

ABSTRACT

Economic Frames: Transitional Rhetoric under Clinton, Bush, and Obama

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During boom and bust periods, the dynamic status of the economy has become a perennial issue in the political arena. In this thesis, I engage in a rhetorical criticism analyzing how three presidents, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, rhetorically framed economic conditions to justify legislative solutions. I examine how each president prescribed policy solutions during his first months in office. In particular, I argue: Clinton constituted national identity around economic concerns to push his 1993 budget plan; Bush reinterpreted the nation-as-family metaphor to justify his 2001 tax cuts; and Obama injected crisis rhetoric into the American Dream to champion his 2009 stimulus. This analysis provides a foundation for understanding the econo-rhetorical leadership role of the president and the implications it has on framing congressional and public deliberation.

Economic Frames: Transitional Rhetoric under Clinton, Bush, and Obama

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

During the 1992 presidential election, the Democratic Party made three simple words famous: “The economy, stupid.”¹ This slogan was emblematic of Clinton’s strategy during his 1992 campaign: focus on the perceived failure of the president’s economic policies, and his broken 1988 campaign promise.² After his inauguration, the president began pushing his new economic policy. On February 15, 1993, President Clinton addressed the nation regarding the economic program he was to propose two days later. The speech kicked off the president’s “campaign”-style tour to garner support for the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, which set the basis for what would later be later known as “Clintonomics.”

Over his eight years as president, the economy grew and the deficit shrank. However, the growth would not benefit Vice President Al Gore in the 2000 election due to the aftermath of the 1998 Lewinsky scandal.³ Governor George W. Bush tied character to economic policy by “personalizing” it relative to the vice president’s proposals.⁴ After the contested election where Gore won the popular vote and the Supreme Court had to intervene in the Florida ballot count, President Bush had to carefully orchestrate his early policy positions. On February 7, 2001, the president delivered a speech in support of his tax cut proposal that continued the “human touch” he had used in his campaign. Bush heavily involved his “tax families” in raising awareness over the benefits to the middle class from his tax cut.

Like Clinton, the economy grew substantially over President Bush's first seven years in office. However, during the president's final year in office, the largest economic collapse since the Great Depression in the 1930s dramatically shifted the focus of the 2008 election. After Senator Barack Obama beat Senator John McCain by tying the latter's economic policies to the incumbent's, he formed an "economic dream team" that represented "academic smarts," "practicality over ideology," and "Wall Street smarts without the ties."⁵ After working with his economic panel for almost two months, the president-elect delivered a speech on January 8, 2009 focusing on the need to act urgently on his economic proposal following his inaugural. Unlike Clinton and Bush, there would be no extended debate over Obama's proposal.

Focus of Thesis

The study proposed here will examine the rhetorical situation that each of these three newly elected presidents faced and how they sought to resolve the exigencies posed by those situations given their previous rhetorical commitments and audience expectations. Three texts will be analyzed: President Clinton's "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program" (February 15, 1993); President Bush's "Remarks at the Tax Family Reunion" (February 7, 2001); and President-elect Obama's "Address at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia" (January 8, 2009). While other presidents gave similar addresses, most notably President Roosevelt's first fireside chat (March 12, 1933) and President Reagan's "Address to the Nation on the Economy" (February 5, 1981), the decision to focus only on Clinton, Bush, and Obama represents a necessary limit that will allow a detailed examination of each situation. Additionally, the rhetors were responding to similar situations that point to the need to study the aforementioned texts as a group.

First, each president came into office following an elongated period of his political party being out of power. President Clinton came into office following twelve years of Republican control under Reagan and Bush. President Bush followed Clinton's eight years, and President Obama followed Bush's eight years. These changes in political power, especially after multiple terms, are important because they represent a break in party ideology and policy that had not occurred for eight or more years. While this has importance from the perspective of businesses, this is also important for how the president crafts messages and supports policies.

Second, each president was elected with a heightened focus on economic policy. Clinton took over because the economy under Bush was stagnating, and the incumbent had broken an economic promise. Bush bested Gore because little credit was given to the vice president for his role in economic growth over the previous eight years. Obama beat out McCain because the economy entered its worst recession since the Great Depression. While each election featured other important issues, such as the end of the Cold War and Gulf War I during H.W. Bush's presidency, the Lewinsky scandal during Clinton's presidency, and the War on Terrorism during W. Bush's presidency, the first major action taken by each president was to focus on economic policy.

By considering the early trajectory of economic policies under each president, these texts represent significant departures from the previous administrations, all of which were cast out on some level due to public dissatisfaction with their economic ideology and/or performance. Setting the stage then requires a fresh start not only on presidential rhetoric but also on economic policy.

Prior Research on the Topic

There is a substantial amount of scholarship that examines whether there is an actual effect to presidential rhetoric. This debate has occurred between scholars who prefer quantitatively measured effect and those who analyze individual cases qualitatively. In analyzing the effect of speech on approval ratings and other metrics, George C. Edwards III concludes, “[T]he bully pulpit has proved ineffective not only for achieving majority support but also for increasing support from a smaller base. Similarly, presidents usually fail to move the general public.”⁶ However, quantitative models find the reverse. Based on another set of metrics, Matthew Beckmann contends, “Presidents’ legislative influence is real, often substantial, and, to date, greatly underestimated.”⁷ Instead of engaging with this quantitative debate, this thesis turns instead to how these messages were constructed. Martin J. Medhurst argues, “A president normally comes into office with a policy agenda ... such policies take months, sometimes years, to enact. Rhetorical leadership, therefore, must be more than just a single successful speech.”⁸ The effect of presidential rhetoric, in other words, can be considered more than just the short-term effect of policy success or failure. In her analysis on how President Jimmy Carter altered the way presidents talk about human rights, Mary E. Stuckey concludes, “Presidential rhetoric also has important long-term instrumental effects ... to reinforce or to change the terms with which we debate an issue, or to give an issue a particular valence that affects how we interpret it.”⁹ However, tracing the instrumental, or long-term, effects of presidential rhetoric has not been examined significantly.¹⁰

Relative to presidential rhetoric, the study of economic rhetoric has received little attention in communication studies. Deirdre McCloskey's *The Rhetoric of Economics* is arguably the most popular book explaining the subject, and one of the earliest. However, McCloskey focuses on the "conversation economists have among themselves, for purposes of persuading each other" and not on how the economy is portrayed more broadly.¹¹ That is not to suggest that the technical persuasion between economists is not important. Economist James Galbraith argues, "The rhetoric of political economy, 'of economic discourse in the political events,' is ... a rhetoric of translation, of intercultural communication. To understand it properly you have to have a sense of nuance in both cultures."¹² Over the past twenty years, economic rhetoric scholarship that examines the political economy has witnessed a significant increase.¹³

Despite its increasing popularity of study, only a small amount of scholarship has investigated the intersection between presidential rhetoric and economic rhetoric. Leroy G. Dorsey examined President Theodore Roosevelt's use of moral rhetoric in pushing for an economically progressive platform domestically.¹⁴ Paul Stob focused on the same subject as Dorsey, but evaluated the era through the lens of Louis Brandeis's rhetoric as a response to TR's.¹⁵ David Zarefsky contended that the federal government could start social movements through his analysis of President Johnson's War on Poverty.¹⁶ Amos Kiewe and Davis Houck focused entirely on Reagan's economic rhetoric in *A Shining City on a Hill*, but only a fraction of the book is about the Reagan presidency. Richard Johannesen examined how President Reagan adapted the jeremiad form for technical economic rhetoric.¹⁷ Wynton C. Hall and Amos Kiewe, in separate pieces, analyzed the failure on H.W. Bush's part to uphold his pledge to not raise taxes and how that promise

put a constraint on his 1992 campaign.¹⁸ David G. Levasseur focused on how President Clinton rhetorically shaped the 1995 budget debates.¹⁹ Houck investigated the idea of how rhetoric could function as “currency” to improve optimism about the economic situation.²⁰ John Murphy assessed how President Kennedy reconfigured the government as the solution to economic problems, not as the cause.²¹ Martín Carcasson traced how President Clinton framed the debate over “ending welfare” during his first term in office.²² David A. Crockett analyzed how President Bush was able to advance his tax cut proposal despite being an ungifted rhetor.²³ Lastly, Murphy investigated the different rhetorical strategies of Hilary Clinton, John McCain, and Barack Obama in framing the economic downturn during the 2008 primary campaign.²⁴

Missing from this collection of presidential rhetoric on economic issues is an analysis of how rhetoric was used to construct the economic situation, to frame policy responses to that situation, and to shape legislative debates on that policy. By taking these three texts and examining them in the context of their respective presidencies and chronologically across multiple presidencies, this thesis will contribute a fresh perspective on presidential economic rhetoric. By considering how each president justified and framed his economic policy, this analysis will also contribute to general rhetorical theory concerning the instrumental effects of rhetoric.

Justification of the Study

A thesis examining the first major economic speech during the presidencies of Clinton, Bush, and Obama is important for several reasons. First, one of the many roles of the president is as agenda setter. Establishing early policy proposals requires that the newly inaugurated president break away from the preceding presidency. Since each text

follows a break in party power, the president has the opportunity to define the economic situation.²⁵ Understanding how presidents frame their policy proposals to suit this situation is critical to a complete picture of the transition between presidencies, which has only been studied in the context of President Hoover to President Roosevelt.²⁶

Second, the questions to be examined in the thesis are important questions to political science, presidential studies, public address, and rhetorical theory scholars. Additionally, each individual chapter benefits scholars of the respective presidencies. While this study will focus on the rhetorical aspects of these texts, the analysis will be forged with an interdisciplinary audience of political scientists, rhetoricians, and historians in mind. This thesis will contribute a method that can be applied to the change in framing of any issue between or within presidencies. National security, environmental protection, and other issues could be explored via the breaks in ideology across presidencies. For example, there was a sharp contrast in environmentalism between the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft despite both being from the same party. Additionally, a major issue concerning the switch from the Carter to Reagan administrations was the handling of the Iran Hostage crisis. For non-presidential scholars, these breaks are important for understanding how the discussion of various *topoi* changes across time.

Third, the salience and pervasiveness of economic issues require a greater attention considering the use of historical examples in contemporary political debates. Zarefsky highlights these ideas: “Historians not only argue *about* history; they also argue *from* it, using historical premises to justify current actions. ... Analogical reasoning from history has a powerful influence on policy makers.”²⁷ Without understanding how past

economic policies were framed and justified by their administrations and how that framing constituted a break from previous administrations, an understanding of historical economic ideology loses its potential. Thus, this thesis seeks not only to fill the historical gap by analyzing these respective texts but also seeks to bridge the gaps in economic debates as a *topos* of political and presidential debates. By understanding how past presidents shaped policies to address the budget deficit, tax rates, and economic recession, the public can be better equipped the next time these economic factors have to be resolved.

Methodology

For this thesis, I will perform a textual analysis of speeches by Clinton, Bush, and Obama through a close reading of those speeches. The goal of this approach will be to “coax from the critical object its own essential form of disclosure.”²⁸ However, instead of an analysis that simply “begins and ends with the particular object of study,” this thesis will analyze how each text operated in the situation in which it was given.²⁹ In general, the purpose of understanding the “textual context” will be to enable the analysis to “break down its rhetorical elements so completely as to determine how they function individually and to explain how they interact to shape the text as a strategic, artistic response to the exigencies of a particular situation.”³⁰ With regards to presidential rhetoric, the idea that a text seeks to respond to exigencies in a situation is “a helpful starting point for considering the rhetorical leadership of a president, for it parallels the political situation faced by all presidents who must daily deal with ... various problems or exigencies.”³¹ Each speech examined in this thesis sought to meet similar and distinct

exigencies. Each was given to garner support for a specific piece of legislation; however, each rhetor approached this situation in a different manner.

Each of the presidents tried to construct rhetorically the economic situation, the need for political action, and the role of the audience. Thus, each text acted as a “positioned response set within a constellation of other positioned responses.”³² While numerous studies have been done on the economic impact of presidential rhetoric, it is necessary to understand how presidents actually tried to frame that impact.³³ This act is the attempt to contextualize within the political situation within the speech. By framing the economic situation through a rhetorical perspective, the president invites the audience to understand the justifications for the proposed economic policy. For example, President Bush’s speech at the “Tax Family Reunion” had to redefine the discussion on his tax cut plan from being beneficial to business interests to being beneficial to middle class families. Bush attempted to redefine the perceived impact of his policy by framing the economic effect in terms of what it would do for individual families. How this redefinition occurred and how it was indicative of other domestic policy debates will be discussed in the Bush chapter. Understanding economic impact would be lacking without an analysis of how each rhetor sought to change the perception of that economic impact. Hence, this thesis will analyze the speeches to evaluate how they moved from campaign rhetoric to detailed proposals for economic legislation—and why the audiences, including the American public and Congress, should adopt the proposed measures.

Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter of the thesis will review the context surrounding the three speeches. It will consider several topics, including earlier examples of presidents who focused on economic policy given similar exigencies, the change in domestic policy in the post-Cold War era, the ongoing dialectic between actors in the political economy, and the significance of action in the first hundred days of a presidency.

The second chapter will analyze President Clinton's "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program," which he gave on February 15, 1993. The chapter will begin with an examination of the 1992 presidential election between President George H.W. Bush and Governor Bill Clinton, specifically focusing on the commitments that the governor made during the campaign. I will argue that President Clinton sought to reconstitute national identity in terms of domestic policies, specifically economic ones. By doing so, national identity was separated from its attachment to Cold War ideology and redefined to fit its new domestic context. Clinton reimagined the economic focus of national identity through justifications for his economic policies that were grounded in helping the middle class as opposed to wealthy business owners. For Clinton, the goals of such rhetoric were twofold. First, Clinton needed support to pass his economic program. Second, the transition from the Cold War meant that national identity could not rely as heavily on identity through appeals to national security. This chapter will then examine how this new definition of national identity set up the debate over Clinton's proposed economic program.

The third chapter will involve a close reading of President George W. Bush's "Remarks at the Tax Family Reunion," which he gave on February 7, 2001. The chapter

will analyze his framing of fiscal policy reform in terms of benefits to the “tax families” that he courted during the 2000 campaign. While Clinton made similar references to the benefit that middle class individuals would receive under his program, Bush’s use of the family frame was distinct for two reasons. First, Bush was facing criticism that his proposed Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 only benefitted wealthy Americans and business interests. Second, as a departure from Clinton, Bush’s use of family framing was couched in terms of the government giving back to the family, whereas Clinton asked families to make sacrifices for the government. In order to maneuver the issue away from specific economic effects, Bush emphasized the importance that the tax cut would have for families. This chapter will argue that the switch in emphasis is significant because it reconceives the relationship between individuals and the government. Additionally, by leaving out other groups that would have benefitted, such as recent graduates or single parents, the use of family-first rhetoric foreshadowed Bush’s positions on other issues, such as marriage and immigration.

The fourth chapter will examine President-elect Obama’s “Address at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia” on January 8, 2009. By focusing on his use of urgency, this chapter will consider the role that crisis rhetoric played in Obama’s framing of the economy. I will argue that Obama’s crisis rhetoric uses a form of “disjunctive mode” without an adversary.³⁴ Similar to how war rhetoric includes a choice between “us” or “them,” Obama’s crisis rhetoric issues warnings that a failure to act immediately will come with grave consequences for the country. However, it is not a singular opponent that Obama is attacking, rather it’s the amorphous threat of continued economic decline. After establishing that the president-elect’s rhetoric is analogous to war rhetoric,

this chapter will finish with an analysis that is focused on how that rhetoric shaped and framed the prospect for deliberation over the details of the legislation. By reappropriating rhetorical strategies usually suited for times of military conflict, Obama essentially securitized the debate over the economy.

The final chapter begins with an analysis of where presidential rhetoric on the economy is currently situated. It begins by explaining the shift of this rhetoric over three administrations. I will look at how presidents responded to various statuses of the economy from Great Depression-like conditions to mild downturns. After tracing how these administrations justified ideologically different economic policies, I will discuss how this evolution of economic rhetoric impacts contemporary and historical discourse on economic policy. Finally, the chapter will finish by surveying areas of scholarship that are unexplored and potentially affected by this consideration of economic rhetoric.

Notes

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CHAPTER TWO

President Clinton's Economic Program and Post-Cold War National Identity

President Bill Clinton's February 15, 1993 address to promote his economic program was given during the confluence of two transitions. First, the world was still transitioning to a post-Cold War era in multiple facets, as the dissolution of the Soviet Union was just over a year old. With the threat of nuclear destruction via a skirmish with the Soviet Union becoming a fleeting memory, the American public lacked the unifying mechanism that had defined the previous fifty years. Second, the address was given a short twenty-six days following Clinton's inauguration. Hence, the United States was not only transitioning to a new presidency but also a Democrat was in the White House for the first time since President Carter ran the Oval Office in January 1981. Together, these breaks offered the president the chance to constitute what it meant to be an American in the post-Cold War era.

The first transition, to the post-Cold War era, created a new problem in formulating national identity. During the Cold War, foreign policy and national identity in the United States were crafted with the Soviet Union in mind. To be a citizen of the United States was to be free whereas to be a citizen of the Soviet Union was to be a slave, at least from the American point of view. While the period of the Cold War was inclusive of other conflicts and issues, such as the Great Society under President Johnson or human rights promotion under President Carter, Cold War ideologies overshadowed these issues. The Great Society aimed to ensure that the United States remained

exceptional, or as President Reagan would later say, “a shining city on a hill.”

Additionally, pressuring for human rights was an effort to make nations more like the United States and less like the Soviet Union by pointing to the progress the United States had made with its policies.¹

These formations of national identity can be tied back to a traditional conception of the “us/them” dichotomy. Unifying the American public, “us,” required villainizing the Soviet Union, “them.”² Forming this dichotomy depended on the Soviet Union being external to the United States. It was impossible to be simultaneously a constituent of the Soviet Union and a constituent of the United States. Thus, national identity and unity could be formulated through rhetorical opposition to the Soviet Union. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the external “other” was lost, which complicated the ability of the president to unify the American public. Robert L. Ivie presses on this point. He writes, “Patriotism surpassed all other considerations regardless of whether established policies undermined the rights of other people to set an independent course of action. Such blind devotion to a coercive nationalism was grounded in powerful appeals to prophetic dualism and technocratic realism.”³ Thus, being a patriot during the Cold War required opposing the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, Clinton had the chance to offer the first interpretation of what it meant to be a patriot.

The second transition, to the Clinton presidency, resembled the traditional constraints in establishing the next presidency. Rachel L. Holloway argues that this transition came about from the situation surrounding the 1992 election. She writes, “Clinton became the ‘agent of change’ in what was perceived as a ‘time for change.’”

And his definition of the situation resonated with the public's change in political commitment.”⁴ Continuing from the campaign, the transition had to become official during the inaugural. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson argue that a major aspect of this transition is located in the inaugural address, which serves as “a rite of passage, a ritual of transition in which a newly elected president is invested with the office of the presidency.”⁵ While the February 15 address was not an inaugural, it did represent the president’s first policy proposal to the public. Hence, the address drew on inaugural themes, such as transitioning, as a way to justify new economic policies.

By breaking with the twelve years of Republican ideology over economic policy, the address had to set up a new economic philosophy. It had to break from the previous conservative foundations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In establishing the efficacy of his economic program, Clinton had to distinguish it from the previous administration’s program, which was perceived as insufficient in fixing the ailing economy. Wynton C. Hall comments, “In 1992 the economic reality was that the U.S. economy *was* in a recovery. But the perception at large was antithetical to that reality. ... Voters saw an economic landscape riddled with fear, lack of confidence, and uncertainty.”⁶ Bush was unable to convince the American public that the economy was in fact improving, and thus failed at properly translating “economic discourse” into “political events.”⁷ Given this perception of Bush’s economic policies, Clinton had to distinguish his policies from those of the previous administration.

This chapter argues that Clinton managed these dual transitions by grounding national identity in his economic program. Martin J. Medhurst contends that one of the president’s essential roles is being able to unify the American public. He notes,

“Presidents who cannot memorialize, who cannot help us to remember in ways that unite us as people, are presidents who will find rhetorical leadership extremely difficult to manage.”⁸ Further complicating Clinton’s ability to unify the nation is an inherent tension in the American political economy. Vanessa Beasley notes, “[C]itizens often argue about how equality of opportunity might be promoted within a capitalistic system that is guaranteed to produce inequality of results.”⁹ Reagan was able to build support for capitalism by juxtaposing the system alongside communism; Clinton had no such opposing foreign economic system. The president instead posited a new contradistinction by contrasting the economic policies of Reagan and Bush with his proposed economic program. By artfully redefining America’s relationship with the economy, he concurrently defined his ethos as president and ultimate overseer of the economy. Additionally, constituting national identity behind economic ideology allowed Clinton to manage the transitions away from the Cold War and away from his Republican predecessors.

This chapter proceeds with four sections. First, I trace the interplay between constitutive rhetoric and forming national identity in presidential rhetoric. Second, I look at the rhetorical commitments made by Clinton on economic policy in the 1992 presidential campaign that he had to respond to during his 1993 address. Third, I analyze how the president justified his economic program as a transition from the economic philosophy of the previous twelve years and into the beginning of his presidency. Fourth, I examine how Clinton justified this transition with regard to constituting national identity via economic policy given the loss of the “external” Other of the Soviet Union.

Following these sections, I draw conclusions about how economic philosophy may serve as a unifying mechanism for the American public.

Constituting National Identity in the Presidency

An essential part of constitutive rhetoric is its ability to render historically a specific community. With this function in mind, John Lyne posits, “Texts can be significant historical events in their own right” as they have the possibility of rhetorically constituting communities, or nations.¹⁰ Unifying a nation often requires “political myths,” such as the American Creed, that presuppose the existence of a “people” in the nation. Michael C. McGee argues, “So long as ‘the people’ believe basic myths, there is unity and collective identity. When there is no fundamental belief, one senses a crisis which can only be met with a new rhetoric, a new mythology.”¹¹ The end of the Cold War and the subsequent election of Clinton produced such a crisis because the United States could no longer be defined solely as the rhetorical and political opposite of the Soviet Union.

The basis for these myths, such as what makes a person an American, change based on historical events, technological change, and rhetorical evolution. These changes allow for the reconstituting of national identity. Maurice Charland notes:

Indeed, the development of new subject positions, of new constitutive rhetorics, is possible at particular historical moments. . . . Successful new constitutive rhetorics offer new subject positions that resolve, or at least contain experienced contradictions. They serve to overcome or define away the recalcitrance the world presents by providing the subject with new perspectives and motives.¹²

The complexity of the American public is then both a perpetual opportunity and a perpetual constraint. Since the public is diverse, there are multiple ways in which a president could form coalitions. However, by the same process, a president could equally alienate another group. Kenneth S. Zagacki elucidates, “Advocates must negotiate

paradoxical constraints and turn them into founding opportunities or resources for the establishment of a political-moral telos. They must understand that many audiences exist between and among competing narratives.”¹³ The paradox of the American public is often managed by defining identity externally through an “us/them” dichotomy. Mary Stuckey explains, “But often, if not inevitably, the invention of an ‘us’ requires the creation of a ‘them,’ a fact that has led leaders to define another group or set of groups as outside the nation, incapable of incorporation into it.”¹⁴ The Cold War exemplifies the capability of presidents to define America through a stark distinction with another nation. Drawing these distinctions is premised on attaining peace or coexistence through the “defeat of difference.”¹⁵

When national identity can no longer be defined externally, presidents face a dilemma about how to maintain national unity. To manage diversity, past presidents relied on consistent rhetorical strategies throughout the history of the United States. Beasley observes that presidents “have used a civil religious rhetoric of American nationalism to promote national unity” and treated diversity in “highly symbolic yet strategic ways.”¹⁶ Effective unification requires rhetors to minimize diversity that would prevent the formation of a coherent national identity while preempting any concern that diversity is being taken away. Stuckey reasons, “Nation building thus inevitably requires reduction. It therefore also implies inclusion and exclusion. That is, in telling us what sorts of policies we ought to espouse or what sorts of values we hold dear, presidents are also telling us who we are, what kinds of people we have been, and how we will proceed into the future.”¹⁷ Presidents during the Cold War used the Soviet Union as an antithesis by which to promote policies, to cherish values, and to define identity.

With the end of the Cold War, national identity could not be defined as an extension of excluding the Soviet Union. Instead, President Clinton had to set the foundation for his new presidency through his economic program. While Reagan justified the broad ideals of capitalism by posing it as the only alternative to communism, Clinton was left with building support by drawing distinctions with the previous administration's economic philosophy. In the abstract, these economic debates have the potential to become contentious in the United States because the ideals of individualism, equal opportunity, and capitalism are frequently in tension. Given the transition to a new president, these tensions posed a rhetorical problem for Clinton, as he needed to unify the United States to start his term in office.

The rest of this chapter focuses on how Clinton justified his economic program as an extension of one's patriotic duty. Since the end of the Cold War required a new mechanism to unify Americans, the president turned to domestic economic policies in his first year. Instead of crafting an external "us/them" dichotomy, Clinton constructed an internal dichotomy between his philosophy and that of Reagan and Bush. Although that initial step created divisions between various constituencies, the president reunified and interpellated the American public through an economic national identity.

The Post-Cold War Presidential Campaign

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, President George H.W. Bush's ability to focus extensively on foreign policy was diminished. However, this did not stop Bush from attempting to do so in his campaign. Sidney Blumenthal recalled, "The celebration at the Republican convention of the fall of communism was a celebration of the removal of the central organising principle of their

politics. ... The long twilight struggle has ended, but for the Republicans the twilight remains.”¹⁸ During the campaign, the president built a campaign on his foreign policy successes, including victory in the Persian Gulf War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, Bush was not able to build a sense of national identity from this perspective. He could not rely on the use of vilification of communism to craft a sense of national identity nor to garner political support. Instead, Bush had to generate a sense of national identity around domestic policies. On the other hand, Governor Bill Clinton centered his campaign strategy on diminishing Bush’s foreign policy successes and emphasizing Bush’s domestic policy failures. He argued that Bush’s foreign policy success was centered solely on Cold War dynamics and offered no solution for the post-Cold War era.¹⁹ In essence, Clinton criticized Bush’s conception of national identity as still driven by the Cold War. On the domestic side, the Democratic campaign emphasized the now famous slogan “the economy stupid” at their headquarters. That motto was emblematic of their repeated attacks on Bush’s economic policies.²⁰ The campaign prioritized domestic issues in crafting policies legislatively and rhetorically and in turn made them more salient to the crafting of national identity.

However, domestic issues, unlike their international counterparts, feature a multitude of factions and constraints. On foreign issues, politicians could historically rely on the *topoi* of national security and the “us/them” dichotomy. The support of hawks and doves tends not to differentiate between various foes or conflicts. On domestic issues, interest groups have multiple interests. Libertarians, for example, support a liberal conception of rights protection but maintain a conservative stance on government spending. In addition, increased voter access made building domestic coalitions

increasingly problematic. Stuckey remarks, “The social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, the dislocating aftermath of Vietnam, the contentious politics and fiscal deficits that followed Ronald Reagan into office, and the end of the cold war opened the national agenda to various groups in ways that no one could have predicted.”²¹ The visibility of previously dismissed groups required coalitional politics to unify around a new national identity. Thus, the 1992 campaign relied heavily on a post-Cold War narrative that was based mainly on domestic issues. Governor Clinton commented on this fact during the first presidential debate in the 1992 campaign. He proclaimed, “We are too divided by race, by income, by region. ... If the American people cannot be brought together, we can't turn this country around. If we can come together, nothing, nothing can stop us.”²² Clinton used the division to criticize the president's economic policies.

In criticizing Bush, the Clinton campaign also created rhetorical commitments on what the future president would do in his first year. The first of these came in July 1992 when, following bad economic data, the Bush campaign decided to increase its emphasis on character issues.²³ In the same month, the Clinton campaign emphasized the need for new government investment in the economy and downplayed the issue of deficit reduction.²⁴ Clinton contrasted his deficit reduction goals with Bush's, whose economic policies were inextricably tied to Reagan. Since the deficit had largely expanded under Reagan, the Democrat's campaign strategy became a thorn in the Republican's side. While the Bush campaign tried to minimize focus on a slowly recovering economy, the Clinton campaign pushed the need for economic growth through government spending.

The second commitment came as a response to the Bush campaign's attacks. During a session with the American Legion Boys Nation, President Bush remarked,

“What I see is a program that does not address itself to the deficit ... we've got to get the deficit down. I don't think you need to go raise taxes on people right now. I think that's a big mistake.”²⁵ Bush's criticism of new taxes though was not effective. His infamous pledge, “Read my lips: no new taxes,” ensured any focus on taxes would be counterproductive. After the 1988 election, Robert Teeter, Bush's campaign pollster, asked voters what they remembered most from the campaign. A majority of the voters answered the tax pledge.²⁶ Edward J. Rollins, Reagan's 1984 campaign manager, told Teeter, “You can't give it up. ... This is the most sacred pledge he made.”²⁷ The Clinton campaign heavily criticized Bush for going back on his pledge. Amos Kiewe notes that “the pledge continued to haunt George Bush” throughout the 1992 election.²⁸ While the president's focus on the deficit may have been a legitimate stance, he lacked the rhetorical footing to make it effective.

The third commitment to focus on long-term growth developed after the election. On December 23, 1992, the president-elect began countering reports that the economic recession had long been over.²⁹ He said, “We may or may not be coming out of our recession; there are some good indicators that we are. ... But the long-term problems are there, and that is what I have to address.”³⁰ Entering his presidency, Clinton had to handle three rhetorical constraints regarding economic policy: deficit reduction, tax increases, and long-term growth.

On February 15, 1993, President Clinton addressed the nation regarding his soon-to-be-proposed economic program. The speech, given two days prior to his first joint session address, had to operate within the three constraints of deficit reduction, tax increases, and long-term growth. To manage these constraints, Clinton needed to reorient

national identity to be a product of his economic program. Going into the speech, analysts were in agreement that the political stakes for Clinton were high—he might well become the champion of tax increases, not tax cuts.³¹ Additionally, the speech kicked off the president’s “campaign”-style tour to garner support to pass his economic program. The legislation became the basis for what is now called “Clintonomics.”

Transitioning to Clintonomics

To argue for a transition to his economic philosophy, Clinton had to develop a contradistinction with Reagan and Bush. During the campaign, the president connected the perception of Bush’s failed economic record to the policies and philosophy of Reagan. That rhetorical strategy bore similarity to the one Reagan employed when he became president. Amos Kiewe and Davis Houck explain, “Reagan embarked on the presidency by introducing the theme of a New Beginning to signify a radical change from existing political notions and practices.”³² For Reagan, the radical change involved “pushing his less-government principle” and “making drastic reductions in [non-defense] government spending.”³³ While incoming presidents differentiate themselves from their predecessors to establish their own credibility, the decline in presidential approval from Reagan to Bush further encouraged Clinton to offer a new economic philosophy.³⁴

Clinton also focused on the loss of character when Bush went back on his “no new taxes” pledge. Clinton had to establish an ethos and sense of trust with the American public given Bush’s decision to forgo his promise. Glen Thurow underscores, “It is only in the light of people’s speech that we can see and assess the character displayed in their deeds. So the access to presidential character is through presidential speech.”³⁵ Even if the status quo is problematic, changing major facets of a person’s life

requires a certain amount of trust to exist between the public and the president. The Bush administration had lost that trust. Medhurst explains, “After the 1990 budget deal, many people perceived Bush as a man who did not keep his word. ... Once audiences seriously begin to question a person’s ethos ... the damage is done.”³⁶ Clinton, then, needed to establish a sense of trust with the public to promote his economic program effectively.

Clinton began his 1993 address by emphasizing the changing nature of global politics. He told the audience, “For two decades we’ve moved steadily toward a global economy ... a world in which putting people first is more than a political slogan, it’s a philosophy of governing and the only path to prosperity.”³⁷ In contrast, he described the philosophy of Reagan and Bush, “For 12 years we’ve followed a very different philosophy. It declared ... that fairness to the middle class is less important than keeping taxes low on the wealthy, that Government can do nothing about our deepest problems.”³⁸ To contrast the philosophy enacted by the previous two presidents, Clinton drew upon his experience as governor. Clinton noted, “During those 12 years as Governor of Arkansas, I followed a very different course ... I invested in the future of our people ... with honesty and fairness and without gimmicks.”³⁹ Clinton’s choice to demonstrate his virtues was a fleeting rebuttal to Bush’s character attacks during the campaign and functioned to demonstrate the credibility of his economic philosophy.⁴⁰

When engaging in comparison, the initial separation between choices is critical in drawing a clear distinction. Kenneth Burke explains, “To treat two terms as differing in degree is to exemplify the principle of merger. ... And we exemplify the principle of division when treating such pairs as differences in kind.”⁴¹ Clinton positioned the two philosophies as incompatible. His contrast emphasized “division” over “merger” because

a limited government would be unable to engage in the global economy. The president's use of "comparative policy rhetoric" functioned to depict "absolute differences in commitment."⁴² Clinton's choice to set up this commitment at the beginning framed the entire theme of the speech. Burke continues, "One's initial act in choosing 'where to draw the line' by choosing terms that merge or terms that divide has an anticipatory effect upon one's conclusions."⁴³ Clinton interweaved distinguishing the two philosophies throughout the rest of the address. Each economic goal, ideological commitment, and policy goal was understood to be distinct from the previous administration.

Having focused on economic philosophy and his personal character, Clinton turned to specific statistical impacts between the two policies. First, he focused on the unexpectedly high unemployment rate. The president postured that "despite the talk of a recovery" there were still "more than 9 million" Americans out of work.⁴⁴ He contrasted that a "normal recovery" would have "3 million more" Americans "back at work."⁴⁵ He emphasized both points by pointing to a chart, a favorite tactic of Reagan's. But unemployment was not the only problem, Clinton explained, "In the last 12 years we piled up 4 times as much debt as in the previous 200."⁴⁶ The three main drivers of the debt were "tax cuts for the wealthy, the growth in Government spending, and soaring health care costs."⁴⁷ Instead of leaving his criticism at that, the president engaged in a counterfactual. He hypothesized, "If all that debt had been invested in strengthening our economy, we'd at least have ... more jobs, better educated people, a health care system that works."⁴⁸ Instead, the money "was just wasted." Clinton finished his explanation of the detrimental economic effects by individualizing these effects. He clarified:

When you don't invest in jobs and education and economic opportunity, unemployment goes up and our incomes go down. And when the deficits get bigger ... the Government takes more of your money just for interest payments. And then it's harder for you to borrow money for your own business or to afford a new home or to send a child to college.⁴⁹

Clinton's last step was crucial as it "translated" the economic statistics from esoteric graph movements to familial narratives.⁵⁰ During his presidency, Bush had failed to make the transition into the third step. By articulating the economic ills of Reagan and Bush, Clinton set up the need for a new policy, a new philosophy.

Having made the case for disregarding old economic policy, Clinton needed to make the case for adopting his philosophy. First, he positioned himself as the president of the United States, and consequently as the one who would lead the charge to forge a new economy. He reasoned, "The price of doing the same old thing is far higher than the price of change. After all, that's why you sent me here: not to kept this seat warm but to work for fundamental change."⁵¹ Whereas Bush perceptually lacked the legislative and rhetorical solutions to combat a weak economy, Clinton possessed both. Hence, the president drew his economic authority from the expectations of the American public. With that authority, Clinton could provide a new direction for the United States economy. He promised, "Here's the challenge I will offer the Congress. ... We'll invest in our future by nurturing our children and supporting their education, by rewarding work and family, by creating the jobs of the future and training our people to fill them."⁵² By framing his proposal as a "challenge," Clinton predicted the upcoming, difficult legislative debates. Issuing "challenges," however, has the potential to backfire. David Levasseur cautions, "Since it engenders fear, public policy arguments that espouse drastic change undermine their ability to bring about such change."⁵³ Clinton decided to face the "challenge" and prevent "fear" by leading by example. He proclaimed, "Change must

begin at the top. That's why I cut the White House staff by 25 percent and ordered Federal agencies to cut billions of dollars in administrative cuts. ... In my budget there will be more than 150 specific cuts in Government spending programs."⁵⁴ By having the government make the initial sacrifice, the president preempted challenges to the tax increases and contributed to an inclusive framing of his economic program.

Clinton's next step focused on citizens. First, he said he would "ask the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share," but he left this point ambiguous. Second, he addressed those "who gave the most in the 1980s." The president became more somber when speaking to this group. He reflected, "I had hoped to invest in your future ... without asking more of you. And I've worked harder than I've ever worked in my life to meet that goal. But I can't because the deficit has increased so much."⁵⁵ Clinton forced a choice between two rhetorical commitments he made during the campaign. The president could not simultaneously control the growth of the federal debt while lowering taxes for the middle class. Given the conflict, Clinton offered an apology to the middle class before justifying why he needed to break the commitment.

When Bush faced a similar situation, critics universally lambasted him for going back on his "no new taxes" pledge. Clinton did not face similar criticism; in fact, he faced quite the opposite. When he went on the stump the next week in Ohio, residents were holding signs that read, "I want to pay more taxes."⁵⁶ Polls by *Time/CNN* and *Newsweek* "found solid majorities supporting the Clinton plan."⁵⁷ Audience expectations and rhetorical commitments helped shape these reactions. Bush made an explicit and strong pledge not to raise taxes whereas Clinton left it as a possibility. Clinton's proposal also benefitted from the timing of the perceived economic downturn. His proposal was

not a reaction to an economic recession resulting from his own policy failure; rather, the president predicted the proposal would be necessary to prevent a recession. He also juxtaposed the tax hike with government spending cuts. Clinton's proposal represented a shared sacrifice between government and citizen. Instead of leaving the middle class to fend for itself, Clinton changed with the middle class. He promised, "I can assure you of this: You're not going alone anymore. You're not going first. And you're no longer going to pay more and get less."⁵⁸ The president's rhetoric fostered a notion of unity by presupposing what the middle class would not have to do. Clinton's goals and justification for his economic program thus represented a transition from the previous administration.

To finish describing the economic program, the president turned to "the payoff." Clinton declared that the plan would create "millions of long-term, good-paying jobs."⁵⁹ The president argued that even though "deep cuts" would be made in "existing Government programs," his program ensured "investments" in business incentives, education funding, defense jobs, limiting childhood poverty, welfare reform, vaccinations for children, affordable health care, and college education.⁶⁰ Clinton's program was inherently a unifier because it included a reward to multiple demographics. However, the president was not purely optimistic. Clinton cautioned, "Changing this fundamental will not be easy, nor will it be quick."⁶¹ He warned the audience about the "defenders of the status quo" who would "be out in force."⁶² The president called on the "architects of the future" to oppose "the defenders of decline."⁶³ Clinton used an enthymeme to imply the "defenders" were supporters of Reagan's economic philosophy.

By associating them with “decline,” the president provided the audience with a choice. The American public could be an architect and progress into the future with Clinton or be a defender and regress into the past. The president created a contradistinction between the two philosophies. Throughout the address, Clinton offered the audience a series of choices. He blamed the previous economic policies for a slew of problems and associated his own proposals with a multitude of benefits. The president’s economic program was not only materially beneficial; it was also grounded in trust between government and citizen. Hence, Clinton provided the foundation for his proposal to be a site of national unification. With Reagan and Bush, the public went first and received last. With Clinton, everyone went together.

The end of the Cold War brought with it no singular opposition to the United States; the world was witnessing unipolarity. Since Clinton could not use an external dichotomy to justify his policies, the president turned toward an internal dichotomy. The president’s contradistinction between the two economic philosophies splintered the nation into various factions. However, Clinton could not simply exclude systematically supporters of Reaganomics from the United States. A complete removal would jeopardize future political deals and elections. The president’s division along economic lines had to be coupled with a merger along national lines. He had to unify the nation after splintering it. He had to reconstitute “the people.”

Transitioning to Economic National Identities

During the Cold War, Reagan juxtaposed capitalism in the United States with communism in the Soviet Union. When he addressed Moscow State University on May 31, 1988, he proclaimed that the world, due to capitalism, was “breaking through the

material conditions of existence to a world where man creates his own destiny.”⁶⁴ B. Wayne Howell comments, “Reagan’s implicit message was a comparison between two economic systems—socialism and capitalism—and their consequences for humanity’s material existence.”⁶⁵ Since the two economic systems were distinct in principle and in fact, Reagan was able to create an external dichotomy between the philosophies. Even at the end of his presidency Reagan still attached moral frames to the choice between capitalism and socialism. For Reagan, the connection between these systems and the Cold War were integral to the ideological tint in his rhetoric. Houck and Kiewe explain, “By framing matters of taxation within an ideological context, capitalism vs. socialism, Reagan capitalized on the "good vs. evil" theme of cold war rhetoric.”⁶⁶ The choice he posited was never about how to enable growth in the United States; rather, his comparative policy rhetoric offered the audience a choice between two nations. Clinton on the other hand had to unify the nation with a reinterpretation of the capitalist system.

While Clinton described the economic philosophy between Reagan and Bush and his own as incommensurable, he recognized the need to maintain a unified people throughout the campaign. During the first presidential debate, he argued, “If the American people cannot be brought together, we can’t turn this country around. If we can come together, nothing, nothing can stop us.”⁶⁷ During his victory speech, Clinton reasoned the antidote to the division in America was moving away from the Cold War and Reaganomics. He declared, “This election is a clarion call for our country to face the challenges of the end of the cold war and the beginning of the next century. To restore growth to our country and opportunity to our people.”⁶⁸ During his inaugural, the president built on his previous calls by focusing on responsibility. He emphasized,

“Today, a generation raised in the shadows of the cold war assumes new responsibilities. ... We inherit an economy that is still the world's strongest but is weakened by business failures, stagnant wages, increasing inequality, and deep divisions among our own people.”⁶⁹ The crystallization of these rhetorical starting points demonstrated the need to rebuild national identity.

To make unity possible, Clinton turned to the audience “for strength and support” and “to enlist” them “in the cause of changing our course.”⁷⁰ The president implied that without the people and their support, he could do little as the president to effectuate change. At first glance, this notion seems to contradict the idea that presidents need to persuade Congress, not the American public, to pass legislation. However, as a political strategy, “enlisting” the public for the president’s agenda acts as a flanking maneuver. On one side, Congress, facing the threat of losing re-election, would have to manage a determined public. On the other side, the legislature would have to rebuke the president’s uses of political capital to garner policy concessions. In this instance, raising taxes should be unpopular, which would mean Congress could use that notion to reject the bill. But, if Congress lost its primary reason to vote against this piece of legislation, then the president would have a political advantage. Medhurst comments on this strategy, “Scholars of the rhetorical presidency have been fascinated, as well as appalled, by the modern president's ability to appeal over the heads of Congress as a means of bringing public pressure to bear on individual members.”⁷¹ Hence, if Clinton were successful in crafting national unity, the president would be able to use the hand of the bully pulpit to gain the necessary support to pass his economic program.

While this strategy sounded simple on paper, attempting to use economic policy to constitute national identity is inherently difficult. Beasley explains, “By its very nature this presumably shared belief [Lockean individualism] can severely challenge the possibility of a united, inter-dependent citizenry.”⁷² Notions of shared sacrifice depart from the “Lockean individualism” Beasley argues is engendered in American culture. Individuals, whose primary focus is their own economic well-being, usually do not favor denigrating their own position to help out a fellow citizen. However, Beasley also notes this instantiation of the belief “was central to the ‘trickle-down theory’ of Reaganomics in the 1980s.”⁷³

Clinton’s criticism of Reagan’s policies implicitly refuted the notion of individualism in “trickle-down theory.” When Clinton splintered the American public by criticizing conservatives and the upper class, the president also attacked the underlying ideology on which those groups justified policy positions. Clinton’s “defeat of difference” was aimed at eliminating philosophical support. Without trickle-down ideology, shared economic beliefs in national identity would not be in constant tension with each other. Presidents perpetually have to manage these tensions by providing new directions. McGee explains, “Each new vision of the collective life, in other words, represents a movement of ideas (and of ‘the people’) from one ‘world’ of attitudes and conditions to another.”⁷⁴ Since the notion of individualism has the potential to conflict with the notion of equal opportunity, Clinton’s goal was to remove the influence of the former. The new vision is then created by reconstituting national identity without an emphasis on individualism.

In constant tension during the Cold War were beliefs in the benefits of capitalism as opposed to socialism. By extension, these tensions manifested themselves in the incompatibility between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ivie contends that the external Othering of the Soviet Union occurred through the use of “victimization.” Positioning the United States as the victim naturally juxtaposed the Soviet Union as the villain. This juxtaposition enabled national identity to be constituted via opposition to the Soviet Union. Ivie argues that these appeals promise “to reveal a major generic mechanism for legitimizing the call-to-arms.”⁷⁵ Clinton’s call-to-arms, however, was not tied to either an external dichotomy or military power.

Clinton employed a victimization strategy during his address. Throughout the speech, he described the United States economy and its members as victims. Reaganomics and its supporters was the villain because its philosophical underpinnings declared government to be the problem and favored the upper class. Both actions effectively displaced the middle class through the loss of jobs, education, and health care. Clinton’s rhetorical maneuver internalized the economic dichotomy, which had previously been externalized under Reagan. Under Clinton’s view, an American citizen could not simultaneously be part of the middle class and believe in the economic philosophy of the previous twelve years. As a consequence, the president justified “enlisting” the middle class to support his economic program.

For the contradistinction to work properly, Clinton had to go beyond victimizing the middle class and villainizing conservative economics, as that strategy only prohibits constituent overlap. In order to complete the transition, the president needed to constitute the people through a shared understanding of patriotism. Clinton had to “navigate the

permanence/change dialectic” by employing “discourse that fluctuates between the old and the new” in order to foster patriotism.⁷⁶ The president interweaved these two concepts throughout his address. Clinton opened with, “I have chosen this [President’s] day ... to talk with you about the serious problems and the great promise of our country and the absolute necessity for change if we’re to secure a better future.”⁷⁷ His policy goals were not revolutionary. In a jeremiadic sense, the president offered a way to restore the American Dream that he argued had been lost over the past twelve years. Clinton proclaimed that he was sent “to make Washington work for all Americans.”⁷⁸ He told the audience this was a necessity because it was their country. Clinton’s inclusive language positioned his program as being inclusive of all Americans. The president finished his address by going back to the past. He implored:

On this Presidents' Day, we recall the many times in our history when past Presidents have challenged this Nation from this office in times of crisis. If you will join with me, we can create an economy in which all Americans work hard and prosper. This is nothing less than a call to arms to restore the vitality of the American dream. When I was a boy, we had a name for the belief that we should all pull together to build a better, stronger nation. We called it patriotism. And we still do.⁷⁹

Clinton’s closing statements were critical for how he wished to constitute national identity. Challenging the belief of individualism required the nation to unify behind Clinton’s vision. The president defined the endeavor as “patriotism” because it rhetorically hailed an important conviction in the American public: serving the nation.

Clinton’s positive framing of the American conviction of patriotism functioned to unify the public behind a single creed. Recognizing these convictions can be powerful acts of persuasion. McGee explains, “It should be possible to speak meaningfully, not of one’s own, but of *the people’s* repertory of convictions, not as they ought to be, but as they *are*.”⁸⁰ Clinton did not attack the public for its lack of patriotism; rather, he assumed

the public was patriotic and offered them a way to enact that patriotism. The president's appeal to the inclination to be patriotic was an act of interpellation because he already assumed they were. Maurice Charland notes, "One must already be an interpellated subject and exist as a discursive position in order to be part of the audience of a rhetorical situation in which persuasion could occur."⁸¹ Clinton's offer operated as a forced choice for an American citizen. If a citizen opposed the program, he or she was un-American. The choices may have changed from the Cold War dichotomy, but the rhetorical structure was the same.

During the Cold War, Americans fulfilled their patriotic convictions by opposing the Soviet Union. To counter the Soviet threat was to fulfill one's sense of duty. When Clinton created the internal dichotomy between conservative economic philosophy and his economic program, he altered the opposing frame to include choices between two American groups. By defining his proposal as "patriotic," Clinton reinterpreted how a citizen served in America and thus labeled his opposition as non-citizens. David Zarefsky classifies such acts as attempts to expand "the meaning of a term to cover the new case at hand."⁸² Since the Cold War had ended, patriotism was no longer exclusively focused on opposing the Soviet Union. Clinton argued that citizens had a patriotic duty to support equal economic opportunity.

The president's strategy to reconstitute national identity was necessary to reunite the American public after he divided them. According to Zarefsky, "the effectiveness of presidential definitions is to find evidence of such resonance."⁸³ After his address, Clinton's redefinition of patriotism resonated positively and negatively. On the positive side, polls showed unexpectedly high support for raising taxes. In addition, the public

greeted Clinton with signs pledging their patriotism to pay higher taxes. On the negative side, the media and oppositional party were more critical. Thomas Friedman observed, “President Clinton is trying to redefine ‘patriotism’ from pulling together to face a mortal threat abroad to paying higher taxes to face an economic threat at home.”⁸⁴

Representative Jim Leach (R-IA) attacked Clinton for the phrase, “Patriotism and economics form strange bedfellows. . . . Patriotism is when you risk your life, not when you risk your wallet.”⁸⁵ Leach’s comments were demonstrative of a Republican move to criticize Clinton’s focus on economic patriotism. He reasoned, “What Clinton is doing is unifying the Republican Party on economic grounds and creating a constituency of disappointed Americans.”⁸⁶ From Clinton’s perspective, that appeared to be the rhetorical strategy: align the Republicans with the past and make their ideology incompatible with the public good.

By framing his policy in terms of patriotism, Clinton sought to offer ideological support for his program. If Reagan and Bush represented the new villains, and internal Others, then Clinton represented the new America. Tapping into patriotism when forming shared beliefs specifically attacks the notion of individualism. Kenneth Burke comments, “As a patriot he may act by the motive of sacrifice in behalf of his country, but as an individual he may want to profit.”⁸⁷ By offering the choice of economic policies not in terms of perceived benefits or failures but in terms of fulfilling one’s patriotic duty, the American public was interpellated along the lines of Clinton’s economic philosophy. Clinton assumed his audience had a desire to be patriotic; his goal was to make his economic program the vehicle toward a unified public. Constituting national identity in

this way allowed Clinton to transition from Reaganomics to Clintonomics, and from an external dichotomy to an internal dichotomy.

Conclusion

With the end of the Cold War, defining national identity and the requirements of patriotism through a contradistinction with the Soviet Union were no longer possible. Clinton formed a new contradistinction based on internal economic threats, as opposed to external military and political ones. He drew the contradistinction through contrasting the economic philosophies of Reagan and Bush with his own. By interpellating the American public through the use of the shared belief of the American Dream and equal opportunity, Clinton reconstituted national identity in terms of this internal dichotomy. The president villainized his opposition and created a rhetorical barrier between supporters of each philosophy. His comparative policy rhetoric framed the discussion to set up this barrier. However, creating this internal dichotomy fostered its own rhetorical problems. By labeling his opposition as un-American, Clinton posited that they did not belong in the national discussion that their viewpoint should not be heard. Similar to how one could not simultaneously be a constituent of the United States and the Soviet Union under Cold War dynamics, the internal dichotomy fostered rhetorical and political exclusion. Problematizing this exclusion was the fact that the individuals excluded are also citizens of the nation.

At the same time, Clinton's new contradistinction demonstrated a way rhetorical leadership could function within economic policy. Focusing on the political economic myth of the American Dream and opportunity enabled the president to unify the nation. During the Cold War, these strategies were born from military opposition to the Soviet

Union. Clinton's proposal ushered in an era that could develop national unity from within its own people and without the need to villainize other nations. This allowed the president to establish his ethos to lead the nation as its economic overseer—a necessity given his fledgling presidency.

Clinton's rhetorical strategy brings to light the necessity of rhetors to address rhetorical gaps that are created by legislative goals. Proposing his economic program required shedding a philosophy that not only underpinned twelve years of Republican rule, but also one that was foundational to American identity. While the proposal was borne from the changing geopolitical climate, it created a rhetorical void that needed to be filled. Simply proposing the legislation in response to the new economic climate without replacing either the Soviet Union or conservative philosophy would create two problems. First, there would be no unifying mechanism in American politics. The lack of a way to unify the American public over a major issue forgoes one of the major roles of the president—to craft a national identity. A fractured public has no need to support the government or each other. Second, there would be no guiding philosophy. If politicians, especially the president, are to be representatives of the people, they need rhetorical signals with which their constituents can identify. Economic philosophy, in this situation, affords a signpost, a way forward. Hence, Clinton's turn to constitute national identity may have had nothing to do with the sense of American self and may only have been a tool to build political support. As Medhurst reminds us, the goal of rhetorical leadership is “movement toward a goal;” in this case, the goals included a new formulation of national identity and Clinton's economic program.⁸⁸ Either way, the

address transitioned America from the Cold War, Reaganomics, and external dichotomies to the post-Cold War era, Clintonomics, and internal dichotomies.

Notes

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³ Martin J. Medhurst et al., *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology*, rev. ed. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 205.

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⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 30.

⁶ Wynton C. Hall, "Economically Speaking: George Bush and the Price of Perception," in *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 192.

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⁸ Martin J. Medhurst, "Rhetorical Leadership and the Presidency: A Situational Taxonomy," in *The Values of Presidential Leadership*, ed. Terry L. Price and J. Thomas Wren (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2007), 75.

⁹ Vanessa B. Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 38.

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¹³ Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered: Constitutive Paradoxes in G. W. Bush's Iraq War Speeches," *Western Journal of Communication* 71 (2007): 288–289.

¹⁴ Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 9.

- ¹⁵ Medhurst et al., *Cold War Rhetoric*, 206.
- ¹⁶ Beasley, *You, the People*, 150.
- ¹⁷ Stuckey, *Defining Americans*, 9.
- ¹⁸ Sidney Blumenthal, "President Without a Purpose," *The Guardian (London)*, September 7, 1992, 17.
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³³ Kiewe and Houck, *A Shining City on a Hill*, 228.

³⁴ See the chapter on inaugural addresses in Campbell and Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency*. This rhetorical strategy is also a key step in the American Jeremiad, see Kurt W. Ritter, "American Political Rhetoric and the Jeremiad Tradition: Presidential Nomination Acceptance Addresses, 1960-1976," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980): 153-171.

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³⁷ William J. Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program," *American Presidency Project*, February 15, 1993, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=47155>.

³⁸ Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program."

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⁴⁰ For an example of these attacks, see the Bush campaign's depiction of Governor Clinton as "Slick Willie," Andrew Rosenthal, "Bush Campaign Issues Stinging Attack," *New York Times*, August 3, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/03/us/the-1992-campaign-the-republicans-bush-campaign-issues-stinging-attack.html>.

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⁴² David G. Levasseur, “The Rhetorical Construction of Economic Policy: Political Judgment and the 1995 Budget Debate,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3 (2000): 201. Levasseur describes the use of “comparative policy rhetoric” during the budget debates in 1995. Connecting the 1993 budget debate to the 1995 is outside the scope of this chapter, but the insights Levasseur provides generically offer an insight into how competing political factions debate over economic matters.

⁴³ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 415.

⁴⁴ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁴⁵ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁴⁶ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁴⁷ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁴⁸ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁴⁹ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

⁵⁰ Translation is essential in the political economy to build support for legislation, see Galbraith, “The Grammar of Political Economy,” 202.

⁵¹ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

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⁵⁷ Robin Toner, “Voters Viewing Tax Bill, And Saying They’ll Pay,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1993, A1.

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⁶¹ Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program.”

- ⁶² Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program."
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- ⁷¹ Medhurst, "Rhetorical Leadership," 77.
- ⁷² Beasley, *You, the People*, 38.
- ⁷³ Beasley, *You, the People*, 39.
- ⁷⁴ McGee, "In Search of 'The People'," 245.
- ⁷⁵ Ivie, "Images of Savagery," 282.
- ⁷⁶ Levasseur, "Rhetorical Construction of Economic Policy," 203.
- ⁷⁷ Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program."
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- ⁷⁹ Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program."
- ⁸⁰ McGee, "In Search of 'The People'," 249.
- ⁸¹ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," 139.
- ⁸² David Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34 (2004): 612.

⁸³ Zarefsky, "Power of Definition," 311.

⁸⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "President's New Pitch: Redefining Patriotism as a Banner for Peace, Not War," *New York Times*, February 17, 1993, A14.

⁸⁵ Jim Leach, "Metropolitan Desk," *New York Times*, February 17, 1993, A2.

⁸⁶ Judy Keen, "Galvanized GOP Stands Ready to Fight Back," *USA Today*, February 18, 1993, 6A.

⁸⁷ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 37.

⁸⁸ Medhurst, "Rhetorical Leadership," 72.

CHAPTER THREE

President Bush's Tax Relief and Rebalancing the Nation-as-Family Metaphor

After a contested election that required an intervention from the Supreme Court, the political climate following president-elect Bush into his first hundred days required careful orchestrating of his early agenda. On February 7, 2001, less than three weeks after being inaugurated, President Bush delivered a speech at his "Tax Family Reunion" to justify the tax relief plan he was about to send to Congress. With the Senate evenly split between Republicans and Democrats and only a slight Republican edge in the House, Bush had to control how deliberation over the tax relief plan was framed. If the tax relief plan was portrayed primarily as a benefit to the wealthy, its likelihood of passing would decrease. On the other hand, if the tax relief plan was considered beneficial to his "tax families," it would be difficult to oppose. President Bush's speech sought to counter attacks and to establish the ability for the plan to stand on its own terms.

The focal point of the speech centered on two competing rhetorical strategies. First, President Bush employed a narrow definition of family. The president during the campaign and in his speech focused on families who would receive large benefits under his plan. By classifying these families as "typical" American families, Bush defined what it meant to be a family in the United States. However, Bush's ideal family was representative of less than fifteen percent of families in the "middle class" income bracket.¹ Indeed, the campaign selected families that would qualify for none or very few

of the deductions available under Gore's plan.² According to various e-mails and flyers circulated by the Bush campaign, the showcased families had "incomes between \$35,000 and \$70,000" and were "without child-care expenses, college-age children, babies under one year old, or parents in nursing homes."³ Instead, Bush only chose families with older children as the family would qualify for the child deduction credit, which he wanted to double, but not Gore's proposed newborn and college deductions. Additionally, the president solely invited married couples with multiple children onto stage with the sole exception being his reunion address where he invited a single mother. However, he frequently mentioned that being a single mother was "the toughest job in America" during his stump speeches.⁴ While the Bush campaign highlighted only these families during events, wealthy families, such as the Cheney's or Bush's, would have also financially benefitted more under the president's plan. Highlighting only middle class families functioned to repudiate the idea that the relief package benefitted the wealthy in any regard.⁵

The second major rhetorical strategy centered on the role between government and family. Before the 2000 campaign and subsequent tax cut debate, the relationship between government and families had been debated on two major fronts. First, the 1992 presidential campaign included two such events. In May 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle delivered a speech on family values as a response to the riots in Los Angeles.⁶ In another venue, H.W. Bush and Clinton debated the connection between family values and welfare reform.⁷ These campaign efforts set up the second front when legislative debates occurred over the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).⁸ In both situations, government officials, both Republican and

Democrat, attributed the lack of family values to a loss of personal responsibility. During the 2000 presidential campaign and his tax family reunion address, Bush transitioned away from this framing of responsibilities. Rather, he hailed the work effort of these individuals and argued that taxes were blocking meaningful progress to further develop their own livelihood and families.

In this chapter, I argue that Bush's depiction of the typical American family and framing of the role between the government and families presented a complicated narrative. While his "tax families," which reflected a conservative conception of family, were selected to fit his tax proposal, his framing of the relationship between family and government departed from traditional conservative rhetoric. To show this transition, I rely on George Lakoff's development of "Strict Father" morality and "Nurturant Parent" morality that conservatives and liberals draw from respectively to explain the "nation-as-family" metaphor. Conservatives tend to rely on a "Strict Father" morality that prioritizes self-control and self-discipline, and Liberals tend to employ a "Nurturant Parent" morality that emphasizes "empathy for others and the helping of those who need help."⁹ Even though Bush's proposal was a solution derived from "Strict Father" morality, his justification for passage represented a liberal rhetoric derived from "Nurturant Parent" morality.

Bush's transition away from a "Strict Father" morality also served as a bridge between the economic positions of Clinton and Obama. Clinton's stump speeches on welfare reform during the 1992 campaign and the later 1996 welfare reform debates emphasized personal responsibility, an agent-centered orientation.¹⁰ In this chapter, I argue that Bush already assumed that families were responsible and criticized the fiscal

policies that prevented economic progress, a scene-centered orientation. Bush grounded this scene-centered orientation in compassionate conservatism and broke away from the binary Lakoff argues is inherent in the “family-as-nation” metaphor. As a result, he equated the level of responsibility between the citizen and government. Hence, Bush’s proposal departs from Lakoff’s position that “the children correspond to adult citizens, and the parent corresponds to a national leader.”¹¹ By defining families as typical and reshaping the government-citizen familial relationship, Bush was able to maneuver the debate on his tax cut proposal from being perceived as solely benefiting wealthy families to benefiting all families.

This chapter proceeds with four sections. The first section traces how family metaphors have been used to construct ideal families through legislation and configure the nation-citizen relationship. The second section focuses on the 2000 presidential campaign and how Bush used his “tax families” to personalize the debate over competing tax proposals. The third section engages in a close analysis of his February 7, 2001 address at the “Tax Family Reunion” that he used as a means to rally support for his tax cut legislation. The fourth section analyzes how his definition of a typical family and framing of family-government relations coalesced to set up the debate over the tax cuts.

The Function of Family Metaphors

Bush’s reliance on family-based metaphors was not new in the 2000 campaign. John Adams notes that the use of familial metaphors enjoys a long history in the American political canon and serves to “entangle the speaker and the listener in relationships that have *a priori* behavioral expectations built into them.”¹² While Adams focuses on the use of relationships, such as “father/son,” by rhetors, these metaphors

undergird the literal relationship between government and citizen. Lakoff explains, “The link between family-based morality and politics comes from one of the most common ways we have of conceptualizing what a nation is, namely, as a family.”¹³ While Lakoff conceives of these metaphors as being grounded in paternal relationships, Sara Hayden argues that the Million Moms March demonstrates the “political potency” of maternal-based metaphors. She claims, “[T]he Million Moms transform maternity from a personal relationship ... into a public alliance modeled after the interconnected relationships between the moms and their children.”¹⁴ Additionally, Hayden’s research assumes that both political officials and political audiences employ family metaphors as a means of persuasion. In a quantitative study, Alan Cienki comes to a split conclusion on whether this persuasion is effective. On one hand, he finds that Gore and Bush extensively used “family terms” in their three presidential debates. However, Cienki finds only an indirect formation between the “family terms” and the metaphors, suggesting a tenuous relationship.¹⁵ A Northwestern study sampling the narrations of “religious and politically active adults” counters Cienki’s second claim and supports Lakoff’s hypothesis given how self-identified liberals and conservatives perceive certain issues.¹⁶ Taken together, these studies point to the need to investigate how politicians construct these metaphors in order to persuade certain audiences. In this chapter, I seek to clarify these issues with regard to the 2001 tax relief proposal by focusing on how Bush utilized family metaphors in an attempt to persuade both conservative and liberal audiences.

Lakoff’s distinction between the “Strict Father” and the “Nurturant Parent” does not apply to every action or policy supported by conservatives and liberals. Dana Cloud reasons that President Clinton framed welfare policies in a similar fashion to Republicans

during the 1990s. She argues that Clinton “emphasized not government programs, but personal responsibility. . . . He promised, like the Republicans, to end welfare as we know it and to enforce personal responsibility even among those with few personal opportunities.”¹⁷ Emphasizing personal responsibility invokes what Kenneth Burke calls an “agent-centered” orientation.¹⁸ By placing blame on the lack of individual self-discipline to pull oneself out of poverty, critics of welfare programs accuse welfare recipients, the agents, of lacking family values instead of interrogating the surrounding socioeconomic status, the scene.

When juxtaposed in public policy, family metaphors and agent-scene orientations help shape ideal concepts of family through government incentives. Building on Cloud’s analysis of the 1992 campaign, Lisa Gring-Pemble shows how these two factors constructed an ideal family during the 1996 welfare reform debates. She reasons, “Ultimately, these depictions of welfare families serve as evidence to support legislative proposals and policies designed to enforce marriage, paternal economic support, and maternal dependence.”¹⁹ By crafting incentives that reward maternal dependence, the legislation reinforced the concept of a traditional, nuclear family.²⁰ While Cloud and Gring-Pemble do not mention Lakoff’s work, the idea of “Strict Father” morality is intertwined with agent-centered approaches for describing problems, which allow government officials to blame citizens for the lack of ideal families. Martín Carcasson explores this last idea in his work examining how Clinton responded to oppositional arguments on welfare reform.²¹ In this chapter, I investigate how Bush complicated the ideas of agent-scene orientation and traditional constructions of family. While Bush’s primary focus on married couples with children and a secondary focus on single mothers

was conservative in nature, his justification for the problem emphasized a scene-orientation as it identified the tax code as the source of the problem.

In addition to constructing ideal concepts of families, family metaphors form the basis of the nation-as-family concept that Lakoff proposes. Traditionally, the metaphor entails a relationship with citizens as the children and the government as the parent.

Lakoff explains:

We have Founding Fathers. We send “our sons and daughters” to war. We have organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution. Groups in the military think of themselves as “bands of brothers.” In America, we have “homeland security,” where the nation’s landmass is seen as “home” to the nation seen as a “family.” ... [I]t defines the shape of our politics and the major ideological rift that our nation now faces.²²

Figuring the nation as the parent fits within both the “Strict Father” model and the “Nurturant Parent” model. Under a “Strict Father” model, the figuring could be based on the government acting in times of war to protect its citizens, while under a “Nurturing Parent” model, it could relate to government programs that help irresponsible or unfortunate citizens find their way.

Fiscal policy serves as a vehicle by which the parents can shape their children’s behavior. Across the board tax cuts emphasize self-reliance. Targeted deductions “nurture” citizens to take certain actions, liberal or conservative. Megan Foley contends that this metaphorical relationship was completely inverted during the 2008 financial crisis. She observes, “Citizens, refigured as responsible taxpayers rather than irresponsible delinquents, were depicted as surrogate caretakers for Fannie [Mae] and Freddie [Mac] in this reconfigured national family metaphor.”²³ Since the government-sponsored financial institutions needed “time-outs” for irresponsible behavior, congressional hearings figured Fannie and Freddie as lacking responsibility to make

financial decisions. Whereas Clinton figured citizens as irresponsible and Obama figured governmental agencies as irresponsible, both agent-oriented framings, Bush figured both parties as responsible and instead placed blame on the structural unfairness of the tax code, a scene-oriented framing. He argued that citizens and their families were responsible enough to make their own financial decisions but did not attack the ability of the government to make these decisions.

The rest of this chapter focuses on how Bush defined ideal families and used family-based metaphors during the 2000 campaign debate and the tax family reunion address. His definition was conservative by nature because he framed the typical family in a traditional, nuclear context: husband, wife, and multiple children. After defining what made an ideal family, he took a scene-centered approach and defined their economic issues as a result of an unfair tax code. While that approach is typically liberal in nature, as it adopts a “Nurturant Parent” frame, his solution of tax relief was conservative. In order to conceal liberal criticism of his conservative proposal, Bush equated the levels of responsibility between government and citizen, and as a result, he reconfigured the nation-as-family metaphor.

The 2000 Presidential Campaign

Over the eight years of the Clinton presidency, the economy grew and the deficit shrank. While these economic fortunes would normally mean favorable election prospects for the incumbent party in the upcoming cycle, the aftermath of the 1998 Lewinsky scandal had a lasting effect on the 2000 campaign. Al Gore, Clinton’s vice president for eight years, distanced himself from Clinton during his campaign.²⁴ With many voters satisfied with the economy and other issues, the 2000 election centered on

issues of character.²⁵ The Lewinsky scandal extended issues of character to issues of family values, as Clinton's adultery called into question his—and, by extension, his party's—commitment to marriage. The Gore campaign attempted to correct these negative perceptions of character and party morality. A Democratic strategist commented, "Clinton's problems put on hold, a transformation of trying to deal with family ... Lewinsky was a major setback to the Democrats' ability to lead this transformation."²⁶ Thus the quandary for Gore was how to associate himself with Clinton in terms of economic policy but distance himself from Clinton in terms of character.

By contrast, the Bush campaign spent the early parts of the election cycle solidifying how they would use "compassionate conservatism" as a means to garner support.²⁷ While the ideas of compassionate conservatism had been written about years before the campaign, Bush's application of the philosophy to proposed policy "propelled" it "into the national public spotlight."²⁸ The theory, first proposed by Marvin Olasky, provided the connection between policy and character necessary to minimize Gore's strength and maximize his weakness. Bruce Pilbeam notes, "Central to the appeal of compassionate conservatism ... was the implication that it can bridge the gap between the demands for greater liberty ... and those for greater moral order."²⁹ Hence, Bush could use compassionate conservatism as a vehicle to propose conservative fiscal policy with justifications based on family and morality. The campaign even placed a foreword by Bush in Olasky's latest book that came out in 2000. Bush wrote, "Conservatism must be the creed of hope. The creed that promotes social progress through individual change. ... There are still too many for whom the American dream is distant. Compassionate

conservatism is a conservatism that cares about them.”³⁰ The “creed” complicated Lakoff’s binary, as “individual change” is grounded in a “Strict Father” morality, but the aspect of “compassion” is rooted in a “Nurturant Parent” morality. By invoking compassionate conservatism, Bush had the ideological basis on which to connect fiscal policy to issues of character and family.

In order to juxtapose the issues of economic policy and character, the Bush campaign began introducing “tax families” at his campaign rallies. On August 25, 2000, Governor George Bush showcased the Bechac family, the first of his “tax families,” and emphasized the savings they would enjoy under his tax relief proposal relative to Gore’s. Bush claimed, “Under my opponent’s plan, he [Mr. Bechac] gets no tax cut.”³¹ Later that day, at an event in Miami, the governor introduced the Melow family and made similar claims regarding their savings under the two opposing tax plans. After these events, the Bush campaign told the media that more families would be introduced in the following weeks. In response to Bush’s “tax families,” the Gore campaign focused on the minute differences between the two plans.³² By putting a “human face” on his plan, Bush attempted to create contrast with Gore’s tax deduction proposal. In New Orleans, Bush charged, “The so-called targeted tax cut means some are targeted right out of tax relief.”³³ In this particular instance, the Bechac family had one working parent, which rendered them ineligible for Gore’s day care deduction proposal. The next day, vice presidential nominee Joseph Lieberman responded to Bush’s claim about the Bechac family. On the attack, he said that the Bush plan “helps those who need it least” and the Gore plan “might even provide more benefits for them [the Bechac family].”³⁴ The positions from both campaigns remained stable throughout the election.

With two months left in the election, Gore and Bush were virtually tied in polls headed into Labor Day.³⁵ Analysts estimated that ninety percent of the vote was already decided and that the remaining ten percent could be parsed to less than a million when limited to battleground states. The voters shared a few key qualities: “mostly married, between the ages of 45 and 65, ... from working-class families in which both parents work, and the income is between \$30,000 and \$50,000.”³⁶ The Bush campaign recognized this particular demographic when selecting its “tax families.” In an event in Ohio, Bush met with a family of four with an income of \$50,000. By contrast, Gore was still attempting to appeal to a national, generic audience.

In addition to the “tax family” selection process, the Bush campaign began to criticize the targeted deductions proffered by Gore. On September 18, the governor honed in on his opponent at a campaign event in Kansas City, Missouri. He argued, “I don’t believe in the rhetoric he used at this own convention, when he said only the ‘right’ people will get tax relief.”³⁷ In addition to criticizing specific deductions, Bush made a point about the role of government. He proclaimed, “I trust the people, he [Gore] trusts the planners, thinkers and deciders in Washington, D.C.”³⁸ While Bush used specific “tax families” to illustrate the benefits of his plan, he criticized Gore for proposing targeted tax deductions.

As the campaign evolved, Gore and Bush fought intensely over which tax policy would benefit the “family.” On September 19, the Gore campaign launched the website “realplansforrealpeople.com” that it used to promote the savings for the average family under Gore’s plan.³⁹ At an event in Little Rock the same day, Bush claimed, “The hopes of American families are the cornerstones of my campaign.”⁴⁰ By locating the discussion

of taxes and spending on what benefits the family, the debate over the preferable plan became a debate over the family-government relationship. A Bush adviser commented, “The tax cut becomes a surrogate for a broader discussion about values and the role of government.”⁴¹ Bush illustrated this point in the first debate on a question about fiscal policy. After narrating the tale of another “tax family,” Bush answered, “You ask whose plan makes more sense. ... He [Gore] would rather spend the family's \$1800 and I would rather the family spend that money.”⁴² Instead of offering his own counter example, Gore retreated to the abstract details of each policy and how they would impact hypothetical families. Both candidates’ answers were emblematic of the broader campaign. Whereas Gore would come off as stiff or “robotic” during his speeches and the presidential debates, Bush appeared to be personable and human.⁴³

Bush’s use of individual families at campaign events and references to them during the debates did not represent a new GOP strategy during the 2000 campaign. Michael Deaver, Reagan’s Deputy Chief of Staff during his first term as president, introduced the strategy of narrating the tale of an exceptional citizen who was in the audience during State of the Union addresses. In order for the inclusion of these individuals to work, Deaver contended, “It has to be credible. ... Otherwise, it won’t connect with the voter.”⁴⁴ While the media and the Gore campaign repeatedly criticized the Bush campaign for its tax family screening process, the careful selection was necessary in order to ensure that the Bush message on tax relief maintained its effectiveness.

Instead of criticizing the conclusions drawn from the use of the family, the media instead focused on the strategy of using the families in the first place. Kathleen Hall

Jamieson and Paul Waldman argue that the media made a major error in framing the criticism in this way. They write, “[T]he public was ill-served in the case of tax plans not because reporters didn’t spend enough time discussing the issue, but rather because they allowed the strategic narrative to overwhelm a discussion of the facts being contested. . . . [T]hey would have served their audiences better not by discussing the strategy, but by investigating its factual underpinnings.”⁴⁵ The Bush campaign screening process strategically selected the families so that the examples could not be debunked.

While the strategy may have been a “gimmick,” it was an effective one, as it represented broader America. Gring-Pemble observes, “[D]epictions accurately reflect the lived experiences of some American families, select the experiences of others as normative and ideal, and deflect the lived experiences of others.”⁴⁶ The families may have represented less than fifteen percent of America, but the campaign’s construction of the families was broadly relatable to the rest of the nation. Jamieson and Waldman argue that these family narratives provided the Bush campaign with a resource that was hard to attack. They further note, “With the ‘tax families,’ Bush offered a concrete narrative where Gore had only numbers. The family was the Republican nominee’s protagonist—they struggled, worked hard, had trouble making ends meet; Bush’s tax cut would ease their lives.”⁴⁷ Bush’s definition of a typical family, one who would benefit most under his tax relief proposal, became an ideal that other families could relate to and thus be persuaded by Bush’s fiscal policy.

By inviting the families on stage, the campaign created a political and rhetorical resource for Bush to use not only during the campaign but also during the push for tax relief during the beginning of his presidency. Even if the critics were correct about the

numbers in Bush's tax relief proposal, the governor was able to shift the debate from one of numbers to one of character and family values. The inclusion of families on each campaign stop functioned as "performance fragments" in the political scene, which allowed Bush to set the message. Keith Erickson explains, "[R]hetorically crafted performance fragments constitute political illusions—aesthetically framed images that manipulate the public's emotions and perceptions of political reality."⁴⁸ By having a family stand next to him at these campaign stops, Bush was able to personalize the message on tax relief by the visual association between himself and the family and by the narration he provided in his speech. Since his tax relief proposal would benefit the family, even if relatively less than Gore's plan, the inclusion of the family in the "performance fragment" made it difficult for these criticisms to be effective.

Centering the focus on "typical" or middle-class families also shaped what it meant to be an ideal family. Under Lakoff's "Strict Father" morality, conservatives valorize the success of wealthy individuals, as that is a "sign of having been obedient and having become self-disciplined."⁴⁹ By crafting the typical family as middle-class, Bush departed from this morality. The middle-class was not the most "self-disciplined" otherwise they would have been more successful. Although the families Bush chose represented traditional nuclear families, by casting them as typical, Bush complicated the conservative metaphor of what an ideal family was. Setting these ideas into action during campaign provided Bush with a rhetorical and political resource that he could use during the his push for the tax relief program during his early presidency.

The Tax Family Reunion

In January 2001, economists emphasized two significant changes in the economy that altered the debate for tax relief headed into the Bush presidency. First, the Congressional Budget Office revised their projections on the growth of the budget surplus. Initially, the ten year forecast had a budget surplus around 4.5 trillion dollars. The CBO adjusted these numbers upward to 5.6 trillion dollars.⁵⁰ Since 3.1 trillion of the projected surplus was not tied to social security, it would be available to “pay” in theory for tax relief and new spending programs.⁵¹ Bush’s original proposal called for 1.6 trillion in relief, which meant the revised projected surplus covered the tax cut and thus guarded against the potential backlash to its size. During the campaign, the president illustrated the projected surplus for the audience by holding up four one-dollar bills.⁵² He put two bills aside for social security and one bill aside for military spending and a prescription program. The last bill, he gave to a member in the audience to represent his tax relief proposal. With the extra bill resulting from the new surplus projections, the president could theoretically hand that to the Federal Reserve to pay the debt or enact other spending programs.

In addition to a higher surplus projection, economists began to predict a higher probability for a recession, which created a new impetus to frame the tax cut as being a tool useful in sustaining economic growth. On January 26, Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, clarified how much growth was slowing. He said in a statement, “As far as we can judge, we have had a very dramatic slowing down, and indeed we are probably very close to zero at this particular moment.”⁵³ President Bush wasted no time in agreeing with the chairman. He explained, “[W]e need good monetary

policy and sound fiscal policy to make sure the economy grows.”⁵⁴ However, Greenspan also cautioned against a tax cut proposal being so large that it would have a detrimental effect on the budget deficit. He warned, “We need to resist those policies that could readily resurrect the deficits of the past and the fiscal imbalances that followed in their wake.”⁵⁵ Going into Bush’s proposal, the specter of a budget deficit was reintroduced and attached to the tax cut proposal. Whereas during the campaign Bush framed the tax relief as being a reward for having a surplus, Greenspan warned against a package that would undo the surplus.

Two rhetorical hurdles faced Bush as he entered into his address and the soon-to-follow debates over tax relief. First, he had to make sure that the policy was not framed as simply pandering to corporate interests, which had been the main criticism of the Gore campaign. Second, he had to counter the introduction of the size of the national debt as the primary concern for producing a recession, which sprung from Greenspan’s statement in late January. To handle these concerns, the president returned to the strategy that he had employed during the campaign. On February 7, he held a reunion for all of the “tax families” he met on the campaign trail. By launching his proposal with the image of the family, Bush sought to inject the familial metaphor into fiscal policy and revise the government-family relationship. The president revised the traditional nation-as-family metaphor from one of nation as the parent and citizen as the child to one of nation and citizen as equals, or siblings. His use of familial metaphors, implicitly and explicitly, served to change this relationship while focusing on the typical American family.

At the reunion, Debora Miskowskus, a member of Bush’s tax families from the campaign, provided the opening remarks and introduced the president. Her introduction

mentioned the campaign trip that Bush made to her hometown of Arlington Heights, Illinois, and how beneficial the tax cut proposal, which she calculated would be one thousand dollars, would be to her as a single mom.⁵⁶ By having a member of a tax family introduce the president, the opening reinforced the familial image that Bush sought to convey as his justification for the tax cut. The “performance fragment” functioned “to create hegemonic impressions of shared power, cultural accommodation, and political inclusiveness,” as it involved the personal image of a person who stood to benefit from the proposed policy.⁵⁷

In his address, the president immediately capitalized on this inclusion by connecting the reunion to the presidential campaign. He emphasized,

[W]e’re glad to welcome you to the White House. One of the best parts of the campaign was to meet the hard-working Americans who really make up the backbone of our country. I’d go to the different cities around our great Nation and get off the airplane, and there’d be a tax family. And it was our way to put a face on a piece of important public policy. ... [B]ehind all the numbers we were talking about and the talk about budget, there were real, live Americans who will benefit.⁵⁸

In offering an extended narration about the tax families, Bush connected the reunion to the series of campaign stops he made where he introduced each family that served to connect the event to the message he pressed during the campaign.

Moreover, during the campaign, the president visited each family at its hometown, and now at the reunion, Bush invited the families to visit his home. Spatially, the dual invitation created a sense of relationship between the two parties. The event is like a family reunion at a relative’s house. Thus, the spatial location of the White House alters the family-as-nation metaphor by equating the citizens—the tax families—with the head of the government—President Bush. The president highlighted this spatial change

in his address, which reinforced the communal aspect of a family. He continued, “I look forward to you to see the people’s house, the place that Laura and I are now fortunate enough to call home.”⁵⁹ He used this frame to strengthen the personal effects that tax relief policy had on individual lives, which could also be used as a means of deflecting criticism in the debates that were to follow.

After establishing the spatial connection of family, the president reiterated the importance of fulfilling campaign promises. Bush noted, “I have one message for all the folks that were our tax families. . . . You helped me make my case, and now I intend to make good on my promise.”⁶⁰ The president set up a reciprocal relationship between the citizens and himself. The citizens helped elect him and now it was the president’s turn to help them. By equating the two positions, Bush disturbed the “Strict Father” model that Lakoff says is evidence of conservative politics. Instead, the president viewed himself and the families as equal partners in trying to make the nation better. By equating the levels of responsibility, Bush minimized the necessity for the government to “take care of” the citizens, as they were no longer children. In equating the roles, he referenced the multiple stump speeches where he said he trusted “the people” and not “the planners.” Altering the metaphor implicitly criticizes the notion that government spending needs to be increased.

According to Bush, only by working together can the president and the tax families seek out meaningful change in the tax code. Bush returned to a toll booth metaphor that he frequently used on the campaign trail. He said, “[I]t’s as if our Nation had erected a toll booth right in the middle of the road of the middle class, . . . making it hard for hard-working Americans to realize more money for their own. And so we’re

going to start dismantling that toll booth, brick by brick.”⁶¹ Here, Bush reiterated the connection between his tax relief program and the plight of the middle class. Progress in the travel metaphor required that the road be open in order to arrive at a better destination. The toll booth, or taxes, made it more difficult for a family to make it to that place. Originating in his campaign stump speeches, the toll booth analogy referred to a common visual image of a family going on vacation. The toll booth made it more difficult for the family to reach that vacation and by extension the leisurely time associated with being prosperous.

After setting up the problem through the toll booth analogy, Bush described his plan for taking apart the tax code. He declared, “It begins by simplifying the code. We’ll reduce the rates from five to four.”⁶² This move was a recognition that the “tax code is unfair ... to people who struggle to get ahead.”⁶³ Bush connected the rate reduction to the tax families. He implicitly referenced Debora Miskowskus, who introduced him, and the plight she faced while living on “the outskirts of poverty.” The fairness of the tax code was problematic because she paid a “higher marginal rate on that dollar [above \$25,000] than someone who’s wealthy.”⁶⁴ The fairness justification signified an important departure from the “Strict Father” model that Lakoff describes. Instead of celebrating the achievement of the wealthy individual, Bush sympathized with the family who has difficulties in reaching the same level of prosperity. However, Bush also did not move completely into the “Nurturant Parent” model, as he left out the tenet of responsibility on behalf of the wealthy individual to help the single mother. Thus, while the president proposed a policy that would be moral under the “Strict Father” model, he used a justification more in line with the “Nurturant Parent” model.

Bush's dual rhetorical approach reflected the compassionate conservatism on which he based his policy. Tax relief resulted in less government interference in a family's private life. However, the president recognized that to garner support for the legislation, he needed to appeal to left-leaning independents. By using liberal rhetoric from the "Nurturant Parent" model, Bush's proposal appealed to the audience who could ensure its passage. Without that justification, these independents could be swayed by the criticism that the tax cut overly favored wealthy businesses. Bush's reliance on compassionate conservatism minimized that backlash and rhetorically framed the tax relief policy as a liberal agenda item, one that was more politically palatable to the opposing side.

However, the president did not entirely leave out benefits to the wealthy individual. He reasoned, "It is also fair that everybody who pays taxes should receive relief, and that's why we drop all rates. We drop the top rate, and we drop the bottom rate."⁶⁵ Bush never expanded on the specific benefits for a family in the top rate. Instead, he illustrated the policy by discussing a hypothetical "family of four making \$50,000" who would "receive a 50 percent cut in the taxes they pay to the Federal Government."⁶⁶ By only focusing on the entire package for a minute part of his speech, Bush ensured that his message would stay on the middle-class families whom he used as justification for a broader tax cut. The president strengthened this point further by reiterating the benefit to Debora whom, he noted, would receive a thousand dollars. He emphasized, "Maybe for some, the number 1,000 doesn't mean much. ... But for thousands of Americans it means a lot."⁶⁷ The repeated deflection to middle-class families allowed Bush to control

the justification of the tax relief and minimize focus on benefits to wealthy families thus effectively neutralizing the concern originally raised by Gore during the campaign.

After addressing the criticism of benefitting wealthy individuals, the president turned to the issue of the debt. To deflect Greenspan's earlier criticism, Bush reiterated that he would submit a "budget that sets clear priorities, a budget that pays down the national debt, and a budget that has got room for a meaningful, substantial tax reduction."⁶⁸ Like a family who must manage its own budget for their household, Bush extended the analogy to the nation thus further reentrenching the family-as-nation metaphor. The president used this instantiation of the metaphor as a way to discuss the debt. He highlighted, "There's a lot of talk about debt in this town, and it should be talked about—national debt. And our plan pays down debt."⁶⁹ However, for Bush the notion of debt did not end with the federal budget. The president wanted to pay down the debt of the rest of the family as well. He reasoned, "[T]here are a lot of folks struggling to get ahead who have got high consumer debt ... more of the backbone of this country struggle to save and struggle to get ahead."⁷⁰ Thus, the purpose of tax relief was not only to address the national debt but personal debt as well. The importance of the package was that it "understands people need to have more of their money."⁷¹ Bush strengthened the budget metaphor and emphasized that we need to have "strict budgeting" so "when we have surpluses, we must remember" that "its these folks who pay the bills."⁷²

In a typical household, the parents pay the bills for the rest of the household. By figuring citizens as the bill payers, Bush eliminated the idea that citizens were children of the nation. However, the president did not reduce the role of the nation to children. He left the two as equals in his extended analogy. Equating this relationship configured the

citizen and the nation as “relatives *in law*” who were “bound only” by “custom.”⁷³ Adams observes, “The sense of mutual responsibility ... that exists between co-members of the ‘in law’ pair raises an ought emphasis that bears upon the preservation of the relationship.”⁷⁴ By establishing the mutual responsibility between citizen and nation, Bush relied on a familial image that departs from Lakoff’s binary of the “Strict Father” and “Nurturant Parent” models. Framing the tax cut with this familial relationship created a “base of moral consciousness” that provided a “powerful means of motivation that act[s] to ‘familialize’ audiences and sensitize them to the value of their collective potential to meet political exigencies.”⁷⁵ While the tax families were already their own individual families, Bush’s extension of the family metaphor expanded the family to encompass not only all the tax families, and by extension the rest of American citizens, but also the members of Congress.

Forging that sense of shared responsibility created a barrier against criticizing the tax relief proposal. In essence, for a member of Congress to criticize the tax relief package he or she must also refute the familial relationship that Bush has created. Bush finished on this point. He directed, “And so I call upon Congress, when they think about tax relief, to think about the members of our tax family who represent all the people of our country.”⁷⁶ Framing the tax families and Congress as representative of the entire country worked to change the nation-as-family metaphor. While the tax families paid the bills, it was the job of Congress to ensure they had relief. That required Congress to prioritize in its budget in the same way a household prioritizes its financial needs.

The tax family reunion address coalesced three elements to craft the extended family metaphor. First, the president’s inclusion of the tax families at the White House

during the address spatially formed a linkage between nation and citizen. Instead of giving the address before a joint session of Congress or even simply a press announcement signaling the transmission of the legislation, Bush invited the tax families to “his” home, which created a rhetorical and political resource from which he could argue in favor of tax relief. Medhurst argues that places have the ability to reinforce the message of the rhetor and hence “can be a powerful resource for rhetorical leadership.”⁷⁷ Bush created a shared linkage based on place by meeting the tax families in their hometown and then meeting them at his home.

Second, the introduction by Debora Miskowskus and the visual juxtaposition between Bush and the tax families on the campaign trail formed “performance fragments” that associated the tax relief plan with each individual family. Since Bush repeatedly engaged in these meetings on the campaign trail, they became a rhetorical resource he could use during the reunion address. Erickson notes that “[performance fragments] succeed because such prudent performances echo prior events, occasions, and actions. Hence, such ritual performatives privilege the president and symbolically create community, parry dialogue and criticism, all the while imposing political deference and conformity.”⁷⁸ At the reunion, the “echo” effect was quite literal, as Bush invited each of the families he met on the campaign trail to attend the speech. Additionally, family reunions in general function to create a communal bond between the family members, which the president sought to emulate. Forming that bond allowed Bush to deflect the dual criticism of benefitting the wealthy and worsening the national debt because he coupled benefitting the middle-class with benefitting the upper class and fixing the national debt with alleviating personal debt.

Third, President Bush justified the tax relief program not for its economic benefit but for its familial benefit. With tax relief, struggling families would have an easier time getting ahead. Maintaining the “toll booth” would constitute an unfair act by Congress. By offering a moral justification for tax relief, Bush invigorated a sense of familial connection with the tax families and by extension the entire middle class. Without protecting these notions of fairness, the relationship between Bush and his extended family would be lost. Adams posits, “The quality of the conjunction prescribed by mutual dependence tends to encourage an empathic projection ... so that coordination of action toward the ‘survival’ of the relationship can be accomplish.”⁷⁹ Treating another member of one’s family requires an obligation rooted in fairness. Hence, the justification of fairness is another extension of the family metaphor that Bush used.

Reconceptualizing Family

Before Bush reframed the nation-as-family metaphor, he set up his own conception of a typical family in America. Unsurprisingly, the typical family for Bush was the one who would benefit most under his tax proposal relative to Gore’s. However, the legislative function of helping these families also rhetorically crafted a sense of an ideal family. In Bush’s view, this was representative of a traditional nuclear family given his emphasis on doubling the child tax credit. The president also introduced multiple families that featured single parents, who arguably might have fared better with Gore’s child care deduction credit. By adding single parents to the typical family, the president recognized the shift in family demographics and began to depart from the conservative definition of family.

Aside from family members, the president emphasized middle class families as typical. Since his tax relief primarily focused on income rate reductions, lower income households would not enjoy as many benefits relative to Gore's proposal, as they did not make enough to pay income taxes. While Bush's child credit benefitted non-income-tax paying households, he never identified such a family as a tax family or even invited one to be with him on stage. The president's focus on these families, even though they represented a low percentage of actual households, had the rhetorical effect of supporting the vision Bush was emphasizing. The idea of a traditional nuclear family that is middle class encompasses an implicit reference to the American Dream. It is a narrative in the American canon to which multiple audiences can relate.

With the conception of family left relatively unchanged, Bush sought to reinterpret the economic relationship between family and nation. Under President Clinton, economic policies emphasized responsibility on the part of the family. Cloud argues this emphasis utilized an agent-centered orientation because Republicans "condemned single parenthood as if it ... were the cause of social breakdown."⁸⁰ Gring-Pemble and Carcasson both argue that this responsibility justification was a major part of not only constructing family roles but also establishing the locus of change for handling poverty.⁸¹

On the other hand, it was the Republican president who transitioned away from the guise of responsibility in proposing his tax reform. In his reunion address, Bush specifically lauded the work ethic of Debora, the single mom who introduced him. Even though during the 2000 campaign, Bush occasionally criticized Gore's proposal to enlarge the size of government, he did not extend that argument to show that government

spending would cause the decline in family values, as Republicans had argued under the Clinton administration. By gathering the tax families for a “reunion” at the White House, the president equated the roles of citizen and government within the nation-as-family metaphor. He took a scene-centered approach as he placed blame on the unfair tax code that prevented middle class families from getting past the toll booth. His literal extension of the family metaphor, coupled with eliminating the agent-centered approach used under Clinton, allowed for equalization of previously articulated positions of citizen as child and government as parent. Instead, they were equally responsible.

Switching the agent-scene orientation and extending a more inclusive definition of family upsets the binary model that Lakoff proposes between “Strict Father” and “Nurturant Parent” moralities. Although Bush does not fully adopt a “Nurturant Parent” model, since he does not posit government programs as a viable solution, his justification for tax relief is likewise not fully engrained in “Strict Father” morality. Bush chose a solution—tax relief—from the conservative “Strict Father” model, but his justifications—fairness and familial ties—came from the liberal “Nurturant Parent” model. Bush’s use of the family metaphor was both rhetorically liberal and conservative. In order to persuade the Democrat opposition and moderate Republicans to adopting tax relief, Bush had to present the policy as being as liberal as possible. Thus, while tax cuts are traditionally conservative policies, Bush’s use of liberal justifications for the cuts allowed him to minimize congressional backlash and quell the criticisms of national debt and corporate interests. By answering those claims, the former governor from Texas, a noted conservative, introduced a more liberal concept of family and citizen-government relations.

Notes

¹ The fifteen percent of families is based on annual incomes from \$35,000 to \$70,000, see Mike Allen, “For Bush’s ‘Typical’ Family, Lots of Tax Restrictions,” *Washington Post*, September 13, 2000, A01. Another metric described Bush’s ideal family as a husband and wife with four children, which only comprised seven percent of families with children and two percent of all American households, see Jake Tapper, “Casting the Perfect Bush Family,” *Salon.com*, November 2, 2000, http://www.salon.com/2000/11/02/tax_families/.

² Allen, “For Bush’s ‘Typical’ Family,” A01.

³ Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories That Shape the Political World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 181.

⁴ Judy Keen, “Texan Working to Win Back Women’s Support,” *USA Today*, September 15, 2000, 8A.

⁵ Frank Bruni, *Ambling Into History: The Unlikely Odyssey of George W. Bush* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 102.

⁶ Dan Quayle, “Remarks by Vice President to the Commonwealth Club of California,” *Federal News Service Wire*, May 19, 1992, http://www.vicepresidentdanquayle.com/speeches_StandingFirm_CCC_1.html.

⁷ Dana L. Cloud, “The Rhetoric of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization of Social Responsibility,” *Western Journal of Communication* 62 (1998): 387–419.

⁸ Lisa M. Gring-Pemble, “Legislating a ‘Normal, Classic Family’: The Rhetorical Construction of Families in American Welfare Policy,” *Political Communication* 20 (2003): 473–498.

⁹ George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁰ Cloud, “The Rhetoric of <Family Values>.”

¹¹ George Lakoff, *Whose Freedom?: The Battle Over America’s Most Important Idea* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 66.

¹² John Adams, “The Familial Image in Rhetoric,” *Communication Quarterly* 31 (1983): 57.

¹³ Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, 13.

- ¹⁴ Sara Hayden, "Family Metaphors and the Nation: Promoting a Politics of Care Through the Million Mom March," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 212.
- ¹⁵ Alan Cienki, "The Metaphorical Use of Family Terms Versus Other Nouns in Political Debates," *Information Design Journal* 13 (2005): 27-39.
- ¹⁶ Dan P. McAdams, Michelle Albaugh, Emily Farber, Jennifer Daniels, Regina L. Logan, and Brad Olson, "Family Metaphors and Moral Intuitions: How Conservatives and Liberals Narrate Their Lives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95 (2008): 978-990.
- ¹⁷ Cloud, "The Rhetoric of <Family Values>," 408.
- ¹⁸ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 11-16.
- ¹⁹ Gring-Pemble, "Legislating a 'Normal, Classic Family'," 476.
- ²⁰ For a discussion on how maternal dependence is a key factor in a traditional concept of family, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 8-10.
- ²¹ While Gring-Pemble focuses on the justification for passing welfare reform, Martín Carcasson analyzes how Clinton framed the general strategy of preventing poverty, see Martín Carcasson, "Ending Welfare as We Know It: President Clinton and the Rhetorical Transformation of the Anti-Welfare Culture," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 655-692. The use of anecdotal examples to support these causes is discussed in Lisa M. Gring-Pemble, "Are We Going to Now Govern by Anecdote?: Rhetorical Constructions of Welfare Recipients in Congressional Hearings, Debates, and Legislation, 1992-1996," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 (2001): 341-365.
- ²² Lakoff, *Whose Freedom?*, 65-66.
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CHAPTER FOUR

President Obama's Stimulus and the Perpetual Crisis of the American Dream

The 2008 presidential campaign took place in the midst of arguably the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.¹ After nearly a decade of economic growth, the future of the United States economy was unknown. However, following a landslide victory for Barack Obama, economists and voters were optimistic that the president-elect would improve the economic situation.² Part of this optimism came from the groundwork Obama laid in November and December 2008. First, he formed an “economic dream team” that represented “academic smarts,” “practicality over ideology,” and “Wall Street smarts without the ties.”³ Historically, presidents form a special team of economists and experts to prevent an exacerbation of the economic crisis at hand. Franklin Delano Roosevelt formed a “Brains Trust” to write parts of the New Deal. Ronald Reagan created his Council of Economic Advisors to assist in forming policies grounded in “Reaganomics.”

Second, Obama began a series of “fireside chats,” weekly addresses that the transition team uploaded to *YouTube*. Obama was the first president-elect to deliver a series of addresses in this manner. Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush routinely gave weekly addresses during their presidencies, but H.W. Bush only delivered eighteen such addresses.⁴ Given the economic situation, Obama decided to provide a wider outlet for the addresses. Various media outlets positioned him “as Franklin Roosevelt 2.0.”⁵ His radio addresses primarily focused on the status of the economy, with two exceptions.

One address announced various scientific appointments and the connection between scientific innovation and economic progress. His Christmas Eve radio address narrated the importance of honoring soldiers who were away at the war while focusing on economic recovery as a secondary concern. Taken together, the rhetorical groundwork Obama laid during his campaign, his formation of an economic advisory board, and his weekly radio addresses became the foundation for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

On January 8, 2009, president-elect Obama delivered a speech outlining the major tenets of his stimulus plan. Driven by the perceived urgency of the situation, the address featured four dialectical opposites that Obama sought to overcome. These dialectical pairs—which I label *same v. change*, *now v. future*, *gloom v. hope*, and *divided v. unified*—individually presented self-imposed constraints in justifying the stimulus while simultaneously operating together to overcome those constraints. Specifically these pairs sought to answer existing criticism surrounding the Troubled Asset Relief Plan (TARP), to ease the economic concerns of ordinary Americans, and to provide a vehicle to the American Dream.

Interwoven throughout each pair, Obama employed crisis rhetoric to heighten the importance of acting urgently. With the media highlighting the Great Recession alongside the election for the last four months of 2008, the need for a presidential response to the financial crisis was already established. Obama had recognized the need for immediate legislative action during the presidential debates when he claimed, “We’ve got to take some decisive action. . . . The middle-class needs a rescue package.”⁶ Given

the precipitous loss of jobs in October and November, Obama continued the call during his radio addresses following the election and explained the need to respond to the crisis.

The use of crisis rhetoric to justify policy proposals has been thoroughly researched. Jeffrey Tulis analyzed appeals to popular opinion utilizing the “crisis tool,” an approach that he found could become problematic. He cautioned, “If crisis politics are now routine, we may be losing the ability as a people to distinguish genuine from spurious crisis. . . . The rhetorical presidency is now the creator of crises.”⁷ However, Tulis did not provide a distinction between “genuine” and “spurious” crises outside of noting that the Great Depression and World War II were genuine and the War on Poverty was not. Tulis’s criticism falls short as it only focuses on whether the event itself is a “genuine” crisis not whether the presidential response is appropriate.

Previous studies that sought to expand on crisis rhetoric as a potential genre primarily analyzed international crises as a means to prevent or resolve conflict. For example, Richard Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagacki delineated between “consummatory discourse,” where discourse forms the entirety of the response to crisis, and “justificatory discourse,” where discourse is used to justify military retaliation.⁸ Building on the Cherwitz and Zagacki analysis, Bonnie J. Dow examined the differences between epideictic and deliberative strategies in shaping response to a military crisis.⁹ But, foreign military conflict has lost its monopoly on crisis studies. In the edited volume, *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric*, half of the chapters moved away from international crisis and war and focused on various domestic crises.¹⁰ Denise M. Bostdorf chaired a task force on presidential rhetoric in times of crisis and found that the lines between international and domestic crises “have now blurred.”¹¹

The task force pointed to the need to focus on how presidents either maintain or deflate perceptions of crisis. Part of this research trajectory requires focusing on how presidents “maintain[ed] an ongoing sense of crisis.”¹² Tulis’s concern of rhetorically manufactured crises and the routine use of the “crisis tool” merges with the task force’s focus on crisis maintenance. Examining Obama’s address then serves as an important exercise in analyzing how a president sought to reinterpret a “genuine crisis” —the Great Recession—in order to maintain a sense of urgency—or a “perpetual crisis.”

This chapter contributes to this movement to analyze presidential responses to domestic crises and focuses on a “genuine crisis,” the Great Recession, and Obama’s response. Analyzing the president’s response includes two parts. First, the American public—the audience—and the media created a rhetorical situation that required a response. The media compared the significant losses in the stock market to the Great Depression. Hence, Obama’s response required interpreting and responding to that perceived urgency of the situation. Second, Obama used the crisis as a means to justify his stimulus by associating the perils of not acting by privileging one side of each dialectical pair. I argue that Obama framed this crisis through the use of the “disjunctive mode.” In focusing on Cicero’s philippics, Cecil Wooten concludes that this mode requires a “struggle between good and evil.”¹³ Rather than having a military opponent, Obama reinterpreted “evil” as a continual economic decline and the loss of the American Dream. By interjecting the rhetoric of crisis, the president redefined the association between each dialectical pair.

When Obama proposed his stimulus, he used crisis rhetoric to inject these dialectical pairs—and by extension the American Dream—with a perpetual notion of

crisis. While the magnitude of these situations can be rhetorically exaggerated, the event is not necessarily discursively formed. For example, the American audience demanded a response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, which Bush then used to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Applying this construct to the realm of economic policy seeks to uncover the interlocking relationship in the political economy that raises possible counterfactuals. If economists and the media had not framed September 2008 as the worst downturn since the Great Depression, what reactive policy would the incoming president be expected to enact? However, economists and financial analysts heavily depend on statistical measures to direct these narratives. Inflation, manufacturing output, consumer spending, business investment, home values, and a host of other economic data has been measured for the better half of the twentieth century. Hence the role of the president in economic crises requires a “rhetoric of translation.”¹⁴

In discussing each dialectical pair, this chapter will analyze how Obama translates economic data relevant to the financial crisis to justify urgency in passing the stimulus during his January 8, 2009 address. This chapter proceeds in four sections, each focused on a dialectical pair. Since the dialectical pairs develop in a chronological order throughout the address, the sections will each look at where the pair historically originated for Obama, how he employed the pair in his address, and the constraints that the pair imposed on the passing of the stimulus. After sketching the rhetorical development of each pair, the sections will evaluate how crisis was intertwined in the pairs, the interaction between each pair, and how they functioned to garner support for passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Same v. Change

Obama began his address by generically describing how the arc of American history is occasionally interrupted by moments of crisis. He labeled these moments as occurring “once in a generation” and claimed that this was “one of those years.”¹⁵ Moving toward the specifics of the Great Recession, Obama magnified the severity of the recess and located its place in history. He foretold, “We start 2009 in the midst of a crisis unlike any we have seen in our lifetime. ... Nearly two million jobs have now been lost, and on Friday we are likely to learn that we lost more jobs last year than at any time since World War II.”¹⁶ Obama explained how the historical enormity of the crisis affected individuals. He emphasized, “Many businesses cannot borrow or make payroll. Many families cannot pay their bills or their mortgage. Many workers are watching their life savings disappear. And many, many Americans are both anxious and uncertain of what the future will hold.”¹⁷ The president’s use of anaphora connected these groups as the locus of those affected the most by the recession. It was this collective of individuals that the stimulus hoped to help.

Obama heightened the potential of the crisis if action were not taken. He warned, “I don’t believe it’s too late to change course, but it will be if we don’t take dramatic action as soon as possible. If nothing is done, the recession could linger for years. The unemployment rate could reach double digits. Our economy could fall \$1 trillion short of its full capacity. ... We could lose a generation of potential and promise.”¹⁸ To summarize these concerns, he bluntly stated, “A bad situation could become dramatically worse.”¹⁹ By initially framing the action of *changing* as a requirement to prevent

exacerbating the recession, Obama aligned crisis rhetoric into his ongoing articulation of *change*.

After detailing the urgency of the economic decline, Obama maneuvered into isolating a cause for the recession. He explicitly blamed the “worn-out dogmas of the past” rather than “some accident of history or normal turn of the business cycle.”²⁰ Obama criticized, “We arrived at this point due to an era of profound irresponsibility that stretched from corporate boardrooms to the halls of power in Washington, DC. ... The result has been a devastating loss of trust and confidence in our economy, our financial markets, and our government.”²¹ The relationship between government and corporations was where the buck stopped for the 2008 financial crisis. Obama reasoned that since the problem was “of our own making” then it was “not beyond our ability to solve.”²² Thus, Obama proposed that the solution to the problem was one of his major campaign themes: *change*.

Change permeated the 2008 campaign by both sides. John McCain called himself a “maverick” and different from the GOP. Barack Obama portrayed his proposals as a break from failed Bush policies. Both candidates criticized traditional “Washington” politics. Obama’s focus on change was evident in each issue he discussed. Robert Ivie and Oscar Giner explain, “The theme of fundamental change remained the campaign’s rhetorical fulcrum despite the shift in subject matter, and change continued to be premised on an updated rendition of a foundational myth.”²³ Obama’s emphasis on change continued throughout the campaign including his acceptance address at the Democratic National Convention and the presidential debates.

During the weeks leading up to the presidential debates, the world financial markets witnessed a downturn that had not been seen since the Great Depression. With fortunes, small and large, in peril, the American public tuned into economic news shows. Unsurprisingly, the status of the freefalling economy played a major role in the debates. During the first debate, Obama wasted no time in his opening statement connecting the economic crisis to the dialectical pair of *same v. change*. He argued, “This is a final verdict on eight years of failed economic policies promoted by George Bush, supported by Senator McCain.”²⁴ Obama took similar positions in the other debates. During the second debate, he latched on to Bush’s spending, observing, “When George Bush came into office, we had surpluses. And now we have half-a-trillion-dollar deficit annually. . . . And Senator McCain voted for four out of five of those George Bush budgets.”²⁵ For Obama, Bush’s policies represented an ideology that had to be severed from Washington politics in order for any economic plan to be successful.

When Obama introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan in his January address, it was that regnant ideology that he sought to eliminate. He distinguished his plan from the policies of old Washington. Obama instructed:

It’s a plan that represents not just new policy, but a whole new approach to meeting our most urgent challenges. For if we hope to end this crisis, we must end the culture of anything goes that helped create it—and this change must begin in Washington. It is time to trade old habits for a new spirit of responsibility. It is time to finally change the ways of Washington so that we can set a new and better course for America.²⁶

By rejecting the principles and culture of old Washington politics, the president could be implying a number of actions. First, he had earlier criticized the Bush-style politics for contributing to the budget deficit and for lacking transparency and oversight. Second, he had rejected the lobbying interests of Wall Street.

Various factions levied both criticisms against the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, which created the Troubled Asset Relief Program. Obama presented mixed feelings on the plan in a speech he gave on the Senate floor. While he claimed, “It’s the American economy that needs this rescue plan,” he also emphasized the need for oversight.²⁷ He cautioned, “If this is managed correctly—and that’s an important if—we will hopefully get most or all of our money back.”²⁸ Here Obama potentially went back on his promise to do away with “more of the same.” He heightened the need for oversight, but he supported a bill that largely targeted Wall Street banks, as recipients of stimulus money.

While not a significant factor in the election, as McCain also voted for the bill, public dissatisfaction regarding TARP and its perceived ineffectiveness were rampant both before and after the election. During its introduction in September, the *Los Angeles Times* described the plan as “wildly unpopular” and commented that Obama and McCain had “stuck their necks out, politically, in support of the central feature of the bailout.”²⁹ Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who introduced the plan for the Bush administration, failed at positively shaping media analysis of the plan. As a result, the press colloquially framed the policy as a “Wall Street bailout” for its focus on aiding large corporations.³⁰ Notable members of Congress, including prominent Democrat Barney Frank (D-MA) who was the chair of the House Financial Services Committee, began to criticize TARP when Paulson proposed shifting its goal from purchasing troubled assets owned by corporations to assisting credit card companies and automakers.³¹

The principle of injecting large amounts of government money linked Bush’s TARP with Obama’s stimulus. As a result, the dialectical pair of *same v. change*

presented rhetorical and political hurdles for the incoming president. He had to differentiate the two policies given the negative perception attached to TARP. However, attacking the principles supporting the structure of Bush's program would diminish the chances of passage for his own proposal. Additionally, Obama had to deflect criticism resulting from his vocal support of TARP during the legislative debates. The president's reliance on the dialectical pair of *same v. change* constrained his ability to form a coalition of support for the stimulus. To maneuver around this constraint, Obama transitioned into focusing on the "consequences of doing too little or nothing at all."³² Hence, crisis and urgency became part of the rhetoric of explaining why change was necessary.

Now v. Future

Given the rate at which jobs were being lost, the primary focus of Obama's January 8 address was on how to immediately reverse this trend. However, instead of simply focusing on a short-term solution, Obama called for a plan "that will immediately jumpstart job creation and long-term growth."³³ The complexity of economic trends and the perceived importance of certain metrics forced Obama to balance preventing a lasting recession in the short-term with enabling growth in the long-term. One of these metrics was the size of the budget deficit. By relegating the deficit issue to secondary status, the president ensured that in the future there was the potential for another economic crisis, one centered on the debt instead of unemployment or bank failures.

Enlarging the federal debt is considered not only economically unwise but also politically unpopular. President Clinton pegged reducing the deficit as a key goal under his budget proposal. President Bush deflected criticism that his tax cuts would create a

budget deficit. During the 2008 election, both candidates held the Bush tax cuts and the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars as primary contributors to the budget deficit, which had to be resolved to preserve long-term economic growth. In his address, Obama acknowledged these concerns. He warned, “There is no doubt that the cost of this plan will be considerable. It will certainly add to the budget deficit in the short-term.”³⁴ However, the president cautioned that budget deficit concerns paled in comparison to a potential depression. He implored, “But equally certain are the consequences of doing too little or nothing at all, for that will lead to an even greater deficit of jobs, incomes, and confidence in our economy.”³⁵ Enmeshed with the focus on present or future economic concerns were the metrics of jobs or the budget deficit.

By dialectically opposing the creation of jobs with solving the budget deficit, Obama initially positioned his solution as capable of fixing only one or the other. He elucidated his primary concern of fixing unemployment during a series of radio addresses he gave following the election. All but one of these speeches featured recent economic data on unemployment claims (which are released each Thursday) or on the jobs report (which is released the first Friday of each month). In most of his addresses, he paired this data with a hypothetical family who was concerned with paying bills. He asserted, “We’ve lost jobs for ten straight months—nearly 1.2 million jobs this year ... and millions of our fellow citizens lie awake each night wondering how they’re going to pay their bills, stay in their homes, and save for retirement.”³⁶ Obama also provided an early glimpse that the economic plan he was working on with his recovery team would focus on jobs. He promised, “I have already directed my economic team to come up with an Economic Recovery Plan that will mean 2.5 million more jobs by January of 2011. ... It

will be a two-year nationwide effort to jumpstart job creation.”³⁷ While his campaign focused on the budget deficit, primarily as a means to create contrast with Bush/McCain, his radio addresses represented a shift toward a jobs first focus.

To justify his stimulus, Obama reintroduced the budget deficit concern in order to pre-empt future criticism. He argued, “We cannot depend on government alone to create jobs or long-term growth, but at this particular moment, only government can provide the short-term boost necessary to lift us from a recession. ... Only government can break the vicious cycles that are crippling our economy.”³⁸ Without government infused jobs, the economic consequences would be dire in both the short-term and long-term. In the short-term, there would be a “greater deficit of jobs, incomes, and confidence in our economy.”³⁹

Important in his argument was the explicit focus on government creation of jobs in the short-term. However, Obama framed each proposal in the stimulus as being necessary for future job growth. For the president, there was no distinction between short-term growth and long-term growth, as the former drives the latter. He continued, “That work begins with this plan—a plan I am confident will save or create at least three million jobs. ... That’s why we’ll invest in priorities like energy and education; health care and a new infrastructure that are necessary to keep us strong and competitive in the 21st century.”⁴⁰ Each proposal not only relieved short-term upward pressures on unemployment, it also provided an “investment” that would lead to jobs and a strong economy in the future. By joining the dialectical pair of *now v. future*, Obama implicitly responded to critics who focused on the looming budget deficit.

The structure of Obama's argument justifying short-term government "investment" in a multitude of areas was similar to conservative arguments in favor of large tax cuts.⁴¹ Based on the Laffer curve, the Republican Party since Reagan had argued that "cutting taxes is the only way to grow the economy and assure long-term financial stability of the federal budget."⁴² While a provision of the stimulus included a tax cut, Obama's proposals overwhelmingly included new spending initiatives. At first glance, the president appeared to be justifying a Keynesian style policy with a conservative argumentative structure to deflect deficit criticism. However, Obama had previously rejected the notion that government can create jobs in the long-term.

Throughout each specific proposal, the president repeatedly used verbs that indicated a focus on the future U.S. economic condition. Americans were to be put to work in jobs that lead to "developing new energy technologies."⁴³ The plan put an "immediate investment" in health care to digitize medical records. Schools would be brought into the "21st century" with new "classrooms, labs, and libraries."⁴⁴ America would be "retrofit[ted]" with new "infrastructure projects" that would eventually lead to "new discoveries and entire new industries."⁴⁵ Blurring the *now v. future* pair enabled Obama to justify government spending in a host of economic sectors. By framing them as having short-term and long-term economic benefits, he risked becoming constrained by being too forward thinking and neglecting short-term economic concerns. While he framed the immediate consequences of not taking actions, all of his solutions and proposals heavily focused on future economic benefits.

Obama's stimulus only briefly laid out three aspects of short-term economic relief. First, he promised that "95% of working families will receive a \$1,000 tax cut."⁴⁶

Second, unemployment insurance and health care coverage would be extended. Third, the federal government will help “struggling states avoid harmful budget cuts.”⁴⁷ While Obama characterized the urgency in passing the stimulus as necessary to assist families who “cannot pay their bills” and businesses that “cannot borrow or make payroll,” the aforementioned short-term solutions he offered were neither explained in depth nor hailed as a solution to the long-term problem. Instead of focusing on the short-term benefits of energy, education, infrastructure, and health care “investments,” the president only articulated how government spending would enable a prosperous future in these areas. In his call for a better future, he forgot to redeem a depressed present.

Gloom v. Hope

Hope, like change, permeated the Obama campaign and the post-election scene. The president reasoned that if the people had hope then they could overcome any obstacle. During the presidential debates and his radio addresses, Obama reminded the American people that hope was a necessary ingredient in reaching the American Dream. In his radio addresses, the president-elect attempted his best impression of FDR by calming the American people with the possibility of hope, a strategy the media readily picked up. Emulating the “fireside chats” provided an avenue for Obama to foster optimism in the American people.

Roosevelt believed a strategy of generating optimism and hope through speech would be effective in helping mitigate the Great Depression. According to Davis Houck, John Maynard Keynes, who influenced FDR, proffered that “an ‘immaterial’ solution—namely, belief or confidence fostered by presidential rhetoric” could also foster an economic recovery.⁴⁸ Obama based his rhetorical strategy on focusing on the future with

the idea that it would generate confidence in the present, a tactic Roosevelt attempted.

Houck recounts:

Economic behavior in the present was contingent on expectations about the future—a future, Keynes argued, that was largely unknowable. ... Expectations about the economic future could thus affect the economy of the present. Such expectations have several potential sources, one of the most important of which is presidential rhetoric. A president, through a mass communication medium such as radio, could provide the crucial source for influencing aggregate expectations.⁴⁹

Invigorating current economic expectations requires the possibility of hope and prosperity in the future. Without that expectation, economic policy would be doomed to failure, as without “confidence” legislation cannot succeed.

Not to be outdone by Houck’s qualitative work on Roosevelt and Keynesianism, political scientists took up the task to see whether presidential rhetoric is connected to economic optimism. B. Dan Wood and his colleagues found that “optimistic presidential rhetoric makes a difference to people’s perceptions of the economic news and consumer confidence” which “may produce lower unemployment.”⁵⁰ But, that optimism is dependent on an individual’s “beliefs, ideology, information, education, and intellect.”⁵¹ Matthew Eshbaugh-Soha specified that only presidential action when coupled with unitary influence could be directly responsible for economic performance.⁵² While presidential rhetoric may not have a direct relationship on the price of thirty year treasury bills, hope and optimism about the economic impacts of legislation remain necessary, albeit not sufficient, conditions for economic recovery.

Obama’s previous emphasis on hope allowed him to provide a vision about how to reach the American Dream. As an extension of the long-term “investments” in America, his stimulus provided a vehicle to attain that dream. He commented, “I understand that some might be skeptical of this plan. ... That’s why the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Plan won't just throw money at our problems—we'll invest in what works."⁵³ As a yardstick for "what works," Obama postured that the "true test" would be what "put the American Dream within reach of the American people."⁵⁴

Obama's attempt to lead the American public was similar to how Reagan viewed leadership. Jeffrey Cohen and John Hamman comment, "Reagan might have calculated that an optimistic public would allow him greater latitude in policy choice. . . . His ability to foster a sense of optimism would be greatest when he was popular with the public."⁵⁵ However, Obama neglected to focus rhetorically on how to generate similar optimism in the short-term.

His proposals all focused on long-term economic benefits and were minimally concerned with the relief they would provide in the short-term. When coupled with his descriptors about families and business that cannot pay bills, Obama's stimulus lacked much hope for the present. The perceived failure of TARP magnified this sense of hopelessness. Obama had conceded that TARP had not "translate[d] into more jobs or higher incomes or renewed confidence" when Bush signed the legislation only three months prior.⁵⁶ The president's new solution was another large government expenditure. Complicating this proposal, Obama figured a lack of confidence was a detrimental factor to economic growth. He cautioned, "We cannot have a solid recovery if our people and our businesses don't have confidence that we're getting our fiscal house in order."⁵⁷ By denouncing the capacity for his stimulus to provide hope, Obama rhetorically constructed the legislation as not capable of producing business and consumer confidence.

Obama tried to persuade the audience that *changing* Washington would ensure that the policies worked, but he also admitted that the stimulus alone was not going to fix

the economy. The economic pillars that Obama sought to fix were, by his own admission, not the root cause of the current recession. He warned:

[T]his recovery plan alone will not solve all the problems that led us into this crisis. We must also work with the same sense of urgency to stabilize and repair the financial system we all depend on. That means using our full arsenal of tools to get credit flowing again to families and businesses, while restoring confidence in our markets. It means launching a sweeping effort to address the foreclosure crisis. ... It means preventing the catastrophic failure of financial institutions whose collapse could endanger the entire economy.⁵⁸

The president's economic stimulus did not provide a solution, or hope, to any of the problems he listed. However, he framed each of those factors as critical aspects of the economy that needed to be fixed in the short-term, as they led America "into this crisis." By only orienting hope to a future American Dream, Obama rhetorically and politically painted a hopeless present. Derek Sweet and Margret McCue-Enser contend that this tactic produces an ongoing struggle to realize hope. They write, "Like all journeys toward a horizon, however, the potentiality of Obama's hope is never fully realized. The horizon of hope, always just out of reach, requires the ongoing rhetorical enactment of a committed people."⁵⁹ The financial crisis constrained the president's ability to configure a path toward hope. Instead, he was left with the pragmatic reality that the economic situation would likely recede more before it began to recover.

Invoking hope had become a double-edged sword for Obama. If the president appeared too optimistic about the economic situation in the present and in the future, the major justification for his stimulus—to prevent a situation from becoming "dramatically worse"—would no longer be appropriate. On the other hand, if he appeared too pessimistic, there is little reason to support an economic plan that is preconfigured on long-term economic gains. The trend continued in the president's 2009 inaugural address delivered weeks later. As Martin J. Medhurst notes, "The only slight change is the source

Obama uses to proclaim the nation's unity—moments of crisis.”⁶⁰ Tempering optimism is problematic when it diminishes the possibility of hope and confidence. In these cases, Houck reasons, “Presidential rhetoric could also have deflationary results if expectations were negative or pessimistic.”⁶¹ Obama's downplay of early economic expectations constrained his ability to rely on the same rhetorical devices, metaphors, and symbols in the future should his stimulus be proven ineffective. To counter this possibility, the president turned to the dialectical pair of *division v. unification* as a means of expanding the possibilities of hope.

Divided v. Unified

Unifying the American public is a cornerstone of campaign rhetoric and the transition period to a new president. Kurt Ritter figures the unification of the American people as a necessary step in looking toward the future of the presidency. Ritter comments, “By bridging past and future, the modern jeremiad helps Americans to define their present situation as an extension of their national mission and as an opportunity to fulfill their destiny.”⁶² The president's January 8 address did not follow the typical structure of a jeremiad: “remember the ‘promise,’” “lament the ‘fall,’” and “join in the ‘renewal of the promise.’”⁶³ Instead of beginning with the “promise,” Obama emphasized the “fall” as tied to the economic crisis. He then figured his stimulus as the vehicle to “renew the promise.” Elements of “remembering the promise” were interwoven throughout the speech, but they were juxtaposed alongside elements of crisis. This was a departure from his campaign rhetoric. During the election, Obama's rhetoric intertwined *change, the future, and hope* as a means to lead to a *unified* public. During

the campaign, the process was not unidirectional. Emphasizing unity provided the people the hope necessary to enact change as a means to attain a better future.

Obama's focus on unity as a means to reach the American Dream stretched back to his 2004 address at the Democratic National Convention and continued throughout the campaign. Robert Rowland and John Jones note that "Hope can only be achieved in an America where opportunity is available to all because shared identity means more than embracing strong personal values; it also means reaching out to help those in need."⁶⁴ During his acceptance address in Denver, Obama sought to unify the public by narrating the "American promise." He orated, "It is that American spirit, that American promise ... that binds us together in spite of our differences."⁶⁵ For Obama, America should "rise or fall as one nation."⁶⁶ By unifying behind that spirit, the promise could be renewed. Rowland posits, "Hope was not the core message of the speech; it was the product of it."⁶⁷ Obama continued the message of rising or falling as one nation through his victory address, which focused on producing hope and change for a better future. While the president painted in broad strokes the problems the country was facing, it was not until he began stumping for the stimulus during the transition period that he began to emphasize the waiting economic peril.

Whereas his campaign rhetoric figured the desire for hope and change as motivators to unify, the president's justification for unification behind the stimulus was to avoid crisis. The president argued that America needed "to set a new course for this economy" made possible by Congress acting "as quickly as possible on behalf of the American people."⁶⁸ Without a unified legislative branch, he warned, "Every day ... more Americans will lose their jobs. More families will lose their savings. More dreams

will be deferred and denied. And our nation will sink deeper into a crisis that, at some point, we may not be able to reverse.”⁶⁹ Instead of unification being associated with hope, Obama’s rhetoric juxtaposed unity with crisis evoking a negative imagery of what America would look like a house divided.

Even when the president invoked the journey metaphor, he framed it in terms of avoiding negative consequences. He declared, “It will not come easy or happen overnight, and it is altogether likely that things may get worse before they get better. But that is all the more reason for Congress to act without delay.”⁷⁰ Obama reconfigured his journey metaphor to be associated with the need to avoid ever-present crises. Fear and crisis created the impetus for unity not the prospects for hope and the American Dream. James Darsey calls attention to the importance of purpose in the journey metaphor. He reasons, “A critical element of the journey metaphor, the element that distinguishes the journey from mere movement, is purpose.”⁷¹ For Obama, this journey always had the potential to realize the American Dream even though it had yet to be realized. However, by repeatedly emphasizing the need to avoid crisis, the metaphor became piecemeal in only attempting to focus on a singular event at a time, in this case avoiding a severe economic depression.

By separating the journey from its overall goal, the call to action is always needed. There will always be another crisis to handle before the American Dream can ever be realized, essentially placing the American public in a perpetual state of crisis. Obama seemed to acknowledge that this crisis is ever present in American politics. He said, “I’m calling on all Americans ... to put good ideas ahead of the old ideological battles; a sense of common purpose above the narrow partisanship.”⁷² The president

reasoned that unity was a recurring concept in history. Obama argued, “It is this spirit that will enable us to confront this challenge with the same spirit that has led previous generations to face down war, depression, and fear itself.”⁷³ While the desire for the American Dream is inherent in the people, the constant need to overcome crisis in each generation is also part of the DNA of the American public.

Obama’s use of crisis rhetoric as a means to foster a unified identity was an attempt to patch over an ongoing dilemma in the American political economy. Vanessa Beasley describes achieving the “American Dream” as a “sign of strength, self-reliance, and the ability to overcome the past;” however, “the means by which individuals might achieve these goals can be controversial” and may ultimately place a strain on the “potential for American political community.”⁷⁴ In examining conservative rhetoric about the “American Dream,” James Aune argues, “‘Government’ serves as the scapegoating device for all the ills in the body politic, and ... the market assumes the role of hero in vanquishing government.”⁷⁵ In considering liberal rhetoric on the issue, John Murphy concludes that “reason” allows one “to ‘see’ the world better than rivals,” which is key to “knowing” the world, and the lack of reason results in the conclusion that “government programs” directed toward the economy “are useless at best and counterproductive at worst.”⁷⁶ These tensions are representative of the interactions between politicians and economic interest groups, which manifest during times of economic crises.

The president’s strategy of turning to crisis rhetoric as the primary driver of unity functioned to reconcile the tension between individual and community in economic rhetoric. However, Obama’s use of crisis rhetoric complicated his ability to maintain the

focus on *change*, *hope*, and the *future*. A focus on crisis required elevating *gloom* in the *present*. Since Obama's campaign rhetoric of reaching the American Dream was contingent on producing *hope* for a better *future*, framing crisis as the reason to act and as a perpetual condition in politics constrained the president from associating those ideals with his stimulus. In essence, his justifications for acting urgently and avoiding crisis worked against his ability to foster a rhetorical stimulus.

Perpetuating Crisis in the Dialectical Pairs

In order to justify his stimulus proposal, Obama juxtaposed and reinterpreted the dialectical pairs he used during his campaign through the lens of crisis. *Change*, *future*, *hope*, and *unity* became understood through their relationship to the ongoing financial crisis and the impact failing to act urgently would have in realizing the American Dream. Obama's rhetorical maneuver to introduce elements of crisis complicated his ability to return to the narrative that he promoted during the campaign. The *same* old style of politics in Washington were responsible for the economic decline, but Obama's solution to *change* this style of politics was to return to the *same* American spirit that overcame past crises. Alleviating the present crisis required "investing" in the *future* to prevent it from occurring again, but the solution offered little for the present. *Hope* was tempered by the crisis, as persuading to a sense of urgency and crisis requires the absence of hope. Striving for *unity* became necessary to avoid crisis rather than a motive for reaching the American Dream.

Intertwining these dialectical pairs with crisis rhetoric constrained the president's ability to defend the stimulus proposal and any possible effect, good or bad, it would have. If the stimulus was perceived as failing, the president's call to urgency could be

labeled as the culprit, a popular criticism of TARP. Obama's pre-emption of this criticism aligned a notion of perpetual crisis with the ability to reach the American Dream. By arguing that additional steps were necessary to fix the recession, the president provided the foundation for defending a potentially lackluster stimulus, as the amount of spending in the stimulus was substantially less than his team proposed, by creating the impetus for an ever-present crisis.

Initial criticism of the proposal emphasized deficit concerns. House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) attacked the proposal for not focusing on immediate economic needs and only proposing increased government spending for long-term goals.⁷⁷ The president's rhetorical balancing act between the current and future economic concerns heavily blurred this division. By invoking a perpetual sense of crisis, Obama's rhetoric implied that a deficit crisis was ultimately inevitable but that his stimulus offered the best chance to avoid a short-term depression. The other defense the president fostered against critics of Keynesian solutions was introducing oversight, regulation, and transparency on how the spending would be allocated. However, emphasizing transparency as a solution was overshadowed by the perception of TARP's failure.

When Congress ultimately passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 on February 17, the bill included \$787 billion for government spending on public works, health care, technology, education, and energy.⁷⁸ This amount was near the low end of an expected range from \$775 billion to \$1.2 trillion.⁷⁹ However, the bill did not receive a single vote from a House Republican, and Speaker Boehner criticized the Act's emphasis on spending, "The president made clear when we started this process that this was about jobs ... and what it's turned into is nothing more than spending."⁸⁰ Even

though Congress met the urgent deadline that Obama had set, the proposal polarized Republicans and Democrats, representative of the larger economic tensions in American politics that Beasley identifies.

While the president criticized a few Republican solutions in his address on alleviating the recession, Obama's use of crisis rhetoric never identified those strategies as the "evil" over which the "good" had to triumph. Instead, his use of the "disjunctive mode" focused on the amorphous threat of an economic depression. Obama's emphasis on urgency functioned as the means to temporarily defeat evil. However, by intertwining urgency and crisis into the pursuit of the American Dream, the president ensured that those elements would be perpetual. Sweet and McCue-Enser note that "Addressing such significant problems ... doesn't occur in the halls of Congress but in the continuous communicative action of individuals who, in their day-to-day rhetorical performance of the people, remain committed to striving toward a world that ought to be."⁸¹ Since the journey never ends, crisis must always be overcome.

Without the hope and future possibility of the journey ending, the American Dream remains perpetually out of reach. Each generation has "one of those years" where they must "set a new course" for the nation. Obama illustrated that past generations had to handle "war, depression, and fear itself." He never portrayed the American Dream as something that has ever been achieved. Instead, it is an ideal that is perpetually strived for and never realized in the United States. For Obama, the crisis is not in having "dreams deferred," the crisis arises when *hope* for the *future* ceases to exist. Crisis is heightened when the nation is *divided* and cannot *change*. Since those dialectical pairs

are in constant tension—like the economic values of individual versus community—the American Dream is perpetually in crisis.

Notes

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

What does all this mean?

—Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*

This thesis explored how Clinton, Bush, and Obama attempted to soothe the “animal spirits” through contextualizing their proposed economic legislation as a solution to economic concerns. Each president positioned his policy within a constellation of campaign-established *topoi*, economic data, oppositional critique, prior commitment, and audience expectation. By closely examining the internal and external contextualization of economic concerns, this thesis investigated how each rhetor navigated a sea of constraints and exigencies. The analysis in the previous chapters provided a better understanding of how each president framed the economic situation in order to justify policy proposals. The study attempted to fill a void within the scholarship on presidential and economic rhetoric by focusing on transitional periods in terms of economic ideology, political power, and legislative direction. Examining these transitional periods provides an account of how presidents attempted to exhibit “econo-rhetorical” leadership by fostering economic certainty despite philosophical shifts and a transfer of presidential authority.¹

The rest of this chapter is broken into two sections. The first section summarizes how Clinton, Bush, and Obama justified their economic proposals by making appeals to national identity, family, and crisis respectively. The section concludes by focusing on how econo-rhetorical leadership evolved over these three presidencies and how that

evolution is important to both presidential rhetoric and economic rhetoric scholarship. The second section discusses two limitations in the research performed in this thesis: a narrow focus on early presidencies and on philosophical and authoritative breaks. The section concludes by elucidating how these limitations serve as starting points for areas of potential research that would continue the research trajectory based upon the work of this thesis.

The Evolution of Econo-Rhetorical Leadership

The end of the Cold War was a major event that required refashioning a number of contingencies, one of which was how presidents formulated national identity. The 1992 campaign was the first presidential election following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which removed a heavily used campaign topic from the candidates' arsenal. Analyzing this period and Clinton's subsequent economic proposal is important given the break his campaign and his economic proposal made from Reaganomics and Cold War dynamics. Additionally, the chapter's focus on Clinton's early economic rhetoric fills a gap in the scholarship on Clinton, which has been skewed toward budget and welfare debates in his later years.

The chapter examined how the president navigated the transitional periods to the post-Cold War era and to his own presidency and drew upon those transitions as means to promote his economic program. In so doing, Clinton relied on fostering an intranational dichotomy between the "defenders of decline" and the "architects of the future" instead of an international dichotomy between communism in the Soviet Union and capitalism in the United States. That maneuver allowed Clinton to break not only from the economic ideology purported by Reagan but also from Cold War dynamics. Ultimately, his

proposal and its rhetorical justification transitioned economic policy from the realm of competing international ideologies to a struggle between domestic constituencies.

Inherent tensions within economic legislation and philosophy, however, were not novel during the Clinton presidency. Vanessa B. Beasley found that within the American lexicon the ideal of “equality of opportunity” is at odds with the capitalist system that is “guaranteed to produce inequality of results.”² Clinton’s rhetoric is demonstrative of how presidents seek to manage that tension by finding new ways to strengthen one side or the other. The president supported “equality of opportunity” by proposing a policy “in which all Americans work hard and prosper” grounded in “patriotism.”³ Hence, appeals to national identity operated as the rhetorical fulcrum for Clinton’s proposal.

The president’s economic program relied on generating support for raising tax rates, a goal at its onset that appeared doomed to fail. In economic rhetoric, taxes are always configured as a necessary evil that politicians and economists wish to minimize. However, Clinton diminished the importance of tax rates, a major break from Reagan’s economic rhetoric. He instead focused on the significance of the budget deficit and its detrimental effect on other metrics, such as health care costs, unemployment, and investment. Effectively managing federal debt levels requires a balancing act between present and future concerns. The specter of government debt is often rhetorically magnified to induce action; however, those acts require enduring short-term consequences resulting from raising taxes or cutting government spending. To navigate the balancing act, Clinton relied on appeals to patriotism. He argued that self-sacrifice in the short-term is necessary to lay the foundation to attain the American Dream in the

long-term. Clinton attempted to reframe paying higher taxes from being a necessary evil to fulfilling one's patriotic duty as a citizen, a notion Bush would subsequently reject.

The chapter on George W. Bush's address at the Tax Family Reunion provides a contemporary example of reconfiguring the economic relationship between the nation and its citizens. Analysis of the campaign for tax reform during the 2000 election and Bush's first year in office provides a glimpse into how an infamous piece of economic legislation was rhetorically framed and justified. At the end of the Bush presidency enacting the "Bush Tax Cuts," referring to the 2001 and subsequent 2003 pieces of legislation, contributed significantly to the growth of the deficit. The chapter then provides an important bridge in what David Zarefsky calls the "historical study of rhetorical events."⁴

Two major rhetorical events are historically located by analyzing the Tax Family Reunion speech. First, the economic relationship between the nation and citizen was configured with nation as parent and citizen as child prior to Bush taking office. This was evident in Clinton's justification and framing of welfare reform emphasizing the need for personal responsibility.⁵ That understanding of the "nation-as-family" metaphor is grounded in Lakoff's historical work.⁶ Foley argues that the metaphor became inverted at the end of Bush's presidency during the Great Recession of 2008 and subsequent debates on reforming financial institutions.⁷ Understanding how Bush balanced this metaphor during the 2000 campaign and his 2001 address helps bridge Lakoff's and Foley's scholarship. That nexus serves as a starting point to understand other uses of the nation-as-family metaphor.

Second, the chapter provides a rhetorical starting point to understand the history of the Bush tax cuts. Occasionally, major policy initiatives are recycled and reused as justification in favor of or against future legislation. During the Obama presidency, which heavily focused on economic legislative debate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, Reaganomics, Clinton's surplus, and the Bush tax cuts were all advanced as positive or negative measures or theoretical frameworks. The first three of these historical examples have all been researched in some form whereas the rhetorical framing of the Bush tax cuts has been examined only to the extent that it affects deliberation.⁸

To forge this historical bridge, Bush presented a complicated narrative given his conservative depiction of the typical American family and his liberal justification for adopting tax relief. The president crafted "performance fragments" when he included his "tax families" at campaign stops. The visual presence of the family juxtaposed with the verbal imagery in his speeches helped create "political illusions" that functioned to "manipulate the public's emotions and perceptions of political reality."⁹ Bush argued that the government should be compassionate with regard to its policies that affected these families. That aspect of compassion, which drew upon the influence of compassionate conservatism, blurred the distinction between Lakoff's "Strict Father" morality and "Nurturant Parent" morality. By blurring that distinction, the president's rhetoric functioned to balance the relationship in the "nation-as-family" metaphor. He took a scene-centered approach as he placed blame on the unfair tax code that prevented middle class families from getting past the toll booth instead of the agent-centered perspective inherent in Clinton's approach to welfare reform. That rhetorical strategy allowed for equalization of previously held positions of citizen as child and government

as parent. Instead, they were equally responsible. Bush's address at the reunion exemplified this complicated narrative and set in motion the formal proposal of the tax relief legislation.

The chapter on Barack Obama's address on the stimulus engages the intersection of two recurring topics in presidential rhetoric: the American Dream and the crisis speech. Analysis juxtaposing Obama's campaign with his initial pitch for his recovery plan displays a contemporary example of how a president's rhetoric is altered when the "crisis tool" is used. While the Great Recession was in full swing during the campaign, Obama configured his ideals and policies as hopeful, with a sense of inevitable accomplishment. However, during his speech at George Mason University, the president substantially altered his framing and inserted elements of crisis into each portion of his speech. While crisis speeches may offer "unique moments of rhetorical leadership," Obama's rhetoric functioned to "routinize" the "crisis tool" as part of pursuing the American Dream.¹⁰

While elements of crisis rhetoric tend to be present in most contemporary presidential addresses, the Obama chapter focused on a severe economic recession and the interaction between that crisis and the American Dream. A majority of studies on crisis rhetoric focus on foreign policy events that have either resulted in or have the potential to result in military conflict. Amos Kiewe's edited volume *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* marked a significant move to pursue scholarship on domestic crises. The chapter builds on this movement by analyzing the use of crisis during the Great Recession. Given Obama's previous emphasis and rearticulation of the American Dream during his 2004 address at the Democratic National Convention and

continuing through the 2008 presidential election, the chapter provides a glimpse into how Obama's rhetorical *topoi* become altered through the lens of crisis.

To investigate how the president emphasized crisis, the chapter focused on the evolution of four dialectical pairs as they developed from being relatively free of crisis during the campaign to being juxtaposed with crisis during the stimulus proposal. These pairs—*same v. change*, *now v. future*, *gloom v. hope*, and *divided v. unified*—were a major part of Obama's early rearticulation of the American Dream. He argued that the nation needed to *change* and become *unified* in order to have *hope* for the *future*. These four elements formed major parts of what Medhurst calls Obama's "Narrative Signature."¹¹ A component of each pair became part of the president's vision while its opposite was tied to his political opponents. While that rhetorical strategy was effective during the campaign, Obama's Republican foes were largely defeated during the election. Hence, in transitioning to take office, the president applied the "disjunctive mode" to an amorphous threat: the recession. Traditionally used to promote war policies by creating external dichotomies between America and its military enemy, Obama's "disjunctive mode" functioned to create an enemy that had no physical presence. Instead, he aligned crisis with the American Dream and warned of an enemy that would be victorious when dreams were "deferred and denied."¹² Obama's use of the "crisis tool" signaled that failure to realize the dream represented a crisis, one that was endemic to American history in the past and the future.

This thesis provides but a snapshot of the econo-rhetorical leadership function of the presidency. Tracing the rhetorical strategies of three different presidents provides a foundation for understanding the complicated nexus of the political economy. However,

by tracing how three different presidents exercised that leadership in their first year in office, the work in these chapters seeks to provide a foundation for continuing the development of understanding the complicated nexus of the political economy. Two key elements were present across each chapter. First, each president painted the economic picture as dire. In Clinton's case, experts agreed that his economic depiction was inaccurate. The economy was largely recovering when H.W. Bush lost to Clinton in 1992. Leading up to the 2000 election, economic growth across the board was increasing albeit economists were cautious about the future. But, the party in power lost to a conservative governor from Texas who framed his economic agenda as liberal. During the 2008 election campaign, the economy had its worst downturn since the Great Depression. However, the American Dream only became laden with crisis after the election. Across all three chapters the economic context shaped the text of the speeches and in turn the rhetors framed the status of the economy.

Second, all three presidents proposed legislation that would ameliorate the dire economic conditions they had just depicted. These solutions were necessary independent of whether the severity of the economic downturn was rhetorically manufactured. John Maynard Keynes notes:

If the animal spirits are dimmed and the spontaneous optimism falters, leaving us to depend on nothing but a mathematical expectation, enterprise will fade and die; though fears of loss may have a basis no more reasonable than hopes of profit had before.¹³

Econo-rhetorical leadership becomes necessary to soothe the "animal spirits" endemic in the American economic system. Even if their speeches did not contribute directly to stock market investment or another metric of growth, the rhetoric of Clinton, Bush, and Obama functioned to provide optimism to the American public. They did so by each

focusing on a different economic issue: federal debt, tax relief, and unemployment. Each president helped, along with the media and economists, to construct the narrative that this metric was the one that needed to be fixed. Clinton, Bush, and Obama dimmed the “animal spirits” as they pertained to these metrics and then sought to provide optimism and relief and in doing so crafted their own version of econo-rhetorical leadership.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

As a result of narrowing the focus to three early addresses by Clinton, Bush, and Obama, two limitations developed. First, this thesis only examined economic rhetoric during each rhetor’s presidential campaign and their first initial economic proposal. Although this limit was necessary, it leaves an incomplete picture, as presidents often change their positions or the political situation is changed, both rhetorically and politically, during their terms in office. For example, after Bush’s first year in office, his focus turned significantly toward the War on Terrorism and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. September 11, 2001 marked a change in political focus for the president. However, Bush also faced economic debates on accelerating the effects of his tax relief legislation in 2003, on reforming financial regulations in 2003 and 2005, on privatizing social security in 2005, and on crafting an early response to the recession in 2008. In *Invoking the Invisible Hand: Social Security and the Privatization Debates*, Robert Asen engages in a longitudinal analysis that touched on the 2005 debates. However, there has yet to be significant rhetorical scholarship on the economic arc of either president. It is possible this scholarship would not bear fruit, as focusing on the development of a single president’s economic rhetoric would not be able to develop each economic policy as fully as works similar to Asen’s would be able to do.

Despite this challenge, one economic issue that significantly binds together Clinton, Bush, and Obama is the development of the 2008 financial crisis. In 1999, President Clinton passed the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which repealed the Glass-Steagall Act, and effectively deregulated a large portion of the banking industry. President Bush attempted to counteract part of this policy in 2003 and 2005 but lacked the coalition in Congress to enact legislation. He later became a major figure in constructing the Troubled Asset Relief Program in 2008. President Obama provided his initial response to the crisis by enacting his stimulus in 2009, but he also made a significant move to garner support for reforming Wall Street with an address he gave at Cooper Union on April 22, 2010. Understanding these economic historical arcs provides an avenue for future research on this trio of presidents.

The second major limit in this thesis is its focus on breaks in administrative power and economic philosophy. Clinton, Bush, and Obama each entered office following eight years of the opposing party being in power. However, this type of change rarely happens in the United States. The work of this thesis could be expanded to include President Carter and Presidents Reagan and H.W. Bush in order to provide a broader focus on breaks in economic thought. While this may be fruitful, more work should be done on how presidents attempt to maintain and continue the economic work of their predecessors. In addition to the pair of Reagan and H.W. Bush, the transition between Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft could offer a snapshot of how economic philosophy is maintained across differing presidencies. While a significant amount of rhetorical scholarship has been done on Reagan, examining the transition to H.W. Bush would provide a better understanding on how Bush altered the rhetorical message of

Reagan while maintaining a similar economic ideology. The pair of Roosevelt and Taft provides an interesting snapshot in history given that Teddy chose to run against Taft, his Secretary of War, four years later. While Roosevelt thought Taft would continue his progressive agenda on economic issues, his successor departed significantly from the vision TR had, which culminated in a political schism within the Republican Party. Investigating the rhetorical developments of that schism would broaden the field's understanding of how economic ideology is not uniform across party lines.

Focusing on these challenges would provide a more complete rhetorical picture of the United States, historically and economically. Analyzing how presidents exhibit econo-rhetorical leadership is essential to understanding how legislation is crafted. The rhetorical frame used to support policies can become a future resource for future presidents to use in debates. The Obama chapter is illustrative of this trend. Throughout the 2008 election, the criticism of Bush centered on his tax cuts. However, this criticism only focused on the economic effect of the legislation not on its rhetorical starting point. Since the “interpreter-in-chief” role of the presidency plays an important part in contextualizing the magnitude of a recession or economic growth. Attending to these frames provides political analysts and communication scholars with the tools necessary to examine how politicians use “historical premises to justify current actions.”¹⁴ The recurrence of economic contractions and expansions ensures that these situations will occur again, and the president will be there ready to exhibit his or her own econo-rhetorical leadership.

Notes

¹ James Aune uses the term “econo-rhetorical presidency” to describe the interrelationship between the presidency and the Federal Reserve on monetary policy. “Econo-rhetorical” leadership then is a specific instance of the rhetorical leadership function of the presidency that Martin J. Medhurst describes. See James Arnt Aune, “The Econo-Rhetorical Presidency,” in *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric*, ed. James Arnt Aune and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 46–68; Martin J. Medhurst, “Rhetorical Leadership and the Presidency: A Situational Taxonomy,” in *The Values of Presidential Leadership*, ed. Terry L. Price and J. Thomas Wren (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2007), 59–84.

² Vanessa B. Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 38.

³ William J. Clinton, “Address to the Nation on the Economic Program,” *American Presidency Project*, February 15, 1993, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=47155>.

⁴ David Zarefsky, “Four Senses of Rhetorical History,” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 29.

⁵ Dana L. Cloud, “The Rhetoric of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization of Social Responsibility,” *Western Journal of Communication* 62 (1998): 387–419.

⁶ George Lakoff, *Whose Freedom?: The Battle Over America’s Most Important Idea* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 66.

⁷ Megan Foley, “From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economy in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 (2012): 386–410.

⁸ David A. Crockett, “George W. Bush and the Unrhetorical Rhetorical Presidency,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 465–486.

⁹ Keith V. Erickson, “Presidential Rhetoric’s Visual Turn: Performance Fragments and the Politics of Illusionism,” *Communication Monographs* 67 (2000): 141.

¹⁰ Medhurst, “Rhetorical Leadership,” 65; Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 22.

¹¹ Medhurst isolates twenty-four “grammatical units” in Obama’s Narrative Signature. He explicitly mentions *hope*, *change*, and *unity*. My focus on *future* in the chapter departs slightly from these units, but there is a large overlap between *future* and *journey*. See Martin J. Medhurst, “Barack Obama and the 2009 Inaugural Address: Narrative

Signature and Interpretation,” in *Making the Case: Advocacy and Judgment in Public Argument*, ed. Kathryn Olson et al. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 196-197.

¹² Barack Obama, “Address at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia,” *American Presidency Project*, January 8, 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=85361>.

¹³ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 161-162.

¹⁴ Zarefsky, “Four Senses,” 28.

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