ABSTRACT

Vigilant Justice and Insurgent Freedom: A Post-9/11 Film Study

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In a post-9/11 America where national security is critical for preserving American values, power that the government exercises can be subject to abuse. Because United States citizens place a copious amount of power in their government, government control and oppression are important issues to be addressed. As dystopian films allow filmmakers to comment on social and political stigmas and assess authoritative procedures, this study will compare two post-9/11 films, *Equilibrium* (2002) and *V for Vendetta* (2005), to the second Bush Administration's response to terrorism. As evaluations and critics of establishing control, preventing crime, potential vigilante behavior, and understanding terrorism, governments should be dependable entities to ensure safety, protect rights, and properly serve society.

Vigilant Justice And Insurgent Freedom: A Post-9/11 Film Study

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In its idealized conception the United States of America is the land of opportunity and freedom, the nation where the concept of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" exists as a prerogative for anyone willing to dream. Americans have shown that they will defend this principle and its values without hesitation, which is precisely what happened following the devastating events that occurred on American soil on September 11, 2001, in New York City, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Terrorists seized control of aircrafts that were then targeted at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Washington, D.C. As a result, homeland security became a prominent issue for Americans.

The immediate passage of the USA PATRIOT Act, better known as the Patriot Act, was intended to enable the government to prevent terrorism and bring to justice those who utilized terror. By monitoring phone calls and Internet correspondence, compiling criminal data among different government agencies, and tightening traveling measures and security, the U.S. government argued that it was serving its duty to ensure the safety and security of the American people. Yet, the Patriot Act generated a buzz of contention regarding the power the government would have in collecting data on its own citizens and the potential infringement of Constitutional freedoms.

American citizens are now caught in a security paradox: They feel insecure and expect the government to protect them, but the government's responses make

them feel newly insecure (Shriver, 2006). Controversial sections within the Patriot Act include Section 206, which specifically allows roving wiretaps to cover multiple devices such as a suspect's cell phone and computer; Section 213, which allows "sneak and peek" search warrants, that permit authorities to search a home or business without notifying the target of a probe; and Section 215, which allows access to records for intelligence investigations (Abramson & Godoy, 2005). All of these violate the Privacy Act of 1974, which states under the conditions of disclosure that:

> No agency shall disclose any record, which is contained in a system of records by any means of communication to any person, or to another agency, except pursuant to a written request by, or with the prior written consent of, the individual to whom the record pertains. (p. 3)

The Patriot Act, however, creates a special set of compliance rules for access to personal records without the need to inform the individual to whom the record pertains (Miller & Lozar, 2002). Yet, allowing the government to examine our records is particularly problematic because aggregation of such personal information invites possible suspicion based on the things we study, read, and discuss.

Americans are perceived as having an individualistic approach to society and a self-preservationist outlook; yet, a more cohesive America is arguably attainable through a collective pursuit of community standards and national security. The ceaseless power struggle of the people versus the state (individual states within the United States of America) versus the nation (the country itself) shifts radically depending on America's economic status, military supremacy, and supposed

constraints limiting the needs of the people. As a democracy established on the grounds that its citizens influence the state and that individual states have power over the nation, the United States seems to have evolved into an insecure and fearful nation that allows the federal government to expand its authority over society, thus limiting the power of its citizens.

Since its passage in 2001 and indefinite extension in 2006, the Patriot Act and its regulations regarding surveillance, wire taps, and unwarranted searches have inspired and been integrated into modern fictional dystopian films. The conceptual dystopia—a fictional society that failed to reach its idealized goal of becoming a sustainable utopia—differs from traditional science fiction in its emphasis on political and social systems rather than science or technology, which allows filmmakers to speculate on possible political futures. In recent years, the dystopian film has reflected society's fears of monopolistic capitalism, totalitarian socialism, environmental catastrophe, out-of-control technology, and theocracy (Berg, 2008). Most dystopian films illustrate governments or societies exerting control over thinking, freedom, or information; what was created and intended for the betterment of society is ultimately flawed and criticized.

For example, *Southland Tales* (2006) shows the Patriot Act being strengthened to the point that a visa is required to travel between states and the implementation of US-IDENT, a surveillance agency cultivated to keep an eye on cyberspace and airwave activities. Similarly, *Eagle Eye* (2008) depicts a monitoring system called ARIA, which is used for data collection and monitoring. ARIA

eventually turns rogue and becomes a threat to the U.S. when it calculates that the executive governmental branch poses a threat to the public and seeks to eliminate it.

Other films such as *Minority Report* (2002) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) suggest potentially positive aspects of government observation and scrutiny, namely that preventing crime and saving lives can only be accomplished through surveillance of individuals. Yet, what are the drawbacks of such enforcements? How accurate is data collection and analysis? Films such as *The Island* (2005) and *AEon Flux* (2005) significantly question authoritative motivations and values and the possible distortion of power. *Children of Men* (2006) depicts the social decay and terrorism in an infertile world. *Idiocracy* (2006) mocks the social disgrace of mass conformity and lack of education. And *Blindness* (2008) shows the fear of social collapse.

Of the dystopian films produced since the passage of the Patriot Act, two works, *Equilibrium* (2002) and *V for Vendetta* (2005), best encompass themes of oppressive government supervision and surveillance, crime prevention and control, corrupted authoritative power, and the results of war and terrorism.

Significance of Analyzing Equilibrium and V for Vendetta

Generation Y, or the Millennial Generation, which is comprised of those born from 1980 onward, has been described as apathetic and cynical when it comes to politics. As a result of growing up in an age of conspiracy theories where it is generally accepted that governments and politicians cheat and manipulate to seize and hold on to power, younger individuals use words such as “lie," "distrust," and "corrupt” in connection with politics (Huntley, 2006). However, with new

generations come new forms of expression, and Generation Y has come to embrace developing technologies and visual media. Blogs thrive and multiply as people engage with social and political questions, thrash out their opinions, and debate and discuss with their peers (Crawford, 2006). Thus, it is not that youth no longer care about social and political concerns, but rather that they have found a different medium in which to voice their thoughts and opinions. In this regard, it is not surprising that films such as V for Vendetta and Equilibrium, given their fantasy/science-fiction genres, action violence, and graphic-novel inspirations, might better appeal to a younger demographic than traditional forms of political and ideological debate.

As two of the prime examples of post-9/11 films that question terrorism; national security; crime control, prevention, and response; and individual life liberties, *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* tell stories in which rules that are intended to "protect" liberties ultimately violate freedoms. Would life be more or less meaningful if regulating powers controlled every aspect of existence by limiting cultural content and scrutinizing private communication? Because government is a necessity as a means to govern civilians and protect each individual, whose responsibility is it to govern the government? In *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta*, the totalitarian state is perceived as one of efficiency—public servants are passionate, dedicated, and, above all, submissive (Berg, 2008). And although these films depict fictional totalitarian governments, the likes of which do not exist in America, they can serve as warnings of the potentially suppressive nature of any government that has absorbed too much power.

Equilibrium and *V for Vendetta* also tell stories of terrorists seeking justice on government administrations. The actions of the two protagonists in the films follow the classic representation of terrorists. Terrorism simply means deliberately and violently targeting individuals for political purposes. The point of terrorism is not to defeat the enemy but to send a message (Richardson, 2006). The U.S. government labels its enemies as terrorists, a politically charged and semantically negative term. We disassociate terrorists from humanity and view them as ideas that attack the heart of American democracy and values. This forms two clashing ideas (those of Americans and those of terrorists), both misunderstood by the other, both protective of certain ways of life, and both defending faith till death.

According to a military transcript of a weekend hearing at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, Osama bin Laden's operations chief, Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the man the United States says masterminded the 9/11 terrorist attacks, confessed to the attack and to plotting a reign of anti-American terror across the planet (Rosenberg, 2007). The al-Qaeda suspects Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, Walid bin Attash, and Mustafa al Hawsawi all wish to be martyred in the name of God (Arena et al., 2008). The question we continue to wonder is: Why did al-Qaeda attack America? President Bush and his accomplices have been offering the same response: They hate us for our freedom. In a collection of bin Laden's declarations translated by Duke University professor Bruce Lawrence in *Messages to the World* (2005), bin Laden dismisses Bush's accusation that he hates America's freedoms (Aslan, 2007). In an interview with former CIA senior analyst of the Middle East, Bruce Riedel states that al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. because:

> The Islamic world has been under systematic attack by the West for the last century, and that in order to defend itself from Western attack, the Islamic world has to take the war to the United States and its allies in order to drag them into quagmires that will bleed them until they finally admit defeat and leave the Islamic world. (Barry, 2008, p. 1)

From this perspective, then, the U.S. is the "oppressor" and the Islamic terrorists are "freedom fighters," which underscores the complexity of the historical and ideological relationship between America and the Middle East.

When the U.S. is terrorized by external threats, Americans agree that those attacking us need to be brought to justice, as was demonstrated with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the flights on 9/11. But *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* are films with a social conscience that situate evil not as a force threatening us from without, but as a presence in our midst (Goldstein, 2006). Prompted by the government's injustice and power surge, the social well-being of citizens being oppressed, and a desire to change the political arena of their country's future, the "terrorists" in each film comes to be viewed in a different light. This allows viewers to reconsider responses to and feelings about "terrorism" because the attacks directed toward the government are coming from its own citizens on behalf of realistic and possibly reasonable motives.

In *Equilibrium*, the Tetragrammaton government of Libria manipulates the media to force its citizens to take actions that appear to be in their best interest. Libria uses propaganda to blame human emotion for the devastation and hatred that leads to destructive behavior and then prescribes a cure for the damage: daily doses of *prozium,* a synthetic medication created to suppress human emotion that

every citizen must take. The Librian government effectively controls society with the use of prozium and the law-enforcing institution of the Grammaton Cleric, which sustains conventional behavior through politics and rules, penalties and rewards, and organizational structures and routines (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2008).

In *V for Vendetta*, Andy and Larry Wachowski adapted a graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, setting the story in the 2020s and updating the film with references, both visual and verbal, to President George W. Bush's administration (the second Bush administration) in the United States. Because *V for Vendetta* comments on a then contemporary political condition, it demands to be viewed not only as entertainment, but also as a critical social and political statement (Shepard, 2006).

The story takes place in a near future in which Britain is under the totalitarian Norsefire regime, and the protagonist, V, is in search of sociopolitical change from government control. Through a televised broadcast, V urges the citizens of Britain to reconsider their silent abdication of societal control and to take a stand against the totalitarian regime. V states that on the fifth of November he will blow up the Houses of Parliament as a symbolic gesture of objection to the current governmental regime and its oppressive tactics. The character of V is a freedom fighter, but audiences are reminded that he is also a terrorist, and as such he is both hero and villain (Grossman, 2006). Director James McTeigue said that he hoped the movie, which references terrorism, bombings, and totalitarian states, would spark debate among U.S. audiences. Asked if the film excuses terrorists, McTeigue was cagey and answered, "I'm trying to ask why people think their only way out of

situations is through violent means. V's character embodies terrorism—which has been a very one-dimensional word—and turns it into a three-dimensional word. There are a lot of other ideas in the film—about the individual versus the state, the politics of fear, and about how to be different is dangerous" (Kemp, 2006).

Film can be a positive educational, social, and political force for Americans. Social and political debates and discussions are significant in that we are all a part of society, governed by law. Political culture is an important means of encouraging citizens to become more active in their government, and by utilizing art as a means of constructive political criticism, *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* can serve as explorations of governmental control, abuse of power and resistance to governmental oppression, and the freedoms that individuals are willing to surrender for personal security. Change must begin at the foundation of society: the individual.

The purpose of this study is to compare *Equillibrium* and *V for Vendetta* to the second Bush administration and their responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the correlations regarding the passing of the Patriot Act, which violates First Amendment rights by creating a form of inadvertent censorship. Both of these films represent specific ideologies that are particularly crucial to understanding the complex political terrain of the post-9/11 era. Crucially, in portraying the actions of characters who are deemed "terrorists," but ultimately stand as "freedom fighters," *V for Vendetta* and *Equilibrium* provide audiences a new perspective that allows them to rethink and reevaluate the meaning of political change through violent action. These films serve as criticisms of society and our complete dependency and

trust on government entities. This analysis will emphasize the importance of increased involvement in social concerns, individuals understanding political policy, and defending Americans' entitled rights and liberties.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

In *The New Rhetoric* (1969), Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize that "the two techniques of association and dissociation are complementary and are always at work at the same time; by processes of association we understand schemes which bring separate elements together and allow us to establish a unity among them, which aims either at organizing them or at evaluating them, positively or negatively, by means of one another" (as cited in Saunders, 1994, p. 575). While arguments by association create successive or coexistent links between the starting point and proposition, the technique of dissociation seeks to drive a wedge between ideas. Usually arguments by dissociation divide a concept into two parts in order to resolve an incompatibility (Saunders). Dissociation separates a previously regarded unitary concept (Stahl, 2002). In Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's words, "The dissociation of notions amounts to a compromise, but, on the theoretical level, it leads to a solution that will also be valid for the future, because, by remodeling our conception of reality, it prevents the reappearance of the same incompatibility" (as cited in Stahl, p. 444).

Through a method of dissociation, government can be split into two concepts: "Conventional American government" and "American government after 9/11." The argument based on the process of dissociation consists of a presentation of philosophical pairs, a presentation that takes the form of what Perelman calls "term I" and "term II" (as cited in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1985, p. 127). Term I

corresponds to the apparent, to what occurs in the first instance, to what is actual, immediate, and known directly, which in this study will refer to the "American government in general." Term II, "American government after 9/11," can be understood only by comparison with term I. To understand how American government after 9/11 has been altered and abused, one must first understand term I, American government as created by the people, for the people. Term II provides a criterion, a norm that allows us to distinguish those aspects of term I that are of value from those that are not; after the dissociation has been made, it is possible to distinguish appearance and reality (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969).

In America, as related to *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta*, there is the appearance of government preventing terror and providing security and there is the reality of government abusing power by confiscating individual freedoms and citizens' rights. Through a method of dissociation, these films try to present government from a post-9/11 perspective, which is the focus of this analysis.

"Aesthetic form" can be tentatively defined as the result of the transformation of a given content (actual or historical, personal or social fact) into a self-contained whole: a poem, play, novel, etc. With film as a visual art form, the work is thus "taken out" of the constant process of reality and assumes a significance and truth of its own. The aesthetic transformation is achieved through a reshaping of language, perception, and understanding so that they reveal an overlooked, yet paramount, shade of reality: the repressed potentialities of man and nature. The truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to "define" what is "real." The radical qualities of

art can form a world where art is recognized as a reality. We view suppressed and distorted art as a transformation that appears to be reality; the fictitious world of art then appears as a true reality (Marcuse, 1978). *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* are two films that create a fictitious world that is nevertheless more real than reality itself. As a result these films represent reality while accusing it of misrepresentation.

This study is a critical analysis of the films *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* and their relationship to the political conditions during the second Bush Administration following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Each film will first be analyzed in terms of the establishment of government systems to maintain social order following war and terror, how such institutions are created to defer terroristic activities, and the abuse of power for personal gain. Secondly, this study will examine how government control, in an attempt to prevent crime through the use of heightened security measures and media manipulation, ultimately oppresses its citizens on the grounds of "national security" and becomes an entity working against the betterment of society. Thirdly, this study will look at how the oppressive nature of authority provokes vigilantism and the potential criticisms or support individual actions can attain by defending entitled rights and liberties. And fourthly, this study will analyze the role of terror in the films and how it relates to Americans' understanding of the concept of terrorism. By evaluating how these topics correlate to 21st century American society, this study will demonstrate how *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* can help people understand and construct meaning regarding the potential damage government control and oppression can create.

Each film tells a story that can be educational in terms of cultivating new social action or political change within an audience. The hope of this study is to encourage political discussion and debate and the education of American political and social history. To exercise rights and freedoms is one thing, but to understand the history of why and how they came to be, as well as where they are headed, is another.

The literature review covers the topics of film influence, established government, freedom, political culture and criticism, and the Constitutional First Amendment and the USA PATRIOT Act. This review will serve as a foundation for critically analyzing *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* in terms of political history, social philosophy, and future development.

CHAPTER THREE

Review of Literature

Why Study Film?

No one originally intended movies to be important. They began as an obscure invention thrust into social prominence by businessmen intent on making money from everyday observations. Their unintended social significance stems from, among other sources, the fact that they developed the ability to tell stories; stories convey information and ideas; information and ideas affect the way people act; and stories meld people together into audiences—this too affects the way they act. The social consequences of being an audience are most important and usually underrated (Jarvie, 1978).

Film theorists do not study film as an unproblematic, pre-given entity, but as a complex and little-understood medium with its own properties and cultural and social effects. Film theorists therefore challenge and go beyond the common sense ideological understanding of film as a form of harmless entertainment and instead maintain that it is an intrinsically significant medium integral to modern and postmodern society (Elsaesser & Buckland, 2002). To explore the subtle meaning of an art form so purposefully designed for popular consumption is a difficult task requiring the observer to go beyond the superficial level and put film in societal context (Franklin, 2006).

Film is a mode of narration unlike any other, one that allows viewers to temporarily and consciously experience a separate life through the sequences of a

story. The more cinema becomes a purely visual mode of narration, the more this art will realize its unique character (Colapietro, 2000). In a movie, every camera angle has a meaning and every costume has significance. The conversion of life into an entertainment medium is pervasive. Movies have proven to be a force for healing and insight. The power of film can change lives and communicate truth; it can reveal and redeem. Movies can help viewers to see life more clearly. They can also help us empathetically understand both others and ourselves.

In an increasingly visual culture, film images are an important source of knowledge. Because viewers cannot control the images, they remain surprised throughout the work while delighting in the discoveries these frames of life tell them about themselves and others. Viewed in this light, movies are part of the toolbox that many people use as they respond to and give shape to their lives. As such, they can be significant ingredients in a person's individual formation (Johnston, 2000).

According to Johnston (2000), film has the intrinsic ability to disturb and enlighten, to make us more aware of both who we are and what our relationships, both personal and on a communal level, can be. They have the power to grip the viewer's emotion while at the same time engaging the mind. Film can help shape the audience's view of reality by offering viewers a slant on life that both reflects the reality of an age and helps define it.

Because movies provide such a powerful representation of reality, their effect on the audience is profound (whether it eventuates in demonstrable change or not). As James Wall observes,

> Movies are not just 'discursive,' providing information to be digested, but also 'presentational.' We do not just focus voyeuristically on the material before us in an audiovisual sense, allowing the movie perhaps to show us a slice of life or inform us about a 'truth.' We also focus on the vision of the movie and become vicariously engaged with it (or not) depending on whether we as its viewer can relate the film's understanding of life to/with our own. (as cited from Johnston, 2000, p. 94)

Filmmakers use images and stories to probe life's possibilities. Popular movies are a rich source of ideas with information, as well as misinformation, concerning and criticizing society (Jarvie, 1978).

Influence of Films

Do films influence people? If so, is it in a quantifiable sense? Is it for good or for bad? In 1916, Hugo Munsterberg, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, published *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. Although he did not seem unduly worried about the influence of movies, he stressed their capacity to represent reality and free the consciousness from present space and time (Jarvie, 1978). Yet, it is almost certainly the case that some of what we learn about how to dress, how to act, and how to think comes from the movies (Franklin, 2006). Many who harbored suspicions about the movies' power to influence society must have felt their worst fears were confirmed when in 1915 serious race riots followed the showing of *The Birth of a Nation* in certain abolitionist cities (Carter, 1960; Cripps, 1963, 1977).

People bring into the cinema with them a whole social and psychological cloud of context from within which they observe, learn, think, feel and act. This matrix is what confronts, filters, absorbs, and otherwise deals with the messages

coming off the screen. Such a theory leads to the conclusion that any influence a film may exert is at least a joint product of the intentions (and accomplishments) of the filmmaker and the predilections and interests of the moviegoer. Films surely have a responsibility to inform people, not to distract them; to help them cope with problems, not run away from them. Whatever the aims or intentions—realism, naturalism, propaganda, socialist realism, fantasy—the filmmakers must originate from entertainment. Entertainment need not be regarded as a frivolous matter (Jarvie, 1978).

Understanding Established Government in America

In modern times, the most respected philosopher to embrace the revolutionary concept of world government was Immanuel Kant. He insisted, in his plan for a world peace federation, that the federation must limit its role to maintaining peace among nations, each of which should be an autonomous republic under its own internal rule of law (Rabkin, 2008). Kant's practical philosophy revolved around the idea that free will is to be interpreted as autonomy, meaning the moral subject both makes the law and is subject to it (Dorschel, 2002). As James Madison, the "Father of the American Constitution" wrote in the *Federalist Papers No. 51* (1788)*:*

> In framing a government, which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions. (p. 255)

Thomas Paine, famous for his pamphlet "*Common Sense*," which has been described as the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era (Wood, 2002), made comments about government and society in 1776 that are still highly relevant today. Paine cautioned colonists that government, "even in its best state, is but a necessary evil. A government that performs with the least expense and greatest benefit is preferable to all others (p. 40)." Government was necessary because some men do not obey their conscience and lead moral lives (Cantoni, 2007).

The purpose of the United States government is expressed in the preamble to the Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish the Constitution for the United States of America."

American history is usually framed as a quest for freedom—the struggle for political liberty; emancipation from bondage; the rise of civil, economic, and social rights. Property, contract, and freedoms of speech, press, and association form the constitutional backbone of a free market, a vigorous civil society, and a democratic polity—hallmarks of a free people. However, the American present witnesses the steady aggrandizement of executive, administrative, emergency, penal, military, and war powers (Novak, 2008).

In American politics, he who controls the states controls the nation. Our national constitution design enumerates limited powers for national government

and assumes plenary powers of states. The result is that states do the largest share of governing in America by a considerable margin (Rogers, 2004). Government by consent does not mean government with which all its citizens agree. It means government with which citizens may freely disagree—the great achievement of Western constitutional democracy (Rabkin, 2008). As Americans are fundamentally egalitarians and largely individualists, most would therefore agree that the government that governs best governs least (Franklin, 2006).

Alexis de Tocqueville, best known for his book *Democracy in America*, had a basic assumption that every modern country needs a complete, centralized government. Political power, though not all administrative power, must be concentrated in a central government. "I cannot conceive that a nation can live, much less prosper, without a high degree of centralization of government," writes de Tocqueville (1969).

This disjunction between historical perception and political reality is not an entirely new phenomenon in the United States. In a penetrating essay in 1887 titled "*The American State and the American Man,"* Albert Shaw chided Americans for their laissez-faire fantasy, stating:

> The average American has an unequaled capacity for the entertainment of legal functions and kindred delusions. He lives in one world of theory and in another world of practice. Never relinquishing their theory [of laissez-faire], the people of the United States have assiduously pursued and cherished a practical policy utterly inconsistent with that theory, and have not perceived the discrepancy. The one common striking characteristic of this huge collection of new statues is its utter disregard for laissez-faire principle… They deal with the citizen in every conceivable relation.

> They seem to have nothing left for future Legislatures to regulate. (Novak, 2008, p. 2)

In 1953, the historian Daniel Boorstin, who later became the 12th librarian of the U.S. Congress from 1975 to 1987, went so far as to argue that the absence of debate over American political theory was one of the nation's chief virtues. The unpremeditated "givenness" of American political institutions constituted for him the genius of American politics and defined the difference between the placid stability of America and the chaotic instability of other nations. With a notion that America is a nation chosen by God, a New Israel destined for a providential mission of world redemption, and a collective bearer of a world-historical destiny, many Americans believe steadily in their nation's special missions and, by the early years of the 21st century, had come to see it as a pattern for universal emulation (McClay, 2003).

Defining "Freedom" in America

The world is full of countries with written constitutions but few possess actual constitutional governments, also termed constitutionalism. Constitutionalism requires that a government be limited in its power and liable for its actions. Constitutional scholars have noted that such a system is tied to a suspicion and distrust of power in general and the concentration of power in particular. In addition to emphasizing limited government and the rule of law, constitutionalism recognizes the fundamental worth of each individual and their rights and liberties. Constitutional scholar Cass Sunstein argues that:

> The central goal of a constitution is to create the preconditions for a well-functioning democratic order,

> one in which citizens are genuinely able to govern themselves. One of the principle purposes of a constitution is to protect not to rule the majority but democracy's internal morality, seen in deliberative terms. (Curry, Riley & Battistoni, 2003, p. 8)

The American founders drew on John Locke, who argued that the government has primary responsibility for deciding what can and must be done. This is including those actions that preserve each individual's natural rights (his life, liberty, and estate), and Charles de Montesquieu's influential philosophy of trias politica, also known as the separation of powers. By dividing administrative powers into three categories, the executive, the legislative and the judicial, it allows each power to be separate from, yet, dependent upon each other so that the influence of any one power would not be able to exceed that of the other two. Thus, the founders believed that constitutional government was informed by philosophic truth (Dry, 1998). The founding fathers of the United States recognized that liberty is government's opposite; the more we have of one, the less we have of the other. Free people act, think, and speak as they wish, without anyone forcing them to behave or believe otherwise—even if that "anyone" wears a government uniform. Liberty means an absence of governmental force (Akers, 2008).

In George W. Bush's second Inaugural address alone, he invoked "liberty" 15 times and "freedom" 27 times—yet the speech was only 32 paragraphs long. Bush seemed to define both concepts as "following the American government's orders," which differs greatly from our founders.

In *The Fear of Freedom,* an analysis of governmental influence in the ordinary lives of its citizens, Francis Biddle (1953) questions the threat to the liberties of the

citizens of the United States. *Fear of Freedom* concerns human nature, as for example (as cited in "The New Political Criticism"):

> The human spirit is a strange complex of inconsistencies, of opposing desires and attitudes, of contradictions that defy the application of generalities, and even the diagnosis of reason. In each of us the conflict is endless between our individual urge to freedom and the opposite longing to avoid the exercise of choice, to be safe, to have others make our decisions—the need for security as against the adventure of liberty. At any particular time the one or the other attitude may be in the ascendancy… (pp. 2–3)

Today we more often think of freedom as an attribute of places. We refer to a "free country" or a "free society" or (as the Second Amendment to our Constitution puts it) a "free state." To view it this way implies that freedom is not so much a challenge one must live up to as a place to which one can move. What constitutes freedom is not the extent of government or its lack of national boundaries, but the way in which government is exercised (Rabkin, 2008). Americans believe that freedom revolves around individual choice and that the government's job is to secure that choice while staying neutral about its content. Michael Sandel (1996), a political philosopher, contends that this conception is both new and faulty: "The liberal vision of freedom lacks the civic resources to sustain self-government… The public philosophy by which we live cannot secure the liberty it promises, because it cannot inspire the sense of community and civic engagement that liberty requires" (p. 1). Civic republicanism holds that freedom is not a matter of individual choice but of self-government. It therefore strives to turn people into citizens, and it evaluates policy initiatives according to this objective (Beem, 1996). Local liberty allows and encourages individuals in small civil communities to participate together

in defining and addressing their common needs and aspirations and, thereby, learning how to express their self-interest—as rightly, rather than wrongly or selfishly, understood—in ways that defend individual liberty and republican citizenship against the atomizing, enervating effects of a mass democracy driven toward centralization and uniform legislation by popular clamoring for equality (Kincaid, 1999).

Political Culture and Criticism

In *Political Criticism* (1992), Ian Shapiro writes that, "success comes to political ideas not when they are justified in seminar and speech, but at the moment of their application to life and society (p. 19)." Political culture, or the societal context in which distributive decisions are made, is influenced by a myriad of historical, geographical, and cultural factors. What makes political culture "political" is that attitudes, particularly in a democracy, are translated into public policy though political participation. To the extent that the media craft and reinforce this political culture, they become a pivotal part of the process that guides the formation of public policy (Franklin, 2006).

Michael Oakeshott, a renowned 20th century political philosopher, does not value politics for its own sake, nor does he believe that politics should be the focus of courage in action, let alone heroism or the pursuit of glory (Pitkin, 1973). For Oakeshott, all politics should be is an activity of ordering and administering, not creating. The material with which such politicians' work is already given by tradition; they need not assume the burdens of creating anything anew (and certainly must not presume to destroy). Pitkin (1973) believes Oakeshott is one of

those political theorists, like Plato, who are so deeply concerned about the dangers of power, interest, and conflict, that they develop a theory in which those problems are eliminated rather than solved.

Political participation and criticism come in many forms. Democracy 2.0 is an organization founded at the University of California at Berkeley by 28-year-old David Smith. The organization's goal is to begin a process of upgrading democracy with individual citizens identifying problems in government and society and engaging in conversations that cultivate the search for innovative solutions. A nationwide survey sent out to the millennial generation showed that 43% of survey respondents said that society was somewhat successful at addressing its most important problems, while 44% said that it was not very successful. Three issues emerged regarding the success of American government: public education, national security, and democracy. As for the failings of government, public schools are also seen as failing, along with the Iraq War and health care (Gagnier, 2008).

Feedback in political systems is the information transmitted to the public, mainly by the media, which informs the community about the actions of the government and guides the public to their responses, which in turn gives direction to the government for further action. While the role of the entertainment media in this feedback loop is much more subtle compared to journalistic media, what we view as entertainment informs, constructs, and transmits our concerns (Franklin, 2006). Whatever their mood or factual content, most Hollywood films view politics as a slightly sordid affair and portray the American political system as corrupt or broken. It can be inferred that our political system is broken because it is ran by

wealthy and powerful insiders who have lost touch with the common man (McCormick, 2008). George W. Bush's administration has made some of the broadest assertions of executive power in U.S. history, which has justifiably given rise to fears of a new Imperial Presidency. Yet, many of the same people who condemn growing concentration of power in the executive branch, both Left and Right, also embrace a virtually limitless notion of presidential responsibility. Neither Left nor Right sees the president as the framers of the Constitution saw him: a constrained chief executive with an important, but limited job to enforce the law, defend the country, and check Congress. A truly heroic president is one who appreciates the virtues of restraint, and we will not get that kind of presidency until we demand it (Healy, 2008).

The First Amendment and the USA PATRIOT Act

In the United States Constitution, the First Amendment states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to assemble peaceably, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, in New York City and Washington, D.C., were a critical turning point in this nation's history. Not since the bombing of Pearl Harbor has an event captured Americans' attention and fostered such national preoccupation (Wheeler, 2005). Subsequent U.S. policy in the "War on Terror" has given law enforcement authorities unprecedented legal access to covertly scrutinize the activities of individuals and groups perceived as

potential terrorists. As an effort to protect the freedom and liberties of its citizens, the U.S. government instituted methods that were once considered unconstitutional without probable cause or evidence of a crime. Yet, it abruptly became lawful to monitor and detain those individuals perceived as threats to national security. The lawlessness in the Bush's administrations foreign policy also reflects disdain for civil liberties. Thousands of men with foreign backgrounds have been held secretly in U.S. prisons and detention centers without charges for months at a time. The Justice Department has claimed unprecedented authority to arrest U.S. citizens in the United States without charges and deny them legal counsel on the mere assertion that they are enemy combatants (Shattuck, 2004). Controversy over the state's alleged abuses of civil liberties and the constitutionality of such far-reaching surveillance has occupied public discourse and the judiciary ever since (Robinson, 2008; Wheeler, 2005). The U.S. Supreme Court even invalidated this breathtaking assertion of executive power with one of its most conservative members, Justice Antonin Scalia, reminding the administration that, "the very core of our liberty… has been freedom from indefinite imprisonment at the will of the Executive (Von Drehle, 2004, p. 1)." Longstanding principles of privacy that reflect colonial America's antipathy for the hated secret searches of King George III have been eroded by Congress' hasty enactment in 2001 of legislation drafted by the administration with the ironically Orwellian title USA PATRIOT ACT (Shattuck, 2004). President Bush signed the Patriot Act into law on October 26, 2001. The acronym stands for "United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001."

The U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights protects the freedom to express ideas. Attempts by the government or an agency of the government to subvert this freedom are regarded as censorship (Dresang, 2006). In a democratic society with a diverse population, there are wide ranges of opinions, as well as conflicting beliefs about information (Jaeger & Burnett, 2005). William G. Staples' (1997, 2000) research on state-sponsored social control in the United States details the myriad everyday ways in which the public is technologically monitored through a network of observational methods such as surveillance cameras, wire taps, and invasive computer software. Staples has documented the increasing governmental and corporate encroachment of technological surveillance in everyday life, raising important questions about the consequences of what he terms a "culture of surveillance" on human relationships, particularly our ability to trust one another, our right to preserve a modicum of privacy in our lives, and our basic freedoms of speech and association.

V for Vendetta and *Equilibrium* both serve as examples of governments increasing and abusing powers that ultimately lead to a country's demise. Government oppression and control in a post-9/11 fictional world can thus be compared to the reality of the second Bush administration.

CHAPTER FOUR

Unmasking V for Vendetta

V for Vendetta symbolically parallels the second Bush administration and the 9/11 attacks in its depictions of government conspiracy, governmental oppression, and potential crime control and prevention techniques.

Told primarily through the point of view of Evey Hammond (Natalie Portman), the female protagonist, the film opens with her voice-over explaining the precedent for the actions of the terrorist known as V (Hugo Weaving): "Remember, remember the fifth of November, the gunpowder treason and plot. I know of no reason why the gunpowder treason should ever be forgot." The Gunpowder Plot, which took place in 1605, was an unsuccessful conspiracy initiated by religiously oppressed citizens to assassinate King James I of England. The demolition expert behind this conspiracy, Guy Fawkes, was caught and, according to Evey's words, killed and forgotten. But the power behind Fawkes' plot lay in the ideas he was willing to die for, which are remembered by V: What is the power of an idea? How can terrorist actions make a statement and change the world?

As terrorists in Britain target three establishments, the actions in the film parallel, in reality, the three targeted areas and the killing and injuring of thousands of civilians on 9/11. The attacks in America also served as a rude awakening to the social and political values that we hold in the highest regard as well as the vulnerability and insecurity of our nation. Terrorist groups suddenly had the American people's complete attention.

In response to the terrorist attacks, Bush said that the U.S. would make no distinction between the terrorists who committed the acts and those who harbored them (McCaleb, 2001). Yet, even with Bush's statements on increasing military power to bring terrorists to justice, there was speculation regarding government manipulation of the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) suggests that Bush manipulated the incident to further his own agenda and ambitions and used fighting terror and protecting democracy as a cover.

In *V for Vendetta*, an underlying conspiracy theory that members of the Norsefire Regime engineered an attack against Britain civilians is disclosed at the end of the film. The idea is taken from conspiracy theorists who believe that what happened on September 11 was merely a front to fool the American people and that the perpetrators included members of our own government—that somehow the Bush administration, with the collusion of the Pentagon, was either behind the attacks or simply allowed them to happen in order to institute a quasi-police state (Stillwell, 2006). The 9/11 Truth Movement believes that the U.S. government planned and orchestrated the terrorist attacks, and an overwhelming amount of publicity material argues that the World Trade Center (WTC) collapsed due to controlled demolitions set off by squibs (Molé, 2006). Other theorists believe in the involvement of the Israeli government, which forewarned Jews about the attacks so they were able to escape (Stillwell). Much like the conspiracy theories against the U.S. government, the citizens of Britain in *V for Vendetta* have conspiracy issues of their own.

By comparing Britain's war-torn country in *V for Vendetta* to the events following the 9/11 attacks and the Bush administration's response to terrorism, this chapter explores: (1) how established governments obtain power through lawful, democratic means and transform it into suppressive authority; (2) techniques used to control and prevent crime, thus keeping citizens under control; (3) how individuals might willfully fight against oppression; and (4) the concept of "terrorism" and how viewers come to understand it.

Establishing a Solid Government

The Norsefire Regime

In the backstory of *V for Vendetta*, the contamination of a water treatment plant has resulted in the sickness, viral disease, and death of thousands in London; a religious children's school is a target of radical activism; and underground terrorist attacks lead to social chaos, riots, and war. As a result of a democratic election, the Norsefire Regime is voted into office as an answer to the current catastrophes befalling 2020 Britain. The British hand over complete confidence to Adam Sutler (John Hurt), an obvious allusion to Hitler, who assumes the newly created position of High Chancellor of Britain to rid the nation of disease, war, and terror.

To what extreme would a government go to unite a country? Sutler and his conservative party initiate a special project on the grounds of "national security." His first act of order is to cleanse the city streets of those considered to be unfit, unhealthy, and impure: those who are ethnic minorities, handicapped, or homosexual. Anyone who is considered to be "different" by the conservative party

is labeled as dangerous. The government creates a biological virus at a detention center in Larkhill, where the "degenerates" are sent and experimented upon. This exact virus is later released and targeted at their community, as fear and panic already divide the country. With the government having the only treatment for the virus, citizens have no other choice but to turn to Sutler, the man with the cure. His strong position against terrorists resonates with the demands of citizens, ensuring that his political rise to power is swift and unequivocal, resulting in a landslide victory during tough times. By disguising the ethnic and religious cleansing as a "national security" project, the ultimate goal of Sutler's special project is unrestrained and unchallenged power. As the Norsefire party members thrive, gain wealth, and assume power, the oppression of the common people begins.

The Bush Administration

Prior to the 2000 election victory of President George W. Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney, Bush, as governor of Texas, had no foreign policy experience (Woodruff & Morton, 1999). Bush's foreign policy has its roots in a strain of dated realist political thinking best labeled "preponderant" and "hegemonist." The U.S. lives in a dangerous world, one closer to philosopher Thomas Hobbes' state of nature, in which life is "war of all against all," than to philosopher Immanuel Kant's "idea of a law of world citizenship" (Ruddin, 2006, p. 5). Distrusting his father's political advisors, Bush surrounded himself with neoconservative consultants with combative vision (Fineman, 2007).

After the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., governments from around the world offered condolences and statements denouncing acts of terrorism. In a telegram

sent to Bush, Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote, "Such an inhuman act must not go unpunished." British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that democracies must "fight this evil" of terrorism. And the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated, "The fight against terrorism is an international struggle of the free world against the forces of darkness." With the support of nations around the world, Bush became an international adversary fighting the war on terror ("World Shock Over U.S. Attacks," 2001).

President Bush had an advantage over every other U.S. president in his lifetime in that the United States was attacked under his watch (Zune 2005). U.S. officials accused the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, of harboring and supporting al-Qaeda operations, and Bush believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which posed security threats. Yet, because no factual link of the 9/11 attacks could be traced back to Iraq, the reasons for the subsequent invasion of that country created controversy.

Because "national security" has become a striking term we hear often yet is so vaguely defined, we associate it with any possible threat, major or minor. On a political level, Republicans are frequently seen as military-based and national security-oriented and Democrats are seen as economical and domestic-based. With the Presidential election around the corner in 2004, the media played an integral role in framing the political candidates, which the Republican Party used to its full advantage. In an article titled "Vote Bush or Die," Legum and Sirota (2004) argue that the right-wing media swayed citizens to vote for Bush by announcing that voting for John Kerry was siding with terrorism. In a time where national security

was at stake, the Democratic Party could not provide the military protection that was deemed necessary. After a long, hard battle, Bush was voted into a second term as president.

Comparison and Analysis

In such times of turmoil, people look up to a strong individual who is willing to take charge, create change, and promote unity. Just as Bush was regarded as a leader against the war on terror, Sutler acquires support from the British. The two conservative leaders are determined to seek out terrorists, persistent in bringing them to justice, and dedicated to improving and defending their country no matter what the costs.

During government teleconference meetings with the High Chancellor, Sutler's visage is projected on a wall-sized screen while party members sit in a row looking up at him. This creates a sense of reverence to Sutler and shows his dominance and importance. On each side of his image is the Norsefire party symbol, which is a black and red sign that resembles a crucifix. The colors not only mirror the Nazi party's swastika, but the uses of red also align with the conservative, Republican Party's color code in America (possibly hinting at Bush's political views).

With televisions, radio stations, and newspapers constantly fueling anxiety with stories about the contamination of the Three Waters treatment plant or radical activists, which reflects the U.S. news stations replaying footage of the twin towers being hit by airplanes and the iconic images of the burning structures, the media is bound to evoke a call for retaliation. A lack of understanding about those who are different, whether in ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, can create

uncertainty, and uncertainty can create fear. By tapping into the fear of citizens, control comes easily: internment camps for "undesirables" in *V for Vendetta* and strong support for the passing of the Patriot Act in the U.S., as well as the detainment of accused terrorists. But, with education and tolerance, a way to overcome that fear and move past violent and destructive means can be possible.

Although the American government has not reached the extremes of totalitarianism, the Bush administration has been blamed for abusing power and politics for personal gain. People have wondered whether the war on terror and the search for WMDs was simply a cover-up for a separate agenda. With measures having been taken that breach our freedoms, and even though our right to privacy is not constitutionally guaranteed, there are still laws in place to protect us. Yet, there are conflicting governmental regulations that cause uncertainty, such as the Privacy Act, which protect against the disclosing of personal records without consent and the Patriot Act, which allows the government to access records for intelligence investigations. Even though such laws will likely not affect the majority of law-abiding citizens, the idea that the government has unrestricted power makes us uneasy. With power comes a great responsibility, and abuse of such power should be scrutinized and resolved.

Preventing, Controlling, and Responding to Crime

V for Vendetta's Oppression

The Norsefire Regime operates with video surveillance in the streets and random audio sweeps that allow the governing board to know what people do and

what issues they discuss. What is at the core of people's interests? How do they assess the actions of the Regime? Implementing nightly curfews and routine patrols by Fingermen (the enforcing equivalent to police or security guards) keeps delinquents from roaming the streets at night. A "blacklist" of objectionable content created by Sutler means any individual found with unlawful material is subject to arrest and prosecution. And with the execution of extremists who admitted to the viral outbreak in London, the Norsefire party returns order to society.

Media—radio, newspaper, and television—are now regulated and scrutinized by the Norsefire, which requires codes of conduct from networks and allows only edited scripts to be produced and distributed to citizens. Controlling content also necessitates the controlling of information that could to be educational. One of the employees at the British Television Network (BTN) even states that it is the government's job to fabricate the news and the news station simply reports it. Such restricted access to additional knowledge that could be empowering contributes to the growing machine of oppression as the government tries to keep its citizens under control.

A prominent form of crime prevention is conveyed through the motto of the Norsefire: "Strength through unity, unity through faith." Lewis Prothero (Roger Allam), the former commander of the Larkhill internment camp where V was once held, is now the "voice of London." As a politically right-winged commentator, Prothero can be compared to American conservative talk show hosts like Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh. Prothero is seen on the television at the beginning of the movie stating that the demise of other nations is a result of Godlessness.

Without the guidance and belief in God, nonbelievers are judged and punished, which according to the film's back-story is what happened with the fall of the United States. And no one, states Prothero, escapes judgment.

The individuals who are willing to challenge the power of Sutler and his contingency of oppressors answer to a man named Creedy (Tim Pigott-Smith), who seeks out protestors, opponents, and general rebels of the system with the express intent to "black bag" them. By implementing a new law and order under Sutler's administration, people are afraid to contest their government and therefore comply without a struggle for their freedoms.

Controlling Americans

The modern mass media in the U.S. have gradually become less partisan in their portrayal of political life, financially independent of political parties, more objective in how they cover public business, and more professionally skilled in gathering and reporting news about public affairs (Curry, Riley, & Battistoni, 2003). But news media also compete with reality shows and meaningless drama that Americans thrive on and keep viewers unaware of world events or pressing issues.

The media play an integral role in shaping the way individuals perceive events. The Fox News Channel has been criticized for their reporting on the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a one-sided conservative commentary that supports the Bush Administration. The abundance of conservatives and Republicans at Fox News does not seem to be a coincidence (Ackerman, 2001), and its opinion shows blatantly tilt right (Poniewozik, 2006). American president of Fox News Channel, Roger Ailes, was, for decades, one of the savviest and most pugnacious Republican political

operatives in Washington. Seeking to trademark the marketing phrase "Fair and Balanced," Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox News, has said the station was not the least bit biased and was more balanced in reporting than other U.S. networks (Australian Associated Press, 2004). Scott Norvell, London bureau chief for Fox News, stated in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* that, "Fox News is, after all, a private channel and our presenters are quite open about where they stand on particular stories. That's our appeal. People watch us because they know what they are getting" (Noah, 2005, p. 1). CNN founder, Ted Turner, has attacked Fox News, labeling it "propaganda" for its stance towards the Bush administration and for not criticizing the Bush administration enough (Fox News 'propaganda', 2005).

Responding to terrorism is necessary, thus the passing of the Patriot Act, which occurred within a month of the attacks, and the creation of the 9/11 Commission a year later. Short for the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, the 9/11 Commission was "chartered to prepare a full and complete account of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, including preparedness for and the immediate response to the attacks" (National Commission, 2004). Countering and preventing terrorism was deemed a top priority for the U.S. and was supported by members in governmental offices and the American people.

Through the act of surveilling Americans, which in this study will refer to the gathering of personal and private information on individuals, the U.S. government argues that it can better assess the probability of another terrorist attack. Originally, surveillance and search practices were strictly for detecting evidence for

criminal prosecutions. However, increasing surveillance is also being used for the preventive purpose of gathering information on persons perceived to be crime or terrorist threats (Cole, 2003, as cited in Bloss, 2003, p. 210). With the advancement of technology and the increased use of electronic communication, the result has been to expand both the reach and authority of the government in pursuing criminals. Thus, the Patriot Act is the epitome of federal law empowering policing agencies with greater authority and increased surveillance, search, and seizure powers.

Comparison and Analysis

In *V for Vendetta*, controlling and oppressing the population results in crime prevention: keep crime and poverty low, maintain surveillance on citizens, and prepare to respond swiftly to anyone who might disturb the peace. Without fair trial and denied of their lawful rights, activists are prosecuted immediately and killed for failure to comply with the government. As effective as this type of response might be for an unstable nation, the lack of rationality and humanity behind these actions is terrifying, especially when a government is willing to perform them on their own citizens without repercussions. These actions, as portrayed in the movie, can be compared to the racial profiling and large-scale detention of a group of people based on country of origin or ancestry, which the U.S. witnessed within hours of the 9/11 attacks, as federal agents swept through Arab, Muslim, and South Asian neighborhoods throughout America, detaining men (Sanctioned Bias, 2004). However, because of the U.S. Constitutional right to a fair trial (the Sixth Amendment), the American citizens who were arrested and detained

on charges or suspicion of terroristic activities based on race or religion were never charged with crimes. And by no means would the American government murder thousands of "innocent until proven guilty" prisoners as was depicted in *V for Vendetta*. Yet, the case of a dual Saudi-U.S. citizen, Yaser Hamdi, who was detained at Guantanamo Bay, brought forth concerns about conditions and the treatment of prisoners. A statement issued from the Pentagon by Navy Commander Jeff Gordon said, "The Department of Defense policy is clear: We treat all detainees humanely. The United States operates safe, humane and professional detention operations for unlawful enemy combatants at war with this country (Cratty, 2008, p. 1)." Yet, three years later it was learned that Hamdi was an American-born citizen, and, after never being charged with breaking the law, he was released from Guantanamo. After being released Hamdi said that he was treated abysmally and unconstitutionally for years. It was a clear violation of the Fifth Amendment, which guarantees the right to due process. These examples shown in *V for Vendetta* as well as the post-9/11 round-up demonstrate that, during times of turmoil and war, governmental practices can be abused and the rights of citizens can dwindle.

The BTN in *V for Vendetta* is depicted as an extreme version of Fox News, as a biased and conservative media outlet. Much like the support the Norsefire regime receives from the BTN and commentator Lewis Prothero, Fox News and its affiliated political commentators reported information supporting President Bush's policies following September 11 and the "war on terror" against al-Qaeda and the search for "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq. The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland conducted a thorough study of public

knowledge and attitudes about current events and the war on terrorism. Researchers found that the public's mistaken impressions of three facets of U.S. foreign policy—discovery of alleged WMDs in Iraq, alleged Iraqi involvement in 9/11, and international support for a U.S. invasion of Iraq—helped fuel support for the war. Those who received their information from Fox News were less informed about facts and were three times more likely to misinterpret information and accept claims as accurate (Benen, 2003; Stoller, 2007). While there are similarities between the ideological and political functions of BTN and Fox News, it is also important to acknowledge the major difference between the two: BTN is owned and operated by the government with strict broadcasting guidelines, whereas Fox News is part of a competitive conglomerate of broadcasting companies and channels seeking viewership. Thus, while Fox News may function to restrict certain viewpoints while promoting others, it does so as part of the free market and is thus best viewed as a form of expression. Although communication may be monitored with the passing of the Patriot Act, in the U.S. the freedom of expression remains intact. It is evident in *V for Vendetta* that media shape society, yet we seem to be frequently blinded by that. By allowing ourselves to be manipulated by the government and the media, we are more susceptible to appeals to fear, which leads us to accept action as a way of avoiding danger (Walton, 2007). Americans adhere to laws without coercion because we are socialized from childhood that there is the distinction between right and wrong. Social control theories attribute crime and law-breaking delinquency to the weakness, breakdown, or absence of those social bonds or socialization processes that encourage law-abiding conduct. Such theories

accord primacy to relationships, commitments, values, norms and beliefs that explain why people do not break laws as compared to theories that accord primacy to motivating forces to explain why people do break laws (Jensen, 2003).

Government control in America is a form of protection for civilians, allowing us our civil liberties and rights. If Americans are oppressed in any fashion, it pales in comparison to the drastic totalitarian government as depicted in *V for Vendetta*. As long as people do not have any passionate views about administrative actions, have no arsenal to use against military force, are satisfied with their monotonous lives, and accept and adapt to the lifestyle under the regime, the status quo remains.

Fighting Oppression

The Man Named "V"

Having been held at the Larkhill Detainment Center as a victim of the government's exercise of corrupt power, V returns as a villain using acts of terror against those in control as a means to provoke dialogue, debate, and change. Furthering his own agenda, he seeks revenge on the individuals who created the monstrosity of his hate; his actions speak just as loudly as his words. He harms only those he believes need be harmed, such as Fingermen abusing their status or the Norsefire party members using society to climb the political and economic ladders for power and fortune.

The character of V is first introduced when he saves Evey from Fingermen as she is wandering the streets after curfew. Appearing in a dark alleyway where Fingermen catch Evey and are about to take advantage of her, V has no regard for

their lawful status in society and protects her from them. Evey watches as this man in a mask and cape fights the law enforcers of London and wonders if he is simply a lunatic dressed up as Guy Fawkes.

But V's self-introduction is poetic and theatrical. Asking Evey if she knows what date it is (as it is the fifth of November), he invites her to witness the demolition of Lady Justice, a building that symbolizes integrity but also contradicts everything that Britain has become. Living without freedom and governed by force through fear of political justice, why honor and exult a statue that stands for liberty when it no longer exists? Broadly orchestrating the symphony that accompanies the explosions and fireworks of the building, V looks like a madman, and the power of freedom for which he stands for cannot be stopped.

The next day, V broadcasts a message to all British citizens through the BTN about the nation's dilemma. He inquires about the immorality and transgression of the current government: Where individuals once had freedom to think and speak freely, they are now censored and observed by surveillance and coerced into submission and compliance. What is wrong with the country? People are afraid, and their fear can be overpowering. The government may be abusing its power, but if the citizens allow it to continue, they are just as guilty by being irresponsible. V's mission is to challenge the current system and promote change in the minds and actions of the people. V's conviction is that people should not be afraid of their government, but rather the government should be afraid of its people. However, are violent means moral under any circumstance?

Having to go outside the system of justice in Britain to convey real justice, V attributes the fall of society to the corrupt individuals in power while also blaming citizens for allowing this fraudulent government to continue damaging life and liberty. He vilifies the prominent members of the Norsefire Regime and then uses violence to fight against their oppressive ways. He destroys empty buildings and murders prominent administration members as a voice for the oppressed because, under Britain's Norsefire Regime, silent and lawful protests have no constructive results. It is only violence, the language of the fascist Norsefire Regime, that demands prompt and forthright responses. However, no "hero" arose after the events of 9/11 to bring the suspected government to justice. Thus, for those who believe the U.S. government was a part of the attack, V serves as a symbolic conqueror of injustice, and the victory and recognition of the hero confirms the validity of the ideals and values he embodies (Bass, 1981).

V is a heroic terrorist who then recruits Evey and pushes her through the same treatment he sustained at Larkhill, eventually creating a fearless freedom fighter (or terrorist, as it is Evey who ultimately has the choice of blowing up Parliament). Determined to revive Britain from the poison of the government, V is also a vigilante, a man with an objective who cannot be stopped as he seeks to demolish evil and restore true liberty. The Guy Fawkes mask he wears is a symbol of freedom and justice, the ideals that Fawkes stood for and died defending.

Comparison and Analysis

During V's broadcast over the BTN, he states that citizens could once think and speak freely, but under the Norsefire reign, silent obedience replaces judgment

and rhetoric. Thought itself cannot be stopped, but it can be influenced and altered and the citizens of Britain can be restrained from freely expressing their ideas. Americans consider prior restraint of free speech to be a breach of the Constitutional First Amendment. However, being in a fictional world outside the limits of American soil, the power of free speech does not apply. But, a deeper meaning is embedded in the implication of depicting 2020 Britain under such strict rule, all the while making it comparable to the U.S. (This concept will be further discussed in the next chapter along with *Equilibrium*.)

V's actions are defined as terroristic. Yet, Inspector Finch, the man behind V's case who is set to discover the truth, makes the remark that some part of V is human, even if he is a terrorist. Having been locked up by the government without justified legal means, it appears that V is the creation of the government. And because V is a victim of the totalitarian government, the filmmakers and actors have forcefully, insistently stressed that V is an ambiguous, ambivalent figure (Grossman, 2006). Profiled as a national terrorist, V is a radical patriot who utilizes extreme actions to convey his ideas, which is difficult for audiences to justify. In one scene Evey is cleaning an old mirror with the inscription "Vi Veri Vniversum Vivus Vici," which means, "By the power of truth, I, a living man, have conquered the universe." As she moves out of frame, V appears as a reflection in the mirror, thus visually associating him with the mantra. His home, which he refers to as the shadow gallery, is filled with piles of literature and classic works of art that are considered "objectionable materials" by the Norsefire because they represent acceptance through education and appreciation of difference. Thus, it becomes much more

difficult to grasp that V is a terrorist because of his intelligence and acceptance of diversity.

V's actions seem justified, supported with reason and logic that viewers can understand. His threat and promise to blow up the Houses of Parliament on November 5 stands strong with the idea that what the British citizens need is not a building, but a newfound faith that government can be, once again, what it was originally intended to be: a proper, fair representation of its people that serves and protects them. This poses a dilemma for audiences who believe the use of terror to be an intolerable strategy to achieve anything, especially in America where terrorism is viewed as inherently negative and indefensible. As discussed in the introduction, terrorism is a multifaceted term that can take on different meanings to different people regarding different actions. Yet, one should also realize that the buildings that V demolishes are empty, thus, his action is more symbolic rather than terroristic. And once one learns the background of V's mindset and considers the enlightening messages he sends, it becomes possible to side with the "terrorist," an anti-hero, who now becomes a freedom fighter under the totalitarian rule.

CHAPTER FIVE

Equilibrium Disrupted

Equilibrium is set in the aftermath of World War III and deals with political and social stigmas. Libria is a dystopian society that has achieved harmony under the governmental rule of the Tetragrammaton and the law-enforcing, premonitory Grammaton Cleric. Feelings are a luxury that individuals sacrifice for the greater good of humanity to sustain apparent world peace. As a result, people now function as autonomous machines, without instinct, emotive reasoning, or purpose in life.

But, what happens when one of the highest ranking Grammaton Cleric accidently misses an interval of the emotion-suppressing drug and starts to gain an individual consciousness and feel emotions? As a man who believes in and advocates for a system established and ruled by the Tetragrammaton, he comes to realize the irony of preventing crime though the use of violence. In finding truth and justice by siding with the revolutionaries against the Tetragrammaton, first-class John Preston (Christian Bale) begins questioning his commitment to his government and doubting the truth of the Librian lifestyle.

Like Librians content under the Tetragrammaton rule, Americans are, for the most part, satisfied with the U.S. government. And just as Librians forsake their emotions for the stability and harmony of Libria, Americans forsake certain forms of freedom for personal protection and security against harm. By comparing the aftermath of World War III in *Equilibrium* to post-9/11 America, this chapter investigates: (1) government response after a catastrophic event and during a time

of need; (2) preventing, controlling, and responding to crime and terror; (3) the internal struggles of the values of justice and freedom; and (4) terroristic actions as depicted and understood by viewers.

Government Powers on the Prowl

The Tetragrammaton Council

Opening with images of war, destruction, and dictators, Joseph Stalin and Sadam Hussein, *Equilibrium* shows that those who survived World War III knew humankind could not survive a fourth. The purpose of the Tetragrammaton Council is to manage what is left of humanity. Libria takes pride in having successfully achieved harmony through individual submission. Librians follow the orders of Father (Sean Pertwee), the ruler and creator of Libria. His image is seen throughout the city on public screens and in homes; his educational teachings about the volatile nature of humans are the only media content people are allowed to watch. Vice-council DuPont (Angus MacFayden) serves as the messenger between Father and the Librians, much like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed to Osama bin Laden as one of his most trusted associates. DuPont is the voice of Father in the flesh, as no one has ever been allowed a private meeting with Father for fear of assassination.

The intention of the Tetragrammaton is to construct a society where every individual leads an identical life. From the conservative, colorless clothes they wear to the simplicity of their environment, Librians minimize comparison with others to lessen materialism and maintain order and obedience while giving absolute power

and control to DuPont and Father. And, as is true in most governments or hierarchies of power, there is contradiction, corruption, and hypocrisy.

The Bush Administration

No new order of law was created in response to the 9/11 attacks. Instead, the advancement and improvement of current enforcing agencies, especially via the Patriot Act, was the Bush administration's response to terrorism. Foreign policy took a dramatic turn as President Bush notified Russia that the U.S. would be withdrawing from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (AMB), which served as an enactment of nuclear arms control. Because Russia could not be persuaded to set the treaty aside and negotiate a new strategic agreement, Bush concluded that the ABM treaty hindered the U.S. government's ability to develop ways to protect its people from future terrorist or rogue state missile attacks and thus proceeded with the unilateral withdrawal (Perez-Rivas, 2001), which was an important step for America's nuclear arms development and weaponry.

However, government actions and intentions can be misinterpreted domestically and internationally. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower created the United States Information Agency (USIA), which was intended to function as an independent foreign affairs bureau. Working within the executive branch of the U.S. government, USIA was charged with the conduct of public diplomacy in support of U.S. foreign policy (United States Information Agency, 1999). An agency dedicated to promoting the country's image abroad by explaining American society, values, and institutional workings, the USIA oversaw educational and cultural exchanges and a network of libraries around the world (Keith, 2005). Operating on an

international basis, the USIA was a liaison for other countries to better understand and accept the lifestyle and culture of Americans. USIA ran vast broadcasting efforts in different languages, providing information and promoting U.S. interests. After periods of expansion, reduction, and dissemination as presidential administrations changed, USIA was eventually merged into the Department of State in 1999. Because most of USIA's work was done overseas, its contributions remain little known by the average American or heralded even in the Department of State, as even today many have not even heard of the agency (United States Information Agency, 1999). Two years prior to the 9/11 attacks, USIA shifted its focus to primarily within the U.S. borders and reduced efforts in international public diplomacy. Had USIA continued endorsing American foreign policy abroad and communicating differences to other nations rather than focusing on internal affairs, its influence could have made a difference.

Following the terrorist attacks in September, President Bush was told in a highly classified briefing that the U.S. intelligence community had no evidence linking the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein to the attacks and that there was scant credible evidence that Iraq had any significant collaborative ties with al-Qaeda. Yet, in arguing their case for war with Iraq, the president and vice president said after the 9/11 attacks that al-Qaeda and Iraq had significant ties, and they cited the possibility that Iraq might share chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons with al-Qaeda for a terrorist attack against the United States (Waas, 2005). The U.S. media began broadcasting news on the war in Iraq and the search for Saddam Hussein, who had helped terrorists, thus harboring responsibility for 9/11. The American

government and its citizens had finally found a focus for the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, even if it was in the wrong direction.

Comparison and Analysis

On a level of insecurity, it is curious and frightening how powerful government can become and how trusting citizens can be of their governments. Father's words are law and each individual must obey. President Bush lacked crucial information connecting terrorists and Iraq, yet, still proceeded to convince Americans to support the war on terror.

Children training to become clerics are seen throughout the film serving as human surveillance of the eyes of Father, pinpointing individuals who display signs of sense offense. As seen in one part of *Equilibrium*, a child points into a crowd of pedestrians at an elderly man, and without notice law enforcers take the man away. All across America, many Middle Eastern immigrants were detained for questioning following the 9/11 attacks, with no distinction between legitimate terrorist suspects and innocent individuals caught up in the sweep. Of the 762 people arrested during the investigation on immigration violations, not a single one turned out to have any links to terrorism (Brzezinski, 2004). The swift reaction of government powers to crises such as a possible WWIII or terrorist attacks are inherently necessary. Who does authority target as the enemy? What does the opponent want? How will the adversary succeed in their objective and the rival prevent it? But underneath each question lays the biggest question to be answered: Why?

Preventing, Controlling, and Responding to Crime

By some accounts, 9/11 has cost the U.S. economy anywhere from $75 billion to several hundred billion. All across the country, officials at virtually every level of government rushed to take stock of America's vulnerabilities, starting with the White House, which commissioned the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to identify the 100 most likely terrorist targets in the U.S. (Brzezinski, 2004). Because crime-free societies effectively remove a large burden from the government, they allow energy and effort to be placed elsewhere. The prevention of crime is the goal of the Tetragrammaton in Libria; and the prevention of future terrorist attacks is the goal of the American government.

Emotional Content & Prozium

In *Equilibrium*, one possible first step in avoiding aggression of any kind is the destruction of content that might tempt people to "feel." Similar to Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451,* which depicts a dystopian American society where books are burned as a way to prevent critical thinking, Libria classifies music, writings, paintings, and movies with codes of emotional content (EC-10). Possession of any quantity of EC-10 is prohibited and can result in the processing and incrimination of the offender. People cannot be trusted to fight their own urges of emotionality. People are weak because they feel, and individuals allow feelings to manipulate behavior. Removing these temptations is a step toward accomplishing Father's will: complete compliance and conformity.

Because aggression, terror, and war are products of human emotion, the Tetragrammaton isolates and resolves the problem by a manufactured drug called

prozium. Librians are required to take daily intervals of the euphoric drug, which is distributed at locations called Equilibrium at specific hours of the day. Acting as an emotional suppressant, it eliminates stimulation of the senses. Combined with the brainwashing poison of Father's words, the use of prozium facilitates the mandate that compliance of law is of the utmost importance because, if one cannot feel, one cannot react with cognitive intent. On one hand, it is sensible that some individuals cannot be trusted to their better judgment, but on the other hand, demanding that an entire nation of people succumb to totalitarian rule because of the mistakes of some seems harsh and unnecessary.

The Grammaton Cleric

The Grammaton Cleric has been created to control those Librians still willing to risk their lives in pursuit of "self-interest" by acquiring forbidden content and rejecting the standard use of prozium. The mission of the Grammaton Cleric is to seek out offenders of the law, eradicate any emotional content an offender might possess, and kill the offender on site without investigation or due process of law. The ability of Clerics to think as an offender without ceasing their dose of prozium is unusual; having no insight into the emotional world, they can predict how a feeling person would think and act, fostering the illusion that explains why they are so revered and powerful. Thus, the Grammaton Clerics paradoxically achieve peace and sustain social order by utilizing violence.

What, then, is the morality of using violence to counter violence? In *Nonkilling Global Political Science* (2000), Glenn D. Paige argues that, in the last century, politics have failed to suppress violence by violent means. Violence

becomes an anticipated way to liberate and protect (as depicted in *Equilibrium)*, but it also creates insecurity and impoverishment and threatens human existence. What is intended to defend, through this "pathology of defense," becomes the source of self-destruction. Using violence as a way to prevent violence only creates a never-ending cycle (Bhaneja, 2003).

America's Security & Surveillance State

After the airplane hijackings of 9/11, airport security measures increased greatly. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) introduced new rules and regulations for all air travelers such as showing an identification card with a boarding pass, removing shoes before walking through metal detectors, and the 3-1-1 rule for carry-on liquids and gels (3-ounce bottles in a 1-quart bag for 1 person). Such precautions are meant to prevent another air related attack in the U.S. But Offer Einav, an Israeli security consultant, explained, "terrorists usually stick to their game plan. They only change methods when they see that we've caught on to them" (Brzezinski, 2004, p. 31). With the likelihood of another similar airplane-related attack being slightly reduced due to increased airport security, we can only imagine what terrorists might think up next.

Super Bowl XXXVII, which was held in San Diego, was monitored by a network of 50 cameras installed throughout the stadium while military aircraft flew overhead enforcing a 7-mile no-fly zone around Qualcomm Stadium. With an attendance of 67,000 fans, audience members had to park at least 5 miles from the venue and take shuttle buses to the stadium gates, where they were then greeted

with airport-style metal detectors and were prohibited from bringing bags, cushions, or anything else that could conceal a weapon (Brzezinski, 2004).

There's some comfort to be drawn from the fact that bin Laden has not been able to strike on U.S. soil since 9/11. Thanks to more effective intelligence gathering, immigration control, and the heightened vigilance of ordinary Americans, there is scant evidence of al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the U.S. (Bergen, 2008). This by no means indicates that our intelligence agencies are on the right track, nor does it suggest that 9/11 will be the last attack on American soil. With unpredictability being al-Qaeda's strong point, we must always be alert and attentive.

Comparison and Analysis

Libria's use of drugs as a way to control its citizens is a reminder of medication dependency in America. Instead of changing personal habits, most individuals prefer taking a pill to solve the problem for the time being, just as the government of Libria suppresses the emotions of humans as a provisional solution to their problem instead of educating individuals on the responsibility of their actions. The U.S. has become the most drug-abusing nation in the history of the industrialized world with Americans consuming three tons of aspirin a day (Lawn, 1986). The number of individuals abusing pain medications alone grew from 628,000 in 1990 to nearly 3 million in 2000 (Kraman, 2004). Prozium hints at the nature of the American addiction to medication (both legal and non). Both Librians and Americans use drugs to suppress emotions, ironically, a requirement in Libria and a voluntary action in America. Each year more than 120 million prescriptions are written for psychoactive drugs in the U.S. (Lawn, 1986). Because prescription drugs can be

obtained through legal means, users and abusers have the illusion of safety, whereas addiction and withdrawal associated with the abuse of many prescription drugs can be more harmful than that associated with illegal drugs (Grier, 2003, as cited in Kraman, 2004, p. 6). The U.S. has become a nation that, instead of dealing with its problems, takes a pill to make it temporarily disappear.

In the previous chapter, the discussion of government censorship brought up the argument of infringement on the First Amendment. The Patriot Act causes a chain reaction of communication barriers that unintentionally forms a kind of censorship. Call it either the scientifically termed "observer effect," otherwise known as "the Hawthorne effect," or the socially oriented "panopticism," but people who know they are being watched will act differently rather than naturally and instinctually (Brannigan & Zwerman, 2001). "The Hawthorne effect" is used to explain how the introduction of experimental conditions designed to identify salient aspects of behavior has the consequence of changing the behavior it is designed to identify. Michel Foucault's idea of panopticism is based on Jeremy Bentham's constructed prison that is built radially, so that one guard positioned in its center can view all prisoners (Piro, 2008). According to Foucault, the primary difference between Bentham's Panopticon and the "disciplinary mechanism" of panopticism is that the Panopticon is a physical architectural utopia in which discipline is enforced and panopticism enforces discipline invisibly, without a physical, palpable presence (Oakley, 2005).

With these two theories in mind, it can be noted that citizens of a country under constant surveillance will act according to social expectations and

government-controlled regulations. This can alter physical actions, verbal rhetoric, communication methods, and even aspects of thinking, which serves as a form of censorship. As the Grammaton Cleric constantly monitors Librians for signs of emotive violation, the U.S. government scrutinizes and tracks the private communication of Americans for probable violence against the U.S. The invisibility of the government's voyeuristic method is, according to Foucault (1977), "a guarantee of order" (p. 200).

It is argued that closed-circuit television (CCTV) (especially if well publicized) may prevent crime because potential offenders are deterred by their increased subjective probability of detection. CCTV may also increase the true probability of detection, may increase pedestrian usage of places and hence further increase the subjective probability, may encourage potential victims to take security precautions, and may direct police and security personnel to intervene to prevent crime (Armitage, 1999, as cited in Welsh & Farrington, 2008). Using CCTVs, police departments, the FBI, the Secret Service, the State Department, and the Defense Intelligence Agency, to name a few, can access simultaneous live feeds of schools, subways, landmarks, and main streets. With prior permission, clicking a few times on a computer's mouse can also link up surveillance systems to closed-circuit cameras in shopping malls, departments stores, and office buildings (Brzezinski, 2004). Individuals being watched at every corner, possibly even in the safety and comfort of their own homes generates one of two feelings: a sense of protection or a false sense of security.

Fighting for Freedom and Justice

The Resistance, The Underground

There is a group of individuals who are reluctant to live under Libria's law and order, conform to Father's teachings, and surrender their freedoms of life and liberty. Referred to as the "Resistance," they live in what is known as the underground, which is located quite literally under the soil of Libria. The Tetragrammaton has been trying to infiltrate their civilization to bring them to Father's justice. If located, the offenders will be sentenced to death and their possessions destroyed. Having previously attempted to attack Equilibrium centers, it is the Resistance that eats at the core of Librian society. With individuals waiting for an appropriate time to revolt against the Tetragrammaton, they seek the aid of one man with the capability and determination to bring down the totalitarian system: John Preston.

As the highest ranking Grammaton Cleric, Preston leads the search and raids for lawbreakers, tracking down sense offenders in the Nether, an area outside of Libria, executing them and destroying any emotional content found. A strong and avid advocate of Father's teachings, Preston genuinely believes that Libria can prevail by eradicating all emotional content and sense offenders. The Tetragrammaton and Father's instructions condition Preston's conscience. Preston's partner, Errol Partridge (Sean Bean), questions the purpose of their actions and the future when sense offenders have all been prosecuted and killed.

While returning from one of the Grammaton Cleric's raids into the Nether, Preston remarks that every time they return from the Nether, he is reminded of why

they do what they do, to which Partridge delivers an unconscious, reactive remark in the form of a question: "It does?" Partridge's question surprises Preston, but he is saved by the alarms on their watches that remind them to take their intervals of prozium. After Partridge injects himself with the dose, he restates his comment in a more affirmative reply: "It does."

Nevertheless, Preston begins to suspect that Partridge is, in fact, a sense offender. And, when he finds him one night in the Nether reading from a book, Preston shoots and kills him. The effect of his partner's death is a turning point in Preston's conscience because, later that night while asleep, he remembers the Grammaton Clerics breaking into his home with a warrant to arrest his wife for sense offense. The images of Preston and his wife visually indicate a difference in character, as shots of Preston are of a dim gray, indicating his lack of emotion, while images of his wife show saturation, which shows the presence of emotion. She runs to him, kisses him, and as she is dragged away, calls out to him, "Remember me!" Preston wakes up in a trance that causes him to accidently break his dose of prozium, which is witnessed by his son. From that moment forth, his world starts to transform.

Preparing to head to work, Preston's son, on the track to becoming a cleric himself, informs his father that his new partner, Brandt (Taye Diggs), will pick Preston up from Equilibrium, as Preston is to go there to log his missed prozium interval and replace it. *Equilibrium* shows that not only are individuals being watched by clerics in public, but also in the comfort of their own homes. In the span of a second, Preston's son orders his sister to stop messing with her breakfast

cereal, and Preston picks up on his son's brash manner, something he would not have otherwise noticed. Being unable to replace his dose of prozium due to terrorist activity at Equilibrium, Preston goes with Brandt to detain another sense offender.

When they arrive at Mary O'Brien's (Emily Watson) living quarters, she curses the Grammaton Clerics as they enter her home. Preston, ostensibly finding both her appearance and attitude despicable, grabs her and forces her toward a mirror. Confronting her through the reflection, he asks her how long she's been off the dose. Right then, his gaze lands upon himself; it is the first time he is seeing and reacting to his own reflection. Looking at more than simply a mirror image, Preston perceives himself as a human being rather than simply a faceless instrument of Father's will. Through Mary's arrest and another raid in the Nether, Preston begins to learn the effects of feeling and the responsibility that comes with it. Associating with the sense offenders and exploring his own emotional range, he is eventually propelled by his feelings, which serve as motivations for his actions in joining the Resistance and fighting against the Tetragrammaton.

Fighting From Within

The message of Father is secondary to the obedience it requires as a means of sustaining the world for Librians. If one individual questions authority, it shows weakness within the system, lack of control from government, and failure to achieve Libria's paradise. As an integral cog in the Tetragrammaton machine, instructed and trained for the sole task of seeking out and eradicating any content that might tempt people to feel and murdering those who disobey Father's commands, Preston is a villain turned hero. He eventually becomes a mole for the Resistance, helping them

to infiltrate the Tetragrammaton and bring down the fallacious and hypocritical system.

Serving as a double agent, Preston leads DuPont to the leaders of the underground who are then arrested and sentenced to death. Preston, who is pretending to be a humble servant to Father, requests to have the honor of meeting him as a reward for bringing down the Resistance; however, Preston's actual objective is to kill Father as a way to revive life in Libria. With instant word of Father's death, the Resistance has explosives planted at each Equilibrium center and dispatches armed followers to attack the Grammaton Clerics. To bring about a revolution, even for a day, can result in the triumph for the Resistance.

Comparison and Analysis

If the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, Immigration and Naturalization Service, State Department, and customs had worked together and shared information, several of the 9/11 hijackers and 30 other known terrorists might not have slipped into the U.S. (Brzezinski, 2004). People who we think are one thing but turn out to be another can be the element of surprise that results in our ultimate doom. Preston's actions against the government are those of an internal, domestic terrorist. And although he changes from a coldhearted killer to a sense-offending cleric, we embrace his transformation. As some might agree with bin Laden in his perspective that there is good terrorism and bad terrorism, which is quoted below; others would note the hypocrisy of bin Laden's quote that the 9/11 attacks terrorized innocent people.

> Terrorism can be commendable and it can be reprehensible. Terrifying an innocent person and terrorizing them is objectionable and unjust, and unjustly terrorizing people is not right, whereas terrorizing oppressors and criminals and thieves and robbers is necessary for the safety of people and for the protection of their property. Traitors who commit acts of treason against their own countries, terrorizing those and punishing them are necessary measures to straighten things and make them right. (Bin Laden interview with ABC's John Miller of ABC News, May 1998, as cited in Richardson, 2006, p. 7).

Al-Qaeda's terroristic actions against the U.S. are not the same form as the actions Preston takes against the Tetragrammaton. This allows viewers see the actions of al-Qaeda against the U.S. as reprehensible and those of "bad terrorists," and see the fight against the Tetragrammaton as commendable and Preston as a "good terrorist" because his actions punish the oppressive government to restore safety and liberty to Librians. Through a newfound reasoning against the killing of law offenders on site, coupled with questioning the values of the Tetragrammaton, Preston realizes that, without freedom, without feeling, and without choice, life is but waiting for death.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Six years ago, Aida Farisca, a Philippine policewoman, foiled a plot by al-Qaeda operatives called "Operation Bojinka" that would become the plan behind the 9/11 attacks. Investigators came to believe that the operation, developed in Manila by Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, was financed by Osama bin Laden (Bonner & Weiser, 2006). General Avelino "Sonny" Razon, one of the lead investigators in the case, stated at a press conference, "We told the Americans about the plans to turn planes into flying bombs as far back as 1995. Why didn't they pay attention?" (Brzezinski, 2001, p. W09). Whether an imminent attack was known to the American government or not, September 11, 2001, is a fateful day that will never be forgotten in American history.

Historians generally agree that the United States has always been an extremely violent nation. As effective social controls have long been viewed as essential features of stable, functioning societies (Ross, 1901), because violence never overwhelms the social order, American governmental officials generally look the other way as private citizens engage in violence against one another (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). As a means for resolving issues, using aggression only augments the situation. The construction and portrayal of government oppression in *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* suggest that, even within the 21st century, American citizens should be aware of the potential of government control and oppression as a subject of political concern. In film, fictional dystopian governments can be created

to comment upon reality, thus promoting viewers to consider the implications of political and moral issues.

Though *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* may not be directly didactic in nature, by using a method of dissociation, to compare the films to the second Bush Administration's response to the 9/11 attacks, one can see the importance of response to and prevention of crime, and understand individual reactions to oppression and the willingness to resist it. Each movie indicates an exaggerated form of government control and oppression and how individuals rise up to fight for their rights and liberties. When national security is of top priority, there are times when governments must take measures that are controversial and contradictory, much like the Patriot Act. But the U.S. is simply too big and too unwieldy to protect properly, and Americans are too inherently independent to accept restrictions on their liberties (Brzezinski, 2004). Thus, regulations sometimes must be forced upon us, such as the Middle Eastern roundup and the newly enforced restrictions on air travel. Other times, laws call for a more secretive approach such as unwarranted search and seizures and private communications monitoring.

"History has shown that many repressive regimes begin by targeting immigrant outsiders, then minorities, and in time the general population," warned David Cole, a Georgetown law professor (Brzezinski, 2004, p. 106). Struggling for truth and justice against one's own government is something only a few are willing and resolute enough to do. The triumph following such efforts can be victorious, but at the same time fatal. Motivated by means of personal revenge in *V for Vendetta*, V achieves his goal of transforming an oppressed nation at the expense of his own life.

And, inspired by personal enlightenment in *Equilibrium*, John Preston succeeds with the help of the Resistance in overthrowing a fraudulent and narcissistic government. Absolute power is bound to corrupt, and with no system of law to regulate and punish those in power, it is the two vigilante protagonists, both implicated in the morally ambiguous roles of "terrorist" or "freedom fighter," who use violent tactics to achieve liberty. Fighting for a belief and fighting for freedom may as well be fighting for one's life.

The al-Qaeda 9/11 attacks targeted the U.S. not because of we value freedom or believe in democracy; rather, they were aimed at our foreign policies and government actions abroad. The death of American citizens served as punishment for the U.S. government's actions; as the representative of the people, the government's bad judgment is viewed as a reflection of the American people's bad judgment. Terrorism has created a widespread fear of weakness and uncertainty on America soil. Presidential adviser Karl Rove said, "Conservatives saw what happened to us on 9/11 and said: we will defeat our enemies. Liberals saw what happened to us and said: we must understand our enemies" (Karl Rove, 2005, as cited in Richardson, 2006, p. 40). The public's desire to understand—which does not mean to sympathize or empathize with—the causes of the terrible violence of 9/11 constitutes one of the strongest elements in the American counterterrorist arsenal (Richardson, 2006). Equilibrium and V for Vendetta depict forms of terrorism that Americans on principle would condemn; yet, Preston and V's actions offer the opportunity for Americans to reevaluate and rethink their definitions of "terrorist" and "freedom fighter."

The Norsefire, Tetragrammaton, and Bush administration are governments appointed into leadership positions to serve the citizens of Britain, Libria, and the U.S., respectively. Responding to terrorism in order to safeguard the institution of each society, each government exercises power as a means to "fight terror" and "establish justice." Instead, to varying degrees, power is abused and used for individual gain, despite the perceived "good" that may result. Corrupt actions from high-ranking, power-holding individuals create an imbalance between government and society resulting in criticism and even retaliation. But when power is radically manipulated and authority corrupted, are American citizens ready to take action into their own hands and fight for their values and freedoms?

Americans are so accustomed to minimal government interference in their daily lives and personal liberty as a given right with no restrictions and no cost, that when any change does occur, either for their protection or against it, the immediate response is negative criticism. Films such as *Equilibrium* and *V for Vendetta* can make audiences more aware of existing political injustices, but can also cause viewers to become more paranoid regarding governmental powers and control. It is the effect of personal analysis and comparison of fictional stories to reality where vigilant justice and insurgent freedom can "play fair" in the entertainment realm, where imagination and intellect can inspire individual change.

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