

ABSTRACT

Easy Certainty: George W. Bush and God's Divine Will for America

After September 11th

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This thesis analyzes the way President George W. Bush used evangelical rhetoric to justify different aspects of his presidency and the actions he took after the September 11th attacks on American soil. After the terrorist attacks on American soil, Bush used many biblical references and divine justifications for both his presidency, foreign policy, and actions in the Middle East. In addition to analyzing the impact that Bush's rhetoric had on his base, this thesis seeks to view Bush's rhetoric through the lens of different rhetorical narratives including Thomas Aquinas' Just War Theory, colonialism and imperialism, and the Frontier Myth amongst others. This thesis also seeks to analyze some of the policies that Bush enacted that began to breach the church-state divide and align the conservative evangelical base with the Republican party and presidency.

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EASY CERTAINTY: GEORGE W. BUSH AND GOD'S DIVINE WILL FOR
AMERICA AFTER SEPTEMBER 11TH

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

George W. Bush's presidency was one marked by an easy certainty in what he believed and in God's power and influence on both his life and his presidency. He is often remembered as a president who stuck to his guns and was sure in every decision he made because of God's direction for both America and his leadership. Throughout his time in office, he sustained and created a series of events and decisions that would affect the separation of church and state in the White House and the United States of America for the foreseeable future. This thesis seeks to explain Bush's connection with his faith and how it influenced his presidency and argue that his faith and belief in God was the deciding factor in all his decision-making and policies.

This thesis will first begin with an explanation of Bush's evolution from a devout Presbyterian, to party boy, to reformed Christian and president of the United States. In the second chapter this thesis will explore Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, and the ways it affected government funding of religious programs and entities. It will also explore George H.W. Bush's influence on George W. and how his presidency and faith affected the way Bush acted during his own presidency.

In the third chapter, this thesis will explore the way Bush employs Just War Theory to justify, to both himself and the American public, his War on Terror and the War in the Middle East. This thesis will argue that through the use of Aquinas's Just War Theory, Bush attempts to create a framework for his war through which he is justified in

retaliating against the September 11th attacks. This chapter will also employ the Frontier Myth and American imperialism in its analysis of Bush's reasons for invading the Middle East and propagating his War on Terror throughout his presidency.

The fourth chapter is an analysis of the War on Terror and the war in the Middle East and the rhetoric Bush employed to the public in order to justify it from a Biblical standpoint. This chapter also analyzes the use of torture that was sanctioned by Bush and his White House in Abu Ghraib and the ethical and biblical implications of using the Bible as a justification for human rights atrocities. It also details the effects of 9/11 on the public and the anti-Arab hate crimes that occurred after the attacks.

In the final chapter and conclusion, the ramifications of Bush's marriage to the Religious Right and the implications of such a collaboration are shown through later policies and executive orders that came from the Trump presidency. Connecting Bush's presidency to modern-day is an important step when viewing Bush's leadership in a historical context and understanding how his decisions affect the present.

Throughout this thesis, it is the hope that the reader gain a fuller understanding of Bush's faith and how when faith is brought into the presidential office, that it can be extremely problematic. Throughout his presidency, Bush's decisions and marriage to his faith had an effect on the future of the nation in a way that was detrimental when he made decisions that cost human lives. The ability and proclivity of Bush to ignore facts and reason when deliberating is what made his presidency definable by an "easy certainty" that is memorable decades later.

CHAPTER TWO

Bush's Evolution and Faith-Based and Community Initiative

On September 11th, 2001, immediately following the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the World Trade Center, President George W. Bush addressed the nation in a way that he hadn't since the beginning of his presidency. In an openly religious and "return to our roots" type address, he rallied the nation under the banner of having a common enemy. This type of speech was not uncommon for Bush, but this was a moment of national crisis in which the nation was hanging on his every word, searching for something or someone to believe in. The nation was vulnerable to the religious rhetoric that was used and was ready to rally behind a strong president who knew where both he and the nation stood.

Bush begins his speech by stating that the American "way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts."¹ The way of life and freedom that the terrorists attacked, for Bush, originated with religion. In his eyes, the reason the nation was attacked stemmed from the Christian belief system that it was founded upon and the freedoms that were allowed because of Christianity. Bush states that "America was targeted for attack because "we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining."²

¹ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Terrorist Attacks | The American Presidency Project," The American Presidency Project, September 11, 2001, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-the-terrorist-attacks>.

² Bush, "Address to the Nation."

This part of his speech is drawn directly from John 1:5, “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Drawing from Biblical verses and inserting them into a speech about the attacks on the nation unites him with his Christian base and tells them that he is actively reading his Bible and learning how to apply it both to his presidency and to his personal life.

This type of diction is especially dangerous and concerning when put in juxtaposition with his next lines, “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them... I ask for your prayers.”³ By placing abject and obvious violence in a position next to asking the American people for their prayers, he allows the people to believe that whatever actions he takes against the “evil” that has struck the United States has been ordained by God and he will listen to His people who are pious and concerned for the freedom and conversion of all peoples everywhere. The alliance of war and the destruction that comes from it with God and Christianity is a purposeful choice on Bush’s part, and one that he was not shy about.

Bush also speaks as to how he prays that the victims and their families “will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.”⁴ The continual insertion of traditionally comforting portions of scripture play in strong contrast to the atrocities that will later be committed in the Middle East in the defense of freedom and the preservation of justice and Christianity throughout the world.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

This is demonstrated in a speech given by Bush only five days later where he speaks of the faith of the American people, himself, and the military in pursuit of the terrorists who perpetrated the attack on New York. He speaks about how the day is a “day of faith” and the “Lord’s Day,” and in the same breath talks about how the War on Terror is a “crusade” against evil.⁵

The significance of the use of the word “crusade” in a war against people of Middle Eastern descent was not lost on the American public or those who would critique Bush later for his religious rhetoric. “Crusade” brings to mind the religious wars of the past in which white conquerors waged war against the Muslims and conquered them, forcing them to convert to Christianity or perish. While Bush’s use of the word was not entirely religiously motivated, the undertones were present and influenced much of his decision-making and choices throughout the ensuing War on Terror and Iraqi war.

The religious convictions that Bush had and what specifically motivated him during his involvement in the War on Terror were largely influenced by the upbringing he had in the church and his later total conversion and commitment to Christianity. Bush was raised Presbyterian and married into the Episcopalian church. He was known as a partier in college and had many entertaining stories that his friends enjoyed telling once he was elected governor of Texas, and later President of the United States. When he was 39 years old, he met with Billy Graham during a family vacation in Maine and had a new conversion experience which changed his outlook on his faith and caused him to stop

⁵ George W. Bush, “President: Today We Mourned, Tomorrow We Work,” The White House Archives, September 16, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>.

drinking.⁶ This conversion experience changed his outlook on life and the way he wanted to lead both his family and the country in his future endeavors.

Bush's close connection to prominent evangelical leaders influenced the way he would view policy and decision-making during his time as president. His presidency was often referred to as the "faith-based" presidency, due to the way he conducted his business and affairs while in the White House. With his election, Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals across America felt they had a president in their corner who would listen to their feelings and convictions in policy and in heart.

According to Ron Suskind, a journalist for the *New York Times*, and the sources he interviewed about Bush's faith, his decisions were not based in facts or reason but rather gut feelings and instincts he had. This is problematic for many reasons, the least of which notwithstanding that he did not listen to his advisors or the statistics and reason that were presented to him, but rather listened to what he thought God was saying to him through prayer and Bible reading. For personal life decisions, this would have been a fine solution for Bush to have taken, but as the commander-in-chief and leader of the United States of America, it was not an acceptable route to take, especially when considering the effect it had on his staff and the people around him. According to Suskind, "The president has demanded unquestioning faith from his followers, his staff, his senior aides and his kindred in the Republican Party. Once he makes a decision -- often swiftly, based on a creed or moral position -- he expects complete faith in its rightness."⁷ Holding his

⁶ George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 136.

⁷ Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2004, sec. U.S.,

staff to the same standard that he had for religion, was extremely problematic for a person in a position of power such as Bush.

Firstly, through expecting his staff to adhere to the same religious beliefs and convictions as he did, he created an unequal playing field for those who would staff the White House. By requiring his staff to hold the same religious beliefs, whether it was stated or implied, an atmosphere of discrimination and exclusion was created. Secondly, through having absolute certainty in decisions made based on a gut feeling or faith, one equates themselves to God, and shames those who would question the decision. This creates an uneven power dynamic between president and aides, advisors, and staff that made his word unquestionable and certain.

Bush having God's approval in his deliberation and decision-making process, even if only in his own mind, gave him the power to be unequivocal in all choices he made. Equating authority with the word of God becomes extremely problematic especially when viewed through the lens of invasion or war. This type of authority allows for Bush to make decisions and be questioned by none even when human lives and mass destruction are on the line. It also brings new meaning to his use of the word "crusade" when describing the war in the Middle East. Because he was emboldened by his God-given authority, the war was indeed a crusade, and was both sanctioned and blessed by God. This allowed Bush to excuse his actions and any negative repercussions he might face by excusing his behavior and decisions through the use of divine authority.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html>.

One of the largest evidences of Bush's belief in his divine authority to rule was his involvement in and conception of the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives that he pushed through during his first term and into his second. Bush's presidency changed the American people's view of government and gave a newfound trust of government and policymaking to evangelical Christians. Through Bush's rhetoric, policymaking, and decisions, he created an ally in the evangelical church that carried much farther than his own presidency. Through his glorification of God and Christianity in his policies as a way to defeat the evils of terrorism, and any other abomination American society might face, he gave a foothold to evangelical leaders to continue to influence policy, and in the process alienated and ostracized other peoples of faith and color.

With the exaltation of evangelical Christianity, necessarily came the exaltation of *white* evangelical Christianity during the Bush presidency. With his garnering of 79% of the evangelical vote in the 2004 election, he facilitated one of the largest turnouts of white evangelical voters in recent history.⁸ With the support of white evangelicals in electing him, they expected policy decisions that would benefit them. This is illustrated greatly in the way the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives were implemented in society.

In 2000, Bush ran for president on a platform of "compassionate conservatism." He defined compassionate conservatism as "being a conservative with a heart," and

⁸ Jessica Martinez and Gregory A. Smith, "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis," *Pew Research Center* (blog), November 9, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>.

basing it on his “No Child Left Behind” initiative.⁹ This distinctive set him apart from the other Republican candidates in the presidential campaign, giving him a boost amongst those who may have been ashamed to identify with the Republican party because of their reputation for not caring for human rights issues. Bush’s identification as a compassionate conservative was largely intentional to appeal to a Christian base and make himself more palatable to the more liberal opposition. With these premises in place, George W. Bush won the election against his opponent John Kerry and began to set in motion and define what it meant to have a “faith-based presidency.”

With Bush’s presidency, he received pressure on every side to perform as the “God’s Chosen Man” that many believed him to be. With major players such as James Dobson (founder of Focus on the Family and prominent Christian writer) known to put political pressure on government leaders and throw his religious prowess around to influence Christians across America to vote in the way he saw fit, as he did during the Clinton presidency, it was clear that the evangelical vote and support of Bush came at a price.¹⁰ In addition to influential religious leaders playing a role in the Bush presidency, he had the ingrained beliefs of the Protestant work ethic, and the influence of Dick Cheney urging him to strike hard and fast, and be sure in his decisions. This led Bush to believe that he spoke directly for God, justifying his actions and political office with divine appointment, and rationalizing his actions with simply, “God told me.”¹¹ This

⁹ Bush, *A Charge to Keep*, 234.

¹⁰ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 445.

¹¹ Suskind, “Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush.”

articulation of his faith and belief in his appointment to power led to many questionable decisions and an absolute belief in his own mandates that would be dangerous for any political leader to hold, and led to his participation and initiation in the breaking down of the boundaries between church and state.

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

The Faith-Based and Community Initiative set forth by President Bush was the first of its kind. The initiative was meant to strengthen and expand the role of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) in public life through providing social services. These social services ranged in effect and level of involvement, but a common thread was the incorporation of religion into their practice. Previous to the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, government funds were allotted only to secular programs, and if a religious program were to receive any government funding for their social services, they would have to remove any religious symbolism, relics, or imagery from the area in which the social services were provided. Bush believed that government funding should be allotted to the most effective organizations, regardless of their religious affiliation, and put forth the initiative to do so.

The main goals of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative were the identification and elimination of barriers that inhibited the participation of FBCOs in the grant processes from the federal government, and to ensure the social services administered were consistent with secular programs. In addition, the initiative meant to encourage more philanthropic support for FBCOs through public education and outreach

and pursue legislation to extend charitable choice decisions to protect FBCOs from discrimination and protect the religious freedom and hiring rights of beneficiaries.¹² It was the Bush administration's belief that through making federal grants more accessible and competitive, that Americans could make better and more informed choices about what kind of social services best fit them and their needs.

The Faith-Based and Community Initiative was enacted through executive orders over multiple years. Beginning on January 29, 2001, two executive orders, 13198 and 13199, were enacted, establishing the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and five other Centers across the United States. On December 12, 2002 through executive orders 13279 and 13280, two more centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives were established, and equal protection was required for FBCOS. On June 1, 2004, executive order 13342 established three centers at the Departments of Commerce and Veteran Affairs and the Small Business Administration. Finally, executive order 13397 established a center at the Department of Homeland Security on March 7, 2006.¹³ With the progression of the executive orders and the placements of the centers, the Faith-Based and Community Initiative was a project and effort that Bush carried out throughout both of his terms and continued to advance and create a place for in society. Additionally, the implementation of the program through the use of executive orders illustrates the will with which Bush wanted these initiatives to take effect. Instead

¹² "President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative," The White House Archives, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/government/fbci/president-initiative.html>.

¹³ "Executive Orders," The White House Archives, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/government/fbci/executive-orders.html>.

of passing a bill or waiting for the initiative to go through the appropriate channels, it took immediate effect in the form of the executive orders, and Bush personally made sure that they were carried out.

The effects of the initiative were many. First and foremost, funds previously forbidden to religious organizations were released to their programs. This gave religious organizations a newfound, untapped source of income through which to provide both social services and spread their religious message. In addition to receiving these funds, the “religious character” of the organizations no longer had to be diminished when receiving funding from the government. In the past, if a religious organization received government funding, any religious iconography or speech had to be eliminated during the time in which the social services were provided. However, with the new provisions under the initiative, this was no longer the case.¹⁴ Bush wanted to ensure that the religious organizations kept their integrity and were able to fully be themselves during their provision of social services.

These first two effects of the initiative began to present the first of many problems regarding church-state separation. Firstly, with the provision of government funds to churches, this allowed for favoritism or preference of a certain religion to receive funding over another, and in addition, was indirectly providing for a state-sponsored religion. When government funds are allotted to a religious organization, it can and will be interpreted as the government’s support of that organization whether it is representative of the state’s beliefs and values or not. Additionally, with the “religious character” of the

¹⁴ George W. Bush, “President Highlights Faith-Based Initiative at Leadership Conference,” The White House Archives, March 1, 2005, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050301-4.html>.

organizations being preserved, it made it much less likely for a person who was not religious, or averse to religion to seek out these social services, regardless of the quality. With the dispersal of funds becoming much more competitive, this took valuable funds away from organizations which may or may not have been religious and provided excellent services to such non-religious persons.

Due to the scope of the initiative, and the lack of accountability thereof, the reporting and accountability from the organizations receiving funds were less than adequate. Reports of discrimination, misuse of funds for outright religious activities, and a lack of audits for organizations receiving less than \$500,000 in government funds were among a few of the problems beginning to appear at the onset of the initiative. Additionally, there were very loose terms defining a “faith-based organization” making it extremely easy for any remotely religious group to get funding from the federal government. In a sampling of organizations receiving money from the Faith-Based and Community Initiative done by the United States Government Accountability Office, only two out of 26 organization were not of Judeo-Christian origin, and were classified as “interfaith” organizations.¹⁵

The blatant favoring of Christian and western religion was troubling, but not a surprising result of Bush’s faith-based presidency. Because of his obvious support and favoritism for Christian churches, especially post-September 11th, feelings of solidarity from evangelical Christians with the Bush administration continued to grow. Bush was

¹⁵ “Faith-Based and Community Initiative Improvements in Monitoring Grantees and Measuring Performance Could Enhance Accountability,” *United States Government Accountability Office*, (June 2006), 67, 68, <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06616.pdf>.

hailed as God's appointed leader, his chosen man who had been sent to deliver America from the scourge of Islam and terrorism. As with any unified base, Christians began to follow Bush and exalt him beyond his office. This led to an over-glorification of his presidency and a white washing of his policies and enactments during this time.

Much of his legacy and the expectations for Bush and his faith-based presidency were set by his father George H. W. and how he integrated his faith into his own presidency. George H. W. Bush was a president that relied strongly on his faith and passed on his faith to his children. Following shortly behind the presidency of Ronald Reagan, Bush Sr. had many expectations and requirements to fill as the newly elected leader of the Religious Right. As with any conservative nominee, the Religious Right plays a large role in getting a person nominated and elected, but in exchange for evangelical appointments to the administration and prolife, profamily policies being enacted.¹⁶

H. W.'s journey with the Religious Right began with his campaign in 1988, that was "charged with religious language and sanctified causes."¹⁷ While H.W. was supported by the Religious Right, they were more unsure of where he stood on the causes close to their hearts because of his seemingly progressive standpoints on gay marriage and abortion rights. Bush did not appoint the correct or acceptable number of evangelicals to the White House that the Right had expected him to as thanks for their support in his election. Additionally, Bush was frowned upon for making the Religious

¹⁶ Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 149.

¹⁷ Ibid, 151.

Right the butt of many of his spiritually charged jokes during his speeches and was seen as too one-sided in his humor towards religious persons.¹⁸ However, the jokes he poked at the Religious Right and his supporters was not to be taken as apathy towards evangelicalism or his faith in the White House.

One of George H.W.'s enduring legacies was his affinity for and use of the "thousand points of light" in his metaphors and speeches. Bush's use of this phrase originated on his campaign trail for election in 1988 and was frequently used as a way of setting the United States apart from other nations through their being a light in the darkness. Bush said during his inaugural speech in 1989:

I have spoken of a thousand points of light, of all the community organizations that are spread like stars throughout the nation, doing good... I will go to the people and the programs that are the brighter points of light... The old ideas are new again because they're not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in.¹⁹

This type of speech and especially the use of light and stars within it are reminiscent of both John Winthrop's "City on a Hill" address and multiple passages of scripture. In Winthrop's address he speaks of how the Massachusetts Bay colony exemplifies being a light upon a hill:

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies... *For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause*

¹⁸ Medhurst, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, 152-158.

¹⁹ George H.W. Bush, "Inaugural Address," The American Presidency Project, January 20, 1989, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address>.

*Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.*²⁰

The belief that God is with the United States unconditionally and will continue to help them overcome their enemies in battle is not a new belief or ideal. The age-old quote of “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” was heavy on the minds of both George W. and George Senior in the speeches they gave, the policies they passed, and how they governed their own lives.

This image of “holiness” and above-board morality shown by politicians in the public eye was a way of connecting the Bushes with their evangelical base. Through their use of biblical rhetoric and veiled allusions to pillars of Christianity from the past, the rapport created between the Bushes and the base was made stronger, and their base was more willing to see them as divinely appointed and strengthened.

This type of certainty and divine authority in George W.’s decision-making was troublesome when it came to issues of policy or making informed decisions as the president of the United States. As Suskind details in his article, the culture of the Bush White House was one of “a disdain for contemplation or deliberation, an embrace of decisiveness, a retreat from empiricism, a sometimes bullying impatience with doubters and even friendly questioners.”²¹ If God was behind Bush as president, and all of his answers came from a “gut feeling” that could only have been God influencing him, this made anyone who would question the president at odds with the God of the universe.

²⁰ John Winthrop, “John Winthrop Dreams of a City on a Hill,” The American YAWP Reader, 1630, <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/colliding-cultures/john-winthrop-dreams-of-a-city-on-a-hill-1630/>.

²¹ Suskind, “Faith, Certainty, and the Presidency of George W. Bush.”

George W. Bush's love for God and religion and their integration into his administration will remain one of his legacies and be a persevering topic of conversation in all remembrances of his life and presidency. Because of his bold statements about religion affecting his life and Christ being his favorite philosopher "because he changed my heart," there was no confusion on either side of the political aisle concerning Bush's religious perspective and beliefs.²² With or without the support of other evangelicals, Bush believed he was fully supported by his Lord and Savior and continued to use this belief as a way to justify his actions, whether correct or incorrect.

The dangers of placing God at the center of a decision-making process and as the sole explanation for policy as the leader of the free world are many, but as is exemplified by Bush's presidency, has not deterred evangelicals from wanting to elect others just as, if not more, radical than himself. If Bush's justification for war in the Middle East, retaliations against terrorists, justifications for torture and other abominable acts come as a result of a direct line with God, what are those affected to think about the God of the Christians? If Bush's true purpose as a Christian and leader was to bring others to the light of knowledge and religion, the alienation and excommunication from the faith that seemed to be commonplace within his White House is something that future critics of his presidency will have to come to terms with.

The certainty offered by Bush's presidency and the foundation set for him by his father and other leading evangelical presidents have set a precedent for the voting bloc of evangelical Christians that continues to affect the outcome of elections in the United

²² Hannah Rosin, "Bush's 'Christ Moment' Is Put To Political Test by Christians," The Washington Post, December 16, 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/1999-12/16/045r-121699-idx.html>.

States and the governance of the free world. If it worked so well for George W. Bush, why wouldn't it continue to work for future politicians?

CHAPTER THREE

Just War Theory and the Frontier Myth

In 2001, the United States was attacked on its own soil for the first time since Pearl Harbor in 1941. This attack on the pillars and symbols of American society and politics was shocking to the nation in its time and remains a clear and present danger even to this day. During the time in which terrorist attacks loomed imminent and there was a large uncertainty surrounding America's security and protection from rogue enemies, President George W. Bush took swift and immediate action that would change the way politics and terrorism were viewed for decades to come.

In the year after the attacks on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and the failed attack on the White House, Americans and the world looked to George W. Bush and the United States' response to an attack on American democracy, freedom, and ideals. What began as a response to a terrorist attack quickly became the basis for the War on Terror and a religious zealotry. On September 11, 2002, Bush addressed the nation from Ellis Island on the anniversary of the attacks and uttered a rallying cry replete with evangelical rhetoric and Christian allusions recalling the founding fathers' speeches during the Revolutionary period. Pointing to the attack on the nation as an attack on the ideals of Americans and the fundamental religious values that had made America great drew rousing responses from both religious and non-religious persons across the country. The Ellis Island speech can be pinpointed as the beginning of what Bush believed to be a God-sanctioned right to war with terrorists and those who aligned with them.

To understand the Ellis Island speech in its full capacity, it is important to analyze it firstly from the view of Just War Theory as set forward by Thomas Aquinas. Through the Ellis Island speech, Bush attempted to justify the right of the United States to proclaim war in Middle Eastern countries and created a strong “us vs. them” argument through the demonizing of multiple countries and governments that did not play a direct role in the attacks on September 11.²³ Aquinas’ theory of just war is in four parts, whether war is always sinful, whether it is lawful to lay ambushes in war, whether it is lawful to fight on holy days, and whether it is lawful for clerics and bishops to fight.²⁴ For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the first treatise.

In the first question, whether war is always sinful, Aquinas lays out a historical context and argument for why a war can, or would be just, and what requirements that war must fulfill in order to align with scripture and morality. Firstly, the war has to be declared and waged by the sovereign by whose authority and command war can be declared.²⁵ This requirement makes it unlawful and unjust for a private entity to declare war. Through this justification for war, it makes the leading entity, the president in the case of Bush, the only person who can declare war and carry out its destruction. From this standpoint, Bush’s declaration of war on the terrorists in the “cities and camps and

²³ George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation From Ellis Island,” New York, on the Anniversary of the Terrorist Attacks of September 11,” *The American Presidency Project*, September 11, 2002, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-from-ellis-island-new-york-the-anniversary-the-terrorist-attacks>.

²⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica,” n.d., 4183, 1813-1818.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 1813.

caves across earth” is just.²⁶ However, the clause stating that the terrorists are across the earth becomes problematic, for it does not set a specific geographic area in which these terrorists are present. Through this language, Bush has set forth the parameters for which he can proclaim war, not limited to any one area, and secures himself free and rightful access to anywhere on earth. This is worrisome not only in terms of a right to the earth, which can be traced back to Genesis in which humanity is given dominion over the earth from God, but also in terms of American Imperialism. The unjust colonization and occupation of many countries throughout history that have been subjected to the colonialist and imperialist ideals of the United States is alive and evident in the way that Bush phrases this portion of the speech.²⁷

Secondly, Aquinas states that in order for a war to be just, those that are attacked should be attacked because of some fault.²⁸ He quotes Augustine in that, "A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly."²⁹ In this scenario, the declaration of war could be seen as just, though it is “wont” because the War on Terror that was waged post-September 11th was one that avenged wrongs and had to punish the loosely defined nation or state of terrorism. Aquinas, without doubt, was not accounting for the rationalization of war against an *idea* of radicalism and terror, rather than an attack and

²⁶ Bush, “Address to the Nation From Ellis Island.”

²⁷ Genesis 1:26, ESV.

²⁸ Aquinas, “Summa Theologica,” 1814.

²⁹ Ibid, 1815.

retaliatory actions against a defined nation or state with a clear army and geographic territory. In this way, and combined with the fact that the War on Terror affected many innocents and non-involved persons, whether Bush's cause for war through this lens would have been considered just, is a stretch at best.

Due to recent studies on the planning and strategy of the terrorists that attacked the United States, the argument can be made that they were a nation or state that was bent on destroying American ideals and way of life. With the information gained on the test runs achieved prior to the attack, the terrorists had a carefully executed plan to enact destruction on the United States, which would shake the American government and people to its core.³⁰ Bush's counterattacks and War on Terror in the ensuing years would be justified from an Aquinian standpoint, but would be shaky in its justification to force another entity to uphold justice and make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects. In this scenario, the governments of the countries in which the terrorists were living would be accountable for producing the culprits and handing them over to the United States government for due justice to be served.

In the final qualification for the declaration of a just war, Aquinas states that the aggrandizer must be in pursuit and advancement of the good, and in avoidance of all evil.³¹ Bush plays heavily to this qualification in his speech, referencing God, the Christian ideals of the nation, and using the "us vs. them" rhetoric that is seen in the

³⁰ Gaetano Joe Ilardi, "The 9/11 Attacks—A Study of Al Qaeda's Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 3 (March 24, 2009): 171–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802670803>.

³¹ Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," 1814.

majority of his speeches on terrorism. To close his speech, Bush states that “[the] ideal of America is the hope of all mankind. That hope drew millions to this harbor. That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it.”³² This strong religious and overtly Christian language is drawn from John 1:5. This language is originally referencing Jesus Christ as the light that shines in the darkness and is not overcome, but here, Bush clearly paints the United States and the war that is waged by him, as in line with Christian ideals and even those of Jesus. This justification for war leaves room for any and all crimes and atrocities committed to be justified from a biblical standpoint and exonerated because the cross of Christ and the seal of approval from God is given to the United States to eliminate the threat to democracy, freedom, and Christianity.

Bush, throughout this speech recalls Thomas Aquinas’ Just War Theory to play on old American ideals and values, and in essence justifies his own actions through Biblical rhetoric and qualifications. By setting his speech in the frame of the three-part qualifications that Aquinas set forth, through whether war is sinful, retaliation for a wrong, and in pursuit of the good, Bush covers all his bases in the sense that any red-blooded American with pride for their country would be wrong to disagree with the American proclamation of the War on Terror. This is not the first time that Bush dove headfirst into a political and religious ideology that there is no return or retreat from. His presidency was marked by a certainty in what he was doing, and that God supported him fully, no matter the decision. With Bush’s declaration of “Jesus Day” in Texas during his governorship and the title of his autobiography “A Charge to Keep,” Bush made it clear

³² Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

which side of the religious aisle he stood on, and how far he was willing to go to introduce God into his policies.³³ The nature of a faith-based presidency and the justification for political actions stemming from religious belief crop up persistently in Bush's analysis and evaluation of terror and threats to America.

The divide between good and evil is so clearly evident in Bush's mind that there is no room for faltering or hesitation in the quick and decisive attacks that need to be brought against the terrorists. As Bruce Bartlett, a domestic policy advisor to Ronald Reagan, and treasury official for George H. W. Bush stated, "This is why George W. Bush is so clear-eyed about Al Qaeda and the Islamic fundamentalist enemy. He believes you have to kill them all. They can't be persuaded, that they're extremists, driven by a dark vision. He understands them, because he's just like them."³⁴ The comparable manifestation of Bush's extremism, even if in a different fashion from the terrorists plaguing the nation was clearly held in the minds of those observing his actions. The extremism in Bush's mind that led the terrorists to attack the US, was the same type of extremism that he believed needed to be employed to counter such horrific acts of evil and terror that would destroy Western society. Because this extremism and absolutism may not be evident to the general American public, and especially those that cannot see

³³ George W. Bush, "The Jesus Day Proclamation," PBS, March 17, 2000, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/readings/jesusdaymemo.html>; George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

³⁴ Ron Suskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/faith-certainty-and-the-presidency-of-george-w-bush.html>.

nor understand the ferocity that is required in Bush's mind, the use of covenant rhetoric is employed to persuade those that may be on the fence about the War on Terror. This type of rhetoric is especially important in a war-time presidency because "war rhetoric, although it deals with deliberative matters, also involves epideictic appeals because presidents perform the role of a war leader in their discourse, blaming the enemy and praising national precepts," as a way of uniting the base and rallying them under the banner of the cause.³⁵ This covenant rhetoric appeals strongly to the religious base that elected Bush president and continued to support him throughout his presidency.

Bush's approval ratings as president were never higher than in the weeks following the September 11th attacks. From September 5-10th of 2001, Bush as a newly elected president sluggishly sat at a mid 50% approval rating, with that jumping to an extraordinary 86% and even reaching 90% in the days and weeks following the attacks.³⁶ This massive jump in his approval ratings can be seen as a result of the support for the families affected by the attacks and the rhetoric he used to unite Americans under a single, Christian and American banner that was ever-present in his speeches and demeanor from September 11th onward. However, in the year following the September 11th attacks, including the day he gave the Ellis Island address, September 11th, 2002, a large fall in Bush's approval ratings is seen, specifically from Democrats. While

³⁵ Denise M. Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (November 2003): 300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0033563032000160963>.

³⁶ "Presidential Approval Ratings - George W. Bush," Gallup.com, January 20, 2008, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-George-Bush.aspx>.

Republicans still approved of Bush in the 80 and 90th percentiles, Democrats displayed an approval rating of a mere 45%.³⁷ This was exacerbated by the Iraq War which started in 2003 and began a long war with seemingly no point and no end in sight that was to come.³⁸ Historically, or at least since the late 70s and early 80s, Republicans have tended to adhere to fundamental Christian ideals more so than Democrats, and were more likely to be attune and receptive to Bush's evangelical and Christian language that he frequently and persistently uses in his speeches.³⁹⁴⁰ For this reason, covenant rhetoric strongly appealed to his evangelical base and gave him the support he needed to continue to justify and pursue the war in the Middle East that became such a dividing component in the American people.

Covenant rhetoric can be seen as a recurring feature in Bush's speeches and is employed in a variety of ways but is most commonly seen in Bush's speeches as an appeal for the return to the Biblical covenant and Christian ideals that the United States was founded upon. Throughout many of his speeches post-September 11th, this rhetoric of covenant renewal, and painting the U.S. itself as the city on a hill, can be seen in an

³⁷ Philip Bump, "Analysis | Americans United after 9/11. When Did We Rip Back Apart?," *Washington Post*, accessed October 15, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/09/11/americans-united-after-911-when-did-we-rip-back-apart/>.

³⁸ Herbert W. Simons, "From Post-9/11 Melodrama to Quagmire in Iraq: A Rhetorical History," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2007): 183–93.

³⁹ Richard J Jensen, "The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896," (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

⁴⁰ Samuel P. Perry, *Rhetorics of Race and Religion on the Christian Right: Barack Obama and the War on Terror* (Lexington Books, 2019).

attempt to appeal to his audiences.⁴¹ During times of crisis, it is not uncommon for the American people and public to rally behind the president and show support in a variety of ways. This is obviously demonstrated in the approval ratings given to Bush directly following the attacks.⁴² Playing into the desires and fears of his base, and the reeling American public, covenant renewal was used as a way to unite the American people and demonstrate to them, whether accurately or inaccurately, that the battle looming ahead was not one of mere flesh and blood, but against ideals and the polar opposites of morality and immorality that were at stake.

The root of covenant rhetoric and the concept of a renewal of such rhetoric can be traced to the early Puritans in the 1600s. This type of rhetoric was used as a way to urge listeners to repent before it was too late, or they would have to face God and the punishment he would inflict on evildoers.⁴³ This type of rhetoric is and was often used as a scare tactic in order to get followers or large masses to submit and obey, or agree to go along with a certain type of thinking, i.e. religious thinking at the time of the Puritans. Additionally, this type of covenant rhetoric and being in alignment with God's values and view of the world, helped to define clear boundaries for the Puritans, and it can be seen in the Speech from Ellis Island as well. In Denise Bostdorff's article, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11th Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest

⁴¹ Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal," 313.

⁴² "Presidential Approval Ratings," www.Gallup.com.

⁴³ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 74.

Generation,” she thoroughly details the boundaries that Bush’s covenant rhetoric upholds. In the Puritans jeremiad rhetoric (covenant rhetoric), the jeremiad was used to uphold and define their values, create and share community amongst its members, create conformity to an approved and sanctioned way of life and way in which to act, and finally, to elevate and glorify those speaking the jeremiad and maintain their leadership role.⁴⁴ All of these elements are present in Bush’s rhetoric.

Firstly, defining American values and morality is central to the Ellis Island speech. Bush highlights the American heroes who rushed into the burning Twin Towers on September 11th, directly comparing them with the enduring qualities that define America, “love for our families, love for our neighbors, and for our country; gratitude for life and to the Giver of life.”⁴⁵ Placing the noteworthy feats of firefighters and first responders directly preceding a listing of values that make America what it is, necessarily derives the conclusion that all Americans display these traits and values, and those who attacked the United States do not. By placing American citizens and the terrorists in sharp contrast to each other by implying that all Americans are loving, God-fearing families, who care for kin and country connected by the “Giver of life,” and that those who attacked us are not, Bush draws a strong line in the sand between the in-groups and out-groups he is addressing. Bush creates a strong sense of unity amongst his supporters and listeners, meant to enrage the hearer and draw a strong call to action. In his speech on

⁴⁴ Denise M. Bostdorff, “George W. Bush’s Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (November 2003): <https://doi.org/10.1080/0033563032000160963>, 295.

⁴⁵ Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

September 14, 2001, to firemen, rescue workers, and police at the World Trade Center, an audience member yells that he cannot hear Bush over the rest of the audience's chants of "USA! USA! USA!" and Bush replies, "I can hear you. I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." To which raucous shouts of "USA! USA! USA!" continue, further evidencing the base he is drawing together.⁴⁶ In essence, the central argument of his statement, is that to be anything other than God-fearing and nation loving is essentially un-American. If they are not with him, they are against him and on the side of the attackers.

He follows these statements with, "the attack on our Nation was also an attack on the ideals that make us a nation. Our deepest national conviction is that every life is precious, because every life is the gift of a Creator who intended us to live in liberty and equality."⁴⁷ What Bush may have implied before, he overtly states in this paragraph. What was done to the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and the attempt on the White House, was not politically motivated. It was a direct attack on the ideals and morals of the United States, and even Christianity. The alignment of Christianity with the ideals of liberty and equality, necessarily paint any country or outsider who are not Christian, or even Western, as opposed to these ideals. This type of thinking sowed the seeds for xenophobia and racism against people of Middle Eastern descent that reached a peak in the months after 9/11. In 2003 alone, there were over 700 attacks targeting Arab

⁴⁶ George W. Bush, "Remarks to Police, Firemen, and Rescueworkers at the World Trade Center Site in New York City," The American Presidency Project, September 14, 2001, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-police-firemen-and-rescueworkers-the-world-trade-center-site-new-york-city>.

⁴⁷ Bush, "Address to the Nation."

Americans, or those who were seen as such, including multiple murders.⁴⁸ Through the strong language Bush used in his speech, he created a community, likely unknowingly, of Americans who enacted xenophobic attacks on other Americans who they identified to be a part of the out-group of attackers who would destroy American ideals and Western morality. To be American, you were outraged, you would be willing to do anything to uphold the society that stood for truth, justice, and God. Anything other than that was the work of the terrorists.

Finally, Bush states that “we do know that God has placed us together in this moment, to grieve together, to stand together, to serve each other and our country... we’re prepared for this journey, and our prayer tonight is that God will see us through and keep us worthy.”⁴⁹ Through this statement, Bush aligns both himself and America with God, giving him the authority and the respect to wage war with America’s enemies. Not only do statements like these elevate Bush’s status with the American people, they give him a oneness with God and a perceived inerrancy that effectively allows him to make statements or policy decisions that come directly from God. Through this, Bush sees himself and is seen by his audience, to be speaking as God’s messenger, a mighty warrior for the sake of freedom and for God who is desperately in need of defense from the darker, sinister powers who would love to see both Christianity and America topple from grace.

⁴⁸ Simone Schüller, “The Effects of 9/11 on Attitudes Toward Immigration and the Moderating Role of Education,” *Institute of Labor Economics*, November 2012, 14.

⁴⁹ Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

Nationalism and the Frontier Myth

The strong nationalist and pro-American rhetoric that is visible in the Ellis Island speech also speaks to a theme of colonialism that has been heavily prevalent throughout American history, largely through the propagation of a frontier myth and manifest destiny. Manifest destiny has long been a trait of American conquest and the early precursor to imperialism and colonialism as coined by John O'Sullivan in 1845, during Andrew Jackson's presidency.⁵⁰ At the very heart of manifest destiny is an innate belief in American superiority as well as a right to civilize and tame others who are viewed as inferior. This concept of manifest destiny and the right for Americans to civilize and tame whatever God may hand to them largely drew on the frontier myth that has been propagated throughout American history. Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 book, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Americans began to view other nations and countries as a frontier to tame and conquer, with the end of the "frontier" of the west in America. The premise of Turner's book was that there has been and always will be a frontier to discover, and with the outcome of the 1890 American census, the Western frontier had disappeared. Because the presence of the frontier had shaped Americans, Turner encouraged his reader to find a new frontier, that frontier being the world.⁵¹

⁵⁰ "Manifest Destiny," Digital History, accessed April 5, 2021, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/dispatch_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=362.

⁵¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm>, 19-35.

With the expansion of the frontier to the world at large, rather than territories west of the Mississippi river, this drew great interest from figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, and other “manly” presidents who justified their often-reckless actions with an American right to conquest.⁵² Beginning especially with Roosevelt, and his belief that the world was his frontier, his rhetoric strongly suggested that it was not only an American right, but a duty to conquer and civilize other territories for their best interest. This belief that Americans must colonize and civilize was drawn from a sense of male potency, and the power of whites to preserve their dominance.⁵³ This rhetoric is problematic for many reasons, mainly due to the belief in white superiority and supremacy, and the assumption that other countries are less suited to govern and protect themselves due to the color of their skin, or the framework of their government. These ideas are strongly employed in Bush’s speech as well, with the description of “cities, caves, and camps across the Earth” that the terrorists are sheltering in.⁵⁴ Given that the terrorists are not hiding or being sheltered in American cities, this equates other countries as lesser, dirty, and uncivilized and thus gives the United States a right to invade and take over until all of the evildoers have been found and punished, based on a white superiority.

This white superiority and belief in an ever-expanding American empire was also ushered in by Brooks Adams, whose thesis of American foreign policy was that the

⁵² Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

⁵³ Leroy G. Dorsey, “Managing Women's Equality: Theodore Roosevelt, the Frontier Myth, and the Modern Woman,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Fall 2013), 424.

⁵⁴ Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

American way of life, as well as democracy could only be preserved by a continually expanding American empire and frontier.⁵⁵ The world as America's playground and conquest is and has been called into play by numerous presidents through United States' history. Adams, in contrast to Turner was a strong believer in funneling his ideas directly to policy makers and politicians, rather than writing and distributing them to the public at large. Adams held the ear most notably of Theodore Roosevelt and even Woodrow Wilson, during a time of great turmoil, and pushed for the expansion of the American frontier through power and even war.⁵⁶ Adams' speech troubled even Roosevelt, the American crusader, conqueror, and leader of the Rough Riders, through his book "The Law of Civilization and Decay." Adams' book focused on the arguments and logic surrounding a successful advancement of the American frontier, and with Roosevelt's roughshod policy of act first, apologize later, Adams' logic was much harder to break down and deny than Turner's call to find a new frontier.⁵⁷ The Frontier Myth adapts Aquinas' Just War Theory through the use of justifications for further conquest of other nations and lands, attempting to justify such conquests with the use of superiority and right.

The evolution of Turner and Adams' ideas and theses, turned into the propagation of the Truman doctrine in later years, citing that United States security and world-power status was dependent upon the discovery and creation of new frontiers, and that American

⁵⁵ William Appleman Williams, "The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (1955), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3635322>, 380.

⁵⁶ Williams, "The Frontier Thesis," 385-389.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 387.

democracy must be spread to the farthest reaches and corners of the world, for a successful mission. However, as proposed by Janice Hocker Rushing, in her essay “The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth,” a president, or rhetor, in order to employ a frontier myth and create the desired response from those they are addressing, must have a collective consciousness from the audience and their sympathies.⁵⁸ This presumed that collective consciousness from an audience allowed them to sympathize with the speaker’s words and motives, and causes a rousing anger towards injustice and a incites a move to action. Bush’s speeches and language appealed to this sentiment. Because the American public was still reeling from the 9/11 attacks, they were inclined to the idea of a war on terrorism, and the American right to preserve justice and freedom throughout the world.⁵⁹ This sense of morality and protection of the United States is easily awakened in an American audience because of their sense of the United States being the “promised land” and the idea that Americans are God’s chosen people, based on the idea that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and upon Biblical ideals.⁶⁰

Religious War and Christian Ideals

However, the premise that the United States was a Christian nation founded upon Christian ideals has long conflicted with the proclamations of war, the destruction, and

⁵⁸ Janice Hocker Rushing, “The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth,” *Communication Monographs* 50, no. 4 (1984), 16.

⁵⁹ Michael J. Lee, “Us, Them, and the War on Terror: Reassessing George W. Bush’s Rhetorical Legacy,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 3–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2016.1257817>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

the chaos that presidents and Americans have caused in the world's sphere. The American approach to conquering and dominating lesser countries and striking hard and fast to eliminate any threats to the American way of life is not the gospel that Christ would have preached or advocated for. The Jesus of the Bible would have called to mind the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God."⁶¹ The rooting of Bush's rhetoric in the Bible and a constant return to scripture seems to mask the violence and destruction that he did and would call for in the War on Terror and the attacks he would sanction in the Middle East. The Aquinian justifications for war demonstrate Bush's understanding of a need for cause in invading the Middle East, but a recurring ignorance to the need for a *just* cause to explain that invasion. Bush sets himself up as the savior-warrior that will lead the American people and the United States to victory over the terrorism that is knocking down the door of safety and democracy as a way of life.

The sense of urgency that Bush pushes forward in his speech, in terms of terrorists and tyrants threatening freedom with weapons of murder and mass destruction create only one right way, and only one course of action.⁶² This appeal that Bush makes, that the American way of life is in jeopardy, and in framing America's enemies as tyrants and terrorists allows for a discourse of good vs. evil to be enacted and for the American public to become more receptive to a "by any means necessary" approach to eliminating

⁶¹ Matthew 5:7-9.

⁶² Bush, "Address to the Nation."

the threat and the evildoers at large. These types of appeals draw in the hearer and perceiver as an active participant in the rhetoric, and a person who will continue to contribute to the discourse surrounding the subject in a cycle of being able to produce and reproduce the significance of what they have heard.⁶³ This cycle of repetition is important to the ultimate goal of Bush, to justify and gather support for the War on Terror.

This type of rhetoric strongly feeds into the sense of “us vs. them” language that was heavily prevalent throughout Bush’s presidency and the media language during the weeks and months after 9/11.⁶⁴ This led to a strong sense of cultural ethnocentrism and a lack of care for non-white men and women in the United States following the attacks in New York. Race based violence after September 11th hit an all-time high, with anti-Islamic and hate crimes towards people of Middle Eastern descent or perceived to be so, becoming more prominent, as well as hate speech and hateful rhetoric becoming commonplace. In 2001, after the September 11th attacks, hate crimes against Muslims skyrocketed to 481 incidents as opposed to the previous year’s 28 incidents.⁶⁵ Balbir Singh Sodhi is a heartbreaking example of the violence and crimes perpetuated on those

⁶³ Joanne Esch, “Legitimizing the ‘War on Terror’: Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric,” *Political Psychology* 31, no. 3 (2010): 364.

⁶⁴ Andrew Rojecki, “Rhetorical Alchemy: American Exceptionalism and the War on Terror,” *Political Communication* 25, no. 1 (February 5, 2008): 67–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600701807935>.

⁶⁵ Kuang Keng Kuek Ser, “Data: Hate Crimes against Muslims Increased after 9/11,” *The World from PRX*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-09-12/data-hate-crimes-against-muslims-increased-after-911>.

⁶⁶ Moni Basu, “15 Years after 9/11, Sikhs Still Victims of Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes,” CNN, September 15, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/15/us/sikh-hate-crime-victims/index.html>.

perceived to be of Muslim or Arab descent, as he was gunned down outside his gas station in Mesa, Arizona, as the first of many killings following the attacks of September 11th.⁶⁷ The key word involving the hate crimes perpetrated after the terrorist attacks lies in attacks on those *perceived* to be Middle Eastern. This leaves a wide range of people with darker skin tones to be attacked and singled out for attacks they were not involved in, nor had any connection to. In the times after crises, it is not uncommon for people to lash out at anyone or anything that may be a perceived threat to them, and it is even easier for those with underlying judgments or biases to use times of crisis to enact their hatred and malice on undeserving people.

The panic and chaos that September 11th caused for the United States unleashed a wave of distrust, fear, and confusion that culminated in an anti-Islamic sentiment against fellow Americans. The us vs. them rhetoric put forward by Bush in his speeches led to the retaliation against people of Middle Eastern descent and served as a justification for ordinary Americans to hate those they may have been prejudiced against previously to 9/11 and now had a reason to hate. Bush's unforgettable reference to the War on Terror as a "crusade" in another address to a reporter, likewise, gave religious undertones and accents to the already morally questionable reality of the War on Terror.⁶⁸ By framing the War on Terror as a crusade, a sense of moral superiority and Christian duty to conquer

⁶⁷ Rana Sodhi and Harjit Sodhi, "Remembering Balbir Singh Sodhi, Sikh Man Killed in Post-9/11 Hate Crime," StoryCorps, September 14, 2018, <https://storycorps.org/stories/remembering-balbir-singh-sodhi-sikh-man-killed-in-post-911-hate-crime/>.

⁶⁸ George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President upon Arrival," The White House Archives, September 16, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>.

and convert the unbeliever is given as a justification for battle with the evildoers that are present.

This type of rhetoric and moral high ground that Bush possesses, gives him a divine right and authority to proclaim war on terrorists. Beginning with an empathetic call for those who have lost loved ones in the attacks and ending with a call to action against those who have made Lady Liberty suffer, enrages and arouses even the most complacent of Americans. This is not by accident. The inflammatory language and return to the seeds of United States history as a Christian, conquering nation is meant to illicit an emotional response to the words Bush is uttering. Bush is known to have used more religious language in his addresses and speeches than nearly any president before him, and this is because Bush is thoroughly convinced that what he is doing and achieving as president is ordained and sanctioned by God. Likewise, in the use of this religious rhetoric, Bush is appealing to a strong religious base that will support him through their words and their votes in his reelection campaign in 2004. With the use of religious rhetoric, comes the misuse and misinterpretation of the religious passages that Bush claims to be quoting and using as a basis for his inerrancy. The use of religious verses and language in his speeches lend him an authority and knowledge of the Bible that Bush may or may not have had. The distortion and cherry-picking of Scripture that is present in his speeches was meant to lend the Bible as a supporter of his foreign policy and decision-making process.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Jean Pierre van Noppen, "God in George W. Bush's Rhetoric," *Observatoire des Religions et de la Laïcité*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.o-re-la.org/index.php/analyses/item/175-god-in-george-w-bush%E2%80%99s-rhetoric>.

CHAPTER FOUR

Terror and War in Public Memory

The gravity of the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 would not soon be forgotten, and it rallied a cry for war and the protection of America that had not been seen in many decades. George W. Bush's rallying cry for America post-September 11th was one of "if God is for us who can be against us," and this led into a discussion of a God-given right to defend America, by whatever means necessary.⁷⁰ In his "Address Before the Joint Sessions of Congress on the State of the Union," on January 29, 2002, Bush makes a convincing case to strike back hard at the terrorists who would destroy America and gives Biblical justifications for why the nation will prevail.

The significance of this State of the Union address was not lost on the American people. Historically, State of the Unions have been used as a way for the president to summarize and shape the reality that the American people have been living. This particular address given by Bush allows him to frame the aftermath of September 11th in a fashion that is both uplifting to the people, and also gives him the authority, whether God-given or otherwise, to push through his agenda and his beliefs about the war to come. State of the Union addresses have been characterized as having three main parts, public meditations on values, assessments of information and issues, and policy

⁷⁰ Romans 8:31.

recommendations.⁷¹ All of these elements are present in Bush's speech and are rhetorically constructed to bring about the result he desires.

Firstly, with the public meditation on values, Bush speaks to the values of the American people: good, righteousness, freedom, and democracy. By defining the United States in these terms, he unifies the public, whether they are for him or against him, by using values and ideals that all can agree upon. In the same manner, Bush frames the enemy as the antithesis to all of these American values and ideals: evil, treacherous, hateful, in opposition to justice and Christianity. In first unifying his audience through positive adjectives to describe the American people, he draws his audience in to agree with him on the more controversial and less concrete view he has of the enemy.

Secondly, with his assessment of information and issues, Bush paints a seemingly larger-than-life caricature of the terrorist movement. They are hellbent on destroying America and all it stands for. They are hiding in every country, in every hole, cave, and family home, waiting for the chance to strike God's chosen nation whenever their guard is let down, if even for a moment. This rallies his audience to support him in his efforts to extinguish this threat and scourge to democracy and all things uniquely American. He assesses the state of the world, the mourning the people feel due to the losses from September 11th, the resilience of the Afghan people in rebuilding after they have discovered terrorists in their midst, and other regimes in the world who have antithetical values to the United States. These issues of human rights, freedoms, and justice are first and foremost in Bush's mind and each need to be addressed in the coming months and

⁷¹Kathleen Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 139.

years. This State of the Union would become the beginning of a lengthy rhetorical act built around prolonging the War on Terror and strengthening Bush's case for change.⁷²

Finally, Bush puts forth his policy recommendations. He makes his case for renewed and reinvigorated spending in the War on Terror, creating jobs for good, hardworking, Christian, American citizens, more funding for schools, and a call for all to join the USA Freedom Corps.⁷³ All of these in their individual right speak to Bush's priorities in the War on Terror, and why his policy recommendations would strengthen and grow the United States as a whole. The increased spending for the War on Terror would allow Bush to continue his pursuit of any and all terrorists, wherever they may hide. Bush was already spending an unprecedented \$30 million a day on the war he had waged in the Middle East. Finally, his call to join the USA Freedom Corps speaks to his desire for all nations of the world to be reached with the uniquely Christian and American doctrine, so that the continued spread of these ideals could dominate.

Bush began his speech by laying out the perilous ground America treads, with a nation at war, the country divided and in a recession, as well as the dangers of terrorism knocking at the door of the civilized world. With the opening of this speech, he drives fear and a concern for the future of the United States into his audience that will be crucial to the claims he makes later on, as well as in the rallying cry for more funds and more support for his War on Terror. He opens, saying, "As we gather tonight, our nation is at

⁷² Campbell and Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency*, 146.

⁷³ George W. Bush, "President Delivers State of the Union Address," The White House Archives, January 29, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

war, our economy is in recession, and the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers.”⁷⁴ With a statement like this, he viscerally illustrates the peril the United States is facing. To understand this State of the Union address, it is important firstly to pull from, and understand, all the biblical analogies and direct quotes that Bush uses to bolster his argument and his position.

Bush appeals to a uniquely American sense of the afterlife by inserting a quote in a situation he likely did not witness at Ground Zero. Bush states that a little boy left a football at Ground Zero, for his firefighter father who had died on September 11th, with a note that read: "Dear Daddy, please take this to heaven. I don't want to play football until I can play with you again someday."⁷⁵ He follows this quote with another by a woman who states that their “cause is just” and that the United States will never forget the sacrifice, or the attack made on September 11th. By inserting these two personal anecdotes into a speech where he is explicitly talking about more funding for a War on Terror, he makes his cause personal for the American people. In essence, Bush is asking, “who are you to deny me funds to fight the monsters that have taken this little boy’s father, or this woman’s husband? How can you stand to the side while the American ideals of justice, freedom, and Christianity are trampled upon by the pagans who would attack the United States and force it to its knees?” Bush creates a sense of empathy and unity with his audience by playing on their sympathies for lost American lives and their anger towards the terrorists after the attack.

⁷⁴ Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Throughout this speech, Bush repeatedly refers to the fight of good versus evil and plays very strongly on the religious sympathies of his audience. He paints a clear picture of America, good, and all who would oppose America, bad. This is an interesting comparison that comes up, which not only places those who committed acts of terror on U.S. soil as the enemy but aligns all others who do not participate in the fight for freedom and democracy, as defined by uniquely American terms, as the enemy. Bush attempts to place the enemy in terms of insanity, as an enemy that delights only to see the free world burn and characterizes the enemy as one to “laugh at the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design.”⁷⁶ The picture he painted, that of pure evil versus righteous good is so clear in Bush’s mind that there is no room for any other interpretation or perspective, and this leads to a large fallacy that drew much criticism from his War on Terror, that of absolutes: “Either you’re with us, or you’re with the terrorists.”⁷⁷ Because there is no room for wavering or gray area, Bush visualizes an entirely evil enemy bent on the destruction of the world as Americans know it. This led to the Islamophobia and xenophobia that followed in the months and years after September 11th and contributed to a distrust of foreigners and Islamic peoples that is still present in American culture and society today.

Because of the regurgitation and rehashing of the attacks in American popular culture and memory, the feelings of anger, hatred, and revenge are not far away and not

⁷⁶ Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address.”

⁷⁷ “Bush: ‘You Are Either With Us, Or With the Terrorists,’” VOA News, October 27, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/archive/bush-you-are-either-us-or-terrorists-2001-09-21>.

hard to stoke in an enflamed public. The dehumanization of the attackers and their allies have likewise led to a generalization of darker skinned, or seemingly Islamic peoples. The creation of an enemy such as an Islamic terrorist or Islamic fascist were made to stoke the rage already felt by the American public and justify the actions that Bush, and the commissioning of the War on Terror were going to use to eradicate this threat.⁷⁸ The prevalence of the attacks and stereotyping in American popular culture created a series of events that led to the dehumanization of Islamic peoples, unjust wars, racial profiling, stereotyping, and discriminatory legislation disproportionately affecting immigrants.⁷⁹

All of these factors contributed to an environment that was hostile and unforgiving of Islamic peoples in the post 9/11 environment and contributed to the hysteria and support that invigorated the War on Terror. The widespread awakening of rationalizations and stereotyping that occurred changed Americans' perspectives on people that had previously been their neighbors, friends, family, and coworkers. Shawna Ayoub Ainslie recounted in an article written for the Huffington Post that she had to change almost every aspect of her life in order to fit in and not be deemed a threat or a dangerous Muslim in her everyday life. Ainslie writes as to how she "left public play spaces if my son said an Arabic word or I had performed any action that might reveal me as Arab or Muslim," she also had to change the way she dressed, spoke, and acted to avoid detection or the possibility of violence against her, as her mosque had been burned

⁷⁸ Margaret Scanlan, "Migrating from Terror: The Postcolonial Novel after September 11," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46: 3 (2010), 266-278.

⁷⁹ Muhammed Safeer Awan, "Global Terror and the Rise of Xenophobia/Islamophobia: An Analysis of American Cultural Production since September 11," *Islamic Studies*, 49:4 (Winter 2010), 524.

shortly after the attacks.⁸⁰ A prominent theme throughout the post-September 11th era is one of ignorance toward the Quran and of the verses that are commonly referred to as those that support the use of terror and force to convert others.⁸¹ Because of the quantity of misconceptions surrounding the Islamic faith, and the violence that is the outlier rather than the defining feature of the faith, it created a mass panic among a section of Americans that defined Islam as bent on destroying Americans and all that they stood for.

In many of the characterizations of Islam and the Quran after September 11th, the language of “killing the unbeliever” as the defining trait of the holy book ran rampant in depictions of Muslims.⁸² This type of trope and defining feature of Muslims and people who looked to be of Islamic descent is most prominently illustrated through the book, *Terrorist*, by John Updike. The fears and misrepresentations of Muslims written about in his book became a substantial way in which conservative politicians ramped up the public’s fears and continued to justify the War on Terror. The book also led to the use of terms like “radical Islam” and religious language being used to justify actions taken against the Middle East both during Bush’s presidency and beyond, further characterizing the conflict as a holy war.⁸³ Updike was also an acquaintance of both George H. W. and

⁸⁰ Shawna Ayoub Ainslie, “20 Ways 9/11 Changed My Life as an (American) Muslim,” HuffPost, September 11, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/20-ways-911-changed-my-life_b_8111518.

⁸¹ Awan, “Global Terror and the Rise of Xenophobia/Islamophobia,” 528.

⁸² Sura 9:5, Sura 47:4.

⁸³ Uri Friedman, “The Coming War on ‘Radical Islam,’” *The Atlantic*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/trump-radical-islam/508331/>.

George W. during their presidencies, having honors for writing bestowed upon him by George Senior as well as Junior.

Within his book, while being a fictional psychological thriller, he fully characterizes the fears and misconceptions that dominated the American mind during the time. Skin color is heavily referenced in his book, with many quotations of the Quran out of context and with little regard for their original meaning or intention. Throughout the book, most of the quotes inserted are concerning divine rage and the killing of infidels, in an attempt to paint Islam as an inherently violent and terroristic religion. Likewise, his characterization of Islam and the authority he lends his quotations are seemingly coming directly from the mouths of Imams and religious leaders whom he describes foully and without respect.⁸⁴ Likewise, this characterization of Muslims and their holy leaders led to a widespread view of Islamic leaders as radical, and their only purpose to radicalize and indoctrinate their followers into a religion of violence and hatred towards all who would not bend the knee to Islam.⁸⁵ It would be untrue to say that Updike's characterization of Muslims was the exception and the rare occurrence, and because of this, the War on Terror gained momentum and led to many human rights atrocities that were seemingly justified in the name of Jesus Christ and the United States.

These fears were strongly played upon in Bush's language descriptors of their efforts to rebuild the nation through having "rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training

⁸⁴ John Updike, *Terrorist*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,) 102.

⁸⁵ Awan, "Global Terror and the Rise of Xenophobia/Islamophobia," 529.

camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression... Terrorists who once occupied Afghanistan now occupy cells at Guantanamo Bay. And terrorist leaders who urged followers to sacrifice their lives are running for their own.”⁸⁶ This type of language is interesting, particularly when Bush mentions the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, terrorist training camps that American foreign policy armed and created.⁸⁷ All of these descriptors of a mass extermination of life that had been supposedly justified by an attack on U.S. soil are extremely reminiscent of the Israelites’ extermination of the Amalekites in 1 Samuel. In this chapter, God directly commands King Saul to destroy the Amalekites for their attacks on the Israelite nation and justifies the extermination of an entire people group for their acts of terror on God’s chosen people:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey...’” Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.⁸⁸

Because of the biblical justification for total annihilation, and Bush’s deeply religious roots, he argued for a complete and total “Global War on Terror.” In this

⁸⁶ Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address.”

⁸⁷ Lawrence Wright, “The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11,” August 21, 2007, <https://www.amazon.com/Looming-Tower-Al-Qaeda-Road-11/dp/1400030846>.

⁸⁸ 1 Samuel 15:4-9.

construction, America was founded on “Christian principles” and ideals, and Bush’s alliance with the Bible was the justification for his actions, despite the passage being thousands of years old, and extremely problematic with current standards on terror and retribution, is clear. The gravity of the efforts in Iraq were not lost on Bush nor in the American public’s view but were deemed righteous and acceptable. The viewpoint of complete and total annihilation is worrisome for many reasons, and it contributed strongly to American efforts in extracting information from terrorists. Due to Bush’s rhetoric of there being “thousands of terrorists” that were eradicated after September 11th, this led to widespread phobia of other attacks. However, the facts showed that those who committed acts of terror on September 11th only came from four different countries. These phobias and over exaggerations provided warrants for and led to the enhanced interrogation and human rights violations that occurred; most famously in Abu Ghraib.⁸⁹

Abu Ghraib came about as the result of the Global War on Terror. Bush’s main beliefs in perpetrating this war on terror were to defend and eliminate the “enemy [that] is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them... They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”⁹⁰ By framing

⁸⁹ CNN Editorial Research, “September 11 Hijackers Fast Facts,” CNN, August 25, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/07/27/us/september-11th-hijackers-fast-facts/index.html>.

⁹⁰ George W. Bush, “Transcript of President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress on Thursday Night, September 20, 2001,” CNN, September 20, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

the enemy in the non-negotiable light of anti-American, anti-Christian, and anti-freedom, Bush in essence, gives himself free reign to do whatever means necessary to eliminate the threat to freedom and everything that the American people hold dear.

Abu Ghraib was fortunately found out and exposed to the American public. However, the atrocities that occurred in the Middle Eastern prison were said to be the exception rather than the rule, but the opposite is more likely. Due to the mass release of the “Torture Memos” as they were colloquially known after the Abu Ghraib scandal came to light, it is clear that enhanced interrogation techniques were not only used, but condoned by the United States government, in clear violation of the Geneva Convention.

In the “Memorandum for John Rizzo Acting General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency,” ten different torture methods were approved for use on an Al Qaeda agent that had been captured. These methods were by no means expansive, nor were they the only methods employed during enhanced interrogation. The methods were defined as:

(1) attention grasp, (2) walling, (3) facial hold, (4) facial slap (insult slap), (5) cramped confinement, (6) wall standing, (7) stress positions, (8) sleep deprivation, (9) insects placed in a confinement box, and (10) the waterboard. You have informed us that the use of these techniques would be on an as-needed basis and that not an of these techniques will necessarily be used. You have, however; informed us that you expect these techniques to be used in some sort of escalating fashion, culminating with the waterboard, though not necessarily ending with this technique.⁹¹

The release of this information was extremely shocking and upsetting to the American people, especially due to the fact that the information flies in the face of all of Bush’s

⁹¹ U.S. Department of Justice, *Memorandum for John Rizzo Acting General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency*, Washington, DC: Office of the Attorney General, August 1, 2002.

cries for American superiority through belief, religion, democracy, and other avenues. How can an administration that condemns terrorists for their acts of terror carry out those same acts on others? The torture and abuse that was carried out in Abu Ghraib was authorized by the command of a person extremely high up the chain of command, likely Bush. Likewise, in 2004, the American Civil Liberties Union exposed other memorandums of violations of the Geneva Convention that had occurred in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Within these memorandums from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, it was stated that “the things our personnel witnessed (but did not participate in) were authorized by the President under his Executive Order... I wish to make clear our personnel have been present at different facilities when interrogation techniques made lawful by the Executive Order, but outside standard FBI practice, were utilized.”⁹²

Since the release of the memorandums made clear that Bush not only authorized the use of torture, but the FBI supervised such use of torture, this draws in sharp contrast with his portrayal of the War on Terror and of American tactics in fighting terrorism. Repeatedly, Bush refers to enemies of the United States as “evil,” “threatening the United States,” and “parasites,” framing the United States as the antithesis of these terms.⁹³ Additionally, because his cause is just and correct in eliminating terrorists from the world, Bush has in essence excused all guilt and blame that could be placed upon him or the United States for the cruel and unusual treatment enacted on their prisoners, in the

⁹² U.S. Department of Justice, *Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzales Counsel to the President*, Washington DC: Office of the Attorney General, August 1, 2002.

⁹³ Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address.”

name of freedom and Christianity. While it is uncertain how much Bush knew about the methods being used during CIA interrogations of terrorists, he did sign a memorandum entitled "Humane Treatment of Taliban and al Qaeda Detainees," which was an ironic title considering the memorandum allowed for the abandonment of principles set forth in the Geneva Convention and set the United States apart from other countries in their uses of torture.⁹⁴ However, it is clear that Dick Cheney was privy to and supportive of the techniques. In an interview with Wolf Blitzer, Cheney was asked about the use of waterboarding on prisoners, to which he replied "Now, you don't go in and pull out somebody's toenails, in order to get them to talk. [Waterboarding] is not torture. We don't do torture." To which the interviewer said, "John McCain says it's torture," and Cheney replies "Well, John is wrong. He and I have a fundamental disagreement on this point. If necessary, I would certainly recommend [waterboarding] again."⁹⁵ This type of apathy towards human rights given to American prisoners is what made the Abu Ghraib scandal so atrocious and abhorrent.

Torture and Popular Memory of War

These justifications for abuse and absolute power are reminiscent of the pro-imperialism push of President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's view of the world, and

⁹⁴ Andrew Cohen, "The Torture Memos, 10 Years Later," *The Atlantic*, February 6, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/02/the-torture-memos-10-years-later/252439/>.

⁹⁵ "Interview of the Vice President by Wolf Blitzer, Late Edition," *The White House Archives*, January 9, 2009, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2009/01/20090111.html>.

the United States as its “policeman” caused him to intervene and take over in numerous countries where he did not have any authority or reason to be. Most notably, with his governance of the Philippines, the building of the Panama Canal, and the sailing of the Great White Fleet, all of these actions were intended to solidify American superiority and authority across the globe.⁹⁶ With Bush’s rhetoric of bringing freedom and democracy to the rest of the world through the utilization of American power, or rather terror, and his belief that they must “do what is necessary,” Bush strongly employs this Roosevelt philosophy.⁹⁷

Bush also employs the use of a “new” American motto, and states that the new American way of life will be governed by “Let’s roll.”⁹⁸ With this new philosophy, it is not implied nor encouraged to wait and feel out the territory before taking action. “Let’s roll,” strongly implies the willingness and ability to shoot first, ask questions later, no matter the consequences. The idea of “Let’s roll,” implies that America is ready to face whatever opposition may come their way, and they will continue to push forward. With the influence of Dick Cheney and his access to information about the war and methods used in the Middle East, this philosophy could have been adopted as a result of Cheney’s influence on Bush.

Dick Cheney was long suspected to be the one pulling the strings behind the War on Terror, and the extreme measures that Bush spearheaded. With his strong personality

⁹⁶ Robert Hornick, “The Great White Fleet,” in *What Remains*, Searching for the Memory and Lost Grave of John Paul Jones (University of Massachusetts Press, 2017), 139.

⁹⁷ Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address.”

⁹⁸ Ibid.

and his behind-the-scenes dealings with many of the operations in the Middle East, Cheney's sway and sense of importance to the War on Terror as well as the Bush administration cannot be understated. Cheney's attitude towards waterboarding as a torture method among other enhanced interrogation techniques, necessarily dehumanized the subject and allowed for the torture to be used in the future, violating the standards and freedoms allotted by the United States constitution. It also begs the question: if the U.S. government is willing to do this to foreigners, are they also willing to do it to American citizens they perceive as a threat?

This shift in American policy (at least in the public eye) and the open justification for torture as an accepted method of extracting information is echoed in Bush's call for people to participate in public works programs. This change in his emphasis for citizens to participate in the USA Freedom Corps rather than the Peace Corps echoes a change in Bush's priorities and what he believes to be the first and foremost need. The Freedom Corps represents a shift in the peaceful acts and changes that the public was focused on to one of change, resilience, and arguably indoctrination. With the introduction of the Freedom Corps, the focus shifted outward, to changing other nations, and showing them the "good" of the American people and the benevolence of their government. This new focus could be a result of the critiques of major religious figures such as Pat Robinson and Jerry Falwell who espoused views that the September 11th attack was God's judgment against the United States for its newfound hedonistic and pagan lifestyle.⁹⁹ This type of rhetoric is what engaged the American public in a new

⁹⁹ Barbara Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, no. 1 (2007): 147.

campaign of fearmongering and repentance for their sins which led God to enact such a harsh judgment on his chosen people and nation.

As Barbara Biesecker states in her article “No Time for Mourning,” this rhetoric paints the loss of life and the potential loss of democracy and American freedom in a melancholic state of emotion that places the future in the hands of the citizen.¹⁰⁰ This citizen now bears the weight of the responsibility to steer the U.S. in the right direction, back from the brink of destruction, and causes Bush’s call for more volunteers for the Freedom Corps to ring even truer in the average citizen’s ears. Through this new crusade, with endless bounds for which the U.S. can enact its great and heroic actions, the citizen-subject that Biesecker references is forced into a religious crusade in which there is only one goal: the elimination of evil. Anyone who stands on the sidelines is not American enough to do their duty to preserve the freedoms they have been granted and which should be extended, or forced, into every other nation in the world without hesitation.

Due to the call for an overhaul of citizens to actively participate in the War on Terror, it was necessary for Bush to define the terms of war in ways the public could understand. Because he references good versus evil as the only enemies in the battle, it is easy for the public to understand that it is more than mere lives at stake, but rather the attacks and upcoming battles are for the Christian principles they stand on and that their nation was founded upon. This type of language is again, very reminiscent of the Biblical verse that reads: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 149.

forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”¹⁰¹ By referencing a verse that has often been used in evangelical circles to justify campaigns or actions that were flimsy at best, Bush appeals to his base. The base that will continue to fund the extremely expensive, aggressive, and nearly unprecedented raise in spending for the military to fight the forces of evil that are lurking everywhere and anywhere in the world, waiting for a chance to take out God’s nation.

The call to arms for the war in Iraq and against terrorism is reminiscent of the calls for young men to fight in World War II. Both wars were framed as “good wars” meant to defend those who cannot defend themselves, and framing the United States in the glorified savior-state that it attempts to portray itself as in every conflict it involves itself in. This type of framing and explicit rhetoric that allows the U.S. to involve itself in foreign affairs is best summed up by David Hoogland Noon in that “Collective memory of war, more than any other genre of historical experience, has been central to the public culture of the modern United States as well as to the commercial realm of historical memory. Popular memories of war not only claim to preserve some heroic moment of the past, but they often make acute demands upon the living, who must periodically show themselves worthy of the gifts bestowed upon them by the wartime sacrifices of others.”¹⁰² The call to action that Bush repeatedly employs in his speech is building upon

¹⁰¹ Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁰² David Hoogland Noon, “Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2004): 342.

the ultimate sacrifice given by those who were affected in the attacks, and those who rushed in to help and lost their lives in the process.

Bush's belief that the American people were willing to go above and beyond what others would and will do was a recurring element he employed in his calls to action. In his 1999 speech on "A Distinctly American Internationalism," he says that when Americans liberated the internment camps during World War II, "No one questioned what those words meant: "Be American." They meant we were humble in victory. That we were liberators, not conquerors. And when American soldiers hugged the survivors of death camps, and shared their tears, and welcomed them back from a nightmare world, our country was confirmed in its calling."¹⁰³ This rhetorical use of "Be American," is very similar to his use of "Let's Roll." It means to be the definition of American values, to stand for freedom, to go above and beyond, and not to fail. This is an interesting strategy, because in the same way that Bush employs the use of these short catchphrases, they also strongly denote the Christian values he believes himself to exemplify, and the same Christian values that he believes the United States radiates.

The concept of American exceptionalism is not new, nor was George W. Bush a stranger to the connotations and meanings that such a high calling has held. Throughout history, Americans have prided themselves as being morally superior, willing to step in and take the loss whether or not there was anything in it for them. This is evident through American involvement in Vietnam, Korea, both World Wars, and even in Latin America. This concern for others and a seeming selflessness is rooted not only in Christianity and

¹⁰³ George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationality," Mount Holyoke College, November 19, 1999, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm>.

the idea of turning the other cheek, but also in a quest for power and control over other countries. Through conquering and winning the approval or gratitude of the countries the U.S. has been involved in, the belief is that the command in Genesis “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth,” was being enacted by Americans.¹⁰⁴

The belief in American exceptionalism was largely put forth and championed by the Religious Right, and the rise of conservative evangelicals in the United States. The use of the phrase “axis of evil” in Bush’s speech, speaks to the exceptionalism that is needed to overcome the threat to the U.S. and its values. This term is reminiscent of Ronald Reagan’s use of “the evil empire” when trying to frame foreign policy in a moral light, but Bush takes it much further with the descriptive language used to demonize many countries that were not even aware of their participation in the axis of evil. This demonization of others and the morally tinged foreign policy that Bush was promoting was pleasing neither to realists nor to liberal internationalists. Placing entire countries and people groups in the “good” or “evil” categories with little room for inflection or wavering on either side’s part only further polarized the American public, with radical conservatives supporting this black and white divide of foreign policy, and all the other groups and political viewpoints left hanging in the balance.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Genesis 1:28.

¹⁰⁵Andrew Rojecki, “Rhetorical Alchemy: American Exceptionalism and the War on Terror,” *Political Communication* 25, no. 1 (2008): 71.

The American exceptionalism put forth by Bush is so forward in its rhetoric largely due to the alliance of the United States with Christianity and with God, and for all perceived foes with the devil. This drastic contrast makes clear the enemy in the mind of the citizen and continues to allow Bush to justify to himself the type of measures he is using to eliminate the threat. Because of his firm belief in God as backing the United States in all their efforts, he essentially makes himself one with God, and gives himself the authority to speak on behalf of the divine. This is extremely problematic due to the large evangelical base he commanded. With the rise of the evangelical base during Bush's presidency and their commitment to activism and evangelizing the nations both through foreign policy and action, this type of speech was both dangerous and inflammatory to a group of people already on the brink due to the terror they felt from the attacks.¹⁰⁶

As Bush closes his speech, he leaves his listeners with a rallying cry for perseverance and steadfastness, "God is near...Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory."¹⁰⁷ Bush's words of encouragement strongly echo Paul's in 1 Corinthians where he states, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."¹⁰⁸ In this way, Bush encourages

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 69.

¹⁰⁷ George W. Bush, "President Delivers State of the Union Address."

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

his audience to continue pressing on, through the pain, through the sorrow, through all the trials that will come about as a result of the War on Terror, and in essence asks, “if God is for us, who can be against us?”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Romans 8:31.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The effects of George W. Bush's religious rhetoric and alignment with the conservative right have made themselves evident in more ways than just his presidency. With the praise of evangelicals across the nation and the newfound friendship between conservative Christians and a republican president, his boldness in proclaiming his faith and using God as a basis for decision-making paved the way for future presidents to bring their faith into the White House or be excluded from it because of a different way of belief.

From the outset of Obama's campaign for president, it was clear he would not garner the white, evangelical vote as his George W. Bush had done. The evangelical vote sustained a dramatic drop to 26% in favor of Obama as contrasted with Bush's 79% in 2004.¹¹⁰ Because Obama was a black, progressive, presidential candidate, he received much more skepticism from the white evangelicals than George W. had received. Even three and a half years into his presidency, 17 percent of registered voters believed he was a Muslim, despite being a self-proclaimed born again Christian and an avid churchgoer of Trinity United Church of Christ, until the Jeremiah Wright controversy.¹¹¹ Obama's self-

¹¹⁰ "How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), November 7, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/11/07/how-the-faithful-voted-2012-preliminary-exit-poll-analysis/>.

¹¹¹ Michael Powell, "Following Months of Criticism, Obama Leaves His Church," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/01/us/politics/01obama.html>.

proclaimed faith was not enough to garner the white evangelical vote due to his political alliances, and very likely had something to do with the color of his skin.¹¹²

Because of the unhappiness of evangelicals with Obama's person and presidency, the stage for Trump to take the presidency was perfectly set. In 2016, Trump garnered 81% of the white, evangelical vote; the largest percentage of the vote in many years.¹¹³ Additionally, 72% of white evangelicals approved of how Trump was handling the presidency as of June 16, 2020. This included a 6% drop in his approval ratings since April, likely due to the coronavirus crisis, but still an overwhelming rate of approval.¹¹⁴ This approval for Trump from self-proclaimed Christians is entirely unprecedented, given his persona, political experience, past actions, and rhetoric. To evangelicals, he is still "God's chosen man" and his behavior is accounted for through the use of comparisons to David, Nehemiah, and other biblical characters who were extremely sinful but were still the apple of God's eye.¹¹⁵

The breach of church-state separation that Bush accelerated was only the beginning of new policy and legislation that would come to infringe on the boundaries separating

¹¹² Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

¹¹³ "White Evangelical Approval of Trump Slips, but Eight-in-Ten Say They Would Vote for Him," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed July 23, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/01/white-evangelical-approval-of-trump-slips-but-eight-in-ten-say-they-would-vote-for-him/>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Time Staff, "Read the Sermon Trump Heard Before Becoming President," *Time*, January 20, 2017, <https://time.com/4641208/donald-trump-robert-jeffress-st-john-episcopal-inauguration/>.

church and state. Beginning with the Faith-Based and Community Initiative, government involvement in and financial support of religious organizations and programs began to grow. On June 30, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that parents may use taxpayer funds through the use of state scholarships, to pay for students to attend private schools, which included religious schools.¹¹⁶ Not only does this channel government funds and taxpayer dollars toward a private, religious education in which there is less monitoring of what is taught and being ingrained in youth, but it played strongly into the July 8, 2020 ruling that job discrimination laws did not apply to Catholic private schools.¹¹⁷ This ruling made it legal for private schools to discriminate in their hiring processes, as well as use government funds to do so. Historically, beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education*, private schools have been havens of discrimination and segregation, and the allowance of taxpayer dollars to support a private school education would only continue this pattern and further detract government funding from the public schools that need it the most.¹¹⁸ Likewise, it creates an outlet for parents who would rather their children go to predominantly white, religious schools rather than secular, public schools, continuing de facto segregation in the United States.

¹¹⁶ Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Gives Religious Schools More Access to State Aid,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/us/supreme-court-religious-schools-aid.html>.

¹¹⁷ Adam Liptak, “Job Bias Laws Do Not Protect Teachers in Catholic Schools, Supreme Court Rules,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/job-bias-catholic-schools-supreme-court.html>.

¹¹⁸ Norman Dorsen, “Racial Discrimination in ‘Private’ Schools,” *William and Mary Law Review* 9, no. 1 (October 1967): 42.

On July 6, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that employers with religious or moral objections may opt-out of providing birth control to their employees. Under the Affordable Care Act, Obama had already made provision for houses of worship, allowing them the option to afford birth control to their employees or to abstain due to religious convictions.¹¹⁹ The extension of the provision allows any company or employer to opt-out of providing a basic human healthcare service, simply because they have a moral objection. This Supreme Court ruling, in the same way that the Faith-Based and Community Initiative did, allows a loophole for organizations and employers that may not be religious at all, to cut costs and deny their female employees a service that should be counted as essential healthcare.

Most recently, on July 29, 2020 Trump repealed a 2015 program addressing housing discrimination in suburban neighborhoods. The repeal of this Obama-era program—intended to combat racial segregation and discrimination—was used as a way in which to appeal to white, suburban voters in Trump’s bid for reelection.¹²⁰ The repeal of this program disproportionately affects people of color and minorities and allows for discrimination and a lack of enforcement of the Fair Housing Act. In much the same way

¹¹⁹ Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Upholds Trump Administration Regulation Letting Employers Opt Out of Birth Control Coverage,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/supreme-court-birth-control-obamacare.html>.

¹²⁰ Hailey Fuchs, “Trump Moves to Roll Back Obama Program Addressing Housing Discrimination,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/us/politics/trump-housing-discrimination-suburbs.html>.

that the use of government funds for private schools encourages de facto segregation, so does the repeal of this housing discrimination program.

The new policies that were enacted under Trump and the decisions handed down by the Supreme Court are a direct result of the faith-based presidency of George W. Bush. With a mobilized evangelical base, and the support of many white conservatives, Trump used the opportunity to push religiously influenced bills through Congress, and with a conservative-heavy Supreme Court (3 of the 5 sitting conservative Supreme Court justices were appointed by George W. Bush), religiously motivated and favored decisions have been increasingly more common.¹²¹ Prolonged government support for predominantly Christian organizations and religious groups has contributed to a distrust of non-Christian religious organizations amongst evangelicals and increases the likelihood of breaching the boundaries for church-state separation in the future.

The willingness of evangelicals to overlook certain portions of presidents' personalities and pasts continues to shape the future of American politics and democracy. The continuation of this research would look at the influence of Ronald Reagan's policies and presidency on Bush's religious presence in the White House as well as the policies he enacted. In addition, future research would attempt to further analyze the connects between Bush's alliance with conservative Christians and the connections with the Obama and Trump presidencies as well as their effects on the present-day political climate.

¹²¹ "Nominations and Appointments to Federal Office - The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum," accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/en/Topics/Nominations>.

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