic). The patterns and the number of times coded for each pattern follow: The United States as a superior nation (10), mention of American civilian experiences with 9/11 (11), the concept of liberating or helping other nations (8), association of an enemy with the concept of good verses evil (34), God on the side of the United States (7), the responsibility of the United States to fight terror (8), and the United States as a nation that is vulnerable to imminent attack/action is required immediately for safety purposes (31).

I then studied my data in order to decide which patterns were the most dominant and the most inclusive of the other themes in the other patterns. I decided to choose the pattern likening enemies of the United States to an image of good verses evil and the pattern concerning the United States as being vulnerable to immediate attack. I chose these patterns both because they occurred the most frequently, and because I believe that they were most indicative of the other major patterns found and of the actual events that took place during history while the addresses were made. It is important to note that of the 31 references found to the United States being vulnerable to an imminent attack, there was only one reference to this in the 2008 address. This

played a factor in my deliberation process, because this address took place at a much later time in history, after the United States was already engaged in the Iraq War. This may indicate that the addresses played an important role in fostering a unique patriotism that contributed to national support for the Iraq War. Thus, I believe that these two patterns were the most important ones to analyze as they worked together to construct an enemy with whom to wage war as well as a dire need to enter such combat for safety purposes.

Data Analysis

It is first important to note that there is a team of people behind the annual State of the Union Address given by the President. There are speech writers, editors, administrators, producers, and other advisors who stand behind and even create the words and policies that eventually flow from the President's mouth. All of these people influence the patterns and conclusions that will be spread out in this analysis, but ultimately, for purposes of clarity, this analysis will define each speech as President Bush's speech and as President Bush's words.

Pattern 1: Good Vs. Evil

The first and most prominent pattern in this data is that when speaking of people, groups, or countries that President Bush deems "enemies" to The United States, he often analogizes the concept of good verses evil through associating moral ("good") actions and values with the American people and immoral ("evil") actions and values with the "enemies" of the American people. President Bush's construction of "enemies" of The United States as immoral, corrupt and evil people based on their actions and values is exemplified by the following excerpt of his 2003 State of the Union Address:

The dictator who is assembling the world's most dangerous weapons has already used them on whole villages -- leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured. Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained -- by torturing children while their parents are made to watch. International human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape. If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning (9).

In this passage, President Bush relates horrific images. It would take a unique personality to not be moved by such graphic violence and sad imagery and to be further able to separate those emotions that are engendered from a view of the Iraqi dictator and Iraqi people in general. There is an overabundance of examples of human rights violations which have been “catalogued” by international human rights groups that could have been highlighted within the text of the most viewed speech of the year. However, the only references to international human rights violations that appear in this speech are examples taking place in Iraq (the home of some of America’s primary “enemies”). Additionally, these are examples of violence that are outside the range of “normal” immoral actions. That is, the documented acts are extreme acts of violence that fall outside even the already extreme levels of crime (such as garden variety murder, assault, etc.) which have been rendered our norm by media bombardment and the omnipresence of violence in our society. President Bush references weapons which leave people “blind, or disfigured”, and torture such as “electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues”. These examples are so extreme that even Americans who have become enormously desensitized to violence are impacted by them. These are particularly

graphic examples – examples that might even be considered to be too extreme to be reported on our evening news shows. What is accomplished through the usage of such graphic and disturbing language?

These references are not presented to explain the state of our union, but instead are used to position the United States as the morally superior nation in relation to the global landscape. The graphic images in the passage evoke disgust and horror that mere references to evil or immorality or “normal” acts of violence could not have done alone. Instead of just directly stating that we are morally superior to our enemies, President Bush’s words play the emotional heart-string in linking these terrible acts with the people who are constructed as “enemies” – the Iraqi dictator and his followers, thereby leaving the viewer to come to this reactionary conclusion on her or his own. In this passage, President Bush does not even need to directly say that the United States is morally superior to such actions, because it is assumed in his presentation. The usage of such appalling examples creates the moral hero in this example – it is without question the humane and compassionate American who stands for all that is “good” and opposite the horrendous acts referenced in this passage. President Bush is able to conclude his statement with, “If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning”, because there is no way for the reader to deny that the acts he has just referenced are not “evil”. Only a callous person would feel such a way. By evoking emotions of horror, shock and empathy for these victims in the American people, the enemy is constructed. President Bush is able to confidently state that our “enemies” are “evil”, as he is certain that no moral person would likely question this assertion after he has directly linked such appalling acts with those our country holds as evil. Since he has previously constructed the United States as the “hero”, through the use of graphic examples of violence used

against innocent people, President Bush thereby successfully places the United States in juxtaposition with the evil enemy.

The construction of an “enemy” to the United States is furthered through the use of examples that capitalize on acts that Americans would find most threatening and horrific: those targeting women and children. “Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained -- by torturing children while their parents are made to watch”; this reference evokes sheer sadness, disgust and rage in the average American listener. There are few acts more upsetting or immoral based on “American values” than the torture of a small child. Later in the passage, President Bush lists atrocious acts of violence that were previously discussed in the above paragraph. After listing some of the most ghastly and shocking acts most could ever imagine, the catalog ends with “and rape”. Through listing rape last, the act of rape is positioned as one of the most prominent examples of the passage. By ending on this note, the speech accomplishes portraying the United States as the hero, positioned to save all of the women who are suffering from such a heinous act. This exemplifies the gendered construction of countries. If the United States is the moral hero, and one of the tasks of this hero is to save all women from rape, then the United States cannot be defined as being female – in contrast it is constructed as a male hero. Additionally, it constructs the average United States citizen as a male adult, out to protect the women and children. This further constructs the image of a heroic country paralleling stereotypical masculine characteristics, such as bravery and sheer strength. In our social world, men are constructed as the big, strong protectors, and women are constructed as the lesser, weak victims. Since the United States is unquestionably the hero and not the victim, the United States is constructed as a masculine entity.

The next excerpt also constructs The United States as the moral actor and the “enemies” of The United States as immoral. In this text, The President expresses what he considers to be the understood and established standards and values of our system of government:

America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. We have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance (2002: 5,6)

“Liberty... justice...respect for women, free speech, equal justice”: these are the values that Americans hold closest. By implying that we need to protect these values, President Bush is simultaneously implying that our “enemies” do not have these same values, and, further, that we may be in danger of losing our basic values and freedoms if we do not so act. This passage also implies that we are responsible to own and uphold these values for the world, which also suggests that our enemies could not possibly hold the same values. In this instance, who we are and what we stand for are constructed through the identification of our enemy. In this way, the identification of our enemy tells us who we must be and how we must act in stark contrast, for we must uphold the good and reject the bad to live our destiny. “America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity” contends that our enemies are also attempting to challenge the concept of human dignity. The statement “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere” concurrently states that our enemies are attacking liberty and justice. By choosing the understood measures of morality of our nation, these words leave the listener with little room for

disagreement. Few people will say that they do not support the upholding of liberty, justice and respect for women. Thus, the speech holds the enemy accountable for assaulting these American values, and leaves little room for the listener to internally challenge those termed as “enemies”. In this way, the average listener’s conscience is so focused on the enemies’ attack on American morality that he or she cannot assess the facts of the situation clearly without associating such feelings with being unpatriotic.

In addition, the gendered construction of the United States as a masculine nation, and the typical citizen as male, is again constructed through stating that Americans stand for “respect for women”. That is, we do not stand for “respect for people”, but instead we stand for the “respect for women”. This statement assumes that the universal citizen cannot be defined as a woman, for if the definition of a citizen was inclusive of both men and women, then the statement would be “respect for us”. Instead, “Americans”, being men, stand for the respect for that segmented portion of the population, the women, who in their eyes need to be protected by the dominant male citizen. Additionally, since this applies to a value that the United States claims as a universal value that Americans must uphold globally, it again implies the gendered construction of the United States as a masculine state in relation to the global landscape.

The only exception to the pattern of the construction of the United States as the good or heroic actor in contrast to the construction of the enemy as the evil or immoral actor can be seen in the excerpts that document the theme of good verses evil through referring to America’s calling to bring justice to the enemy. These are exceptions to the above pattern, because they do not make a direct linkage of the enemy and immorality, or the United States and morality. However, such passages still reflect the theme of good verses evil, as they illustrate that it is the

mission of the moral and honorable United States to defeat and bring justice to our “evil” enemies. Consider these examples:

The man (sic.) and women of our Armed Forces have delivered a message now clear to every enemy of the United States: Even 7,000 miles away, across oceans and continents, on mountaintops and in caves -- you will not escape the justice of this nation (2002: 1).

We have the terrorists on the run. We’re keeping them on the run. One by one, the terrorists are learning the meaning of American justice (2003:6).

We will not rest until this enemy has been defeated (2008: 5).

While none of the above exceptions directly state or reference the idea that The United States is moral and the enemy is immoral, the concept of good verses evil still comes into play with the mention of “justice”. A responsibility to defeat the enemy is charged. These excerpts have a common theme of power as it relates to being an American. They construct the United States as being the most powerful and righteous, such that all other states should be threatened and frightened in relation. Through focusing on a military capacity to “bring justice” to the enemies of the United States, this passage relates the threat that the use of military power grants ultimate control over international relations, as no other state should feel comfortable or safe while in conflict with the most powerful state. This portrays The United States’ position of hegemonic power in the global landscape as being the supreme and dominant physical power, capable of and responsible for enforcing its will on the enemy. The major pattern of the above exception is the construction of The United States as the primary and most powerful state in the world in regards to military power. In this way, not only is the United States constructed as the heroic, strong and

moral actor, it is also constructed as having ultimate, imperious power. This power allows the United States to set the definition of justice, and force all enemies who violate American “justice” to be subject to the consequences of such an action – as there will always be consequences if another state dares come into conflict with the ultimate powerful hegemonic threat that is The United States.

Pattern 2: The United States as Imminently Vulnerable to Attack

In addition to the former pattern, the speeches also exhibited a strong construction of the pattern of the United States as being imminently vulnerable to an attack. An example of this second pattern can be seen below:

What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. Most of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September the 11th were trained in Afghanistan's camps, and so were tens of thousands of others. Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning (2002: 2).

This excerpt constructs the idea that the United States is imminently vulnerable to an attack. The passage begins by explaining that the events of September 11 – the most devastating attack on American soil in the history of this country – marked the beginning of further vulnerability to attacks of the liking, rather than the end. It goes on to relate that while the 19 men who were involved in the attacks are no longer threats, there are “tens of thousands of others”. This implies that thousands of (other) evil men are on a mission to attack the United States. The passage even states that these men are “dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder”.

This likens those who are out to attack the United States as being abnormal human beings, who are on a mission of murder. The term “dangerous killers” contains a threatening undertone, implying that there are an abundance of men who are trained murderers seeking the demise of our nation. The passage goes on to associate these men with “outlaw regimes”. The average person’s knowledge of an “outlaw” constructs the enemy as an unpredictable actor from the old Wild West and creates America as the heroic cowboy out to save the world. The passage ends by explaining that these threatening murderers “are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning”. This passage could not be more direct in probing and jabbing at the fear felt by United States’ citizens in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. It makes clear that an attack could take place at any moment, with the emphasis on there being no warning before hand. The image of a “ticking time bomb” certainly compounds this idea, by picturing the explosion of a bomb at random – certainly an event no person could anticipate or prepare for.

The selected passage constructs the United States as having no other choice but to act immediately, as the enemy is constantly planning, and any sign of weakness by the United States would be strategically capitalized on by the enemy. It creates terror as an entirely new threat that our nation is unfamiliar with, as there is no way to predict what will happen next. This lack of expectation constructs a society that must be afraid and stand guard at all times, as a threat could take place anywhere from the supermarket to schools to a large city landmark to even one’s own backyard. Through emphasizing that this threat is spread throughout the world, the implication is that it is sensible and reasonable to feel an omnipresent sense of fear. In turn, a full acceptance and reliance of unfettered power in the government is constructed as the only option for safety;

American citizens are left with few choices but to trust the government to do anything necessary to prevent this imminent and unprecedented threat.

Another passage also greatly demonstrates the meaning of this pattern:

Our military has put the terror training camps of Afghanistan out of business, yet camps still exist in at least a dozen countries. A terrorist underworld -- including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed -- operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities (2002: 2).

In this passage, the term “underworld” is emphasized much like the term “outlaw regimes” in the previous passage. The term “underworld” is associated with the criminal world, the mob world and Hades – some of the most threatening and intimidating concepts to the average American. This passage also gives a name and association to the “terrorist underworld”, those who the average American would find most threatening, by listing names of terrorist groups that have been deemed to fall into this category by the government. Through associating the terrorist underworld with these groups, the association of fear and the threat of violence also accompany these groups. When speaking of such groups, the speech goes on to explain that they “[operate] in remote jungles and deserts, and [hide] in the centers of large cities.” “Remote jungles and deserts” are associated with Third World Countries. As a First World Country, Americans often view or term these countries as “uncivilized” or inferior to “civilized countries”. “Uncivilized” countries mark a stark difference to “civilized” countries that Americans are familiar with, and something extremely threatening emerges in the unknown. When something is so extremely unfamiliar, and a lack of control exists as in this instance, it creates great fear, dread and uncertainty in the average person. It can be theorized that this unfamiliar and “uncivilized” enemy is broadly advertised for purposes of evoking an irrational reaction that allows for blind

support of defense of country and shows the inordinate power conferred upon words that stir these fears.

In further support of the President's agenda, the phrase "jungles and deserts" evokes the image of a time in history when humans were less evolved, in turn associating the terrorist underworld with primitive actions, while again creating the same sense of unfamiliarity and fear in the average person living in a "civilized" country. When referencing that members of the "terrorist underworld" may be "[hiding] in the center of large cities", these large cities are associated with First World Countries – countries that the average American may associate as being more "civilized" than countries which contain jungles and deserts. The image of terrorists hiding in First World Countries is more threatening to the American audience, because United States citizens would be more likely to find ourselves in one of these countries. Thus, in this simple statement, the terrorist is associated with primitive stereotypes, while the average American is simultaneously constructed as being vulnerable to becoming the victim of primitive, evil and unpredictable activities. This passage also associates large cities with danger. It insinuates that large cities provide a perfect asylum for terrorists, for they can blend into the crowd due to a relatively high proportion of minorities in cities. This provokes a deep fear, implying that our cities are not safe and that all those people who match the physical profile of a terrorist cannot be trusted; they may either be a terrorist themselves or they may be interacting with a terrorist on a regular basis, possibly without even realizing it. The overarching insinuation is that terrorists could be hiding anywhere and interacting with anyone, and in all likelihood employ tactical measures by hiding amongst those people who look like them.

The last passage that will document the pattern of the construction of the United States as being imminently vulnerable to attack is taken from the 2003 State of the Union Address – the address that immediately preceded the United States invasion of Iraq.

Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans -- this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that that day never comes. Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option (2003: 8).

It is no coincidence that this excerpt was taken from the 2003 State of the Union Address – the State of the Union Address that immediately preceded the United States engagement in the war in Iraq. These images and examples given in the text condition the American people to support the cause of invading Iraq through a capitalizing on fear. The passage creates Saddam Hussein as an unpredictable and evil leader who is associated with the terrorist “outlaws” reigning from the “underworld” as constructed in the previous passages. Additionally, there is another term in this passage that is again associated with villainous behavior: “shadowy terrorist networks”. Shadowy implies darkness, and again associates the threatening enemy with evil.

This passage also directly states that The United States has reason to believe that two of the most threatening enemies to the United States - Saddam Hussein and terrorists – may potentially collaborate, and “it would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known”. Still today, there are Americans who falsely believe that we invaded Iraq because Iraq was responsible for the September 11 tragedy, which suggests that statements like this excerpt made by The President had an immense effect on the public’s conception of why we invaded Iraq in the first place.

Furthermore, this passage blatantly states that the United States is vulnerable to an attack even greater than that of September 11. The passage follows with: “Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late.” By labeling the threat as something even more current than imminent (if such is even possible), an emotional self-blackmail is created that the threat has a constant presence even if it cannot immediately be identified or seen. Indeed if such a threat cannot even wait until it becomes “imminent”, then we are in constant and immediate danger. If we do not act as if the threat is there, then the threat may “suddenly emerge” out of nowhere. Thus, our fears are tapped at our core and we must be proactive and on the offensive to act regardless of a reasoned analysis of reality; danger is constructed as being omnipresent, and therefore the average person is left feeling that she or he has no choice but to constantly stand guard. The text ends stating: “Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option.” This again illustrates the enemy as a “ticking time bomb”. It implies that there is no logical reasoning behind those who threaten the United States – instead they are irrational, evil and

unpredictable, and they therefore must be the most threatening enemy the United States has ever seen. This again constructs the United States as being imminently vulnerable to a novel sense of danger.

The exception to the pattern of the construction of the United States as being imminently vulnerable to an attack lies in passages where President Bush directly asks for support from Congress or from the American people for a bill or policy, and implies that if Congress or the American people deny him support for such bill or policy, then an increased vulnerability of The United States will manifest as an absolute consequence.

To protect America, we need to know who the terrorists are talking to, what they are saying, and what they're planning. Last year, Congress passed legislation to help us do that. Unfortunately, Congress set the legislation to expire on February the 1st. That means if you don't act by Friday, our ability to track terrorist threats would be weakened and our citizens will be in greater danger. Congress must ensure the flow of vital intelligence is not disrupted. Congress must pass liability protection for companies believed to have assisted in the efforts to defend

America. We've had ample time for debate. The time to act is now (2008: 6).

Here, the United States' vulnerability to attack is directly stated, as opposed to implied: "That means if you don't act by Friday, our ability to track terrorist threats would be weakened and our citizens will be in greater danger". In saying this, the act of not supporting the referenced legislation is associated with endangering the lives of American citizens. It is also associated with purposely not "protecting" America, as President Bush states that this was the purpose of the bill in the first place. Instead of generally constructing the vulnerability of the United States in order to gain support for the general actions of the administration, this passage directly links

the vulnerability with a specific policy change. Therefore, it makes clear that the vulnerability of the United States will either be increased or decreased depending on the support the Administration receives. This is different than the general pattern, as it has a tangible purpose behind referencing the vulnerability of the United States to an attack. In the other passages, one can assume or hypothesize as to why President Bush relates how vulnerable The United States may be to an attack, but there is not a concrete purpose or motive linked to his construction of the United States as being vulnerable.

Conclusion

The two patterns found in this study answer my research questions and work in tandem to give major insights into the State of the Union Addresses of the Bush Administration. Through the foregoing extensive analysis, it is clear how the pattern of the association of an enemy with images of good and evil and the pattern of the United States as being vulnerable to attack work together to produce a nation prepared to go to war. This study serves as a potent example of the impact of Presidential discourse on the average American. While the effects of the speeches cannot be proven, based on the historical events that accompanied each speech, it can be hypothesized that the speeches had a great deal of influence in providing a culture of support and patriotism for the invasion of Iraq and in support of the War on Terror.

There were countless times that the US Constitution was not observed during the Bush Administration. Just to name a few, those who were deemed potential terrorists did not receive fair trials, the average American had her right to privacy infringed through The Patriot Act, and torture and other atrocities took place at Guantanamo Bay. Based on the founding tenets of our constitution, one would theorize that the average American would never approve of such

policies. However, through an analysis of the language used by our government during these political addresses, it becomes clear that a culture of fear was created during the Bush Administration. The likening of our enemies to innately evil beings, while simultaneously advertising that we are constantly vulnerable to an unprecedented attack most likely had an effect on a tacit acceptance to forfeit certain formerly inalienable rights in exchange for promised “necessary” protection. The atmosphere of irrational fear so subtly enforced and spread by the Administration won out.

While some brave citizens may have questioned the infringement of civil liberties during the Bush Administration, a dominant culture that the ends were justifying the means prevailed. That is, people were so frightened for their own safety that they were willing to tolerate unconventional and unconstitutional actions by our government in the name of national security. The truly frightening part of this passion play is that there is no real way to measure whether or not our government’s stance against terrorism worked effectively. One measure of success of the War on Terror and Iraq War appeared to be that there was not another comparable attack after September 11. However, this does not translate that the War on Terror was a success, because we cannot measure what would have happened otherwise. It is entirely possible that there would not have been another terrorist attack of the same scale as September 11 if the infringement of civil liberties had never occurred. In addition, while there are many people who may still believe that there was a causal connection between September 11 and the Iraq War, there is no proven correlation – nor has there ever been in the past – of this kind. These realities put in perspective the importance of being forever vigilant in keeping the power of government in check, as our system of justice was meant operate. A lesson re-learned is that great power lies in fear. It is our responsibility as citizens to closely follow the governing administration in order

to keep the power in the people rather than allowing that power to be abused by the select people in power. If we are to continue to claim to be the leading democracy in the world, then our citizenry must press our government whenever civil rights are in danger of becoming in jeopardy. Perhaps if as a nation we had acted more responsibly in defense of the tenets of our basic freedom during the Bush Administration, then many of the problems we face today in terms of international relations would not exist.

Discussion

Sociological theory regarding conformity gives deep insight into the impact of dominant discourse in our society. The conformity that was exhibited during the Bush Administration after September 11 was in part a result of the way that our government constructed the global landscape at that point in history. Constructing an enemy that Americans were intended to fear made it much easier to gain support for the Iraq War. In addition, since this enemy was constructed as launching an attack on our very way of life, it became unpatriotic to dare to disagree with the administration in such a time of crisis. Even as the enemy was being constructed in this way, an image of the American as the moral hero was inherently constructed as well. Racial profiling and incidents of discrimination escalated after September 11, suggesting that the average American felt a responsibility to target those that he or she interpreted as being “different” or possibly having traits that jibed with those of our advertised enemies. Then, as a topper, the construction of the United States as being in imminent danger put further pressure on the average American to conform to a specific form of patriotism – support for combat in a time of war – in order to protect our country. By striking fear in the average American, logic goes out the window, as fear has the effect of blinding people to reality.

For example, as mentioned above, millions of Americans believed the propaganda without proof that Iraq was behind the invasion of September 11, which contributed to support for that invasion. This absence of clarity translated into significant public support for entry into a war. Upon further analysis and review, with the fervor created by an untrustworthy Administration now absent, that war is currently looked upon with widespread disfavor.

In addition, the sociological theory of power informs my study greatly. The culture of fanatical patriotism that was created through the impact of the speeches shows the true power that the governing administration holds. If one merely looks at initial speeches during the Obama Administration, it becomes clear how truly influential language can be. Instead of words like justice and war, President Obama uses words like peace and dialogue. The culture of change and social action that have stemmed from President Obama's speeches mark a new era and a new environment in the United States. President Obama has not only influenced the culture within our country, but has also significantly affected world opinion of the United States, even in the short time since he has taken office. The stark difference between administrations shows that the President of The United States is an extremely powerful and influential person in world politics – possibly the most in the world – and in turn, has the ability to create a particular kind of atmosphere among United States citizens and within international relations. As a country that elects our governing officials, it is important to pay attention to the way that the President will use his or her power, both concerning foreign and domestic issues. The power must remain in the people, with the majority population being represented through the government official. The President should not have the power to act as he chooses simply because he has been elected and has a certain agenda or doctrine. We must be ever vigilant in support of the checks and balances

established in our Constitution. It is up to us as responsible citizens to constantly be in the ear of our elected officials to protect and enforce those limits.

Aside from the importance of being an active, diligent and responsible member of a democracy, the major lessons I have learned during this project are in regards to my study informing sociological theory. My research shows the dangers of socialization and unchecked power. While it is inevitable that socialization will take place because of the norms in our society, it is a dangerous reality that socialization can produce a culture that stands silent when the U.S. Constitution is ignored and other key elements of democracy are overlooked based on an assumption that we are in imminent danger and left with no other choice. The real danger learned is the vulnerability of our society to the kind of propaganda of fear spread in the name of safety and all that is “right”. We must be constantly reminded of the lessons of history in that regard. It is also illuminating that we are susceptible to the kind of socialization that generates a culture of discrimination and racial profiling in order to target select people who match the profile of our “evil enemies”. It is even shocking that socialization can spawn a culture ready to go to war before there is a widespread understanding of the logic behind that war because so many citizens are too blinded by fear to look deeper into the situation. None of these realities would be possible if there was a better check on the power of the President and on the words that leave the President’s mouth. One must surely imagine that if each citizen had the opportunity to have studied the speeches of the President that there would have been a different cultural understanding concerning the best way to handle the War on Terror.

Concerning my methods, I learned that a textual analysis cannot speak to effect. While I can make educated hypotheses or inferences, I cannot make any concrete statements about the effects of the speeches. This is mildly frustrating, as it would be extremely empowering and

enlightening to be able to pinpoint the concrete effects of the speeches. As a result, I strongly recommend that further qualitative research be done through interviews with United States citizens in order to measure the effects of the State of the Union Addresses on individuals. This study should also explore whether or not the people are aware of such effects, and how significantly the effects of the State of the Union influenced support of various policies and general beliefs about the United States and its place in international relations. In addition, it is advisable to further explore the placement of these different patterns and discourses. Since they appear across all three speeches, it is worthwhile to analyze their strategic impact at each place in history (i.e. immediately following the September 11 attacks, immediately preceding the Iraq War, and today). Further research should be undertaken in order to analyze the effect of the speeches on individuals at each point in history.

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