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EXPLORING PROTOFASCISM IN GEORGE W. BUSH'S POST 9-11 SPEECHES

By

Danielle Sabelli

Masters Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

Through Communications, Media and Film

In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Masters of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2009

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## Abstract

After the 9/11 attacks on America and the subsequent onset of the “war on terror” declared by former President George W. Bush, several scholars and political observers began to suggest that the Bush administration was exhibiting what could be called “proto-fascist” proclivities. Incorporating elements from Laurence Britt’s “fourteen points of fascism” as a conceptual framework and critical discourse analysis as a methodological approach, this thesis examines various speeches made by Bush following 9/11 in an attempt to illustrate the discursive manifestations of those proto-fascist tendencies.

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## INTRODUCTION:

In his 1935 novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis wrote that if fascism were to come to America, it would be “wrapped in the flag carrying the cross” (Conason, 2007, p.5). The story told of a politician, Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip, who was elected president and ushered in a fascist regime of terror and authoritarianism that disguised itself as patriotism (Meyer, 2005). Windrip, who was charismatic but lacked the intellectual curiosity typically associated with political leaders, deceitfully presented himself as “average,” as a common man—a façade that concealed his belief in the superiority of the wealthy (Conason, 2007). Windrip presented himself as the embodiment of all things “American” namely, traditional values, democracy, freedom, righteousness, and godliness. He pursued an aggressively masculine military agenda and introduced economic policies that only served the wealthy (Ibid).

In the post-9/11 era, Windrip, however, no longer seemed like a fictional character existing in a dystopian landscape, instead, he seemed very real and familiar in the form of George W. Bush. Indeed, after 9/11 and as the Bush presidency evolved, several scholars and critics began to argue that it, not unlike that of Buzz Windrip's, was exhibiting proto-fascist tendencies (cf. Conason, 2007; Giroux, 2006; Goldberg, 2006; Hedges, 2006). At this juncture, it is worth briefly noting some of the similarities between the fictional Windrip and George W. Bush.

Windrip was largely the creation of Lee Saranson, a ruthless but brilliant strategist who had been preparing Windrip for a presidential run for several years. Karl Rove, otherwise known as Bush's brain, was associated with the Bush family for almost three decades and worked on every one of George W. Bush's campaigns. Known as the



“junkyard dog” of campaign consulting, Rove helped Bush usurp Ann Richards in the 1994 Texas gubernatorial election, making him the Governor of Texas (Ivins & Dobuse, 2003). And, of course, Rove was the mastermind behind Bush’s contested ascension to the White House in 2000 and his subsequent re-election in 2004.

With the help of Saranson, Windrip became a “professional common man” who represented himself as an “average” guy, even though he “believed in the superiority of anyone who possessed a million dollars” (Lewis, 2005, p. 72). Similarly, the very monetarily privileged George W. Bush was able to project a regular guy persona to Americans very early on by publically, yet selectively, discussing his *relatable* life struggles. For example, when questioned about his alcohol abuse and a 1976 drunken driving arrest while running for President, Bush claimed that he, like so many others, including “some who wear suits,” had made mistakes of which he was not proud. He went on to state that he had learned his lesson and quit drinking, not because of “government programs” but apparently because of a higher calling (Busby, 2004, p. 17). Bush’s relatable posturing attempted to dispel impressions of elitism and to cast him as an individual, who like many other Americans, had experienced highs and lows in his personal life despite his privileged position.

Even after he was elected to the White House, Bush’s image was carefully managed by Rove and other handlers to lend credence to his “down-home” persona. With his Crawford ranch that was purchased in 2000 providing background scenery, Bush was able to sell himself to the public as a man of the people, with typical values and small town beliefs despite coming from one of the wealthiest backgrounds of any presidential candidate in American history (Mayer, 2004). And like Windrip, Bush

managed to push through economic policies that largely benefited the richest American citizens and corporate interests—a topic which is taken up in Chapter Two.

Bush's down-home, aw-shucks persona was also conveyed through his use of language. While Bush's rhetoric has been ridiculed by scholars and political pundits alike for its use of over-simplified language and perpetual deployment of misnomers, some have argued that his strategy was purposefully designed (likely by Karl Rove) to appeal to white, working-class male voters and "NASCAR dads" who have little use for intellectual types and elites (Hochschild, 2003). Similar to Windrip, Bush attempted to distance himself from any pretence of "elitism." For example, in speaking at the President's dinner on June 19, 2002, Bush referred to his "West Texan" slang and claimed that his wife, Laura, often reminded him to "tone 'er down." And, in a comment he made on July 18, 2002 at a luncheon with Polish American leaders, Bush alluded to his lack of fancy, debonair clothing by claiming that he had rented his black tie and tux.

The fusion of church and state characteristic of fascist regimes will be further explored in Chapter Two, however, it is worth noting here yet another similarity between Windrip and former President Bush. The fictional fascist, Windrip, often portrayed himself as a man of God and claimed most of his support from white, conservative, fundamentalist Christians. He routinely invoked religious rhetoric while he campaigned for office and after he was elected (Lewis, 2005). Once again, the parallels to Bush are uncanny. While he was governor of Texas, Bush officially recognized "Jesus Day" and while running as a presidential candidate in 2000, Bush proclaimed that his favourite philosopher was Jesus Christ (Giroux, 2006). Five days after 9/11, Bush referred to the war on terrorism as a "crusade" and in private conversations, he suggested that the

terrorists despised Christianity (Woodward, 2002). Bush also told author Bob Woodward that when deciding whether or not to go to war after the 9/11 attacks, he consulted not his secretary of state nor his secretary of defense, but rather a “higher father” (Kaplan, 2005, p. 11). His rabid fundamentalist followers repeatedly perpetuated the myth of America as God’s chosen nation and Bush as the messiah while Bush did little to stifle such pretentious proclamations. In fact, it appears as though he did the opposite if statements from even the most fawning accounts of his presidency are to be believed. From Woodward’s *Bush at War* to David Frum’s *The Right Man*, we see a portrait of a president who was convinced that he was on a divine mission. As Chip Berlet has noted, Bush was “very much into the apocalyptic and messianic thinking of militant Christian evangelicals” and seemed to buy into the worldview that suggested that there was a “giant struggle between good and evil” (2003). Throughout his presidency, Bush spoke with certitude as if he were a prophet of God advocating a militaristic foreign policy as if it were a God-given mission and proclaiming the “freedom” to operate without restraint as a God-given gift (Phillips, 2006; Wallis, 2004).

In *It Can’t Happen Here*, Windrip’s advisor Sarason concocts a strategy that would allow the government to wage preemptive war against Mexico. Sarason believed that launching such a war would be politically useful to Windrip’s regime—enabling it to carry out policies that had long been in the making. In a cabinet meeting, Sarason “demanded that, in order to bring and hold all elements in the country together by that useful patriotism which always appears upon threat of an outside attack,” the government should quickly arrange to be “insulted and menaced in a well-planned series of deplorable ‘incidents’ on the Mexican border” in order to declare war as soon as

“America showed that it was getting hot and patriotic enough” (Lewis, 2005, p. 346-347). The idea, of course, was to identify an enemy around which a sense of collective identity could be forged. After 9/11, Bush used the all encompassing rubric of “terrorists” and “evil-doers” and his Manichean “you are either with us or against us” to unite the “American people” behind his “war on terror.” He and members of his administration repeatedly deployed a fear-mongering strategy that functioned to impress upon the populace that grave enemies were lurking about, willing and waiting to attack at any moment, and that citizens should seek shelter under the rubric of militarized, domestic power (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale & McLaren, 2007).

Amid the post-9/11 fear and anxiety, the administration was essentially given free reign to respond to the attacks as it saw fit. In October 2001, “Operation Enduring Freedom” began by raining down 25,000 cluster bombs on Afghanistan in a “humanitarian” effort to “free” the Afghan people from the diabolical rule of the Taliban. Of course, the “war on terror” and the desire to smoke the terrorists out quickly gave way to a war waged against Iraq, a nation that had nothing to do with the attacks of 9/11, but which was of strategic importance to American interests. The war in Iraq was in keeping with a plan long advocated by the neoconservatives in Bush’s cabinet. Within hours of the 9/11 attacks, Donald Rumsfeld was “ordering his staff to find something that could be used to pin the blame on Iraq” and Condoleeza Rice instructed her staff to “consider the opportunities 9/11 provided” in order to “justify the vigorous extension of U.S. hegemony” (Gowans, 2003). While the White House presented the attack on Iraq as an extension of the “war on terrorism,” neoconservatives had wanted to wage war on that nation for quite some time as documents from the Project for the New American Century

(PNAC) clearly demonstrate. A report entitled *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*, authored in September 2000 called for an “aggressively unipolar defense posture, one that would make the United States an uncontested hegemon with the military capacity to enforce a worldwide Pax Americana” (Conason, 2007, p.32-33). The report also called for regime change in Iraq and the events of 9/11 were quickly pressed into service towards that aim.

Like Windrip, who identified both foreign *and* domestic enemies, any and all who challenged Bush's agenda became vilified as part of “them,” as supporters of terrorism. Key members of his administration including Vice-President Dick Cheney and his Machiavellian handler Karl Rove often utilized the classic “rhetorical tactics of authoritarianism, employing innuendo and lies to transform political opponents into soft-minded dupes and potential traitors” (Conason, 2007, p. 25). It is also worth noting that Bush, Cheney, and Rove's attempts to cast their adversaries as inferior were often achieved through the use of a feminized discourse. Those with more liberal views were labeled wimpy, “girly men” and characterized as too impotent for the cowboy masculinity necessary to undertake the “war on terror.” Just as Windrip had redefined “liberal” into a term of derision, Bush and his minions went perhaps further than any conservative regime in recent history to demonize Democrats and liberals.

One could easily cite many more similarities between Windrip and Bush and those to which I have drawn attention are, admittedly, a mere sampling. However, they serve as a useful backdrop to contextualize the intent of this thesis, which is to demonstrate that a very real proto-fascist discourse was both observable and operative in Bush's post-9/11 America.

Laurence Britt (2003) has identified fourteen points (which are discussed in Chapter 1) that he argues are common to all forms of fascism. In this thesis, I draw upon elements from Britt's analysis of fascist propensities and use them as a conceptual framework to inform a critical discourse analysis of Bush's post-9/11 speeches. My intent is to shed light on the discursive manifestations of proto-fascism that were evident in many the president's orations and public statements.

This thesis is essentially divided into three chapters. The first outlines each of Britt's fourteen points of fascism and explains the methodological approach, critical discourse analysis, which is used in my analysis of Bush's speeches. Chapter Two provides an analysis of Bush's speeches using five of Britt's fourteen points of fascism as a framework for the analysis and Chapter Three discusses the contemporary manifestations of fascist ideology in the post-Bush era.

## **CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Like many others, Laurence Britt (2003) believes fascism hovers above us all, deceitfully disguised as something else. Accordingly, Britt felt a systematic study of all observable fascisms would aid in revealing a common modus operandi that would be useful in identifying fascist tendencies in various contexts. To develop his list, Britt reviewed the activities of previous fascist regimes including those of Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Papadopoulos' Greece, Pinochet's Chile and Suharto's Indonesia. While Britt acknowledges that his examples "constitute a mixed bag of national identities, cultures, developmental levels, and history," he nonetheless contends, that they "all followed the fascist or protofascist model in obtaining, expanding, and maintaining power" (2003, p. 1). The analysis of the aforementioned seven regimes led Britt to conclude that there was a recognizable pattern of "national behavior and abuse of power" (Ibid). Based on his findings, Britt compiled a list consisting of fourteen commonalities each of which is briefly summarized below.

### **I. Britt's Fourteen Points of Fascism:**

Similar to others such as Eco (1995), Britt contends that a powerful nationalism is one of the key elements of fascist regimes. From the prominent "displays of flags and bunting to the ubiquitous lapel pins, the fervor to show patriotic nationalism, both on the part of the regime itself and of citizens caught up in its frenzy, was always obvious." Additionally, "catchy slogans, pride in the military, and demands for unity were common themes in expressing this nationalism" and they were "usually coupled with a suspicion of things foreign that often bordered on xenophobia" (2003, p. 1-2).

A second common thread that linked these fascist governments was a “disdain for the importance of human rights” (Britt, 2003, p. 2). Each of them viewed human rights as “of little value” and further believed that they were “a hindrance to realizing the objectives of the ruling elite.” Through the use of propaganda, the populations of those nations were convinced to accept an assortment of human rights abuses. This was often accomplished by “marginalizing, even demonizing, those being targeted.” And when egregious abuse was revealed, the “tactic was to use secrecy, denial, and disinformation” to confuse citizens even further (Britt, 2003, p. 2).

The identification of enemies or scapegoats as a unifying cause is a third element that was shared by previous fascisms. Scapegoating was often a “means to divert people’s attention from other problems, to shift blame for failures, and to channel frustration in controlled directions.” Unrelenting “propaganda and disinformation” were the preferred methods of choice and were often quite effective. Typically, “the regimes would incite ‘spontaneous’ acts against the target scapegoats, usually communists, socialists, liberals, Jews, ethnic and racial minorities, traditional national enemies, members of other religions, secularists, homosexuals, and ‘terrorists.’ Active opponents of these regimes were inevitably labeled as terrorists and dealt with accordingly” (Britt, 2003, p. 2).

According to Britt, the “ruling elites” always “identified closely with the military and the industrial infrastructure that supported it” in those countries he examined, thereby making the “supremacy of the military and avid militarism” another characteristic common to fascist administrations. In those contexts, a “disproportionate share of national resources was allocated to the military, even when domestic needs were acute.”



The military was also seen as an “expression of nationalism, and was used whenever possible to assert national goals, intimidate other nations, and increase the power and prestige of the ruling elite” (2003, p. 2).

Rampant sexism was often a pervasive feature in previous fascisms. In addition to the fact “that the political elite and the national culture were male-dominated, these regimes inevitably viewed women as second-class citizens.” They were both “adamantly anti-abortion” and “homophobic” and these attitudes were usually “codified in Draconian laws that enjoyed strong support by the orthodox religion of the country” (Ibid).

Under most of the regimes examined by Britt, “the mass media were under strict direct control and could be relied upon never to stray from the party line” while others “exercised more subtle power to ensure media orthodoxy.” The methods deployed to ensure media complicity “included the control of licensing and access to resources, economic pressure, appeals to patriotism, and implied threats.” The owners and leaders of the mass media were “often politically compatible with the power elite.” Hence, the “result was usually success in keeping the general public unaware of the regimes’ excesses” (Ibid).

The seventh point of fascism that Britt identified was an “obsession with national security.” A national security apparatus, under “direct control of the ruling elite,” was usually used as “an instrument of oppression, operating in secret and beyond any constraints.” Its actions were typically justified under “the rubric of protecting national security,” and “questioning its activities was portrayed as unpatriotic or even treasonous” (Ibid).

Britt argues that the rulers of previous fascist regimes often linked themselves “to the predominant religion of the country and chose to portray themselves as militant defenders of that religion.” Hence, the eighth common thread identified by Britt relates to the marriage of religion and the state. The fact that “the ruling elite’s behavior was incompatible with the precepts of the religion was generally swept under the rug” while powerful propaganda efforts “kept up the illusion that the ruling elites were defenders of the faith and opponents of the godless”. A manufactured perception suggested that those “opposing the power elite” were engaged in a relentless “attack on religion itself” (Ibid).

Corporate power was protected by previous fascist leaders who enabled “large corporations to operate in relative freedom.” The “ruling elite saw the corporate structure as a way to not only ensure military production (in developed states), but also as an additional means of social control.” Additionally, members of “the economic elite were often pampered by the political elite to ensure a continued mutuality of interests, especially in the repression of “have-not” citizens” (Ibid). This ninth element of fascism worked hand-in-hand with the tenth point of fascism identified by Britt—namely the suppression and/or elimination of labour power. Since “organized labour was seen as the one power center that could challenge the political hegemony of the ruling elite and its corporate allies, it was inevitably crushed or made powerless.” In previous fascist nations, the poor “formed an underclass, viewed with suspicion or outright contempt” and “under some regimes, being poor was considered akin to a vice” (Britt, 2003, p. 2-3).

Occupying position eleven on Britt’s list of fascist characteristics is the “disdain and suppression of intellectuals and the arts.” The “inherent freedom of ideas and

expression” associated with intellectuals “were anathema to these regimes.” Intellectual and academic freedom “were considered subversive to national security and the patriotic ideal.” Universities were “tightly controlled” and politically “unreliable faculty” were “harassed or eliminated.” Those intellectuals expressing dissent or what were deemed “unorthodox ideas” were “strongly attacked, silenced, or crushed.” Fascist leaders generally held that art and literature “should serve the national interest” otherwise “they had no right to exist” (Britt, 2003, p. 3).

Most of the fascist regimes that Britt explored were obsessed with “crime and punishment.” Most of them “maintained Draconian systems of criminal justice with huge prison populations.” The “police were often glorified and had almost unchecked power, leading to rampant abuse.” The actions of activists and political opponents were often criminalized. The “fear, and hatred, of criminals or ‘traitors’ was often promoted among the population as an excuse for more police power” (Ibid).

*Rampant cronyism and corruption is the thirteenth component of fascism outlined by Britt.* He claims that, “those in business circles and close to the power elite often used their position to enrich themselves.” The “corruption worked both ways; the power elite would receive financial gifts and property from the economic elite, who in turn would gain the benefit of government favoritism.” Additionally, “members of the power elite were in a position to obtain vast wealth from other sources as well: for example, by stealing national resources.” With the media essentially “muzzled” and “the national security apparatus under control,” this type of corruption was “largely unconstrained and not well understood by the general population” (Ibid).

Finally, Britt argues that “fraudulent elections” were common across different fascist regimes. Elections “in the form of plebiscites or public opinion polls were usually bogus” and when actual elections with candidates were held, “they would usually be perverted by the power elite to get the desired result.” Common methods “included maintaining control of the election machinery, intimidating and disenfranchising opposition voters, destroying or disallowing legal votes, and, as a last resort, turning to a judiciary beholden to the power elite” (Ibid).

Although Britt compiled a list of fourteen points of fascism, I have chosen to focus on five particular themes, which include: a powerful and continuing nationalism, the militarization of culture, protecting and maintaining corporate power, the disdain for human rights, and the fusion of church and state.

I have chosen to discuss the five aforementioned themes for two reasons. The first is practical in nature: addressing all fourteen points would have been difficult, if not impossible, given the length limitations for a master’s thesis. Secondly, although each one of the fourteen points are significant in their own right, I feel that the five themes I discuss are the most relevant for the purpose of my thesis because they were more directly related to already existing (pre-9/11) neo-conservative forces in the United States, which tended to blend religion, nationalism and free market ideology. As Doumani has noted, rightly in my opinion, 9/11 “crystallized” a number of long-term processes including the emergence of the United States as an “uncontested global economic and military power” and the “political triumph of a highly ideological coalition of evangelical religious fundamentalists, militant nationalists, and neoconservatives” that eventually came to dominate “the presidency, the Congress, and the top civilian ranks of

the Pentagon.” As a result, there was a sustained effort to “shift public discourse in favor of four major agendas in foreign and domestic policies: dominating the globe through the doctrine of preemptive military intervention,” dismantling “the New Deal society” and strengthening corporate power, “reversing the gains” of the various civil rights movements, and “blurring the line between church and state” (Doumani, 2006, p. 15-16).

I should also note that throughout my analysis I detected an undertone of hypermasculinity that was often evident, both implicitly and explicitly, in Bush’s speeches. While Britt acknowledges that “rampant sexism” was a defining feature of previous fascisms, he does not really relate this, in any fundamental sense, to the theme of hypermasculinity. Therefore, while I have not specifically addressed rampant sexism as a separate category of analysis, I have, where appropriate, drawn attention to the hypermasculinist aspects that were apparent in the texts that I examined.

## **II. Critical Discourse Analysis:**

To effectively examine Bush’s post 9/11 speeches, I utilize Thomas Huckin’s (2000) approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Huckin (2000), CDA is best characterized as an “approach toward textual analysis rather than a step-by-step method” (p.1). CDA is highly “context-sensitive” in that it acknowledges that texts are produced and interpreted “not in isolation but in some real-world context with all its complexity” (Huckin, 2000, p. 1). CDA tries to take into “account the most relevant textual and contextual factors, including historical ones, that contribute to the production and interpretation of a given text” (Ibid).

CDA also attempts to unite three different levels of analysis: the text itself, the “discursive practices” (i.e. the writing/speaking and reading/hearing) that create and

interpret the text; and the “larger social context that bears upon it” (Ibid). This third level therefore involves situating the text within larger social and political formations to show how the text may function to legitimize or reinforce certain ideologies, myths, values and power relations and how texts are often mobilized to “naturalize” or promote particular interests and ideas. Huckin further notes that CDA involves the “close analysis of written or oral texts that are deemed to be politically—or culturally influential to a given society.” However, the “text-analytic activity cannot be done in isolation; rather, the analyst must always take into account the larger context in which the text is located” (2000, p.2).

Undoubtedly, presidential speeches qualify as politically and culturally influential texts. Typically, such speeches are intended to persuade—they are purposefully designed to elicit a particular reaction from the audience by invoking themes, images, and ideas that are emotionally powerful. Speeches are also “constitutive;” they have the ability to construct meaning through the clever use and/or manipulation of language. Rather than merely reflecting “reality,” speeches often construct a particular version of reality.

For the purposes of my thesis, I extrapolated relevant categories from Huckin’s approach in my analysis of Bush’s speeches. These include framing, foregrounding/backgrounding, omission, presupposition, connotations, and modality.

*Framing* refers to the way in which the content of a text is presented and its overall tone, bias, or perspective. Frames also construct boundaries within which the content is intended to be interpreted—i.e. good versus evil. Huckin also notes that one “particularly powerful way of framing a text is through the use of visual aids” (2000, p. 5) therefore analysts should be alert to visual embellishments that are utilized. While I

generally treat the speeches I analyzed as written texts, in those instances where visual aids clearly played a significant role (as in Bush's Mission Accomplished speech), my analysis addresses their relevance.

Foregrounding refers to what is privileged in the text—the ways in which writers or speakers emphasize certain concepts or information while backgrounding refers to the marginalization, de-emphasis, or masking of other information or facts. Omission is the ultimate form of backgrounding and is often “the most potent aspect of textualization” because if the writer or speaker “does not mention something, it often does not enter the audience member's mind” and thus “is not subjected to his or her scrutiny” (Ibid).

Presupposition involves using language in a way that takes certain ideas for granted. Huckin provides the example of a politician who says, “We cannot continue imposing high taxes on the American people” to illustrate how presupposition works. In the aforementioned sentence, the speaker is presupposing that the taxes paid by Americans are high, which as Huckin points out “makes good political rhetoric but is not true, at least not compared to other industrialized nations” (2000, p. 7). Such presuppositions are “common in public discourse, especially in political speeches” and other forms of “persuasive rhetoric” and they are “notoriously manipulative because they are difficult to challenge.” Many readers or listeners are often reluctant to “question statements” that the author or speaker “appears to be taking for granted” (Ibid).

An analyst can also draw attention to special meanings or “connotations that certain words or phrases carry.” Connotations derive from the “frequent use of a word or phrase in a particular type of context;” labels (such as terrorist or evil) often carry

unavoidable connotations and sometimes connotations are “conveyed through the use of metaphor or other figures of speech” (Ibid).

Finally, modality refers to the “tone of statements as regards their degree of certitude and authority.” Modality impacts the tone of a given text and is carried by, and conveyed through words and phrases like “might,” “could,” “will,” “must,” “without a doubt.” Through their use of “such modal verbs and phrases, some texts convey an air of heavy-handed authority” (Huckin, 2000, p. 8).

In Chapter Two, I examine various speeches made by Bush in a one-year period following 9/11 as well as other significant speeches including those made on November 30, 2005 (remarks on Iraq) and May 1, 2003—the date of Bush’s infamous “mission accomplished” oration.



## CHAPTER TWO: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BUSH'S SPEECHES

### I. A Powerful and Continuing Nationalism:

As previously noted, Britt (2003) claimed that powerful, continuing nationalism could be witnessed in the ubiquity of patriotic songs, mottos, slogans, freedom walks, etc. In the aftermath of 9/11, there were also a variety of “patriotic” products available for consumption that included window flags, lamps, coins, snow globes and even children’s books that began to infiltrate everyday life in the form of kitsch. Sturken (2007) says that kitsch is the official aesthetic of patriotism due to its immediacy. Therefore, fellow patriots are easy to identify due to their “clip on” patriotism—be it a bumper sticker, window flag, lapel pin, etc.

There was also another type of 9/11 patriotic paraphernalia that aimed to suspend the tragedy and its memory within an object, or what I like to call a “tragedy preserve.” Snow globes resurrected the twin towers, with their respective birth and death date written on the bottom, commemorative coins displayed etchings of rescue workers erecting the American flag in the spirit of the soldiers at Iwo Jima, etc. These cultural artifacts can be viewed as aestheticizing politics. As Koepnick (1999) notes, politics become aestheticized in fascism because fascism promises great politics in a viable consumer good and a carefully designed marketed product.

Although Koepnick’s (1999) account of aestheticized politics is mostly concerned with spectacle and ideology, I contend that the same political aestheticization can also apply directly to actual consumer goods that commemorated the tragedy, namely the aforementioned kitschy artifacts because they mobilized emotions through the constant reminder of 9/11, eternally frozen, reminding citizens “why we fight.” For the architects

of the Bush administration, the fighting and the true reasons for the fighting (neoliberalism, imperialism, global domination) were cloaked in the rhetorical veneer of America's "greatness." Engle (2007) explains that when mourning and grief become kitschified, totalitarianism is not far behind. This is because, as Sturken (2007) points out, kitsch is an inexpensive way for totalitarian regimes to assimilate within the masses. It keeps a dictator close to their people by selling ideas of solidarity and brotherhood.<sup>1</sup>

Britt implies that for people who feel they do not have a social identity, discourses of nationhood may provide a bond that plays upon the feelings of being born in the same country, which helps to perpetuate a sense of brotherhood. This is the origin of nationalism (Eco, 1995). Paxton (2004) illustrates how fascism is "true" insofar as it helps to fulfill the destiny of a chosen people in a Darwinian struggle. In such scenarios, the strongest people are to fight it out for primacy; violence becomes beautiful on behalf of the nation.

Bush regularly spoke synecdochically on behalf of all Americans, conveying in speeches the types of emotions and feelings he believed the American people were collectively experiencing, or should be experiencing, as a brotherhood. Through both presupposition and modality, Bush tried to encapsulate the feelings and emotions of the American people during his presidential address to the nation on September 11, 2001. He said:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts... The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing

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<sup>1</sup> Fascism and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive: for example, a fascist state could be ruled by a totalitarian leader. However, a totalitarian state does not have to be fascist.

have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness and a quiet unyielding anger. These acts of murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation... This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.<sup>2</sup>

When rallying troops at the Travis Air Force Base on October 17, 2001, Bush emphasized specific ‘American’ qualities, when he claimed that “we are a good-kind-hearted decent people.” In reference to the terrorists and applying a collectively ‘American’ reaction while visiting the Dixie Printing Company to discuss the strong economy and homeland defense on October 24, 2001, Bush said that “they don’t understand that small business owners all across our country are saying, we’re not going to allow you to terrorize us.” And, during his remarks in his announcement of the “Lessons of Liberty” initiative on October 30, 2001, Bush framed the events of 9/11 in terms of how it allegedly affected and renewed all ‘Americans’:

... We have a renewed spirit of patriotism... We have a renewed appreciation of the character of America... We are a generous people, a thoughtful people who hurt...

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<sup>2</sup> In quoting from Bush’s speeches throughout this document, I include specific reference to the date in the body of my text, so that readers can consult the list of speeches provided in the bibliography.

According to Fairclough (1989), the most effective form of ideological common sense is the sense of “being” shared by most, if not all members of a society.

According to Eco (1995) in *Ur-fascism*, people do not have rights and the “people” become a monolithic entity expressing the common will. The leader articulates the common goals to the populace. This creates a situation wherein citizens are no longer autonomous agents, rather they are characters called upon to play a role in the narrative that the Bush administration had fabricated, a condition central to Ur - fascist psychology.

The social identities that Bush perpetuated and offered to Americans through his discourses of nationhood were based upon the presupposition of American global and moral superiority. During his Presidential address to the nation on September 11, 2001, Bush emphasized America’s “leadership” with regards to freedom when he stated that “America was attacked because we are the brightest beacon of freedom and opportunity in the world.” Repeatedly, the terrorists were characterized as freedom-haters who despised the “American” way of life. In his September 20, 2001 speech to a Joint Session of Congress, Bush claimed that:

...we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom...

On September the 11<sup>th</sup>, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country...freedom itself is under attack. Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government...They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other...

Not surprisingly, Bush omitted some important information from the frame which he created. For example, whether or not Bush had been democratically elected was still being hotly contested at the time. The fiasco that was the 2000 election led many to conclude that it was stolen or unjustly handed to Bush by a conservative Supreme Court (Palast, 2003; Kellner, 2001). Bush's reference to the freedom to vote would have likely irked those who were disenfranchised in the 2000 election as a result of Republican shenanigans (Palast, 2003). It is also important to acknowledge that while Bush was pontificating about freedom, the Patriot Act, one of the most egregious assaults on civil liberties, was already being written.

During his Presidential radio address on September 22, 2001, Bush continued to emphasize America's alleged superior qualities, particularly those of its worker-citizens when he claimed that America could boast "the best educated, most productive workforce in the world." However, this nod to workers was a bit disingenuous since Bush had already begun his attack on labour and unions (pre-9/11) prompting some to claim that he was even more anti-labour than Ronald Reagan (Green, 2003).

During his "Get on Board" speech to airline employees at O'Hare Airport on September 27, 2001, Bush again reminded Americans of their global superiority and exceptionalism:

...There will be a broad coalition of nations that understand what's at stake that have come rallying to our side... America will stand strong.

Others will tire and weary. I understand that but not our nation. Others

will second guess, but not our nation. Others will become impatient but not this great nation...

And at the “Jim Talent for Senate” dinner in Missouri on June 11, 2002, Bush once again repeated the mantra that America “is the greatest nation on the face of this earth.”

This type of national hubris regarding American superiority provided fertile ground for a complicit polis that would trust the words of the leader and buy into the desired imperial war's perpetual rhetoric as a valiant effort to save civilization. This type of Messianic rhetoric is problematic in its semblance to discourses regarding a “chosen people” or a Darwinian master race narrative that is arguably central to fascism (Goff, 2006).

“Ground zero” was also used in the service of promoting nationalist sentiments. In Italy, Mussolini often resurrected romantic nationalist ideas through spectacle and aestheticization regarding the sacred nature of Rome—palingenetic myth—to help mobilize his political ideologies concerning ‘rebirth.’ Palingenetic is derived from the term “palingenesis,” which comes from the term palin meaning “anew” and “genesis” meaning birth. Conceptually, palingenetic refers to regeneration following a period of crisis, which is often associated with the mythical. Regenerative concepts, like palingenetic myth, have the capacity to romanticize aggressive economic projects, transform consciousness, and promote magical personal regeneration, which is most often observed when individuals inexplicably succumb to “falling in love” or “turning over a new leaf” (Griffin, 1991).

Upon observing its function throughout history, we can see that palingenetic myth has often contributed to discourses of national regeneration promoted by various actors,

including political leaders (Griffin, 1991). Through the use of palingenetic myth, previous fascist regimes vowed to replace inadequacy, mediocrity and national weakness with heroism and national reputability (Griffin, 1991) and a compliant citizenry was systematically encouraged to blindly accept the trusted words of their leader, including sentiments that portrayed “their” nation as the greatest on earth.

In some ways, ‘ground zero,’ the residual site of the 9/11 attacks, possessed similar nationalist ideological analeptics to Mussolini’s Rome. According to Kaplan (cited in Sturken 2007, p.167), the term ‘ground zero’ is often used colloquially to convey “starting from scratch” or operating upon a clean slate. In observing consistent spectacles, one could argue that ‘ground zero’ was metaphorically linked to the national psyche. Amidst the chaos and disorientation, the American psyche was transformed into a “clean slate” upon which certain narratives could be written—narratives that were devoid of context and unencumbered by the messy realities of history.

Although Mussolini’s resurrection of Rome provided a representational narrative regarding the rebirth of their greatest empire, Bush’s ‘ground zero’ and the subsequent reconstructed national psyche, would help bring about America’s rebirth as the ‘new world order’ empire, through the perpetual deployment of an “America as saviours of civilization” narrative and ensuing imperialistic endeavors. Correspondingly (and more in line with Mussolini’s direct resurrection of Rome), the Bush administration also employed palingenetic myth through the direct resurrection of a romanticized yesteryear within America’s mythic past through notions of the Wild West.

Bush often notoriously spoke in cowboy rhetoric when discussing the perceived enemy. In reference to Osama Bin Laden, Bush recalled the popular old west criminal

poster and stated that he wanted Osama either “dead or alive.” In reference to the terrorists, Bush referenced the popular method of cowboys trapping Indians, by stating: “we’ll smoke ‘em out.” One could also argue that Bush sought to reaffirm America as the quintessential embodiment of the “tough cowboy” by (i) mocking those who may have believed that the nation was weak and vulnerable to attack pre-9/11 and; (ii) dismissing those who may have believed that the U.S. response to the attacks would be anything less than full-frontal war. This was particularly evident when the president was speaking to fellow Republicans at a luncheon in Connecticut on April 9, 2002:

...I can’t imagine what went through their minds when they attacked. I like to remind people they must have felt we were so materialistic and self-absorbed and so weak and feeble that all we would do would be to file a lawsuit...

Both Bush and members of his administration used this joke repeatedly. Ascribing “weakness” to the act of filing a lawsuit worked in conjunction with the cowboy masculinity Bush worked to promote. Within this context, Bush was not only trying to dismiss those who criticized his aggressive foreign policy; he was also attempting to uniquely position himself and his party as fierce and brave—willing to do whatever it took to protect the “homeland” regardless of pesky international laws and conventions. After all, the cowboy is a man of direct action and only believes in natural law, unleashing a great fury upon those who do not adhere (Kimmel, 1987). He possesses a rugged individualism and acts according to his own moral order, not the order of formal organization (Christensen and Ferree, 2008); he knows what is right and remains distrustful of those who dare to invoke man-made laws. Once an individual has



convinced himself that there are people who deserve punishment, he is freer to unleash a deep-seated aggression while maintaining a disquieting sense of morality (Adorno et al., 1982).

While promoting the Faith Based initiative on April 11, 2002, Bush invoked a sense of moral certitude underscored by cowboy bravado when he asserted that “when we say we’re going to do something, we’re going to do something, we’re going to do it, because the credibility of our country is at stake.” During his visit to Oak Park High School in Kansas on June 11, 2002 to discuss the nation’s critical infrastructure, Bush continued the “proving our worth to the world” narrative:

...You know there is no question in my mind that this great country is going to show the world what we’re made out of. This great country will show the world that we fight for what we believe...This great country will show the world the true compassion and decency of a great nation...

As in previous examples, Bush was clearly attempting to forge a “common identity” among the populace. “We” were part of the great nation, “we” would show the world what “we” were made of, “we” were compassionate and decent, our cause was noble and “we” would defeat the terrorists.

## **II. The Supremacy of the Military and the Militarization of Culture**

As Britt (2003) notes, avid militarism usually involves massive military spending and proto-fascist leaders tend to allocate a disproportionate share of national resources to the military. Since 9/11, the United States has undergone a radical shift in national values, resulting in a disproportionate amount of national resources and government spending allotted to the military.

The attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, according to the Bush administration, represented a new type of war, one where clandestine adversaries were globally dispersed and attacked by exploiting structural weaknesses with relatively minimal costs to themselves. Due to these unfamiliar tactics ascribed to the “new enemy,” certain forces within the state were advocating the need for new monies and resources to combat this “new” risk. In response to these concerns, the Bush administration freely increased the military budget by \$48 billion dollars with a five-year increase of \$120 billion. By 2008, more than \$600 billion federal dollars had been poured into defense, which is more than what any other country throughout world spends on their defenses combined (Adams, 2009).

However, these military budget increases occurred to the detriment of various social programs. As noted by journalist George Monbiot [cited in Giroux, 2004 (b)], the Bush administration spent as much on the military as it did on education, public health, pensions, food aid, employment, housing and welfare combined. According to Lutz (2002), this type of intense reallocation of labour and national resources for military purposes, along with the reshaping of institutions to make them congruent with militaristic ideals, is part of the larger discursive practice of militarization, that is, the restructuring of civil society “for the production of violence” (Lutz, 2002, p.723). This monetary growth of the American military-industrial complex makes what C. Wright Mills calls “a military definition for reality” (Ibid. p.725) a common truth amongst most Americans, that is, the Hobbesian notion that all human beings are inherently territorial and bad, making force the only way of achieving and maintaining order in the world (Ibid).

Of course, militarization also manifests itself in other ways in the culture at large. Giroux (2006), citing Lutz, also suggests that militarization is a discursive practice involving a shift in general societal beliefs in particular ways necessary to legitimate and justify the use of force, and the organization of long standing armies and their leaders. Unlike the old style of militarization in which all forms of civil authority were subordinate to military authority, the new ethos of militarization is organized to engulf the whole social order, centralizing and celebrating its values in American public life. In his various political speeches, Bush embedded militaristic values within the social fabric of the everyday as often as he could, including those occasions when he welcomed sports teams to the White House.

For example, when Super Bowl champions, the New England Patriots, visited the White House on April 2, 2002, Bush remarked:

...I was impressed by a lot, but let me tell you what impressed me most was when the team took to the field prior to the Superbowl, it wasn't one of these things where the spotlight was on any individual, everybody went out at the same time...I thought this was a good signal to America that teamwork is important; that the individual matters to the team, but the team is bigger than the individual... We're here to serve something greater than ourselves...

He employed similar rhetoric when welcoming the NCAA champs on May 21, 2002:

...You showed some things that I think are necessary for our country, particularly at this time, that if you serve something greater than yourself, called a team, you can achieve great things...If we serve something better

than materialism, self absorption, we can do some great things in our country...

The notion of “serving something greater” is the preface to the military’s narrative of honour and nobility, and is littered in numerous locations on the official website of the United States military (<http://www.army.mil/info/>). Weaving this militaristic mythical narrative in the practice of the everyday naturalizes it as something Americans should dutifully praise and strive towards. When militarization seeks to transform a society, that society begins to imagine military needs and values as valuable and normal (Enloe, 2000).

During his infamous “mission accomplished” speech on the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, Bush illustrated the superior citizen quality of those serving in the military:

...When Iraqi civilians look into the faces of our service men and women, they saw strength and kindness and good will. When I look at the members of the United States military, I see the best of our country and I am honoured to be your commander in chief...

He also referred to soldierly sacrifice on May 2, 2002 otherwise known as “Loyalty Day”:<sup>3</sup>

...President Woodrow Wilson said, “loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of sacrifice...For our military personnel, loyalty and dedication is a way of life. The men and women of our Armed Forces embody

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<sup>3</sup> Loyalty day was first established on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921 and initially referred to as “Americanization day.” This initial commencement was quite uneventful as its primary function was to counteract “Labor Day” (Time and Date, 2009). However, under the Bush administration, “Loyalty Day” was conveniently “hijacked” and transformed into a nationalistic, jingoistic celebration with a distinct focus on military personnel who “continually serve and self-sacrifice daily on behalf of the nation.” (Ibid).

loyalty as they work to protect our ideals. Throughout our history, America's military has heroically defended our country and its founding principles of freedom and democracy. Today, our military is again responding to the call of duty with courage and pride. These brave individuals who risk their lives fighting terror honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of the American people...Loyalty Day provides an opportunity to recognize those who demonstrate their commitment to our country through service and sacrifice. These individuals serve as a model for all Americans...

During his presidential address to the nation on October 17, 2001, Bush praised young American children for understanding the dignity of service and personal sacrifice:

...I recently received a touching letter that says a lot about the state of America during these tough times a letter from a fourth grade girl, with a father in the military. 'As much as I don't want my daddy to fight,' she wrote, 'I'm willing to give him to you.' Since Sept. 11 an entire generation of young Americans has gained new understanding of the value of freedom, and it's cost in duty and sacrifice...

In this type of emotional appeal, Bush framed the soldier as someone who willingly put service before self, voluntarily leaving family for the sake of the nation (team).

As the militarization of culture proceeded apace, citizens were increasingly recruited as foot soldiers (Giroux, 2004). Bush often referred to those Americans who were inquiring about how they could help in the aftermath of 9/11. While Bush suggested that Americans should volunteer and persevere against terrorist intimidation by working and consuming, he also encouraged Americans to spy on their neighbours, report any

suspicious activity or people and supply data to government sources to assist in the war on terror. [Americans seemed to willingly and enthusiastically accept their role as homeland foot soldiers because military personnel were presented as ideal, superior citizens].

Elevating the role of soldiers to the status of super-citizens also contributes to the glamourization of the military, which Britt identifies as a key feature of fascism. Within the American context, the valorization of the military was based upon a longstanding American monomyth derivative of tales of Judeo Christian redemption (Lawrence and Jewett 2002) combined with elements of the selfless servant and the keen crusader who vows to destroy evil at all costs.<sup>4</sup> Central to the glamourization ethos is the “superhuman” or “ubermensch” discourse.<sup>5</sup> Fundamental to this discourse is the image of a selfless servant who undergoes intense training sacrificing the pleasure principle and replacing it with pain. This renders their physical bodies mechanistic (Theweleit, 1987, vol.2). The mechanistic troop is emotionless and represents the epitome of strength, determination and a specific masculinity well suited to conservative politics. Arguably, the Bush administration valued and promoted the discourse of the mechanized soldier by disallowing photographs to be taken of those military personnel who lost their lives in the theatre of war. To uphold the mechanized soldierly discourse one must eliminate the visibility of their humanity, and the organic makeup of their bodies, which can eventually deteriorate.

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<sup>4</sup> It is also important to note, that this glamourization applies almost exclusively to male soldiers, as men are viewed as the sole possessors of the particular mental and physical capacity necessary to combat evildoers.

<sup>5</sup> *Übermensch* is a Nietzschean term describing a “superman,” a state wherein ordinary humanity is overcome.

At one point, Bush himself assumed the role of the mechanistic hard body by synecdochically self-identifying with the soldiers as if he too was one of them, on the front lines of battle. For example, after the president had a colonoscopy on June 28, 2002, he said, “I did so because we are at war—I just want to be super—you know.” This suggested that Bush underwent a physical examination to ensure he was in pique physical condition as if he too, would be putting his physicality to use during battle. Some have noted that in the post-9/11 political landscape, there was a cultural disposition that demanded semblance between political figures and uniformed military personnel (Enloe, 2001). Bush’s “mission accomplished,” speech, was what Susan Jeffords described as a “remasculinizing spectacle” wherein Bush’s strength was considered to be at its highest peak both physically and sexually (von der Lippe, 2005), and was also illustrative of the links between militarization and hegemonic masculinity.

In what was arguably one of the most egregious examples of “pure propaganda” spectacle reminiscent of Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, Bush’s handlers produced an elaborate backdrop for the President to declare the ‘official’ end of the Iraq war” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2005, p. 43). Dressed from head to toe in a flight suit, Bush made a tailhook landing from a vintage Navy aircraft—that was branded with Navy One and George W. Bush Commander-in-Chief logos—onto the *USS Abraham Lincoln* on May 1, 2003. Bush deplaned from the aircraft and swaggered across the flight deck amidst a crowd of “cheering officers and sailors who had been lined up like an assembly of tin soldiers” (Ibid). Under a banner that read “mission accomplished,” Bush delivered a speech claiming that the battle of Iraq had been a “victory” in the ongoing war on terror:

...In this battle, we have fought for the cause of liberty and for the peace of the world. Our nation and our coalition are proud of this accomplishment, yet it is you, the members of the United States military, who achieved it. Your courage, your willingness to face danger for your country and for each other made this day possible. Because of you our nation is more secure. Because of you the tyrant has fallen and Iraq is free...

As well as:

...Operation Iraqi Freedom was carried out with a combination of precision and speed and boldness the enemy did not expect and the world had not seen before...

A narrative of American military exceptionalism is also prevalent in this particular excerpt with Bush's mention of military precision, speed and boldness as "unexpected and unlike anything the world has ever seen before." The latter presumption is more telling as it attempts to inferentially transcend both space and time to emphasize America's spatio-temporal supremacy throughout the world in regards to military matters.

Television news and cable media outlets ran Bush's speech and the scenes from the *Lincoln* ad nauseum. Not surprisingly, the fact that Bush had been AWOL for more than a year of the National Guard Service that saved him from being sent to Vietnam did not register with most media pundits who were literally gushing about Bush's masculinist display.

Considering the vitality of the penis as a testament to one's degree of masculinity, it was hardly surprising when the presidential appendage became an object of adulation



among those discussing George W. Bush's masculinity after the carefully orchestrated spectacle. In an interview regarding the "mission accomplished" speech on *Hardball*, Gordon Liddy could hardly contain his admiration for Bush's padded panache:

And here comes George Bush. You know, he's in his flight suit, he's striding across the deck, and he's wearing his parachute harness. You know, and I've worn those because I parachute – and it makes the best of his manly characteristic... You know all those women who say size doesn't matter – they're all liars... check that out... what a stud (Liddy cited in Ducat, 2004, p. 244).

It should be noted that this phallic fascination also manifested itself in the broader popular culture as the rapid selling of a George W. Bush action figure manufactured by *Talking Presidents* suggested. The doll was 12" complete with a visor, goggles, oxygen mask and an anatomically, exaggerated penis underneath his little flight suit. The penis was constructed from a life like silicone material making it clear that the company realized that Americans needed to know that the president was "not another Ken doll or G.I. Joe" (Ducat, 2004, p.245).

In addition to the valorization of hypermasculinity, narratives of human exceptionalism are also part of ubermensch discourse. When Bush saluted the troops of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mounted Division on July 19, 2002, he melodramatically emphasized their superiority despite the apparent disadvantages they were facing:

...As General Hagenbeck put it, when this division was called in September to deploy, nobody ever asked, are you ready; it was assumed

...You fought beside our allies in cold rugged terrain, against trained and resourceful killers. You met the enemy half a world away, in his own element, yet the terrorists discovered no bunker could protect them...

This example illustrates the exceptional *ubermensch* attributed to the American soldier. Bush paradoxically claimed that American soldiers were fighting against trained and resourceful killers without acknowledging that the American military is arguably the most sophisticated killing entity in the world. By backgrounding, in fact, omitting this reality to use Huckin's terminology, Bush reinforced the narrative of a virtuous nation by suggesting the American military's might was being used only for noble purposes. Bush also foregrounded tales of American exceptionalism and American superiority regarding individual soldiers by suggesting they were victorious against an enemy that had every advantage, including a territorial edge since the battle was being waged on the terrorists' own turf.

This narrative created a contradictory complex regarding American soldiers as both underdogs (untrained killers on enemy terrain) and superheroes (persistently victorious in unlikely situations). The American military as both David and Goliath created a more appealing tale. Much like Peter Parker or Clark Kent, military men were portrayed as regular guys dealing with adverse circumstances but nonetheless determined to triumph against evil by virtue of their inherent superiority.

Soldiers were also portrayed as saviours as was evident in the "rescue" of Jessica Lynch. Initial reports had suggested that Lynch's convoy was ambushed in Nasiriya and that she had sustained injuries, including knife and gun shot wounds, while fighting off Iraqi forces. According to the official account, she had been tied up and taken to the

hospital in Nasiriya. On April 1 2003, American Special Forces “freed” her in a daring, surprise raid despite “resistance” from the Iraqi guards who were stationed at the hospital and later that day, in an address from the White House, Bush announced her rescue to the nation. The Pentagon subsequently released a video of the raid to the news media. The “rescue” was filmed on a night vision camcorder by a former assistant to director Ridley Scott, who had worked on the film *Black Hawk Down* (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2005). Eventually, the Lynch drama was revealed to be a well-choreographed operation crafted by the military propaganda machinery. She had not fought off Iraqi forces in a hail of gunfire; rather, Lynch’s injuries, which included a fractured arm and a dislocated ankle, were caused by an accident in the lorry in which she had been travelling and her rescuers did not encounter any resistance at the hospital. Faludi claims that while Lynch may have been in uniform, this “wasn’t a story about a soldier’s return to her brothers in arms. It was a tale of a maiden in need of rescue” (Faludi, 2007. p.169). The Lynch rescue supplied the grandiose images of American military heroism and by theatrically saving Jessica the American public’s sense of virtue was revitalized and their sense of moral superiority reaffirmed (Brittain, 2006).

According to Lawrence and Jewett (2002), the constant presence and visibility of a glamourized military can lend itself to a situation in which citizens may experience the Wurther Effect. The Wurther Effect is said to shape audiences’ actions in a way that is consistent with fantasy. Those submitting to fantasy often refuse to accept known truths while being more susceptible to believing the fabrications of those in power (in this case, war stories) even after those stories are discredited.

As is now well known, the Bush administration attempted to justify the invasion of Iraq through mythical war stories that began with the debunked story that Saddam Hussein was in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Upon finding out that there were no weapons of mass destruction, the narrative shifted to Bush's desire (and by extension, America's desire) to liberate Iraqis, namely women and children, suffering under a callous dictator (Hunt & Rygiel, 2006).

These narratives helped to obfuscate a very public claim that Bush was interested in going after Hussein well before 9/11. As McLaren and Jaramillo recount, on the June 15<sup>th</sup> edition of NBC's *Meet the Press* former general and architect of the Yugoslavian destruction, Wesley Clark, told Tim Russert that the Bush administration had engaged in a campaign to connect Hussein to the 9/11 attacks the morning the attacks occurred. Clark himself was called upon by the administration to strategically associate Hussein with the terrorist attacks. Mainstream media coverage of this revelation was virtually non-existent. The Bush administration's pre-orchestrated plan to inundate Iraq and the shifting of narratives illustrated the administration's desire to initiate war for reasons other than humanitarian purposes (McLaren and Jamarillo, 2005).

As Giroux (2005) argues, the militarization of culture contributes to the onslaught of unbridled political power and the depoliticization of the public wherein citizens may submit to government's militaristic agendas both at home and abroad. American military presence in other countries is not just about basic military ends; it is also used to promote the economic and political objectives of U.S. capitalism and express American domination. And as Klein (2007) and others have convincingly argued, contrary to the

noble causes cited by the Bush administration, recent wars have been waged to promote a neoliberal agenda for the benefit of corporate interests.

### **III. The Protection and Maintenance of Corporate Power**

Banal militarism and the glamourization of the soldier work in conjunction to help preserve and maintain the nation's corporate power. Financial figureheads became viewed prominently among the real heroes of 9/11 as finance and militarism became publically joined, reinforcing and normalizing the militaristic attitudes adopted by the finance industry that commend masculine qualities of aggressiveness and war making, and revaluing the greed and predatory behaviour that is often associated with financial agents. The gendered language surrounding the market worked to enforce ideas of nationhood and, consequently, market actions that were considered "normal" by the financial sector and the general populations were regarded as unifying and resilient (Mayhall, 2009).

During his "Today we mourned tomorrow we work" speech upon his arrival from Camp David on September 16, 2001, Bush reminded citizens of their part in economic resiliency:

...I have great faith in the resiliency of the economy, and no question about it this incident affected our economy but the markets open tomorrow, people go back to work and we'll show the world...

During his "we've got a job to do" speech to employees of the Eisenhower Executive office building on September 17, 2001, Bush explained how terrorism would be fought through the continuation of the economy:

... I'm here to remind people that the best way to fight terrorism is not to let terrorism intimidate America... there are a lot of courageous people here and they are coming back to work...I want to thank them for that and remind them we've all got a job to do...

In his "get on board speech" urging Americans to have faith in the American airline industry, on September 27, 2001 Bush stressed the importance of standing united by continuing to feed into the economy:

... We've got quite a crowd traveling today, all of whom, all of whom are here to say as clearly as we can to the American public, get on the airlines go about the business of America (applause). I think it's interesting how on one side we see Americans; on the other side it says "united" (applause) because that is what we are - America is united (applause) we are united...

The importance of an orderly day of market trading following the attack was also repeatedly emphasized. Panic in the market was deemed unpatriotic and Bush suggested that if people ceased to work or lost faith in the market that this would have signaled a victory for the terrorists. Those who fought terror by consuming and maintaining faith in the market were assimilated into the heroic foot soldier discourses of 9/11. For example, members of the bond-trading firm Cantor-Fitzgerald began working immediately after the attacks, deciding their return would be suggestive of the terrorist's failure, a move highly celebrated in the media (Mayhall, 2009).

During the CEO Summit in China on October 20, 2001, Bush discussed the attempt of terrorists to disrupt the world economy and reiterated the theme of battling terrorism with “free trade:”

...The terrorists hoped the world markets would collapse. But markets have proven their resiliency and fundamental strength... We know a future of greater trade and growth and human dignity is possible and we will build it...

Britt (2003) argues that the industrial and business aristocracies are often the ones who put government leaders into power. This creates a mutually beneficial business government model. According to Gross (1980), under presidents Nixon, Carter and Ford, two similar trends developed. First, there were plenty of investments within areas such as the promotion of multinational corporations, foreign currency manipulations, the protection of US foreign investments, and the application of wage controls or wage guidelines. Second, there was an exponential growth in the amount of interaction between the financial community and presidential staff (many of whom hailed from business positions). These trends ultimately led to the integration of top business leaders and the prime movers in federal government—an alliance some have suggested is characteristic of fascist forms of socio-economic organization. In America, this protection and maintenance of corporate power is most evident through the neoliberal practices that were central to the Bush administration.

According to Giroux (2005), neoliberalism, one of the driving forces of the Bush administration, represents an attack on democracy and renders everything for sale to be plundered for profit. Essentially, neoliberalism works to depoliticize (with the

privatization of the public square) and deregulate, resurrect social Darwinism, eliminate all social programs necessary to democracy, humiliate weaker nations by subjecting them to “readjustments” packages through the IMF, privatize public assets, and subcontract private employment including the business of waging war and war/disaster profiteering. The events following 9/11 proved to be quite lucrative for the neoliberal agenda (Klein, 2007). According to Bellamy Foster (2006), for a suffering Wall Street stuck in stagnation, the disasters created after 9/11 were good news, as the stocks of military contractors soared. The war on terror provided the neocons with a refurbished, more effective way to achieve their economic goals (Klein, 2007). Fundamental to the war profiteering of the Bush agenda was the implementation of various neoliberal economic initiatives that were promoted through ‘shock and awe’ tactics both domestically and abroad.

The working economic thesis in Iraq was the implementation of *economic shock therapy*. Torturers know that when implementing shock therapy, victims become psychologically paralyzed and disoriented. *Economic shock therapy* operates under similar pretenses and is applied to the immediate implementation of painful free market reforms, often following a period of epic social disruption like war or government collapse. The populace becomes so preoccupied with the social shift and pressures of survival that they go into a state of suspension, incapable of resistance. To resurrect a preceding notion, they become “clean slates” (Klein, 2004). Following the creation of the “clean slates” and the ultimate destruction of Iraq’s infrastructure as a result of the war, the Bush administration proposed to rebuild the country as a free market haven.



Two months before the Iraq war, USAID (United States Agency for International Development) drafted a work order for a private company to look after Iraq's transition to a market driven economy. The company, KPMG (Bearing Point offshoot), was to take "appropriate advantage of the unique opportunity for rapid progress in this area presented by the current configuration of political circumstances" (Klein, 2004 p.45).

L. Paul Bremer, the man who led the US occupation of Iraq as administrator of the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) from May 2, 2003 until June 28, 2004, made visible a free market accommodation when he fired 500, 000 state workers, most of whom were soldiers, doctors, teachers, nurses, printers and publishers. He continued his corporate-minded strategy by allowing unrestricted imports to flood in, essentially opening the country up to foreign investors and declaring Iraq "open for business" (Klein, 2004 p.45). Bremer created a series of Orders to further encourage foreign investors and multinational corporations to invest in Iraq. For example, Order 37 lowered Iraq's corporate tax rate from 40% to 15%; Order 39 allowed foreign companies to own 100% of Iraqi assets and they were not required to reinvest in Iraq or be taxed; and Order 40 allowed foreign banks to come into the country. The only economic policy from Saddam's regime that was left intact was a law restricting collective bargaining and trade unions (Klein, 2004).

Extreme profiteering also came as a direct outcome of warring itself. Companies like The Carlyle Group, which has close ties to the Bush family and in which Dick Cheney was an equity partner, profited immensely from the sales of robotics, defense communication systems, and received a major contract to train Iraqi police that saw a 6.6 billion payout to its investors (Klein, 2007). Halliburton, where Dick Cheney was a

former CEO and shareholder, also saw an increase in stock price by 300% after the war due to escalating energy prices and Iraq contracts (Klein, 2007). Freelancers with ties to the governments were also profiteering from the waging of war. Former Secretary of State, George Shultz headed up the committee for the Liberation of Iraq, a group formed in 2002 to help the Bush Administration build the case for war to the American public by creating hysteria over Saddam's brewing threat. What Shultz failed to disclose was that he was on the board of Bechtel and had been for many years. Bechtel saw its profits rise by 2.3 billion dollars from rebuilding the very country whose destruction Shultz had advocated (Klein, 2007).

The agenda was set for the Middle East to be cleansed for a giant free trade zone to be established. Bush's sentiment about bringing freedom to a troubled area was not about spreading democracy and freedom for Iraqis, rather it was about spreading economic freedom that allowed US multinational companies to feed off of Iraq as a newly privatized state, which began with a reconstruction boom of \$38 billion from congress, \$15 billion from countries outside the US and \$30 billion of Iraq's oil money. The reconstruction plan further deprived Iraq's already weakened industrial sector, increased the unemployment rate and ignored any development towards a sustainable economy (Klein, 2007, p.416). This reconstruction plan did not involve any Iraqi workers or companies; instead it became USAID's jurisdiction, developing what Klein calls, "a kind of country in a box, designed in Virginia and Texas, to be assembled in Iraq" (Klein, 2007, p.418). Naturally, this "missionaries of democracy" paradigm carries monetary benefits to the United States while destroying the infrastructures of the supposed countries in need.

As soon as the war began, Iraqis were subject to mass destruction of the cities' major sensory centers. On the night of March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003 as US troops closed in, the Ministry of Communication was bombed as well as twelve telephone exchanges. By April 2nd hardly anyone had a working phone. As part of the same assault, major radio and television transmitters were also destroyed, making it impossible for residents to receive any news regarding the carnage that was occurring in their very neighbourhoods. Also, five million people unknowingly descended into darkness with the headlights of passing cars as their only relief. Like the famed hooded victim at Abu Ghraib, an entire city was hooded, deprived of their abilities to both see and hear (Klein, 2007). Some Americans tolerated this infrastructural destruction because they operated under the premise that the American military was in Iraq to reconstruct the country, and to bring it closer to 'civilization.' And this, according to champions of neoliberalism begins with a free market ideology and Friedmanite economics.

An example of this could be observed during the CEO Summit in China on October 20, 2001 wherein Bush discussed the attempt of terrorists to disrupt the world economy. Bush remarked:

...When nations allow their citizens to exercise conscience and creativity, the result is economic and social progress. When nations accept the rules of the modern world, they discover the benefits of the modern world...

The linguistic use of "modern world" in this situation speaks directly to ideas of civilization as part of a constructed language in the creation of a new social reality that validates and normalizes warring for the purpose of civilizing rogue nations through free market ideology. Words are imbued with histories and words like "civilization" or

“modern world” cannot avoid their historical application by imperialists and colonialists of the last century, which affects their usage in a contemporary context (Jackson, 2005). Ideas of the uncivilized or unmodern historically resonate with notions of the prehistoric and the irrational, hence Iraq’s constructed anachronistic existence (Zine, 2006).

During this address, Bush continued to promote “progress” through free trade when he claimed that “trade is the engine of economic advancement on every continent, in every culture trade generates opportunity” and when he suggested that “the habits of economic freedom will create expectations of greater democracy.” Bush continued to rally people to work together using this type of language as justification for the advancement of free global markets. Inherent in this language was a jingoistic discourse that constructed associations between freedom, democracy and the financial markets—an eventual association that became the motif of civilization (Mayhall, 2009). Shepard (2006) even suggested that the Bush administration’s propagation of the alignment between freedom, the spread of democracy and economic liberalism was strongly gendered insofar as the Iraqi state was portrayed as a female spinster while the market was characterized as a masculinized meandering cowboy waltzing in to tame and save her. Additionally Klein’s (2007) mention of Milton Friedman’s (a key player in the development of neoliberal ideology, a man honoured and paid tribute to by George Bush and a mentor for most neoconservatives) desire to freely de-pattern society and return to a pure capitalism devoid of regulatory restriction and trade barriers, is illustrative of the aforementioned cowboy masculinity. As George Soros pointed out, the rigid neoliberal mission allowed the Bush administration to believe that America was stronger than other nations. This ultimately led to an American complex of supremacy blending both free

market ideology and religious fundamentalism [cited in Giroux, 2004 (a)] as part of its imperialistic plan.

Fundamental to America's supremacy through free market ideology is also the promotion of free trade as an eradicator of terrorism. On September 20, 2001 US trade representative Robert Zoellick announced that the "Bush administration would be countering terrorism with trade" (Juhasz, 2006, p.17). Additionally, in a *Washington Post* op-ed Zoellick continued to say that, 'free trade' and 'freedom' were inextricably linked and that trade would promote "the values at the heart of this protracted struggle" (Juhasz, 2006, p.17). In the spirit of fighting terror, Zoellick also requested the passage of a series of corporate globalization agreements (Juhasz, 2006).

Bush conveyed these same sentiments regarding free trade as the saving grace amidst dark times, when he encouraged congressional support of American corporate globalization as a gesture towards recovery after 9/11, which he suggested would result in prosperity and freedom throughout the world. Juhasz explains how George Bush's idea of "freedom" was synonymous with "free trade" and "free markets," all of which were concepts his administration was willing to protect through military violence (2006). As Juhasz notes, "President Bush has explained the policies of corporate globalization through the barrel of a gun. Extreme benefits have accrued to his corporate allies, but the costs are being born out by us all" (2006, p.298).

The United States has, for years, through various Democratic and Republican administrations, promoted the agenda of corporate globalization and Friedmanite economics. However, the Bush administration was particularly aggressive in pursuing

these aims and cementing the shift from a “paternalistic” welfare state to a neoliberal patriarchal warfare state.

#### **IV. Disdain for Human Rights**

The “nation recreating” and civilizing paradigms the Bush administration perpetuated were also evident at the civil level wherein violations of human rights and “terrorist cleansing” occurred alongside the claim that the “war on terror” was about expanding human rights. During the lead up to the war, the Bush administration began to speak of the abuses and misogynistic treatment of Afghan women at the hands of the Taliban. The Bush administration continued to argue that the war on terror, in large part, was to be fought on behalf of the restoration of rights and dignity of oppressed women. Correspondingly, three years after the Taliban was removed from power, the Bush administration professed the liberation of Afghan women as the greatest accomplishment of the war on terror (Hunt, 2006).

However, despite the liberation rhetoric, international human rights watchdogs and Afghan women’s rights organizations monitoring post-Taliban Afghanistan concluded that the war on terror did not liberate women at all, rather it amplified their desperate situations. More particularly, the war stimulated resistance to women’s rights by Afghan conservatives who viewed the American attempt to liberate women as an assault on their culture and religion. Furthermore, the war culminated in the displacement of many women from their homes, the death of several at the hands of US bombs, and in material, physical and spiritual losses as they were left to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and war torn country (Hunt, 2006). Hunt illustrates this notion well by citing Christine Delphy, “to say the war is beneficial for Afghan women is to decide that

it is better for them to die from bombs, from hunger, from cold, than to live under the Taliban. Death rather than servitude: that is what Western public opinion has decided for Afghan women” (Hunt, 2006, p.61).

According to Britt (2003), due to the fear of enemies and the need for security, leaders with fascist proclivities can persuade people to believe that human rights can be ignored, in certain cases presumably out of “necessity.” People often look the other way or even approve torture and long incarcerations of prisoners. Davis (2006) contends that human beings are creatures ruled by emotions, this makes ideology difficult to subvert because the ideas and beliefs satisfy underlying emotions. If one could get people to invest enough emotion in a flag, image or a symbolic act, it would be quite effortless to enlist their continuing support for questionable policies and practices. Arguably, the emotions and fears stirred up by the Bush administration affected the way people responded to the war, devoid of critical reflection and rational thought, prompting the tolerance of human rights violations at home and abroad.

Until 9/11, Americans reveled in the naturalized sentiment that they were and would continually be safe on their own soil. After the attacks, those feelings of perceived safety receded as feelings of vulnerability prevailed. This manifested itself in the form of a collective panic and fear as Americans were constantly reminded of the looming threat posed by the terrorists through Bush’s framing of the “crisis”—a rhetorical strategy that permitted the Bush administration to effectively silence policy critics, sanction partisan legislation and continue to profit from future political capital. For the most part, the public accepted this crisis rhetoric as Americans were asked to support their

government's handling of the crisis in ways that precluded any debate about the issues surrounding it (Drew, 2004).

The violation of human rights is more easily justified when people are demonized and dehumanized. Central to the rhetorical strategy of "crisis" is the creation of a narrative involving a horrifying, monstrous, degenerate form of humanity as the adversary. "Monster rhetoric" has often been used in the western world alongside discourses of normality as Puar and Rai (2002) note. It invokes images of the "other" as uncivilized and subhuman. Bush perpetuated this "monster rhetoric" by his constant referral to terrorists as cave dwellers. This narrative correlates to ideas of the mythic because fabled monsters most often lived in caves. For example, while in Tennessee promoting Citizen Corps for Safer Communities on April 8, 2002, Bush claimed that there was "no cave deep enough to hide from the army of justice of the United States army." In the same address, he continued to speak of the inhumane qualities of terrorists by suggesting that, "these people hate America. They are cold-blooded killers ."

This discourse was also reinforced by the media in general, but more specifically by Fox News anchors, analysts and correspondents who constantly referred to Osama Bin Laden as a "monster" with a band of "terrorist goons." As a result of this repeated demonization and dehumanization, traumatized Americans were more likely to accept questionable policies that were enacted under the guise of "safety" and "security."

For the Bush administration, the guise of security was used to sanction the use of torture and the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Jackson & Towle (2006) note that the rights normally granted to prisoners in accordance with international treaties and constitutional principles, were repeatedly violated leading to routine torture and abuse



witnessed by the public through visual documentation, which included images of naked Iraqi prisoners piled atop one another, soldiers urinating on prisoners, Iraqi corpses, and dogs barking in the face of cowering prisoners (Brittain, 2006).

These photographs were heralded as something that would discredit the Bush administration. Democrats began calling for Donald Rumsfeld's resignation as the pictures came to represent a direct reflection of the administration's corruption and depravity (Brittain, 2006). However, rather than contributing to its demise, the photographs actually helped the administration to manage the PR crisis. Bush and his minions claimed that, upon further investigation of the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, they had discovered that there were only a "few bad apples" perpetuating the atrocities, and upon witnessing what had transpired, the rest of the troops came forward to alert the rest of the civilized world. Rather than the incident being reflective of Bush's policies, the "bad apple" explanation was utilized to maintain the administration's legitimacy as well as the wars (Sheperd, 2008).

In the beginning, the Abu Ghraib photographs depicted male soldiers torturing and humiliating Arabic male prisoners. As time passed, the photographs of the male abusers started to diminish and images of one single female, Lynndie England, were widely circulated, as she became the prominent face of the "bad apple" gang. However, it is important to note that the soldiers' actions (including those of England) were not random or "out of the ordinary" as the bad apple discourse suggested. Rather, the specific types of psychological and physical coercion were reminiscent of how military intelligence routinely receives information. Therefore, the atrocities were systematic and authorized from above (Brittain, 2006). Nonetheless, it was the "bad apples" that were reprimanded.

General Jane Karpinski, who ran the prison, was suspended from command; Colonel Thomas M. Papas was reprimanded and fined for his failure to ensure the “proper” training of the interrogators, and a handful of junior guards were court marshaled (Jackson & Towle, 2006). England, of course, received an honourable discharge and served half of her three-year jail sentence.

Since the brutalities were first exposed, it has become quite clear that the “bad apple” discourse was used to obfuscate the fact that the approval of torture came from the highest echelons of the Bush White House as has since been revealed. Indeed, evidence began to surface as the summer of 2009 wore on. Dick Cheney eventually admitted to approving “interrogation” techniques such as “water-boarding” or simulated drowning, which was performed on a suspected organizer of the 9/11 attacks, a process that WWII Japanese soldiers were tried and convicted for as war crimes (Edwards & Webster, 2008). Cheney’s admission implied that Bush too had sanctioned the use of torture. In fact, during an April 2008 television interview with *ABC News*, Bush stated that he was aware that the “national security team had met” on the issue and that he had approved of the meeting, and presumably the tactics used. This was in response to a question of whether or not he knew about the meeting of his subordinates regarding the specific instance of torture. In the same interview, Bush defended the use of water boarding on Khalid Sheikh Mohammed saying, “We had legal opinions that enabled us to do it. And no, I didn’t have any problem at all trying to find out what Khalid Sheikh Mohammed knew” (Bush cited in Swanson, 2006, p.1). On May 10, 2009, Dick Cheney further implicated Bush when he appeared on the CBS show, *Face the Nation*. When asked about Bush’s knowledge of the torture methods, Cheney replied, “I, certainly, yes, have every reason to

believe he knew – he knew a great deal about the program. He basically authorized it. I mean, this was a presidential–level decision...he signed off on it [*sic*]” (Cheney cited in Swanson, 2006, p.1). In addition to Cheney’s revelations, Bush also implicated himself by alluding to the use of torture in January, 28, 2003 State of the Union, when he claimed that more than “3000 suspected terrorists had been arrested in many countries.” He went on to say that many others had “met a different fate” and that they were “no longer a problem to the United States and our friends and allies” (Bush cited in Swanson, 2006, p.1).

Taken together, these examples of the blatant disregard for human rights suggest the Bush administration’s behaviour reflected tendencies that Britt has aptly associated with fascism.<sup>6</sup>

## **V. Fusion of Church and State**

Richard Neustadt argued that modern presidents need to be active and experienced politicians, skilled in the art of political compromise and the power of persuasion. However, the presidential election of George Bush illustrates how Neustadt’s essential presidential attributes are not imperative to the American electorate. In certain circumstances throughout America’s history, “amateur” politicians and “men of faith” who pursue what Max Weber called “the absolute ethics of the gospel,” have served as chief executives (Berggren and Rae, 2006 p. 608). Neustadt believed that these types of

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<sup>6</sup> It should also be noted that Americans seemed willing to relinquish their own civil liberties for protection. The attacks prompted changes within domestic law that euphemistically stood to protect Americans, while undermining their basic civil rights. According to Jackson and Towle (2006), these new draconian laws allowed for people to be held in jail for indefinite periods without trial, permitted secret military tribunals and the implementation of wiretaps. The most egregious of laws can be found in the “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism” or the USA PATRIOT Act. The USA PATRIOT Act was drafted by the Justice Department and passed by Congress within weeks of the 9/11 attacks. This act passed behind closed-door negotiations and without committees’ final hearings. The act is most harmful in its clear violation of the fourth amendment (protection of due process) and fifth amendment (safeguard against unreasonable search and seizures) (Jackson and Towle, 2006). Critics have suggested that the PATRIOT Act allows the FBI, CIA, and White House to spy on Americans and repress any political dissent (Jackson & Towle, 2006).

leaders are guaranteed to fail because they are unable to comprehend their own limitations as president and the futility of utilizing moral pressures in achieving goals within a pluralistic political system (Berggren and Rae, 2006).

When Bush, arguably an “amateur” politician, was elected to the White House in 2000 after one of the most bitterly contested presidential elections in American history, many Christians rejoiced in the belief that “one of them” was in control of the highest office in the nation. While the Republican Party had, for some time, courted the religious right, Bush’s ascension to the White House represented the culmination of years of aggressive grass roots activism by the Christian Right (Hedges, 2007).

The Republican Party had come under the increasingly theocratized control of the religious right with “Christian Nation” platforms posed by presidential aspirants Pat Robertson and John Ashcroft (Phillips, 2006). Although Robertson failed to capture the White House, John Ashcroft did get his opportunity as the Attorney General of the Bush Administration and immediately set an aggressively Christian tone by covering the breasts of the statues in the Department of Justice (Ducat, 2004). And, of course, Bush himself was quick to buttress his Christian credentials. In keeping with the dominionist theology of his fundamentalist supporters, Bush launched his Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives during the first month of his presidency (Ebaugh et al., 2003).

The Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives worked to encourage more cooperation between government and faith-based organizations. The initiative was modeled after a relatively unknown section of the 1996 welfare reform legislation called *Charitable Choice* wherein religious organizations were allowed to compete with other charitable organizations for government funding without having to forgo their religious

objectives. To help achieve the objectives of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, Bush set up offices in five sectors of government including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Justice, Housing and Urban Development and Labour to further promote the partnership between government and faith-based initiatives. In the 2002 budget, Bush also allocated \$89 million in funds to faith-based organizations with his compassion capital fund, the largest budgeted faith-based support in American history (De Vita & Wilson, 2001). According to White House counts, nonprofit groups received \$15.3 billion in competitive grants in 2007, with an increase of 3.9% over the previous year. This figure included \$2.2 billion to faith-based nonprofits, which have collected federal grants of more than \$10.6 billion since 2002 (Banks, 2009). This allowed federal funds to be channeled to religious right organizations such as National Right to Life and other church-based welfare and abstinence programs. These moves also led Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, to state unequivocally that Bush's plan was the single greatest assault on the church-state separation in modern American history (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, forthcoming).

Theocratic Christian fundamentalists and others like them all share a key element: intolerance for ambiguity. One of the most intolerable ambiguous discourses is related to gender. Included in this gendered dogma is a restoration of the golden age of patriarchal domination, punishment for those who stray from their ascribed gender roles and fascist righteousness combined with terror regarding female sexuality (Ducat, 2004). These sentiments are pervasive in organizations such as the Promise Keepers, a right wing group responsible for some of the largest gatherings of Christian men in American

history. The Promise Keepers hold massive revival meetings in football stadiums where they vow to take back their rightful place in their homes. The group retreats to the verse in Ephesians that calls on wives to be “subject to your husbands, as to the lord” (Ephesians 5:22) to give their cause biblical legitimacy. Accordingly, women were not allowed to attend events held inside stadiums but were told that they could help with concessions outside (Hedges, 2007). Davis (2006) illustrates how religion fills a psychological need for an absolute certitude that can be established at the level of facts without any ambiguity or uncertainty.

According to Davis (2006), literalism is a product of a mind that wants to put itself to sleep, and represents the refusal to try and comprehend anything outside a simple proclamation. This results in the reduction of the world into simplicities. There is also one important text, the Holy Bible, that establishes fixed truths resolving all of life's questions and dilemmas. These fixed truths do not ever change and do not require interpretation. The Christian right appropriates literal biblical “truths” and selectively chooses passages (selective literalist) that sacredly legitimate its intolerance, bigotry and desire for the eradication of those who do not embody the righteous lifestyle, which it advocates. According to critics like Neustadt and Weber, Christian certainty is what predestines governing bodies to fail because it tends to create a moral unilateralism that offends allies, weakens alliances and stimulates enemies (Berggren and Rae, 2006).

One of the most eternal themes in the discourse of the Christian right is the preoccupation with an otherworldly conception of demonic evil—a theme that Bush promptly adopted after the 9/11 attacks to characterize those who perpetrated them. In many ways, Bush’s semantic shift from “terrorism” to “terror” in regards to the war on

terror indicated a shift from a political agenda to a cultural and religious agenda (Agathaangelou & Ling 2004). From the moment the planes hit the towers this rhetoric of demonology was evident through Bush's almost constant reference to the war on terror as battle between "good and evil."<sup>7</sup>

Bush's battle for civilization through his crusade against evil was a testament to his faith-based presidency. Bush and the architects of his administration had tactfully created an electoral engine where millions of likely voters judged Bush on a series of intangibles like character, certainty, godliness and fortitude. Therefore the deeper Bush defined the darkness and the brighter he described his faith, the more Bush became an affirmation of God (Suskind, 2004).

Bush often spoke as if he were a prophet of God (Phillips, 2006), professing militaristic action and foreign policy as a God-given mission and the "freedom" to operate within both facets without restraint as God-given gifts (Wallis, 2004). Bush's servitude as a self-professed mouthpiece of God likened America to the epicenter of freedom and terrorists as reincarnates of absolute evil. This notion operated as a pretext for warring in both Afghanistan and Iraq and concurrent ambitions concerning foreign policy, which included controlling two-thirds of the Iraq's oil reserves, buttressing relations with Israel, planting the seed in the global collective mind for an attack on Iran, catalyzing future "democratic" ambitions in the middle east (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2005), promoting "freedom" and "democracy" through displays of military might,

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<sup>7</sup> Adorno et al. (1982) suggest that when subjects become preoccupied with evil forces as illustrated by their belief in the existence of such phenomena, the stronger their own subconscious desires towards destruction become.

demonizing a grouping of countries by referring to them as the axis of evil and employing a cleansing rhetoric by desiring to “rid the world of evil,” through tropes of saviourhood, goodness and war.

Crucial to the construction of Bush’s godliness, and likewise to his expression of his presidency as ordained by God, was his patriotic re-construction of Christian hymns and prayers. In his January 29, 2003 State of the Union Address, Bush used a recognizable line from a gospel hymn when he said that, “the need is great. Yet there’s power, wonder-working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.” This was derived from a hymn which actually refers to the “power, wonder-working power in the blood of the lamb.” The power to which the actual hymn refers is that of Jesus Christ, not the American people. Furthermore, on the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks, while on Ellis Island, Bush claimed, “this ideal of America is the hope of all mankind...That hope still lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.” The last two lines of this gospel of John had been wrongfully appropriated, rather than speaking about America and its values, this hymn references the word of God and light of Christ” (Wallis, 2004, p.66). Replacing God or Christ in biblical hymns and gospels with reference to “Americans,” could, according to the Christian faith, be interpreted a blasphemous act. Yet, Bush’s Christian followers seemed more than willing to accept this since they believed that the Christian president was engaged in a God-given mission to save civilization.

Bush routinely referred to the faith of the American people as though that faith alone would serve to insulate them from further danger. For Bush, a man guided by cultural chimera and religion, the most effective way he believed he could comfort the



American people was through the validation and proliferation of prayer. A traumatized, if not, infantilized, populace often depends on literalisms and certitude handed down from the patriarch to help them find comfort and comprehend a crisis.

During his proclamation of the National Day of prayer on April 26, 2002, Bush remarked:

...Especially since September 11, millions of Americans have been led to prayer. They have prayed for comfort in a time of grief, for understanding in a time of anger, and for protection in a time of uncertainty...In the face of terrorist's attacks prayer provided Americans with hope and strength for the journey ahead...

And during his commemoration of the National Day of Prayer on May 2, 2002, Bush remarked on behalf of Americans, "prayer is a vital part of our national life."

On June 27, 2002, during a photo opportunity between Bush and Russian leader Vladimir Putin, that followed their declaration of America and Russia's joint effort to fight terrorism, Bush explained how he dealt with America's grief:

...I was among people who were hurting a lot. And I was trying to figure how to bring a sense of hope, and I thought the best thing I could say was *there is a God who loves them and I believe that's the case. And as a result, I feel comfortable in my life because I have that belief and that understanding...*

Rather than provide Americans with viable coping mechanisms or clinically therapeutic approaches, Bush promoted prayer as the only way (by virtue of omission of any other way) to achieve internal peace.

Much like the grandfathers of fascism, the Bush administration politicized religion and spirituality. Hitler's success is attributed to fusing racial dogma and German Christianity shifting from artificial religious invocations of destiny to traditional Christian forms (Moyers, 2005). Mussolini often used metaphors of Christianity to define his revolutionary party and fascism became a religion of patriotism (Gentile, 1990). It can be said that Bush followed the principles of a radical Christian movement known as dominionism, which cloaked its intolerance in American patriotism and Christian faith. Departing from traditional evangelism, and born out of Christian reconstructionism, dominionism takes its name from Genesis 1:26-31 which gives humans domination over all other living things.<sup>8</sup> Like fascism, dominionism seeks to commandeer religious/patriotic language. In the vernacular of dominionism, there is only one way to be Christian and one way to be American, which is the only way to live (Hedges, 2004).

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<sup>8</sup> Bush's authoritarian stance assumed the domination of all forms of humanity, as evidenced by his destruction of environmental protections in the name of big business

## CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSION

### I. Manifestations of Proto-Fascism in Contemporary America:

The examples I have provided throughout this work would seem to suggest that, through both word and deed, Bush and his administration, exhibited many of the proto-fascist tendencies identified by Britt. While I have examined just five of Britt's fourteen points of fascism, there is certainly evidence to suggest that the Bush regime took on a proto-fascist complexion in relation to other elements outlined by Britt including, among others, the contempt for intellectuals, a compulsion toward national security, and unbridled corruption.<sup>9</sup> And now that Bush is out of office, more examples of his, and his administration's, abuse of power and their fascist propensities will likely continue to surface.

It is important to note that even while the Bush presidency was nearing its end, proto-fascist tendencies did not diminish in the larger body politic. Indeed, they were quite evident during the 2008 presidential election campaign and were marshaled by the likes of John McCain, Sarah Palin and other Republican politicians.

Right-wingers portrayed Democratic presidential candidate, Barack Obama, as an "enemy within," an enemy of "the nation." Questions about his "Americanness" emerged as opponents suggested that he was not American-born, he lacked patriotism and that he was Muslim. To function within the discourse of "Americanness," I would argue that one must possess two distinct components. The first component deals with being "phylogenically American", which is about being physically born in America. The

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<sup>9</sup> See the Project for the Old American Century for examples at [www.oldamericancentury.org](http://www.oldamericancentury.org)

second component is being “ontogenically American,” which involves psychologically developing into a self-identifying American who proudly conforms to American ideals both internally and externally and is, in short, a legible patriot. The latter component is arguably the most potent in terms of “Americanness” because it is an exercise in autonomy, which is more indicative of one’s personal allegiance to American ideals than the former component.

The concept of “un-Americaness” both in definition and boundary reinforcement has been given a renewed existence in the post Bush-era (Lugo-Lugo, 2009). According to Lugo-Lugo (2009), “the figure of Obama served as a canvas on which constructions of terrorism, post-September 11 anxieties and fears of renewed terrorists (and anti-American) threats were sketched as questions surrounding Obama’s Americanness” (p. 112), both in the phylogenic and ontogenic sense – began to emerge.

Conspiracies regarding Obama’s birth also began to pervade political dialogue as proponents of the “Birther movement” perpetuated the outlandish accusation that Obama was not born in America (Montopoli, 2009). Ironically, the movement began in response to efforts made by the Obama camp to dispel rumours regarding his place of birth in his “fightthesmear” campaign. To do so, the “fightthesmear” website produced a certificate of live birth from Hawaii’s health department indicating that he was, in fact, born in America. However, this effort to discredit rumours ironically served as a catalyst to perpetuate the rumours even further. “Birthers” began to publically question the authenticity of the certificate of live birth and suspected it to be a forgery (Weigel, 2009), which in turn helped strengthen the Birther debate yet again, making it increasingly influential on the American socio-political stage and unavoidable for Republicans to

address. In 2009, former Republican presidential candidate Alan Keyes, amongst others, pushed the birth certificate debate into court (Montopoli, 2009) and in February 2009, Representative Bill Posey, introduced a bill that would require presidential campaigns to provide the birth certificates of their candidates. As of July 15, 2009, nine Republican congressional members were backing the bill and at least four Republican members of Missouri's state legislature have explored introducing a similar bill (Weigel, 2009).

Questions concerning Obama's birthplace were an attempt to exclude him from being "phylogenically American." However, as previously mentioned, for the full "un-American" treatment, the opposition had to concurrently construct a discourse regarding Obama's "non-ontogenic Americanness". Immediately following his presidential victory, the Associated Press released a story regarding Obama's perceived lack of patriotism under the headline, "Patriotism questions for Obama. No flag pin, no hand over his heart: Is he exposed?" In the article, Obama was accused of refusing to wear his American flag lapel pin, which was accompanied by photo of him not putting his hand over his heart during the National anthem. Naturally, a conservative outcry poured into the media with questions regarding his patriotism.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most pervasive attempt to render Obama "un-American" was to "brown" Obama by depicting him as a Muslim. The Muslim portrayal is arguably the most potent because it perceivably melds notions of the "non-phylogenic American" with the "non-ontogenic American." That is, he is both born of a different culture and race and is the preminent post 9/11 "enemy of American ideals". Representations of Obama as an

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<sup>10</sup> Michelle Obama was also criticized as not being patriotic enough when she mentioned that she was now proud to be American for the first time in her adult life. These comments pervaded every media outlet causing the "Barack Obama" patriot debate to extend to the "Obama family" patriot debate (a too-little, too-late "ontogenic American").

insurgent Muslim Manchurian candidate persisted with the constant referral to Obama's middle name (Hussein), an online campaign that accused Obama of attending a fundamental Madrassa in Indonesia, and the circulation of a photo of Obama in traditional Kenyan garb, which resembled Muslim garb (allegedly leaked by the Clinton camp) (Walsh, 2009). Fellow politicians were also participating in this Muslim rancour when in June 2007, while campaigning in South Carolina, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, was photographed next to a sign that read, "No to Obama, Osama, and Chelsea's momma." Later, Romney was photographed holding the sign himself (Lugo-Lugo, 2009, p.117).

Obama's alleged birthplace deception, lack of patriotism and "browning" of his public persona culminated to form a depiction of Obama as a threatening figure to white, American livelihood and tradition (Lugo-Lugo, 2009). Obama was cast as a perpetual kind of terror—the familiar "other" (Lugo-Lugo 2009), which is a sign of Umberto Eco's concept of eternal fascism or *ur-fascism*. Those with fascist tendencies seek solidarity by capitalizing on the natural fear of difference and fear of the perceived infiltrator (Eco, 1995). The natural fear of difference is a social and ideological process based on projection wherein people are persuaded by both personal experience and social norms to choose a group of people (others) that are societally defined as subordinate within the socio-economic hierarchy and imaginarily projected as 'safely' responsible for undesirable situations. This divide and rule is clearly evident in the current right wings stratagem of stimulating and instigating various niche "anti-Obama" groups like the Birthers. This type of division amongst people invokes processes of objectification, where people separate themselves from the other, that is, they define themselves as in

opposition to them (Wilden p.192).

Of course, despite the rhetoric that was part of the campaign, Obama was elected president and hope was seemingly restored in America. As a Canadian, I found myself very happy and relieved that my American comrades who, after eight years of one of the most corrupt regimes in American history, voted convincingly for the candidate of change. Unfortunately, the ghosts of fascism have overshadowed that hopeful moment and they continue to hover over the American political landscape. The proto-fascist tendencies are still very much in evidence, in the post-Bush era, in the actions of those right-wing fundamentalists who were among the former president's most ardent supporters but who have turned their attention to demonizing Obama as evil incarnate.

Arguably another example of proto-fascism can be seen in the "Tea Baggers movement". This particular "astroturf" movement, which has been funded by corporate special interests, was initially birthed out of comments made by CNBC respondent Rick Santelli in February 2009. The comments made, which generated millions of YouTube views and a response from the White House, were in regards to Obama's alleged tax increase. In what appeared to be more of a rant, Santelli stated that, "Americans were being forced by the Obama administration to subsidize the losers' mortgages," and called for a, "Chicago Tea Party (hence the name of the movement) to show his and others anger." The Tea Party to which Santelli was referring was of course, the Boston Tea Party, the 1773 protest where Boston colonists dumped tea into the harbour in response to taxation without representation by the British. Proponents of the Tea Bagger movement even reappropriated the word 'tea' and used it as an acronym for "taxed enough already." Though there seems to be a veritable group of members who are frustrated with paying

taxes and spending, the Obama administration has been constructed as the enemy and scapegoated for the financial woes that were largely the result of the policies and practices of the Bush administration and the kind of unbridled free market fundamentalism that led to the financial collapse of global markets just before Obama took office. This type of scapegoating which includes shifting blame for failures (from the Bush administration to Obama) and channeling frustration in controlled directions (i.e. anger that should be directed at irresponsible corporations is being directed at Obama and liberals) is reminiscent of the third element of fascism identified by Britt. The difference, of course, is that such manifestations of fascism are emanating not from the regime in power but from those who aspire to power, particularly certain factions of the Republican Party.

As such, some critics suggest that the movement is more about Republicans trying to gain support against the Democratic Party, rather than fiscal discipline. A clear example of this type of rallying against the Democratic Party was the Republican stratagem of combining the Tea Bagger's theme, fiscal conservatism, with the culture of fear. Paul Krugman (2010) contends that fear mongering Republicans are stirring up fiscal scare tactics by promoting "deficit hysteria" throughout the media.<sup>11</sup> Americans are being bombarded by the right with the reckless notions (presented with the notorious right wing certitude) that the deficit threatens economic recovery and will undermine America's position in the world, without offering any hard facts to back up its "truth." By promoting these falsities with conviction, Republicans are denouncing the Democrats and are attempting to weaken Obama's policy agenda by creating a fearful hysteria regarding

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<sup>11</sup> According to Krugman (2010), running large deficits in economic slumps is the best option. Krugman (2010) thinks that the deficit should even be larger than it is to help create jobs and reduce unemployment.



potentially disastrous economic consequences for America as a result of the alleged poor economic decision making of Democrats.

Furthermore, aside from scoring points against the Democratic Party, Republicans are working with the Tea Baggers to promote white Christian ideologies and cultural bigotry (Pilkington, 2010). On February 5, 2010 the first national Tea Bagger convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee and in the opening speech at the convention, former Republican Denver congressman and 2008 presidential candidate, Tom Tancredo, spoke about illegal immigration, propagated racist sentiments regarding “Islamification” and explained how “multiculturalism has destroyed the social fabric of American society with a number of immigrants refusing to be Americans.” However, Tancredo’s most contentious display of racism was evident when he said that Obama was elected because America does not require “a civics literacy test before people can vote in this country,” which was a historical allusion to the practices of southern segregationists who would administer difficult qualification tests to black people to impede their participation in elections (Pilkington, 2010). Tancredo continued to rally the Tea Baggers by calling for a “counter-revolution” that would be based on “Judeo Christian principles,” which was met with a standing ovation.

Amid the rabble-rousing and xenophobia, there was also another unifying force at the convention—support for the former vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin (Queen of the Tea Baggers), who was the highly anticipated keynote speaker of the event (Plinkington, 2010). During her address, Palin mostly spoke about the primacy of the tenth amendment and the need for limited government power, moaned about government bailouts (Zenike, 2010), national security, Obama’s detrimental fiscal fixes, Obama’s

apologies to other countries and finally for being “weak” on the war on terrorism, specifically speaking about his lax attitude towards the Christmas day “underwear bomber.” Once Palin finished her sermon, Tea Baggers showed their support throughout the arena by hopping on their chairs, waving American flags while chanting, “run Sarah run!” (Zenike, 2010). Palin also furthered ties between the Republican Party and the Tea Baggers by suggesting that the two parties become more congruous, stating that the Republican Party would be wise to align with such a powerful ‘grassroots’ force because the Tea Baggers are the future of politics (Zenike, 2010).

The actions and beliefs of Tea Baggers have already led some to suggest that this movement could easily become fascist. Wright (2010), for example, states that while Tea Baggers “may not necessarily be full-blown fascists at this time,” they are “definitely leaning in that direction” (p. 1). Wright cites the Tea Baggers hyper-patriotism, religious fundamentalism, xenophobia, and hyper-militarism as indicative of their fascistic tendencies and notes that like fascism, the Tea Bagger movement thrives on “fear, anger, ignorance and resentment among the people” (ibid).

## **II. Suggestions for Future Research:**

My analysis of the proto-fascist tendencies that were observable and identifiable during the Bush presidency post-9/11 is, admittedly, limited but it nonetheless suggests directions for future research. For example, while I, for the most part, focused my attention on Bush’s speeches—specifically the text of his orations—to illustrate his proto-fascist proclivities, a thorough analysis of the media spectacles he and his administration staged could yield interesting findings as to how visual images figured prominently in the proto-fascism of the Bush regime.

Additionally, Britt's framework could fruitfully be used to examine the unfolding political aspirations of Sarah Palin, who like Buzz Windrip, has aggressively draped herself in the "flag and the cross" and whose followers revel in anti-intellectualism—a point of fascism not explored in this work. The role of media outlets such as the Fox News Channel and the personalities it currently employs such as Glenn Beck could also be examined through the lens of Britt's fourteen points to explore those fascist undercurrents which seem to endure in right-wing America—including those exhibited by the aforementioned Tea Bagger movement.

It has long been noted that fascism most often rears its "ugly head in times of turmoil and great economic difficulty" (Wright, 2010, p. 1). The current economic conditions and the kind of radical right-wing populism that is gaining ground in the United States and elsewhere, particularly in Europe where fascism is, according to Briggs (2009), threatening to erupt, should give us pause. Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* reminds us that one of the most powerful tools that fascists have in their arsenal is the belief among "more sane-minded citizens that fascism simply couldn't occur in 'our country'" (Wright, 2010, p. 2). We would do well to heed his warnings and remain ever-vigilant about the proto-fascist undercurrents that, unfortunately, continue to plague the political landscapes of many nations. In this sense, Wright's recent observations serve as a fitting conclusion to this thesis:

Fascism is never taken seriously enough by responsible parties until it is too late to stop it. Fascism thrives and grows because most reasonable observers underestimate it, laugh at it, ignore it, or dismiss it. Until it is too late to stop it. The lessons of history teach us that fascism is like a spark in dry and

hungry tinder, which in an instant can engulf an entire society in voracious flames of fire that burn hot and ravenously for a very long and violent time. The only way to prevent such a conflagration from arising in the first place is to douse the ground around it with plenty of cold water (Wright, 2010, p.2).

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