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“OUR MISSION AND OUR MOMENT”: GEORGE W. BUSH AND SEPTEMBER 11TH

JOHN M. MURPHY

This essay explores the ways in which President George W. Bush explained the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Through his choice of genre, use of visual imagery, and creation of an American people, Bush crafted the authority to dominate public interpretation of those events and the appropriate response to them.

On January 20, 2001, President George W. Bush inherited a peaceful and prosperous nation. In less than a year, he found himself mired in war and recession. Nearly three thousand Americans died in the bloodiest terrorist attacks to occur on U.S. soil. It was an extraordinary intelligence failure on the part of the United States.¹ Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, the group said to have carried out the attacks, and Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, the group said to have supported Al Qaeda, are still at large.² The nation is still at war in Afghanistan. In the name of preemptive war, the nation fights in Iraq. Americans now measure their daily safety by the color of the new Department of Homeland Security's terrorist alert scale. The world, in short, has grown significantly less peaceful since George W. Bush took office.³

Meanwhile, the nation slid into recession even as Bush pronounced the oath. So far, better than two million jobs have disappeared and one million workers have dropped out of the labor force. For the first time in six years, wage increases fell below the inflation rate for most Americans.⁴ The stock market lost nearly \$5 trillion in value during the president's first two years in office, the largest real and percentage loss suffered by any president in that period, including Herbert Hoover. In 2001, the budget surplus projected out at \$5.6 trillion from fiscal 2002 through fiscal 2011. That same time now yields a \$1.8 trillion deficit, a figure that is constantly growing. In other words, the Bush administration has lost a *minimum* of \$7.4 trillion in projected budget surpluses. In 2011, baby boomers begin to retire, a very expensive event for which we are now not prepared. The dollar's value has dropped 13 percent since 2001.⁵ The trade deficit hit \$435.2 billion in 2002, the largest in history.⁶ The

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As a result of his performance, George W. Bush has seen his popularity ratings rival those of the most beloved chief executives in memory. Of course, many citizens understand that events from Israeli/Palestinian violence to increasing income inequality to rising crime rates may not be the president's fault. Yet Americans have generally held presidents responsible for events on their watches and rewarded or punished them accordingly. Generosity alone cannot explain Bush's popularity. Of course, Americans tend to rally around the president during a crisis. Yet Jimmy Carter failed to win reelection during the Iran hostage crisis and Abraham Lincoln faced severe criticism for his policies during the Civil War. Crisis alone cannot explain Bush's popularity. We could also attribute his popularity to his intrinsic leadership ability; little of that, however, was apparent before 9/11, and a plurality of the people, whose wisdom he lauds, chose his opponent on Election Day 2000.⁷ If we are so smart, why did we not see his leadership qualities then?

Such explanations are useful but not sufficient. I believe that President Bush has done a remarkable job of defining the attacks of September 11 to his advantage and that his rhetoric is a key factor in his success. In the remainder of this essay, I examine his discourse. I explore three strategies—choice of genre, use of visual imagery, and creation of self and audience—that animate his 9/11 rhetoric, primarily his famous speech on September 20, 2001. My major claim is simple: These rhetorical strategies crafted the authority President George W. Bush needed to dominate public interpretation of the events of September 11. This is a speculative essay, an effort to explore a fascinating set of speeches. I invite responses in the hope that critics will begin to grapple with the rhetoric that infuses our increasingly bellicose and divided public sphere.

GENRE

Genre means type or sort. Generic critics assume that regularities in rhetorical life matter. If the same sorts of speeches recur, it is likely because they do something important for the community. Critics who employ a generic perspective seek to explain the strategies typically used by rhetors and audiences to encompass similar situations. That is, critics care about the ends sought by a community and the means used to achieve those ends, the ways in which form follows function. A type emerges from this rhetorical action, a constellation of form and argument that facilitates a community's efforts to do the social tasks, such as religious instruction (a sermon), that regularly need doing.⁸

Given the emphasis on routine, a generic perspective is particularly useful when dealing with institutions. An institution such as the presidency must accomplish recurrent rhetorical tasks, including committing the nation to military action. War

or crisis rhetoric, in fact, infuses the U.S. presidency. Despite our professed desire for peace, this nation has risen to greatness through war, about one each generation: the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Plains Indian wars, the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the First Persian Gulf War, the Afghan or Terror War, and the Second Persian Gulf War. In between have come a series of military actions too numerous to mention.⁹ On nearly every one of these occasions, the president must rally the nation to pay any price or bear any burden in the pursuit of victory. Recurrent type, indeed.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have detailed five appeals common to presidential war rhetoric, Robert L. Ivie has explored the *topos* of savagery that runs through this discourse, and Richard A. Chervitz, Kenneth S. Zagacki, Bonnie J. Dow, and others have examined crisis rhetoric—that discourse which stops short of a full-fledged war.¹⁰ Through the research runs a common thread: war rhetoric is a rhetorical hybrid, combining the qualities of what Aristotle termed *deliberative discourse*, arguments to justify the expediency or practicality of an action, and *epideictic rhetoric*, appeals that unify the community and amplify its virtues. We go to war because it is a practical act and an honorable choice.¹¹ Depending on situation, presidential preference, communal need, or other factors, presidents emphasize one of the Aristotelian genres over another when taking the United States to war.¹² Remarkably, President Bush has spoken almost solely through the medium of epideictic rhetoric when it comes to his war on terror.

Much to the chagrin of rhetoricians, Aristotle failed to provide a coherent explanation of epideictic rhetoric and that has led to proliferating perspectives. Celeste M. Condit notes that various definitions of epideictic rhetoric focus on the message, the speaker, or the audience.¹³ Particularly troublesome to scholars has been the audience. In the other Aristotelean genres, deliberative and forensic rhetoric, the audience makes clear decisions: we should or should not adopt a particular policy, we should or should not regard a particular act as just. In those cases, Aristotle calls the audience “judges.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, the role accorded to the audience for an epideictic speech is less clear. Translations differ, but the terms used are generally “spectators” or “observers.” They come from the Greek *theoros* (spectator) or *theoria* (observation). Interestingly, Aristotle uses the latter term in his famous definition of rhetoric. He calls it the “ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion,” or “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” In doing so, he grants rhetoric the power of theoretical reflection through inclusion of *theoria* or observation or spectatorship.¹⁵ As Thomas Farrell notes, rhetoric “retains the concrete emphasis of *techne* while attempting to include the reflective capacity to identify the possible materials of rhetoric in real settings.”¹⁶ The *theoria* that makes up rhetoric, the means we observe, constitute the art in that

they give the art, in theory, potential for existence, but it can only be brought to life at a specific time and place by particular people—that is, Aristotle also views rhetoric as a *dynamis*, “a potential for doing, a power in its nascent state.”¹⁷

What is true for rhetoric as a whole is likely to be true for the epideictic genre. When an epideictic audience observes, it reflects on the means of honor or dishonor, unity or disunity, community or chaos in public life; the epideictic performance then brings particular values to life. Indeed, Takis Poulakos sees epideictic rhetoric as a “creative and productive process, an act through which nothing is being copied but something novel comes to be—a new world is disclosed.”¹⁸ Yun Lee Too says that it “exemplifies rhetoric as a language of transformations—of old to new, of great to lowly, of familiar to unfamiliar, and vice versa.”¹⁹ Poulakos, reading Isocrates, emphasizes epideictic’s potential: varied worlds come into being. But it is possible that, for the probabilistically inclined Aristotle, *one* world is made “real” or probable in performance, a collaborative creation of speaker and audience as they establish the appropriate relationships between each other in a new world. Each judges the other as a partner in the enterprise, reflecting on the tactics used to create a world (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and so forth) and the world itself. Epideictic rhetoric, then, shapes the world that provides the backdrop of values and beliefs, heroes and villains, triumphs and tragedies against which and through which deliberative and forensic judgments are made in a ceaseless swirl of discourse.

At least, that is the potential for epideictic that I plan to explore. I suspect that I do so partly because I am dealing with a president during a crisis. If ever a new world is brought into being in U.S. society, it is made by a “rhetorical president” in a troubled time. Several studies have explored the ways in which epideictic rhetoric asserts itself during a crisis. Citizens need to understand what has happened and who they are in light of a communal rupture.²⁰ Epideictic speech addresses such concerns. In addition, studies of the rhetorical presidency emphasize its ability, particularly in comparison to other political institutions, and its power, implicit in the role of head of state, to speak to epideictic concerns and through ceremonial speech.²¹ Ronald Reagan, for example, understood this power very well. Jamieson argues that epideictic rhetoric was his “stock in trade,” and Campbell and Jamieson note his tendency to transform State of the Union addresses, a genre that traditionally balances deliberative and epideictic concerns, into a purely ceremonial speech.²² For practical politicians like Reagan and Bush, epideictic rhetoric is appealing. The president speaks synecdochically as the voice of the people, making their world, and the amplification strategies inherent in the genre mesh nicely with the display and entertainment functions of a contemporary televisual culture. Amplification makes this new world a vivid creation.

President Bush spoke about the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Afghan war in almost purely epideictic terms. Initially, such a choice was appropriate. Like Ronald Reagan after the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, George Bush felt the need

to define the meaning of 9/11 and we felt the need to understand this horrific event.²³ Bush's poor speech on the evening of September 11 and his eloquent meditation at a memorial service on September 14 crafted our interpretation of the attacks. He began the former: "our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist attacks."²⁴ The words "deliberate and deadly" were likely meant to evoke FDR's famous war address to Congress, but the awkward repetition of "attacks" undermined the flow.²⁵ Bush also placed our experiences in a biblical context through quotation of the opening of the 23rd Psalm, shaping the meaning of 9/11 as a passage through the valley of the shadow of death yet simultaneously assuring us that the Lord was with us (2). This was a nice, if cliché, choice. Unfortunately, he turned to a modern translation, disdaining the traditional and comforting language of the King James Bible.²⁶ He concluded with an awkward lesson for the future: we "unite in our resolve for justice and peace" (2). Given the fact, as he put it, of a terrorist attack on the United States, those two resolves appeared to be mutually exclusive on the evening of September 11. This speech was not helpful.

The prayer service speech was better and explicit in its epideictic purpose: "We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow" (5). His deft management of time ("middle hour") crafted the response of the audience; we mourned the past and looked to the future as we stood in the present, an appropriate strategic move for an epideictic address. In this speech, the president shaped our understanding of an inexplicable event, taking as his goal to explain, to express, to comfort. Drawing on the deepest wellspring of the American tradition, Bush interpreted the attacks much as a Puritan would have done. They were seemingly unbelievable, but the "world He created is of moral design" (6). Why, then, did tragedies occur? The president explained that "adversity introduces us to ourselves" (6). He then recounted acts of sacrifice and courage that, in their individual parts, came together to display the whole of the nation's character in the midst of terrible trauma. "In this trial, we have been reminded," the president said (6), of our character. Framing the attacks as a biblical test of a chosen people made them comprehensible. "God's signs are not always the ones we look for," but they brought out, as God must have intended, the best in the nation (6).

Although focused on character past, the frame permitted him to hint at character tests to come—the war that faced the nation. Bush would not violate the occasion with policy argument, but he would unveil the policy that the national character demanded. Much as Reagan pledged that space flights would continue after the *Challenger* explosion and Clinton claimed that justice would prevail after the Oklahoma City bombing, Bush promised, "This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others; it will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing" (6).²⁷ Real Americans could hardly believe differently, any more than they could abandon

the New Frontier. The president ended the speech with comfort and policy, put in the language of Christian love and Christian soldiers. He turned to Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:38, assuring us that "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth can separate us from God's love. May he bless the souls of the departed. May he comfort our own. And may He always guide our country" (7). Paul's Letter to the Romans detailed the rebellion of humanity against God's Lordship, a terrible sin for which Jesus Christ redeemed all those who accepted his sacrifice. For the community of belief who embraced Jesus, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him. . . . If God is for us, who is against us?" (Revised Standard Version, Romans 8:28, 31).²⁸ The chosen people who stood by God understood that nothing could separate *us* from his love. God would, in Bush's words, "comfort our own." As for the others? Neither principalities nor powers could stand against the God of battles. As Bush concluded, "a military choir burst into 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic'—and not one of the soulful renditions that had become popular in the 1990's, but the full-throated anthem of Protestant righteousness militant."²⁹ He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword in a new world made old by a new war.

Nor did Bush waver in his choice to speak through the epideictic genre in the succeeding weeks. He offered a series of short radio broadcasts, on one occasion noting, "Good morning. I want to report to you on the progress being made on many fronts in our war on terrorism" (18). If not an epideictic speech, it was, at best, a report. Yet that purpose disappeared as the president launched into an encomium for the "many members of our military [who] have left their homes and families" (18). Mixed in with such appeals were deliberative claims, but they were again not developed. For instance, he said, "I'm working with Congress to put federal law enforcement in charge of all bag and passenger screening at our airports" (19). No argument was presented as to the policy's practicality, nor did he engage the then-competing plans for increased air safety.

On October 7, the president announced the start of military action against Afghanistan. Again, objectives and actions were announced, not justified. In contrast to other speeches, there were some reasons given. He said that by "destroying camps and disrupting communications, we will make it more difficult for the terror network to train new recruits and coordinate their evil plans" (20). Unlike his father at the commencement of the First Persian Gulf War, however, this President Bush did not use the occasion to develop a full rationale for war. Rather, the final third of a short speech was, again, an encomium to members of the armed services. In none of these speeches did the president justify the expediency of his policy in terms of the common *topoi* of deliberative address: the harm we faced, the choices available, the time and resources his choice would take, the advantages and disadvantages of his policy and various alternatives, or the long-term effects of the policy on the world

community. These speeches focused almost entirely on national *ethos*. In Bush's view, we acted for reasons of character, not expediency. We chose the right way, not the easy way.

The most famous speech of this period, indeed of the Bush presidency, occurred before a joint session of the Congress on September 20. Bush began by appropriating the ritual, and thus the symbolic charge, of the State of the Union address: "In the normal course of events, Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people" (10). After several vignettes amplifying national unity, a tactic reminiscent of his September 14 address, Bush concluded his opening: "My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union—and it is strong" (10). The latter line contradicted the former and revealed the first movement of the text. The "report" of the people could only be seen in action; the world observed them, but they could not speak. Bush took for himself, through invocation of the genre of the State of the Union, the authority to speak on behalf of the people. After all, the Constitution mandated that the president report from time to time, not necessarily annually, on the state of the union and that was what he was doing. He thereby invoked the authority of the founders and the Constitution, a legitimacy rarely available outside of the State of the Union genre.³⁰ He, as the president, interpreted the actions of the people and offered them up for contemplation. The people were mute. He also delivered the report—"it is strong"—he had initially termed unnecessary. Clearly, his voice was needed to supplement the people's actions.

This opening set the genre. He did not preview policies for the union's betterment nor did he suggest expediency arguments. Rather, he was representative of the people; he stood as a part for their whole. He spoke as their voice, expressing their feelings, as, it seemed, the Constitution mandated. Kenneth Burke tells us that synecdoche is the trope of "political representation, where some part of the social body (either traditionally established, or elected, or coming into authority by revolution) is held to be 'representative' of the society as a whole." Burke also reminds us that all "such conversions [part for the whole, whole for the part, container for the contained, and so forth] imply an integral relationship, a relationship of convertibility, between the two terms."³¹ Oddly, Bush came to power in all of the ways specified by Burke: as the son of a president, he inherited the throne; as Republican nominee, he was elected by the Electoral College; and, as the president on 9/11, he became authoritative because a new world seemingly revolved into existence on that revolutionary day. Given this role, Bush sought to become the people's voice and to represent their whole in his part. He would be the container for their contained.

But first he needed to make the new world, an imagined creation that would justify his authority to act in the material world. The crucial paragraph occurred early, immediately after the president had thanked the nations that responded with

sympathy and fury to the attacks, an enumeration that built momentum for the proclamation to come. He deployed definition: “On September 11th, the enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country.” Three choices were critical. First, those who attacked did so for ideological and not expedient reasons; they were “enemies of freedom,” not those who, because of self-interest, “would end American occupation of Saudi Arabia” or some such. This Manichaeian frame, almost offhandedly slipped in as fact and not argued as proposition, was valuable to the president later in the speech. Second, this was an act of war, not an act of terror or a crime against humanity. That meant that military strategy, not criminal justice, should inform the nation’s actions in this new world. Third, these two reasons meant that we *were now* at war against an implacable foe. Bush brought to bear the sort of orientation that had served the nation (and presidential powers) so well in World War II and the Cold War.³² An ideological enemy deceitfully began a war against the United States (or might do so), and the president felt compelled (or felt compelled to have to hand) extraordinary powers to respond to that assault (or possible assault).

He followed definition with dialysis—a series of disjunctive propositions that lead to a conclusion.³³ In this case, Bush linked the old with the new to create the unprecedented present: “Americans have known wars—but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known casualties of war—but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks—but never before on thousands of civilians” (11). The disjunctions asserted in form and content that a break had occurred and that the world was born again. Yet they also enacted in form the claim that the new world had emerged from the cocoon of the old, exploiting the fact that epideictic is a rhetoric of transformation. We had fought wars, but not recently a domestic war; we had suffered surprise attacks, but not in a peaceful city. The past informed the present, but the present was not the past. The present was new. Consistent with the demands of his genre, he disclosed a new world. Note also the realism; the attacks created a world and Bush only told us of it. But once unveiled, this new world demanded of the people new behavior.

The rest of the speech shaped behavior by returning to the synecdoche. He structured the address through four rhetorical queries beginning with “Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking: Who attacked our country?” (11). Again, he spoke as the people’s voice. He asked the questions and asserted the right to know what we would say were we able to speak. Three were epideictic in nature; who attacked our country and why they hated us developed into ad hominem arguments, nicely illustrating the amplification strategies available in a speech of blame. The Manichaeian frame enabled and constrained the character attacks. Within its purview, no subtlety was possible, but amplification of evil was easy. So, for instance, when the president answered the first question, he used grammatically

balanced statements to polarize our world and amplify al-Qaeda's evil: "Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world" (11). Comparison and amplification likened al-Qaeda to a familiar marker yet lifted it to the levels of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union; John Gotti, after all, did not wish to remake the world. The rhythmic balance iconically enacted the newly polarized globe. The Manichaeic frame charged these words and, in turn, became more "real" as a result of them. Given all of this, it was easy to accept al-Qaeda as a "Soviet" threat, despite the fact that, unlike the Soviets, it did not possess tens of thousands of nuclear weapons, capable delivery systems, and millions of troops. Within this textual world, however, al-Qaeda seemed an extraordinary menace, comparable to the worst in American history.

Description amplified the threat. Al-Qaeda was a "fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam." It sought to "kill Christians and Jews, kill all Americans," kill "women and children," "plot evil and destruction," and commit "murder" (12). Isocrates writes of amplification that people who blame exaggerate the poor qualities displayed by their subjects and people who praise do the opposite.³⁴ It was unlikely that the al-Qaeda would, could, or even wanted to kill "all" Americans. Such a threat, however, divided the world and united Americans. That was the goal. The threat seemed realistic and the president believable partly because of the synecdoche. He spoke in our voice. He was a part for the whole of the social body and so he was only saying what we already "knew" if we could only speak. That is the power of synecdoche.

If the first question were devoted to blame, then the second turned initially to praise of the United States: "Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government" (13). They also hated our freedoms, which the president recited in a way that strongly resembled Franklin D. Roosevelt's four freedoms.³⁵ These two sentences, however, constituted the whole of the praise and even that operated through indirection. Bush stated our fine qualities not in a positive fashion, but as a negative contrast—these qualities were what they hated and, as a result, these freedoms were to be treasured.

Bush returned quickly to an attack on al-Qaeda. The audience then received the only hint of pragmatism to color al-Qaeda's motivation: "They stand against us because we stand in their way" (13). But assertion of a practical reason for the hate, to get the United States out of the way, was *preceded* by extravagant descriptions of their aims. The avowals implied the terrorists could reach such ends (unlikely) or provided clues as to their character (likely).³⁶ If they wanted to kill and destroy, then they were the sort of people who liked to do so. Bush said al-Qaeda sought to "overthrow existing governments," "drive Israel out of the Middle East" and "Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa" (13). Al-Qaeda kills "not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life" (13). The claim of

expedient motivation was *followed* by analogy. They were “heirs to all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century,” including “fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism” (13). The implication of blood relations (heirs) solidified the connections. Any idea that al-Qaeda acted out of expediency died under this framing barrage. They were crazed murderers. In Burkean terms, an agent/act ratio crafted the characterization, partly because the who and why questions came first and framed the others. Terrorists did what they did because character (blood) drove them. They could not be reasoned with or rehabilitated. They attacked us because that was what rabid murderers did.

The final question, “What is expected of us” in the face of these murderers, seemed likely to address policy (15). After all, future action is the province of deliberation. But the president implicitly distinguished between public and private action, relegating the citizenry to the private sphere and avoiding deliberation. We should live our lives, hug our children, cooperate with the investigation, have confidence in government, and say prayers for victims. In short, Americans should “uphold the values of America” (15) in daily life, an epideictic act because it solicited performance of national principles. Note that his requests concerned only the private sphere; we were not asked to debate policy, volunteer for the armed services, contribute to bond drives, or perform other public acts. Instead, the government would act in the public sphere and make policy. The citizens would act in the private sphere structured by that policy. Implicit in the speech was praise for such behavior, praise that became explicit in the models provided, an issue I address later. The people’s duty rested in private use of what Bush identified as American values.

Only the third question—“How will we fight and win this war?”—concerned policy (13). In this area, he announced his actions. They included financial and military moves, overt and covert war. None was justified in the traditional sense. No arguments were presented as to their practicality. In fact, the audience shifted between the people of the United States and foreign governments. It was here that he issued his warning to those who might harbor terrorists. That warning made the Manichaeian shape of the new world as clear as it was possible to be: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (14). The shift in addressee, however, relieved him of any need to justify the policy’s expediency to an American audience concerned with our future acts because he was not now speaking to that audience; he was threatening others. As a result, he did not have to address issues such as the size of the Special Forces vis-à-vis the tasks he set out for them, the cooperation of financial institutions around the globe and especially in “allies” such as Saudi Arabia, the money needed for defense, or the utility of creating an office of homeland security rather than a cabinet department, a stance Bush insisted on until the 2002 election loomed. This section was more a warning to others than a rationale for his policy and a discussion of the resources needed for its enactment.

Bush’s preference for epideictic rhetoric defined the problem we faced not as one of policy, but rather as one of unity. Not a single section of this address, nor of the others he made during this period, moved much beyond the memorialization of the dead, the amplification of al-Qaeda’s evil, and the promise of retribution. His two other major statements, the 2002 State of the Union address and the memorial speech on the six-month anniversary of 9/11, took place on ceremonial occasions and used the epideictic genre. Not once did he address us concerning the expediency of his policies—the practical steps we would need to take, the resources we would need to invest, and the consequences of his choices.

We also have evidence from beyond the text. To a degree that was remarkable, the White House revealed almost everything about the composition of the September 20 address. That in itself was noteworthy because, as numerous sources agree, the Bush team, since his first run for governor, was very disciplined.³⁷ They controlled leaks. Massive leaks regarding this speech and the surrounding events suggested that this was the version of history that they *wanted* people to know. The sources, primarily Bob Woodward in *Bush at War* and D. T. Max in the *New York Times Magazine*, agreed: its goal was, in Max’s words, “to reassure Americans.”³⁸

In addition, there was no sense that Bush sought to initiate a debate about or to justify his policies. When Woodward asked Bush about his relationship to cabinet members, for instance, Bush provocatively explained his view of the presidency: “I’m the commander—see, I don’t need to explain—I do not need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation.”³⁹ In specific reference to his public communication strategy, the president said, “I had to show the American people the resolve of a commander in chief that was going to do whatever it took to win. No yielding. No equivocation. No, you know, lawyering this thing to death.” He said of his discussions with other world leaders: “These guys were watching my every move. And it’s very important for them to come into this Oval Office, which they do, on a regular basis, and me look them in the eye and say, ‘You’re either with us or you’re against us.’”⁴⁰ The president spoke. Others obeyed. This was not a mind that regarded the slow and messy processes of democratic deliberation, diplomacy, and compromise as useful tasks. In his private view, as in his public address, character made policy and there was no need to lawyer the thing to death.

VISUALS

In her thoughts on the speech, presidential counselor Karen Hughes noted, “I felt strongly the need for new images to replace the horrible images we’d all seen.”⁴¹ Her words eerily recalled Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s analysis of Reagan’s *Challenger* speech. Jamieson said that Reagan, to succeed in a televisual age, needed to replace

one horrible image—the contrails blowing apart in the sky—with something reassuring. He spoke of “the last time we saw them—this morning—as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye, and slipped the surly bonds of Earth to touch the face of God.”⁴² The imagery first substituted the picture of the astronauts walking and waving for the image of the explosion and then, should that move fail, romantically recontextualized the explosion—those contrails were reaching for the face of God.

It has become a truism in U.S. culture to assert that, since the Kennedy funeral, the nation experiences its most traumatic moments through the medium of television. I hesitate to subscribe fully to that notion. If my personal experience is any guide, people not only watched television on 9/11, they also called friends and family and talked through the day. Nonetheless, the assertion possesses validity. We know these events partly from television. It follows, then, that rhetors who dominate the interpretation of common televisual experience are powerful speakers. Presidents, as the leaders we look to for reassurance and direction in a national crisis, are ideally situated to exploit such opportunities. Ronald Reagan understood this and so did George Walker Bush. Like Reagan, Bush used personification of central themes and evocation of televisual experience to dominate the high ground of politics—the pictures that are our window on the world.

Such strategies are nearly required of presidents in a televisual age. Drawing on the work of Michael Warner and W. J. T. Mitchell, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites argue that a public “can only acquire self-awareness and historical agency if individual auditors ‘see themselves’ in the collective representations that are the materials of public culture. Visual practices in the public media play an important role at precisely this point.”⁴³ Hariman and Lucaites, as well as other scholars in this field of study, emphasize the polysemic, even subversive potentialities, of the visual image.⁴⁴ Cori E. Dauber, however, reminds us of two important aspects to the process of visual interpretation. First, in the context of photojournalism and news coverage, “the point of the image is to suppress the fact of its constructedness. . . . visual images offered as news are presented as authentic and objective pieces of evidence—not as representations of reality, but in a sense, as reality itself.” Second, “images are interpreted within an already existing context. Images come *with* words. . . . They come with historical baggage, both in terms of the particular event and in terms of previous events.”⁴⁵ These factors have particular salience for presidential crisis address because the visuals, when they appear, are nested in an argument or narrative and that interpretation carries with it the authority of the institution in times of trouble.

Ronald Reagan demonstrated the use of personification with his display of Lenny Skutnik in the 1982 State of the Union address. Skutnik was a government worker who dove into the Potomac River to rescue plane crash survivors. Reagan introduced Skutnik to personify a favorite theme: heroism lived in ordinary

Americans. Simultaneously, a visual, associative logic flowed through the story: Skutnick did not need government to do this. If Americans were heroes, then of what use were the government programs that Reagan sought to cut? Heroes did not need food stamps. There was no logical link between said programs and the "evidence" proffered by Skutnick's swim. Yet we "saw" the argument and were more likely to accept the claim. Equally important to this "logic" was the evocation of televisual experience. As Jamieson says, Reagan often argued "that his actions are justified not by what we have read or heard but by what we have seen. The visual evidence conveyed by television eliminates the need for additional words. . . . In such a world, words contextualize pictures."⁴⁶ The pictures, rather than traditional modes of argument or evidence, justified policy. Display of persons and pictures, of course, is facilitated by the epideictic genre. Amplification, Aristotle notes, is the key strategy in epideictic address, and the president's words amplified the always already experienced visual aids.

Bush consistently displayed the heroes of 9/11, deploying associative logic, particularly when it came to the Flight 93 passengers who stormed the cockpit and crashed the plane. On September 20, for instance, Bush featured the heroism of ordinary Americans. After Bush asserted that the people had reported on the state of the union, he painted the pictures: "We have seen it [the state of the union] in the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground—passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer. And would you please help me to welcome his wife, Lisa Beamer, here tonight" (10). This visual vignette was followed by more pictures, shaped into a parallel structure in which each image was preceded by "We have seen..." The images were common from that day and the following ones on television—we saw the unfurling of flags, the giving of blood, the endurance of rescuers, and so forth (10). The verbal repetition amplified the previous *good* televisual experience. President Bush sought to replace images of the planes crashing into the towers, again and again and again, with pictures of rescue workers digging, flags waving, and Americans offering up their blood.

The president fashioned these images into what Burke terms a qualitative progression in form—a movement in mood.⁴⁷ Bush not only reported on the Union, he crafted our feelings about it. The sight of Lisa Beamer, the applause, followed by the amplification of common televisual experience, called forth our feelings, feelings Bush then shaped before unveiling the next step: "Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution." No verbs needed in that last phrase; the feelings were there and he channeled them. He continued: "Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" (10). The pictures and feelings did not support the claim nor, in fact, did the claim make sense; what was the difference between bringing enemies to justice or justice to enemies? Yet through the associative logic, the action the nation should take was clear, acts compelled by the pictures we saw and by the pregnant grieving widow whom the president displayed. A western

sheriff, in the tradition of Ronald Reagan, knew what justice meant for men who made pregnant wives widows.⁴⁸

Again, this was not deliberative argument. The president shaped experiences, amplified visible qualities, and, in effect, insisted that his war policy was the *natural* result of those scenes and traits; the speech suppressed the “constructedness” of those images and the policy was, as Dauber might say, “an authentic and objective” reaction. It needed no more justification. He concluded the speech by displaying the “police shield of a man named George Howard who died at the World Trade Center trying to save others” (17). Bush promised to carry the badge, the part for the whole of those who died, as “my reminder of lives that ended, and a task that does not end.” The two were associated, but there was no logical link between the victim of a terrorist attack and a war that did not end. It could have been a link between a horrific crime and a conviction in an international court of law. His connection was an associative relation, one visually displayed for the audience, and his policy relied on visual performance rather than practical wisdom for its persuasive appeal. Bush claimed that his policy (endless war) grew out of Howard’s character (visible in the badge) and so the policy was not open to debate, lest one violate the memory and, generically speaking, the epideictic rules of decorum. Support for Bush became a test of character and decorum. If we honored those who died on 9/11, we supported the president. If we understood common decency in moments of grief, we supported the president. To attack Bush’s policy was to attack George Howard, Todd Beamer, Lisa Beamer, and the rest.

WE THE PEOPLE

Not many Americans made the “wrong” choice. Bush’s decision to speak through the epideictic genre positioned him as the voice of America, and his masterful use of visual imagery, a practice that extended beyond September 20, made it difficult to dispute his policies. To stand against Bush was to stand against Lisa Beamer, and we were not likely to do that. The visual images, as Hariman and Lucaites might note, worked well to constitute a public in support of Bush’s policies. The president, however, would not rest there. Bush created an audience, endowing it with the qualities needed to support the war on terror.

For centuries, rhetoricians shared the predilection of philosophers for a rational audience member, for the “transcendental subject,” a man (and it was a man) who lived prior to and apart from the speech to be judged. As Maurice Charland notes, however, Kenneth Burke’s emphasis on identification rather than persuasion as the key term in rhetoric changes things.⁴⁹ To identify with someone is to transform identity; we become different as a result of sharing our substance, sharing identity, with another. If discourse enters into identity, then the audience is a rhetorical effect. Who we are as a collective evolves from the discourses we commonly experience. From

Edwin Black's "second persona" to Michael C. McGee's "people" to Charland's adaptation of "interpellation," critics have realized that the audience cannot be taken as a given.⁵⁰ Charland says, "If it is easier to praise Athens before Athenians than before Laecedemonians [as Aristotle said], then we should ask how those in Athens come to experience themselves as Athenians."⁵¹ If it was easier for Bush to gain support from "Americans" than from others, then we should ask how we came to experience "American" in his discourse.⁵²

Three "American" strategies animated the September 20 address, as well as the other speeches during this period. Initially, the praise and blame polarized the world, as I argued above, and crafted a Manichaeian frame through which the audience was to interpret its identity. Simply put, we were good and they were evil. In addition to the passages cited earlier, note how Bush brought in the world: "This is not just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom" (15). World War II was much on everyone's mind during this time. FDR's voice echoed through the speeches, amplifying the present with the heroic past. A plaque quoting Winston Churchill ("I was not the lion, but it fell to me to give the lion's roar") inspired those in Karen Hughes's office. As they drafted the September 20 speech with few facts, "knowing little increased their natural tendency to sound like Churchill, whose writing they all liked. . . . The computer screen filled with rolling triads."⁵³ Their hero appeared, disdaining surrender amidst unremitting defeat. In his "finest hour," he saw a war for civilization: "Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. . . . if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more prolonged, by the lights of a perverted science."⁵⁴ Bush said that al-Qaeda "pervert [ed]" Islam; they were "heirs" to "fascism" and "Nazism"; people feared "an age of terror" (12, 13, 16). This language was not accidental. Like Churchill, Bush framed the conflict as a war between citizens and barbarians, between American values and those of a horde rushing the gates of civilization from the Middle East and Afghanistan. The identity was, shall we say, familiar to the Western mind. To be American was to be civilized; to be al-Qaeda was to be barbaric.⁵⁵

To be American was also to imitate true Americans. These speeches were saturated with models for good conduct, examples that taught us how to be American in the days after 9/11. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca say rhetors cite models in order to "incite to an action." Good rhetors use those "whose prestige confers added value on their acts. . . . One does not imitate just anybody; the person chosen as model must enjoy some measure of prestige."⁵⁶ On September 11, Bush praised those "who responded with the best of America—with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give

blood and help in any way that they could” (1).⁵⁷ On September 14 he called forth the “names, the list of casualties we are only beginning to read.” Given the popularity of “naming” memorials since the Vietnam monument, the use of “names” was a good strategy for a eulogy. Interestingly, Bush kept them anonymous; he cited “names” but he did not name names. We could fill in the names from the profiles we saw on the news, yet the “names,” in their anonymity, were us. They resembled us in our daily activities, “busy with life.” But the terrorists came. So, as we might hope of ourselves, “in their last moments [they] called home to say, be brave, and I love you.” They were “passengers who defied their murderers, and prevented the murder of others on the ground. . . . [they] wore the uniform of the United States, and died at their posts” (5). Even when the president cited specific acts, he avoided proper names. He presented the models as *typically* American, as possessing qualities that we *saw* and would imitate:

And we have seen our national character in eloquent acts of sacrifice. Inside the World Trade Center, one man who could have saved himself stayed until the end at the side of his quadriplegic friend. A beloved priest died giving last rites to a firefighter. Two office workers, finding a disabled stranger, carried her down sixty-eight floors to safety. A group of men drove through the night from Dallas to Washington to bring skin grafts for burn victims. (6–7)

These Americans provided models for emulation, as did those I cited from the September 20 speech, the people who “reported” on the state of the union. They, too, displayed truly American acts: waving flags, giving blood, rescuing victims, and, in the persons of Flight 93, fighting evil. To be American in Bush’s texts was to do these things, not the least of which was the last. No action involved crafting or debating the U.S. response to terror. No person spoke.

Finally, Bush completed the trope. In his September 20 peroration, the president established a synecdochal relationship with the people. He represented our experiences, feelings, and actions and spoke of those actions in our voice. Karl Rove, his chief political aide, saw this, the creation of “a sense of national unity,” as a “huge political opportunity.” In his view, “Bush’s first eight months had been middling. To many, he seemed a little slight for the job.” The attacks fortuitously offered him “a second chance to define himself, an accidental shot at rebirth. . . . A strong speech could revive Bush’s presidency.”⁵⁸ The president sensed the opportunity. For instance, he wanted the conclusion of the September 20 address to be about *him*: “The speech shouldn’t end reflectively, he said. It should end with him leading. . . . The president didn’t want to quote anyone else. He’d said this to them in emphatic terms at a meeting the day before, explaining that he saw this as a chance to lead.”⁵⁹ He took full advantage of the “huge political opportunity” offered by the 9/11 attacks by becoming the one voice of the nation.

President Bush eased into the conclusion with the display of two more models, Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Guiliani. Bush claimed that the two leaders "embod[ied] the extraordinary spirit of all New Yorkers," foreshadowing the relationship Bush wanted with the American people. If such embodiment were possible on the state level, then it should be possible on the national level. He also addressed one of his nagging problems. While he fluttered about the nation on 9/11, Guiliani strode directly into battle. Sharing Guiliani's substance was useful for President Bush.

If Bush had failed to capture the public's imagination on 9/11, he was determined to grab it here. After the applause for the New Yorkers, Bush became ruminative, a change in mood that signaled the conclusion. He said, "it is natural to wonder if America's future is one of fear." He answered that it was not: "this country will define our times, not be defined by them" (16). The power to define seemed critical to Bush during these days. On September 14, he claimed that we would define the end of the conflict, "an hour of our choosing." Here, he made a larger claim, asserting that time itself, our era, was amenable to American definition. This contrasted to the experience of 9/11 because the terrorist attacks struck at the power of definition. We thought we controlled our lives, but death improbably flew out of the sky on airliners. So, how could the president say that we defined our lives in light of such random destruction?

In Bush's view, we controlled our fate because of our character. Character drove scene, a relationship he had established on the opposite side in his discussion of al-Qaeda. With character, one rode events. Calling on the biblical frame from September 14 and recalling the mood of his introduction, he said, "And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment" (16). Three levels of meaning potentially percolated through this phrase. To say that we were found was to imply with amazing grace that once we were lost. In 2000, he said that *the nation* had lost its moral compass and wasted the opportunity afforded by prosperity.⁶⁰ On a smaller level, Bush also believed that *his generation* had lost its way. He agreed with conservatives such as Marvin Olasky, David Horowitz, and Myron Magnet who derided the 1960s "as a period of moral decay and knee-jerk northeastern liberal policies that the nation was still paying for."⁶¹ The boomers had embraced bad values, a process that culminated in Bill Clinton, and George Bush offered redemption. On a yet smaller level, the theme of lost and found echoed in *him*; every biography and many interviews told the story of his redemption, the frat-boy drinker turned born-again president.⁶² The current assertion, then, tied the president's interpretation of terrorism to his past and reminded us of his wisdom. In other words, he knew that as a nation, as a generation, and as individuals, we once were lost and now were found. That was, perhaps, why God allowed these terrible events. We needed to find ourselves, as Bush had found himself. In this speech, we found a part for our whole in George W. Bush. Given the redemption story that he had lived and

now offered to the nation, no other man was so fitted to be America at this time. We had indeed finally found our mission and our moment—and our man.

But only a man aware of history and the place of this challenge in history could stand for America. Bush interpreted this war as the sort of fight that had shaped his father. “Mission,” in fact, echoed the key lines from his father’s 1988 nomination acceptance address. Like the father, the son was now defining his life in terms of missions accepted and missions accomplished. In this time and text, the boomers finally became Private Ryan—they could live up to their fathers. Bush’s character, now synchronized with the American character, authorized him to define yet again the fight his generation was destined to wage: “Freedom and fear are at war” (17). This definition, however, implied a new scene for the struggle. Bush had termed the fight between the United States and terror as a war between good and evil. Evil could cause fear, but it was not the same as fear. So, if this fight was not that fight, who did it involve and where did it occur?

The battle was to be fought, I suggest, for the nation’s soul. Bush continued, reinforcing the generational theme, “Our nation—this generation—will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail” (17). Bush here orchestrated the titans of World War II. The allusion to fear echoed FDR’s voice and claim that “this generation” had a rendezvous with destiny. Roosevelt dismissed fear in his first inaugural address, an effort that imbued people with his jaunty confidence. The light/dark metaphor, a favorite of Roosevelt and Churchill, eased us into the Englishman’s voice. We were to meet destiny with Churchillian verve, determined, in the master’s words, that “we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. . . . We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”⁶³ Each leader addressed the people’s determination. Before the material fight could be won, the spiritual fight demanded attention. Each sought to assure the people that they were strong. But as Derrida or Mencken might observe, when the president repeatedly told us not to flag nor fail, then he was probably worried that we were about to flag and fail.

If that were the case, the president, in the manner of a Christian witness, was determined to share his faith and strength with us. He expressed “my hope” that “life will return almost to normal” (17). He spoke of memories of 9/11 and turned to the tale of George Howard. His badge, as I said, compelled Bush to fight the endless war. It also led him to share that compulsion with the audience, a resolve that replicated the will of his Churchillian people: “I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people” (17). This rolling triad repeated almost exactly the earlier rolling triad. People and leader became one in the conclusion. Each matched the other and, as it turned out, found

strength in the Lord God Almighty. The president proclaimed, "Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them" (17). The first pair defined the spiritual struggle for our soul and the second defined the military struggle for global hegemony. The enthymeme (he only implied the Lord would smite Osama) led us to come to our own conclusion, one that he then felt the need to say for us: "assured of the rightness of our cause and confident in victories to come," we would go forward certain that God "watch [ed] over the United States of America" (17).

Read in conjunction with the president's earlier interpretation of 9/11 as God's test of his chosen people, the conclusion imbued the struggle against al-Qaeda and for America's soul with religious, even apocalyptic, significance. The paired sets "*have always been at war.*" The current struggle, as the allusions to World War II indicated, was, in the old meaning of "revolution," yet another turn in the fight documented so ably by John Milton. The chosen people and the citizenry and the long civic generation and the baby boomers became a textual symphony, lines weaving together, always already making the same fight and believing in the same values. It was, and was always to be, an eternal struggle. From within the purview of this text, you were either with the president or with Satan.

All presidents seek to shape the national character. Reagan saw us as a special people placed between two great oceans for God's purpose, the elder Bush saw us as a thousand points of light, and Bill Clinton saw us as the restless avatars of a new information age. This Bush, however, became the national character. Polarization divided the world, modeling displayed appropriate conduct in that world, and synecdoche represented the "right" of the world in the person of the president. In this final strategy, George W. Bush became America made flesh. It was hard to argue with the Word incarnate. Karl Rove was undoubtedly pleased.

CONCLUSION

I am filled with admiration for the political results of this strategy and filled with doubts about the policy ramifications. There have been few presidents of recent vintage who have so successfully weathered their first several years in office. Despite economic reverses, President George W. Bush maintains high levels of popularity. Despite the world's disapproval, he creates domestic support for the invasion of another nation. Despite a reputation for a troublesome tongue, he turns rhetoric into a useful asset.

In various venues, his supporters have argued that his rhetorical success results not from traditional eloquence, but rather from a clear and compelling vision of the world. I find no reason to disagree with that assessment. Bush tends, in these speeches and in others, to define the world in which we live. The attacks of September 11th offered him a potent occasion to indulge in that tendency, and he

took advantage of the opportunity. As many scholars note, the epideictic genre provides extraordinary inventional resources for the definition of a new world or, perhaps more accurately, it offers a little rhetorical engine that can take the old world and make of it a bright and new creation. President Bush fills that world with heroes and villains, offering as evidence the things we have seen and the people we have watched. The people and the president who has sketched them, in turn, embody the qualities we should possess and the faith we should carry as we move forward to do God's will—which is the president's policy.

The instrumental power of these strategies is self-evident, although I cannot resist the chance to amplify on them. As Kathleen Jamieson says of Ronald Reagan, the marriage of the rhetorical presidency and the epideictic genre is a robust one.⁶⁴ The rhetorical president is in the most commanding political and social position to make a world. Epideictic rhetoric is in the most commanding political and social position to amplify in words a world in a televisual age. For a people that seemingly endorses the notion that seeing is believing, presidential epideictic rhetoric strongly encourages us to believe in the world the president's text imagines.

It is here that the power of contemporary epideictic rhetoric asserts itself. President Bush "justifies" his policies through the use of televisual definition. He shows us an unchanging and essential world, performing and displaying the actions and attitudes we should take in that world. Celeste Condit says that epideictic speakers gain "power through the power to define."⁶⁵ Richard Weaver argues, "Definition is an attempt to capture essence. When we speak of the nature of a thing, we speak of something we expect to persist. Definitions accordingly deal with fundamental and unchanging properties."⁶⁶ For President Bush, the world is, as it ever was, divided between good and evil. People of character oppose evil. Policy is justified not by expediency arguments, but by metaphysical ends—by character and by faith. Definition, Weaver says, "ascribes to the highest reality qualities of stasis, immutability, eternal perdurance—qualities that in Western civilization are usually expressed in the language of theism. . . . The realm of essence is the realm above the flux of phenomena, and definitions are of essences and genera."⁶⁷ This president's epideictic argument creates a kind of hermetically sealed system in which the world is as it is, people are as they are, and real Americans act accordingly.

Equally important, such epideictic rhetoric provides powerful disciplinary mechanisms. In this discourse, public judgments are rendered through the prism of honor or dishonor. Pierre Bourdieu writes of a culture bound by such discourses: "The point of honor is the basis of the moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of others, who has need of others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people. . . . Hence it is that the dynamics of honor are based essentially on the pressure of opinion."⁶⁸ In a televisual time, an era in which we see the world displayed before us and observe the relevant actions, the nation begins to resemble such a culture.

Although I do not believe we fully inhabit that world, Bourdieu describes the dynamic of authority offered by contemporary epideictic rhetoric. If the world is the way that it is, and good people act accordingly, then we may observe those who act and judge the honor or dishonor of that deed based on the values the president has made visible. Extraordinary public pressure is brought to bear on those who oppose the president because opposition based on practicality and expediency makes no sense in a world governed by theistic essence. If the president’s policy is not justified through reference to expediency, then it is not appropriate to judge the policy on its practicality. Disagreement can be based only on opposition to the values that the president expresses as the synecdochical voice of the people. To oppose him is to oppose the voice and, not coincidentally, the will of the people—and not just any people, but a people of theistic essence, a people of the Book, of the Battle Hymn, of John Milton, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Private Ryan. In this discourse, President Bush, as the voice of “eternal perdurance,” exists above the flux of phenomena.

Although that may be a nice place for presidents to visit, it is not a good idea for them to live there. Democracy is based on the premise that many heads, no matter that some may be silly, come up with better policies than few heads. I believe that is because it is not given to us to exist in a world above the flux of phenomena, and the more people we involve, the greater the chances we can comprehend the flux. The world moves, people alter, character changes, and, as Gerry Adams and Menachem Begin might suggest, one occasionally ends up negotiating with and finding some good in terrorists because it is expedient to do so, as improbable as that may now seem to Americans. To posit essence is to live outside of such contingencies. It is, therefore, to live without deliberation and rhetoric. I doubt that President Bush wishes to live in that world, although in the dark of night I entertain doubts about Attorney General Ashcroft. More serious, perhaps, is the fact that such a world is fragile. As John Adams said, facts are stubborn things. Notwithstanding the cries of Fox News and other supporters of the president, the world may well be somewhat more complex than is suggested in these speeches and it will undoubtedly change over time—in fact, it already has done so. Sooner or later, President Bush will discover the world’s resistance to simple answers.

NOTES

1. For powerful accounts of that failure, see Michael Elliot, “The Secret History,” *Time*, August 12, 2002, 28–43; Michael Isikoff and Daniel Klaidman, “A Matter of Missed Signals,” *Newsweek*, December 24, 2001, 30–32; David Johnston and Neil A. Lewis, “Whistle-Blower Recounts Faults Inside the F.B.I.,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2002, A1, A21; Jason Vest, “Why Warnings Fell on Deaf Ears,” *The American Prospect*, June 17, 2002, 18.
2. Joanna McCreary and Douglas Waller, “Why Can’t We Find Bin Laden?” *Time*, November 25, 2002, 28–35.

3. For general assessments of the ongoing wars and Bush foreign policy issues, see Anthony Lewis, "Bush and Iraq," *The New York Review of Books*, November 7, 2002, 4–6; Frances Fitzgerald, "George Bush and the World," *The New York Review of Books*, September 26, 2002, 80–86; Stanley Hoffmann, "America Alone in the World," *The American Prospect*, September 23, 2002, 20–25; Harold Myerson, "Axis of Incompetence," *The American Prospect*, May 20, 2002, 18–19; Gary Hart, "The Other War," *The American Prospect*, December 16, 2002, 10–11; Richard Wolfe and Michael Hirsh, "War and Consequences," *Newsweek*, February 3, 2003, 22–28; John Lewis Gaddis, "Bush's Security Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2002, 50–57; Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Fareed Zakaria, "Why America Scares the World and What to Do About It," *Newsweek*, March 24, 2003, 18–33.
4. Not, of course, for the wealthiest quintile. See David Leonhart, "Hiring in Nation Hits Worst Slump in Nearly Twenty Years," *New York Times*, February 6, 2003, A1, C6.
5. The deficit figures come from Paul Krugman, "A Fiscal Train Wreck," *New York Times*, March 11, 2003, A29. The rest of the figures come from Allen Sloan, "Bush's Depressing Economy," *Newsweek*, February 10, 2003, 56–58. For a powerful critique of Bush's economics, see Paul Krugman, *Fuzzy Math* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).
6. Martin Crutsinger, "2002 Deficit Hit Record 435.2B," February 20, 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.
7. The first "inside" memoir of the administration, in fact, makes surprise at Bush's success its central theme: David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2003).
8. My perspective on genre is shaped by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Falls Church, Va.: Speech Communication Association, 1978), 9–32; Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151–67.
9. For an argument that the United States relied on military prowess for national development, see Geoffrey Perret, *A Country Made by War* (New York: Random House, 1989).
10. Campbell and Jamieson, *Deeds*, 101–26; Robert L. Ivie, "Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War," *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 279–94; Richard A. Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Consummatory versus Justificatory Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 50 (1986): 307–24; Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 294–310.
11. See David S. Birdsell, "Ronald Reagan on Lebanon and Grenada: Flexibility and Interpretation in the Application of Kenneth Burke's Pentad," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 267–79.
12. See also John M. Murphy, "Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Opposition to War: The Paradox of Honor and Expediency," *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 65–78.
13. Celeste M. Condit, "The Function of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly* 33 (1985): 284–99.
14. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 32; Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47.
15. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 36–37; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 24.
16. Thomas Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 65.

17. Farrell, *Norms*, 63.
18. Takis Poulakos, “Isocrates’s Use of Narrative in the *Evagoras*: Epideictic Rhetoric and Moral Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987), 323.
19. Yun Lee Too, “Epideictic Genre,” in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252.
20. Condit, “Epideictic”; John M. Murphy, “‘A Time of Shame and Sorrow’: Robert F. Kennedy and the American Jeremiad,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990): 401–14.
21. For a fine review of scholarship on the rhetorical presidency, see Mary E. Stuckey and Fred Antczak, “The Rhetorical Presidency: Deepening Vision, Widening Exchange,” in *Communication Yearbook* 21, ed. Michael E. Roloff (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage), 405–41.
22. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 147; Campbell and Jamieson, *Deeds*, 68–71. For another example, see Michael Waldman’s brief discussion of President Clinton’s Oklahoma City Memorial Address. Michael Waldman, *POTUS Speaks* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 81–83.
23. Sadly, as I wrote these lines, George W. Bush found himself faced with the same task.
24. My texts for this project come from a commemorative book I found at my local Border’s. That says something about the reach of these speeches. I checked them against my personal videotapes. They are accurate. George W. Bush, *United We Stand: A Message for All Americans* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Mundus, 2001), 1. Subsequent references for speeches in this edition will be by page number in the text.
25. The White House staff, with the possible exception of author Karen Hughes, uniformly regarded this address as a terrible speech. David Frum reports that it even earned the nickname “Awful Oval Office Address.” Frum, *Right Man*, 133. It also seems to have convinced everyone that Bush cannot give the standard Oval Office address. After the *Columbia* disaster, for instance, he spoke first from the Treaty Room and then at the memorial service for the astronauts. For Bush in the Oval Office, see Frum, *Right Man*, 135.
26. I owe this observation to the students in my fall 2001 presidential rhetoric class. Despite their emotional state during our September 12 meeting, they were coolly disdainful of this speech as a whole and of this translation in particular.
27. Bush used the same phrase when he abandoned diplomacy and committed the nation to war in Iraq: George W. Bush, “‘This Is Not a Question of Authority; It Is a Question of Will,’” *Washington Post*, March 18, 2003, A12.
28. The King James Version puts this phrase in the conditional, making it more unlikely that anyone could oppose the chosen: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Satan, perhaps, but the grammar itself diminishes the evil one’s powers. Paul is rewriting Psalm 118 here, which is yet more militant: “Out of my distress I called on the Lord; The Lord answered me and set me free. With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. . . . All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord, I cut them off!” (RSV, Psalm 118: 5–7, 10).
29. Frum, *Right Man*, 138.
30. The State of the Union has become an increasingly important speech in the contemporary era. Campbell and Jamieson note the traditional salience of the address, given that the Constitution orders the president to report and gives the chief executive the opportunity to act as the “national historian.” In addition, “No one else is charged with this specific responsibility. . . . By the sheer fact of its delivery, the address reminds the country that presidents have a unique function in our system of government. They are to view questions in the aggregate and as they pertain to the whole,

to the Union.” I also believe that, in our media-saturated era, this is a speech that invokes nonpartisan authority. Certainly, the media interprets the address partly through a political frame, but, after all, the Constitution requires it, the networks carry it, and everyone else (most of the time) shows up for it, including the generals, the ambassadors, and the Supreme Court. This speech *appears* to be an act of government, not an act of politics, in the eyes of many people. That matters. That makes it a very useful genre for Bush to appropriate on this occasion. As national historian, he can unveil this new world. Campbell and Jamieson, *Deeds*, 52.

31. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 508.
32. For a discussion of the orientations available to U.S. foreign policy, see Mary E. Stuckey, “Competing Foreign Policy Visions: Rhetorical Hybrids after the Cold War,” *Western Journal of Communication* 59 (1995): 214–27.
33. Richard Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 52.
34. Sloane, “Epideictic Genre,” 252.
35. The editing is telling. The first two are the same. FDR then turned to “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments.” President Bush was not interested in defending those freedoms. Roosevelt is quoted in James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 34.
36. It was also likely that the president built up al-Qaeda for the same, probably unconscious, reason that conspiracy theorists see much more at work in John Kennedy’s assassination than a deranged Lee Harvey Oswald. If one loser could kill our president, then how important were we really in the grand scheme of things? If life is that arbitrary, then we face the uncomfortable (and existential) fact that it makes no sense at all. Similarly, if one small group of suicidal nuts could bring down the World Trade Center, then where was the rationality in the world? There had to be more here to put America at risk.
37. Bill Minutaglio, *First Son: George W. Bush and the Bush Family Dynasty* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999); Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose, *Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Frank Bruni, *Ambling into History: The Unlikely Odyssey of George W. Bush* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Frum, *Right Man*.
38. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002); D. T. Max, “The Making of the Speech: The 2,988 Words That Changed a Presidency: An Etymology,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 7, 2001, 32–37. The prestige of the two outlets also supports my contention. If you want to write the first draft of history, turning to Bob Woodward and the *New York Times* is a pretty good strategy.
39. Woodward, *Bush*, 145–46.
40. Woodward, *Bush*, 96.
41. Max, “Speech,” 35.
42. Quoted in and analysis from Jamieson, *Eloquence*, 128–33.
43. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaities, “Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of ‘Accidental Napalm,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 36. See also W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
44. For other examples, see Kevin M. Deluca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Kevin M. Deluca and Jennifer Peeples, “From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the Violence of Seattle,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 125–51; Cara Finnegan, “Social Engineering, Visual Politics, and the

- New Deal: FSA Photography in *Survey Graphic*," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3 (2000): 333–62; Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaities, "Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (2001): 5–32; Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 363–92.
45. Cori E. Dauber, "The Shot Seen 'Round the World: The Impact of the Images of Mogadishu on American Military Operations," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4 (2001): 656–57.
 46. Jamieson, *Eloquence*, 126.
 47. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 124–25.
 48. In lines that became famous, Bush also said that he wanted bin Laden "dead or alive" and declared that we would "smoke out" the "killers" and "git 'em." See Frum, *Right Man*, 141. For an analysis of Reagan as a sheriff, and of this sort of romantic appeal generally, see Walter R. Fisher, "Romantic Democracy, Ronald Reagan, and Presidential Heroes," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 46 (1982): 299–310.
 49. Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133.
 50. Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 109–19; Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 235–49; Charland, "Constitutive."
 51. Charland, "Constitutive," 134. I would also suggest that our material experience provides the inventional resources to construct a people. The "American" George W. Bush created was not *mandated* by 9/11, but it was certainly made *possible* by the attacks. Absent those planes, it is difficult to imagine Bush giving this speech or any similar sort of speech.
 52. I do not mean to suggest that Bush was the only source for cultural definitions. This is a study of his speeches, however, and it is to those texts I limit myself. Certainly, cultural productions such as the telethon to raise money for the victims and Alan Jackson's "Where were you when the world stopped turning?" contributed to national identity. I still believe, however, that, even in post-modernity, presidents matter more than most cultural or political actors.
 53. Max, "Speech," 36, 34. One of the phrases that Max identifies as Churchillian is the civilization quotation I discuss below.
 54. Quoted in Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (New York: A Plume Book), 621.
 55. "Civil" was a god term for the Bush administration before September 11. It was one of the four god terms that structured his inaugural address, for instance.
 56. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 362–63.
 57. This quotation is typical of that messy speech. The internal rhyme is excellent and the sentence flows, so the immediate impression is a good one. But the second phrase is confusing. Bush lauded "the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could." So, speaking in grammatical terms, what he ended up praising was the caring people offered to the stranger and neighbor who came to give blood. I am not at all sure he meant to do that. I suspect he meant to laud those who gave blood and help. That is not, however, what he said.
 58. Max, "Speech," 34.
 59. Max, "Speech," 35, 36.
 60. R. W. Apple Jr., "Bush, Accepting G.O.P. Nomination, Pledges To 'Use These Good Times for Great

Goals,” *New York Times*, August 4, 2000, A1, A18. Apple quotes the key line on the first page: “Our current president embodied the potential of a generation. So many talents. So much charm. Such great skill. But in the end, to what end? So much promise, to no great purpose.”

61. Minutaglio, *First Son*, 290.
62. This stock story is present in the biographies cited above. Another fine example is Nicholas Lemann, “The Redemption,” *The New Yorker*, January 31, 2000, 48–63.
63. Quoted in Jenkins, *Churchill*, 611. Jenkins notes that this is, perhaps, the most parodied speech in history and its echoes are here unmistakable, even apart from the fact that the writers admitted that they borrowed from Churchill. It is also worth noting that the generational imagery could bring John Kennedy to mind. Given how often Kennedy cribbed from Roosevelt and Churchill, the three are probably all tangled up in public memory.
64. Jamieson, *Eloquence*.
65. Condit, “Epideictic,” 288.
66. Richard Weaver, “Language Is Sermonic,” in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2d ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 1354.
67. Weaver, “Language Is Sermonic,” 1355.