

THE RHETORIC OF POLITICAL TIME: TRACING THE NEOLIBERAL REGIME'S
ASCENT

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that Stephen Skowronek's theory of political time can be used as analytic to better understand the rhetorical opportunities and constraints for presidents and presidential candidates. In particular, I look to Ronald Reagan as a case study: as a president who came on the heels of the end of FDR's liberal era, Reagan set the tone for a new presidential regime, consisting of particular rhetorical and policy commitments that were all shaped through his neoliberal economic policy. After identifying the rhetorical hallmarks of the neoliberal era as constructed by Reagan, I analyze the rhetorical efforts of his successor, regime articulation president George H.W. Bush, to negotiate the changing domestic and international atmosphere within the rhetorical and policy constraints of Reagan's neoliberalism. Finally, I identify and analyze the preemptive efforts of Bill Clinton and Ross Perot during the 1992 election as they attempted to renegotiate key aspects of Reagan's rhetorical and policy commitments to win the presidency.

The analysis of each individual's rhetoric is aided by attention to both discursive and visual rhetoric: the rhetorical interiors and exteriors of regime discourse. The analysis of Reagan's neoliberal regime emergence begins with the 1964 primary run against Barry Goldwater and continues through his presidency. Analysis of Bush begins with his 1980 primary election contest against Ronald Reagan and culminates in the 1992 election. Both Clinton and Perot were analyzed using stump speeches and advertisements from the primaries through the 1992 presidential election. For each

individual, analysis of *Time* magazine covers provided visual confirmation or rejection of each rhetor's rendition of neoliberal regime commitments. In the end, while Reagan was successful in establishing the rhetorical and policy commitments of the Neoliberal regime, Bush was unable to perform those commitments to the satisfaction of the base; as a result, Clinton's rendition of the neoliberal regime, which he presented as a "third way" during the 1992 presidential election, succeeded in winning the presidency.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to those frustrated by the state of party politics, those who seek to change them, and to a dear friend who reminds us that we are first and foremost to be citizens, not partisans.

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A project as large as a dissertation is not possible without the assistance of a village. My personal dissertation village consisted of the committee, friends, and family who helped guide me through the practical and emotional aspects of completing the dissertation. Each individual deserves far heartier thanks than this space provides, but I shall do my best.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the height of the 1992 Republican primaries, president George H.W. Bush traveled to Dover, New Hampshire to deliver a series of speeches to secure the Republican nomination from challenger Pat Buchanan. While, as Bush recounted, the entire trip seemed “off,” it was his address to Liberty Mutual Insurance Company employees that caught the attention of both his campaign staff and the media. During the course of the speech, Bush wavered between criticizing Congress for not letting him govern, the media for being “smart alecks,” and the people for failing to understand the complexity of the economy. Toward the end of the speech, Bush compared himself to “Lincoln, going on his knees in times of trial,” and entreated the audience, “. . . don’t cry for me, Argentina.”¹ Following the trip, Bush was shown on the cover of *Time* magazine as weak and receding in relevance despite being engaged in “the fight of his life.”² White House Communications Director David Demarest demanded that the campaign managers keep Bush on message because the media were picking up on his odd turns of phrase, calling his speeches “word salad.” A bigger problem than staying on message existed for Bush, though, for as a number of campaign and White House employees have argued, the president did not have a consistent message. Caught between the interests of the party, his own convictions regarding governance, and the looming shadow of Reagan’s presidency, Bush was mired in a rhetorical situation that few presidents face.

¹ Bush, George. H.W. “Address to Mutual Liberty Employees at Dover.”

² *Time*, “The Fight of His Life,” August 24, 1992.

As his own rhetorical performance and subsequent visual representations of Bush's presidency (such as that on the cover of *Time*) indicate, Bush faced a rhetorical situation that required he carefully manage the expectations of the Reagan legacy while continuing to be responsive to the swiftly changing international and domestic situations.

A number of rhetorical scholars have explored why George Bush has largely been considered a rhetorical failure and an unsuccessful president. These studies have examined his economic, foreign policy, religious, and domestic policy rhetoric at length.³ What many of these studies conclude, is what Marty Medhurst succinctly argues: "The specter of Reagan, and particularly Reagan's skills at public communication, seemed to haunt Bush from beginning to end."⁴ Certainly, the Reagan presidency placed constraints on Bush, many of them rhetorical. But presidents are always judged according to their predecessors. Why, then, the focus on Reagan as Bush's main obstacle? Steven Skowronek's theory of political time sheds some light on this question.

Skowronek's body of work, which focuses on the issue of presidential leadership, can help rhetorical scholars to better understand how presidential rhetorical authority is enabled and constrained by the "specter" of presidents such as Reagan. Skowronek contends that the warrants for presidential authority are affected by what he calls "political time," a recurrent pattern of presidential authority that results in political

³ See *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush*, ed. Martin Medhurst (Texas A&M University Press, 2006).

⁴ Martin Medhurst, "Why Rhetoric Matters: George H.W. Bush in the White House," in *The Rhetorical Presidency of George H.W. Bush*, ed. Martin Medhurst (Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 5.

“regimes,” created by presidents who find themselves in the right place, at the right time, with the right resources: presidents such as Reagan. These individuals have the ability to reset the narrative cycle of political time, forging a new political regime in opposition to the old. For example, Reagan established his claims to presidential authority by arguing that the existing regime (the “Liberal Regime” initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was no longer a viable system. By critiquing the existing regime and providing a new ideological perspective on government, Reagan was able to forge a new regime, supported by a new set of coalitions. Reagan had effectively reconstructed the political scene from the ashes of his predecessor.

We might ask: what does this mean for George Bush? According to Skowronek’s theory, there are four distinctive roles that presidents occupy within political time: reconstruction, articulation, preemption, and disjunction. Reconstruction presidents, as previously discussed, create a new political regime and forge new coalitions in opposition to the old; articulation presidents are representatives of the dominant regime and continue to forward its commitments; preemption presidents are opposed to the dominant regime and attempt to chip away at its power; and disjunction presidents represent the dominant regime as it becomes enervated, or sapped of power.⁵ Each of these roles creates particular opportunities and constraints for the presidents who inhabit them.

Within political time, Bush occupied a specific type of articulation role: that of the “orthodox innovator.” Gaining the presidency on the heels of the reconstructive

⁵ Skowronek, Steven. *Presidential Rhetoric in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*.

president (Reagan), he was placed in the difficult position of turning the “predecessor’s legacy into a workable system of government.” This process, he admits, lacks the rhetorical appeal of reconstruction. Certainly, then, Bush’s role as an orthodox innovator following Ronald Reagan’s regime reconstruction affected Bush’s performance of presidential authority and the public’s reception of those performances. As Skowronek argues, political time has a “narrative structure” that presidents must manage in order to make the case for the exercise of presidential leadership. Presidents must reckon with the work of their predecessors and rhetorically situate themselves within the existing narrative of the affiliated regime, as it is ascending, maintaining, or waning. Skowronek explains:

. . . presidents will have a rudimentary understanding of their political identity as affiliated or opposed to the basic commitments of ideology and interest institutionalized by the last reconstruction . . . they will make a contingent evaluation of the current prospects for action on that relationship.⁶

Thus, the relative strength of the regime will lend itself to particular “stories” that establish the warrants for presidential authority: a strong regime will lend itself to narratives of presidential authority that accept and extend the regime’s commitments. Likewise, a presidential candidate during a moment of regime weakening will be more successful situating him or herself as an agent of change rather than a continuation of the established order. This becomes especially clear during moments of transition within the regime: as John Murphy has argued, “Presidential authority becomes increasingly complex in moments of succession.”⁷

⁶ Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, xv.

⁷ Murphy, “Crafting the Kennedy Legacy,” 578.

The complexity of presidential authority in moments of succession calls for the question: how is presidential authority passed on to regime successors? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to pay close attention to the regime's rhetoric beginning with its first moments of emergence during presidential elections, a task Skowronek does not undertake. This dissertation argues that by first tracing the regime's rhetoric as it was constructed and attending to its circulation across a series of regime transitions, we might better understand how the warrants for presidential authority are constructed, circulated, and transferred from president to president. For example, we might consider how Ronald Reagan's rhetoric of regime construction enabled and constrained particular rhetorical practices for George Bush throughout his presidency, as well as during subsequent moments of transition, such as the 1992 presidential election.

In this dissertation, I make two main claims: first, I argue that there is a rhetoric of political time. The rhetoric of political time for a particular regime relies on the circulation and rearticulation of key texts that first emerged during the previous regime's decline. As presidential rhetors affiliated with the dominant regime attempt to exercise their presidential authority, they are bound to the commitments of the dominant regime and must manage the discourse of the regime in ways that respond to domestic and international exigencies as they arise. Relatedly, I demonstrate that each role in political time (repudiation, reconstruction, articulation, and preemption) has its own set of rhetorical resources that individuals ideally engage in order to manage the regime's constitutive legacies during their moment in political time.

Second, I contend that using the rhetoric of political time as an analytic framework to understand presidential rhetorical leadership provides scholars with a more nuanced means of engaging in thick contextual analysis of presidential rhetoric, including the rhetoric of presidential campaigns. That is, by closely attending to the constitutive legacies of a regime over time, it becomes possible to more accurately reconstruct the context of presidential rhetorical texts and provide reasoned judgments of their efficacy. As part of the effort to reconstruct a text's rhetorical and historical context, I argue that doing thick contextual analysis requires attention not only to the textual discourses of a regime, but also the visual rhetorical responses to a president's regime management, such as the images of Bush on the cover of *Time* following his stump speech debacle in New Hampshire. Such texts, I argue, are part of understanding presidential rhetoric's "rhetorical exteriors" and serve as visual rhetorical confirmation or rejection of a president's regime management and provide insights into public perceptions of a president's rhetorical authority.⁸

In an effort to better understand Bush's predicament and what it can teach us about the exercise of presidential rhetorical authority, the remainder of this chapter will proceed as follows: first I will provide a review of the literature on presidential rhetorical authority in order to make the argument that understanding presidential rhetorical authority requires attention to its constitutive functions. I continue by offering thick contextualism and constitutive rhetorical history as a rhetorical method by which it is

⁸ See James Jasinski and Jennifer Mercieca. "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics," in Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Michael Hogan (eds.) *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address*. West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. (2010).

possible to trace the layers of discourse that enable the rhetorical exercise of presidential authority. More specifically, I point toward constitutive legacies as a theoretical perspective that can guide the process of thick contextualism. Embedded within a regime's constitutive legacies, I argue, are potential narratives that enable and constrain rhetorical practice for regime representatives and challengers alike. In order to sharpen the methodological focus on presidential authority, I explain how political time can serve as an analytical framework that draws our attention to the workings of a regime's constitutive legacies during different moments in the regime. To that end, I define what I call the rhetorics of repudiation, reconstruction, articulation, and preemption. Finally, I provide summaries for each analysis chapter, including Ronald Reagan's Liberal regime repudiation and Neoliberal regime construction, George Bush's Neoliberal orthodox innovation, and finally, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot's Neoliberal regime preemption.

Understanding Presidential Authority

Presidential authority is influenced by a president's use or misuse of the "bully pulpit." As Richard Neustadt argues, the president "does not get action without argument" and "presidential power is the power to persuade."⁹ Similarly, a robust line of inquiry examines rhetorical leadership as it relates to the president's appeals to the people rather than Congress. In Jeffrey Tulis's 1987 book, *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Tulis posited that the presidency underwent a major change as a result of Woodrow

⁹ Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons, 1960. Print.

Wilson's "doctrine of popular leadership."¹⁰ Following Wilson, Tulis argued, presidents ceased appealing to Congress and instead began the practice of "going public": directly appealing to the people. These appeals to the public were often attempts to circumvent Congress and gain popular support for the President's agenda.¹¹ As a result of Wilson's doctrine of popular leadership, a "second constitution" went into effect that legitimized and perhaps even created a requirement for presidential popular leadership. However, as Terri Bimes argues, this put the president in an awkward situation as he was "simultaneously expected to be the head of state representing a stable constitutional order and a popular politician swaying the public to support new initiatives."¹² This shift, then, changed not only the rhetorical practices of individual presidents, but also the public's expectations for the institution of the presidency itself as the president was expected to persuade the people of his constitutional authority and gain support for particular pieces of legislation.

Presidential authority, as a number of scholars have argued, is linked to a president's understanding of *kairos*, or the opportune moment. That is, in order to successfully perform the presidency and influence the public, presidents must understand the contexts within which their discourse intervenes. These scholars argue that a number of situational factors contribute to a president's ability to successfully enact the rhetorical presidency. These situational factors involve public expectations for particular

¹⁰ Tulis, Jeffrey. *The Rhetorical Presidency*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987: 132.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Bimes, Terri. "Understanding the Rhetorical Presidency," in George C. Edwards III and William G. Howell (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (208-231), 2009, p. 211.

forms of speech, public perceptions regarding the exercise of presidential authority, and the myriad influences of media on public understanding of the presidency.

Studies related to public expectations for presidential speech focus primarily on generic expectations for presidential address. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argue that genres of presidential speech, such as inaugural addresses and state of the union addresses, provide the president with the opportunity to constitute the people, rehearse national values, make policy recommendations, and enact the presidential role.¹³ The expectations for such speeches, Campbell and Jamieson argue, have evolved over time as previous presidents set the standard and established public expectations for particular moments. By employing the requisite rhetorical form in response public expectations regarding a particular context, presidents have the opportunity to perform the role of the presidency through public discourse.¹⁴

Public perceptions regarding the exercise of presidential authority also impose constraints on the rhetorical presidency. While the rhetorical presidency model posits that presidents increasingly appeal to the public, the existence of the “unitary executive”

¹³ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words*.

¹⁴ See also Stephen Browne, “‘The Circle of Our Felicities’: Thomas Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address and the Rhetoric of Nationhood,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 5:3 (2002), 409-438; Mark P. Moore, “Reagan’s Quest for Freedom in the 1987 State of the Union Address,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53 (Winter 1989), 52-65; and Davis W. Houck and Mihaela Nocasian, “FDR’s First Inaugural Address: Text, Context, and Reception,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 5:4 (2002), 649-678; and John M. Murphy, “A Time of Shame and Sorrow: Robert F. Kennedy and the American Jeremiad,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76 (1990), 401-414.

presents challenges to this model.¹⁵ Using institutional means such as executive orders and signing statements, presidents have the opportunity to influence policy without the assistance of the public. These practices, Vanessa Beasley argues, may make the “strategic need to ‘go public’ on public policy” less urgent and highlight the need to attend to “institutional arrangements” both within and from the White House.¹⁶ Public opinion regarding presidential use of signing statements and executive orders is mixed at best, and can be seen as a circumvention of checks and balances.¹⁷ However, the need for presidents to lead the public, rhetorically or administratively, is linked to a larger issue of public expectations regarding presidential leadership, which Justin Vaughn and Jennier Mercieca have called “heroic expectations.” As they argue, the kinds of promises presidents must make to legitimize their candidacy for office has resulted in the public expecting more and more action from the president, despite existing institutional constraints.¹⁸

Adding to the public’s unrealistic expectations of the president are media, whose horse-race election coverage and focus on polls often reduce presidential address to their

¹⁵ See Kenneth Mayer, “Going Alone: The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, 427-564; Richard W. Waterman, “Assessing the Unilateral Presidency,” *Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, 477-500.

¹⁶ Beasley, Vanessa. “The Rhetorical Presidency Meets the Unitary Executive: Implications for Presidential Rhetoric on Public Policy.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 13:1 (2010), 29.

¹⁷ For example, the public firestorm that erupted regarding Obama’s immigration policy.

¹⁸ Mercieca, Jennifer and Justin Vaughn. “Barack Obama and the Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations,” in *Heroic Expectations: Establishing the Obama Presidency*, ed Justin Vaughn and Jennifer Mercieca. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012.

most truncated audio and visual forms: sound bites and image bites.¹⁹ In addition to reporting sound and image bites of presidential address, news media also offer visual rhetorical snapshots of the presidency via images and video clips. These visual rhetorical discourses, Keith Erickson argues, can be thought of as performance fragments: images and texts “assembled to illuminate” a president’s political influence. These images and help to constitute the president’s relationship with the people and “recount, retell, or reshape society’s cultural and political realities.”²⁰ Although presidents may attempt to control the kinds of presidential images that circulate throughout American culture, such as Barack Obama’s White House flickr stream, mass media continue to provide a source of presidential images that have journalistic legitimacy.²¹

¹⁹ See Jody C. Baumgartner, Jonathan S. Morris, and Natasha L. Walth. "The Fey Effect Young Adults, Political Humor, and Perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2012): 95-104; Martin Gilens, Lynn Vavreck, and Martin Cohen. "The mass media and the public's assessments of presidential candidates, 1952–2000." *Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007): 1160-1175; Kiku Adatto. *Sound bite democracy: Network evening news presidential campaign coverage, 1968 and 1988*. Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1990; Erik P. Bucy and Maria Elizabeth Grabe. "Taking television seriously: A sound and image bite analysis of presidential campaign coverage, 1992–2004." *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 4 (2007): 652-675. For more on image bites, see E.P. Bucy and M.E. Grabe, "Taking Television Seriously: A Sound and Image Bite Analysis of Presidential Campaign Coverage 1992-2004." *Journal of communication*, 57 (2007), 652-675.

²⁰ Erickson, Keith V. "Presidential Rhetoric’s Visual Turn: Performance Fragments and the Politics of Illusionism." *Communication Monographs*, 67: 2 (2000), 138-157.

²¹ See Cara Finnegan, "Picturing the Presidents: Obama and the Visual Politics of White House Art" in *The Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations: Establishing the Obama Presidency*, ed. Justin Vaughn and Jennifer R. Mercieca (Texas A&M University Press, 2014).

In addition to journalistic media outlets, entertainment media also influence public perceptions of the presidency. For example, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles argue that “The West Wing” influences the way people think about the presidency in terms of issues such as character personality, and credibility: what these authors call “presidentiality.”²² These mediated and fictional representations of the presidency influence the public’s expectations for presidential performance and provide presidents with rhetorical resources for executive action.

Because of the myriad situational issues that enable and constrain the exercise of presidential authority, successful presidential leadership is linked to persuasion, or *rhetorical* leadership. Leroy Dorsey defines this as “the process of discovering, articulating, and sharing the available means of influence in order to motivate human agents in a particular situation.”²³ In addition to successfully engaging the available means of persuasion, presidential rhetorical leadership has also been linked to the concept of prudence, a specific type of rhetorical performance that represents a president’s *ethos* and requires that presidents be able to enact the “sometimes conflicting virtues of thought and character—to understand how, when, and in what manner or balance being strategic and saintly, reasonable and righteous.”²⁴ In order to be perceived as a successful rhetorical leader, the president must be capable of enacting “the artful

²² Parry-Giles, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles, *The Prime Time Presidency: The West Wing and U.S. Nationalism* (University of Illinois Press, 2006).

²³ Dorsey, Leroy. “Introduction” in *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*, ed. Leroy G. Dorsey. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press (2002) p. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

balance of superior decision-making skills *and* the exhibition of the requisite character.”²⁵

Ethos is also related to a speaker’s ability to manage myriad and competing rhetorical traditions. S.M. Halloran contends that

...*ethos*, underlines the importance of the orator’s mastery of the cultural heritage; through the power of his logical and emotional appeals, he became a kind of living embodiment of the cultural heritage, a voice of such apparent authority that the word spoken by this person was the word of communal wisdom, a word to be trusted for the weight of the person who spoke for it and the tradition he spoke for.²⁶

When presidents perform in a manner that demonstrates *ethos*, they weave together the different threads of ideology, policy, and “communal wisdom” in order to demonstrate their mastery of the nation’s cultural heritage as it exists in relation to pressing events. Presidents demonstrate *ethos* by contextualizing the cultural heritage of the nation and finding ways to situate the American people within those parameters. As a number of scholars argue, presidential rhetoric has a potent constitutive function that aids in the exercise of presidential authority.

The study of presidential rhetoric’s constitutive function is derived from Maurice Charland’s germinal essay on constitutive rhetoric. In it, Charland demonstrates how proponents of Quebec’s political sovereignty called into being the *peuple québécois*, an identity that “would legitimate the constitution of a sovereign Quebec state.”²⁷ He

²⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁶ Halloran, S.M. “Tradition and Theory in Rhetoric.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 62 (1976), 234-241.

²⁷ Charland, Maurice. “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73:2 (1987), 133-150.

continues, arguing that “claims for a Quebec sovereignty base themselves upon the asserted existence of a particular type of subject, the “Québécois” who are called forth

... as political subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that “always already” presume the constitution of subjects ... a subject is not “persuaded” to support sovereignty. Support for sovereignty is inherent to the subject position addressed by *souverainiste* (pro-sovereignty) rhetoric because of ... a series of narrative *ideological effects*.²⁸

This group of people, Charland argued, did not “exist in nature, but only within a discursively constituted history.”²⁹ Or to put it another way, the *peuple québécois* were called forth through rhetoric and the process of rhetorical identification. Similarly, Benedict Anderson has discussed “imagined communities” when discussing the idea of the nation. As Anderson argues, “the nation. . . is an imagined political community” because “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”³⁰ Constitutive rhetoric as used by presidents can thus be thought of as a kind of rhetorical imagining: presidential discourse can enable individuals to imagine themselves, to constitute themselves as part of a group that did not exist before the rhetorical imagining began. Constitutive rhetoric is the process by which the imagined community is constructed. The presidency is a place where particularly potent forms of constitutive rhetoric work to help disparate American citizens understand themselves not just as people geographically located in the United States, but as connected parts of the whole that is the rhetorical construct of the United States.

²⁸ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 134.

²⁹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 136.

³⁰ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, 6.

Constitutive rhetoric is an important component of presidential authority, as a number of scholars have argued. For example, Mary Stuckey and Frederick Antczak point out that presidential rhetoric has a constitutive function that “plays a major role in the construction and continuous reconstruction of political perceptions” that help the public to understand the president’s role and authority.³¹ Extending this notion, Vanessa Beasley argues that chief executives have historically “used the bully pulpit to ‘form a mass’ out of an increasingly diversifying American people,” indicating that presidential rhetoric can be used to constitute the people as well.³² In other words, there exist within presidential rhetoric moments where presidents use their rhetorical authority to subtly reinforce “the audience’s presumed collective identity as national subjects.”³³

Continuing the discussion of presidential rhetoric’s constitutive power, Stuckey argues that “differing elements of discourse and constitutive claims come together to forge our national identities” within presidential rhetoric.³⁴ More specifically, Stuckey demonstrates how the processes of inclusion and exclusion are enacted through presidential rhetoric because the institution of the presidency has the power to define. By closely analyzing specific instances of presidential discourse that exclude specific

³¹ Stuckey, Mary and Frederick J. Antczak. “The Rhetorical Presidency: Deepening Vision, Widening Exchange.” *Communication Yearbook*, 21 (1998), 405-441.

³² Beasley, Vanessa. *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press (2004).

³³ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁴ Stuckey, Mary. *Defining Americans*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas (2004), p. 3.

groups, Stuckey draws attention to an affordance of the institution itself, articulating how presidential rhetoric functions to define who can be “American.”³⁵

Constitutive rhetoric used by presidents is not always successful, though. Kenneth Zagacki explores failed constitutive rhetoric in his discussion of George W. Bush’s discourse concerning the military occupation and democratization of Iraq. Zagacki concludes that Bush’s rhetoric, in which he attempted to “call forth” an audience of democratized Iraqi subjects resulted in a number of “constitutive paradoxes” because the “collective democratic ‘we’” does not always recognize foreign subjects for who they are, especially a mixed variety of fragmented ‘peoples’ such as the people of Iraq.³⁶ In attempting to “create identification” between Americans and the Iraqis,” Bush unwittingly “contributed to conditions that were diametrically opposed to democratic transformation.”³⁷ Constitutive rhetoric is thus part and parcel of a president’s enactment of rhetorical authority. By using constitutive rhetoric wisely, presidents can call forth the people to support any number of issues. How, though, do presidents judge a wise use of constitutive rhetoric? How might they come to comprehend the rhetorical resources that will help them to call the people forth? John Murphy argues, “The past is always present in American politics and forms a potent base for the creation of political authority.”³⁸

³⁵ For more on presidential rhetoric’s definitional function, see David Zarefsky. “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34:3 (2004), 607-619.

³⁶ Zagacki, Kenneth S. “Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered: Constitutive Paradoxes in G.W. Bush’s Iraq War Speeches.” *Western Journal of Communication*, 71:4 (2007), 272-293.

³⁷ Zagacki, “Constitutive Rhetoric Reconsidered,” 272.

³⁸ Murphy, John M. “Crafting the Kennedy Legacy.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 3: 4 (2000), 577-601.

Likewise, Skowronek points to a “rudimentary understanding” presidents have regarding “their political identity as affiliated or opposed” to the dominant regime within political time.³⁹ We can infer, then, that prior discourses are part of a president’s available rhetorical resources. Indeed, a number of scholars have examined at length how presidents draw from past political discourses to exercise their rhetorical authority. But in order to understand how a president’s use of these rhetorical resources operates in response to the existing regime (whether ascendant, dominant, or waning), some method of rhetorical reconstruction, some way to better understand presidential rhetoric’s context, is needed.

Presidential Rhetoric and the Challenge of Context

Issues related to understanding, analyzing and evaluating context lie at the heart of rhetorical studies. While the earliest studies considered only the immediate context of a speech and biographical information regarding the speaker,⁴⁰ Lloyd Bitzer’s account of the “rhetorical situation” encouraged rhetorical critics to think both of particular and broader societal contexts that provided the exigencies and created constraints for rhetors.⁴¹ As rhetorical scholars have engaged with Bitzer, our understanding of context has evolved. More recently, scholars have begun to call for “thicker” contextual methods that enable rhetorical scholars to understand how rhetors interact with the inventional resources afforded by the layers of texts and discourse that are part of the rhetorical

³⁹ Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, xv.

⁴⁰ See Wichelns, Wrage, and those other studies of Lincoln.

⁴¹ Bitzer, Lloyd. “The Rhetorical Situation.”

context. According to John Murphy, rhetorical studies have progressively called for critics to consider the “linguistic context of speeches,” resulting in a

...steadily increasing concern with the inventional sources of public discourse. This re-invention of the historical aspect of public address emphasizes not only the traditional factors of immediate context and speaker biography, but also the “intertextual matrix” out of which and through which rhetorical acts emerge.⁴²

Further, Murphy argues, one thing that differing accounts of context have in common is an “emphasis on the inventional charge or that intertextual matrix, in terms of not only the historical antecedents of a speech but also the broader culture in which that speech moves.”⁴³ Rhetorical studies at present view political rhetoric “as existing not at a sacred distance or in an absolute past but rather within a zone of direct and even crude contact with all other discourses past and present.”⁴⁴ Understanding context as the interaction among texts, past and present, is thus necessary for understanding how presidential rhetorical authority is constructed and enacted.

The Promise of Political Time for Thick Contextualism

As a means of understanding the interaction among text, context, and presidential authority, I propose to approach presidential rhetoric through the lens of Stephen Skowronek’s theory of “political time.” Skowronek explains,

Political time is the medium through which presidents encounter received commitments of ideology and interest and claim authority to intervene in their development. Political time has a narrative structure: Presidents bid for authority by reckoning with the work of their predecessors, locating their rise to power

⁴² Murphy, John M. “The Language of the Liberal Consensus: John F. Kennedy, Technical Reason, and the ‘New Economics’ at Yale University.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 90:2 (2004), 133-162.

⁴³ Murphy, John M. “History, Culture, and Political Rhetoric.” *Rhetoric Review*, 20 (2001) 46-50.

⁴⁴ Murphy, “History, Culture, and Political Rhetoric,” 49.

within the recent course of political events, and addressing the political expectations that attend their intervention in these affairs . . . The rhythms and demarcations of political time are thus very much expressions of the presidency itself, of a political imperative inherent in the office prompting each incumbent to attempt to control the terms in which the exercise of its powers will be understood.⁴⁵

In other words, the warrants for presidential authority reside within an existing political regime that is emerging, maintaining, or waning. A given president's available rhetorical resources are thus expanded or constrained based on the regime's place in political time as he (or someday she) attempts to control the manner in which the exercise of presidential power is understood. Political time draws our attention to the broader historical context of a given president's place within a political regime, helping rhetorical scholars to understand the types of rhetorical options available to these individuals. This is because, as Skowronek explains, presidents hold parallel positions to each other within the recurrent phases of political time based on their temporal location within a regime.

Political regimes occur in three broad phases: emergence, maintenance, and enervation. Emergent regimes, as Skowronek argues, usually develop in opposition to an existing political regime that is falling out of favor. For example, Ronald Reagan was the leader of an emergent reconstructive regime because he was able to redefine "the terms and conditions of legitimate national government" by disavowing the Roosevelt regime's existing "commitments of ideology and interest."⁴⁶ Once a regime has risen to power, it enters the maintenance phase, in which the representatives of the regime must

⁴⁵ Murphy, "History, Culture, and Political Rhetoric," 49.

⁴⁶ Murphy, "History, Culture, and Political Rhetoric," 19-20.

successfully manage the coalitions that helped the regime rise to power, as well as continue to extend the ideological and policy commitments set forth during the reconstruction phase. For example, during his second term, Reagan furthered his economic policy (known as Reaganomics) both rhetorically and practically, calling his economic scheme the “American miracle” and the “great triumph” of his presidency while continuing to advocate policy that furthered the goals of Reaganomics.⁴⁷ Despite the efforts of regime representatives, the demands of the very coalitions that helped bring a regime to power eventually sap its strength; this leads to infighting, fragmentation, and ultimately, regime collapse. Skowronek calls this weakened phase enervation, as regimes in this state are opened up to potential repudiation by either a new emergent regime or a restructured version of a previous regime.

Political time has the potential to assist rhetorical scholars in engaging with thick contextualism because the political time thesis draws our attention to layers of texts and context that enable and constrain the exercise of a president’s rhetorical authority. The cyclical nature of political time can aid in understanding how different moments in political time provide certain presidents with more expansive rhetorical resources than others. The notion of “regimes” in political time provides a more nuanced way for rhetorical scholars to think about the evolution of political ideologies as particular presidents shifted U.S. politics from one regime in political time to another. Political time can thus enhance our understanding of presidential rhetoric as it exists in the

⁴⁷ Niskanen, William A. “Reaganomics” in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Library of Economics and Liberty, 1993.
<<http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/Reaganomics.html>>

context of political time, embedded in and interacting with myriad discourses from prior moments in political time as presidents have striven to exert their rhetorical authority. Or to put it simply, political time provides a framework for doing thick contextual analysis of presidential rhetoric.

Thick contextualism as a rhetorical method involves performing a constitutive rhetorical history in which the critic analyzes context by attending to layers of discourse, both quotidian and official, as they are circulated and recirculated through public discourse. This kind of work, Jennifer Mercieca argues, involves “attending closely to layers of context,” which “enables critics to read texts as they were produced understood, circulated, and interpreted;” this allows critics to “contribute to the history of ideas as well as improve our analyses of texts within contexts.”⁴⁸

Thick contextualism also involves tracing how texts are circulated and constituted through different kinds of textual practices. James Jasinski contends that the “idioms of public life (for example, liberalism, conservatism, free market capitalism, pro-choice, or pro-life, etc.) and the specific concepts that organize, link, and separate these idioms are continually reconstituted through quotidian interaction as well as more nuanced textual practices. Charting such alterations in ‘usages’ is a central aspect of a constitutive rhetorical history.”⁴⁹ To that end, James Jasinski has argued that engaging “thick contextualism” as a rhetorical method can assist the rhetorical critic in “charting

⁴⁸ Mercieca, Jennifer. “The Fourteenth Amendment and the Privileges and Immunities of American Citizenship.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101:1 (2015), 306-311.

⁴⁹ Jasinski, James. “A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of ‘Constitution’ in *The Federalist Papers*,” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 74.

the organization of, and interaction among, constitutive legacy traditions within the field of the text.”⁵⁰ These “constitutive legacy traditions” serve as inventional resources for rhetors, both enabling and constraining rhetorical performance. Thick contextualism, according to Jasinski, requires that the critic attend to how texts are “embodied in a linguistic idiom or language,” “enacted through particular speaking voices,” “marked by various figurative and argumentative patterns or structures,” and “perpetuated through a range of textual practices and organized into generic forms that are structured through generic conventions.”⁵¹ Attention to constitutive legacies as part of constitutive rhetorical history is one method of doing thick contextualism.

Extending Jasinski’s work on constitutive legacies, John Murphy argues that “Rhetorical traditions organize the ‘social knowledge’ of communities and make available symbolic resources for the invention of arguments aimed at authoritative public judgments,” providing people with a “cultural grammar” through which “they might speak to each other, define pressing problems as public, and address those issues.”⁵² These rhetorical traditions, Murphy argues, are part of history and both “shape and share the ambiguities of historical experience and communal life.”⁵³ If we extend this to understand that political regimes have their own rhetorical traditions, they could serve as

⁵⁰ Jasinski, James. “Instrumentalism, Contextualism, and Interpretation in Rhetorical Criticism” in *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*, ed. Alan G. Gross and William M. Keith (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1997), 195-224.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 213-214.

⁵² Murphy, “Rhetorical Traditions,” 72.

⁵³ Murphy, “Rhetorical Traditions,” 72-73.

a kind of “cultural grammar” through which both presidents and the public understand the presidency and understand the exercise of presidential authority.

Based on the existing scholarship, we can conclude that the rhetorical method of thick contextualism involves tracing how texts are taken up, circulated, and reconstituted; understanding the figurative and argumentative patterns the texts take on; and unpacking the ways in which these texts contribute to cultural grammars, or the “social knowledge” of the communities in which they are employed. Thick contextualism can aid scholars in better understanding presidential rhetorical authority, because these “Rhetorical traditions provide inventional resources which offer actors the opportunity to construct political authority.”⁵⁴ For example, John Murphy’s analysis of Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy’s speeches regarding Vietnam show how a former president’s rhetoric can provide a “linguistic context” that frames particular arguments as a president’s political heirs seek to “provide the public with the most authoritative reading” of their legacy.⁵⁵ Engaging thick contextualism can thus assist rhetorical scholars not only with their analyses of presidents and presidential rhetoric, but also presidential campaigns. For, as Murphy observes, “Presidential authority becomes increasingly complex in moments of succession.”⁵⁶

Thus far I have argued that understanding presidential rhetorical authority involves understanding its constitutive functions. Thick contextualism—attention to the

⁵⁴ Murphy, John M. “Inventing Authority: Bill Clinton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Orchestration of Rhetorical Traditions.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 83 (1997): 71-89.

⁵⁵ Murphy, “Crafting the Kennedy Legacy,” 579.

⁵⁶ Murphy, “Crafting the Kennedy Legacy,” 578.

layers of discourse and context that enable an understanding of presidential rhetoric's constitutive rhetorical history—is the rhetorical method that I argue provides the most insight into presidential rhetoric, especially in moments of transition such as presidential elections. In this dissertation, I engage thick contextualism by identifying texts (specifically from regime construction president Ronald Reagan) that indicated regime emergence and tracing their circulation and rearticulation through the process of regime ascendancy and maintenance. More specifically, I focus on Reagan's 1964 speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater, "A Time for Choosing," in order to identify key ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments contained within the text, and then analyze how those core commitments were rearticulated throughout Reagan's presidency, that of his immediate successor George H.W. Bush, and preempted during the 1992 presidential election.

At this point, I have provided a guiding question: how is presidential authority rhetorically constructed; a case study: Reagan's reconstruction; a potential theoretical guide: political time; and a method: thick contextualism. What is still needed, however, is a theoretical perspective that will more closely guide the process of thick contextualism and provide insight into how we might trace the layers of context and discourse of presidential rhetoric, such as that of the Reagan regime.

Understanding Textual Circulation: Constitutive Legacies

As a means of engaging with thick contextualism and approaching constitutive rhetorical history, James Jasinski and Jennifer Mercieca have theorized regarding the ways in which texts can work beyond their immediate context, providing rhetors with

rhetorical resources that far outlast a rhetorical artifact's moment of invention. Drawing from Maurice Charland and James Boyd White, Jasinski and Mercieca argue that a rhetorical act can be a failure in its immediate context, yet circulate and shape rhetorical practice in a manner that provides subsequent rhetors with inventional resources; they call this a text's "constitutive legacy."⁵⁷ More specifically, their analysis of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions demonstrates how constitutive invitations inhabit texts, which through circulation and rearticulation, form constitutive legacies. They argue: "Over time, circulation practices produce a constitutive legacy that critical analysis can reconstruct."⁵⁸ For example, "When advocates shift a trope, and argument, or a visual image from one historically particular rhetorical situation into a new context or connect it to some new controversy, circulation occurs via specific articulatory practices."⁵⁹

Analyzing these practices requires attention to both a text's interiors and exteriors. A text's interiors invites "listeners and readers to modify the meaning of a culture's key terms, to reconceptualize a culture's experience of public time" and "to affirm as well as challenge established sources of cultural authority, bonds of affiliation, and institutional relationships": the text's "constitutive invitations."⁶⁰ For example, Jasinski and Mercieca identify four specific constitutive invitations contained within the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions: they located the Alien and Sedition acts within an

⁵⁷ Jasinski, James and Jennifer Mercieca. "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics," in Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Michael Hogan (eds.) *The Handbook of Rhetoric and Public Address*. West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. (2010).

⁵⁸ Jasinski and Mercieca, "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics," 320.

⁵⁹ Jasinski and Mercieca, "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics," 320.

⁶⁰ Jasinski and Mercieca, "Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics," 320.

“ominous narrative structure,” “reimagined the states’ role in the constitutional narrative,” invited citizens to adopt “a radically textual understanding of the constitutional enterprise,” and invited a “hermeneutic posture” that constituted “a national community that distrusted those selected to govern.”⁶¹ On the other hand, attention to a text’s exteriors involves unpacking how texts are circulated and rearticulated so that they can be made relevant to new exigencies. Jasinski and Mercieca’s analysis of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and *Principles of ’98* traces how a number of different groups and individuals took up these texts and rearticulated them to respond to new circumstances, such as Henry Clay’s 1818 argument that the Principles of 1798 and its rigorous textualism be the terms by which the Constitution was interpreted. In short: the constitutive invitations within a text, even if it is unsuccessful in its immediate context, can be circulated and adapted to new exigencies, resulting in a text’s rhetorical legacy.

In addition to tracing changes in a text’s usage, rhetorical exteriors can also be analyzed by looking at responses to the text. These responses can take any number of forms: for example, speeches, letters, and news commentary. While much attention has been given to discursive responses to presidential rhetoric, less attention has been paid to the visual rhetorical interactions with presidential rhetoric. For example, it may be useful to consider how images of presidents on the cover of mass media outlets such as *Time* magazine provide a visual rhetorical response to that president’s negotiation of a regime’s core commitments and contribute to the rhetorical exteriors of the regime narrative.

⁶¹ Jasinski and Mercieca, “Analyzing Constitutive Rhetorics,” 321-325.

Examining visual rhetoric as one kind of rhetorical exterior requires analyzing these images within their larger context as a response to a president's efforts to negotiate the dominant regime's commitments. I thus attend both to the interior and exterior of the image itself. I analyze the image's rhetorical interiors by considering it as a visual rhetorical text on its own terms. Attending to the visual rhetorical arguments in the image itself, it becomes possible to understand how the image as a rhetorical text presents particular constitutive invitations regarding the presidency with regard to the particular president it features. Additionally, I examine the rhetorical exteriors of these images by situating them within their broader context and considering how they interact with existing regime narratives and commitments. For example, an image that features a president engaged in debate with a world leader might invite the public to conceive of the president as a world leader and representative of American exceptionalism (rhetorical interior) and might also interact with the regime commitments of diplomacy, international cooperation, and deliberation (rhetorical exterior). Making these kinds of judgments, however, requires a robust examination of the layers of context (both historical and rhetorical) that assist the public in making sense of these visual discourses.

Images from the cover of *Time*, as I will demonstrate in my analysis, function as public commentary regarding a president or presidential candidate's proffered vision for the nation, and therefore provide a means by which we can better understand the rhetorical exteriors of a regime's rhetoric. *Time* magazine has played a role in visually and rhetorically framing the presidency since its inception in 1923. Historically it is the most widely read and influential magazine in the world, contributing significantly to

presidents' and presidential candidates' attempts to construct their public images.⁶² The corpus of presidential images on the cover of *Time*, Rod Hart, Deborah Smith-Howell, and John Llewellyn explain, should be considered as “important cultural artifacts that reflect societal trends and that provide visual cues that can be used by citizens to better understand the issues represented.”⁶³ And, as these scholars have noted, there are “ideological and societal beliefs embedded in mass media texts” such as *Time*; these texts provide “constitutive invitations” that guide the public’s view of the presidency. Additionally, as Erickson notes, presidential images captured by mass media outlets provide visual clues into the ideological relationship between the president and the public; *Time* could thus provide clear examples of external validation or repudiation of a regime. Thus, *Time* functions as visual rhetoric about presidents that comments upon the stability of a given political regime and represents an ideal rhetorical artifact through which we can better understand the rhetorical exteriors of a regime’s constitutive legacies.⁶⁴

Connecting these ideas to presidential discourse and political time, we might consider that a president’s efforts to do rhetorical reconstruction draws from the constitutive invitations within existing texts that comprise the regime’s intellectual tradition. These texts contain potential narratives that emerge as constitutive legacies in

⁶² Norberto Angeletti, and Alberto Oliva. 2010. *Time: The Illustrated History of the World’s Most Influential Magazine*. New York, NY: Rizzoli.

⁶³ Mark S. Meisner and Bruno Takahashi, “The Nature of *Time*: How the Covers of the World’s Most Widely Read Weekly News Magazine Visualize Environmental Affairs.” *Environmental Communication*, 7:2 (1993), 255-276.

⁶⁴ Roderick P. Hart, Deborah Smith-Howell, and John Llewellyn, “The Mindscape of the Presidency: *Time* Magazine, 1945-1985.” *Journal of Communication*, 41:3 (1991), 6-25.

relation to the other texts. Reagan's form of conservatism, for example (as I will argue more fully in the next chapter), drew from a number of rhetorical resources, including the preemptive rhetoric of Barry Goldwater, neoliberal ideology, and existing cultural fears related to the Cold War. Within each of the texts that formed Reagan's rhetoric of reconstruction in 1980, Reagan was able to capitalize on the narrative potential of each that, carefully woven together throughout the campaign, formed the constitutive legacy of his reconstruction, which I call the Neoliberal regime. This regime relied on a particular narrative arc that offered neoliberal policies as the solution for the nation's economic, foreign policy, and moral ills. Using thick contextualism to analyze the constitutive legacies of the Neoliberal regime would thus require (1) understanding the constitutive invitations located in the rhetorical interiors of a regime representative's discourse and how it interacts with existing constitutive legacies, and (2) examining the rhetorical exteriors, or responses to those texts, including both discursive and visual rhetorical responses.

Once a regime has been established by a reconstructive president, managing the regime's constitutive legacies becomes an important resource for rhetorical authority. Or, as Murphy argues, the need for authority "requires rhetors to adapt the wisdom of the past to the problem of the present."⁶⁵ Because there is both an overarching narrative that binds the regime's core texts together as well as narratives embedded in the constitutive invitations of those texts, the regime's representatives must also manage those narratives

⁶⁵ Murphy, "Rhetorical Traditions," 85.

in a way that resonates with the regime's core ideology (in Reagan's case, neoliberalism) and makes those narratives responsive to changing domestic and international situations.

Political Time as Analytic Framework

Using political time as an analytic framework to do thick contextualism has the potential to help scholars of the presidency better understand how layers of context and discourse enable or constrain presidential rhetors' attempts to perform presidential authority. First, political time draws our attention to the broader historical context within which presidential authority is enacted. Understanding Reagan's rhetoric in the context of Roosevelt's Liberal Regime, for example, could provide insights into how the ideologies that undergird political regimes shift and change in response to historical exigencies.⁶⁶ Second, political time could help rhetorical scholars understand generic possibilities and constraints for presidents as they operate in different moments of political time. For example, we would expect that the rhetorical expectations and possibilities for a reconstructive president would be quite different from those of a disjunctive president because one speaks as the regime is coming into power and the other during its decline. Third, political time as an analytic framework can help us to better understand the aesthetic resources of presidents in relation to their political regime. Just as Jasinski argues that constitutive legacy traditions are marked by figurative and argumentative patterns, so political regimes also have expectations for argument and style that enable and constrain rhetorical practice. Following John

⁶⁶ Similarly, Raymond Williams has argued that there are dominant, emergent, and residual discourses that are cycled through politics. For more on this, see Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *New Left Review* 0.82 (Nov. 1, 1973): 3.

Murphy's argument that rhetorical traditions have "interpretive master codes" that "provide aesthetic resources for rhetorical action," I intend to argue that political regimes have their own rhetorical legacies, guided by particular texts whose constitutive legacies, woven together through the authority of the reconstructive rhetor, form a master code for the regime, with its own aesthetic resources.

More specifically, I will argue that each regime reconstruction results in a blend of ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments that distinguish it from what came before. Ideological commitments are the underpinnings of a regime's rhetorical legacy: regimes tend to have one or two core ideological commitments that all others link back to. For example, we might consider how Reagan's neoliberal ideological commitments, most obviously manifested in economic policy, provided a guiding framework that all other policy commitments could be linked to.

Policy commitments are the observable manifestations of the regime's ideology, worked out in policy. Affiliated presidents within a given regime must at all times find ways to clearly link their policy recommendations to the regime's ideology; to do otherwise would result in being tarred as an apostate to the regime, risking one's legitimacy and opening the door to regime members questioning one's authority. For example, Johnson followed the course set by FDR, offering up his vision of the "Great Society" as the next step in fulfilling the promises of the New Deal. Further, Murphy argues, Johnson also managed the regime by "continuing the international commitments that marked FDR's final two terms as well as subsequent presidencies."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Murphy, "Crafting the Kennedy Legacy," 583.

Rhetorical commitments are those “aesthetic resources for rhetorical action” that define a regime. Typically, the rhetorical commitments will take the form of specific tropes and figures that distinguish a regime reconstruction president. For example, as I will demonstrate in my first analysis chapter, Reagan’s Neoliberal regime was distinguished by narrative and appeals to commonsense; these elements of rhetorical style set the tone for what was expected of Reagan’s successor, George H.W. Bush.

The Rhetoric of Political Time

In order to understand how political time functions as an analytic tool for doing thick contextualism, some definitional work is in order. Because I intend to demonstrate in my analysis that each moment in political time has its own set of rhetorical resources, I will now define each moment in political time from a rhetorical perspective as they occur in the process of regime construction.

The rhetoric of repudiation is the first moment of an emergent regime. Repudiative rhetoric in its most nascent stage occurs while another regime is still in power. Rhetorics of repudiation are fundamentally antagonistic, for they must provide the public with a strong reason to reject the existing order. Rhetors employing repudiative rhetoric take advantage of any ideological cleavages or signs of weakness in the dominant regime, and use those weaknesses to make way for a new order. For example, Reagan’s “repudiative stance drew upon Carter’s failure and saddled the very word ‘liberalism’ with a stigma of illegitimacy.”⁶⁸ In so doing, he repudiated the old

⁶⁸ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 19.

order and made way for the second type of rhetoric in political time: the rhetoric of reconstruction.

Drawing from the rhetoric of repudiation, the “rhetoric of reconstruction” offers a new way of understanding government that replaces the old. Reconstructive rhetoric thus works in tandem with rhetorics of repudiation, providing justification for the establishment of a new order. Reconstructive rhetoric is thus the moment in political time where the people, presidency, and government are rhetorically constituted within the new order. For example, Reagan’s reconstructive stance “promised the American people a ‘New Beginning’ that would proceed on the devastatingly simple premise” that government was cause rather than the solution to the nation’s ills.⁶⁹ This “new beginning” constituted the people as rugged individuals fighting a battle against encroaching communism, the president as the narrator of a series of epic struggles (both domestic and abroad), and the government as an instrument of largesse that must be checked. Skowronek points out that individuals inhabiting the reconstructive moment in political time have “great rhetorical latitude” to offer new ways of understanding the relationship between the president, government, and people. However, as I will argue, the rhetoric of reconstruction is constrained by the constitutive legacies initiated by the preemptive and repudiative rhetoric that provided the initial warrants for a regime change.

A third type of rhetoric that occurs within political time is the “rhetoric of articulation.” Regime articulation presidents (orthodox innovators and disjunctive

⁶⁹ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 19.

individuals) hold a tenuous place in political time as they must “balance the interests represented” by a “Huge, diverse, and inherited electoral coalition.”⁷⁰ Because regime articulation presidents are expected to continue the legacy of their predecessors, successful articulation rhetoric maintains the core commitments of the regime while making them responsive to pressing issues. John Murphy’s analysis of Lyndon Johnson’s and Robert Kennedy’s Vietnam rhetoric is instructive in understanding the rhetoric of articulation. Murphy argues that when a president dies or leaves office, his or her successors “cannot help but augment and alter a heritage even as they speak of that heritage in an effort to engage specific controversies;” “the new must accentuate and augment the old.”⁷¹ We would expect, then, that a rhetoric of regime articulation would draw significantly from the existing regime rhetoric while augmenting that rhetoric so that it makes sense in light of changing domestic and international exigencies.

The final type of rhetoric within political time is the “rhetoric of preemption.” Individuals who engage in preemptive rhetoric (preemptive presidents and candidates) oppose the regime in power and attempt to challenge it. Because the regime has not significantly waned, though, this rhetoric does not have the same resonance as the dominant regime’s rhetoric. However, preemptive rhetoric can sow the seeds for the rhetoric of repudiation once the time is right for challenging the dominant regime.

Thus far, I have identified four key types, or genres, of rhetoric within political time: repudiative, reconstructive, articulation, and preemptive. It is important to note that although political time has a somewhat cyclical nature, the genres of rhetoric within

⁷⁰ Murphy, *Crafting the Kennedy Legacy*,” 587.

⁷¹ Murphy, “*Crafting the Kennedy Legacy*,” 581.

political time do not necessarily occur in the order I have listed. It is possible for a regime to experience a series of articulation or preemptive presidents (or some combination thereof) before political time resets and reconstruction again becomes possible. In fact, rather than thinking of the rhetoric of political time in terms of cycles, it might be more useful to think of it in terms of rhetorical evolutions: preemptive rhetoric sows the seeds for repudiative rhetoric, which often takes time to evolve into another rhetorical regime construction; articulation rhetoric slowly moves reconstructive rhetoric further and further away from the situation in which it first emerged, as new situations arise and the initial rhetoric of reconstruction becomes less persuasive.

Conclusion

This dissertation project seeks to engage political time as a thick contextual method in an effort to better understand how presidential authority is crafted, negotiated, and received. The case study for this project takes on a significant moment in political time: the emergence and ascendancy of the Neoliberal regime beginning with Ronald Reagan's 1964 campaign speech on behalf of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater and ending with the contentious 1992 presidential election. This time period in U.S. presidential history is important for continued study by rhetorical scholars because the ideological shifts that took place during Reagan's presidency continue to influence presidential politics in the current moment. Not long ago, Republican presidential primary candidates debated in front of Air Force One at the Reagan Library and engaged in the contest of proving who was fit to be the heir to the Reagan legacy. While the future of the Republican Party seems tenuous at present, there is no question that the

specter of Reagan's Neoliberal regime continues to provide rhetors with rhetorical resources and constraints.

Second, this period of time is significant for what it can teach us about presidential authority. While Bush was ideally positioned as the legitimate heir to the Reagan legacy, he lost to William Jefferson Clinton in 1992; a baffling turn of events for many. The 1992 presidential election was both contentious and kaleidoscopic as the candidates fought over the national deficit, healthcare, supply side economics, and the role of the United States in a post-Cold War world. More importantly, the campaign included a third-party candidate, Ross Perot, who posed significant challenges to Bush as a fiscal conservative who opposed "Reaganomics" and directly challenged Bush's authority regarding economic issues. The emergence and evolution of the Neoliberal regime from its most nascent form in 1964 through the 1992 presidential election thus has much to offer regarding the construction, use, and reception of presidential rhetorical authority. However, before digging too deeply into the case study itself, it is necessary to understand the broad ideological and rhetorical context in which the Neoliberal regime first began to emerge.

Chapter Descriptions

This dissertation tells the story of the Neoliberal regime's emergence and ascendancy under Ronald Reagan, its articulation under George H.W. Bush, and preemption during the 1992 presidential election. However, understanding how Reagan enabled the Neoliberal regime's emergence requires first understanding the commitments of the regime for which Neoliberalism was offered as an alternative. While

Barry Goldwater was running for president and Ronald Reagan developing his rhetoric of neoliberal preemption, the United States was still in the throes of the Liberal regime. Initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Liberal regime was marked by faith in the government and a fundamental belief in the value of progress. John Murphy explains, the liberal era “began with fundamental liberal principles and then turned to pragmatic application,” making the government responsible “for creating the social conditions” that allowed people to improve. As a result, government “intruded far more into the affairs of its citizens than had previously been the case,” emphasizing, “the utilitarian calculus of the greatest good for the greatest number.”⁷² Liberalism venerated those who proved themselves through hard work because “those who did not work, or those who impeded the bourgeoisie . . . had neither crafted themselves as respectable people nor had they earned their way.”⁷³

In addition, the liberal regime’s priorities emphasized “experimentation, results, and progress,” proving the truth of political propositions by testing them in practice rather than accepting them “because of tradition or morality.”⁷⁴ The controlling logics of the Liberal regime can thus be thought of as valuing pragmatism, hard work, and accountability. Policies were pragmatic rather than radical. Government was seen as a means to check corporate greed, and the nation was optimistic “regarding the government’s competence, a faith unusual in U.S. history.”⁷⁵ The rhetoric of the Liberal

⁷² Murphy, “The Language of the Liberal Consensus,” 139.

⁷³ Murphy, “Rhetorical Traditions,” 77.

⁷⁴ Murphy, “The Language of the Liberal Consensus,” 139.

⁷⁵ Murphy, “The Language of the Liberal Consensus,” 137.

regime was thus marked by confidence in the government, undergirded by firm belief in the efficacy of a Keynesian economic perspective.

Within the framework of political time, Barry Goldwater's oppositional rhetoric regarding the Liberal regime could be understood as preemptive rhetoric. As a candidate opposed to the existing order, Goldwater offered a series of ideological, policy, and rhetorical positions that designed to refute the Liberal regime. Rooted in a nascent form of neoliberalism, Goldwater's preemptive rhetoric sought to undermine faith in government action, replace a belief in progress with nostalgia, and predicted "impending doom even during apparently favorable times" by characterizing communist action abroad as a direct threat to American liberty.⁷⁶ Prioritizing political freedom, the Neoliberal ideology tied issues of personal liberty to economic freedom. Based Milton Friedman's monetarism, the Neoliberal approach to government argued that government control over the economy was a threat to freedom and that unregulated markets were the only way to assure individual freedoms.⁷⁷

Although Goldwater won the Republican nomination, his run against Lyndon Baines Johnson, the faithful son of the Roosevelt legacy, was hugely unsuccessful. Goldwater lost in a landslide, yet the rhetoric of conservatism he offered appealed to a number of Republican voters who lamented what they perceived as government overreach, feared Communism, and longed for a national renewal and return to "traditional" values. Thus, while Goldwater's campaign was unsuccessful in the short

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 310.

⁷⁷ Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2002).

term, he provided the public with texts that, primarily through Reagan, resulted in a constitutive legacy of Neoliberalism that provided a foundation for Reagan's repudiative rhetoric in 1980. The remainder of this project will thus be dedicated to tracing how the rhetoric of the Neoliberal regime emerged, ascended, and was maintained from Ronald Reagan's political emergence through the regime's first significant challenge in 1992.

Chapter II tells the story of regime emergence. In this chapter, I focus on Ronald Reagan's efforts to negotiate the nascent Neoliberal regime beginning with his preemptive rhetoric on behalf of Barry Goldwater in 1964, and continuing through his successful repudiation and reconstruction in 1980 and 1984. The argument for this chapter is twofold: first, I argue that there is a distinct rhetoric of repudiation; its rhetorical resources include the preemptive rhetoric of earlier rhetors (in this case, Barry Goldwater). Repudiative rhetoric, I argue, relies on Burkean identification and division, establishing an "us" and a "them." The rhetoric of repudiation thus constructs the affiliated regime (in this case, the Liberal regime) as an other with which identification is no longer possible. The rhetoric of reconstruction capitalizes on identification, actualizing the narrative potential within the constitutive legacies of the emergent regime. This results in a broader narrative that constitutes the people in a new relationship with the government that reflects the emergent regime's ideological commitments.

Drawing from a number of texts throughout his campaign and presidency, I first examine the rhetorical interiors of these texts in an effort to understand how Reagan negotiated the constitutive legacies of Neoliberalism to repudiate the Liberal regime and

establish the Neoliberal regime. I then examine the rhetorical exteriors of these texts, attending to public reception of Reagan's neoliberal rhetoric by examining cover images from *Time* magazine as responses to and commentary on the Neoliberal regime.

In Chapter III, I tell the story of regime articulation by examining the presidency of George H.W. Bush. Because articulation presidents are charged with extending the regime's commitments and making them responsive to changing domestic and international situations, I argue that regime articulation presidents have two primary rhetorical resources: casuistic stretching and prudential accommodation. In particular, orthodox innovators such as Bush must carefully engage in casuistic stretching, consistently justifying their efforts to shift the regime's commitments in response to changing situations. In Bush's case, casuistic stretching required that he construct a hierarchy of the Neoliberal regime's core commitments and rearticulating the constitutive legacies of each commitment so that they fit together in a new narrative. However, as I argue, Bush made a critical miscalculation in his exercise of casuistic stretching by failing to arrange the regime commitments in a hierarchy that made sense both to the Neoliberal regime's political coalitions and the American people. Further, in this chapter I suggest that the rhetorical performance of casuistic stretching is essential to prudential accommodation.

Chapter IV tells the story of preemption by examining competing preemptive rhetorics during the 1992 presidential election. Specifically, I analyze the efforts of regime challengers Bill Clinton and H. Ross Perot as they attempted to articulate the constitutive legacies of the Neoliberal regime in a manner that would justify a change in

leadership. I argue that the rhetoric of preemption, enacted in response to a dominant regime, resulted in what Skowronek calls a “mongrel mix” of ideology and policy as the candidates rearticulated the regime’s constitutive legacies to serve their own purposes.⁷⁸ More specifically, I argue that Bill Clinton coopted the rhetoric of small government, capturing its ethos and inviting the public to imagine a government that was both responsive to the people’s needs as well as small and efficient. Ross Perot, on the other hand, focused more on using the stylistic resources of the Neoliberal regime, doubling down on the folksy style and simple policy solutions favored by Reagan. The analysis in this chapter suggests that preemptive rhetoric occurring early in a regime’s lifespan tends more toward harnessing the dominant regime’s convenient *ethos*, and less toward repudiation. In other words, early regime preemptive candidates such as Clinton and Perot work harder to reckon with and manage the regime’s constitutive legacies rather than contradicting them. To that end, both candidates consistently repudiated Bush rather than the Neoliberal regime’s policies because the regime’s constitutive legacies were still a powerful rhetorical force.

In Chapter V, I offer concluding thoughts regarding political time as an analytic framework for thick contextualism. Reconstructing the context of presidential rhetoric and political campaigns remains a necessary exercise for those who would analyze and evaluate the different forms of political speech. Political time assists in these efforts to understand context, drawing attention toward the inventional resources of presidential rhetors as they attempt to challenge, reconstruct, or maintain the political order.

⁷⁸ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 106.

Attending to textual interiors and exteriors as they function within political time offers critics a way to introduce nuance into their contextual analysis as they attempt to account for the exercise of presidential rhetorical authority.

CHAPTER II
RONALD REAGAN'S LIBERAL REPUDIATION AND NEOLIBERAL
RECONSTRUCTION

The day was October 27, 1964. It was less than a week before the presidential election and Republican candidate Barry Goldwater was polling far behind Democratic incumbent Lyndon Baines Johnson. In an effort to close the gap between the two candidates, Republican elites contacted actor and cochairman of Californians for Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and asked him to deliver an address on Goldwater's behalf. As Reagan recalled in *Speaking My Mind*,

One night a few weeks before the election I addressed a fundraiser at the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles. When the evening was over, a delegation of high-powered Republicans waited for me. They asked whether I would deliver that same speech on nationwide TV if they raised the money to buy the time. I said yes and suggested that, instead of just having me in a studio alone, they bring in an audience to get a little better feel. They readily agreed. The night that the tape of the speech was to air on NBC, Nancy and I went over to another couple's home to watch it. Everyone thought I'd done well, but still you don't always know about these things. The phone rang about midnight. It was a call from Washington, D.C., where it was three a.m. One of Barry's staff called to tell me that the switchboard was still lit up from the calls pledging money to his campaign. I then slept peacefully. The speech raised \$8million and soon changed my entire life. Although I didn't put a title on it, it later became known as "A Time for Choosing."⁷⁹

If fundraising is any indication of success, then "The Speech," or "A Time for Choosing," as it later became known, was certainly well received. In addition to raising millions of dollars for the Goldwater presidential campaign, "The Speech" catapulted

⁷⁹ Reagan, Ronald. *Speaking My Mind*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks (1989), p. 23.

Reagan into the national political spotlight, leading to a successful gubernatorial bid in California.⁸⁰ Despite the immediate success of the address, Goldwater lost. However, “A Time For Choosing,” a distillation of Goldwater’s conservatism and Reagan’s rhetorical skill, represents an important moment in the gradual transition from the Liberal regime to the Neoliberal. As I argue in this chapter, “A Time For Choosing” represents an important moment of regime preemption; the constitutive legacy of the speech served as an important inventional resource for Reagan in his 1980 presidential campaign, setting groundwork for the rhetorical tradition of the Neoliberal regime. Additionally, I argue that it is possible to trace the processes of Liberal regime repudiation and Neoliberal regime emergence by attending to the constitutive legacies that developed as a result of Reagan’s 1964 address.

The amalgam of ideological, rhetorical, and policy commitments Reagan established during his tenure as president and left for his successor, George H.W. Bush, is what I am calling the Neoliberal regime tradition. As Robert McChesney notes,

Neoliberalism is the defining political economic paradigm of our time—it refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit.⁸¹

These policies, according to McChesney, are “characterized as free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic

⁸⁰ Alsop, Stewart. “The Good Guy.” *Saturday Evening Post*, CCXXXVIII (November 1965), p. 18.

⁸¹ Chomsky, Noam. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order*. Seven Stories Press, 1999. 7.

and parasitic government.”⁸² The set of ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments introduced by Reagan reflect these ideals: the core of his reconstructive efforts consisted of his economic ideology, which shifted toward supply-side economics, prioritizing private enterprise while wrapping it in the mantle of “free markets.”

In this chapter, I trace the processes of regime emergence and ascendancy as Reagan helped move the nation from the Liberal Era to the Neoliberal Era. In order to trace out this process, I first examine the rhetorical interiors of “A Time for Choosing” by closely reading and identifying the constitutive invitations within the text. In so doing, I argue that it is possible to trace the constitutive invitations within that text that circulated during Reagan’s gubernatorial campaign and resulted in a powerful constitutive legacy that Reagan drew from throughout his presidency. These constitutive invitations encouraged four interconnected conceptions of the American people: first, they encouraged the public to see themselves as rugged individuals, second, as neoliberals and champions of monetarism, third, as citizens engaged in an all-or-nothing battle against communism, and finally, as members of an exceptional nation whose civil religion set them apart from their adversaries. These four constitutive invitations, circulated through public discourse and employed by Reagan during the 1980 presidential campaign, were masterfully woven together and resulted in an overarching narrative of Neoliberalism that redefined the relationship between the American people and the government, linking American identity with Neoliberal economic ideology.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Further, I argue that the constitutive legacy of a regime, once established, constrains regime representatives and binds them to the regime narrative they construct from those constitutive legacies. In order to make these arguments, I first set the historical context of the Liberal regime prior to “A Time for Choosing,” and then engage in a rhetorical analysis of its rhetorical interiors to determine its constitutive invitations. As a means of understanding the rhetorical exteriors of the speech, I trace how the constitutive legacies of the speech were circulated through Reagan’s rhetoric during his presidency and visually constituted on the cover of *Time*. The chapter closes by considering how using political time to analyze rhetorical circulation enhances our understanding of Reagan’s rhetoric and those who followed him. To begin, I locate Reagan in political time.

Ronald Reagan’s Political Time

Within political time, Ronald Reagan occupied three distinct rhetorical roles: first he engaged in preemptive rhetoric of the Liberal regime; second, he provided persuasive repudiation of the Liberal regime; finally, he engaged in the rhetorical construction of the Neoliberal regime. As a preemptive rhetor, Reagan had to reckon with the existing Liberal regime, which underwent a resurgence under Lyndon Baines Johnson. As I have previously discussed, the controlling logics of the Liberal regime were pragmatism, hard work, and accountability. Undergirding these issues was a belief in the efficacy of Keynesian economics, which recognized the complexity and nuance of legislation on the economy. Johnson extended the policy commitments of the Liberal regime by signing the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which acknowledged the role of the government

in alleviating poverty and stimulating economic success for its workers. Further, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in Kennedy's stead. During this moment, Johnson rhetorically extended Liberal regime commitments by underscoring the value of hard work and fairness, as well as the role of the government in ensuring equality of opportunity.⁸³ Johnson was thus the established representative of the dominant liberal regime, which opposition candidates such as Goldwater (and by proxy, Reagan) needed to rhetorically preempt in order to pave the way for Liberal regime repudiation.

1964 was a time of great upheaval in the United States, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy. President Kennedy had recently been assassinated and replaced by Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson; the Civil Rights movements was in full swing and Freedom Summer was about to take place; Vietnam was just heating up; and the fear of Communism was pervasive. It was within this whirling vortex of social and foreign policy pressure that the 1964 presidential campaign took place, featuring GOP candidate Barry Goldwater and Democratic incumbent Lyndon B. Johnson. The two candidates took dramatically different stances on the issues: while Goldwater attempted to call up a "popular nostalgia for the world of yesteryear,"⁸⁴ Johnson offered up his "Great Society" vision for the future directly descended from FDR's New Deal.⁸⁵ In terms of political time, Johnson represented the politics of articulation: the faithful son of FDR's New Deal coalition, Johnson was firmly established within the Roosevelt regime. Indeed, as

⁸³ Johnson, Lyndon Baines. "Remarks Upon Signing the Civil Rights Bill (July 2, 1964)." <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3525>

⁸⁴ Wraga, Ernest J. The Little World of Barry Goldwater. *Western Speech Journal*, 27:4, 207-215 (1963), p. 214.

⁸⁵ Leuchtenburg, William E. *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan*, revised ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1985.

William Leuchtenburg explains, Johnson became all but “obsessed with him [FDR] during the 1964 campaign,” even to the point of studying FDR’s 1932 speeches in the hopes of “producing the same kind of effect.”⁸⁶

While Johnson ran his campaign as a successor to the New Deal, Goldwater stood in staunch opposition, providing a preemptive challenge to the still-dominant Liberal regime. Both the content and tenor of Goldwater’s campaign attempted to refute the Liberal regime by characterizing government action as federal overreach, which he argued would only result in the triumph of communism and continual erosion of individual liberties. As a means of countering Johnson’s emphasis on continued progress, Kathryn Olson argues, Goldwater’s campaign rhetoric took on the form of a jeremiad: a prophetic voice calling Americans to renewal and urging them to “return to a way of life aligned with a strict interpretation of the country’s covenant, the Constitution.”⁸⁷ By taking a firm repudiative stance toward Johnson and the Liberal regime he represented, Goldwater advanced “criticism of the existing peace, prosperity, and progress,” allowing him to “predict impending doom even during apparently favorable times.”⁸⁸ This is an important feature of preemptive rhetoric, for preemptive rhetors often must contradict a favorable situation to create rhetorical space for increasingly larger criticisms of the dominant regime. Goldwater accomplished this by making much of an issue that most Americans feared: the threat of encroaching communism.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 139.

⁸⁷ Olson, Kathryn M. “Completing the Picture: Replacing Generic Embodiments in the Historical Flow.” *Communication Quarterly*, 41:3, 299-317 (1993), p. 310.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 310.

Goldwater's campaign revolved around three critical themes: the size and scope of government, anticommunism, and the right to private property. John Hammerback contends that this trifecta of issues allowed Goldwater to emphasize "one pervasive ideal, rugged individualism."⁸⁹ For Goldwater, rugged individualism was the only way to guard against the threat of communism in both governmental and private contexts. He called for a significant decrease in federal government that would free localities to manage their own issues and individuals to protect their property from government overreach. Similarly, his foreign policy approach required that the United States take on the persona of rugged individualism by "de-emphasizing international cooperation, discontinuing conciliatory foreign policies, and challenging communism directly."⁹⁰ In short, what Johnson argued was the logical continuation of the New Deal through the Great Society, Goldwater characterized as continued government largesse and control that would permit the spread of communism; what Johnson argued was limited involvement in Vietnam, Goldwater characterized as a lack of willingness to be tough on communism. Johnson praised the stability of the status quo and encouraged the nation to continue moving forward; Goldwater warned against a nation tending toward totalitarianism and called for a return to his view of Constitutional "government confinement."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Hammerback, John C. Barry Goldwater's Rhetoric of rugged Individualism. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58:2, 175-183 (1972), 180.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 180.

⁹¹ Goldwater, Barry. *The Conscience of a Conservative*. New York: Macfadden (1960), 16.

Throughout the campaign, Goldwater consistently lagged behind Johnson in the polls and faced intense media scrutiny for his discourse. Perhaps best known from this campaign was Johnson's "Daisy ad," which resulted from Goldwater's argument that nuclear weapons be used in Vietnam if necessary. By September it was clear that Johnson had a comfortable lead, prompting GOP elites to stage an event that would remedy Goldwater's ailing campaign. For this event, they turned to Ronald Reagan.

Crafting a Conservative Legacy in "The Speech"

Although delivered on behalf of Barry Goldwater, Reagan's 1964 televised address does far more to establish Reagan as a legitimate preemptive rhetor than it did Goldwater. Although he clearly followed the stock issues of the Goldwater campaign, Reagan distinguished himself as a viable political figure apart from Goldwater. He accomplished this by engaging in the rhetoric of preemption while employing Burkean techniques of identification and division to establish himself as a more centrist voice to Goldwater's strident partisan: first, Reagan carefully situated himself as a reasonable individual who had come to conservatism as a result of the Liberal regime's problems; second, he clearly preempted the Liberal regime by criticizing its ideological and policy commitments; finally, Reagan offered an alternative to the Liberal regime, what Skowronek calls the "legitimizing ideas" that would form the basis of "common sense" under a new order.⁹² These rhetorical processes – identification with the existing regime, dissociation via ideological and policy criticism, and offering a solution to the existing order – form the basis for the rhetoric of preemption. As I will argue, Reagan's

⁹² Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 171.

preemptive rhetoric contained constitutive invitations that made it possible for moderate Republicans to accept the possibility of a new order, whereas Goldwater's did not.

Thus, in the following section I will identify the rhetorical markers of regime preemption, repudiation, and reconstruction within Reagan's 1964 "A Time for Choosing Address." Because this address contains the initial constitutive invitations that became the constitutive legacy of the Neoliberal regime, I will then trace out how these ideas were rhetorically realized during key moments of Reagan's political career, including his 1976 stump speech, his 1980 inaugural address, and the 1986 "Challenger Address."

Reagan's Rhetoric of Preemption

Preemptive rhetoric is distinguished from repudiative and reconstructive rhetoric primarily by its place in time. The preemptive rhetor has come too early for the process of reconstruction to begin and so has the potential to present the texts whose constitutive legacy will be invoked when the time for repudiation and reconstruction is right. Reagan's primary rhetorical strategies—identification, dissociation, and establishing an alternative—illustrate his place as a preemptive rhetor. Reagan strategically dissociated himself from Goldwater while finding ways to identify with moderate voters and supporters of the Liberal regime while appealing to the conservative base. In so doing, he was able to engage in slight modifications, or redefinitions, of Goldwater's ideology and shift the focus from anticommunism to economic issues: an almost imperceptible shift that changed the ideological locus from governmental to economic structure. Using dissociation and redefinition, Reagan provided his audience with a preemptive rhetoric

of repudiation that would become useful when the Liberal regime had run its course. Finally, the alternative Reagan offered (neoliberalism) served as a preview of the eventual neoliberal reconstruction. His 1964 address, while unsuccessful in the short term, resulted in a constitutive legacy that circulated and provided Reagan with rhetorical resources during his later campaigns and throughout his presidency.

Although Goldwater was ostensibly the object of “The Speech,” Reagan began by strategically dissociating himself—and his ideas—from Goldwater while addressing the same key issues of the Goldwater campaign. This is apparent in Reagan’s efforts to lay claim to his ideas. He stated, “I have been permitted to choose my own words and discuss my own ideas regarding the choice that we face in the next two weeks.”⁹³

Reagan employed personal pronouns that made the critiques and policy stances in “The Speech” his own, stating, “I have an uncomfortable feeling . . .”, “I wonder who among us . . .”, and “I personally resent it . . .”⁹⁴ These first person pronouns reinforced the idea that these are Reagan’s thoughts and his alone, making Reagan more than a mouthpiece of the Goldwater campaign. This strategy of dissociation, Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca and Chaim Perelman argue, works to negotiated tensions and help both rhetors and audiences overcome cognitive dissonance.⁹⁵ Subtly dividing the conservative stance into two parts: Goldwater’s perspective and Reagan’s perspective, Reagan provided his extensive televised audience with a way to justify supporting conservatism without supporting

⁹³ Reagan, Ronald. “A Time for Choosing.” October 27, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1-2.

⁹⁵ Olbrechts-Tyteca, Lucy and Chaim Perelman. *The New Rhetoric* (trans. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press (1969).

Goldwater. In Olbrechts-Tyteca's and Perelman's terms, Reagan provided a way for his audience to support the reality of conservatism (Reagan's) without supporting the appearance of it (Goldwater's).⁹⁶

Second, Reagan used identification to connect with his broader television audience by sharing his partisan history. Identification, Kenneth Burke argues, uses language to permit individuals to share substance, albeit momentarily. This can allow individuals to see themselves as consubstantial, or "both joined and separate," part of a community and as autonomous individuals.⁹⁷ Reagan accomplished this by drawing attention to points of identification he held in common with both Republicans and Democrats, stating, "I have spent most my life as a Democrat. I recently have seen fit to follow another course."⁹⁸ By sharing his history as a Democrat, Reagan creates a point of identification with other Democrats and establishes himself as a reasonable voice of preemption. Reagan's partisan history provides another tacit dissociation from Goldwater, a self-proclaimed lifelong Republican who was opposed to FDR's New Deal policies.⁹⁹ As a Conservative Republican and former Democrat, Reagan had the capability to be consubstantial with Republicans and Democrats alike. In contrast to the extreme and unstable Barry Goldwater portrayed in the media, Reagan established himself as a reasonable man of thought not only understood those faithful to the Liberal regime, but had been one of them. Having characterized himself as a separate political

⁹⁶ Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman, *The New Rhetoric*.

⁹⁷ Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. New York: Prentice Hall (1950), 20.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Goldberg, Robert Alan. *Barry Goldwater*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (1995).

entity from Goldwater and established his rhetorical authority as a preemptive voice of conservatism, Reagan swiftly moved toward criticizing the ideological and policy commitments of the Liberal regime.

Preemptive Repudiation

Reagan's critique characterized the New Deal regime as weakened and corrupt by drawing from key themes within Goldwater's campaign: the size and scope of government, the right to private property, and anticommunism. For each of these issues, Reagan critiqued the New Deal regime's approach in a manner that, while following the *topos* of Goldwater's campaign nonetheless gestured toward what would become the hallmarks of the Reagan regime in terms of ideological and policy commitments. Using the exigencies of the moment to undermine the Liberal regime's ideology as a whole, Reagan created space to offer up a new ideological framework in its place. Reagan's critique of Liberal regime government programs and spending laid the groundwork for his rhetoric of repudiation: Reagan's speech contained constitutive invitations that encouraged the audience to join him in redefining government as the problem, the threat of communism a threat to free markets, and the United States' role in the world as a safeguard of free markets, which he directly connected to democracy promotion.

Reagan first addressed the size and responsibility of the federal government. Continuing his rhetorical strategy of dissociation, Reagan redefined government overreach in terms of its economic consequences rather than, as Goldwater did, another step toward communism. This redefinition of government overreach as an economic issue gave Reagan the space to critique the Liberal regime's economic ideology as a

whole. Using the extended example of the farm economy, Reagan challenged the notion that government programs solve problems. He explained,

Since 1955, the cost of this program has nearly doubled. One-fourth of farming in America is responsible for 85 percent of the farm surplus. Three-fourths of farming is out on the free market and has known a 21 percent increase in the per capita consumption of all its produce. You see, that one-fourth of farming—that's regulated and controlled by the federal government. In the last three years we've spent 43 dollars in the feed grain program for every bushel of corn we don't grow . . . Every responsible farmer and farm organization has repeatedly asked the government to free the farm economy, but how—who are farmers to know what's best for them? The wheat farmers voted against a wheat program. The government passed it anyway. Now the price of bread goes up; the price of wheat to the farmer goes down.¹⁰⁰

In this example, the fate of the farm industry (one of Goldwater's biggest grievances with FDR¹⁰¹) stands in synecdochically for industry as a whole. As Reagan argued in this example, government regulation and programs, far from helping the farm industry, prevented farmers from doing what was "best for them": turning a profit. In addition, Reagan criticized a number of other federal programs, including the Area Redevelopment Agency, welfare spending, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Each of these, for Reagan, demonstrated that the current regime's focus on big government, rooted in an overly complex economic ideology, created problems instead of solving them.

The attacks on big government that Reagan used to repudiate a Keynesian economic scheme also applied to the erosion of individual liberty because, for Reagan (and Goldwater), the bigger the government, the greater its potential to impede the

¹⁰⁰Ibid, p. 2-3.

¹⁰¹ Goldwater, Barry. *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Shepardsville, KY: Victor Publishing Co (1960), chapter five.

peoples' right to self-government. He explained, "This is the issue of this election: Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."¹⁰² The choice Reagan articulates here is clear: the electorate must choose between the competing ideologies of the New Deal regime and its nascent alternative, at this point associated with Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater.

The final means by which Reagan repudiated the existing regime identified Liberal ideology with the threat of socialism and, by extension, communism. Throughout "The Speech," Reagan accused the current administration of bending to socialism abroad and advocating socialist policies at home. He mentioned socialism and socialist policies nine times during the course of the eight-page speech. In particular, Reagan accused the Democratic party of supporting socialist systems abroad and predicted that their policies would plunge the United States into the "ant heap of totalitarianism," imposing socialism on the people. For Reagan, repudiating socialism allowed him to negate the Liberal regime's economic ideology. Reagan thus constructed a chain of logic in which Keynesian economic ideology advances big government, big government results in socialist policies, and socialist policies erode the rights of the people.¹⁰³ This chain of logic formed a kind of slippery slope in which any kind of federal policy could be seen as tending toward imposing socialism on the people.

Reagan stated,

¹⁰² Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 6.

Now it doesn't require expropriation or confiscation of private property or business to impose socialism on a people. What it does mean whether you hold the deed to the—or the title to your business or property if the government holds the power of life and death over that business or property? And such machinery already exists. The government can find some charge to bring against any concern it chooses to prosecute. Every businessman has his own tale of harassment. Somewhere a perversion has taken place. Our natural, unalienable rights are now considered to be a dispensation of government, and freedom has never been so fragile, so close to slipping from our grasp as it is at this moment.¹⁰⁴

By identifying the status quo with socialist threats, Reagan tapped into existing cultural anxieties regarding the spread of communism, anxieties heightened by the American military presence in Vietnam. Reagan accused the current administration of allowing “a perversion” to take place, a perversion whose result was the erosion of private liberties. The examples Reagan cited throughout the address, however, have to do specifically with economic liberties: he cited examples of businessmen being harassed, farms being seized, and property rights being diluted.¹⁰⁵ In each of these cases, personal and economic liberty are equated, resulting in a chain of logic that ultimately tied back to Reagan's repudiation of the New Deal economic ideology.

Preemptive Reconstruction

Reagan's repudiative rhetoric created the rhetorical space to offer solutions to New Deal economic ideology. For each issue he addressed, Reagan provided an alternative rooted in an alternative economic ideology. In the farm example, Reagan advocated for less government control of the farm economy so that the industry could regulate itself, arguing for privatization of the farm industry. This is just one example of

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 1, 6 respectively.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

the larger shift in economic ideology Reagan advocated: a move away from the Keynesian economic ideology that governed the New Deal regime and toward a Neoliberal ideology of free market capitalism.

Here, the rhetorical processes of reconstruction emerged as Reagan offered an ideological alternative to the Liberal regime. By advocating that, “government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy,” Reagan made clear that his alternative economic ideology would privatize business.¹⁰⁶ Arguing for Friedman and Schwartz’s monetarism, which theorizes that restricted government spending checks inflation, Reagan offered up neoliberalism as an alternative to Keynesian economic policies.¹⁰⁷ Increasing privatization, Reagan argued, would not only solve the ills within the status quo, but also allow the United States to maintain its place as the “last best hope for man on earth.”¹⁰⁸

In order to support this new economic ideology, Reagan connected neoliberal economic ideology with transcendent issues such as freedom, morality, and commonsense. In messianic style, Reagan exhorted his listeners to “have the courage to tell our elected officials that we want our national policy based on what we know in our hearts is morally right” and argued that refusing to do so would result in being “weakened from within spiritually, morally, and economically.”¹⁰⁹ Reagan extended the

¹⁰⁶ Reagan, Ronald. “A Time for Choosing.” October 27, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

¹⁰⁷ Cagan, Phillip. “Monetarism.” *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, v. 3. Reprinted in John Eatwell et. al (1989), *Money: The New Palgrave*, 195-205 & 492-497 (1987).

¹⁰⁸ Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

connection between freedom and morality even further by invoking biblical figures such as Moses and Jesus, who were unwilling to purchase life “at the price of chains and slavery.”¹¹⁰ He asked his audience,

. . . should Moses have told the children of Israel to live in slavery under the pharaohs? Should Christ have refused the cross? Should the patriots at the Concord Bridge have thrown down their guns and refused to fire the shot heard ‘round the world? The martyrs of history were not fools, and our honored dead who gave their lives to stop the advance of the Nazis didn’t die in vain.¹¹¹

By creating rhetorical linkages between religious figures and American military history, Reagan connected Neoliberal economic ideology with civil religion.

Equating Neoliberalism with civil religion elevated economic ideology to the level of sacred texts such as the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, and transcendent values such as freedom. Civil religion, the idea popularized by Robert Bellah that there exists in the United States a sort of nonsectarian religion consisting of sacred symbols and discourses from the nation’s history, is rooted in covenantal theology.¹¹² Covenantal theology posits that the United States has a kind of sacred contract, or covenant, with the nonsectarian “God” of civil religion. As such, this deity is personally invested in the United States fulfilling its role in the world.

Reagan’s address directly linked Neoliberal economic ideology with the idea of the covenant. By characterizing a transition to neoliberalism as the only way for the United States to fulfill its divine destiny (or covenantal obligation) of preserving and spreading democracy over communism, Reagan made the transition to neoliberalism a

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹¹² Bellah, Robert N. “Civil Religion in America.” *Journal of the Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 96:1 (1967), 1-21.

sacred charge. Calling the U.S. “the last best hope of man on earth,” without which the world would be plunged into “a thousand years of darkness,” Reagan performed the role of the nation’s civil religious priest, exhorting the people to preserve their freedom over the “utopian solution of peace without victory” offered by those who represent the welfare state.^{113,114}

In “The Speech,” protecting the United States from the threat of communism through economic ideology took on a heightened significance; protecting the nation from its enemies within (those affiliated with the Liberal regime) and without (communist regimes) became the divine appointment of the U.S. and a project upon whose success the fate of the world hung in the balance. Kurt Ritter calls this Reagan’s “secular apocalyptic,” in which Reagan fused the prophetic, apocalyptic style to secular issues by warning of impending doom while maintaining a hopeful tone for the future.¹¹⁵ Reagan’s address thus invited the audience to see themselves as members of a divine drama, in which the economic ideology of the United States had the potential to affect not only its own fate, but the world’s.

As I have argued, Reagan’s 1964 “A Time for Choosing” address served three purposes: first, it established Reagan as a legitimate preemptive voice for conservatism, tacitly dissociating him from Goldwater and making Reagan the next logical choice to carry forth the torch of neoliberal conservatism. Second, it demonstrated the rhetoric of preemptive repudiation by linking the Liberal Regime’s economic ideology (Keynesian

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” 8.

¹¹⁵ Ritter, Kurt and David Henry. *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press (1992), p. 27.

economics) to all manner of ills, both personal and governmental. By undermining the Keynesian economic approach, Reagan was able to access a larger critique of the New Deal regime's system of "big government," whose endless regulations and encroachments would erode individual liberties, destroy the economy, and, take a soft line on the socialist policies that would eventually give way to the spread of communism across the globe. Finally, Reagan offered up a preemptive ideological alternative, or preemptive reconstruction, to Keynesian economics: neoliberalism. Just as Reagan was able to link Keynesian thought to all manner of socialist evils, he also implied that a neoliberal economic approach would solve all the nation's ills and fulfill its sacred obligation to the world. While Reagan never went so far as to identify neoliberalism by name, he functionally advocated this ideology by emphasizing the need for government to back down, leaving businesses and individuals free to regulate themselves. In essence, Reagan's economic ideology echoed the "rugged individualism" Kathryn Olson identifies as a key component of the Goldwater campaign.¹¹⁶ This rugged individualism was logically extended to the United States' international policies, necessitating a tough stance on communism and resulting in anticommunist action both at home and abroad.

Rhetorical Circulation: The Constitutive Legacy of Neoliberalism

From the rhetorical interiors of "The Speech," four constitutive invitations emerge that comprise a neoliberal approach to government. First, Reagan invited the people to equate liberalism and Keynesian economic with governmental excess, resulting in communism. Second, Reagan invited the people to see a neoliberal

¹¹⁶ Olson, "Generic Embodiments in the Historical Flow."

economic structure as the solution to those ills. Third, Reagan's address invited the people to see themselves and the nation as rugged individuals committed to fighting for freedom by spreading democracy and free markets. Finally, Reagan invited his audience to associate economic ideology with democracy, and free markets as part of the national civil religion. Each of these ideas was linked together by Reagan into a master narrative of neoliberalism that, put in its plainest terms, told the following story: "Liberalism has led to government control and excess, and will hasten the spread of communism not only in our country but abroad. As Americans we have a sacred responsibility to fight totalitarianism and spread democracy; this can only be accomplished by ensuring personal liberties and checking government intrusion through a free market economic system."

While Reagan's address did not help Goldwater win the presidency, it arguably set the stage for Reagan's reconstruction, which most visibly occurred during his 1980 presidential campaign. Realizing this narrative required that Reagan craft a series of policy and ideological commitments, including (1) a shift in economic ideology and a series of deregulation policies, (2) a continued and careful ideological link between civil religion and free markets, (3) a staunch anticommunist stance, and (4) a rhetorical and policy stance that demonstrated the United States' belief in rugged individualism, both in terms of the citizen and the nation as a whole. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to tracing the rhetorical exteriors of Reagan's 1964 address by identifying how these ideas circulated and were rearticulated throughout his presidency. In order to do so,

I examine both Reagan's campaign and presidential discourse as well as responses to his rhetoric of neoliberalism as visually constituted on the cover of *Time*.¹¹⁷

Neoliberal Economic Ideology: "Reaganomics"

Arguably, the controlling ideology of the Reagan regime had to do with its economic scheme. As demonstrated by the analysis of his 1964 address, each component of a regime's rhetoric (rugged individualism, anticommunism, and civil religion) served as further justification for embracing the economic ideology of monetarism. Reagan's ideological commitment to neoliberalism developed throughout his presidency, eventually becoming rearticulated as "Reaganomics." During the 1976 Republican primary election in particular, Reagan developed his economic perspective by drawing from his experience as governor of California to demonstrate that his economic ideology was feasible.

In order to demonstrate how his ideology, turned into policy, might work, Reagan utilized the extended example of welfare. His standard stump speech during 1976 included the following:

I've heard it all before. A few years ago in Calif. [sic.] we were faced with the kind of "welfare mess" we are still faced with in Wash. [sic.]. For 4 yrs [sic], we tried to halt the ~~ever~~ runaway increase in ~~cost~~ caseload & cost but nothing seemed to work. We were frustrated by Fed. [sic.] regulations, court orders

¹¹⁷ The process used to select speeches that clearly demonstrate the elements of the Neoliberal regime's constitutive legacy tradition included reading a vast number of Reagan's radio addresses, stump speeches, and speeches given during his tenure as governor of California, and later, president of the United States. Based on my reading of this material, I selected speeches that served as representative anecdotes and clearly engaged the three key elements that came to constitute the Reagan regime: anticommunism, monetarist economic ideology, and civil religious justification.

obtained by “welfare rights groups” using govt. paid lawyers from O.E.O. and a liberally oriented Dem. [sic.] majority in the legis. [sic].¹¹⁸

He continued by explaining how he and his administration went about turning the 40,000 per month caseload increase into an 8,000 per month decrease. He explained further that following this reduction in caseload, “Forty three of our fifty-eight counties were able to reduce their property tax rates two years in a row and the second year two other counties joined them . . . that \$750 million deficit turned out to be and \$850 million surplus” that was returned to the people as a tax rebate.¹¹⁹ Reagan continued, characterizing the “welfare mess” in Washington as an issue that crossed party lines and was acknowledged as such by a “liberal Senator *now a Presidential candidate.*”¹²⁰ In order to underscore this point, Reagan used the example of a Chicago woman who “used 80 names, 30 addresses, & 15 telephone numbers in collecting food stamps, social security, welfare, and veterans benefits from four deceased but non-existent husbands.”¹²¹ This reference became a stock section of Reagan’s 1976 primary stump speeches, as he decried welfare and government spending, instead advocating for cutbacks in federal government spending just as he enacted in California. The successful changes in California, Reagan explained, were the result of hard work studying congressional acts and regulations in order to find inconsistencies and loopholes. Should the federal

¹¹⁸ Reagan, Ronald. “Stump Speech Insert.” January 22, 1976. In Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (eds.) *Reagan in His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*. New York, NY: Touchstone (2002).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 459.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*.

¹²¹ *Ibid*.

government engage in such action, Reagan argued, the nation would see the same success as California.

Despite losing the 1976 Republican primaries, Reagan's economic ideology nonetheless gained traction. His stump speeches were famously associated with the "welfare queens," whose perceived abuses would be stopped through the policy implementation of Reaganomics. Following his 1976 defeat, Reagan ran a wildly successful presidential campaign during 1980, winning the presidency with 489 electoral votes to President Jimmy Carter's 49.¹²² Following his election, Reagan began the process of putting his economic ideology to work in terms of policy. The fraught nature of this process is reflected on the September 21, 1981 *Time* cover image of Reagan (see figure 1). This image visually constituted the process of transitioning to "Reaganomics" and reflected the difficult reality of enacting economic change.¹²³

¹²² US Election Atlas. "1980 Presidential Election Data, General."
<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/data.php?year=1980&datatype=national&def=1&f=0&off=0&elect=0>

¹²³ *Ibid*, p. 459.

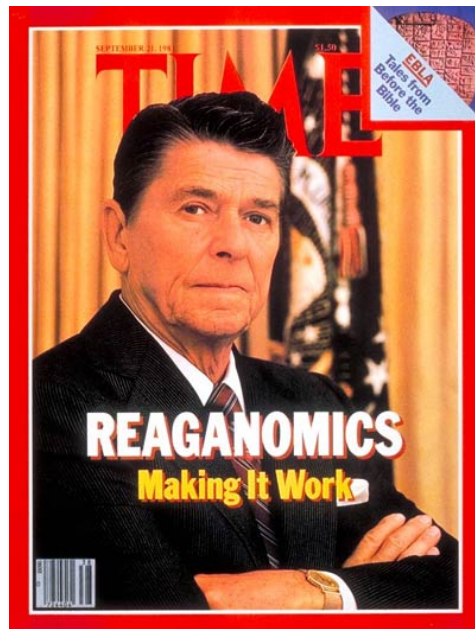


Figure 1. *Time Magazine*. September 21, 1981.

From a compositional standpoint, the image falls in line with typical portraiture standards: Reagan is clearly foregrounded, his features are clear, and he is posed at a slight angle to the camera. The image cuts off just below Reagan’s chest so that his folded arms are visible. The background of the image includes the gold curtains and flag bearing the presidential seal, signifying that Reagan is standing in the oval office preparing for work. As if to forestall any confusion regarding Reagan’s purpose, the headline: “REAGANOMICS Making It Work” is superimposed over Reagan’s bust.¹²⁴ Reagan’s expression is one of grim determination: his mouth is set in a firm line and he gazes intently into the camera. Combined with his firm stance and folded arms, Reagan appears unyielding. By visually citing the trappings of the oval office, including the flag and curtain, Reaganomics is visually associated with the presidential office and its

¹²⁴ *Time*, September 21, 1981.

attendant *ethos*. Thus, while the text of the cover image seems to signify the challenges associated with making Reaganomics “work,” the visual representation of presidential authority in the image indicates that Reagan’s economic scheme will work; that he will make it work.

Neoliberalism as Civil Religion

The second element of Reagan’s emergent narrative of neoliberalism, the continued connection between civil religion and free markets, prominently figured in Reagan’s discourse. Perhaps nowhere is this clearly articulated than in his first inaugural address. In his inaugural address, Reagan took on the role of civil religious priest and used the authority of this role to redefine freedom to include a specific, neoliberal idea of free markets.

Delivered at noon on January 20, 1981 from a platform at the West Front of the Capitol, Reagan’s first inaugural is rife with examples of his particular form of civil religious exceptionalism. Although the address is relatively short—only three pages long—it communicated a vast deal regarding Reagan’s vision for the United States, grounded in a shift away from liberalism and toward neoliberal conservatism.

Both the content of Reagan’s speech and its location on the West Front of the Capitol provide insights into the role Reagan constructs for himself and the nation with regard to American civil religion. Reagan acknowledged the importance of the location, informing his audience:

This is the first time in our history that this ceremony has been held . . . on this West Front Capitol. Standing here, one faces a magnificent vista, opening up on

this city's special beauty and history. At the end of the mall are those shrines to the giants on whose shoulders we stand.¹²⁵

Reagan continued by referencing the key figures associated with American civil religion, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, in whose company he had been placed, both by winning the presidency and giving his speech among the great monuments to those individuals. In addition, Reagan referenced the Declaration of Independence, which Robert Bellah calls a "sacred document" within American civil religion.¹²⁶ Having positioned himself as not only president, but as an individual imbued with the authority afforded by the texts and lineage of American civil religion, Reagan spoke with the authority of national priest.¹²⁷

In addition to situating himself firmly in the tradition of civil religion as national priest, Reagan carefully articulated the American people's place within that tradition. Connecting the American people to the great battle against Communism, Reagan stated, "no weapon in the world is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. It is a weapon our adversaries in today's world do not have. It is a weapon that we as Americans do have."¹²⁸ He praised the "tens of thousands of prayer meetings" being held during the inaugural and reminded the people, "We are a nation under God, and I believe God intended for us to be free. It would be fitting and good, I think, if on

¹²⁵ Reagan, Ronald. "First Inaugural Address." January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

¹²⁶ Bellah, "Civil Religion in America."

¹²⁷ For a detailed discussion of the president as priest of American civil religion, see James David Fairbanks, "The Priestly Functions of the Presidency: A Discussion of the Literature on Civil Religion and its Implications for the Study of Presidential Leadership." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 11 (2): 214-242.

¹²⁸ Reagan, "First Inaugural Address."

each Inaugural Day in future years it should be declared a day of prayer.”¹²⁹ By invoking the idea of the sacred covenant and linking it with freedom, Reagan set the stage to elevate economic freedom to the level of sacred obligation.

A significant portion of Reagan’s inaugural was dedicated to the economy. Reagan opened and closed his address by invoking normative ideas of civil religion (sacred texts, presidents, and sacred places), folding his economic ideology into the body of the speech. This created associations between civil religion and economic ideology, making the economy a vital part of civil religion. For example, Reagan used a prophetic style when referencing the economy, calling it “an economic affliction of great proportions,” which “distorts our economic decisions,” and would certainly end in “tremendous social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals.”¹³⁰ Having repudiated the Liberal order by establishing the severity of the economic situation, Reagan engaged in a rhetoric of reconstruction, arguing for an economic renewal that involved unleashing “the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than it has ever been done before,” and “removing the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity.”¹³¹ The goal, Reagan argued, was to create “a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunities for All Americans.” This would take place by curbing “the size and influence of the Federal establishment” and “demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the federal government and those reserved to the States or people.” Checking the federal government, Reagan argued,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” 1.

¹³¹ Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” 2.

would put “Americans back to work,” end inflation, and ensure a “strong and prosperous America, at peace with itself and the world.”¹³² Finally, this economic shift to free markets would ensure the United States freedom. Playing with the idea of freedom, Reagan oscillated between discussing free economies and individual liberties until they seemed synonymous: he argued, “ending inflation means freeing all Americans,” the American people must be willing to ensure the “freedom and dignity of the individual” and pay the high price for freedom in order to remain the “last and greatest bastion of freedom.”¹³³

Finally, Reagan compared the challenges of economic change with sacrifice on behalf of the nation, linking individual sacrifice to the civil religious martyrdom. Reagan provided a number of examples of individuals who gave their lives on behalf of the country, reminding his audience of the “simple white markers bearing crosses or Stars of David” that “add up to only a tiny fraction of the price that has been paid for our freedom.”¹³⁴ “Each one of those markers,” Reagan stated, “is a monument to the kind of hero I spoke of earlier.” By invoking the sacrifice of those who died in combat, Reagan set the stage to require a sacrifice from the American people to ensure freedom through the economy:

The crisis we are facing today does not require the kind of sacrifice that Martin Treptow and thousands of others were called upon to make. It does require, however, our best effort and our willingness to believe in ourselves and believe in our capacity to perform great deeds, to believe that together with God’s help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us.¹³⁵

¹³² Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” 1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Reagan, “First Inaugural Address,” 3.

By comparing the challenges of economic change with the sacrifices of individuals who died in places “called Belleau Wood, the Argonne, Omaha Beach, Salerno, and halfway around the world in Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Pork Chop Hill, the Chosin Reservoir, and in a hundred rice paddies and jungles of a place called Vietnam,” Reagan made the difficulties of economic transition seem both relatively minor and expected part of being American. By exhorting the people, praising sacrifice, and citing the authority of the leaders of American civil religion who came before him, Reagan took on the authority of the nation’s civil religious priest. This persona authorized Reagan to redefine freedom in economic terms, incorporating the free market into the idea of freedom in civil religion. Serving both as the narrator and moral guide of the nation, he had the rhetorical authority to do so.¹³⁶ It is as national priest that Reagan was also visually constituted on the cover of *Time*.

The theme of civil religious authority construed in Reagan’s inaugural address also bore out in his representation on the cover of *Time*: despite being embroiled in controversy, Reagan’s actions as civil religious priest representing the United States in a foreign country were visually represented as both natural and appropriate, signifying acceptance of Reagan’s civil religious authority.

The May 13, 1985 *Time* cover featuring Reagan provides an interesting representation of Reagan as United States’ civil religious priest (see figure 2). The photograph was taken during Reagan’s visit to Germany for the economic summit.

¹³⁶ See William F. Lewis, “Telling America’s Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987), 280-302.

During this time, Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited the West German town of Bitburg for a “reconciliation ceremony” at a military cemetery where both German fighting men and members of the Waffen SS—the elite SS members in charge of the Nazi death camps—were buried.¹³⁷ The visit to these graves provoked controversy both in the US and abroad: US journalists, private citizens, and religious leaders criticized what they perceived as endorsement of and forgiveness toward the perpetrators of the holocaust. A writer from the *Los Angeles Times* argued that Reagan’s actions memorialized and dignified “the agents of Nazi criminality,” while Jewish religious leaders stood in staunch opposition to the visit. One moment within the visit stood out to theologians as particularly troublesome: laying a wreath at the gravesite.¹³⁸ Harvey Cox, a professor at Harvard Divinity School, called it a “very religious gesture,” arguing that Reagan had “no right performing as a kind of high priest of the United States.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Doerner, William R., et al. “Paying Homage to History: Caught in a Storm of Controversy, Reagan Tries to Heal Old Wounds.” *Time* 125, no. 19 (May 13, 1985): 16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Cox, Harvey. Qtd in Doerner, William R., et al. “Paying Homage to History: Caught in a Storm of Controversy, Reagan Tries to Heal Old Wounds.” *Time* 125, no. 19 (May 13, 1985): 16.



Figure 2. *Time Magazine*. May 13, 1985.

Despite the controversy discussed at length in the cover story article and the media at large, the image of Reagan on the cover of *Time* is overwhelmingly positive. The text of the cover image features a quotation from his speech at the museum of Bergen-Belsen, one of the sites where Holocaust victims were killed during Hitler's Final Solution. However, the image is from the reconciliation ceremony at Bitburg, the location that stirred such controversy. Bearing a large wreath with red, white, and blue ribbons, Reagan is pictured in motion, walking toward the site where he will place the wreath. In effect, the image portrays Reagan performing his role as the priest of American civil religion. The *Time* title and headline echo the red, white, and blue in the wreath's ribbons, literally surrounding Reagan with colors that represent the United States. The patriotic coloring of the headline seems to visually confirm Reagan's

enactment of American civil religious priest during this controversial moment, while the accompanying text associates Reagan's Bitburg visit with his more accepted tour of the Bergen-Belsen museum. The editorial choices made for this cover image thus characterized Reagan's act of civil religious priesthood free of controversy, visually constituting Reagan's enactment of civil religion as dominant. The circulation and reception of Reagan's form of civil religion through his Inaugural address and depiction on the cover of *Time* thus illustrates the success of Reagan's rhetorical reconstruction of free markets as part of the United States' civil religious obligation to the world.

Rejecting Liberalism, Fighting Communism

Closely linked to Reagan's performance of the civil religious priesthood was his staunch anticommunist stance. As I have previously argued, Reagan invited his audience to see the Liberal regime as tending toward totalitarianism and permitting the spread of communism both at home and abroad. Throughout his presidency, Reagan identified the threat of communism as a threat to individual liberties; his foreign policy was therefore deeply concerned with promoting democracy in order to thwart the spread of communism. The importance of protecting freedom and spreading democracy were important features of Reagan's anticommunist discourse, along with strong anticommunist posturing. The evolution of these features is easily observed both in Reagan's "First Inaugural Address" and in his January 11, 1989 "Farewell Address to the Nation."

Although Reagan did not name communism specifically in his "First Inaugural," there are a number of references to the threat of communist states. Reagan compared the

United States’ “neighbors and allies who share our freedom” to “the enemies of freedom, those who are potential adversaries.”¹⁴⁰ Understood within the context of Reagan’s redefinition of freedom to include free markets, we can conclude that the “potential adversaries” Reagan referenced were the communist states identified in his 1964 address. Additionally, Reagan posed a warning to those adversaries: “When action is required to preserve our national security, we will act. We will maintain sufficient strength to prevail, if need be.”¹⁴¹ Further, Reagan promised that the United States would “again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not now have freedom.”¹⁴² Each of these references tacitly addressed communist nations who, as Reagan previously argued in his 1964 address, posed a threat to both the nation and the world.

It is interesting to note that as a president engaged in the rhetorical process of regime construction, Reagan’s references to communism are far less obvious than they were during his stump speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater. While Skowronek notes that reconstructive presidents have “great rhetorical latitude,” Reagan’s reserved references to communism seem to indicate that this rhetorical latitude has bounds, perhaps enforced by the constraints of the inaugural address genre. However reserved his articulation of the communist threat was at the beginning of his presidency, by its end the constitutive legacy of his anticommunist stance had been reinvigorated with a willingness to name communist threats explicitly.

¹⁴⁰ Reagan, “First Inaugural,” 2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 1.

During his 1989 “Farewell Address,” Reagan again invoked the theme of protecting freedom. This was illustrated through the story of a sailor on the carrier Midway, who was hailed by refugees as a “freedom man.” Reagan finished the story by explaining, “that’s what it was to be an American in the 1980’s. We stood, again, for freedom.”¹⁴³ Freedom as part and parcel of democracy and capitalism promotion leads into democracy promotion, Reagan argued, and represented a new era. This new era of American leadership, he stated, led to the promotion of democracy and safeguarding freedom worldwide:

We meant to change a nation and instead, we changed a world. Countries across the globe are turning to free markets and free speech and turning way from the ideologies of the past. For them, the great rediscovery of the 1980’s has been that, lo and behold, the moral way of government is a practical way of government. Democracy, the profoundly good, is also the profoundly productive.¹⁴⁴

Following this statement, Reagan contrasted democracy promotion with its antithesis, stating, “Nothing is less free than pure communism.”¹⁴⁵ He demonstrated this by providing a brief narrative of a visit to Moscow where the people saw Reagan and the first lady and attempted to engage with them, when “a KGB detail pushed their way toward us and began pushing and shoving the people in the crowd.” As Reagan recalled, this moment reminded him “while the man on the street in the Soviet Union yearns for peace, the government is Communist. And those who run it are Communists, and that means we and they view . . . freedom and human rights very differently.”¹⁴⁶ For Reagan,

¹⁴³ Reagan, Ronald. “Farewell Address to the Nation.” January 11, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the presence of a communist government means that “we must keep up our guard” while continuing to work with the Soviet Union. This relationship, he stated, was “trust but verify. It’s still play, but cut the cards. It’s still watch closely.”¹⁴⁷

For Reagan, communism was a continued problem that required a tough stance, continued vigilance, and the extension of freedom through democracy promotion and a free market capitalist economy. As indicated in his Farewell Address, this stance was galvanized in the face of threats to freedom and attacks on the people. During Reagan’s first term, one such event happened that gave Reagan the opportunity to demonstrate his staunch anticommunist stance: the Soviet attack on Korean Air Lines Flight 007.

Following the Korean flight’s demise, Reagan appeared on the cover of *Time* on September 19, 1983; this cover was accompanied by both an article regarding the attack on the Korean flight as well as an interview with Reagan regarding the incident. As George Church, Bruce Van Voorst, and Laurence Barrett explained in the cover story, after shooting down the Korean commercial airline, “Foreign Minister Andrew Gromyko indicated, the Soviets would do it again” in order to protect the “sacred borders” of Soviet airspace.¹⁴⁸ As the authors of the cover story acknowledged, “The widespread outrage at the Soviets’ behavior presented the Reagan administration with a delicate diplomatic problem,” the result of which was that “The U.S. . . . would play the part of

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Church, George, Bruce Van Voorst, and Laurence I. Barrett. 1983. “Turning on the Heat.” *Time* 18.

prosecutor in the court of world opinion, presenting evidence of wanton Soviet destruction of civilian lives and demanding an accounting.”¹⁴⁹

The cover image that accompanied the story closely matched the narrative provided in the article, portraying Reagan as enraged at the loss of life and the Soviets engaged in calm discussion with the phrase, “The target is destroyed” emblazoned across the bottom of the cover (see figure 4). The image visually constitutes Reagan’s tough stance on communism: a tight close-up of Reagan’s face is located near the top right-hand side of the cover; his expression appears angry and his mouth is slightly open as if he were chastising the Soviet government, pictured on the bottom left of the cover. While Reagan looks directly into the camera, the Soviet leaders are pictured talking with each other, looking at a TV screen, and staring off-camera; none of them make “eye contact” with the reader. To Reagan’s immediate left the cover reads, “Putting Moscow on the Defensive.” With the text written all in caps and tightly wrapped around the image of Reagan’s face, it looks as if he could be shouting at the Soviets government members, some of whose posture seems to denote boredom.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

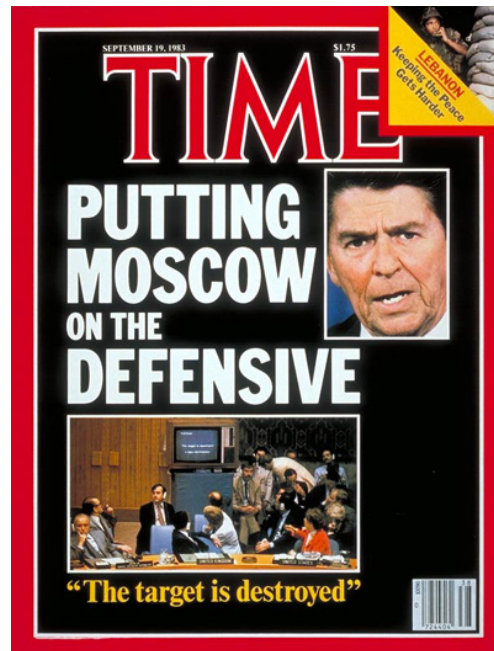


Figure 3. *Time Magazine*. September 19, 1983.

The images of Reagan and the Soviet leaders are each bordered and separated by text, which is indicative of the deep ideological schism between the two countries. However, from a visual perspective, Reagan appears to inhabit the “high” ground, indicating the moral nature of his opposition to both Soviet action in this situation and communism as a whole. Taken as a whole, the cover image visually constitutes Reagan as strong, tough on communism, the protector of the innocent. Conversely, the Soviet leaders are portrayed as smaller than Reagan and somewhat scattered. The message to the audience is clear: Reagan, with his staunch anticommunist stance, is the dominant leader and would, if nothing else, intimidate Moscow into submission.

Reagan’s “First Inaugural,” “Farewell Address” and his image on the cover of *Time* following the Korean Airlines Flight 007 demonstrate Reagan’s anticommunist constitutive legacy: Reagan positioned himself as strongly anticommunist starting in

1964, tempered his anticommunism immediately following his election, and strengthened his anticommunist stance throughout his presidency, culminating in his farewell address. Reflecting back during his “Farewell” address, Reagan recognized his continued skepticism toward the Soviet Union but acknowledged the need to continue building a relationship with them in order to continue the project of promoting democracy worldwide. The constitutive legacy of anticommunism thus shifted in response to changing world events and was used to demonstrate a hopeful skepticism regarding the Cold War’s end.

Rugged Individualism

The final constitutive invitation within Reagan’s 1964 address that recirculated throughout his presidency is the one that has perhaps become most synonymous with Reagan: rugged individualism. The dominance of this trope can be seen in both visuals of Reagan and his public address. More specifically, I look to Reagan’s “Challenger Address” in order to demonstrate how the constitutive legacy of rugged individualism developed through both his persona and, by extension, the nation’s. This included not only Reagan’s successful performance of the rugged individual, but also his ability to superimpose this trope onto the nation as a whole.

Delivered on January 28, 1986 following the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger, this relatively short speech served both to eulogize those whose lives were lost and restore the nation’s confidence in the U.S. space program.¹⁵⁰ In order to

¹⁵⁰ See Mary E. Stuckey, *Slipping the Surly Bonds: Reagan’s Challenger Address*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006 for a more detailed explication of this address. In her book, Stuckey argues that the speech was

accomplish these goals, Reagan drew from the “rugged individualism” trope that characterized much of his discourse. As I argue, the fact that this trope was successfully marshaled for the purpose of eulogy following a national tragedy speaks to its resonance within the culture and demonstrates the strength of the Reagan regime.

Less than two pages long, the Challenger Address drew heavily from the rugged individualism trope in order to praise the dead and encourage the American people to continue supporting the space program. Reagan named the members of the crew individually, calling attention to their courage in the face of danger. He called them “daring and brave,” with a “special spirit” that met challenges “with joy” and “a hunger to explore the universe and discover its truths.”¹⁵¹ The members of the crew were thus characterized as embodying the kind of rugged individualism that would inspire them to face any number of dangers in the pursuit of progress. Further explicating this theme, Reagan called the crew “pioneers” who were “pulling us into the future.” It is at this point that Reagan expanded his identification of the rugged individual from the crewmembers to the nation, reminding the people, “We’re still pioneers.”¹⁵²

For the remainder of the speech, Reagan incorporated the audience into the rugged pioneer trope, making the crewmembers’ sacrifice part of a larger project in which the entire nation was involved. He reminded the nation, “The future doesn’t

epideictic address, encomium, eulogy, and deliberative speech simultaneously. The “Challenger Address” is thus, for Stuckey, a useful example of a generic hybrid.

¹⁵¹ Reagan, Ronald. “Address to the Nation on the Space Shuttle Challenger Tragedy.” January 28, 1986. Online by *American Rhetoric*.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganchallenger.htm>

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave,” and followed this statement by praising the space program and ensuring its continuation: “We’ll continue our quest in space . . . Nothing ends here; our hopes and journeys continue.”¹⁵³ By characterizing the crewmembers and nation as rugged individuals imbued with a pioneer spirit, Reagan made continued space exploration—and by extension, the space program—a foregone conclusion. For Reagan in this address, the only proper way to memorialize the lost crewmembers was by continuing their journey. Reagan closed by drawing an analogy between the crewmembers and Sir Francis Drake, who “died aboard his ship” while exploring the “great frontier” of the ocean.¹⁵⁴ The crew and the U.S. were thus linked to a concrete example of rugged individualism in world history, broadening the scope of the potential consequences for the United States’ involvement in space. Thus, the United States became the rugged individual who must push forward in the wake of tragedy, continuing to explore space for the good of mankind.

The resonance of Reagan’s rugged individualism is evident in his January 1981 “Man of the Year” cover on *Time* magazine. In this image, Reagan literally embodied the rugged individual (see figure 4). Clad in denim, Reagan is reminiscent of a cowboy dressed to go to town. Both his jeans and denim shirt are crisp, his belt and belt buckle are prominently displayed, and his carefully coiffed hair contrasts with his ruddy face. The top two buttons of his shirt are unbuttoned, evincing a more relaxed Reagan, and his hands are in his back pockets. Reagan does not look at his audience but rather off to the

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

side, as though contemplating the future. Indeed, Reagan's entire body is presented at an angle, creating a long, lean line down the cover of the magazine.

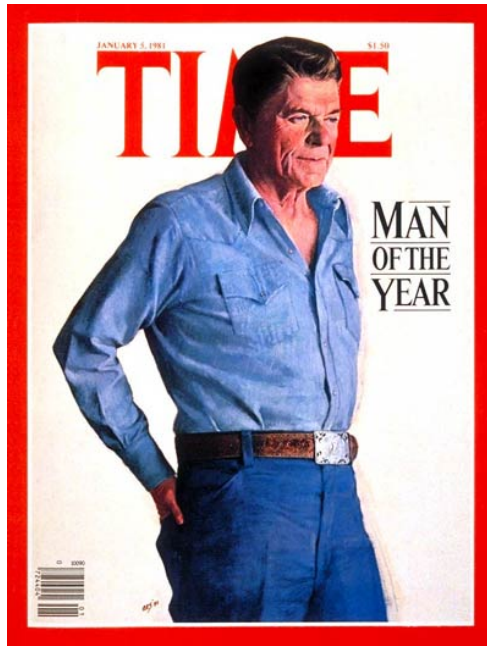


Figure 4. *Time Magazine*. January 5, 1981

More importantly, the image of Reagan is hand-drawn and the result is that he appears to be a piece of Americana, a mythic hero from the not-too-distant past. The colors of *Time* magazine (red and white) along with Reagan's blue denim invoke a sense of patriotism, while the quality of the drawing is reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell painting. Standing alone on the white background and relegating even the *Time* logo to the background, Reagan is literally the picture of rugged individualism, seemingly ready to contemplate and taken on whatever challenges he may face. As a newly elected president, Reagan's rugged individualism was already closely associated with his persona, as the *Time* cover shows.

In both the *Time* cover image of Reagan and the Challenger address, the trope of rugged individualism, first articulated in his 1964 “A Time for Choosing” address was equated with Reagan’s persona and, by extension, the nation’s. The image of Reagan on the cover of *Time* reflected the dominance of this the rugged individual constitutive legacy, and the Challenger address demonstrated how pervasive this trope became as it was used not only to justify policy, but also to encourage the nation in the wake of a national tragedy. Rugged individualism’s constitutive legacy therefore developed from the 1964 address into a powerful component of the Neoliberal regime.

Conclusion

As I have argued, the ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments that became so closely identified with the Reagan regime began to emerge far in advance of his election to the presidency in 1980. The 1964 speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater contains a series of constitutive invitations which, woven together into a powerful narrative, were recirculated throughout Reagan’s presidential discourse and visually represented on the cover of *Time*. The visual representation of Reagan’s economic ideology echoed the difficult nature of economic reform Reagan outlined in his 1976 stump speech insert, while the authority of his performance as civil religious priest, articulated in his inaugural address, was visually constituted on the cover of *Time* despite the controversy that surrounded his visit to the Bitburg cemetery. Additionally, Reagan’s persona of rugged individualism, clearly portrayed on his “Man of the Year” *Time* cover in 1981 later translated into the persona he created for the nation, a persona powerful enough to assuage the nation’s grief following the Challenger tragedy. Finally, the

strong anticommunist stance Reagan first declared in the 1964 address was visually represented on the cover of *Time* following the Korean Airlines incident; this strong stance was further reflected in his “Farewell” address and connected back to rugged individualism and civil religious exceptionalism in order to promote American leadership in spreading democracy.

As my analysis suggests, the rhetorical development of a regime depends on the careful weaving together of potential narratives located within constitutive invitations, enabling the circulation of a new constitutive legacy that gains potency as the affiliated regime wanes. For Reagan, a shift in economic ideology was the linchpin that held together his reconstructive narrative. Reagan’s explanations of all other elements of the Neoliberal regime were linked back to its economic ideology: existing Keynesian economic ideology created a problem of government excess that would lead toward communism; the solution to the problem was a shift to a more free market model, which, coupled with rugged individualism and a staunch anticommunist stance, would keep free markets safe. Civil religion authorized the shift to supply side economics, protecting free markets and modeling democracy for the unfree communists.

The successful emergence and construction of the Neoliberal regime—and Reagan’s performance of these ideas—was echoed on the cover of *Time*. The cover images associated with each of these core issues portrayed Reagan as strong, dominant, successful. By contrast, when Reagan engaged issues that were not part of his regime commitments, such as the Iran contra affair, he was portrayed as weak and uncertain. The constitutive invitations Reagan offered during 1964 therefore developed into a

powerful constitutive legacy that placed constraints on Reagan: he was as bound to function according to the dictates of the Neoliberal regime as his successor would be. Continuing in this vein, the following chapter will discuss George H.W. Bush's rhetoric of regime articulation as he governed under the constraints imposed by the neoliberal regime.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE H.W. BUSH'S RHETORIC OF ORTHODOX INNOVATION

The evening of February 14, 1988, George Herbert Walker Bush reviewed his notes in preparation for the Republican primary presidential debate in Manchester, New Hampshire. Among the position reminders on foreign and domestic policy issues, Bush's team admonished: "For New Hampshire Republicans, the primary is more than anything else a race to see who is the legitimate heir of Ronald Reagan. You must affirmatively show that you are that person by embracing Ronald Reagan at every opportunity."¹⁵⁵ While Bush won the New Hampshire primary and went on to win the presidency in 1988, his presidential performance displayed a persistent struggle to perform according to the expectations imposed by the Reagan legacy.

Bush's efforts to perform as the "legitimate heir of Ronald Reagan" were fraught with difficulty: in the 1980 presidential primaries, he had criticized Reagan's domestic and foreign policy, characterizing Reagan's monetarist policies as "voodoo economics" and calling Reagan's suggestion to blockade Cuba an "inappropriate response to Soviet military activity elsewhere."^{156,157} As a result, Bush faced lingering mistrust from the Reagan faithful who questioned his commitment to forwarding the Reagan legacy.¹⁵⁸ The situation was further exacerbated during Bush's presidency, at which point he

¹⁵⁵ "Briefing Materials for the League of Women Voters Debate." Manchester, New Hampshire, 14 February, 1988 (p. 9). Emphasis theirs.

¹⁵⁶ Bush, George H.W. "Address at Carnegie Mellon University." 10 April 1980.

¹⁵⁷ Associated Press, February 21, 1980, Thursday a.m. cycle.

¹⁵⁸ "The Lessons of Campaign '92." 1992. *Bloomberg Businessweek*, November 01, 1992.

violated his core domestic policy position, “No tax increases,” which was popularized during the campaign as his “read my lips: no new taxes” pledge.¹⁵⁹ Bush’s decision to raise taxes on the domestic front came to overshadow a number of foreign policy victories, which included the liberation of Kuwait, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By the time Bush was preparing for his 1992 re-election campaign, his 89% approval ratings from February 1991 had plummeted to a dismal 19% in July of 1992.¹⁶⁰

In the midst of Bush’s trouble in the polls came yet another blow: *Time* magazine’s “man of the year” cover of Bush was heavily critical and featured a cover image that portrayed Bush as a two-faced individual. The image, combined with the headline, “Men of the year: The two George Bushes,” took the Bush administration completely by surprise. As Marlin Fitzwater, White House Press Secretary recounted of the photo shoot and interview, “They [Time] knew damn well we wouldn’t grant one with the President if we knew that this was going to be a mocking cover that showed him to be a two-faced politician...we were duped.”¹⁶¹ The negative cover story, paired with Bush’s approval ratings, paints a picture of a failed president. Yet during Bush’s presidency a number of successes occurred, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy: the Americans With Disabilities Act was passed, Kuwait was liberated, the

¹⁵⁹ Briefing Materials, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ “Presidential approval ratings—Gallup historical statistics and trends.” Gallup.com: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>

¹⁶¹ Marlin Fitzwater, “Call the Briefing”, Interview with Brian Lamb, November 5, 1995. CNN Booknotes. <http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/67754-1/Marlin+Fitzwater.aspx>

Soviet Union was dissolved, and the Berlin Wall came down. Why, then, was Bush characterized so negatively? This is the question the following chapter seeks to address.

In this chapter, I argue that although Bush was initially well-positioned to manage the core tenets of the Neoliberal Regime, he ultimately failed to capitalize on his achievements and allowed alternative renditions of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy to overshadow his own. In the story of political time, then, Bush failed as an orthodox innovator by consistently allowing events to define themselves, rather than defining events for the people as logical extensions of the Neoliberal regime's core commitments.

Situated within political time as an orthodox-innovator, George HW Bush's rhetoric of regime articulation became increasingly fragmented across the course of his presidency and represents a failure to continuously control party and public interpretations of the ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments of the Neoliberal regime. While Bush's actions can be interpreted as prudent, or wise in the moment, his articulation of those policies failed to gain rhetorical traction within public discourse.

From a rhetorical perspective, the Bush presidency reveals that in order to maintain rhetorical authority, regime articulation presidents, and especially orthodox innovators like Bush, must make use of casuistic stretching to legitimize their rendition of the regime's constitutive legacy. Kenneth Burke explains that casuistic stretching involves introducing "new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles."¹⁶² Casuistic stretching can occur through metaphorical extension, transferring words "from one category of associations to another," and using synecdoche

¹⁶² Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 230.

to “speak of the ‘head’ of a ‘corporation’ or the ‘network’ of a ‘broadcasting system.’” More specifically, Richard Miller explains, casuistic stretching requires that the rhetor attend to “complex details, the contingencies and vagaries of human experience. Casuistry demands that we examine the data and interpretations that surround a given case, that we work through appearances in order to find those that are most reliable.” Whatever method of casuistry is used, however, Burke cautions that the exercise of casuistry must be “absolute and constant.”¹⁶³

As an orthodox innovator, I argue that Burke’s use of casuistic stretching was neither absolute nor constant, as he failed to exercise rhetorical control over his rendition of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, instead leaving the casuistry to others. To explicate this argument, the chapter will proceed as follows: first, I set the context of the Bush presidency using Skowronek’s theory of political time, beginning with the 1988 election. I then examine speeches and images of *Time* from Bush’s presidency that demonstrate how Bush’s disjunctive performance of the Neoliberal expectations bore out both in Bush’s rhetoric and popular visual commentary on those rhetorical performances. The chapter closes by considering how political time can help scholars to better understand the rhetorical situation of the orthodox innovator.

The Bush Presidency: An Exercise in Regime Articulation

As Stephen Skowronek explains, George H.W. Bush can be characterized within political time as an “articulation leader.” Articulation leaders, and specifically orthodox innovators such as Bush, follow regime builders like Reagan who “leave in their wake a

¹⁶³ Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 230.

more constricted political universe for presidential action.”¹⁶⁴ Bush was expected to serve as loyal representative of the political alliance Reagan established; this required that he stay in line with established power relationships; any tinkering with received commitments would be met with skepticism.¹⁶⁵ In order to be perceived as a successful orthodox innovator, Bush faced the task of maintaining the commitments of ideology and interest established by Reagan and “keeping faith with a ruling coalition in changing times.”¹⁶⁶ This required that Bush manage the “narrative structure” of political time, extending the constitutive legacies of the Neoliberal regime by maintaining the repudiative stance of the Reagan regime with regard to any lingering policy or ideological ideas from the Liberal regime. Any adjustments to the commitments of the Neoliberal regime had to occur in a manner that maintained the overarching narrative of the regime, which made big government and communism part and parcel of the same problem, and posited free markets as the solution in which the “true” American—the rugged individual—would prevail.

For Bush, the changing times of the late 1980s and early 1990s presented significant challenges for performing the economic, exceptionalist, and rugged individualist standards of the Neoliberal regime. From an economic perspective, Bush was expected to follow in lock step with the monetarist ideology implemented by Reagan. In addition to affirming the ideology of Reaganomics, Bush also needed to perform Reaganomics through policy recommendations. Bush was also required to

¹⁶⁴ Skowronek, Stephen. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010: 45.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

perform the exceptionalist discourse of the Neoliberal regime, particularly with regard to foreign policy; this foreign policy approach included a strong anticommunist stance applied specifically to German and Russian relations. Finally, Bush was expected to couch his foreign and domestic policy performances in the persona of rugged individualism that Reagan established throughout his presidency. However, as Skowronek notes, extending the commitments of a dominant regime proves difficult when those commitments are contradicted by political reality. While Reagan, as the reconstructive president, had the rhetorical latitude to construct regime expectations, Bush was faced with the task of turning that legacy “into a workable system of government,” a process that necessarily lacked the rhetorical appeal of Reagan’s transformational changes.¹⁶⁷ Bush’s position as immediate heir to the Neoliberal regime was therefore constrained in interesting ways as he was bound by Reagan’s well-established constitutive legacy and policy expectations.

To understand George H.W. Bush’s presidency means to study the historical situation in which Bush transitioned from Republican primary presidential candidate in 1980, through his selection as vice president and eventual election to president. In particular, the 1980 Republican primary presidential election reveals the tensions between Bush and Reagan that became especially problematic during Bush’s presidency. The 1980 Republican primary was a particularly bitter battle between Bush, a career politician who ran on the old guard Republican ticket, and Reagan, the former California governor and movie star whose political popularity had steadily increased since his 1964

¹⁶⁷ Skowronek, *Political Time*, 100.

debut on behalf of Barry Goldwater during the 1964 Republican primaries. Bush's bid for the Republican nomination in 1980 was a foregone conclusion for many. As the editors of the *Washington Star* remarked, Bush had "been put forward, almost inevitably, as the leading heir to the support that Gerald Ford enjoyed in bitter contest against Reagan in 1976."¹⁶⁸ While Bush maintained popularity among many Republican elites, others complained, "there is no legacy Ford can pass on to a candidate. On the contrary, his 1976 supporters are all over the lot—some with Reagan," and the rest spread across the field of Republican primary candidates.¹⁶⁹ Thus, the political climate Bush faced demanded more than the "moderate alternative" Bush offered, as the *Washington Star* editors continued: ". . . there just isn't a great demand for moderates in the Republican Party these days."¹⁷⁰

Although Bush attempted to characterize himself as a "moderate" alternative to Reagan, Reagan spent time articulating his ideological and policy positions on issues such as the economy and foreign policy. In so doing, Reagan established himself as the measure against which the other candidates would be judged. As a result, Reagan's opponents— especially Bush—spent much of their time attacking Reagan's policies rather than offering their own. For example, an editorial in the *Philadelphia Evening*

¹⁶⁸ Germond, Jack W. and Jules Witcover. "Pros Suspect Campaign Has Already Peaked." *Washington Star*, A-6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Bulletin made the following assessment of Bush: “We’ve had enough people defining the problems. Where are his *solutions*? Nice guy. Presidential material? Not hardly.”¹⁷¹

As the campaign wore on and other potential Republican candidates dropped out of the field, the contest became increasingly tense. Bush criticized Reagan at every opportunity, characterizing his foreign policy positions as “counter-productive” and “inappropriate.”¹⁷² On the economy, Bush was even more critical: at his April 10, 1980 campaign speech at Carnegie Mellon University, Bush famously stated that Reagan supported “. . . what I call a voodoo economic policy.”¹⁷³ With these words, Bush sowed the seeds of skepticism among the far right in the Republican Party that would only proliferate in the coming years. Skowronek notes that this rhetorical move made it difficult for Bush to present himself as a stalwart leader with the ability to further the Reagan legacy.¹⁷⁴ Eventually, Bush was forced to admit defeat and withdrew from the primary election May 26, 1980, just prior to the California June primary election.¹⁷⁵ In a strange twist of fate, Reagan’s first choice for vice president, Gerald Ford, fell through after Ford appeared to affirm that he and Reagan had discussed a “co-presidency.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Lewis, Claude. “Bush Hasn’t Taken Root.” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 25 September 1979: A-15.

¹⁷² Associated Press. 21 February, 1980. Thursday a.m. cycle.

¹⁷³ Bush, George H.W. “Remarks at Carnegie Mellon University.” Pittsburgh, PA. 10 April, 1980.

¹⁷⁴ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 103-104.

¹⁷⁵ Allen, Richard V. “George Herbert Walker Bush; The Accidental Vice President.” *The New York Times*, July 30, 2000.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/30/magazine/george-herbert-walker-bush-the-accidental-vice-president.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* I should note, however, that Tom DeFrank, Washington insider, decorated reporter, and close friend to Gerald Ford, maintains that the idea of a co-presidency was actually a ruse. As DeFrank explained to me in a personal

Richard Allen, Reagan's first national security adviser, recalled that, left with few options, Reagan recommended Bush for vice president on the condition that he "support the platform across the board."¹⁷⁷ Bush agreed and, at 11:38 p.m. the night before the nominating convention, became Ronald Reagan's official running mate.¹⁷⁸

As Reagan's running mate and eventual political heir, Bush was bound to support Reagan's platform in its entirety, despite the very vocal opposition he voiced during the Republican primaries. Throughout his vice presidency, Bush focused on diplomatic negotiations with the USSR; this allowed Bush to begin paving a middle road between Reagan's staunch anti-communist stance and liberal acceptance of the Soviet regime. Instead, Bush argued for a combination of "realism, strength, and dialogue," stating, "We need to talk to the Soviets. This is a nuclear age, which means it's simple not sane to sit in stony silence at bomb's length from a powerful adversary."¹⁷⁹

During the course of Reagan's presidency, Bush was involved in the reconstruction effort, or establishing a new political regime. This involved not only supporting Reagan's ideological, policy, and rhetorical commitments, but also helping put them into action. For example, Bush was deeply involved in establishing a working relationship with the Soviet Union, traveling throughout Europe in an attempt to "defuse Reagan's image as nuclear cowboy" and convince European leaders of the president's

interview, Ford never wanted to be vice president and instead brought up the idea of a co-presidency in order to get out of the situation and force the Reagan team to bring Bush on as vice presidential candidate.

¹⁷⁷ Allen, "The Accidental President."

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Bush, George H.W. "Naval Academy Commencement Address." May 20, 1987.

“depth of conviction” regarding arms reductions.¹⁸⁰ Bush was instrumental in preserving the relationships that made de-escalation of the cold war possible: “By putting a reasonable face on American policy, Bush lowered rhetorical tensions,” arguably saving the Atlantic alliance.¹⁸¹ Bush’s efforts in the political reconstruction of conservatism were thus understood largely in relation to his diplomacy and foreign policy efforts.

As established in the previous chapter, the key tenets of the Neoliberal regime were civil religious exceptionalism, a monetarist economic ideology, anti-communism, and rugged individualism. In order to determine how Bush negotiated these issues as a regime articulation president, I draw from a number of speeches and statements delivered across Bush’s tenure, beginning during the 1988 presidential election and ending during the 1992 presidential election. These texts include Bush’s 1988 speech accepting the Republican nomination, his 1990 remarks announcing a federal budget agreement, his Christmas address regarding the fall of the Soviet Union and resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev, a number of his stump speeches, and his acceptance speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention. Bush’s negotiation of each of the tenets of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, including economic ideology, anticommunism, civil religious exceptionalism, and rugged individualism will be evaluated as performances of orthodox innovation. Following the analysis of Bush’s discourse, I will examine cover images of Bush from *Time* magazine that represent how Bush’s performance of Neoliberal regime commitments was visually constituted for the public.

¹⁸⁰ Meacham, *Destiny and Power*, 285.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 286.

Bush's Economic Articulation: No New Taxes?

Although Bush began his presidency adhering to the constraints of Reaganomics, he failed to engage in casuistic stretching, or consistently communicate with the public regarding the recession. As a result, Bush lost control of the narrative of his regime articulation. This resulted in a series of last-ditch efforts to convince the public of his ability to manage the economy. Thus, while Bush made prudent changes to economic policy in terms of governance, he refused to rhetorically perform regime articulation until forced by outside events. Bush's efforts to shape the narrative later during his presidency were too little, too late, diminishing his credibility as the standard-bearer of the Neoliberal regime. These challenges to his credibility in economic articulation became a defining issue of Bush's presidency, as is illustrated in the increasingly disjunctive nature of Bush's discourse from his election through his eventual defeat in 1992.

Casuistic Stretching: Old Policies, New Presidential Persona

Bush was initially positioned to successfully manage the economic aspect of the Neoliberal regime. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Committee in 1988, Bush had the assistance of Peggy Noonan and a number of key Reagan advisors to help Bush fine-tune his economic discourse so that it would be resonant with Neoliberal regime expectations.¹⁸² Using a commonsense style and invoking the economic gains of

¹⁸² At Peggy Noonan's request, Bush provided her with a series of handwritten notes that communicated his stance on the issues, why he chose to be involved in public service, and one typed letter entitled "Who I Am." Much of this last letter made it into the speech verbatim. In addition, Noonan received unsolicited advice regarding the speech from a number of other individuals concerned with Bush's

the 1980s, Bush articulated his forthcoming presidency as a continuation of the Neoliberal regime, maintaining his fidelity to supply side economics. Specifically, Bush used the economy to connect himself overtly with Reagan, arguing that he and Reagan had begun the task of returning “America to her greatness. Eight years later look at what the American people have produced: the highest level of economic growth in our entire history...”¹⁸³ Additionally, Bush framed economy in terms of achievement, exhorting his listeners to “Consider the size of our triumph: A record high percentage of Americans with jobs, a record high rate of new businesses – a record high rate of real personal income.”¹⁸⁴ Reinforcing his dedication to economic issues, Bush argued, “economic growth is the key to our endeavors” and would be continued by “maintaining our commitment to free and fair trade, by keeping government spending down, and by keeping taxes down.”¹⁸⁵ The issue of taxes cropped up again later in the speech, when Bush famously stated, “My opponent won’t rule out raising taxes. But I will. The Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I’ll say not, and they’ll push and I’ll say no,

upcoming performance, including former Reagan lawyer Peter Wallison, Senator Bob Kasten, Roger Ailes, Jack Kemp, Reagan OMB counsel Mike Horowitz, Congressman Newt Gingrich, vice president’s chief of staff Craig Fuller, and Nixon speechwriter Bill Gavin.¹⁸² According to Noonan, bits of each person’s advice became part of the speech, resulting in a careful blend of Bush’s own thoughts along with Noonan’s structure and turns of phrase, and additional content from a number of key Reagan regime members. For more on this, see Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era*. New York: Random House (1990), 298.

¹⁸³ Bush, George H.W. “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans,” August 18, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15955>

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

and they'll push again, and I'll say to them, 'Read my lips: no new taxes.'"¹⁸⁶ Bush thus established his commitment to the Neoliberal regime's economic tenets while previewing the future of the U.S. economy, which for Bush would include the "free and fair trade" with other nations.

"No New Taxes": A Rhetorical Ticking Time Bomb

While Bush initially performed economic regime articulation in a manner that resonated with Reagan coalition members and the general public, his failure to casuistically stretch the economic narrative in response to the ballooning deficit turned his "no new taxes" promise into a ticking time bomb. After taking office in 1990, Bush initiated a bipartisan deficit reduction summit; by June he had signed a statement permitting tax increases.¹⁸⁷ In response, more than one hundred House Republicans "signed a letter of complaint in opposition to the president's statement on taxes."¹⁸⁸ However, the economy was in recession by July 1990, prompting Bush to move forward with a bipartisan budget proposal despite potential Republican backlash. Despite the fact that the 1990 budget agreement was considered a "very good deal" (less than half of Reagan's 1982 tax increase) and did not affect personal income tax, it was inevitably viewed in light of Bush's 1988 campaign promise: "Read my lips. No new taxes."^{189,190}

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁸ Windsor, Duane. "The 1990 Deficit Reduction Deal," in Himbelfarb, Richard and Rosanna Perotti (eds). *Principle Over Politics? The Domestic Policy of the George H.W. Bush Presidency*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 2004 (29).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁰ Bush, George H.W. "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans," August 18, 1988. Online by

Compounding the issue, Bush refused to speak to the public regarding this subject, with the exception of the July news conference. Instead Bush assumed that his party and the public would understand his means and motives as appropriate for the moment: an overt neglect of the “consistency” principle of casuistic stretching. Dan Quayle recalled, “He truly believed that the country was going to judge him on results—what he did and how it turned out—not on what he said in a speech.”¹⁹¹ In the meantime, it became increasingly apparent that both the public and Congress would not wait for results. On September 30, 1990 Bush and the congressional leadership announced their bipartisan budget agreement. In response, Newt Gingrich rallied conservative Republicans against the deal. In an effort to garner support for the upcoming October 5 vote on the budget deal, Bush gave a speech from the Oval Office on October 22, 1990, which was designed to provide the explanations for renegeing on the “no new taxes” pledge that both Congress and the public demanded.

Bush’s “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement” represents a last-ditch effort at casuistic stretching that proved to be too little, too late. Although the nation expected to be informed about the budget deal, the Bush administration’s failure to understand the moment is perplexing. Much of this could be due to Bush’s own reticence to engage the rhetorical presidency. Admittedly an “awkward” individual lacking in eloquence, Bush put more emphasis on governance than communication. As a result, White House Communications Director David Demarest decided to “place the

Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15955>

¹⁹¹ Quayle, Dan qtd in Jon Meacham, *Destiny and Power*, 417.

onus on the press to decide what it was going to cover,” letting the policy, rather than Bush, speak for itself.¹⁹² The lack of communication with the press extended to within the White House, as the Office of Public Liaison “didn’t have the foggiest idea what was going on” during the budget negotiations.¹⁹³ Further complicating the situation, Bush’s October 2nd speech was not reviewed by Communications: they “learned of the agreement only after it was faxed a copy of Press Secretary Fitzwater’s public statement.¹⁹⁴ The speech took place in the absence any other communication from the White House between June and October regarding the budget deal due to a number of factors, including the White House’s focus on Iraq, a lack of support from the Republicans in Congress, and Bush’s reticence to use his bully pulpit in support of his domestic governance.

In the address, Bush was forced to go back on his earlier claims of economic strength, situating the deficit as a “cancer gnawing away at our nation’s health.”¹⁹⁵ This was a significant change from the narrative he offered in during the election. Instead of Neoliberal policies healing the economy, Bush now told the story of a sick economy diseased by the deficit Reaganomics created. This shift was significant, as it required Bush to admit the ill effects of Reagan’s supply-side economics, an economic policy

¹⁹² Rozell, Mark J. *The Press and the Bush Presidency*. Westport, CT: Praeger (1996), 151.

¹⁹³ Mervin, David. *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press (1996), 76.

¹⁹⁴ Alschuler, Bruce E. “Learning the Art of Policy Management” in Robert W. Watson (ed) *White House Studies Compendium, Volume 5*. New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc. (2008), 176.

¹⁹⁵ Bush, George H.W. “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement.” October 2, 1990. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=18894>.

whose effectiveness he defended during the election. Pointing out the flaws in this economic policy, Bush argued,

...no family, no nation can continue to do business the way the Federal Government has been operating and survive. When you get a bill, that bill must be paid. And when you write a check, you're supposed to have money in the bank. But if you don't obey these simple rules of common sense, there's a price to pay.¹⁹⁶

In an attempt to make the economic difficulties coherent within the narrative of the Neoliberal regime, Bush employed the commonsense reasoning popularized by Reagan. Using the analogy of the family budget and writing a check, Bush reduced a complex issue to a simple one, relying on the analogy to justify the budget agreement.

Bush thus created a sense of urgency designed to motivate his audience – the public – to act on the issue immediately. Bush praised the budget agreement's attributes without providing any particulars, calling it “the biggest” and “the toughest” deficit reduction plan ever, whose enforcement mechanisms would result in “real and lasting spending cuts.”¹⁹⁷ Following this, Bush entered the most treacherous terrain of the speech: revenue increases. Bush first acknowledged public sentiment, stating, “I’m not, and I know you’re not, a fan of tax increases.”¹⁹⁸ Reneging on his core economic pledge, Bush explained the necessity of tax measures to “allow the economy to grow,” “create more jobs,” “lower interest rates,” and “give small and medium sized companies a needed shot in the arm.”¹⁹⁹ By enumerating the advantages of revenue increases, Bush attempted to overcome the audience’s objections to breaking his “no new taxes” pledge,

¹⁹⁶ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement,” 1.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

a key tenet of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy. This represented a significant moment in Bush's economic articulation, during which he had the opportunity to shift the economic portion of the Neoliberal regime narrative to justify the revenue increases Bush thought necessary.

To justify this dramatic moment of economic articulation, Bush hedged his critique of Reaganomics, making the recession Washington's fault broadly, rather than the administration's. Whatever the cause of the economic failure, Bush portrayed his team as willing to meet the challenge of fixing it with hard work and bipartisanship. The agreement was "worked out between the administration and bipartisan leaders of Congress," the "first time a Republican president and leaders of a Democratic Congress have agreed to real cuts," and is referred to as "bipartisan" five times during a speech that lasted just less than nine minutes. Finally, Bush united the "Democratic and Republican leadership" with the president, who "all speak with one voice in support of this agreement."²⁰⁰ By emphasizing the cooperative nature of the agreement, Bush attempted to reach individuals across the partisan divide and persuade them to overcome their possible objections and pressure their congressional representative to vote in favor of the budget agreement.

Building upon bipartisanship, Bush called the budget agreement the result of "blood, sweat, and fears," and designed to prevent the "economic chaos" that would occur if the deficit continued to increase. Bush combined the commonsense style with

²⁰⁰ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement."

fear appeals.²⁰¹ The fear appeals became even more dramatic as Bush described the eventual effects of the ballooning deficit: “if we fail to act, next year alone we will face a Federal budget deficit of more than \$300 billion, a deficit that could weaken the economy further and cost us precious jobs.”²⁰² This attempt to establish the urgency of the deficit can be seen as Bush’s effort to demonstrate the *kairos* of the budget agreement for the audience. However, what Bush failed to recognize was that *kairos* in this circumstance was tied not to the need for the plan itself, but instead assuaging public fears regarding his economic management.

Having established the bipartisan *ethos* of the budget agreement, Bush addressed possible objections individuals might have with the agreement. By couching these possible disagreements in claims of the bill’s bipartisan nature, Bush attempted to characterize those objections as outliers rather than the majority, and opponents of the bill as opponents of fairness and bipartisanship. He argued,

Clearly, each and every one of us can find fault with something in this agreement. In fact, that is a burden that any truly fair agreement must carry. Any workable solution must be judged as a whole, not piece by piece. Those who dislike one part or another may pick our agreement apart. But if they do, believe me, the political reality is, no one can put a better one back together again.²⁰³

In this statement, Bush’s claims of fairness and pragmatism censured those in his own party (namely, Newt Gingrich), who criticized Bush’s decision to permit tax increases.

In fact, as Windsor states, “Gingrich reportedly set out to discredit the government

²⁰¹ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement.”

²⁰² *Ibid*, 1.

²⁰³ *Ibid*.

entirely as a basis for restarting a failed or stalled Reagan Revolution.”²⁰⁴ Bush’s appeals to partisanship therefore widened the schism between Bush and those in his party who remained skeptical of his ability to carry forward the core commitments of the Reagan regime. As if to underscore this idea, in no portion of this speech does Bush apologize to his constituency for renegeing on his “no new taxes” pledge. Instead, Bush takes a defensive posture throughout, justifying his actions and criticizing those who had not yet acquiesced to this new economic plan: one that directly contradicted a core tenet of the economic plank of Reagan’s Neoliberal regime. Bush’s attempts at articulating the economic aspect of the Neoliberal regime was therefore problematic, as it not only widened existing schisms within the Republican Party, but also called into question his *ethos* as a regime representative among voters.

Livid that Bush planned to go back on his campaign promise, congress eventually defeated the budget deal in the House on October 25, 1990 by a vote of 254 to 179.²⁰⁵ In the end, Bush’s claims of bipartisanship further fractured his base, while his overt appeals to the rhetorical presidency and attempts to sell his budget agreement to the people backfired. By effectively turning his back on the economic component of the Reagan Neoliberal regime, Bush alienated not only Republican members of Congress but also the public. However, Bush attempted to temper the extreme negative reaction to his treatment of the Reagan Neoliberal regime with regard to economic policy by successful leadership in foreign policy.

²⁰⁴ Windsor, “Principle Over Politics,” 30.

²⁰⁵ Windsor, Duane. “The 1990 Deficit Reduction Deal,” 29.

Ill-Timed Economic Casuistry: The Cold War's End

In an effort to salvage his economic articulation, Bush endeavored to translate his Cold War successes into economic opportunity for the American people. Successful orthodox innovation requires that the rhetor respond to changing exigencies while maintaining key aspects of the existing narrative framework; the articulation must remain recognizable in relation to preexisting regime commitments. The end of the Cold War represents one such moment of significant change that Bush contended with to maintain his relevance as a Neoliberal regime representative. Bush's "Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States" is an exemplar of these efforts. In the address, Bush used his 1988 acceptance address at the RNC as an inventional resource, linking successful foreign policy and international cooperation to domestic economic opportunity.

Delivered in the wake of Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation, the address focused primarily on acknowledging Gorbachev's contributions and encouraging the American public to support the nascent Commonwealth of Independent States (former members of the Soviet Union). What is interesting here is the final section of the speech, in which Bush inserted a section that attempted to assuage public anxieties about the economy and link the end of the Cold War to eventual economic improvement in the United States. Following his celebratory remarks regarding the end of the Cold War, Bush stated:

These dramatic events come at a time when American are also facing challenges here at home. I know that for many of you these are difficult times. And I want all Americans to now that I am committed to attacking our economic problems at home with the same determination we brought winning the cold war.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States," 1.

Here, Bush attempted to articulate the economic aspect of the Neoliberal regime's constitutive legacy in terms of foreign policy success. By making connections between a successful resolution to the Cold War and public sentiment regarding the economy, Bush attempted to translate his foreign policy success into domestic confidence. The successful conclusion of the Cold War and the economy thus served as mutually reinforcing arguments for evaluating his policies as successful, both foreign and domestic. Within this new framework, international cooperation and prosperity were inextricably intertwined, making foreign policy as important as domestic. As Bush argued,

We will only succeed in this interconnected world by continuing to lead the fight for free people and free and fair trade. A free and prosperous global economy is essential for America's prosperity. This means jobs and economic growth right here at home.²⁰⁷

Bush thus attempted to shift the narrative from one of unilateral economic success into economic opportunity through international cooperation. As a result of the Cold War's end—which Bush had hastened—the United States would become prosperous *because* of the increased economic opportunities abroad.

Bush further invited the public to accept his articulation of the Neoliberal regime's economics by emphasizing the interconnected global economy. He stressed interconnectedness and partnership throughout the speech, foreshadowing his eventual critiques of isolationism. Bush discussed plans to “work with,” “engage,” build ties,” and “work closely” with the former Soviet nations throughout the speech, with his calls

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

for cooperation culminating in his declaration that “Our enemies have become our partners, committed to building democratic and civil societies. They ask for our support, and we will give it to them.”²⁰⁸ In his post-Cold War rhetoric, Bush thus attempted to shift the narrative, making successful foreign policy a prerequisite for American prosperity and economic opportunity.

While Bush’s remarks regarding Gorbachev and the Commonwealth may be seen as demonstrating *kairos* (as I will explain later), his performance of economic orthodox innovation in this moment is somewhat puzzling. The end of the Soviet Union and creation of the Commonwealth was a major foreign policy success; to disrupt this moment of triumph with remarks regarding the nation’s stagnant economy seems strange. Although linking foreign policy success and international trade to the United States’ economic success was a major goal for Bush, this speech demonstrated a lack of attention to *kairos* as he shifted the tone of the speech from epideictic to deliberative, likely violating audience expectations by calling attention to his perceived domestic failures on the eve of a great foreign policy success.

Smart-Alecks and Word Salad: Failed Economic Casuistry in Dover

As the 1992 election neared, Bush’s rhetoric of economic articulation became increasingly disjointed. Rather than capitalizing on the economic narrative he foreshadowed in his 1988 acceptance address and specified in his Christmas speech following the resignation of Gorbachev, Bush’s posture became increasingly defensive and disorderly as the campaign wore on. His stump speech, “Remarks to Liberty Mutual

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Insurance Employees in Dover,” provides insight into the struggles Bush faced as he attempted to continue reconcile public perception of domestic economic woes with his successful foreign policy.

It is worth mentioning at this point that at least some of Bush’s issues during the 1992 election were issues of personnel. His campaign manager from 1988, Lee Atwater, had died, leaving the upcoming campaign leaderless. Compounding the issue, Bush faced increasingly negative poll numbers, which he attributed to problems within his administration: Chief of Staff John Sununu had continuously created “mischief” throughout Bush’s term and was eventually asked to resign.^{209,210} In addition, Bush faced political challenges from within his own party: former Nixon and Reagan aide Pat Buchanan challenged Bush, “finding receptive audiences in places like New Hampshire, which had experienced difficult economic times.”²¹¹ In an effort to hedge against the Buchanan threat, Bush made a trip to New Hampshire in January 1992 during which the initial cracks in the administration’s communication became gaping holes. During this trip, it became clear that there was no clear leadership either in the campaign or the White House.²¹² Having appointed Samuel Skinner as the new chief of staff, Bush put together a campaign team with ties to the 1988 campaign. While each of the members of

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Sununu prevented economic reform to the point of persuading the president to “veto the one economic program the Congress had passed because it had a tax on millionaires.” As Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater recalled, “Ironically, it was also Sununu who convince the president that he could get away with breaking his ‘no new taxes’ pledge by calling the 1990 tax increase ‘enhanced revenues,’” a move that Bush had been skeptical of (Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing*).

²¹¹ Meacham, *Destiny and Power*, 498.

²¹² Demarest, Personal Interview, 12/4/2015.

this team was selected for his success in a specific area, there were communication difficulties, as “each wanted to run the entire show, or at least some piece far greater in size than the president imagined.”²¹³ Additionally, the campaign team did not include the new chief of staff, leading to further disjunction between the White House and the campaign. With no clear plan and continuous infighting over the campaign’s leadership, Bush’s poll numbers continued to plummet. As Bush told a friend in January, “These last two months have been the worst of my presidency, and the last year has been the worst of my political career.”²¹⁴

Within this context, Bush delivered a stump speech to Mutual Liberty Insurance employees in Dover prior to the New Hampshire primary. This stump speech represents a total breakdown in Bush’s economic articulation, as he was caught between defending his economic record and admitting its ills. This created a situation in which Bush’s attempts to extend his earlier economic articulation of increased opportunity through international interdependence was not coherent within the larger public narrative of economic failure (i.e., the recession) that had come to characterize his presidency.

Throughout the speech, Bush’s tone was defensive and pessimistic: a drastic shift from the continuation of positive change Bush had embodied during the 1988 election.²¹⁵ Bush described the economic climate his audience was facing in negative terms, calling

²¹³ Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing*, loc. 3895.

²¹⁴ Bush, George H.W. qtd. in Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing*, loc. 3927.

²¹⁵ During the 1988 election, Bush’s detractors called for a change after eight years of Republican leadership. In response Bush argued “we are the change,” situating himself as the continuation of Reagan’s reconstructive efforts.

them “problems,” “hardships,” and “difficulty.”²¹⁶ He acknowledged that times were “tough,” that there had been “low unemployment” (a misspeak, which Demarest clarified should have been “low employment”), and acknowledged his “share of the blame” in the current economic situation.²¹⁷ While this could be a response to the popular criticism that Bush had failed to take the economy seriously as an issue in the campaign, this strategy became problematic within the speech as Bush painted a grim picture of the economic situation during his term as president at the same time he argued that “we have economic stimulation.”²¹⁸

In opposition to his earlier position on the simplicity of deficit reduction (expressed through his family budget/checkbook analogy earlier in his presidency), Bush shifted to a description of the economy as a nuanced issue. Denouncing his opponents, he implored the audience, “please do not listen to these guys that want to take political advantage, come up with a quick fix to something as complicated as the economy, and then be gone and never to return.”²¹⁹ Bush described his opponents’ propositions as “scatterbrained ideas and quick fixes to something as tough as the economy,” and the country as “plagued” by economic issues. Bush thus challenged his own earlier economic articulation, shifting his domestic policy propositions from a simple deficit reduction issue to an overly complicated, burdensome issue.

²¹⁶ Bush, George H.W. “Remarks to Liberty Mutual Insurance Employees in Dover,” January 15, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://presidency.uscb.edu/ws/?pid=20475>

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Bush also attempted to continue his economic articulation regarding international trade but in order to do so, he had to address the criticisms levied against the linkages he had previously established between domestic and global economic success. His response did not model the form of cooperation he advocated on the international stage, instead evincing a tendency toward unilateral action that undercut the credibility of his calls for interdependence: “they ask . . . ‘how could you lead the world . . . and then have such difficulties with the economy?’ Well, let me tell you something. When I moved all those forces I didn’t have to ask Senator Kennedy or some liberal democrat how, whether we were going to do it.”²²⁰ By blaming the democrats for his domestic trouble, Bush contradicted the *ethos* of bipartisanship he had worked so hard to establish in his “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement.” Throughout the speech, he oscillated between assigning blame to the Democratic Party and admitting his own failures, contradicting his prior articulation of the economy as healthy.

The criticisms of Bush’s foreign policy focus adversely affected his ability to forward a coherent narrative regarding global economic growth as a prerequisite for American economic growth. Bush initially attempted to explain his rendition of economic articulation, claiming “What we’re trying to do is to expand exports by making that playing field level and getting access to foreign markets . . . I am going to continue to work to open markets, to take this question of equal opportunity—that’s all the American worker needs—equal opportunity in the global marketplace.”²²¹ However, he quickly shifted to a defensive posture, addressing the challenges of individuals who

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

advocated "... shrinking world markets and going into some siren call of protection..."²²² Doing so, according to Bush would create the same conditions "that threw this country into a depression back in the thirties. I'm talking 25 percent unemployment back in those days."²²³

Despite being able to refute the criticisms of his global economic stance, Bush's focus on this form of economic articulation rendered him incapable of accomplishing casuistic stretching of the Neoliberal regime's constitutive legacy in a manner that would assuage the public's economic concerns. Bush attempted to accomplish this in his stump speech at Dover but the mix of policies he advocated did not resonate with his prior economic articulation, in part because he had refused to perform casuistic stretching consistently or absolutely, changing his message on the occasions he decided to speak publicly about the economy at all. Over the course of his presidency Bush's economic orthodox innovation lacked both coherence with the existing Neoliberal regime's economic narrative, and fidelity with respect to Bush's economic trustworthiness. In other words, Bush's orthodox innovation reneged on the established orthodox and failed to be acceptable as reasonable innovation. Despite being poised to articulate the necessity of a global economic focus early on, Bush allowed events to define themselves rather than taking control of the narrative he so skillfully articulated during the Republican National Convention. Bush's failure of orthodox innovation can thus be seen not as a failure of policy, but as a rhetorical failure to narrate necessary policy changes in

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

response to changing exigencies in a manner that resonated with existing regime commitments: a failure to engage in consistent casuistic stretching.

Anticommunism Without Communists

Unlike his tenuous economic articulation, Bush was positioned rhetorically as well as diplomatically to engage in a rhetoric of anticommunist articulation. Afforded additional legitimacy due to his diplomatic work with the Soviet Union during his presidency, Bush was able to narrate the end of the Cold War in a fashion that effectively renegotiated existing regime commitments. While some scholars have claimed that Bush's failure to propagate his vision of a "new world order" signaled a failure of his post-Cold War rhetoric, I argue that his management of the anticommunist narrative from the Neoliberal regime provided the public with a way to identify with the former communist threat of Eastern Europe, marking a significant rhetorical success, or *kairotic* performance. In particular, Bush's anticommunist orthodox innovation progressed from a careful balance of hopefulness and skepticism, to a liminal rhetorical space in which the former Soviet states could be seen as friends and democratic partners while still eschewing Communist ideology. Using presidential rhetoric to mark the end of the preexisting, simplistic Cold War narrative, Bush provided a rhetorical transition from a struggle between nations to a struggle between ideologies.

Ending the Cold War: Successful Anti-Communist Orthodox Innovation

Toward the end of his presidency, Reagan predicted that “the prospect of not only a new era in Soviet-American relations but a new age of world peace.”²²⁴

Referencing Reagan’s own shifting attitude with regard to the Soviet Union at the end of his presidency, Bush continued Reagan’s narrative by acknowledging that the changing international situation (the end of the Cold War) would necessitate a new perspective regarding the United States’ former foes.

Bush set the stage for his anticommunist articulation by explicitly referencing Reagan’s anticommunist narrative and renegotiating it in light of changing international exigencies. During his acceptance address at the Republican National Convention, he hinted at anticommunism but the bulk of his discussion was forward-looking, predicting not a continued threat but the end of the Cold War:

Look at the world on this bright August night. The spirit of Democracy is sweeping the Pacific Rim. China feels the winds of change. New democracies assert themselves in South America. One by one the unfree places fall, not to the force of arms but to the force of an idea: freedom works.²²⁵

Rather than framing his policy in opposition to Communist ideology, Bush addressed the issue in positive terms, identifying the change that had taken place during Reagan’s tenure. Further, Bush did not mention communism explicitly but enthymematically, identifying countries the audience would identify with communist governments. Echoing Reagan’s standard of working with the Soviet Union while keeping “up our guard,”

²²⁴ Regan, Ronald. “Address by President Ronald Reagan to the UN General Assembly,” September 26, 1988. Online by the *U.S. Department of State*, <http://www.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207332.htm>

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

Bush promised to employ a “prudent skepticism” that involved peace through strength and “hard cool engagement in the tug and pull of diplomacy.”^{226,227} Using broad terms to discuss his anticommunist stance allowed Bush to apply the abstract idea of freedom to an equally abstract threat. In other words, refusing to mention Communism or the Soviet Union explicitly provided Bush with room to imagine a new future. This was possible only through his careful continuation of the narrative Reagan had put into place.

In addition to managing the Reagan narrative, Bush also negotiated the anticommunist aspect of the Neoliberal tradition by tempering the Reagan Neoliberal constitutive legacy with his own skills. Emphasizing his military experience, Bush reminded that audience, “My life has been lived in the shadow of the war. I almost lost my life in one.”²²⁸ Based on this experience, he was able to say with complete authenticity, “I hate war. I love peace. We have peace.”²²⁹ Bush invited the audience to see him not only as a tried and tested military man, but also as part of the change that had brought peace. By invoking his military experience and connection to the Reagan regime in the same moment, Bush strengthened his claim to leadership: he had both the connection to the Reagan regime and the military and diplomatic experience to lead the nation through the current international moment.

Upon winning the presidency in 1988, Bush used his inaugural address to continue articulating the anticommunist narrative he established during the election:

²²⁶ Reagan, Ronald. “Farewell Address to the Nation.” January 11, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

²²⁷ Bush, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination,” 2.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

We live in a peaceful, prosperous time, but we can make it better. For a new breeze is blowing, and a world refreshed by freedom seems reborn. For in man's heart, if not in fact, the day of the dictator is over. The totalitarian era is passing, its old ideals blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree. A new breeze is blowing, and a nation refreshed by freedom stands ready to push on.²³⁰

As in his acceptance speech, Bush used hopeful, future-oriented rhetoric to describe the situation in Communist countries, invoking the imminent end of the Cold War without actually referencing Communism. He established points of identification between the United States and the Soviet States by referencing a change in the hearts of people in Communist nations. This change—in heart, not in fact—was resonant with the state of soon-to-be Americans on the eve of the Revolutionary War. By tacitly drawing connections between the former Soviet states' struggle and the U.S. during its own moment of political transition, Bush's negotiation of anticommunism drew from powerful existing narratives of the United States' past and made his articulation relevant not just within the confines of the Neoliberal regime, but within the United States' history broadly.

While his public narrative regarding anticommunism hopeful, Bush maintained careful skepticism of the Soviet Union. As CIA sources reveal, Bush “entered office . . . determined to put his own stamp on America's foreign policy and make US-Soviet relations its main focus.”²³¹ He ordered a review of existing US policy toward the Soviet

²³⁰ Bush, George H.W. “Inaugural Address,” January 20, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16610>

²³¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *At Cold War's End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 1989-1991*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/at-cold-wars->

Union. The results of this review split his foreign policy team between those who desired immediate dialogue with Gorbachev and those who remained dubious of his intentions.²³²

Eventually, Bush and his foreign policy staff became convinced that “Gorbachev was ready for dialogue and compromise.”²³³ Gorbachev himself made the first move toward compromise, surprising the Bush administration (and the world) in his Address to the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988 where he “renounced class warfare as the basis of Soviet foreign policy, embraced pan-humanist values, and global interdependence, and pledged to convert an economy of armaments into an economy of disarmament.” Gorbachev called for the end of the Cold War and invited the U.S. to participate by “halting the arms race and seeking settlements of regional conflicts.”²³⁴ In response to Gorbachev’s commitments, Bush gave a speech at Texas A&M University in May 1989 where he proposed that the U.S. should “move beyond containment” and bring the USSR into the international community. This address belied his foreign policy team’s lingering reservations and foreshadowed his eventual articulation of hopeful global interdependence while continuing the Reagan-era rhetoric of cautious skepticism. Qualifying his efforts to bring the USSR into the international community, Bush remarked, “new relationship cannot dimply be declared by Moscow or bestowed by

end-us-intelligence-on-the-soviet-union-and-eastern-europe-1989-1991/art-1.html#rft14

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

others; it must be earned. It must be earned because promises are never enough.”²³⁵

During this period, Bush’s anticommunist articulation struck a careful balance between hopefulness and skepticism, preparing the American people to accept the former Soviet states as friends once the Cold War came to its end.

As Bush predicted, Gorbachev made good on his promises. The Soviet leader initiated *glasnost* (openness/free speech) and *perestroika* (economic reform/rebuilding), replaced key cabinet members who were symbols of “old thinking,” and withdrew Soviet troops from Afghanistan.²³⁶ This show of faith resulted in the first Bush-Gorbachev summit in Malta on December 2-3, 1989. The summit “opened the way for the successful conclusion of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in 1990 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in 1991.”²³⁷ As nations on Russia’s periphery responded to *glasnost* in surges of ethnic nationalism, the Soviet empire began to crumble. A CIA intelligence assessment written by the Office of Soviet Analysis argued, the “unrest that has punctuated Gorbachev’s rule is not a transient phenomenon. Conditions are likely to lead in the foreseeable future to continuing crises and instability on a larger scale.”²³⁸ Within this maelstrom of instability, Bush offered his rhetorical vision of a “new world order,” where diverse nations would be “drawn together in

²³⁵ Bush, George H.W. “Remarks at the Texas A&M University Commencement Ceremony in College Station,” May 12, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=17022>

²³⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *At Cold War’s End*.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Office of Soviet Analysis, “Gorbachev’s Domestic Gambles and Instability in the USSR,” September 1989. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/at-cold-wars-end-us-intelligence-on-the-soviet-union-and-eastern-europe-1989-1991/art-1.html#rft14>

common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind—peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law.”²³⁹

Perhaps in response to Gorbachev’s program of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, a “right-wing cabal of Soviet hard-liners” backed by Boris Yeltsin attempted to depose Gorbachev.²⁴⁰ Although the coup was unsuccessful in the short term, the seeds for Gorbachev’s eventual demise as leader had been sown. Thus, on Christmas Day in 1991 Gorbachev called President Bush to announce the “end of the experiment in Communism born in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.”²⁴¹

Bush’s response, given later that evening, demonstrated that, when willing to respond in the moment, he was quite capable of controlling the narrative of anticommunism and performing orthodox innovation. In the “Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States,” Bush harnessed the *kairos* of the moment while continuing to articulate anticommunism in a fashion that embraced the former Soviet states, just as he foreshadowed in his Inaugural Address. Bush’s performance of regime articulation was therefore successful in this moment not only because he met expectations, but also because he had so carefully prepared the public for it in his previous speeches.

²³⁹ Bush, George H.W. “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 29, 1991. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19253>

²⁴⁰ Meacham, *Destiny and Power*, 484.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 495.

Bush began the speech by reviewing the great “drama of the 20th century,” calling to mind Reagan’s mythic narrative of the ongoing struggle of the “shining city on a hill” with the “godless Communists.” He stated,

For over 40 years, the United States led the West in the struggle against communism and the threat it posed to our most precious values. This struggle shaped the lives of all Americans. It forced all nations to live under the specter of nuclear destruction.²⁴²

Bush’s speech marked a unique moment in the Cold War narrative, as he was able to bring the drama to a close. Continuing to fold the American people into the narrative, Bush stated confidently, “That confrontation is now over . . . This is a victory for democracy and freedom. It’s a victory for the moral force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory”²⁴³ By continuing with the narrative structure of Reagan’s anticommunism, Bush rhetorically performed regime articulation of anticommunism. As William Lewis has argued, one of the hallmarks of Reagan’s style was in creating a sweeping narrative that had specific roles for the American people.²⁴⁴ By beginning the speech in the narrative style, Bush situated himself firmly within the Reagan tradition, meeting the stylistic expectation of the existing narrative.

Having closed this portion of the story, most clearly articulated by Reagan, Bush rhetorically moved the audience forward to imagine what a new era of US-Russian relations would look like in the absence of the Soviet Union. In order to accomplish this,

²⁴² Bush, George H.W. “Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States,” December 25, 1991. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=20388>

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 1.

²⁴⁴ Lewis, William. “Telling America’s Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987): 280-302.

Bush performed an important aspect of orthodox innovation: acknowledging the changing exigencies that permit a departure from the established regime narrative. The most blatant shift from the Neoliberal constitutive legacy of anti-communism concerned Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation. Bush credited Gorbachev, rather than the United States, for the end of the Soviet Union. Although the end of the Soviet Union was seen as "a victory for the moral force" of American values, Bush carefully and deliberately noted that the Soviet Union's end was "signified today by Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to resign as President."²⁴⁵

By situating Gorbachev's resignation as a decision, Bush characterized the leadership of the prior Soviet Union and future Russia as partners, not enemies, moving the narrative away from the "evil empire" narrative forwarded by Reagan. This was significant for Bush because he fundamentally changed the framework through which the American people understood the Cold War, the former Soviet Union, and their own place in the shifting narrative. Understanding the magnitude of this shift, Bush was careful to detail Gorbachev's actions in terms designed to create identification between the American people and Gorbachev:

I'd like to express, on behalf of the American people my gratitude to Mikhail Gorbachev for years of sustained commitment to world peace, and for his intellect, vision, and courage. I spoke with Mikhail Gorbachev this morning. We reviewed the many accomplishments of the past few years and spoke of hope for the future.

Mikhail Gorbachev's revolutionary policies transformed the Soviet Union. His policies permitted the peoples of Russia and the other Republics to cast aside decades of oppression and establish the foundations of freedom. His legacy

²⁴⁵ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States," 1.

guarantees him an honored place in history and provides a solid basis for the United States to work in equally constructive ways with his successors.²⁴⁶

Rather than reference the specific policies Gorbachev implemented (such as *glasnost* and *perestroika*), Bush discusses Gorbachev's leadership in broad terms designed to resonate with the American public. His policies were described as "revolutionary," fought oppression, and promoted freedom; Gorbachev himself is characterized as a partner whose actions paved the way for future positive relations. Bush did not only recognize Gorbachev's accomplishments personally, but on behalf of the American people, describing the events as an "historic choice for freedom," a "peaceful and democratic path" that "clearly serve our national interest."²⁴⁷ Bush further promoted identification between American citizens and the Commonwealth by employing terms popularly used to describe the American democratic project: in the space of the seven-minute speech, Bush used variations of the word "freedom" ten times and "democratic" eight times; he calls the governmental shift "peaceful" and "independent" six times each. By loading the speech with terms that had powerful resonance for Americans, Bush situated Gorbachev and those succeeding him as positive part of this transitional narrative, permitting a change in the national understanding of the Soviet Union's character from "evil empire" to diplomatic Russian partner.

Having closed the narrative of what happened, Bush transitioned to imagining the future for his audience: "We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

before.”²⁴⁸ Identifying this “new world” Bush started to engage in a form of orthodox innovation that left the confines of the Reagan construction of the Soviet Union and defined the relationship anew. Bush’s attempts to redefine the relationship at this juncture are mainly rhetorical in nature: he recognized and welcomed “the mergence of a free, independent, and democratic Russia” along with its “courageous President, Boris Yeltsin.”²⁴⁹ Bush acknowledged the transition in leadership, pledging to work with Yeltsin “to bring democratic and market reform to Russia.”²⁵⁰

Shifting entirely out of the reasoned skepticism of the Soviet Union, Bush encouraged the audience to embrace a “democratic” Russia as partner to the United States. This was reinforced as Bush expressed support for “Russia’s assumption of the U.S.S.R.’s seat as a permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council.”²⁵¹ Bush continued his show of support for the transition by recognizing the independence of the former Soviet states that “have made specific commitment to us,” including Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan.”

Promising to sponsor U.N. membership for those states who are not already members, Bush further pledges to “establish diplomatic ties” with those nations.²⁵² In a final act of recognition, Bush acknowledged “the remaining six former Soviet Republics: Moldova, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, George, and Uzbekistan,” promising to “establish diplomatic relations . . . when we are satisfied that hey have made

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

commitments to responsible security policies and democratic principles.”²⁵³ This act of naming is a powerful rhetorical tool when wielded by a president: Zarefsky notes that “naming a situation provides the basis for understanding it and determining the appropriate response;” presidents specifically have the power to “define political reality” through this process.²⁵⁴ By naming these individual nations within the context of establishing diplomatic relations and membership within the United Nations (arguably the model for Bush’s “New world order”), Bush offered a new definition of the former Soviet Union, one that situated those nations as participants in the great democratic project on a global scale. Thus, Bush provided a rendition of anticommunism that effectively folded the former Soviet states into an international partnership, making communism not a problem of people, but of ideology. Former communist states became analogous to the U.S. during the Revolution, and were thus transformed from ideological foe to potential economic partner and friend.

Disjunctive Anti-Communist Orthodox Innovation in the 1992 Campaign

Although Bush performed orthodox innovation successfully following the fall of the Soviet Union and throughout most of his presidency, as the 1992 election neared, his narrative became increasingly disjunctive. During his stump speeches, and particularly during his address to Liberty Mutual Insurance employees in Dover, Bush was unable to stay on message. This compromised the coherence of his carefully crafted anticommunist narrative, as it became part and parcel of a larger jumble, dubbed “word

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Zarefsky, David. “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34.3 (2004), 607-619.

salad” by critics. In terms of anticommunist articulation, Bush lost the threads of his powerful narrative and took on a defensive stance that undercut his prior successes.

Bush’s defensive posture throughout the speech evinced his lack of control over the anticommunist narrative. Rather than continuing his established anticommunist articulation, he allowed criticisms of the economy to overwhelm the orthodox innovation of anticommunism he had clearly established throughout his presidency. For example, Bush went on the defensive regarding critiques of his focus on foreign policy at the expense of the economy:

I told some of them over there, there’s a big difference, you know, people say to me, difference between domestic and foreign policy. ‘How could you lead the world’—and they gave me some credit for Desert Storm, that the American people feel very, very strongly about—‘how can you do that and then have such difficulties with this economy?’ Well, let me tell you something. When I moved those forces I didn’t have to ask Senator Kennedy or some liberal Democrat how, whether we were going to do it. We did it. I didn’t have to ask some smart-aleck columnist who was saying, ‘Bush hasn’t explained this to the American people.’ We did it.”²⁵⁵

By allowing his critics to define his achievements following the Cold War as opposed to, rather than in support of, his domestic policies, Bush gave up control of his carefully crafted narrative. Thus, when he attempted to remind his audience of the connections between foreign policy and the economy he had laid out during his acceptance speech, inaugural, and remarks at the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it was in opposition to alternative definitions of his foreign policy. Bush’s references to the connection between foreign and domestic policy came across as a response to his critics rather than a carefully laid out, established plan. For example, Bush referenced disagreements with

²⁵⁵ Bush, “Remarks to Liberty Mutual Insurance Employees in Dover,” 1.

his opponents while reminding his audience of the link between economic health and foreign trade:

What we're trying to do is expand exports by making that playing field level and getting access to foreign markets. So, when someone says to me, some politician out of some state that never heard of New Hampshire comes up here and says, 'The President ought not to worry about world peace or the global economy,' I'm going to say, 'Let me run my business the way I think is best.' I am going to continue to work to open markets, to take this question of equal opportunity—that's all the American worker needs—equal opportunity in the global marketplace.²⁵⁶

Not only did Bush reference his detractors, he also gave them a clear voice in relation to his policy arguments. By engaging in an argument with his critics during his stump speech, Bush lent credence to their criticism. Additionally, Bush's attempts to articulate the difference between domestic and foreign policy resulted in a clear statement of his disdain for answering questions regarding his motives and actions, which was ostensibly the purpose of his New Hampshire visit. This also fed the existing perception that Bush was "out of touch" with voters and called into question his advocacy for international cooperation; it seemed that Bush himself did not want to engage in either transparency or cooperation regarding his foreign policy. Additionally, Bush was overt about his reluctance to explain things to the American people. Making his disdain for the press apparent, Bush spoke of "smart-aleck" reporters more than once during the speech. The reluctance to engage with the press and inform the people exacerbated existing notions of Bush as disconnected from voters.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Bush's defensiveness extended from his articulation of post-Cold War foreign policy to his accomplishments in ending the Cold War itself. Continuing to give his critics voice during his event, Bush argued,

And to those political cynics out there, these political newcomers hitting this State for the first time, let me say this: I won't apologize one minute for the fact that your kids and my grandkids might just have an opportunity, because of the way we've conducted the foreign affairs in this country, to grow up in a world with a little less worry about nuclear war.²⁵⁷

Refusing to apologize for his role in ending the Cold War and successful action in Desert Storm, Bush attempted to articulate his post-Cold War, anticommunist narrative, calling to mind the opportunities afforded to American workers as a result of opening trade with former communist countries. However, his condescension for his opponents—who at this point included other Republicans—belied his disenchantment with the Republican base. Attempting to placate voters while showing his contempt for the Republican establishment, Bush pleaded with his audience, “But just give us a little credit for the fact that we now have a tremendous change in the world, old totalitarian systems now democracies, people in the South of the border now working for free markets. And that means more jobs for the people of New Hampshire.”²⁵⁸ As in the previous portion of the speech, Bush attempted to combine his economic and anticommunist articulation, applying extended opportunities specifically to his audience: New Hampshire voters. However, his defensiveness and demands that he be given “credit” for his efforts (repeated three times throughout the speech) seem desperate rather than confident. Interspersed throughout the speech as responses to his critics, Bush's narrative of

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

anticommunist articulation completely broke down at this point, allowing his critics to call into question his foreign policy successes. Further, by attempting to articulate his anticommunism as part of his economic plan in this piecemeal fashion, Bush lent credence to accusations that his foreign policy focus had compromised any domestic focus he might have had.

Bush's articulation of anticommunism from the 1988 through 1992 elections illustrates how the challenges of orthodox innovation can overwhelm a candidate and turn an initially successful articulation into a rhetorical problem. Although Bush began his presidency poised to be the president who ended the Cold War and stimulated the economy, Bush's failure in economic articulation overwhelmed his foreign policy successes. Making his anticommunist articulation primarily about opening borders and increasing trade, Bush failed to capitalize on the narrative he established throughout the first portion of his presidency. Thus, by the time he began the 1992 presidential campaign, his anticommunist articulation had been reduced to a mere distraction from the "real" problems facing American voters rather than a major triumph of the "moral force" of American democracy.²⁵⁹

Liberalism Rears its Kinder, Gentler Head: Bush's Civil Religion

While Reagan used civil religious tropes extensively throughout his presidency to legitimate his actions as civil religious priest and revitalize American exceptionalism, Bush took a decidedly different perspective on this aspect of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy. Rather than act with the authority of a civil religious priest, Bush dissociated

²⁵⁹ Bush, "Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States," 1.

himself from Reagan with regard to civil religion and established a different kind of rhetorical authority. Bush's interpretation of civil religion, grounded in community and mutual responsibility, resulted in a characterization of both local and national government as responsible for ensuring individual success. This perspective represented a turn back to Liberal regime interpretations of government, creating a rhetorical problem for the heir to the Neoliberal regime.

Situating himself as related to, yet distinct from Reagan, Bush rejected the mantle of civil religious priest, instead relying on his diplomatic and military expertise to legitimize his presidential authority. This is made clear in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in 1988, where Bush declared, "But now you must see me for what I am: the Republican candidate for President of the United States."²⁶⁰ Bush clearly dissociated from Reagan by establishing his own leadership credentials, including his military service. The frame of military service became a guiding persona for Bush, who characterized himself as

. . . a man who sees life in terms of missions – missions defined and missions completed. When I was a torpedo bomber pilot they defined the mission for us. Before we took off we all understood that, no matter what, you try to reach the target. There have been other missions for me – Congress, China, the CIA. But I am here tonight – and I am your candidate – because the most important work of my life is to complete the mission we started in 1980.

By inviting the audience to see him as the commander-in-chief capable of continuing the mission Reagan began in 1980, Bush established his authority through life experience rather than the authority imbued by the office of the presidency.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

Bush did not completely eschew civil religion; instead, he enacted the role of national pastor rather than priest, concerning himself more with the care and governance aspects of civil religion than the ceremonial. As a civil religious pastor, his personal experience with religion guided his vision for how American communities should interact. For example, in his 1988 RNC acceptance speech Bush stated, “I am guided by certain traditions. One is that there is a God and He is good, and his love, while free, has a self imposed cost: We must be good to one another.”²⁶¹ For Bush, performing civil religion was part of being a member of a community; instead of performing ceremonially as civil religious priest, Bush invoked civil religion from a highly personal, pastoral perspective. Civil religion became the authorizing force behind his calls for a “kinder, gentler America” and “a new harmony, a greater tolerance” in which “the tired old baggage of bigotry” will be left behind.²⁶²

Bush’s enactment of civil religious pastor continued throughout his presidency: when speaking to a disability community, Bush argued, “Each American shares a responsibility a kinder, gentler America, to follow the example that so many of you in this room have lead with your lives.”²⁶³ This form of civil religion relied primarily on community involvement and individual acts of charity rather than the ceremony and ceremonial declamations of the civil religious priesthood enacted during Reagan’s presidency.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁶² *Ibid*.

²⁶³ Bush, George. “Remarks at a Disability Community Tribute to the President,” January 12, 199

Bush thus engaged casuistic stretching of the civil religious constitutive legacy, using discourse to tacitly shift the metaphor of civil religious leader from priest to pastor. This form of casuistry perhaps stretched the constitutive legacy of civil religion too far, necessitating a shift away from Neoliberal regime government skepticism and toward a more Liberal faith in the government. By calling for a “kinder, gentler” nation and consistently linking the success of the individual to the success of the community and need for government action, Bush articulated a Liberal vision of the relationship between the government and people that directly contradicted the constitutive legacy of government skepticism Reagan had so carefully cultivated. Bush thus attempted to break off one element of the Neoliberal regime’s constitutive legacy—government skepticism—while continuing to support others.

One aspect of Reagan’s civil religious constitutive legacy Bush did not reject was the United States’ sacred obligation to model democracy for the world. However, Bush significantly stretched the constitutive legacy of democracy promotion to accommodate the new situation posed by the end of the Cold War.

At the start of Bush’s presidency, with the Cold War still in effect, a narrative that relied on a clash between the godless Communists and godly Americans was available. However, as circumstances changed and this *topos* no longer made sense, Bush shifted the narrative to reflect the changing relationship between the United States and former Soviet states. In particular, Bush changed the characters in the narrative from a clash between peoples to a clash between ideologies. In this new narrative, it was the “American idea” that triumphed, rather than the American people. This shift allowed

Bush to continue forwarding American exceptionalism while being responsive to global political events, such as the end of the Cold War and establishment of a democratic Russia.

Bush began to make these shifts—or casuistic stretches—early on in his presidency. For example, during his inaugural speech, he stated, “I see America as the leader—a unique nation with a special role in the world,” and “This has been called the American Century, because in it we were the dominant force for good in the world.”²⁶⁴ He continued by arguing that the next century will “be another American century” because “Our work is not done—our force is not spent.”²⁶⁵ While Bush clearly situated the United States as having a “special role in the world,” he did so by calling for continued democracy modeling rather than a continued Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Bush’s more nuanced version of civil religious exceptionalism performed orthodox innovation by responding to domestic and international events: gone was the neat package of the Cold War against which the neoliberal constitutive legacy could offer its narrative of godly American triumph over godless communism. The nuance Bush was forced to introduce as a result of the Cold War’s end presented significant challenges for orthodox innovation, as the Neoliberal constitutive legacy relied on a tight, tidy narrative rhetorical package. As Bush attempted to introduce nuance into particular aspects of the neoliberal constitutive legacy, he neglected others, particularly the trope of rugged individualism.

²⁶⁴ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States,” 1.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Whither Rugged Individualism?

Bush's efforts to perform orthodox innovation within the constraints of the neoliberal regime necessitated significant shifts in his performance of civil religion, anticommunism, and economic ideology. While some of those changes were fairly successful—such as anticommunism and civil religion—others were less so. While I have already discussed the unraveling of Bush's economic articulation, yet another element of the neoliberal constitutive legacy—rugged individualism—was practically abandoned during Bush's tenure. The disappearance of the rugged individualism trope can be directly linked to Bush's efforts to shift the Reagan tradition away from simplicity and individualism, and toward nuance and community responsibility. In other words, Bush's orthodox innovation required recognizing that the elements of the constitutive legacy existed in a distinct hierarchy. When changing political realities posed challenges to the constitutive legacy, some core elements had to be protected at the expense of others.

For Bush, anticommunism and the economy remained priorities. Rugged individualism, on the other hand, did not accord with Bush's rendition of the neoliberal tradition and was thus abandoned. In its place, Bush offered a version of individualism that valorized individual responsibility in the context of contributing to local, national, and global communities rather than the Reaganesque form of rugged individualism. Throughout his presidency, Bush worked to stretch the rugged individualism trope from its Neoliberal form back into a more Liberal understanding of individual citizens as

invaluable members of communities whose success was tied to government interventions.

During the course of his economic articulation, Bush advocated bipartisan cooperation over party loyalty, challenging the idea that the GOP could succeed on their own. This posed a direct challenge to the form of rugged individualism Reagan had advocated for the GOP when he presented the Neoliberal regime as the only alternative to years of Democratic leadership failures. Addressing the need for deficit legislation, Bush acknowledged, “any one of us alone might have written a better plan.”²⁶⁶ Advocating for the bipartisan plan over that of any one person or party, Bush elevated cooperation over individual efforts and the good of the nation over the pride of the party. As he argued,

Those who dislike one part or another may pick our agreement apart. But if they do, believe me, the political reality is, no one can put a better one back together again. Everyone will bear a small burden. But if we succeed, every American will have a large burden lifted.²⁶⁷

While advocating for a shift in economic priorities, Bush thus also attempted to renegotiate rugged individualism by proxy, prioritizing bipartisan efforts. Asking the American people to urge their Senators to “do what the bipartisan leadership has done: come together in the spirit of compromise to solve this national problem,” Bush rhetorically elevated compromise over partisan posturing in the face of a looming national crisis.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget Agreement,” 1.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Additionally, Bush challenged the rugged individualist underpinnings of the Neoliberal economic ideology: namely, the idea that economic success was the inevitable result of individual effort. Instead, Bush acknowledged the role of the government and community in creating the conditions for economic success. He stated, “Everyone who can should contribute something, and no one should have to contribute beyond their fair share. Our bipartisan agreement meets these tests. And through specific new incentives, it will create more jobs.”²⁶⁹ In advocating for government action to safeguard the economy through regulation rather than deregulation, Bush contradicted the existing idea of rugged individualism that was tied to free market capitalism and the anti-government regulation efforts that had been central to Reagan’s economic rendition of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy.

Bush’s efforts to renegotiate rugged individualism were also marked by his embrace of nuance. Rather than offering simple solutions for simple problems, Bush acknowledged the complexities of governing, especially when it came to the economy. This was made evident in his challenge of the antigovernment aspect of rugged individualism in his acceptance address at the 1988 Republican National Convention. Bush addressed the antigovernment stance directly, stating, “Does government have a place? Yes. Government is part of the nation of communities – not the whole, just part. I do not hate government. A government that remembers that the people are its master is a good and needed thing.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Bush, George H.W. “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention.” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T.

Rather than continue the articulation of government as the problem, Bush attempted to introduce nuance into the antigovernment form of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy by arguing that government can do good, when engaged productively. As a representative of the Neoliberal regime, Bush's reminder that a government can, indeed be "good and needed" was an effort to preemptively authorize his use of government to forward his own interpretation of regime commitments. However, this move was potentially fraught for Bush, as the existing regime commitments had relied so heavily on rejecting government intervention. This rhetorical move therefore illustrated the double-bind that Bush inherited from Reagan: expected to use the authority of the regime to engage in government action to forward the regime's interests, yet constrained by the existing regime expectations of an anti-government stance. Bush negotiated this tenuous rhetorical terrain by maintaining careful skepticism of the government and carefully qualifying government action: "good and needed" only when it remembered, "the people are its master." Thus, only a government operating with the authority of the people's voice—ostensibly expressed through the vote—would be authorized for action. Bush thus performed orthodox innovation by shifting from a staunch antigovernment stance to one in which the government could act appropriately, given the right circumstances. These circumstances, for Bush, were those in which the government worked to fulfill the demands of the people, who expressed their will through the vote, authorizing the Neoliberal regime's continuation with Bush as its figurehead.

Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25955>

This more nuanced view of government was directly tied to Bush's description of good and helpful government as "part of the nation of communities." By invoking the idea of the government as part of a larger whole and not simply the ever-present "problem" described by Reagan, Bush attempted to shift the understanding of government to personal rather than political, an integral part of the workings of countless communities. Further, by identifying the United States as a "nation of communities," Bush challenged the existing idea of the nation as a monolithic actor, instead drawing attention to the interdependent nature of its parts: not just cities or states, but communities. The emphasis on community reinforced Bush's efforts to personalize the government, drawing attention to its role not just in politics, but also in its citizens' daily lives. This became increasingly clear when Bush provided his definition of community: not "a limited cluster of interest groups, locked in odd conformity," but rather "thousands and tens of thousands of ethnic, religious, social, business, labor union, neighborhood, regional, and other organizations, all of them varied, voluntary and unique . . . a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky."²⁷¹ For Bush, then, the diversity of the nation's individuals were its greatest strength, as they contributed to the communities that gave authority to government through their civic participation. Celebrating individualism in the context of community interdependence was thus an integral part of Bush's orthodox innovation of rugged individualism.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 3.

While Bush may have shifted the rugged individualism trope into a celebration of diversity, he nonetheless found ways to continue including stock cultural notions of conservatism to temper his efforts at orthodox innovation. In this way, Bush used his rendition of civil religious exceptionalism to displace the rugged individualism trope. One strategy Bush used to accomplish this was by merging the cultural values of conservative voters with his more nuanced version of individualism. For example, during his 1988 acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Bush drew from the stock Reagan notion of individualism while speaking more directly to conservative values voters. Highlighting the importance of family, “our culture, our religious faith, our traditions and history,” Bush used the convenient *ethos* of family values issues as a means of supporting a form of individualism that was reliant on community.²⁷² Like Reagan, Bush cited individualism as an important tenet to understanding what makes us uniquely American. The importance of the individual was tacitly connected to the importance of small government:

From the individual to the family to the community, and on out to the town, to the church and school, and, still echoing out, to the county, the state, the nation – each doing only what it does well and no more. And I believe that power must always be kept close to the individual – close to the hands that raise the family and run the home.²⁷³

While Bush highlighted the importance of the individual, it was not the rugged individualism popularized by Reagan. Instead, Bush situated the individual within networks of family, community, and church. Although Bush emphasized the idea of “tradition,” he did not circumscribe his definition of community in Reagan’s narrow

²⁷² *Ibid*, 2.

²⁷³ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States,” 3.

terms. Community and government, for Bush, were part of the same fabric of the American people, “a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky.”²⁷⁴ Continuing to invoke his role as civil religious pastor, Bush described family values issues and the importance of the individual as part of his “personal philosophy.” By connecting his own personal philosophy to those of values voters and doing so from the persona of civil religious pastor, Bush solidified his place as part of the coalition that brought Reagan to power and as the appropriate interpreter of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy. Thus, Bush harnessed the *ethos* of the Neoliberal tradition and shifted the trope of rugged individualism to one of individuals within networks of community and government.

Visualizing Regime Articulation: Bush on the Cover of Time

Bush’s orthodox innovation of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy was characterized by his embrace of nuance as he attempted to make the tenets of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy responsive to changing domestic and international exigencies, adapting his understanding of *kairos* to events occurring within *chronos*, or linear time. As previously discussed, his attempts at orthodox innovation were received with varying degrees of acceptance throughout his presidency. Cover images of Bush on *Time* magazine provide external validation and repudiation of Bush’s efforts at negotiating the existing commitments of the Neoliberal regime. As I argue, these images mirrored the degree of success with which Bush engaged in orthodox innovation: at first

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

successful, but eventually breaking down completely as Bush's rendition of the Neoliberal regime was ultimately rejected.

Visual Representations of Bush: Faithful Son of the Neoliberal Regime

Visual representations of Bush on the cover of *Time* linked him inextricably to the Reagan legacy, providing publics with the visual rhetorical resources to evaluate Bush in comparison to Reagan throughout his presidency. As the successor to the Reagan legacy, George H.W. Bush was expected to extend the commitments Reagan had established, both in terms of policy and ideology. Closely reading the images of Bush within their journalistic and historical context provides evidence of how Bush's performance as an orthodox innovator, or continuation of the Reagan regime, was evaluated. While Bush was initially situated as a faithful son of the Reagan legacy on the cover of *Time*, the issues leading up to the 1992 presidential election—and specifically his “Men of the Year” cover served as external repudiation of Bush's performance within the Reagan regime.

In his initial appearances on *Time*, Bush was clearly connected to Reagan through visual representations of Reagan and Bush as political father and son. He first appeared with Reagan on the July 28, 1980 cover of *Time*.²⁷⁵ In this image, Reagan and Bush stand shoulder-to-shoulder, waving exuberantly to the crowd during the Republican National Convention. The title of the issue, “Getting it Together,” was emblazoned across the top of the issue and read alongside a teaser for an “Exclusive: Inside the Ford Drama.” This teaser title is located on the bottom right-hand side of the

²⁷⁵ “Getting it Together,” *Time* July 28, 1980.

cover and layered over part of Bush's midsection. The visual of Bush and Reagan together, along with the text of the cover, suggest that Bush was the solution to overcoming the "Ford drama" and would help see the campaign through to a successful end.²⁷⁶ Bush is shown to the right of Reagan, waving and literally performing the position of "right hand man," visually marking him as an irreplaceable part of the Reagan campaign.

Bush was similarly depicted on the August 27, 1984 cover of *Time*, where he appeared with Reagan once again as a member of the "Republican encore."²⁷⁷ This cover, like the 1980 image, was also published as part of the coverage on the Republican National Convention. The subheading here, "Coronation in Dallas," situated Reagan as powerful leader, with Bush firmly at his side. The language of a "coronation" signified the eventual succession of Bush to Reagan and is visually represented in the image, with Reagan depicted as a father figure and Bush as his faithful son. The two men were posed standing side-by-side, with Reagan in a mature, masculine button-down western shirt and Bush in a more casual, youthful polo shirt. Their facial expressions also call to mind a father and son: Reagan has a composed, pleasant smile while Bush, although smiling,

²⁷⁶ Reagan initially chose former president Gerald Ford as his vice presidential candidate. However, as a close friend of Ford's—legendary Washington reporter Tom DeFrank—shared with me, Ford was an advocate of Bush during the primaries for the GOP nominee. Ford had no intention of actually running with Reagan and devised a ruse of sorts in order to put Bush in the position to gain the presidency following Reagan. Ford went on a news show where he casually referenced the idea of a "co-presidency" shortly before the Republican National Convention. With no other vetted vice presidential candidates in sight and the RNC looming, Reagan's advisers advocated Bush as the vice president. The rest, as they say, is history.

²⁷⁷ "Republican Encore," *Time*, August 27, 1984.

looks as though he has been caught mid-laugh, with his mouth partially open. Bush's characterization as a member of the Reagan political lineage continued following his own successful presidential campaign in 1988. The December 12, 1988 cover image once again situated Bush as a son of the Reagan legacy, with the title "Over to You, George" accompanied by an image of Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev, and a number of other Soviet leaders.²⁷⁸ While the image shows Gorbachev making eye contact with Reagan and Bush looking on, the title of the issue suggests Reagan passing the diplomatic torch over to Bush as the president-elect. Throughout Reagan's presidency and during the beginning of his own presidency, Bush was visually positioned as the eventual orthodox innovator: situated alongside Reagan in ways that underscored his youth, Bush was the visual embodiment of what Skowronek calls the "faithful sons" of political time: the regime articulation president.

The False Claimant: Visual Representation Following the Death of "No New Taxes"

Although Bush was visually situated as the unquestioned heir to the Reagan legacy, his performance of that legacy was ultimately called into question, visually positing Bush as a simulacrum of the Reagan presidency. As previously discussed, Bush attempted to reduce the deficit at the expense of his "no new taxes" pledge. This became a point of contention among the party faithful, who questioned Bush's allegiance to Reagan's ideological and policy commitments. Their doubts were visually validated through the January 7, 1991 and August 24, 1992 images of Bush. In these images, the

²⁷⁸ "Over to You, George." *Time*, December 19, 1988.

visual narrative of Bush as the “faithful son” disappeared and was replaced by questions regarding Bush’s ability to govern in line with his received political commitments.

Bush’s “Man of the Year” cover, read within its historical context, provides insight into how political time and visual culture interact to construct particular readings of presidentiality. Created by renowned photographer Gregory Heisler, the image is surrounded in controversy. Marlin Fitzwater recalls that *Time*’s initial request turned out to be disingenuous; writer Dan Goodgame’s initial request for a “Man of the Year” photo shoot and interview was for Bush’s “leadership in Desert Storm.”²⁷⁹ Fitzwater was initially excited by the opportunity, which seemed to be “at last some recognition of the president’s leadership, with a nice picture that would be part of presidential history.”²⁸⁰ However, Dan Goodgame and Michael Duffy, the writers for the story, had been critical of Bush and were in the process of writing a book about his presidency. Having considered the possibility of a negative story, Bush and Fitzwater decided to participate, intending to influence the tone of the story through the interview. As Fitzwater recalled, “The picture seemed like the least of my worries.”²⁸¹ Although he was a bit confused by the precise layout of the photo shoot, Fitzwater was confident that at least some of the coverage would be positive. He was therefore shocked when he saw the cover of *Time*’s “Man of the Year” issue:

“Those dirty rotten bastards!” I screamed. “They lied to me! This whole thing was a setup!” . . . The cover photo showed President George Herbert Walker Bush with two faces. The story was just as bad, giving the president credit for Desert Storm but also presenting his other face, the one that had ‘done nothing’

²⁷⁹ Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing*, loc. 4539.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

in domestic policy. They even renamed the issue: Men of the Year (see Figure 5).”²⁸²

The coverage was disastrous as far as Fitzwater was concerned; as a result of the image and story, Heisler and *Time*'s press White House press privileges were temporarily revoked.

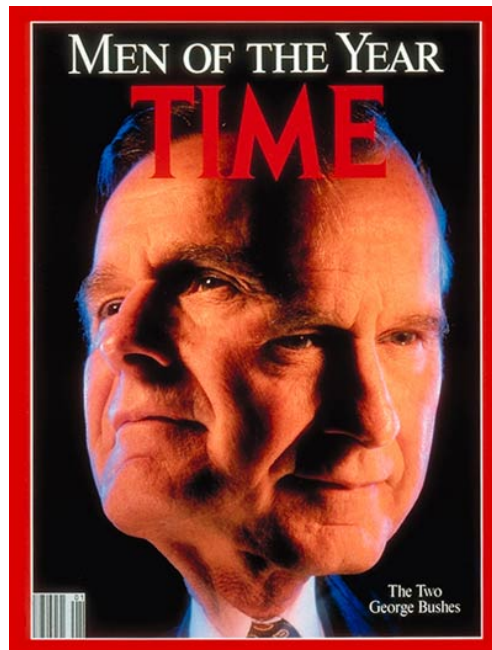


Figure 5. *Time Magazine*. January 7, 1991.

Why were Fitzwater and the White House so upset about this image? Greg Dickinson and Kari Anderson point out that *Time* cover images “serve as enthymematic markers of well-known stories.”²⁸³ As such, they have “an analogical connection to the

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Greg Dickinson and Karrin Vasby Anderson, “Fallen: O.J. Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the Re-Centering of White Patriarchy.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1.3 (September 2004), 271-296.

things they represent in ways that few other representational forms of media have.”²⁸⁴

The image of Bush provided the public with a clear visual representation of Bush’s performance as an orthodox innovator, both enabled and constrained by the Reagan commitments. While the public already perceived his foreign and domestic policy performances as disjunctive, the image took this a step further, encouraging the public to evaluate his presidential performance and his presidential person as two-faced. Visually representing his presidential performance as two-faced directly challenged Bush’s warrants for presidential authority, for if he really were split between “two George Bushes,” then at least one of them was not a faithful representative of the regime. The photo thus condensed critiques of Bush into a single image, resulting in a visual shorthand for a failed orthodox innovator: the two-faced president (see Figure 5).

Taken in the context of the accompanying stories in the “Men of the Year” issue, the cover image highlights the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity, the real and the hyperreal. By portraying Bush with two faces, the image purports to illuminate the “real” George Bush. However, the image has been manipulated in a fashion that draws attention to its fabrication. Photographer Gregory Heisler has stated that the image was created in-camera, as a double exposure, rather than through post-production processes such as Photoshop, making this photo at once more authentic (as an actual photographic solution) and less authentic, as the perfectly fused cheekbones and blurring at the bottom of the image encourage the audience to remain suspended in their judgment of the “real” George Bush. The accompanying stories worked similarly,

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

seeming to suspend final judgment on the real George Bush by oscillating between characterizing him success and failure with stories titled “What if We Do Nothing” (commentary on his foreign policy), “A Case of Doing Nothing” (focused on his domestic policy), and “Determined to Do What is Right.”²⁸⁵ The article sub-headings reinforced this view of Bush, encouraging readers to “Read His Hips: Is this Any Way to Lead a Nation?” and calling his “pandering to the Right,” “A Schizophrenic Straitjacket.”²⁸⁶ The cover image, read within the larger context of the full issue, provided a visual representation of the public’s inability to reconcile Bush’s disjunctive performances as an orthodox innovator.

The two-faced image of Bush also invited the audience to see Bush as a simulacrum of Ronald Reagan. In her discussion of Ronald Reagan, Diane Rubenstein identifies the “two-headed, doubly synecdochal (dare we say schizo?) presidency,” as emblematic of the postmodern presidency.²⁸⁷ Representations of Reagan as a “truncated, disembodied figure” called attention to his status as an autonomous signifier, or a signifier with no attachment to the sign.²⁸⁸ As the orthodox innovator to Reagan’s reconstruction efforts, Bush was necessarily connected to Reagan in ways that encouraged the public to think of him as a continuation of Reagan. However, his unsuccessful performances made Bush a simulacrum of Reagan, “a pretender to the

²⁸⁵ “Men of the Year: The Two George Bushes.” *Time*, January 21, 1991.

²⁸⁶ *Time*, January 7, 1991, p. 30.

²⁸⁷ Rubenstein, Diane. *This is Not a President*.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

throne” and the two-faced image a visual rhetorical means of “distinguishing the true from the false claimant.”²⁸⁹ Bush as simulacrum thus became

...not simply a false copy but that which calls into question the very notion of the copy and the model...Copies, as “second hand possessors, authorized by resemblance,” are in some respects well-grounded claimants. On the other hand, simulacra imply the false claimant, built around a dissimilitude; its dissimilitude is interiorized.²⁹⁰

While Bush was initially a “well-grounded claimant” to the Reagan legacy, his performance as orthodox innovator, visually represented on the cover of *Time*, showed his transition from the role of “faithful son” to “false claimant;” his performance under the auspices of the Reagan legacy evinced his divergence from existing regime commitments.

While the two-faced image of Bush dramatized his disjunctive orthodox innovation, his final cover image on *Time* closed the question of whether Bush was fit to lead. Published shortly after the 1992 Republican National Convention, the August 24, 1992 image, entitled “The fight of his life,” was accompanied by a series of articles that seemed to portray Bush’s defeat as a foregone conclusion. Read within its larger rhetorical context, I argue that the image served to visually confirm of Bush’s futile struggles not just to win the presidency, but within his own party. As such, the image provides us with an example of the visual rhetoric of failed orthodox innovation.

The 1992 Republican National Convention occurred at a difficult political moment, in which the core tenets of the Neoliberal Regime were open for negotiation. Although Ross Perot had dropped out of the race, the Democratic National Convention

²⁸⁹ Rubenstein, *This is Not a President*, 43.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

had been highly successful and the Bush/Quayle team polled significantly behind Clinton and Gore, raising Republican anxieties about the election's outcome to a fever pitch. Bush had faced significant challenges from Republican challenger Pat Buchanan during the primaries and come under significant criticism within the Republican Party. In an effort to rally the base, the Republican National Convention program of speakers appealed primarily to the Christian Right, Pat Buchanan, whose famous "Culture War" speech garnered significant attention for its elevation of moral, rather than economic, issues. In the speech, Buchanan warned that a vote for Clinton was a vote for "abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious school, women in combat units," which he argued was "not the kind of change we can abide in a nation that we still call God's country."²⁹¹ The speech represented the controlling narrative of the culture war that marked the Republican National Convention: one in which the purported "Judeo-Christian" values of the nation, represented by the Republican Party, were pitted against the "false moderates" of the Democratic Party, which included "radical feminists, environmental extremists, and militant homosexuals" who could be "dismissed on moral ground."²⁹² These extremist messages were legitimated by the leading voices of the Neoliberal Regime: Ronald Reagan and George Bush. While their speeches did not echo the vitriolic tone of

²⁹¹ Buchanan, Patrick J. "Address to the Republican National Convention." August 17, 1992. Houston, TX. <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/>

²⁹² Miller, Eric C. "Patrick Joseph Buchanan, 'Culture War Speech: Address to the Republican National Convention' (17 August 1992)." *Voices of Democracy*, 7 (2012): 47-59.

Buchanan's, each of their speeches tapped into the idea of the Republicans versus the "liberals" of the Democratic Party, tacitly reinforcing the idea of the culture war.

Having allowed Buchanan to dominate the Republican National Convention with his moralizing rhetoric of "culture wars," Bush became embroiled in two wars of his own: the first was a fight to control the rhetoric of the Neoliberal regime from within his party. Buchanan had harnessed the power of civil religious exceptionalism, using the Judeo-Christian values implied within civil religion to argue for a nation united under a rhetoric of family values; this rhetorical frame explicitly excluded anyone who identified as a "liberal" of any kind and directly undercut Bush's earlier efforts to unite the nation by virtue of its diversity. Indeed, Buchanan's moralizing challenged Bush's shift from the civil religious priest to the civil religious pastor, as Buchanan engaged in the kind of fire and brimstone sermonizing that made totalizing claims rather than leading through personal example, which Bush had advocated throughout his presidency. Buchanan's use of civil religious exceptionalism took up the earlier "us versus them" trope from Reagan's Cold War rhetoric and transformed the "us" to conservatives and the "them" to liberals, undermining Bush's narratives of cooperation and interdependence. This speech thus stripped Bush of agency as civil religious pastor, calling into question his ability to lead while technically endorsing Bush as the Republican candidate. This challenge to Bush's rendition of the civil religious tenet of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy at this particular moment rendered Bush unable to challenge Buchanan. Instead, he accepted Buchanan's rendition and focused his own speech on foreign policy and the economy.

Bush's choice to focus on foreign policy and the economy in his acceptance speech brings into focus the second battle he faced: the battle for the presidency. Throughout the electoral cycle, Clinton had criticized Bush's handling of the economy and focus on foreign policy, as evidenced in his defensive stance on each issue throughout his campaign. In a number of speeches, Bush addressed Clinton's economic and foreign policy critiques, to the point that his stump speeches became marked by defensiveness, as discussed previously.²⁹³

The struggles Bush faced during the election were visually represented on the August 24, 1992 cover image of *Time*. Titled "The Fight of His Life," the accompanying cover story detailed the fractious state of Republican politics and Bush's choice to bring former Reagan chief of staff Jim Baker onto the campaign.²⁹⁴ In concert with the cover story, the issue included an interview with Bush and an accompanying piece of analysis, in which reporter Michael Kramer described the President as "Bushed, in content if not in tone," and evincing "too little defense and only a halfhearted offense."²⁹⁵ Bush's leadership was further depicted as incapable of uniting the Republicans, Garrett Housont's "Rot on the Right" article asserting that at the convention, "GOP conservatives win a rhetorical victory, but deprived of Reagan's leadership and the Soviet enemy, their fractious movement is in disarray. Some look beyond Bush for a

²⁹³ See "Remarks to Liberty Mutual Insurance Employees in Dover" and "Acceptance Speech at the Republican National Convention," for example.

²⁹⁴ Goodgame, Dan. "The Fight of His Life." *Time*, August 24, 1992, 19-20.

²⁹⁵ Kramer, Michael. "Reading Between the Lines." *Time*, August 24, 1992. 25.

new champion.”²⁹⁶ The issue as a whole thus portrayed Bush as incapable of leadership, failing to live up to the Reagan expectations.

Within this broad rhetorical context, the image of Bush on the cover of *Time* serves, once again, as a condensed visual representation of the critiques levied against Bush. Rather than two-faced or untrustworthy, at this point (nearly a year later), Bush is visually constituted as sapped of strength and incapable of providing a “unifying cause and an external enemy big enough to outweigh its internal division.”²⁹⁷ The image’s composition visually validated the critiques of Bush: although the headline posits Bush as engaged in a “fight,” he is pictured seated with his hands folded, looking calmly into the camera (see Figure 6). This posture is not what one would expect of an individual engaged in a fight. Rather, in the context of the headline and articles, Bush seems resigned and unwilling to defend himself. An additional subheading, “George Bush on His Presidency,” reads more like a postmortem on his presidency than insight into his plan to win a second term.

²⁹⁶ Houston, Garrett. “Rot on the Right.” *Time*, August 24, 1992. 28.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

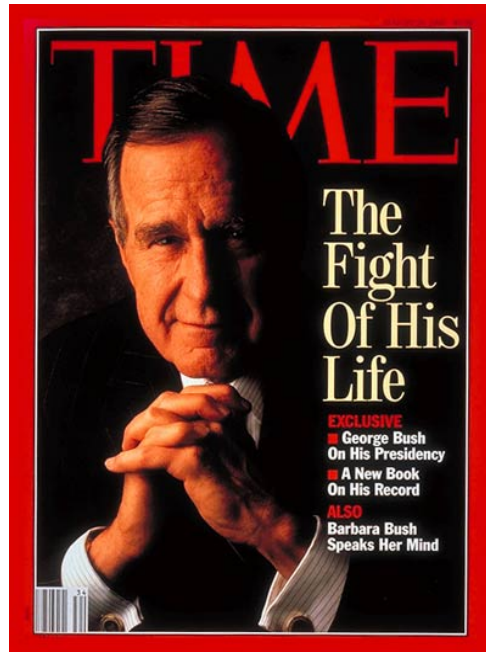


Figure 6. *Time Magazine*. August 24, 1992.

In addition to Bush's posture, the lighting of the photo also seems to visually confirm the end of his presidency. Well-lit on the left hand side of the photo, the right side of his face is almost completely obscured by shadow. Where the image of the "two George Bushes" presented more than one Bush, this image fails to even present the audience with one whole George Bush. Pictured on a black background, the shadowing makes it appear as if Bush is quite literally fading into the background, providing visual rhetorical commentary on Bush's effectiveness and potential for a second term. The image thus provided readers with a forthright visual rhetorical rejection of Bush's efforts at orthodox innovation during the 1992 presidential campaign. Presented as weak and incapable of engaging in a fight, Bush was visually represented as one already defeated, a regime representative whose mishandling of *kairos* had resulted in his moment in *chronos* to end prematurely.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this chapter, although Bush was initially well-positioned to manage the constraints of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy and engage in orthodox innovation, he ultimately failed to do so. Bush's presidency was marked by a number of successes and exercises in wise governance but he ultimately failed to understand the importance of using a consistent and absolute method of casuistic stretching for each element of the narrative he attempted to shift.

Bush's economic orthodox innovation included an attempt to translate foreign policy successes in to domestic economic achievements due to open trade and the job creation open trade would spur. However, Bush's unwillingness to rhetorically manage the bipartisan budget agreement resulted in the perception that he reneged on his "no new taxes" pledge, overshadowing his efforts to link domestic economic growth to the end of the Cold War. Additionally, his attempts to introduce nuance into the economic element of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy was ultimately rejected, perhaps because nuance did not accord with the simplistic narrative style introduced by Reagan. This became increasingly obvious as Bush approached the 1992 presidential election, as he was visually constituted as first two-faced, and then feeble on the cover of *Time*, calling into question not only his judgment but also his ability to govern.

The anticommunist element of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy was more successfully managed. Having overseen much of the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union during Reagan's presidency, Bush was well-versed in making the case for working with, rather than against, the nascent Commonwealth and Russian government.

Bush's orthodox innovation of anticommunism shifted the enemy from a people to an ideology, marking the end of the Cold War in an epic narrative and linking the people of Russia and the Commonwealth to that of the American people on the eve of the American Revolution. Calling the choice of Gorbachev to resign and the Commonwealth to embrace democracy a victory of the "moral force" of American Democracy, Bush demonstrated an understanding of the *kairos* of foreign policy in this instance. The immediacy of his response, his willingness to grant agency to the former Soviet people, and his refusal to gloat were all indicators of Bush's reasoned skepticism and hopefulness. However, as his presidency progressed, Bush allowed economic concerns to overshadow his foreign policy successes, muddling the narrative he had so carefully constructed which linked the two together as mutually reinforcing.

Bush's approach to civil religion was influenced by the end of the Cold War, providing Bush with a clear obligation for casuistic stretching. Without the *topos* of godless communists to draw from, Bush needed to perform orthodox innovation in a manner that would effectively respond to the end of the Cold War and existing domestic issues. He accomplished this by shifting his authority from that of civil religious priest to pastor, relying more on his personal example to lead the people into a spirit of community and volunteerism. Civil religion of the community-focused, pastoral type was thus tied to Bush's domestic "thousand points of light" plans for volunteerism and celebrated the diversity of the American community. While Bush continued to invoke the civil religious obligation to spread democracy, he did so without referencing the sacred covenant, making it difficult to justify continued foreign intervention.

Unfortunately, Bush's choice to embody the civil religious pastor did not resonate with the party and was directly contradicted by Pat Buchanan's performance during the 1992 Republican National Convention. Following this breakdown of his civil religious orthodox innovation, Bush was visually constituted as weak and ineffective on the cover of *Time*: a commentary not only on his performance as president but also his role as civil religious pastor.

There was nothing orthodox about Bush's treatment of rugged individualism. Throughout his presidency, Bush worked to undermine this tenet of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, advocating global interdependence, political bipartisanship, and community as responsible for the success of the individual. Given that the Cold War had ended and the initial motivation for the rugged individual trope had disappeared (at least on an international level), this was an astute rhetorical move and demonstrated a sharp assessment of the *kairos* of the situation. However, Bush's renegotiation of rugged individualism became problematic when it contradicted the Neoliberal economic ideology (which called for more competition and less government intervention) and seemed to call for a return to Liberal government ideology. Ultimately, Bush's handling of this constitutive legacy failed as well: by the time the 1992 Republican National Convention occurred, he was attempting to placate the party by enumerating the praises of supply-side economics and increased competition.

Bush's example provides us with an interesting example of orthodox innovation. As discussed throughout the chapter, part of the challenge of orthodox innovation is to maintain the perception of faithfulness to the established order while making that order

responsive to changing domestic and international circumstances. Bush certainly worked to make the elements of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy responsive to exigencies as they arose; however, he did not consistently do so in a manner that evinced his commitment to the established political orthodoxy. Most significantly, Bush failed to understand that *kairos* is not just about doing the right thing at the right moment, but also a matter of justifying the right thing at the right moment to the citizens you would have trust your judgment and authorize your actions.

While his decision to engage in a bipartisan budget deal was perhaps ill-advised given the political climate of the Republican Party, it was not necessarily an impossible goal. Bush's major gaffe here was not one of governance but one of communication. As with the other elements of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, Bush did not manage the budget deal with attention to *kairos* from the perspective of the people. Orthodox innovators thus face the task not only of performing orthodox innovation in terms of governance, but also in terms of consistent rhetorical performance. In this manner, the orthodox innovator can introduce "new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles," accomplishing casuistic stretching.²⁹⁸ This requires attending to "complex details, the contingencies and vagaries of human experience. Casuistry demands that we examine the data and interpretations that surround a given case, that we work through appearances in order to find those that are most reliable."²⁹⁹ While Bush certainly understood the nuances of each case in which he attempted orthodox

²⁹⁸ Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History* (3rd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press (1984) 229.

²⁹⁹ Miller, R.B. *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1996), 222.

innovation, he failed to heed Burke's warning: "The process of casuistic stretching must itself be subjected continually to *conscious* attention."³⁰⁰ For Bush as orthodox innovator and casuistic stretcher of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, such conscious attention did not occur and the process of "working through appearances" from a rhetorical standpoint was practically abandoned in favor of attending to the details of governance. Orthodox innovators would thus do well to attend to Bush's example and recognize that this process requires careful attention to casuistic stretching, lest the orthodox innovator, like Bush, "stretch" too far and open the field for alternative renditions of the regime's core commitments.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 232.

CHAPTER IV

BILL CLINTON, ROSS PEROT, AND THE RHETORIC OF REGIME PREEMPTION

During the 1992 presidential election, President George H.W. Bush had to deal with not one but two major contenders for the presidency: Democratic candidate William Jefferson Clinton and Independent candidate H. Ross Perot. Both Clinton and Perot faced an incumbent who, at the time of the election, was widely regarded as a failure in forwarding the core commitments of the Neoliberal legacy. In response, they employed different rhetorical strategies to repudiate Bush as a candidate at the same time that they engaged the logics of the Neoliberal constitutive legacies. Skowronek calls this practice preemptive leadership, “an unabashedly mongrel vision, an aggressive critique of the prevailing political categories and a bold bid to mix them up.”³⁰¹ As I argue in this chapter, each candidate offered previews forms of preemptive leadership. Clinton engaged in a rhetoric of preemption by repudiating Bush as a representative of the Neoliberal regime while advocating parts of the Neoliberal regime and discarding others. Perot, on the other hand, engaged in a form of preemptive rhetoric that relied primarily on repudiating supply side economics and embracing the aesthetic resources of Reagan. Although only one candidate came out as the eventual winner (Clinton), understanding how the Neoliberal Regime’s challengers negotiated its constraints provides insight into how a regime maintains dominance in the absence of a successful affiliated leader and,

³⁰¹ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 106.

perhaps more importantly, how would-be preemptive leaders perform articulation and repudiation concurrently.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, I establish the rhetorical characteristics of preemptive leadership in political campaign rhetoric; second, I set the historical context for each candidate's entry into the 1992 presidential election and analyze how the candidates strategically negotiated the core elements of the Neoliberal constitutive legacies. My analysis draws from each campaign's key texts. For Clinton, this includes his 1992 acceptance speech and "Man from Hope" video at the Democratic National Convention, representative stump speeches, and presidential debate performances. For Perot, this includes his video infomercials, one-minute political advertisements, presidential debate performances, and stump speeches. Following this, I examine the candidates' respective images on the cover of *Time* magazine during the election cycle to assist in determining how the public received each candidate's negotiation of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy.

Preemptive Leadership in Political Campaigns

Within political time, the potential for preemptive leadership occurs when the legitimacy of the prevailing regime is questioned, but not enough to shift political time into a new era. This kind of leadership, according to Skowronek, is "more preemptive than reconstructive," and affords individuals more "room to maneuver around received commitments" because "it is not designed to establish, uphold, or salvage any political orthodoxy."³⁰² Preemptive leadership takes advantage of existing schisms within the

³⁰² *Ibid.*

dominant coalition and appropriates “the regime’s most attractive positions and leaves its defenders holding only the most extreme ones.”³⁰³ Skowronek points to Clinton as an example of preemptive leadership, as he offered a “third way” that acknowledged the fractured state of Democratic Party and renegotiated its commitments in fashion that both acknowledged and made use of the changes to established government implemented during Reagan’s presidency. Bringing a rhetorical sensibility to the discussion of preemptive leadership, we might consider how would-be preemptive leaders use the affiliated regime as an inventional resource. Or, in other words, we might ask, how do preemptive candidates engage with the affiliated regime’s reconstruction efforts and craft a message that is responsive to the exigencies that both challenge and affirm the dominant regime?

One way to understand this would be through narrative. As Skowronek has argued, political time has a “narrative structure” that presidents must manage.³⁰⁴ Each new president (or as I have argued, presidential candidate) must situate their bid for leadership in relation to the work of their predecessors. It therefore stands to reason that political candidates must offer the public samples of their leadership that demonstrate an ability to engage with these narrative structures in a manner that is resonant with the existing narrative of the dominant regime. While heroic narratives are available to reconstructive presidents, who intervene in a disastrous situation to save the nation from a crumbling regime, would-be preemptive leaders have no such rhetorical latitude. Instead, they must capitalize on existing cracks within the regime, finding ways to

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 107.

³⁰⁴ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 18.

renegotiate the narrative and adjust the constitutive legacies to fit this narrative. Within the Neoliberal regime, narrative played a major role in how the public understood the key elements of the regime—anticommunism, monetarist economic ideology, civil religion, and rugged individualism—fit together to tell an epic story in which Reagan’s supply side economics saved the United States from encroaching communism, made its people truly free, and became the United States’ sacred charge to model and promote through rugged individualist policies.

While Skowronek’s explanation of preemptive leadership provides a beginning point to understand its characteristics, more work needs to be done to unpack how preemptive leadership operates in the context of a presidential election. Skowronek’s work assumes the exercise of leadership by an elected leader and thus fails to account for how the struggle for power is negotiated by presidential candidates. While we know that preemptive leadership is a “mongrel vision” that mixes up “the prevailing political categories,” the struggle over competing preemptive leaders has yet to be explored. The 1992 presidential election is especially suited for this kind of close examination because it is an election where there was not one, but two, potential preemptive leaders vying to control the public’s perception of a “third way.” While Clinton had the political legitimacy of the Democratic Party behind him, Perot’s calls for an anti-establishment approach to politics also proved to be a persuasive alternative. Both of these candidates purported to understand the situation; both of them offered alternatives to the Neoliberal regime that drew from its core commitments, including its economic ideology, anti-communism, rugged individualism, and civil religious exceptionalism. In addition,

Clinton and Perot took advantage of George H.W. Bush's unwillingness to perform as a willing successor to the Neoliberal regime, performing aspects of the Reagan style and heightening the disconnect between themselves and Bush. Securing a bid for preemptive leadership is thus a careful balancing act that requires the preemptive candidate to split the difference between the dominant regime's commitments in terms of ideology and policy, while also harnessing powerful elements of a popular affiliated leader's style via rhetorical performance.

Clinton's Democratic Preemption in 1992

As a preemptive candidate during the 1992 election, Bill Clinton needed to provide voters with an option that acknowledged the impotence of the Liberal tradition and critiqued enough of the Neoliberal regime to legitimate his bid for leadership. He accomplished this by engaging with structural changes taking place in the Democratic Party and using a highly personal, sentimental style. In order to understand how Clinton was able to offer this "third way" in a manner that was acceptable to establishment Democrats, it is necessary to review the coalitional changes that occurred in the Democratic Party during the 1980s.

Following their defeat to Reagan in 1980, the Democratic Party was forced to move on from the Liberal Regime established during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidency. To address their weakened status, a group of moderate Democrats formed the Democratic Leadership Committee (DLC). The goal of the DLC was to overcome the liberal fundamentalism that had caused the Democratic Party to lose the support of white, middle class voters during the 1980 election. Formed in 1985, DLC leaders aimed

“to move the national Democratic Party, in both perception and substance, toward the center of the political spectrum in order to break the Republican hold on the White House.”³⁰⁵ The DLC was largely successful in its goal, attracting a number of prominent Democrats and developing a more centrist goal for the Democratic Party.

These goals can be directly linked to end of the liberal regime and the need to articulate a new understanding of politics in the wake of Reagan’s reconstruction efforts. According to Al From, the architect of the New Democrats, the party was slow to rebuild in the wake of its defeat. As late as 1984, “special interest politics defined the Democratic Party,” dividing it into a number of caucuses lacking a unified voice.³⁰⁶ In terms of political time, the Democratic Party remained tied to the old liberal regime in a state enervation and unable to rebuild in response to the constitutive legacy tradition established by the Neoliberal Regime. From’s DLC was the first effort to shake off the old baggage of the old liberal regime and move toward the center, offering a version of Democratic politics that would appeal to a country that had soundly rejected Democrats in both the 1980 and 1984 elections by some of the widest margins in history.³⁰⁷ In order to overcome their fractured status, the DLC functioned first as a “forum for elected

³⁰⁵ Hale, 1995. “The making of the New Democrats,” p. 208.

³⁰⁶ From, Al, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13.

³⁰⁷ During the 1980 election, Reagan defeated President Jimmy Carter with 90% of the electoral vote; in 1984, he handily won the election against Walter Mondale, taking nearly 98% of the electoral vote. See “The Election of 1980” and “The Election of 1984,” *The American Presidency Project*, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1980> and
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1984>, respectively.

officials interested in discussing party position policy and in creating an impression in the public mind of a temperamentally moderate party.”³⁰⁸

Despite the DLC’s work to recruit members and appeal to a larger base of voters, the Democrats lost the 1984 and 1988 elections to Ronald Reagan and George Bush, respectively. According to DLC insider Al From, this was mainly due to the DLC’s inability to advocate a candidate from within their ranks that represented the vision of the New Democrat, falling prey to the liberal caricature of Democrats created by Reagan and extended by Bush, appealing to existing tropes in the public mind regarding the old liberal regime.³⁰⁹ As a result, the core membership of the DLC became more focused on developing a policy message in which they characterized the Democratic Party as “progressive” rather than “liberal,” functionally adopting a core position of the Neoliberal regime by calling for an overhaul of welfare, a decrease in bureaucracy, and extensive investment in education and job training for welfare recipients. Additionally, the new DLC platform called for progressivity in the tax code, supported increased public investment to make the economy more productive, advocated a guaranteed working wage, and favored national health care.³¹⁰

Clinton first became associated with the DLC in the mid-eighties, although he did not take on a leadership role until 1990, when he became the first outside-Washington chair of the DLC. In this capacity, Clinton became “the point man for the founding of nearly two dozen state DLC chapters, traveling to the states for the initial

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 216.

³⁰⁹ From, Alvin, as quoted in Hale, John F., “The making of the New Democrats,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 110, no. 2 (1995), 207-232.

³¹⁰ Hale, 1995 “The making of the New Democrats.”

media blitz and networking with DLC supporters.”³¹¹ In exchange for his hard work, Clinton was rewarded with early campaign money, campaign workers, and valuable DLC endorsements. During the DLC’s 1991 annual conference in Cleveland, Clinton gave a stirring speech that caused prominent members of the Democratic Party to take notice of Clinton as a potential presidential nominee.³¹²

At this point, the coalitional changes prompted by the DLC had begun to result in real down-ballot change. Gaining control of both chambers of Congress during Bush’s presidency, the Democrats had a new, more moderate vision and several strong potential candidates for the Democratic nomination. However, thinking Bush to be unbeatable due to his high approval ratings following Kuwait, a number of prominent Democratic moderates decided not to run. It was following this apparent thinning of the moderate field that Clinton announced his candidacy.

The only prominent moderate remaining in a field of staunch liberals, Clinton was well poised to win the Democratic nomination. The reach of the DLC extended far and Clinton was its main beneficiary, gaining a boost from Congressional superdelegates and benefiting from the campaign funding, staffing, and organization afforded by his work within the DLC. Although defeated in the New Hampshire primary, Clinton ultimately prevailed, with more than seventy percent of his congressional endorsements coming from DLC members.³¹³

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 221.

³¹² *Ibid*, 226.

³¹³ From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*.

Despite controversy due to reports of infidelity and draft dodging, Clinton was able to secure the Democratic nomination, handily winning with just over seventy-eight percent of the total delegate votes.³¹⁴ Capitalizing on his success in the primaries, which he largely owed to the support and vision of the DLC, Clinton adopted key portions of the DLC's "New Choice" platform into his campaign: a platform that mixed Neoliberal ideas of restricted government with Liberal notions of equal opportunity and specific policy recommendations such as health care reform. Clinton's platform, entitled "A new covenant with the American people," incorporated thirty-seven specific agenda items from the New Choice draft, and no part of Clinton's official platform disagreed with that of the DLC. By the time the primaries were over, Clinton was ready to campaign. He had a strategy in place, a large number of influential supporters, and the advantage of an electorate that was growing more and more disenchanted with George H.W. Bush and his disjointed articulation of the Neoliberal legacy. Throughout his campaign, Clinton capitalized on Bush's struggle by emphasizing his moderate stance, strategically articulating some ideas from the Neoliberal legacy, and repudiating others. In so doing, Clinton was able to cast Bush as both an unfit representative of the Neoliberal legacy *and* irrevocably joined to the Neoliberal regime's most unpopular policies. As he negotiated the key elements of the Neoliberal regime, Clinton capitalized on the untenable situation in which he had placed Bush, making himself the Neoliberal regime's now-moderate articulation.

³¹⁴ *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 50 (25 July 1992): 2220.

Economic Repudiation and Government Critique

Throughout his campaign, Clinton engaged in a rhetorical strategy that both repudiated and articulated key aspects of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition. In his bid for preemptive leadership, Clinton was able to take a “both/and” approach to negotiating the Neoliberal tradition. A central aspect of this strategy repudiated both Bush and Reagan’s handling of the economy, which Clinton used to legitimize his own economic plan. This strategy was consistent throughout Clinton’s campaign rhetoric, appearing in stump speeches, debates, and his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. Through this strategy Clinton capitalized on a core issue for voters and renegotiated the manner in which the public understood the Neoliberal regime’s synthesis of anti-government rhetoric and monetarist economic ideology.

Clinton’s critique of “trickle down economics” was the primary means by which he repudiated Bush and his articulation of the Neoliberal regime. Harnessing public sentiment regarding Bush’s handling of the economy, Clinton challenged Bush’s argument that the “fundamentals of the economy” were strong. For example, in a campaign speech at the University of Pittsburgh, Clinton criticized Bush’s economic performance by highlighting unemployment rates and income imbalance, citing the Federal Reserve Board: “1 percent of America's people at the top of the totem pole now have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, the biggest imbalance in wealth in America since the 1920's right before the Great Depression.”³¹⁵ Further dramatizing the economic situation, Clinton pointed out that, “For more than two years now, the average

³¹⁵ Ifill, G., "Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech: A Call for Responsibility." *New York Times* 26 (1992).

middle class family has worked harder for less money to pay more for health care, for housing, for education, for taxes. Poverty has exploded, especially among working people.”³¹⁶ Clinton went on to lay the blame at Bush’s feet in his Address at the Democratic National Convention, claiming that Bush had “raised taxes on the people driving pickup trucks and lowered taxes on the people riding in limousines.”³¹⁷ Bush’s handling of the economy was further critiqued as Clinton attacked Bush’s integrity, stating, “He promised to balance the budget but he hasn’t even tried. In fact, the budgets he has submitted to Congress nearly doubled the debt.”³¹⁸

Having firmly established Bush (and thus, his articulation of the Neoliberal regime) as an economic failure, Clinton continued his repudiative rhetoric by questioning Bush’s “theory” of the economy, which he conflated with monetarist economic ideology. In his stump speech, “A Call for Responsibility,” he asked:

What is President Bush’s theory about what’s good about the economy? That the government would mess up a one-car parade, and you can’t trust anybody in politics or the government. So the answer to our economic problems is to make taxes lower on corporations and high-income individuals, and get out of the way and let the market do the rest.³¹⁹

Explicitly connecting public perception of Bush’s economic failure with a textbook description of Reaganomics allowed Clinton to characterize Bush’s economic failure as a failure of Reaganomics. In other words, rather than solely criticizing Bush, Clinton

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Clinton, William J., "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York." *Available at americanpresidency.org* (1992).

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Ifill, G., "Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech: A Call for Responsibility." *New York Times* 26 (1992).

characterized Bush as a failure *because* he performed Reaganomics.³²⁰ This resulted in a chain of logic that made the current economic problems a result of Bush's economic policies, which stemmed from Reagan's economic theory. The logical conclusion of this argument was that a second Bush presidency would lead the country further into economic depression because Bush's economic scheme, an extension of Reaganomics, was unworkable.

Clinton's repudiative rhetoric also critiqued Reaganomics more specifically. Arguing that the nation was "caught in the grip of a failed economic theory" because of "Ronald Reagan and Bush," Clinton stated simply, "Trickledown economics has . . . failed."³²¹ Reiterating this perspective throughout the debates, Clinton advocated for "a departure from tax-and-spend economics" because they had failed to stimulate the economy in a manner that benefited the middle class.³²² This economic failure, for Clinton, was a symptom of a larger problem: a failure of government.

Tapping into the Neoliberal regime's critiques of big government, Clinton turned the tables on Bush as a representative of the Neoliberal regime. Arguing that the

³²⁰ I should note at this point that the historical record shows this is an untenable causal link. In fact, Bush did NOT perform Reaganomics, instead working on a bipartisan budget agreement that would reduce the deficit. A number of economic scholars have argued quite persuasively that the economic improvement that occurred during Clinton's presidency was a result of Bush's decision to raise existing taxes and reduce the deficit. See Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, p. 104.

³²¹ Clinton, William J., "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York." *Available at americanpresidency.org* (1992).

³²² Clinton, William J. "Presidential Debate in St. Louis." St. Louis, MO, October 11, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=21605>.

economic failure was a result of ineffectual and oversized government, Clinton also made Bush into a failure in representing one of the Neoliberal regime's core aspects. In his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Clinton argued:

Our people are pleading for change, but government is in the way. It has been hijacked by privileged private interests. It has forgotten who really pays the bills around here. It has taken more of your money and given you less in return. We have got to . . . give our people the kind of government they deserve, a government that works for them.³²³

By characterizing the Neoliberal regime's handling of government as the problem, Clinton adopted residual rhetoric from Bush's 1980 Republican primary campaign against Reagan. Arguing that the government had be "hijacked" by the Neoliberal regime, Clinton opened space to remake government in a manner that would "work for" the people rather than private interests.

Clinton's redefinition of government excess emphasized not only its ineffectiveness under Bush's administration, but also the intrusion of private interests into governance. During his acceptance speech at the DNC, Clinton identified four main areas in which government intrusion and excess had become problematic: jobs, education, healthcare, and family values. According to Clinton, unemployment was linked directly to the government's privileging of private interests, arguing:

Your country is the only country in the world where the employment of clerical workers in hospitals has gone up by four times the rate of the employment of nurses and doctors and other health caregivers. Because we are drowning in a sea of paper work brought on by health-insurance organizations, health-care bureaucracies and the Government itself.³²⁴

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Ifill, "Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech."

This critique of private interests subsuming the good of the American people extended throughout Clinton's campaign and provided him with a valuable means of rearticulation. By arguing that the bad economy and high unemployment rate was directly linked to government excess, Clinton was able to make Bush guilty of the same issues Reagan had argued against in the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections, reinforcing the idea that Bush was an ineffective representative of the Neoliberal legacy. Clinton was thus able to rhetorically paint Bush in a completely untenable situation, one where he was depicted as both tied to and an unfit representative of the Neoliberal Regime. This created a sort of, "damned if you do and damned if you don't" situation for Bush, who was critiqued by Clinton for his efforts to perform the Neoliberal Regime and by the Republican party when he tried to distance himself from it.

Having thoroughly discredited Bush's handling of the economy, Clinton was also able to discredit Bush's performance in other domestic areas, including healthcare and education. For example, Clinton argued in his speech at the DNC that Bush had "wasted billions and reduced our investments in education," both decreasing the quality of public education and increasing the cost of higher education.³²⁵ Although Bush had an education plan, which he advocated for during each of the presidential debates, Clinton's characterization of Bush fed into the narrative of a struggling president without a clear vision, unable to perform according to the expectations of both his party and the people. Clinton, by contrast, clearly connected education to his arguments about the economy, speaking of "investing" in education consistently throughout his speeches and debates.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

For example, in the first presidential debate, Clinton proclaimed that, “we believe in investing in education.”³²⁶ Clinton repeated this same line in each of the subsequent debates as well as his stump speeches. Emphasizing the idea of investment tied educational policy to economic policy; this made Clinton, not Bush, appear the appropriate choice for an electorate concerned with prudent management of the national budget.

The rhetoric of investment was not only used to advocate Clinton’s educational policy but also his stance on job creation and health care reform. Focusing on investment reinforced arguments regarding perceptions of the Bush administration’s incompetence. As Clinton stated in his standard stump speech:

...your Government has arrogantly refused to do what all of our competitors have done and crack down on the cost of health care and provide a basic health-care package to all. The people that don't have health insurance, do they get health care? You bet they do. But when it's too late, too expensive, they show up at an emergency room, and those of you with health insurance pay the bill.³²⁷

Clinton underscored the Bush administration’s failures by comparing U.S. performance in areas such as health care and economic growth with other nations. As stated above, Clinton criticized the Bush administration for “failing to do what all of our competitors” (in other words, other industrialized nations) “have done.” This form of critique seemed to replace the *topos* of anti-communism: Clinton portrayed the United States as waging an economic war against other countries: a war that, under Bush, it was losing.

³²⁶ Clinton, “Presidential Debate in St. Louis.”

³²⁷ Ifill, “Clinton’s Standard Campaign Speech.”

Anti-Communism

By the time the 1992 election was in full swing, the *topos* of anti-communism was no longer available to Clinton. Acknowledging this explicitly throughout his campaign, Clinton undercut Bush's foreign policy experience, stating "The Cold War is over, Soviet communism has collapsed and our values . . . have triumphed all around the world."³²⁸ No longer able to harness the potent rhetoric of the evil empire, Clinton and his team had to find a new foreign challenge to overcome. They found this challenge in economic competition. As Clinton stated in his acceptance address at the Democratic National Convention, "just as we have won the Cold War abroad, we are losing the battles for economic opportunity . . . here at home."³²⁹ Clinton was thus able to construct a new external threat, one that Bush's foreign policy expertise would not be able to overcome. The idea of an external economic threat further exacerbated Bush's untenable situation, as Clinton both tied him to Reagan's outdated view of Cold War era international economics, and made Bush out to be unfit to articulate a vision of international economic cooperation due to his disjunctive domestic economic performance.

In order to challenge Bush's ability to meet this new foreign threat, Clinton had to prove that the Bush and Reagan administrations were unable to win the battle for economic competitiveness on a worldwide stage. Clinton connected the economic hardships the American people were facing to the Neoliberal Regime's failure to manage

³²⁸ Clinton, William J. "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York."

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

the foreign economic threat. This was illustrated in his stump speech where he argued that the United States' economic challenges were due to the fact that, "We lost our economic leadership. Other nations began to do some things better than we do, and their economies started growing faster and faster as our slowed down."³³⁰ This kind of statement posed a direct challenge to Bush, whose plan for economic stimulation in the post-Cold War world relied on opening trade with the Commonwealth and creating jobs through these new trade partnerships. This also undercut Bush's notion of a "new world order," for if Bush's vision for the economy had failed, how could the United States possibly lead a worldwide economic scheme?

Further challenging Bush's articulation of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy, Clinton portrayed Bush as not only the author of the United States' economic woes, but also the economic boom experienced by other countries. For example, during the second presidential debate in Richmond, Clinton argued that the current administration provided tax cuts for foreign corporations that were not available to American corporations, advocating for "foreign corporations to pay their fair share of taxes, and investing in growing this economy."³³¹ Clinton described the tax codes and loopholes for foreign corporations as yet another example of Bush's failure to stimulate the economy. In fact, Bush's failure to close these loopholes, for Clinton, served as further proof that Bush's legislative priorities were out of order, making a second term under Bush an unwise investment for the American people.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ Clinton, William J. "Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond." Richmond, VA, October 15, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=21617>.

Thus far, Clinton had negotiated the economic element of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy by dramatizing the state of the economy, including unemployment rates, as a failure of Reaganomics (despite the fact that Bush did not abide by its tenets). Clinton continued the narrative by shifting the anti-communism element of the constitutive legacy to an issue of international economic competition, highlighting Bush's economic performance as a reason to believe that he would be an unfit leader in the post-cold war world. Having shifted to a Liberal critique of Neoliberal economic ideology, Clinton needed to create a role for the American people in his articulation of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy that would both energize voters and allow Clinton to continue his critique of Bush's economic performance. He accomplished this through a skillful negotiation of the rugged individualism trope popularized by Reagan and strikingly absent from Bush's performance of the Reagan tradition.

Rugged Individualism into Southern Bootstraps

The beginning of Clinton's "Place Called Hope" video, shown during the Democratic National Convention, set an idyllic scene. Describing Hope, Arkansas as "a wonderful little small town where it seemed like everybody knew everybody else," Clinton told the story of a town where a sense of community and interdependence made Hope the epitome of the American dream. Throughout his campaign, Clinton positioned Hope to stand in synecdochically for the rest of the nation. The Hope trope, employed through a series of short stories about himself, his parents, and his grandparents, was a means by which Clinton challenged the rugged individualism aspect of the Neoliberal regime. Repudiating the idea of rugged individualism and offering a narrative of

Southern small town community, Clinton made the American Dream something achievable *both* through hard work and accepting the help of the larger community. This articulation stood in direct opposition to the highly individualistic form of rugged individualism and economic achievement established by Reagan while also co-opting Bush's vision of community and volunteerism. In this aspect of his campaign, Clinton most obviously negotiated the narrative aspect of political time, offering a wholly different narrative in place of the mythic frontier narrative that Reagan used to depict rugged individualism. This narrative negotiation also tapped into the notions of community implicit in Bush's idea of a "kinder, gentler America" by stressing the importance of community to individual achievement.

The Hope trope prominently featured his grandparents as examples of individuals who, as part of a larger community, overcame struggles to achieve the American dream. In his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, Clinton told the story of his grandparents, individuals who had raised him "to believe the American Dream was built on rewarding hard work."³³² This theme also appeared consistently throughout the campaign in his stump speeches, debates, and advertisements. The idea that the American dream was accessible to those willing to work hard enough for it shifted the trope of rugged individualism that Reagan popularized during his term. However, Clinton replaces the image of the lone cowboy depicted on the cover of *Time* with that of a small town. This is visually represented in Clinton's "Place Called Hope" video at the

³³² Clinton, William J. "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York."

Democratic National Committee, which prominently featured both still images and video of Hope, Arkansas. Interspersed with interviews featuring his mother, brother, wife, and daughter, the video visually represents the argument that success is just not an individual, but also a community accomplishment. This narrative of the individual succeeding through the help of the community mirrored Clinton's focus on small-town America extended his arguments regarding the state of the economy and national government.

Clinton's articulation of rugged individualism, more akin to a Southern small-town narrative of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps (which included community support) allowed Clinton to tie this trope to Bush's economic failures. Clinton managed this narratively, telling a story in which the American dream had been made inaccessible to even the hardest of workers because, under Reaganomics, the rules of the game had been changed to privilege the few (individuals) rather than the many (community). During his acceptance speech at the DNC Clinton narrated the economic situation of the American people, a story in which Washington took the blame: "But we have seen the folks of Washington turn the American Dream on its head. For too long those who play by the rules and keep the faith have gotten the shaft, and those who cut corners and cut deals have been rewarded."³³³ Continuing to narrate the plight of the downtrodden American, Clinton emphasized that, "Tonight 10 million of our fellow Americans are out of work, tens of millions work harder for lower pay."³³⁴ As a result, Clinton argued in a stump speech at the University of Pennsylvania, "1 percent of America's people at

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

the top of the totem pole have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent, the biggest imbalance since the 1920's right before the Great Depression."³³⁵

By emphasizing the hard work of the middle class and temporally linking the current economic situation to the Great Depression, Clinton attempted to persuade his audience of the economy's dire state. If, indeed conditions were just as they had been before the Great Depression, then no amount of hard work would allow the majority of American people to rise up out of their economic situation. The top one percent, as Clinton argued, had broken the system that allowed the rugged individual to make something out of him or herself; Washington's prioritization of corporate interests had turned the American dream into a nightmare of endless work for little reward.

This situation represented a leadership that could only be resolved by a change in national leadership. However, unlike FDR, who had presided over the nation at another time of economic trial, Clinton did not advocate an expansion of government programs. Instead, Clinton acknowledged lingering individualism, advocating for a mixture of individual responsibility and government reforms that moved the Democratic party closer to the government ideology of Reagan than Roosevelt. For example, Clinton's stump speeches encouraged people to "know that there are some things Government can't do. No one can give us an opportunity if we will not take the responsibility of seizing it" and argued that "there are some things the Government can't do if people aren't willing to do for themselves."³³⁶ Despite acknowledging that the existing regime

³³⁵ Ifill, "Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech."

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

had destroyed the efficacy of rugged individualism, Clinton refused to abandon the trope.

Throughout the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton shifted the trope of rugged individualism to a narrative of “Southern bootstraps” that acknowledged the role of the community in individual achievement. Rather than returning to a narrative of government intervention, Clinton rhetorically moved the Democratic Party from left to center. As he stated in his acceptance speech at the DNC: “my fellow Democrats, it’s time to realize that we’ve got some changing to do, too. There is not a program in government for every problem . . .”³³⁷ This position represented “a new approach to government, a government that offers more empowerment and less entitlement . . . A government that is leaner, not meaner; a government that expands opportunity, not bureaucracy.”³³⁸ Clinton negotiated the rugged individualism trope throughout his campaign by linking it to failed economic policies and advocating for significant changes in the Democratic party’s ideology by arguing for smaller, more efficient government. Clinton therefore changed the narrative and made the hard-working communities of American middle class the protagonists in a struggle against government excess. However, in this case the government excess Clinton argued against was that enabled by the Neoliberal regime and, specifically (according to Clinton’s rendition of the situation) Bush’s economic failures. Clinton’s promises to scale back government and restore the economy involved an economic plan called the “New Covenant,” in

³³⁷ Clinton, William J. "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York."

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

which Clinton connected his policies to existing notions of civil religious and American exceptionalism.

Clinton's Civil Religious Economy

Just as Clinton negotiated the anti-communist element of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition by adapting it to economic issues, his articulation of civil religious exceptionalism also relied on the country's economic woes. Specifically, Clinton's domestic policy, "the new Covenant" focused on domestic economic revitalization that would ensure America's "special place" in the world, restoring American exceptionalism. Clinton accomplished this both by drawing from the civil religious element of Neoliberal's constitutive legacy tradition and by identifying challenges to continued foreign intervention that his policy propositions would resolve. At times Clinton's articulation of civil religion and American exceptionalism were distinct from each other but at other moments in the campaign, he wove them together similar to Reagan's performance.

The challenges posed to American exceptionalism, for Clinton, were part and parcel of the Neoliberal Regime's economic failures. These failures, Clinton argued, had resulted in challenges to the international perception of the U.S. as a special, chosen nation. Clinton used specific examples to make this argument, such as during his acceptance speech at the DNC:

Our country has fallen so far that just a few months ago the Japanese prime minister actually said he felt sympathy for the United States. Sympathy. When I am your President, the rest of the world will not look down on us in pity but up to us with respect again.³³⁹

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

If American exceptionalism can be defined as “a powerful national trope that suggests the uniqueness of the American democratic experiences, celebrates the values of American democracy, and affirms the importance of American leadership,”³⁴⁰ then Clinton’s anecdote regarding Japan certainly demonstrated that American exceptionalism was in question. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan responded to the malaise Americans felt by engaging in a rhetoric of renewal; similarly, Clinton responded to Bush by offering a plan that focused on renewal, albeit through domestic, rather than foreign policy.³⁴¹

Clinton couched his domestic plan in civil religious language: his plan, called “the New Covenant,” relied on a civil religious understanding of a sacred covenant. Rather than describing this covenant as between God and the American people, though, Clinton’s “New Covenant” described the ideal state of relations between the American people and their government. The “New Covenant” figured prominently in Clinton’s acceptance speech at the DNC: “I call this approach the New Covenant a solemn agreement between the people and their government based not simply on what each of us can take but what all of us must give to our Nation.”³⁴² Clinton’s version of the sacred covenant was similar to the civil religious covenant between the people and God, requiring that the nation do its part, or uphold its end of the covenant in order to receive

³⁴⁰ Drury, Sara. “Defining National Security as Peace Through Strength: Ronald Reagan’s Visionary Rhetoric of Renewal During the 1980 Presidential Campaign.” *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 51 (Fall 2014): 87-102.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Clinton, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention.”

blessing from a higher power. Taken from the official Democratic Party platform in 1992, Clinton's covenant required that the people continue to strive toward the American Dream as rugged individuals, upholding their end of the covenant with the national government in order to receive its economic blessings. This argument invoked the memory of modern national martyr, Democratic president John F. Kennedy, who had similarly exhorted the American people to "ask not what your country can do for you-ask what you can do for your country."³⁴³ By tacitly invoking Kennedy, Clinton inserted himself into the line of national priests, borrowing the *ethos* of the presidential office for his own presidential bid.

Clinton's form of civil religion also skillfully negotiated changing international exigencies: where Reagan's civil religion had relied heavily on the idea of the "chosen" United States versus the godless Communists, Clinton's civil religion responded to domestic concerns. This was an astute choice, given that the *topos* of anti-Communism, which was linked to foreign policy and figured prominently in the civil religious constitutive legacy tradition offered by Reagan, was no longer available. Additionally, public opinion was on Clinton's side: during the 1992 presidential election, the economy was cited as the issue most important to voters.³⁴⁴ Clinton thus harnessed both public opinion regarding domestic policies and changing international exigencies in order to offer a suitable civil religious alternative in a post-cold war world.

³⁴³ Kennedy, John F. "Inaugural Address." January 20, 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8032>.

³⁴⁴ Kellerman, Donald, Andrew Kohut, and Carol Bowman. "The People, the Press & Politics: Campaign '92, Survey VIII." *Times Mirror Center for the People & The Press*, Pew Research Center (p. 11).

In order to make space for his version of civil religion, Clinton had to discredit the sitting civil religious priest, George H.W. Bush. In order to do this, Clinton challenged Bush's view of the "vision thing," making Bush's lack of vision a reason to reject him as the leader of American civil religion. In his acceptance speech at the DNC, Clinton stated,

Of all the things that George Bush has ever said that I disagree with, perhaps the thing that bothers me most is how he decries and degrades the American tradition of seeing and seeking a better future. He mocks it as the "vision thing." But just remember what the Scripture says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."³⁴⁵

This criticism of Bush's ability to have a vision for the nation both played into popular sentiment about Bush and challenged his ability to lead the country in as its civil religious figurehead. Paired with the policy offering of the "New Covenant," Clinton was able to both repudiate Bush's leadership and capture the *ethos* of civil religion established through the Neoliberal Regime.

Additionally, Clinton used the potent combination of civil religion and American exceptionalism in order to continue his narration of a better future for the United States, rhetorically performing the vision he claimed Bush lacked. Using the Reagan strategy of narrating the people, Clinton proclaimed, "We can seize this moment, make it exciting and energizing and heroic to be American again. We can renew our faith in each other and ourselves. We can restore our sense of unity and community."³⁴⁶ By offering the "New Covenant" and situating the people as heroes within the covenantal narrative,

³⁴⁵ Clinton, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention."

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Clinton offered an inspirational message that reestablished Americans as a chosen people, tacitly reinvigorating the idea of the United States as a “city on a hill,” invoking the Reaganesque combination of American exceptionalism and civil religion. Continuing to perform the rhetoric of visionary leader, Clinton invoked biblical support for his argument: “As the Scripture says, ‘our eyes have not seen, nor our ears heard, nor minds imagined’ what we can build.”³⁴⁷ Clinton thus negotiated the *topos* of civil religion and American exceptionalism, drawing from the Neoliberal tradition and using it to demonstrate that he, not Bush, was capable of leading the nation in a post-Cold War world.

Clinton’s negotiation of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition repudiated one of its key logics: its economic ideology. Capitalizing on public sentiment regarding Bush’s handling of the economy and the effects of the recession on jobs, Clinton was able to renegotiate the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition in a manner that, following the goals of the Democratic Leadership Committee, moved the Democratic party toward the middle. This was only possible because Clinton was able to capitalize on tropes that Bush had abandoned—namely, rugged individualism and anticommunism—and renegotiate anticommunism and civil religious exceptionalism in a manner that resonated with the people’s perception regarding the state of the economy. Thus, Clinton was able to exacerbate Bush’s disjunctive performance of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition by redefining existing policy commitments in light of

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

changing exigencies and re-telling America's story in a manner consistent with the rhetorical expectations of the Neoliberal Regime.

Visually Reading Regime Preemption: Clinton on the Cover of *Time*

Having discussed how Clinton discursively negotiated the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition, we are left to wonder: how effective was he? Certainly, one indication of his success was Clinton's victory during the 1992 election. However, we might also examine how his efforts at regime preemption played out during the course of the election. Just as the cover of *Time* provided insight into public perceptions of Reagan's regime construction and Bush's regime articulation, it could also do so in terms of regime preemption. A cursory examination of the *Time* covers during the 1992 election reveals that Clinton's visual portrayal changed significantly during the course of the election. This shifting coverage provides visual rhetorical confirmation for Skowronek's theory regarding preemptive presidents on the campaign level. In addition to identifying the opportunities for preemptive presidents, Skowronek also outlines particular constraints that I argue are visually observable in mediated depictions of preemptive candidates. While these candidates pull together a "mongrel" mix of existing regime commitments, affording them a degree of rhetorical latitude, these candidates also face character attacks more consistently than other candidates because they are engaged in a bid to mix up the established order in new ways. As Skowronek explains:

Shifty Tom, Tricky Dick, Slick Willy—all of these characterizations are of a type, a political type, not a personality type. They are characteristic of the personalization of politics that occurs when a president is aggressive in

preempting established conceptions of the alternatives and trying to substitute a third way.³⁴⁸

These character attacks occur not only from those faithful to the affiliated party, but also from those within the opposition party who are resistant to change. For preemptive candidates, the battle for leadership is not only a contest over controlling the narrative of the affiliated regime, but also a battle over the terms of their own party. For Clinton, visual rhetorical confirmation of his candidacy required that he weather both character attacks and challenges from within his party. Only after he had survived these challenges was his preemptive vision validated through visual representation on the cover of *Time*.

The cover images of Clinton during the first six months of 1992 (prior to the Democratic National Convention) visually confirm Clinton's tenuous place in the bid for preemptive control. Interestingly, Clinton was the only candidate to be featured on the cover of *Time*, perhaps providing an early signal of his potential to control the Democratic Party's preemptive message. The January 27, 1992 cover of *Time* poses the question, "Is Bill Clinton for Real?" while seeming to visually answer its own question (See Figure 7). The image of Clinton is framed as a tight close-up, which lacks retouching and makes Clinton look almost *too* real. The closeness of the image reveals lines around his eyes, bags under his eyes, and an awkward bulge of skin over his collar. The lack of retouching also extends to the coloring of the photo: Clinton's teeth appear yellowed and his skin—especially his nose—quite red. Additionally, the size and positioning of the text and image reflect the conclusion expected of individuals who read this image: that Clinton is, indeed, "for real." The tight close-up image and question are

³⁴⁸ Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, 113.

the largest items, and those first seen when looking at the image. Smaller text under the question provides the reply implicit in the image, stating, “Why both the hype and substance have made him the Democrats’ rising star.” At least initially, the cover images of Clinton signaled his authenticity.

This continued into the Democratic Primary debates, as Clinton was shown on the March 23, 1992 cover with Paul Tsongas, engaged in “A no-holds-barred debate about how to fix America’s economy” (see Figure 8). In this image, both Clinton and Paul Tsongas are seated side-by-side and posed almost identically; the only differences between them are height and facial expression. In this image, Clinton’s expression is pleasant, half-smiling, while Tsongas bears a grimmer expression. Within the context of the Democratic Primary, the expressions of the two candidates read as their respective feelings about the status of the primary results. While Clinton’s expression appears sanguine, Tsongas’s expression is somewhat bleak, perhaps indicating the meager number of contests he had won. (on March 19th, shortly before the issue was published, he withdrew).



Figure 7. *Time Magazine*. January 27, 1992.

While Clinton was portrayed as a somewhat genuine candidate and individual during the first half of the primaries, this changed drastically as the race heated up between he and California Governor Jerry Brown. The April 20, 1992 cover image is indicative of the character attacks preemptive candidates face: after successfully weathering the Gennifer Flowers scandal during January, in late March Clinton was criticized for admitting that he “briefly experimented with marijuana.”³⁴⁹ In April 1992, his favorability rating had dropped to 24% among all voters. The corresponding magazine cover visually demonstrated the theme of mistrust. The headline read “Why voters don’t trust Bill Clinton” and the attendant image used an enlarged black and white film negative to make Clinton look bizarre and otherworldly (see Figure 9). By using a

³⁴⁹ Ifill, Gwen. “Clinton Admits Experiment with Marijuana in 1960’s.” *The New York Times*, March 30, 1992. <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/30/us/the-1992-campaign-new-york-clinton-admits-experiment-with-marijuana-in-1960-s.html?pagewanted=all>

negative, the publication created an image in which the lighting was the inverse of a normal photo, with his pupils and the space between his teeth bright white, with the rest of his face grainy and dark. The inversion of lighting on the close-up of Clinton's face literally highlights his eyes and mouth, the areas one looks to for nonverbal and verbal expressions of trustworthiness. Additionally, the image is strikingly similar to the January *Time* cover that asked whether Clinton was "for real," suggesting a reconsideration of the claims made in the January cover image.

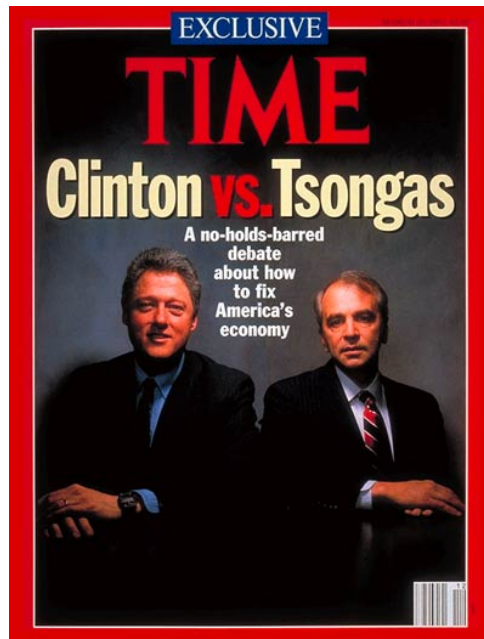


Figure 8. *Time Magazine*. March 23, 1992.

Between April and July (during which the next cover image of Clinton appeared), Clinton won the Democratic Primary and had delivered his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. Arguably, at that point Clinton had won the contest for control of the terms of his party, overcoming questions regarding his

character and authenticity, to become the Democrats' official presidential candidate. The image of Clinton on the cover of *Time* on July 20, 1992 reflects this success. Heralded as a representative of "The Democrats' New Generation," Clinton appeared on the cover image accompanied by vice presidential candidate, Al Gore (see Figure 10).

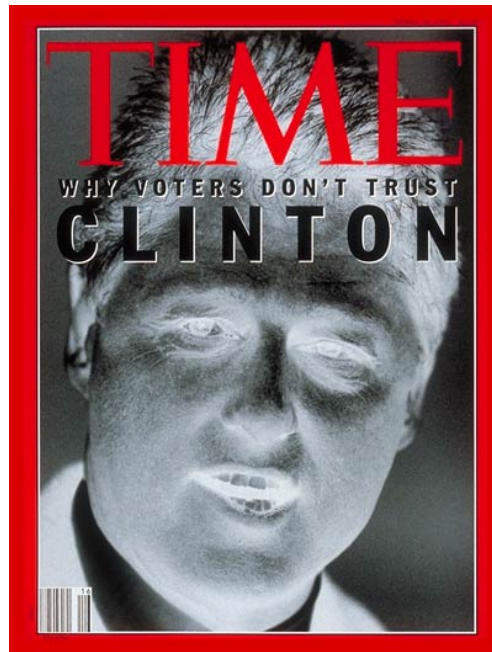


Figure 9. *Time Magazine* April 20, 1992.

The interplay between this image and the April image is striking. Here, Clinton is shown in natural color, from a flattering angle, with a pleasant expression on his face. The pose is symbolic of forward movement, as both Clinton and Gore are looking to the right, or ahead toward the future. Rather than being portrayed as shady or untrustworthy, Clinton is smiling naturally and appears happy. His eyes are wide open, connoting clarity of vision—both physical and political—and the perspectival difference between him and Gore (with Gore in the background) clearly places Clinton in a position of

authority. The yellow text on the cover is vibrant, almost sunny, adding to the positive tone of the cover. This positive representation of Clinton extended throughout the rest of the election, visually depicting Clinton's control over the preemptive rhetoric of the Neoliberal regime.³⁵⁰

Throughout the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton was engaged in a complicated political contest: as a candidate outside the established order, his task was to control the rhetoric of preemption throughout the campaign in a manner that both repudiated aspects of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition that were untenable *and* perform the aspects that remained authoritative. Clinton accomplished this by negotiating the rhetoric of preemption, in which he was able to pick and choose substantive and stylistic elements of the Neoliberal regime, which he reworked into a narrative that responded to changing domestic and international exigencies. From a policy standpoint, Clinton argued that Reaganomics had failed while maintaining the Neoliberal narrative that big government would not solve the nation's problems; responding to end of the Cold War, Clinton reworked the anticommunist narrative to respond to fears regarding international economic competitiveness. Stylistically, Clinton refused to perform the trope of rugged individualism, instead emphasizing the centrality of community to individual achievement, assuaging the concerns of the middle class. In addition Clinton wrapped his policy propositions in the mantle of civil religious exceptionalism, reworking the idea of a sacred covenant to a contract between the government and the people, calling for increased accountability. The relative resonance

³⁵⁰ See "Clinton's Long March," *Time*, November 2, 1992.

of Clinton's regime preemption was visually represented on the cover of *Time*. While Clinton faced character attacks (admittedly, many justified), he managed regime preemption successfully enough that he became the eventual nominee, leading the Democratic Party as the key representative of their "New Generation."



Figure 10. *Time Magazine*. July 20, 1992.

Ross Perot's Preemptive 1992 Campaign

The 1992 presidential election was significant in part because it included an independent candidate who posed a significant challenge to the Republican and Democratic nominees. Outside of the major parties, H. Ross Perot had an opportunity to carve a true "third way." Perot emphasized his status as a self-made businessman throughout the campaign, eschewing "business-as-usual politics" and relying instead on his experience with making tough choices and getting things done to legitimate his bid

for the presidency. It was within the framework of anti-establishment rhetoric that Perot offered his own version of preemptive campaign rhetoric.

While Skowronek has detailed the conditions of the preemptive president, his focus on sitting presidents has resulted in a regrettable lacuna regarding independent candidates who engage in preemptive politics during the campaign. Perot is an example of one such candidate. Beholden to neither the coalitional constraints of the Democratic Party nor those of the Neoliberal regime, Perot operated in a liminal space within political time: both advantaged and disadvantaged by his distance from political parties. His anti-establishment stance meant that Perot could critique the government with great credibility: as someone outside of politics-as-usual, Perot was not culpable for its ills, nor did he run the risk of looking inauthentic or hypocritical. However, Perot was also constrained by his position, as it was possible for those within the system to criticize his lack of government experience, especially with regard to foreign policy. Throughout the campaign, Perot offered a rhetoric of preemption that directly competed with Clinton's: both articulated and repudiated aspects of the Neoliberal regime in different ways. However, Perot's stylistic choices differed greatly: where Clinton offered sentimental anecdotes from small-town America to support his preemptive rhetoric, Perot focused on policy and concrete examples instead, choosing to rely primarily on plain speaking, common sense, and the numbers to legitimate his presidential bid.

Perot had a well-established record of working outside established systems when they kept him from achieving his goals. Having begun his post-Navy career at IBM, Perot quickly became frustrated with bureaucracy and restrictive rules. He left IBM and

founded Electronic Data Systems (EDS), a full-service computer operation that provided data processing operations to large companies in the nascent age of computer processing. As a part-time employee for Blue Cross, Perot had a front-row seat to the flood of claims that resulted from Medicare and Medicaid. Realizing that the insurance companies would be overloaded by claims, Perot acted quickly and gained a contract to handle all Texas Blue Cross claims, later gaining contracts from other states as well. Ultimately, Perot's foresight paid off. By the time EDS was seven years old, the company was worth \$200 per share, making Perot worth roughly two billion dollars.

In 1969, Perot became actively involved in POW and MIA issues during the Vietnam War. He founded an organization called United We Stand, whose goal was to raise awareness about Nixon's Vietnam policies and the plight of POWs. Perot also actively supported the troops in Vietnam, attempting to bring food and supplies to the POWs. However, he was repeatedly denied access and eventually made an assassination target by the North Vietnamese because of his covert MIA searches.³⁵¹ A man of action, Perot was also involved in a successful covert rescue operation to free two of his EDS employees from an Iranian prison.

Given his wide-ranging experience and success in a number of venues, Perot was appointed by Governor William Clements to chair a committee on the problem of illegal drugs in Texas. Spending more than a million dollars of his own money to study the issue, Perot and his team proposed a series of bills designed to make it harder for illegal drug sales to take place in Texas. The legislature passed all of the bills with minor

³⁵¹ Broussard, *A Champion for the Disaffected*.

changes, and Perot's success was noticed by the next governor of Texas, Mark White, who appointed Perot to a state committee on education.

By 1992, Perot had become a political insider in Texas and many questioned whether he would run for the presidency. At first denying any inclination to run, Perot appeared on Larry King and stated that if he could get on the ballot in all fifty states, he would run. The grassroots efforts of Perot's supporters paid off, and in the course of five weeks, Perot had more than enough petition signatures in each state to be included on the ballot.³⁵²

As an outsider to both the Republican and Democratic parties, Perot faced a challenging situation. Lacking the *ethos* of a member of an established regime, Perot had to cobble together a platform that would capitalize public disaffection with Bush, appeal to the still-powerful Neoliberal legacy, and effectively challenge Democratic candidate William Jefferson Clinton. He accomplished this by engaging in what Broussard calls "corporate populism," simultaneously calling for individual responsibility and collective sacrifice to save the economy.³⁵³ Using a style that focused on the nuts and bolts of political change rather than the ideologically-driven positions of Bush and Clinton, Perot's statements served as a catalyst for more pragmatic discourse on issues such as the deficit, health care, and international competitiveness. Paired with a plain-speaking style infused with Texan colloquialisms, Perot couched his extensive knowledge in a folksy style that hearkened back to elements of Reagan's narrative, but without

³⁵² Broussard, *A champion for the disaffected*.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 13.

providing the overarching story that made the facts and figures hang together in a manner that demonstrated narrative coherence.

Economic Ideology and Government Critique

Like Clinton, Perot spent a significant amount of time repudiating the economic ideology of the Neoliberal Regime. Perot relied less on broad descriptions of the economy and narratives, instead engaging in a wonkish discourse that talked about budgets, expenditures, and the deficit in concrete terms, using charts, graphs, and source citations to support his claims. As an outsider to both the old liberal regime and the established Neoliberal Regime, Perot had the rhetorical latitude to eschew discourses of ideology and instead engaged in fact-based arguments using facts and figures to talk about issues such as the economy, health care, and employment rates. In Skowronek's terms, Perot was neither preemptive candidate nor orthodox innovator; instead, he occupied a liminal space both inside (due to his knowledge) and outside (due to his experience) of politics-as-usual.

A primary concern for Perot was repudiating the Neoliberal Regime's efficacy. Appropriating the epithet Bush used to describe Reaganomics during the 1980 presidential primaries, Perot called the Neoliberal Regime's economic plan, "voodoo economics." Perot even went so far as to use a "voodoo stick" that one of his supporters sent him to point to the charts and graphs he created for his 30-minute political infomercials. Like Clinton, Perot took Reaganomics to task specifically, arguing that "Trickle down economics, didn't trickle."³⁵⁴ However, Perot's economic discourse was

³⁵⁴ Perot, "Balancing the Budget and Reforming the Government."

unique in that his critique was accompanied by detailed explanations of the current economic situation, along with an equally detailed solution that was not reducible to a clever sound bite. To the contrary, Perot directly challenged the notion of sound bite politics during the second presidential debate when moderator Carole Simpson told him to “wrap it up.” Perot responded, “Sure. But to the point, do you want to fix the problem or sound-bite it? I understand the importance of time, but see, here’s how we get to this mess we’re in.”³⁵⁵ Rather than offer a “new covenant” or argue succinctly that the “fundamentals of the economics” were sound, Perot encouraged the voters to see the complexities of the economic situation through extended arguments so that they would be better positioned to understand the solutions offered by each presidential candidate. This occurred both rhetorically during the debates and visually during his infomercials, as Perot incorporated charts and figures that illustrated his arguments regarding the economy.

Perot’s rhetorical performance during the presidential debates also clearly separated him from the other candidates. For example, during the first debate in Richmond, Perot answered the other candidates’ critique of his experience by stating, “Well, they’ve got a point. I don’t have any experience in running up a \$4 trillion debt. Don’t have any experience in gridlocked government where nobody takes responsibility for anything and everybody blames everybody else.”³⁵⁶ Rather than challenging assertions regarding his experience, Perot drew attention to the brokenness of the

³⁵⁵ Perot, H. Ross. “Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond,” October 15, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (14).

³⁵⁶ Perot, “Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond,” 3.

existing system, in which the economy—and especially the deficit—figured prominently. Perot thus engaged in a rhetoric of repudiation that refused to acknowledge the kind of experience that politicians such as Clinton and Bush had gained over their political careers. Instead, Perot argued that this kind of experience was what was wrong with the system, merging his economic critique with a critique of government excess. Unlike Clinton, Perot refused to characterize anyone as a villain, arguing instead, “They’re just in a bad system. I don’t think there are any villains, but boy, is the system rotten.”³⁵⁷

For Perot, the system had taken on a life of its own, infusing politics with polarization and ineffectiveness that could not be borne. During one of his infomercials, Perot personified the government, claiming, “You now have a government that comes at you. You’re supposed to have a government that comes from you.”³⁵⁸ Rather than naming individuals within the Congressional and Executive branches who had helped create the economic situation and its attendant governmental excess, Perot made the government a thing in and of itself that could be tamed. By cutting spending (specifically in terms of governmental staff) and imposing campaign finance reform, Perot attempted to demonstrate that he could subdue the governmental beast and put things in order. For a candidate outside the existing political structure, this was an astute move for Perot: as an individual without the built-in support a political party could afford, Perot needed to make the government, not the parties, the issue. Adhering to this strategy, Perot time and again referred to the government and polarization broadly as problems, rather than the

³⁵⁷ Perot, “Balancing the Budget and Reforming the Government.”

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

people or parties themselves. Perot thus attempted to negotiate the constraints of political time by calling attention to the broken structure rather than its figureheads. This, at least in theory, would help Perot gain support across a broad political spectrum because, as Pew Center data demonstrated, the one thing all voters could agree on was the state of the economy.³⁵⁹ In addition to negotiating the economic plank of the neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition via structural critique, Perot also leveraged the economy to renegotiate the anticommunist aspect of the neoliberal tradition.

Anti-Communism

Unlike Bush and Clinton, Perot dealt with the anticommunist aspect of the neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition by linking the United State's economic status to the potential for destabilization in the nascent Commonwealth. For Perot, economic stability was the centerpiece around which both domestic and foreign policy revolved; managing the existing anticommunist sentiment was only useful insofar as it provided the potential to prop up a stagnant U.S. economy. Throughout his speeches, advertisements, and debate performances, Perot argued for a shift away from foreign policy to domestic (and specifically economic) policy focus, advocated for action that would promote stability in the Commonwealth; this explicitly tied international democracy promotion to U.S. economic interests.

Perot's primary rhetorical move when negotiating the anticommunist aspect of the neoliberal constitutive legacy tradition was to critique the existing focus on foreign

³⁵⁹ Kellerman, Donald, Andrew Kohut, and Carol Bowman. "The People, the Press & Politics: Campaign '92, Survey VIII." *Times Mirror Center for the People & The Press*, Pew Research Center (p. 11).

policy and advocate for a shift in priorities to domestic issues. For example, during the presidential debate in Richmond, Perot argued: “See, for 45 years, we were preoccupied with the Red Army. I suggest now that our number one preoccupation is red ink in our country.”³⁶⁰ For Perot, the primary threat was at home, not abroad. Playing with the color red, symbolic of communism, Perot demonstrated the severity of the threat. By equating the state of the economy with the threat of communism during the height of the Cold War, Perot reframed the economy as a national security issue.

Perot continued this economic reframing in his political advertisements. Run during October 1992, one advertisement in particular featured white text scrolling on a red background. The text read:

While the cold war is ending, another war is now upon us. In this new war, the enemy is not the red flag of communism, but the red ink of our national debt, the red tape of our government bureaucracy. The casualties of this war are counted in lost jobs and lost dreams. As in all wars, the critical issue to winning is leadership. In this election, you can vote for a candidate who has proven his leadership by making the free enterprise system work. Creating jobs. Building businesses. A candidate who is not a business-as-usual politician, but a business leader with the know-how to expand the tax base, reduce the national debt, and restore the meaning of “Made in the U.S.A.” The issue is leadership. The candidate is Ross Perot.³⁶¹

This advertisement spelled out in detail the arguments he made enthymematically during the debates. The symbolism is clear: the red threat currently faced by the U.S. was no longer foreign, but domestic; the economic situation was more dire than any existing communist threat. The reframing of the economy in terms of war was made explicit here, with body counts equivalent to lost jobs and dreams. Further, Perot directly

³⁶⁰ Perot, “Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond,” (16).

³⁶¹ Perot, H. Ross. Campaign Advertisement. October 1992. Accessed 5/12/16
https://youtu.be/wcEMDks9_Vw

addressed the issue of leadership—commander in chief—and transformed it into a discussion of economic leadership. This is a direct contradiction of Bush’s leadership, which was understood as foreign policy, not domestic, successes. By shifting the primary exigence at hand to an economic one, Perot reframed the economy as the new Cold War. Using the symbolism of the color red to dramatize the significance of the economic threat, Perot harnessed preexisting public fear of communism and shifted them to the economy.

Another rhetorical strategy Perot used to manage the anticommunist element of the neoliberal tradition explicitly tied the U.S. economic success to the stability of the region. This allowed him to both acknowledge the potential for a continued threat (instability in the region) while continuing to prioritize the U.S. economy. During his debate in Richmond, Perot argued that “...we’ve got to put our people back to work so that we can afford to do these things we want to do in Russia.”³⁶² Perot thus prioritized domestic economic health, arguing that the United States’ role in other countries would be impossible in the status quo. However, Perot did not completely eschew U.S. involvement in the Commonwealth. In fact, he argued that the threat of communist resurgence was real:

We need to help and support Russia and the republics in every possible way to become democratic, capitalist societies and not just sit back and let those countries continue in turmoil, because they could go back worse than things used to be. And believe me, there are a lot of old boys in the KGB and the military that like it better the way it used to be.³⁶³

³⁶² Perot, “Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond,” (16).

³⁶³ Perot, H. Ross. “Presidential Debate in St. Louis,” (10).

The economic health of the United States thus presented a clear threat: without the U.S. to lead the way in promoting democracy, it was possible for the region to destabilize. The economy therefore became, for Perot, as much an international as a domestic issue. Reinforcing the severity of the issue, Perot claimed, “Germany will spend one trillion dollars over the next ten years rebuilding East Germany. We’d better get busy rebuilding our great country . . .”³⁶⁴ For the U.S. to keep the region on track, the economy had to be improved.

Civil Religion, Rugged Individualism, and the Frontier Myth

For Perot, U.S. exceptionalism was of far greater import than forwarding civil religion. While he consistently used the phrase, “God bless America,” these phrases read more as typical Southern colloquialisms coming from a Texan than any kind of religious statement. Perot did, however, present impassioned arguments in favor of preserving American exceptionalism. And like the rest of his policies, the linchpin of preserving the exceptionalism was the economy. Presenting his arguments regarding exceptionalism within the framework of the American dream, Perot presented both domestic and international visions for the future of American exceptionalism that only he, with his particular business acumen, could solve.

Perot presented a form of American exceptionalism that portrayed the American individual as individually important and capable of achievement. Within this portrayal, the true threat to the potential of the American people was the system. In fact, Perot portrayed the American people as hard-working individuals, tapping into the trope of

³⁶⁴ Perot, “Balancing the Budget and Reforming Government.”

rugged individualism and invoking the notion of individual sacrifice. When referencing the sacrifices necessary to save the economy, Perot asked:

Will it be easy? No. The sooner we start, the sooner we'll finish. But believe me: it will be a whole lot easier than a lot of the things that people did for this great country who came before us. I'll take this challenge anytime, to going west in a covered wagon. I'll take this challenge anytime, over the challenge the people had who fought the revolution and gave us our freedom. They had their lives on the line, this is just hard work. If we will do it, if we will team up, if we will make our diversity a strength instead of a weakness, if we will focus on a goal, and if we won't quit until the battle is won, we can pass on the American dream to our children because we can do anything in this great country. That is the American dream: we can be anything we want to be. Now, it's going to be tough but in the thick of it, think of all the difficult things you've done in the past in your life that you totally committed yourself to. I'll bet in retrospect these are some of your happiest memories. These are the things you sit up at night and talk about. Think how good we'll all feel when we have these problems solved. Together, we can do it; together, we can do anything.³⁶⁵

Perot recast the current moment in terms of the frontier myth, making the American people part of an epic narrative: by calling the American people to be part of a larger narrative, Perot made the rugged individualism of the frontiersmen and women central to his articulation of exceptionalism. In doing so, Perot tapped into the frontier myth, which Leroy Dorsey has argued, “offers an account of how the constant challenge of an unknown and limitless frontier turns some individuals . . . into heroes because of their epic struggles.”³⁶⁶

The sacrifice and challenges faced by the individuals on the frontier, according to Perot, were what made them exceptional and made them worthy of attaining the American dream. Similarly, the individuals in the current moment had the opportunity of

³⁶⁵ Perot, “Balancing the Budget and Reforming the Government.”

³⁶⁶ Dorsey, Leroy. “The Frontier Myth in Presidential Rhetoric: Theodore Roosevelt’s Campaign for Conservation.” *Western Journal of Communication*, 59 (Winter 1995), 2.

performing the sacrifice necessary to reinvigorate the economy, making the American Dream available to their children. Perot thus made sacrifice and the performance of rugged individualism by the American people a prerequisite for attaining exceptionalism and being worthy of the American dream. This weaving together of different tropes related to American exceptionalism rearticulated Reagan's version of rugged individualism: no longer was the president (or presidential candidate) a person who performed unilateral action as a kind of rogue cowboy. Instead, Perot made rugged individualism into a kind of individual sacrifice that must be undertaken for the greater good of the nation.

Reading Perot on the Cover of *Time*

As an independent candidate, Perot faced a slightly different set of constraints than Clinton, as his depiction on the cover of *Time* during the election cycle reveals. Rather than facing character attacks or skepticism from within his own ranks, Perot struggled for legitimation in part because he lacked a recognizable political affiliation. When visually reading the cover images of Perot from *Time* magazine in concert with his campaign rhetoric, it becomes clear that Perot was an individual without a complete package. In other words, Perot technically had many of the pieces to be perceived as a credible candidate for the nation's highest office, but he ultimately failed to weave those pieces together into a coherent whole.

The May 25, 1992 cover image of Perot begins to visually establish the image of a piecemeal candidate. Perot is shown full-face, but the right side of the image is cropped in such a manner that his cheek, ear, and the top of his head, are not visible. The

attendant headline, “Waiting for Perot,” calls to mind the play *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett in which the two main characters wait for an individual who never appears (see Figure 11). The subheading reads, “He’s leading in the polls, but can he lead the nation?” suggesting that Perot’s popularity would be insufficient proof of leadership capability. Taken together, the partial face, literary reference, and rhetorical question come together to make the argument that Perot as an electable independent candidate is a person who will never truly arrive. While his performance in the polls may have been heartening initially, this cover image suggests that Perot’s attempts at regime preemption would not be perceived as legitimate.

Questions regarding Perot’s political legitimacy continued throughout the campaign, and his visual depictions as a piecemeal were exacerbated. The June 29th special issue cover of *Time* continued to cut Perot down quite literally, showing this time only half of Perot’s face while the other half of the cover image was blacked out (see Figure 12). The headline, “Nobody’s Perfect: The Doubts About Ross Perot,” seems to indicate that Perot’s issues were simply a function of being human. However the half-black cover image seems as though Perot is hiding something, perhaps some part of himself. The issues in the special issue made clear the message of the cover image, revealing that Perot was “as much of a tyrant as he was a charismatic leader.”³⁶⁷ This challenge to Perot’s character exacerbated questions surrounding his political legitimacy. Perot left the campaign in June, only to reenter during October.

³⁶⁷ Wendt, Ronald F. and Gail T. Fairhurst. “Looking for ‘The Vision Thing’: The Rhetoric of Leadership in the 1992 Presidential Election.” In Kathleen E. Kendall (ed.) *Presidential Campaign Discourse: Strategic Communication Problems*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (1995),108.

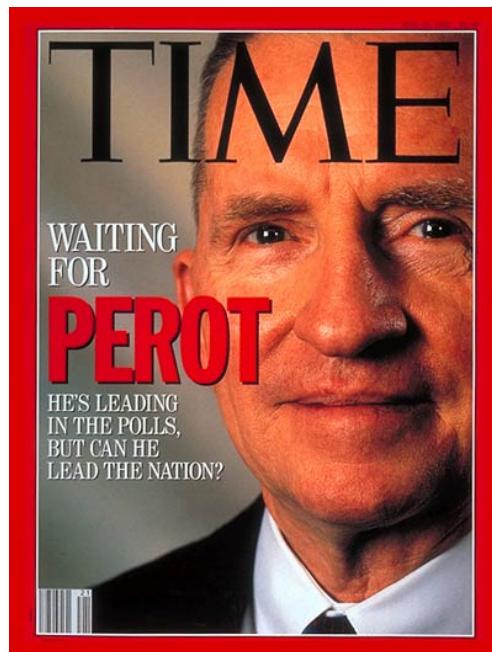


Figure 11. *Time Magazine*. May 25, 1992.

The visual depiction of Perot as a partial candidate was perhaps most clearly visually articulated on the October 12, 1992 cover of *Time*. Having reentered the presidential race, Perot is shown with only the top half of his face visible, his nose hanging over the red edge of the magazine border in cartoonish fashion (see Figure 13). The size of Perot's head in comparison to Bush and Clinton's makes the image even more comical: Perot's image was manipulated to be less than half the size of either Bush or Clinton's. Additionally, he is pictured between two candidates engaged in a vigorous verbal contest: both Bush and Clinton are portrayed with mouths open, speaking to (or at?) each other, while Perot is cropped so that he has no mouth at all. The headline, "He's back!" is in all caps and large, bold font, making the image of Perot anticlimactic by comparison. Perhaps more than any of the other covers, this image serves as a visual

public argument that rejected Perot's rhetoric of preemption. Without the coalitional legitimacy of an established political party or the rhetorical legitimacy of a coherent preemptive narrative, Perot was truly a man without a voice. His attempts to challenge Bush and Clinton from the middle were rejected by the voting public in the end, as he was defeated by Bill Clinton in the general election and came in third to Bush.

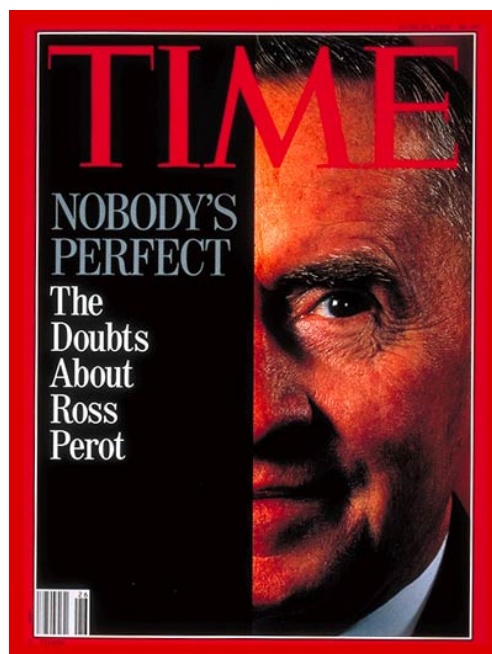


Figure 12. *Time Magazine*. June 29, 1992.



Figure 13. *Time Magazine*. October 12, 1992

Perot's attempts at preemptive rhetoric were not altogether disastrous. Despite losing the general election, he garnered 18.9% of the popular vote, the highest amount for any independent candidate without a party. His rhetoric of preemption relied mainly on facts and figures presented in a folksy, plain-spoken style. However, his campaign rhetoric lacked the narrative coherence of Clinton's, instead taking the form of a series of policy propositions focused on reducing the deficit. By failing to provide a coherent narrative for the people, Perot also failed to manage the narrative structure of political time and locate his bid for power in the context of his predecessors' work. A significant part of the Neoliberal regime's power was in its simple narrative; by running on a series of policy propositions that did not meaningfully interact with the constitutive legacies of the Neoliberal regime, Perot's preemptive rhetoric was indeed a "mongrel mix," albeit one without a clear recipe. Specifically, Perot's rhetorical preemption challenged the

ideology of “trickle-down” economics, characterizing it as “voodoo economics” on the ideological level and a problem of government excess on the practical level. He negotiated the anticommunist trope similarly to Clinton, making economic competitiveness a prime issue and using Cold War imagery to make his case. Finally, Perot avoided civil religion altogether, instead relying on the power of American exceptionalism to make the case for his domestic policies. While each of these made sense on their own, these ideas failed to resonate with each other and form an understandable narrative that would legitimize Perot as a potential president.

Conclusions

The 1992 presidential campaign was primarily a competition among rhetorics of preemption. As Skowronek states, legitimation issues within the presidency continue to “drive American politics toward flashpoint crises of legitimacy before wrenching it in a new direction.”³⁶⁸ Although Neoliberal regime was still in power, its figurehead (Bush) was called into question due to economic legitimacy issues. Without a strong leader to continue the process of regime articulation, the possibility for rhetorical redefinition was opened up to the two preemptive candidates. These challengers to the presidency—Clinton and Perot—took different paths to renegotiating the rhetoric of the Neoliberal regime in a manner that would repudiate Bush and benefit them.

Clinton’s preemptive rhetoric was indeed a “mongrel mix” of political ideology as he moved Democratic Party to the right in an effort to appeal to voters loyal to Reagan’s version of the Neoliberal regime. Challenging Bush more directly, especially

³⁶⁸ Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, p. 25. 2008.

with regard to his economic performance, Clinton was able to invoke some elements of the Neoliberal constitutive legacy (such as civil religion) and shift others toward a Liberal stance which, ironically, Bush had already primed them for, such as community and volunteerism. This renegotiation strategically affirmed portions of the Neoliberal tradition while eschewing Bush as its representative.

From a visual perspective, Clinton's role in political time as a preemptive candidate was predictably represented with character issues at the forefront of his candidacy. However, as his positions gained traction, Clinton's representation on the cover of *Time* was increasingly positive, with Clinton eventually visually represented within the visual rhetorical confines of presidentiality.

Perot's preemption was of a different sort than Clinton's. As a third-party candidate, Perot lacked the institutional support enjoyed by Clinton, presenting Perot with a different sort of legitimacy issue. Reliant on facts, figures, and simple truths, Perot performed the commonsense aesthetic aspect of the Neoliberal regime but was unable to fully realize his vision for voters in the form of a coherent narrative. This was visually represented on the cover of *Time*, as Perot was consistently portrayed as an incomplete candidate, and not one to be taken seriously. This raises the question: in the current two party system, are third party candidates doomed to preemptive status? Despite being a relatively successful third party candidate, Perot's failure to reckon with the narrative structure of political time makes it impossible to determine whether a more fully realized third-party preemptive rhetoric could result in a reconstruction. After all, Skowronek states that preemptive individuals are expected to provide a "third way" and

wrench politics in a new direction. It may be, then, that preemptive rhetoric, properly employed, could provide powerful rhetorical resources for third-party candidates seeking to establish their rhetorical authority within the U.S. political system.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

During the election of 1992, incumbent George H.W. Bush faced a difficult situation: challenged from within his party by individuals such as Pat Buchanan and Newt Gingrich, and from without by Bill Clinton and Ross Perot, Bush's rhetorical authority was persistently contested. Rhetorical authority, especially as it relates to politics, requires mastery of a rhetor's inventional resources. Understanding inventional resources requires an understanding of the past as it informs the present and can provide insight into the future. Individuals who would amass rhetorical authority must therefore understand how past discourses enable and constrain rhetorical practice, finding ways to reorient past discourses to respond to the future, in what Murphy calls a "performative display of practical wisdom."³⁶⁹ This dissertation has sought to better understand how these displays of practical wisdom are constructed, circulated, and responded to as presidents and presidential candidates attempt to convince audiences of their rhetorical authority, locating their bid for authority within the context of their presidential predecessors.

As I have argued, using political time as an analytic framework to engage in thick contextualism provides a more nuanced way to understand presidential rhetoric, including Bush's predicament in 1992. By tracing the emergence, ascendancy, and maintenance of the Neoliberal regime, constructed under Ronald Reagan, it becomes

³⁶⁹ Murphy, "Inventing Authority," 75.

possible to observe how discourses circulated and were reconstituted through the course of political time. More specifically, I have argued that attention to the rhetorical interiors and exteriors of the texts that comprise a regime's core commitments, or its constitutive legacies: texts that, although unsuccessful in their immediate context, gain traction as they circulate, are rearticulated, and responded to over time. Attention to constitutive legacies helps shed light on how rhetors not only interpellate audiences, but also new relationships to and understandings of government and ideology. In this case study, the constitutive legacy of the Neoliberal regime provided inventional resources and rhetorical constraints for each of the regime's members, who each occupied their own place in political time.

The first analysis chapter sought to identify the rhetoric of regime emergence. Rhetors involved in regime emergence, as my analysis suggests, often occupy a preemptive role, offering up repudiative and reconstructive rhetorics to oppose the existing regime before any actual change can occur. In this study, Reagan was situated in the preemptive role prior to becoming a reconstructive figure. As a preemptive rhetor, Reagan provided the audience with a number of constitutive invitations that became clear when examining the rhetorical interiors of his 1964 speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater: first, he employed a repudiative rhetorical strategy by inviting his audience to see Liberalism as an approach that would hasten the spread of communism. Second, Reagan made a reconstructive rhetorical move by offering supply-side economics as an alternative to the existing Keynesian economic ideology. Third, Reagan continued his reconstructive efforts by connecting supply side economics and free markets with

freedom, and constituted the spread of free market ideology as a sacred, civil religious obligation. Finally Reagan offered a persona for the public and the nation through which governmental transformation and triumph over communism would be possible: rugged individualism. Throughout his presidential campaigns and presidency, Reagan rearticulated these themes, merging them into a consistent narrative that posited the U.S. as threatened by liberalism and government overreach, a problem that would only be solved by a shift in economic ideology, whose promotion was the sacred obligation of the United States. Attention to the rhetorical exteriors, or constitutive legacies of Reagan's 1964 address, demonstrated how Reagan continued to offer supply side economics as a panacea for the nation's ills. Finally, attention to rhetorical exteriors as the Neoliberal regime was visually constituted on the cover of *Time* revealed a visual narrative of an increasingly powerful regime. From this chapter, it became clear that the rhetorical act of constituting the regime occurred primarily through rhetorics of repudiation and construction; by the time the regime had become ascendant, its constitutive legacies were well established, as evinced on the cover of *Time*.

The second analysis chapter examined the rhetoric of articulation under George H.W. Bush. As my analysis demonstrates, Bush entered the presidency at the point that the regime had been firmly established and the narrative structure of its core commitments understood. As an articulation president, Bush was charged with making the regime's commitments responsive to changing domestic and international exigencies, such as the end of the Cold War. This rhetoric of orthodox innovation is exemplified through Burkean casuistic stretching: maintaining faithfulness to the old

while making it responsive to the new. In Bush's case, casuistic stretching was most successful with regard to anticommunism: his efforts to "stretch" the anticommunist narrative to accommodate the end of the Cold War resonated with the people and was accepted as an appropriate rendition of the Neoliberal regime's legacy. However, Bush was less successful in his economic casuistry, largely because he failed to consistently communicate his rendition to the public. In addition, his civil religious articulation, while attempting to negotiate the situation presented by the end of the Cold War, failed because it returned to Liberal regime understandings of the relationship between the government and people. Enacting the persona of civil religious pastor rather than priest, Bush lacked the rhetorical authority to reorient the past Liberal discourses to the new situation. Bush's lack of rhetorical authority also bore out in the visual rhetorical exteriors of the Neoliberal regime: displayed as two-faced and enervated, once the 1992 election approached, Bush had not only discursively defined himself out of the Neoliberal regime; the visual discourses on the cover of *Time* had done so as well.

The third analysis chapter, which examined the case study of preemptive rhetoric during the 1992 presidential election, demonstrated two different forms of preemption: one which successfully managed the narrative structure of political time, and the other which did not. Clinton's preemptive rhetoric repudiated particular aspects of the Neoliberal regime, such as its economic ideology, while embracing and rearticulating others, such as individualism. In the process of preemption, Clinton found ways to take a both/and approach, identifying with liberals and conservatives alike by offering a "mongrel mix" of policies that, situated within a coherent narrative, responded to the

nation's economic fears and imbued Clinton with the rhetorical authority Bush lacked. The visual rhetoric about Clinton on the cover of *Time* confirms Skowronek's theory regarding preemption: character attacks predominated in Clinton's coverage on *Time* until he was firmly situated as the Democratic candidate, at which point he was visually constituted in a similar fashion to Reagan during his 1980 campaign.

Like Clinton, Perot engaged in a rhetoric of preemption. Unlike Clinton, however, Perot relied on facts, figures, and anecdotes to build his rhetorical authority. Rather than engaging the existing narrative of the Neoliberal regime, Perot attempted to repudiate it on several fronts and engage in an extensive rhetorical reconstruction—a process the public simply was not ready for. While Perot did attempt to engage the aesthetic resources of the Neoliberal regime by using a Reaganesque plain-spoken style, his failure to meaningfully locate his ideas in relation to the core commitments of the Neoliberal regime, and package them in an overarching narrative, proved to be his undoing. Perot's piecemeal approach to preemptive rhetoric was visually echoed on the cover of *Time*: on each cover, Perot was only a partially depicted. Missing part of his face, manipulated to look far smaller than the other candidates, or shown with his back to the camera, Perot was visually constituted as at best, a partial candidate.

Through these case studies, I have shown that there are distinctive rhetorical moments in political time, each which have a set of rhetorical resources for establishing authority. Successful repudiative and reconstructive rhetors employ identification in order to generate appeal for their challenge to the existing regime; articulation leaders must engage in casuistic stretching; and preemptive rhetors mix repudiation and

articulation, exploiting the cracks in the dominant regime while adopting enough of its commitments to appease the regime faithful. One common thread that crossed each of these moments in political time was the importance of narrative structure: a successful bid for political authority, regardless of its location in political time, requires that the rhetor construct a believable narrative that weaves together the different elements of the regime (or its rearticulation) in a manner that makes sense within the current moment. Finding the narrative that best responds to the moment is a matter of *kairos*, for a narrative may work in one moment that would not work in another. For example, it is possible that had Bush introduced and consistently articulated his post-Cold War narrative of economic opportunity through international cooperation, he may have had less of a challenge when it came to the economy. Of course, this is speculation, but one thing Bush did not do was forward a consistent, absolute narrative of post-Cold War Neoliberalism.

Returning Bush's initial conundrum, the framework of political time helps us to understand Bush's presidency not simply as a rhetorical failure, but as an individual engaged in a persistent struggle to articulate the Neoliberal constitutive legacy during a moment when political realities contradicted many of the Neoliberal regime's core commitments. Bush's rhetorical authority was thus consistently called into question not because of his political ineptitude, but because he did not properly understand the rhetorical resources (namely, casuistic stretching) afforded him through political time.

In this dissertation, I have argued that there is a rhetoric of political time. By engaging in a constitutive rhetorical history of the emergence, ascendancy, and maintenance of the Neoliberal regime beginning with Ronald Reagan and ending during the 1992 presidential election, I have demonstrated that there are particular rhetorical resources for individuals occupying each of the roles within political time: repudiation, reconstruction, articulation, and preemption.

In addition to providing a rhetorical history of the Neoliberal regime's ascendancy and initial challenges, I have also offered political time as a more nuanced method for doing rhetorical history of presidential rhetoric. That is, by layering political time with constitutive legacies and using these theories to orient my approach to thick contextualism, I have demonstrated how political time can aid rhetorical scholars in understanding the emergence, ascendancy, and circulation of ideology. Doing so, as I have argued (following Jasinski and Mercieca), requires attention not only to textual interiors but also exteriors, including the visual rhetorical responses to presidents' and presidential candidates' negotiation of the dominant constitutive legacies.

By attending to the rise of Neoliberal ideologies through these case studies, I hope to have contributed to the history of Neoliberalism's rise in the U.S. through the vehicle of the presidency. Reagan's reconstructive presidential rhetoric, Bush's failed attempt to return to particular Liberal perspectives, and Clinton's shift to the right confirm the political time thesis: that the reconstructive president sets the course for future leaders. Moreover, my analysis has shown that understanding political time is

important not just for understanding the presidency, but also presidential campaigns, an area Skowronek has as yet neglected.

The struggle for legitimacy and rhetorical authority in U.S. presidential politics is continuous. At the time of this writing, the United States is mired in a presidency that strains the bounds of credulity, following an election where one candidate's (Hillary Clinton's) authority was consistently called into question on the basis of her truthfulness, gender, ambition, and so on. The other candidate's rhetorical authority, drawing from stock Reagan economic ideology, is pushing neoliberal regime discourse to its limits. Both candidates, it seems, are still operating under the auspices of the Neoliberal regime, struggling over whose rendition will win out. The rhetoric of political time thus has very real and immediate implications not only for those who would study presidential rhetoric, but also for those who would practice it.

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