

**CAN YOU LAUGH AT TERRORISM: HUMOR AS SOCIAL
CRITIQUE**

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

DARBY RENEE SIMEK

Submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

April 2010

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Approved by:

Research Advisor:
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ABSTRACT

Can You Laugh at Terrorism: Humor as Social Critique. (April 2010)

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Many scholars have claimed that humor is not powerful enough to bring about social change. However, this study argues that humor is a pervasive form of critique used in America, and is worthy of being examined. With the spread of media technology, the amount of influence humorous critiques have on society is increasing. It is difficult to gauge how much power these critiques have over society, but it is important nonetheless to analyze the way humor is used to critique social issues and politics. The purpose of this study was to examine the way humor was used as a method of critique following the 9/11 attacks and the ongoing War on Terror. I analyzed three multiple styles of humorous critique – video clips from The Daily Show with John Stewart, a political cartoon from artist, Daryl Cagle, the comic strip Tank McNamara, and a news article and video from mock news website, The Onion. The results of this study demonstrate how humor as a critique was utilized when there was a common enemy between the rhetor and the audience.

DEDICATION

I am dedicating this to my wonderful parents. Thanks you two for being there for me every step of the way!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to say thank you to my family for putting up with me during this whole process and listening to all that I had to talk about while writing this. I want to thank Amber and Greg especially for reading this thesis time and time again to edit it without complaining. And Professor Jones Barbour, thank you for all the time and effort you have put in to help me with this project my last two semesters of college. You have truly had an impact on my life in so many ways. Thank you for helping me to see that professors are real people too. I was always so afraid of them until I met you. You brighten my day every time I walk into your office. Thank you for being the most wonderful advisor and mentor I could have ever imagined getting to know on my journey at Texas A&M. I hope to remain close even after I graduate. Thank you again for everything. You will never know how much your help and support means to me. You have been such a blessing. God bless.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Humor is one feature of America's identity that has not been extensively researched, nor has it received much attention for the necessary role it plays in society. Specifically, the way humor functions as social and political critique has not been fully examined. The purpose of this thesis is to examine humor as critique. Although research on the efficacy of political humor on *The Daily Show* has been tested and proven to be effective in influencing audience members¹, and the resulting influence of online video viewing has been examined², some other forms of humor have only minimally been investigated.

Owen H. Lynch called for more research to be done on humor in communication fields, and outlined two ways humorous literature could be categorized, psychologically and sociologically.³ The psychological category, which is also known as the "individual level-why individuals use humor," for self motivated means is primarily what has constituted humor research thus far.⁴ The sociological category "focuses on humor's function or impact in a social setting."⁵

This thesis follows the style of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*.

Lynch argues that there has been difficulty connecting the two because of the paradoxical nature of humor, but this can easily be assuaged by “understanding humor as a dualistic function of both control and resistance.”⁶ Lynch also claims “that focusing on the communication process of humor can provide a medium” which unites the two categories and enables more communication studies to be conducted, because it “focuses on understanding humor as a communication process.”⁷ The research conducted in this thesis will attempt to answer Lynch’s call for more communication exploration of the “dialectical nature of both control and resistance”⁸ in humor.

In this thesis I argue that humor has a persuasive power over its audience and is successful in its uses to influence audience members. However, I believe that there must be a common enemy in order for one to enact a humorous political critique. In the three chapters of this thesis, I analyze multiple humorous political critiques, which demonstrate that although situations may be different, the common enemy requirement is still being met by each of the rhetors. I turn now to an examination of the literature on humor.

Following a pattern similar to Lynch’s, scholars Harriman, Kenny, and Speier have agreed that humor is linked to both power and the resistance to power.⁹ Speier also argues that humor is used to challenge and resist an existing power and others claim that humor is used to further the speaker’s own agenda to claim power.¹⁰ Harriman argued that parody is one way to keep the existing power under control.¹¹ But in order to challenge the hegemonic rule, Speier argued that humor highlights the deficiencies of a person in a position of power until he “finds himself robbed of his dignity and stripped naked, so that

he becomes a natural man no different from the lowliest of the low.”¹² Speier also explained that the recognition of the nature of relationships in humor “between the originator of a joke, the person who laughs, and the victim”¹³ are critical. He “recognize[d] further significant differences in jokes among equals, depending on the power positions which make them acceptable.”¹⁴

This claim supports the idea that challenging the dominant person in power with emotional appeals of humor may be effective because “through laughter and humor the group is united together against the target of the mockery.”¹⁵ Thus, if the joke’s originator and receiver are equal on the rung of power and below the person/force they challenge, stronger bonds will be forged between the joke’s creator and recipient. Mascha also argues that “satirical discourse was a discourse that people used to make fun of their rulers, mock them and relieve themselves from the regimes’ oppression.”¹⁶ By making this statement, Mascha is acknowledging the duality of humor’s purpose in society, as both a mental and social process or as internal and external communications.

Morris conducted a study regarding the changes in attitude of an audience after being exposed to Jon Stewart’s humor on *The Daily Show* and proposed that “humor in general has persuasive power.”¹⁷ Morris also claimed that the “political perspective” presented on the *The Daily Show* is powerful and persuasive due to Stewart’s “self effacing humor.”¹⁸ Morris provides a convincing argument for this claim, stating that “in 2004, Stewart... was cited as one of the more influential figures in the presidential election.”¹⁹ Thus, the type of

humor presented, and the manner it is presented in, could play a role in its persuasive abilities when used as a form of critique.

One form of humorous critique that has warranted the significant research of studies is the political cartoon. Medhurst and Desousa have argued “that the *general framework* for producing effective oral rhetoric is, with some modifications, applicable to the production of graphic discourse.”²⁰ Their argument claimed that the attempts of the artist to persuade are very similar to that of the oral persuader, and the “neo-classical canons of invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery help to structure the graphic artist’s persuasive efforts.”²¹ However, they claim that the “*specific techniques* used by graphic artists to invite audience response are significantly different from those of the oral persuader.”²² To corroborate this claim, Connors has argued that during elections, the political cartoon has influence over the voter’s impressions of the candidates.²³ One reason for this could be that the humor is without constraints. This is supported by Connors’ argument that “political cartoons are a ‘safe’ area to express opinions and to make accusations, as opposed to news reports, which are to be factually based and not inflammatory.”²⁴ Gombrich also argues that political cartoons have more persuasive appeal than speaking because visual representations can better trigger audience emotions.²⁵

Schmidt’s research confirmed that “humorous items command increased attention.”²⁶ And Bostdorff claims that “perspective by incongruity is the general formal strategy through which the meaning of a cartoon is apprehended... it also explains how cartoonists can alter audience perceptions of the political figures and issues represented in their cartoons.”²⁷

Bostdorff's essay also argues that perspective by incongruity combined with the "aggressive-defensive nature of humor...is what makes something funny."²⁸ Because of the increased attention political cartoons receive due to their humor and the presentation of the arguments presented, the claims of Schmidt and Bostdorff suggest that the political cartoon is worthy of serious consideration in the area of communication research.

While some scholars may argue that political cartoons are "a passing chuckle rather than a deep reflection."²⁹ Abraham suggests that they "signify complex social commentary."³⁰ Abraham reasons it is "the ability to engage in analytical communication about social events that cartoons can be said to provide discourses."³¹ However, Abraham also states that by using icons, political cartoonists are able to communicate the meaning and reality they are presenting to the audience more quickly and efficiently.³² The argument Abraham makes can also be applied to humor in general. While many may think that humor is nothing more than a passing chuckle, research suggests that humor, especially in the form of critique, has a definite persuasive power over its audience, and can be indicative of a society's needs and desires.

The purpose of this thesis is to expose the reflective nature of humor and society, specifically the way humor functions as a political critique and the reasons why it changes during times of crisis. In this thesis I expound on and model my research based upon Lynch's idea of communication as the medium between the psychological and social environments. I explore various forms of humor as a critique. With critiques taken from a multitude of primary sources such as *The Onion*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*,

comedian Jeff Dunham, a political cartoon from *MSNBC*'s Daryl Cagle and a comic strip, Tank McNamara, I illustrate the way each of these exposes a common enemy and attacks that enemy through humorous critiques. These moments in time are necessary to provide an understanding of the importance of humor as a political critique, which "can be used to expose chauvinism, to expose ineptitude, to expose oppression, and to expose pretentiousness."³³ The artifacts to be examined are also useful in proving the indicative nature of society's humor. Thus I argue that humor as critique can be used as a coping strategy following a national tragedy, but in order for it to be successful, there must be a common enemy.

In this thesis I examined a series of humorous critiques of the events of 9/11, the Bush presidency and the bureaucracies created to respond to 9/11. These critiques came from a variety of sources. Each of the sources of these critiques represents a unique perspective. Perhaps the most famous of the humorous critiques that I examined was *The Daily Show*. Many scholars have examined the efficacy of Jon Stewart's humor on *The Daily Show*. In 2008, Morris conducted a study regarding the changes in attitude of an audience after being exposed to Jon Stewart's humor on *The Daily Show* and proposed that "humor in general has persuasive power."³⁴ Morris also claimed that the "political perspective" presented on the *The Daily Show* is powerful and persuasive due to Stewart's "self-effacing humor."³⁵ Morris provides a convincing argument for this claim by stating that "in 2004, Stewart... was cited as one of the more influential figures in the presidential election."³⁶ Thus, the type of humor presented, and the manner it is presented in, plays a role in its persuasive abilities when used as a form of critique.

The Onion is another famous source of humor as critique in American culture. The fake newspaper was applauded by Achter for the role it played following the 9/11 attacks “as an example of how parodic news discourse could surmount the rhetorical chill that fell over U.S. public culture after the tragedies.”³⁷ Achter also argues that “The Onion’s post-9/11 issue sought to inform and educate U.S. citizens in light of new social issues and language restrictions cultivating a sense of mastery over the news among readers.”³⁸ The manner in which *The Onion* website responded after the 9/11 attacks, as an unbiased source of news entertainment, has led me to conclude that the website also handled reporting the same way after Hurricane Katrina.

As I mentioned previously, political cartoons have long been of interest to scholars interested in humor. I chose to focus on one website of political cartoons that has served as a clearing house of a large number of political cartoons in the United States, Daryl Cagle’s website. In 2004, when describing his cartoon site, Daryl Cagle stated, “it’s the most popular cartoon site on the Web.”³⁹ With this statement, Cagle informed readers of the amount of influence he has over the people who view political cartoons. It is important to note this because, due to his reputation, Cagle has certain standards to hold himself accountable to. These standards would have urged him to produce cartoons after Hurricane Katrina that met and surpassed standards in editorial cartooning.

Yet political cartoons are not the only way comic artists have offered humor as a critique of society. The comic strip, Tank McNamara, was created in 1974 by Jeff Millar and Bill Hinds. This comic strip’s primary focus is sports, but will occasionally address social

issues. So although this comic strip's main concentration is neither politics nor social issues, the social commentary it has provided is important to note because if it is being featured in a primarily sport dominated comic strip, it is likely that it if it addresses a societal issue, it is a noteworthy issue.

Finally, I analyzed the comedy act, Achmed the Dead Terrorist, performed by comedian and ventriloquist, Jeff Dunham. This video is featured on YouTube, and according to video ranking system, Visible Measures, is ranked at number twelve for the most watched video online as of March 23, 2010. It was at one time ranked at number four when it first appeared online.⁴⁰ The ranking this video has received proves how reflective it is of societal needs. Therefore it is an important artifact to be examined to provide insight into the way humor is used as a critique of a common enemy in political debates.

This thesis develops as follows. In Chapter II I begin my analysis of humor as critique by first exploring the humor rhetors' produced about the common enemy, terrorism. I then in Chapter III examine the use of humor around the presidency of George W. Bush. Initially humor was used to empower Bush's presidency following 9/11 because al-Qaeda was a common enemy, yet in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Bush himself became the common enemy, and thus the target of humorous critiques. In Chapter IV I investigate the humorous critique of the bureaucracy and changes to public policy that were directly influenced by the attacks on 9/11. I turn now to an analysis of the use of humor to critique terrorism.

CHAPTER II

OUR COMMON ENEMY IS THE TERRORISTS

On September 11, 2001 the United States survived the most catastrophic event since the attack on Pearl Harbor when four planes were hijacked by al-Qaeda terrorists and flown into the Pentagon, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and a field in Pennsylvania. I was only fourteen at the time of the attacks, but I can still recall the classroom I was sitting in that morning on September 11 as my teachers gathered around the class computer and attempted to make sense of what was taking place, grasping at every bit of information to tell them what was happening. My memory of these attacks is important to note because it is a good example of how much of an impact these attacks had on people nationwide. If I can still recall nine years later what I experienced as fourteen-year old living in Texas, it elucidates how extreme the presence of terror and fear was across the entire country, and felt by every American.

These terrorist attacks had a profound psychological impact on citizens of the United States of America. One way that these issues were addressed was in the construction of humor to make fun of the terrorist attackers. I argue that humorous representations of terrorism in the media were created as a coping mechanism for Americans to alleviate their fear of terrorism. The humorous critiques that were enacted took place and were successful because there was a common enemy for humorists and audience members to rally against together. In particular, these artifacts were created to strip the terrorists (the common enemy) of the power they had acquired over Americans following the attacks. The

terrorists' power and fear of future attacks consumed the American people in a variety of psychological afflictions.⁴¹ According to Pasquali, "humor is an important means of coping with terrorism."⁴² To illustrate some of the humor used following the attacks created in an effort to eliminate the terrorists' power and alleviate the fear felt in Americans I will examine three artifacts that present their audience with a humorous representation of terrorists. First I will analyze an article from a humorous mock news website, *The Onion*. Then I will examine a political cartoon created by Daryl Cagle, a cartoonist featured on the *MSNBC* news website. The last artifact I will study is a video clip of the comedy sketch performance by Jeff Dunham titled "Achmed the Dead Terrorist."

One of the most immediate ways humor was used as a coping method following 9/11 was by comedic website, *The Onion*, two weeks after the attacks on September 26, 2001. The mock news article which was released on the above date is titled, "Hijackers Surprised to Find Selves in Hell. 'We Expected Eternal Paradise for This,' Say Suicide Bombers." This article roused so many emotions it was reprinted in the *American Spectator* in November 2001. In the article, "the 19 eternally damned terrorists" find themselves in Hell and are confused as to why they are there being tortured by Ifrit, an Islamic icon similar to the mythical demon.⁴³ One of the hijackers details the confusion and gore contained throughout the article:

I was promised I would spend eternity in Paradise, being fed honeyed cakes by 67 virgins in a tree-lined garden, if only I would fly the airplane into one of the Twin Towers,' said Mohammed Atta, one of the hijackers of

American Airlines Flight 11, between attempts to vomit up the wasps, hornets, and live coals infesting his stomach. ‘But instead, I am fed the boiling feces of traitors by malicious, laughing Ifrit. Is this to be my reward for destroying the enemies of my faith?’⁴⁴

The article continues to describe the heinous sexual, physical and psychological acts performed on the terrorists by the demons in Hell. This all takes place as the bewildered terrorists try to figure out how this could have happened to them. The cacodemon, Iblis, then says, “‘Indeed, I do not know what they were expecting, but they certainly didn't seem prepared to be skewered from eye socket to bunghole and then placed on a spit so that their flesh could be roasted by the searing gale of flatus which issues forth from the haunches of Asmoday...which is strange when you consider the evil with which they ended their lives and those of so many others.’”⁴⁵

The humor in *The Onion's* article is grotesque and could even be perceived by audiences as disturbing and inappropriate. However, “terrorist attacks are designed to produce terror and panic in people,”⁴⁶ and the terrorist’s confusion over why they are in Hell after killing so many people creates an incongruity in the humor. It is “this kind of [absurd] framing [that] makes the terrorists irrational ‘others’ who are not intelligible to Western minds.”⁴⁷

This statement is one of *The Onion's* article’s intentions. I also believe that another intention of this comedic mock news article is to alleviate the fear of terrorists or terrorism Americans developed in the weeks following the attacks.

One way the article seeks to alleviate this fear of terrorism is by informing Americans that although the terrorists did not receive a punishment on Earth, there will be justice for their actions in the afterlife. An example of this is illustrated in the title as well as the first sentence of the article which states, “the hijackers who carried out the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon expressed confusion and surprise Monday to find themselves in the lowest plane of Na'ar, Islam's Hell.”⁴⁸ This introductory sentence uses humor to inform the reader of the terrorists’ just desserts.

The terrorists’ numerous punishments are explicitly described throughout the article and exemplify another way the article uses humor to assuage American’s fears of terrorists. Relentlessly in the “Hijackers” article, “the terrorists are the subjects of vicious bodily harm.”⁴⁹ One example of the torture they are forced to endure while in Hell is to be “hollowed out and used as prophylactics by thorn-cocked Gulbuth The Rampant,”⁵⁰ while a view of the Heaven they were anticipating is placed before their eyes. This form of humor is intended to alleviate the Americans’ fears of terrorism by invoking feelings of justice in audience members. The article allows readers to believe that the hijackers received the punishment they were meant to be given for their actions and that justice has been served.

Another style in which a humorous representation of terrorism in the media is presented is through the political cartoon. Daryl Cagle’s cartoon, in particular, posted on October 30, 2001, is a notable example of the way humor was used to alleviate the public’s fear of terrorists and terrorist attacks closely following September 11. In his cartoon, featured on

MSNBC's webpage, Cagle has created an image similar to the grotesque depictions given in *The Onion's* "Hijacker" article. The cartoon consists of a car that is driving head-on at the reader. The car has a license plate that reads "USA," and a serious and severe, almost dark Uncle Sam behind the steering wheel. He is clutching tightly to the wheel while three young, children with bulging eyes sit in the back repeating, "Are we there yet?"⁵¹ I believe Uncle Sam represents George W. Bush and the "USA" on the car license plate aids in the symbolization of the car as America. Uncle Sam in the driver's seat places George W. Bush in control of America. The car also symbolizes this control because it is a large piece of machinery that is keeping everyone in the car safe. The most noteworthy feature of the cartoon are the little "bugs" striking the window. These are not bugs that are hitting the windshield; they are terrorists, each carrying a gun. The terrorists who have not been squashed against the windshield are running in the opposite direction with their mouths wide open and screaming, their eyes bulging.

I believe this political cartoon was created to alleviate the fears viewers may have of terrorists and terrorism in general. This cartoon is so profound in its message, not only because it depicts the United States as an angry, driven group, but it portrays the terrorists as small nuisances which the enraged Uncle Sam (George W. Bush) will stop at nothing to destroy. This humor was created to inform Americans that America is a super power and that George W. Bush is in the seat of control. The children represent the people of America, and although they are complaining, they are being protected from the terrorists by Uncle Sam in the driver's seat and the car's windshield that they sit behind. The most significant humorous representations used in this cartoon are the little, bug-like terrorists

hitting the windshield and running from the car. The representations of these men as bugs make them seem insignificant because people rarely fear hitting a bug while driving. Also, because they are being destroyed by the symbolic American car, the perception of the terrorists by the public is that the tiny guns the terrorists carry are of no comparison to the strength and persistence of the very large American car and Uncle Sam. Cagle, through his cartoon is instructing the American public not to fear terrorists because America is stronger and more diligent than the small, pest-like terrorists. Cagle does this by portraying Uncle Sam as determined and angry. And while the children who represent the public sit in the back complaining, Uncle Sam looks straight ahead, gripping the wheel tightly, and does not falter in his attempts to stop the terrorists. In this cartoon Cagle is trying to convince his audience not to live in fear of people as inconsequential as bugs.

The final artifact I will examine is a video featured on *YouTube*. In this clip the comedian/ventriloquist, Jeff Dunham, does his comedy routine with his doll known as Achmed the Dead Terrorist. After Dunham introduces the show he brings Achmed from his box and sits him down. The audience roars with laughter when they see the doll because Achmed is a skeleton with bulging red eyes, a beard, and a Shimagh (head scarf). He stares out at the crowd and his eyes dart back and forth from one audience member to another. Achmed looks like a Halloween decoration. The skeleton even has the voice to match. When he first speaks to say “good evening... infidel,”⁵² his voice is deep and somewhat mimics that of Count Dracula’s. When asked what kind of a terrorist he is, he replies, “a terrifying terrorist.”⁵³ He then asks Dunham if he is scared, to which Dunham replies “not really, no,”⁵⁴ and in response Achmed lets out a little growl at Dunham in an

attempt to scare him, but Dunham does not flinch. The bit continues with similar jokes, and periodically, Achmed responds to the audience's laughter with a line the show is known for, "silence, I kill you."⁵⁵

Jeff Dunham created this comedy routine to help the public overcome their fear of terrorists. By portraying Achmed as a skeleton, unable to do any real harm to a person, Dunham is informing his audience of how weak and frail this "terrorist suicide bomber" is. Another way Dunham uses comedy in this routine to alleviate his audience's fear of terrorists is in the incongruities created by Achmed's outer appearance and the statements the skeletal terrorist makes. A specific example of this is when Achmed's famous phrase, "silence, I kill you"⁵⁶ is used. The audience roars with laughter every time he says this because there is no way a helpless, dead skeleton could hurt anyone. This aids in easing the audience's fears of terrorists. This quote also gets more audience laughter throughout the routine because as the show goes on Achmed's voice becomes more strained as it becomes apparent to him that he can do nothing about the threats he has made, and he becomes more agitated and angry.

During the show, another of Dunham's characters yells out of a box at Achmed, to which Achmed responds, "is that Walter? He scares the crap out of me."⁵⁷ This is an important line in the routine because Achmed's fear of another puppet that has been stored away in a box allows audience members to see that this symbolic terrorist who they fear so much is scared of a character that is not even around. This is humorous because people are usually afraid of the terrorist and not the other way around, so this joke informs people that terrorists are not fearless. The joke also helps the audience get over their fears of terrorists

by simply laughing at one (even though Achmed is a doll). According to Peschel & Peschel, laughing at fatality and disaster is a way in which people affected by a tragedy may be able to cope.⁵⁸ Therefore the audience's laughter at Achmed's grotesque appearance and realization that he is dead is just one way in which the audience is able to cope with some of the psychological wounds inflicted by the terrorist attacks.

Achmed the Dead Terrorist, Daryl Cagle's political cartoon, and *The Onion's* mock news article have multiple themes in common. Each of these artifacts involves some form of grotesque humor, such as the "terrorist bugs" hitting the car window in Cagle's cartoon. The "humorous artifacts" are used to portray terrorists as mortal and weak. By depicting the terrorists in this way, the three different depictions of the terrorists can help to alleviate the fears Americans have about terrorism. The artifacts all depict the terrorists in fear of something. In *The Onion's* "Hijacker" article, the terrorists are afraid of what is going to happen to them now that they are in Hell.

One other theme all of the comedic pieces share is the incongruity theme. The creators of the jokes were able to communicate to the audience, through humor, a weakness of the terrorists through the use of incongruity. Incongruity was used in order to strike a contrast between the intimidating images of the terrorists that the public was used to seeing, and the new mortal, defenseless terrorist that the artifacts were all illustrating.

The main theme, encompassing all of the recurring themes in these artifacts is that the humor created for the audience members is meant to be received as a way for individuals

in the audience to cope with the tragedy and their fears of terrorism through laughter. By portraying the terrorists the way each artifact did, the message the audience received was that one should not be fearful of the terrorists. By utilizing humor, the creators of the artifacts were able to convey, in a non-invasive way, the message that laughter about these images is a way to help one heal and overcome fear, especially in the case of terrorism.

CHAPTER III

OUR COMMON ENEMY IS OUR PRESIDENT

Humor, especially in the form of critique, has persuasive power over its audience. Although critics claim that humor is powerless to bring about a recognizable social change,⁵⁹ I argue that humor can either be used as a tool to give someone power, or as a means to take that power away. The criticism of George W. Bush following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina illustrates these opposing uses of humor. Why wasn't humor used to resist Bush immediately following the 9/11 attacks, when it was used ruthlessly following Hurricane Katrina? I will answer this question by introducing the idea that after a national tragedy there will be humorous critiques that are reflective of societal needs. I also argue that in order to enact a positive and empowering political critique, there must be a common enemy. Thus, the humorous critique created about George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 was intended to empower him and create respect for him as our leader because Al Qaeda was the common enemy. However, four years later following Hurricane Katrina, the lack of an external enemy initiated the resistive humor to George W. Bush.

In this chapter I analyze three humorous political critiques of George W. Bush during his presidency immediately following Hurricane Katrina. In these critiques, Bush becomes the common enemy that America is threatened by. I again look at an article in the mock newspaper *The Onion*, a political cartoon featured on Daryl Cagle's website, and an episode of *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. The time period in which all the artifacts

were produced was September 2005, immediately following Hurricane Katrina. Before I begin my analysis I want to provide some contextual information about Bush's presidency.

Bostdorff claimed that, "in times of crisis, citizens expect to gain verbal reassurance from their leaders".⁶⁰ This claim is supported by the uncertainty, "the shock of attacks on domestic soil, and the enormity of the civilian casualties"⁶¹ caused by the terrorist attacks on 9/11, which left the American public in need of assistance in making sense of the events that had just taken place. The recently elected President George W. Bush answered the Americans' call for reassurance, and "pulled off the best performance of his career, and one that will likely be considered one of the most effective examples of presidential crisis communications ever".⁶²

Bush's speeches were successful because of the messages they contained. Multiple speeches "conveyed the message that America had been attacked, but was not the victim, and would not allow the attacks to go unanswered".⁶³ Another message Bush recycled "associated the U.S. with a transcendent faith and a benevolent, universal God who watched over it".⁶⁴ A final theme Bush employed in his speeches following the 9/11 attacks, was that, "the enemy was opposed to freedom,"⁶⁵ which placed blame on another party entirely, Al Qaeda. The messages in these speeches were created to accomplish Bush's goals, which "were to portray a caring yet in-control president, and to frame the crisis so as to bolster the credibility of the administration, galvanize Congress and the nation, and mobilize international support for the U.S. response."⁶⁶ As a result of Bush's efforts, his approval rating following the attacks increased.⁶⁷ This leap in President Bush's

approval ratings was not the only positive shift that came immediately after the attacks. Almost instantaneously, political humor that had been focused on Bush prior to September 11, ceased.

While Bush's approval rating following 9/11 went up, his approval rating in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was the complete opposite of the results following the 9/11 crisis. According to CBS News, the first week of October 2005 marked the lowest approval ratings since Bush had taken office in 2001.⁶⁸ T' Hart, Brown, and Tindall argued that these approval ratings were a result of failed leadership and a lack of government response to Hurricane Katrina.⁶⁹ In the days following the hurricane, Bush's responsibilities were similar to those he had been faced with following the 9/11 attacks. However, due to the natures of the two crises, "terrorism versus natural disaster,"⁷⁰ Bush could not employ the same tactics he had in response to 9/11. Specifically, "there was no enemy perpetrator to rally against"⁷¹ when addressing the Katrina disaster. And rather than claim personal responsibility, Bush blamed the rare circumstances in which the disaster had occurred.⁷² Another notable factor that impacted the public's disdain of Bush after the hurricane was that, "the shadow of the Iraq war loomed over Katrina, with growing criticism over incompetent and negligent war leadership, and realizations that National Guard troops posted in Iraq might have been put to better use during Katrina."⁷³ According to Durham, the failure of the Bush administration to acknowledge media portrayals "as part of the construction of social reality" also contributed to Bush's decline in approval ratings.⁷⁴ These approval ratings coincide with the humor targeting Bush that was created following

the crisis. Unlike the humor that was created to empower George W. Bush after 9/11, the humor following Hurricane Katrina was resistive to his leadership.

Scholars have argued that humor is used to challenge and resist an existing power.⁷⁵ The purpose of the humor following Hurricane Katrina, which was used in the three political critiques from *The Onion*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and Cagle's political cartoon, is created as resistive to the power of leader George W. Bush. The critiques contain three interrelated, recurring themes throughout the discourses; these assert that Bush is not intellectual, he is weak, specifically in his leadership abilities, and that he is lazy. These three themes consistently influence one another throughout the discourses, and are deployed through sarcasm, irony, parody, and persona.

First I will examine a clip from *The Daily Show with John Stewart* and the strategies of parody and persona that he employs in his rhetoric. Following this I will explore the rhetorical methods of sarcasm and persona employed in the article produced by *The Onion*. Then I will analyze Daryl Cagle's approach to humorous critique in his cartoons, and his use of irony and persona.

According to Henry and Rossen-Knill "parody, involves a highly situated, intentional, and conventional speech act which re-presents the object of parody and flaunts that re-presentation in order to criticize that object in a humorous way."⁷⁶ In the clip of Jon Stewart discussing Hurricane Katrina on September 6, 2005, he employs parody to influence the audience members. He uses a metaphor that states that "Hurricane Katrina is

George Bush's Monica Lewinsky."⁷⁷ Due to the severe wounds of Clinton's actions to his credibility, Stewart is implying that Bush's failed dealings with the Hurricane Katrina disaster will end just as Clinton's did, in political ruin. Stewart's predictions are an attempt to convince audience members of Bush's inadequacies as a leader, and, although this program is intended to entertain audience members, "Jon Stewart and The Daily Show offer another element through its satire: political perspective."⁷⁸ In this case, the political perspective being offered is that Bush is not a capable leader.

Parody is also used when Jon Stewart compares the problems of Katrina to the problems Clinton faced with Monica Lewinsky. Stewart states that the only difference is that "tens of thousands of people weren't stranded in Monica Lewinsky's vagina."⁷⁹ Stewart uses this comical "re-presentation" of the metaphor between Lewinsky and Katrina in order to criticize Bush's intelligence in a humorous way. The critique Stewart is making of Bush is that what Clinton did was not blameless. However Clinton's actions did not affect the safety and lives of other people. Stewart is using parody to downplay President Clinton's dishonesty while highlighting President Bush's lack of intelligence by emphasizing the negative impact Bush's Hurricane Katrina decisions had on the safety and health of others.

Stewart takes on the role of informant when he tells the audience that he wants to clarify the confusion about the government's role after Hurricane Katrina. With this statement, Stewart simultaneously identifies with his audience while influencing them. He says that he wants to clarify some of the confusion over whether there was enough government response following Hurricane Katrina, and then he yells "yes" very loudly. The assertion

he makes reaches the audience that has questions about Katrina. Another group of audience members are those who blame the media for Bush's negative portrayal following the hurricane. Stewart reacts to this, and confronts that audience stating, "this is, *inarguably*, *inarguably* a failure of leadership from the top of the federal government."⁸⁰ One other audience group Stewart targets using persona is the American citizen. He proves to this audience that he is concerned, just as they are by using the words "we" and "us." One example of this is provided when he begins his discussion about how the government has "made *us* safer, given *us* more comfort" in new developments since 9/11.⁸¹ By taking on the role of the American citizen, as well as the informant, Stewart increases his credibility with the audience. These two personas create the notion that Stewart is on the audience's side, and that he is one of them, encouraging their trust in him.

In the humorous critiques examined, the use of sarcasm was found in their musings of George W. Bush. Sarcasm is acknowledged as a form of "put- down humor, [which is an] aggressive type of humor [that] is used to criticize and manipulate others through teasing, sarcasm and ridicule."⁸²

The strategy *The Onion* utilizes is more difficult to discern because this style of critique is not spoken directly. However, it does still play an integral role in understanding the humor following Hurricane Katrina. *The Onion* article, "Bush To Throw Out First Through 120th Pitch Of World Series," featured in the sports section of the website on October 20, 2005 uses sarcasm as a method of critique.

Bush is portrayed as forgetting his duty as President of the United States to pursue pitching the first game in the World Series. He mentions that he has trained for weeks in preparation for the game. Given the date of the article, the reader must conclude that Bush was practicing and training for this game during the entire Hurricane Katrina catastrophe. Sarcasm is seen in a quote from “Nolan Ryan,” who is said to be Bush’s pitching coach. Ryan, in an attempt to explain his confidence in Bush, states, ““after all, the president has worked himself into jams before. But everyone knows he’s a man who always finds a way to get out unscathed.””⁸³ Ryan is referencing all the times Bush has managed to escape problematic situations, which is notable because he seems to be implying that many problematic situations have emerged because of Bush’s decisions and policies. This idea reflects badly on a president because it is important for a leader to be diligent in, and accountable for, his or her actions. This article aims to elicit a consensus from the audience that George W. Bush is no longer able to be President of the United States.

Another strategy that is employed in the article is through the persona the rhetor has developed in this article as a sports news reporter. However, the article is a parody, and thus the reporter becomes a comedian. The reporter/comedian uses sarcasm to propose that George W. Bush does not want to do the work of a president, which suggests that he is not capable of being president. The persona of the comedian that the rhetor has taken on in this article helps build rapport with the audience. The rhetor depicts Bush as lazy, and although this is insulting, the rhetor is able to maintain a relationship with the audience because the persona of the comedian seems harmless.

The cartoonist, Daryl Cagle employed irony and persona in the cartoon published on September 2, 2005. The cartoon consists of six frames. The first five frames are exactly the same. In all of them Bush is sitting hunched over in a chair watching the television, expressionless. In the sixth frame, he jumps up exclaiming, "Let's go save those hurricane victims."⁸⁴ This cartoon illustrates Bush's delayed reaction in assisting in efforts to help Katrina victims.

Cagle utilizes irony in his cartoon as a "communicative behavior through which the Speaker tells the truth by hiding it under the false, but at the same time lets you understand what is true and what is false."⁸⁵ In Cagle's cartoon, five images portray George W. Bush sitting in a recliner watching television. In the sixth frame, Bush is jumping from his chair yelling that we need to help the Katrina victims. Although one purpose of the cartoon is to inform the audience that Bush is lazy, there is some irony to it. The ironic part can be found in the sixth frame when he jumps from his chair exclaiming we need to help. This is ironic because Bush is yelling to help the victims, but he still is not *doing* anything for them. He is only talking about helping them. So while Bush has called for help, and made it seem like help is on the way, ironically, it is not.

The identity Cagle has taken on in creating this cartoon is comparable to the role Jon Stewart took on as the informant. In this cartoon, Cagle informs the public of George W. Bush's delayed reactions, as well as his lack in response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. This persona allows Cagle to portray himself as protecting the interests of the American people. And thus he is perceived as trustworthy and credible to the audience. In completing

this research, I have found that the humor used as resistive to George W. Bush in the three artifacts was done so because he was the common enemy necessary to enact the critique.

CHAPTER IV

OUR COMMON ENEMY IS A BUREAUCRACY

Americans have used many different methods in their attempts to cope with the emotional and psychological trauma caused by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The objective of this thesis is to examine the ways in which Americans who have suffered because of the terrorist attacks have used humor as a coping mechanism. Those who employ humor as a critique in the wake of 9/11 do so because there is a common enemy. In the period following 9/11, multiple policy changes were enacted and additional administrations were created.

Examples of these new bureaucracies and policies which were created as direct results of the 9/11 attacks are the Homeland Security Act which created the Department of Homeland Security and the USA PATRIOT Act which allowed the Bush Administration to engage the National Security Agency with monitoring the emails and phone calls of American citizens. While these measures may be necessary, the drastic changes made to the everyday lives of citizens and the intimidating bureaucracies created to oversee these operations and endured by people worldwide, particularly in airports has changed the course of history and the lives of individuals everywhere forever. One response to these bureaucracies has been the blossoming of conspiracy theories that argue the United State government was behind the 9/11 attacks.

In this chapter, I analyze the way humor was used to critique the changes in America's bureaucracy and policy as well as the conspiracy theories that developed following 9/11. The three artifacts I examine in this chapter use humor to address the negative side effects

of the 9/11 attacks on day-to-day life. The first artifact I examine is a video clip from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* that aired on November 1, 2001. I then analyze a comic strip, Tank McNamara, which critiques the TSA that appeared on April 17, 2006. Finally, I examine a video which addresses a common conspiracy theory that came about following the 9/11 attacks from humorous mock news website, *The Onion*.

In the video clip from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* called “Naked Travel” that aired shortly after 9/11, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert discuss the “airport security debate.”⁸⁶ Throughout the clip, Colbert employs sarcasm and parody to talk about two different bills provided by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Colbert first discusses the flaws in each of the bills and states to each, “this is a *terrible* idea.”⁸⁷ He then uses sarcasm saying:

The House and Senate have it right on one point. They both agree pilots should be armed. That is a great idea that could never go wrong. I mean it’s just comforting to know that in case a pilot gets spooked, there’s gonna be some bullets flying around inside an airplane.⁸⁸

Colbert uses sarcasm to express what a lot of people were feeling at the time, but that not many were willing to admit. He addresses the shortcomings of the federal government less than two months after the attacks on 9/11. It could seem too early to address some of the missteps of the American government, but Colbert is able to get away with his comments

because he is using humor. I believe this clip aired on *The Daily Show* to inform viewers of what was taking place in the federal government regarding airport security. I also believe it was created as an outlet for people to vent their frustration at the government in a time where many believed that American citizens should support whatever their government did, regardless of how ridiculous it was.

Colbert continues his discussion of the airport security issue when Stewart asks what could be used as preventative measures. Using irony, Colbert recommends no luggage. When Stewart argues that people need to bring their items onto the airplane, Colbert, again using irony, responds that people can just buy everything new once they get to their destination. He states “Boom, you’ve solved the security issue and stimulated the economy in one fell swoop.”⁸⁹ Stewart then comments on the plausibility of Colbert’s idea that people are only supposed to travel in the clothes they are wearing. Colbert’s response is, “oh, I forgot to mention, no clothes... totally naked travel, no place to hide a weapon.”⁹⁰ This comment is funny because it seems so unreasonable, but is completely true. If the government wanted the simplest, safest way to protect air travelers, the most efficient way would be to have people fly naked. Although it seems unreasonable, it actually is the best way to have people travel. I believe this is a successful comment because it addresses the negative side effects that were brought about by 9/11 while being very logical and using humor.

In “Naked Travel,” Colbert uses humor to criticize the federal government. In particular, he focuses on the government’s proposed new restrictions on air travel and airport security. I believe this clip provides an outlet for viewers to vent their frustration with the

government, but at the same time laugh about it. The use of humor allows for people to relate to the comments without feeling guilty about critiquing their government in a time when unity was supposed to be of the most importance.

The second artifact I examine is from the comic strip, Tank McNamara. In April, 2006, the cartoonists for Tank McNamara, Jeff Millar and Bill Hinds, put out a series of comics which poked fun at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I will be discussing one comic strip published on April 18, 2006. My intent in including this particular topic from this comic is to incorporate a variety of ways people sought out and used humor to assist themselves in the healing process. This comic, in particular, makes fun of the TSA, which was created by the United States Government in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The TSA has been highly criticized for its many inefficiencies and failures. The relevancy of these jokes to the public's coping with the terrorist attacks is that this administration was created as a direct effect of the September 11 attacks. Therefore, many Americans are affected by the rules and procedures the TSA imposes on them.

In the Tank McNamara comic strip, there are two characters that are the main focus of the cartoon. These two characters are former TSA screeners who now work for a major league baseball team as security inspectors. The comic makes it clear to the audience that these two men have been fired from the TSA due to previous criminal records they did not disclose to the TSA. The fact that the TSA would hire men without doing a criminal background check is a significant notion the cartoon is attempting to inform the audience of. In this message the audience is being informed that without thorough background

checks people working for the TSA could be just as dangerous as the terrorists who forced the government to create this administration to protect the American citizens in the first place. This is important to note because following the creation of the TSA many critiques discussed the failures of the TSA, specifically addressing the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the US government's additional security measures. The message contained in this comic strip can be interpreted as a way to help people cope with the tragedy of the attacks because it uses humor to educate the audience. This comic strip enables the audience to understand that the American government does make mistakes, bad things do happen, and that it is acceptable to criticize the government for the mistakes they have made. This message also stresses the audience to believe that while the American government may have its citizens' best interests in mind; the government can and will potentially do things that are harmful to the public. This use of humor enables citizens to laugh at the government's mistakes. It also allows the audience to see that after 9/11 the government took on a lot more power than it had previously, as illustrated by the USA PATRIOT Act. However, we as citizens should still be able to criticize the government regardless of the power it has or the protection it provides us with.

The Tank McNamara comic strip pokes fun at the insufficiencies of the TSA using the two ex-TSA screeners' discussions with one another. In the comic strip the two guards are checking people's bags as they enter the stadium. One of the guards is holding up money and says, "I gotta wipe this \$20 down for explosives, like we did when we worked for the T.S.A." While he is doing this, the man whose money it is states, "That is so totally obviously a *Kleenex*." The other former TSA screener interjects with, "better quarantine

it.” The insinuation of this particular comic strip is that the American government hired untrustworthy people and allowed them to do deceitful things. This particular comic is using humor to expose the failures of the TSA to readers. The Tank McNamara comic is relevant to my argument that people affected by the terrorist attacks have used humor to cope with the traumatic events because it allows them to vent their frustration at an administration that is failing to provide the protection necessary to defend the citizens it was created to protect.

The Tank McNamara comic strip assists audience members in coping with the 9/11 tragedy because it helps them to laugh at something that is typically an intimidating topic. This intimidation comes from the TSA itself. People are afraid to fly because of the intense security situations at airports. These situations are very stressful because the American government wants people flying to be safe, and in order to do this has put into place extreme regulations. While maximum protection has proven to be important, the TSA has failed on many occasions to protect. Tank McNamara illuminates one of the failures of the TSA with humor. This ability to make light of such a serious issue helps readers who have been affected by the attacks to relax and find humor in a topic that is ordinarily off-limits to humorists.

Another humorous artifact which has been used in an effort to help the people who were affected by the 9/11 tragedy cope, is a video found on *The Onion* titled, *9/11 Conspiracy Theories ‘Ridiculous,’ Al Qaeda Says*. In this mock news video, a news anchor is interviewing two men. The first man he introduces is William Gerard, author of the book,

The Truth about September 11th, and the second man is Al Qaeda operative, Omar Al-Farouq. This video is a response to many theories which claimed that the United States was either completely responsible for the 9/11 attacks or knew about them and did nothing to stop them. The intent of this video is to ridicule those theories in an attempt to prove how ridiculous and false they are.

In this video, the news anchor tells the audience that this news interview is taking place because of the claims Gerard's recently released book makes that "the destruction of the World Trade Center was not the work of terrorists, but was in fact perpetrated US government."⁹¹ The anchor also states that this story is being told because of Al-Farouq's claims that the stories in Gerard's book are nothing but conspiracy theories. Al-Farouq's position on this issue is that Al Qaeda planned and executed the attacks. Also Al-Farouq does not believe the United States should be given credit for the destruction of the Twin Towers. The humor in this video, which makes it a useful coping tool for people suffering following the attacks, is the way it satirizes a discussion that is really taking place.

The conversation presented in this interview over whether the US or Al Qaeda planned the attacks is made humorous by the tone both sides take on and the claims Al-Farouq makes throughout the video. At one point Gerard claims that the US used Thermite bombs which caused the towers to collapse. In response to Gerard's statement, Al-Farouq states, "we flew an enormous airplane into a building. I think it is obvious what caused the building to crumble."⁹² The statement that Al-Farouq makes is humorous because it's true. Al-Farouq's statement bolstered and made more humorous to the audience because Gerard's

theory about the US government involvement is portrayed as far-fetched and impossible, especially to those who were victims or suffered a loss due to the 9/11 attacks.

Throughout the satirical news interview Gerard and Al-Farouq argue about who actually carried out the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers. Gerard continuously claims that the US government and the Bush Administration planned the attacks for “greed... and to increase oil revenues, the weapon’s industry and security industry.”⁹³ Gerard also describes Vice President Dick Cheney as a “puppet master”⁹⁴ when he discusses why the US government would want to plan an attack on its own soil. The description of Cheney as a puppet master is humorous to audience members trying to cope with the trauma of these tragic events because this video addresses some of the genuine claims that had been made by people in America at one point in time. Gerard states that there is evidence to prove that the US government organized and executed the attacks, and he can’t seem to understand why Al-Farouq is arguing with him over these claims. Al-Farouq replies to this with, “how would you like it if you spent two months in mountain caves, sleeping on rocks, planning something really special only to have someone take the credit away from you?”⁹⁵ Again, Al-Farouq’s statement is humorous because it is true. The attack did happen, but it was not a special event for the people who suffered from it. What makes this humorous is that Al-Farouq believes that the attack on the Twin Towers was special and he cannot understand why anyone would try to take that recognition away from him. What is funny is the irony of his statement. The 9/11 attacks were not special to the people who were hurt by them, and it is hard to believe that anyone would actually want to take credit for the heinous attacks.

I examined the ways people use humor to cope in the wake of a tragedy. In particular, I studied three humorous artifacts that were created as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A video clip, “Naked Travel,” from *The Daily Show* provided an outlet for people to vent their frustration at the federal government through laughter. Another artifact I examined was the Tank McNamara comic strip. This comic strip criticized the inadequacies of the American government and enabled people to laugh at something they feared they were not allowed to. The last artifact I analyzed was a video from mock news website *The Onion*. This video used irony and satire to allow audience members to laugh at and make critiques about insulting theories that were created in the aftermath of 9/11. The humor found in all of these artifacts is noteworthy because it assisted people with coping with the terrorist attacks. This humor allowed people to laugh about and criticize certain situations that seemed too controversial to be laughed at.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

My evaluation of the multiple forms of rhetoric examined is based on two basic criteria. First I analyze the rhetoric based on ethical criterion that includes “judgments about the consequences of discourse on the society and judgments about the impact of discourse on future rhetorical activity.”⁹⁶ The discourses are evaluated based on artistic criterion. These standards aid in evaluating the form of genre these critiques represent. Utilizing this approach, I will “identify the characteristics of a particular genre and then use those characteristics as standards to make artistic judgments of the rhetorical acts that are members of that genre.”⁹⁷

The first criteria I will evaluate are the consequences of the discourses on society. American society’s values are condensed into an all-encompassing myth, the American Dream. The American Dream is “one of the most pervasive of cultural myths... [and] it is viewed as the epitome of progress and success.”⁹⁸ This myth helps frame the values of the American people. The person who embodies this myth is hardworking, honest, and successful. The multiple forms of discourse are analyzed to separate the chosen common enemy from the ideal representation of the American Dream.

In Chapter II, *The Onion*’s article which discusses the hijackers finding themselves in Hell, separates the terrorists from the American Dream by explaining how horrible what they did in real life is. Their resulting punishment, to serve in Hell for eternity destroys their hopes

of ever becoming successful in the afterlife, or any life for that matter, which opposes the idea of success in the American Dream myth. Cagle's cartoon, which portrays the terrorists as bugs hitting the windshield, opposes the American Dream because of the comparison that is made in the cartoon. Uncle Sam, who is hard working and successful at killing the "terrorist bugs" is the ideal representation of the American Dream because he is proving that through hard work and determination one can be successful. The last artifact, Achmed the Dead Terrorist, provides the audience with the notion that Achmed can never represent the American Dream because he is a failure. He is a *dead* terrorist and there is no way he could ever represent the American Dream without the hard work, success and honesty that characterizes a person who is living the American Dream.

In Chapter III, Cagle's portrayal of Bush as lazy in the political cartoon which appeared less than a week after Hurricane Katrina made landfall illustrates the pervasiveness of the American Dream on American culture and how much influence it has on the evaluation of a member of society. Similarly, Nolan Ryan's supposed comments in *The Onion* article framed Bush as devious. This portrayal of Bush is inconsistent with the person who embodies the American Dream, and because of this, Bush is portrayed as someone who can never be successful because he has not played by the rules, so to speak. Jon Stewart describes the leadership of Bush as a failure. This description of Bush is portrayed as conflicting with the idea of success in the American Dream myth. Therefore, the image of George W. Bush, the President of the United States, is altered by these discourses and those similar to them to construct a new image of George W. Bush. This new depiction is one of a person who attempted to persuade the public of his life success due to his values,

but was chastised when he failed to provide evidence of any of the characteristics he claimed to possess similar to those represented by the American Dream. The pervasive use of American ideals consistent with the American Dream myth in these three discourses reaffirms the generally unattainable success people associate with it.

In Chapter IV, *The Daily Show* addresses airport security. Stephen Colbert's reports of the contents of the two houses' bills being horrible ideas proves that these suggestions for airport security do not align with the ideals of the American dreams because they are bound to be failures. The Tank McNamara comic strip is similar to this idea of failure because it points out the way the TSA has failed to employ upstanding citizens who represent the hardworking individual associated with the American Dream. This failure to do so causes a loss of faith in the TSA and a conflict with the idea of the American Dream. The last artifact discussed in Chapter IV is *The Onion* video. This video helps to associate a common enemy opposite that of the American Dream. The common enemy in this video is the conspiracy theory itself, and those who support it and disseminate it. This conspiracy theory differs from the American Dream myth because it represents something that is not viewed as a success. It is a theory and the suggestions it makes seem dishonest. This video addresses the conspiracy as the common enemy and therefore, it cannot represent the American Dream.

The second evaluation I will make of the discourse is based on the genre it claims to be categorized in. The discourses in this case all declare to be humorous critiques. In order for an artifact to be deemed humorous, it must contain a number of elements. The first element

requires intent and a positive response, which is audience laughter.⁹⁹ There needs to be symbolic convergence. The rhetor should be aware of the audience's need for shared meaning, because parody or humor is usually a mockery that makes fun of something or someone real. The audience's understanding of the joke's meaning is crucial in getting the intended response from them.¹⁰⁰ Humor must also be somewhat exaggerated or sensationalized in order to capture the audience's attention. Often times, to win the audience's attention, a caricature is used to imitate reality.¹⁰¹ Gomrich and Kris' claims about caricature, are that while classical art is looking for the ideal figure, caricature is searching for the infallible monster.¹⁰² Thus the struggle to disassemble power through the use of humor is revealed.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart meets the first criteria of eliciting a positive response from the audience, because laughter and applause are heard from the audience in the background on the video clip. In Jon Stewart's comparison of Hurricane Katrina and Monica Lewinsky, a symbolic convergence emerges. He does not need to go into further detail after the metaphor because the audience is aware of how problematic the affair was for Clinton, and can deduce the same is going to happen to Bush as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Lastly, *The Daily Show* is deemed a part of the humorous genre because of the exaggerated nature of the discourse. When Stewart addresses the people who blame the media for portraying Bush as a failure after Hurricane Katrina, Stewart tells them, "no. Shut up. No."¹⁰³ This is exaggerated because traditional, non-humorous news reporters do not tell their audience members to shut up. Another example of the exaggeration on *The Daily Show* can be found in the video, "Naked Travel," when Colbert states that people

should only be allowed to travel naked. His exaggeration is humorous because no one would ever be allowed to fly naked due to sanitation, health and safety, as well as indecent exposure. It is made even more humorous however because it actually would be safer in terms of explosives and other items people could sneak on planes.

Due to the mediums that *The Onion*, Cagle and Tank McNamara cartoons discourses were presented in, there is no calculable way to prove they elicited a positive response from the audience. However, the three discourses were able to meet all of the other requirements regarding the genre of humorous critique. The article from *The Onion* required symbolic convergence from the audience. In discussing how much Bush had trained, and leaving out his duties as president, the audience can infer that after Hurricane Katrina, all of Bush's acts were contingent upon his laziness. Cagle's article is similar to this because the laziness of George W. Bush is portrayed by his continued television watching. Waiting six frames until he decided to do something about Katrina victims is also contingent upon his laziness. The discourses also fit into the humorous critique genre because of the exaggerated behavior they represent. In Cagle's cartoon, Bush jumps suddenly from his chair exclaiming that he must help the hurricane victims. This exaggeration is crucial to the idea Cagle intends for the audience to recognize. The video with Achmed is an exaggerated version of terrorism and the culture Achmed represents. In *The Onion's* article, the supposed use of Nolan Ryan as Bush's pitching coach is undoubtedly an exaggeration, as is the whole story portraying Bush as an aspiring baseball pitcher. Due to the nature of the discourses, I argue that they should all be categorized in the genre of humorous critique.

My analysis has demonstrated that humor as critique works particularly effectively when there is a common enemy. The multiple artifacts I have researched assist in proving my argument that in the wake of a national tragedy each portrays some person or entity as the common enemy. This is necessary to each of the artifacts because to create the most effective critique, there must be someone to lay the blame on, or the enemy.

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