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A Matter of Faith: U.S. Cable News Coverage and Definitions of Terrorism

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https://surface.syr.edu/ms_thesis/12

ABSTRACT

What makes an act of violence an act of terrorism? This qualitative study examines the ways in which three U.S.-based cable news networks—MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News—reported and contextualized four violent events within frameworks of terrorism:

- the mass shooting at Ft. Hood near Killeen, Texas (2009);

- the mass shooting near Tucson, Arizona (2011);

- a suicidal plane crash into an IRS building in Austin, Texas (2010); and

- the attempted bombing of the Federal Reserve in New York, New York (2012).

Although details between these four events seem analogous, the three networks appeared to contextualize only the Ft. Hood rampage and the Federal Reserve plot within frameworks of terrorism (specifically, Islamic terrorism)—as being "attacks" on the United States rather than isolated incidents. In contrast, the networks appeared to contextualize the Tucson rampage and Austin plane crash as being the consequences of extreme mental illness.

Existing literature suggests such disparities in coverage are the result of increasing consolidation and corporatization of news and entertainment media organizations, as well as pre-existing Orientalist portrayals of Arabs and misconceptions held by the American public about Islam and Muslims as both a minority and a religious group. Combined with standard journalism guidelines and suggestions for optimal practice during crisis coverage, this literature was used to establish a coherent code structure to analyze the four events. The code structure was used to review a total of 35 video clips from the aforementioned networks, making note of these references or topics of discussion:

- the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001;

- the mental state of the perpetrator;

- the alleged religious or political affiliation of the suspected perpetrator; and

- any mention of Al-Qaeda or terms such as "terrorist," "jihad," "infidel," or "radical Islam."

Although any discussion about news coverage of minorities is nuanced and merits further research, the results of this study indicate there is still much news organizations fail to understand about Islam, Muslims, the Muslim-American identity and the supposed relationship between those entities and "terrorism" or the root causes of its occurrence. Further, it indicates that news organizations experience a degree of cognitive dissonance when non-Muslims (or individuals affiliated with the dominant hegemonic culture) commit terrorism-like violence.

A Matter of Faith: U.S. cable news coverage and definitions of terrorism

Adam Y. Elrashidi

This Thesis submitted in partial requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in Media Studies

Media Studies

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Syracuse University

May 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
(In the name of Allah The Beneficent, The Merciful)

First and foremost, thanks to my amazing parents for their love and support. I will never be able to thank you enough for everything you give to me. I am honored and proud to be your son. I love you, more than you'll ever know, and I hope you will consider this work to be among the best fruits of your labors. Also, thanks to my wonderful siblings, Muhamad and Halla—I love you both very, very much.

To the Khater family—Mohamed, Magda, Hesham, Ashraf, and Ahmed—and Hammam Al-Makadma: Thank you for being my family away from family and taking me into your home. May you be blessed for all the good works you do for Syracuse. I grew as a person and learned so much simply by being around all of you.

Thank you to Jonathan Maze, Josh Bitney, and Taqee Khaled for your letters of recommendation. Also, to Muneer Karcher-Ramos: Thanks for the sagely advice about personal statements and the nature of graduate school. To my cohort and friends—my Adamaniacs: Thanks for always welcoming me home with open arms; two thumbs up to 'Tron and Air.

And a special thank you to Hannah Nemec: Your strength, courage, heart, and friendship have been blessings to my life. I couldn't have achieved so much of this without them—or you.

Thanks to my thesis committee: Richard Breyer, Courtney Barclay, Dennis Kinsey, and Terry Anderson. I appreciate the time you dedicated toward helping me complete this thesis. I hope you are as pleased with it as I am.

Thanks to Carla Lloyd and Sean Branagan: It was a great privilege to have been an assistant to you both. You each taught me so much about bravery and leadership.

Thanks to Kristen Northrop for two years of great conversations. Thanks to Amy Arends for ensuring my bases were always covered. In addition, thanks to Mylinda Smith, Pamela Shoemaker, Sharon Hollenback, Donna Till, Mary Ann Durantini, Christi MacClurg, Stanley Bondy, Phil Johnson, Christopher Dietrich, Bob Lloyd, Michael Schoonmaker, Bob Thompson, Brian Tibbens, Hub Brown, Kelly Barrows, and Brad Gorham for helping me navigate Newhouse and for pointing me in the right directions.

Finally, to Carol Liebler: Thank you for saying "yes," when all I had heard in my professional career for three years was "no." I hope I've followed through on the promise I made during orientation to make you proud of the decision to accept me into the Media Studies program.

To summarize the intention with which I pursued a career in journalism and produced this thesis, I'll conclude with a quote from one of my heroes, Malcolm X:

"I do believe that I have fought the best that I know how, and the best that I could, with the shortcomings that I have had...And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth...then all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine."

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

On November 5, 2009, United States Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan opened fire on his fellow soldiers stationed at Ft. Hood near Killeen, Texas; he killed 13 people and wounded numerous others. At the start of his rampage, Hasan reportedly yelled, "Allahu akbar," which means, "God is Great" in Arabic—a phrase said by Muslims around the world countless times every day. On January 8, 2011, 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner opened fired on attendees at a rally for Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, Arizona. The rampage injured 14 people, including Giffords, and killed six, including District Court Chief Judge John Roll. On February 18, 2010, Andrew Joseph Stack III crashed his single-engine Piper Dakota airplane into an Internal Revenue Service office building in Austin, Texas, killing himself and office manager Vernon Hunter and injuring at least a dozen people. Finally, on October 17, 2012, 21-year-old international student Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis was arrested in a federal sting operation for attempting to detonate a fake bomb outside the Federal Reserve in New York, New York.

In each case, the perpetrator had previously expressed some degree of frustration with or contempt for the United States or its foreign or socio-economic policies. However, it appeared as though cable news media contextualized the Ft. Hood rampage and Federal Reserve bomb plot within frameworks of terrorism—as being "attacks" by foreign entities on the United States. What are the reasons behind such disparities in news coverage?

On the surface, it appears as though the details between the events are analogous: Hasan and Loughner both opened fire on unsuspecting victims and both were reportedly

distressed or disturbed in the weeks prior to their respective rampages.[1] Similarly, Stack III and Nafis acted as "lone wolf" operatives, intending their respective missions to disrupt some aspect of the American socio-economic system.[2] What was it about each incident that caused cable news networks to frame Hasan and Nafis as terrorists, but Loughner and Stack III as mere malcontents (or otherwise mentally disturbed individuals) with axes to grind against the government? Did the specific details surrounding these events affect the ways in which they were covered and framed by news organizations, or was it a matter of faith?

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, preventing terrorism became the highlight of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Media pundits, government officials, and think tank representatives waxed philosophic about the "War on Terror" and the best manner in which to combat it, as if "terrorism" was a corporeal entity or sovereign nation and not a relatively abstract concept. During these discussions, it was seemingly ignored that a portion of the American public associate terrorism exclusively with Islam (DeFoster, 2010)—a religion purportedly practiced by more than a billion people worldwide. Due to its conceptual intangibility, terrorism lends itself to subjective definition and application, especially by news media—a stratified segment of the industry due to cable television, the internet, and other new media technologies and services that allow consumers to receive information tailored to their specific interests and beliefs. The focus of this research is to examine the ways in which cable news media—specifically

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[1] In 2011, CBS News reported that Loughner first met Congresswoman Giffords in 2007 at an event and had asked her a question. According to CBS Homeland Security correspondent Bob Orr, Loughner made generic, unspecific threats between then and the time of the shooting and might have been monitoring Giffords off-and-on in the interim.

[2] It also could be argued that both Stack III and Nafis' missions "failed," even though Stack III's actions resulted in the death of one person. Given the method of his attack, however, Stack III likely did not inflict the damage he had intended.

MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News Channel—did or did not frame and contextualize these four events as "acts of terrorism." Further, the focus is to examine the manner in which these networks did or did not frame and contextualize the reported suspects as "terrorists." The research questions guiding this thesis are:

RQ1: How are acts of violence framed and contextualized by news media organizations as "acts of terrorism?"

RQ2: Do news media organizations define "terrorism" based on the circumstances of the incident, or the characteristics of the alleged perpetrator(s)?

Such research is important due to the potential for it to assist journalists and other media professionals report and discuss news about terrorism and the reasons behind its occurrence. Despite tremendous innovation in the realm of media technology and an increasing emphasis on user/consumer interactivity, the current broadcast news media landscape appears unable to discuss complex issues (such as terrorism) without defaulting to superlative speech from pundits and experts (self-styled or otherwise). This failing becomes especially apparent in the light of the natural constraints and limitations of contemporary broadcast news production. Thus, such research could encourage reporting that might help the public understand similar incidents in greater contexts beyond sound-bytes and edited-for-television footage, which then might facilitate deeper conversations among news media professionals, the public, and policy makers about the nature and root causes of terrorism, as opposed to discussions about how to prevent terrorism or the practicality of anti-terrorism initiatives. In essence, this research endeavors to facilitate and further discussion about the best ways in which to treat the disease, not its symptoms. This theoretical flow is akin to what is referred to as the

"Triangle of Political Communication," the process by which news media organizations "provide the links that allow the flow of messages between those in public offices and the general public" (Nacos, 2003, p. 4).

Admittedly, this chain reaction of events is optimistic. Mainstream news media organizations are complex systems and it is unlikely that upon the completion and dissemination of this research, newsroom routines will simply change overnight. However, such optimism does not invalidate the importance or negate the relevance of attempting to show instances in which national news media have been, at the very least, inconsistent in their coverage and analysis of similar cases of terrorism-like events. This is especially important in the context of the "War on Terror" which, at the time of this research, will have experienced its tenth anniversary and cost the United States more than $1.28 trillion (Belasco, 2011). (This figure, of course, does not account for the numerous lives lost in both Afghanistan and Iraq.[3]) Arguably, news media have not adequately explained the nuances of terrorism and the ways in which it affects relations between the United States and the greater Muslim world, or even the ways in which it affects Muslim-Americans or comprehension and contextualization of contemporary Muslim-American identities. Without question, political tension between the United States government and the greater Muslim world presents problems for Muslim-Americans, who will eventually account for approximately 1.7 percent of the U.S. population (about 6.2 million people), according to a study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (Grossman, 2011).

Muslims comprise an incredibly diverse population—even within Arab communities—with variations based on cultural, ethnic, locational, and doctrinal factors.

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[3] The Pentagon declared an official end to the mission in Iraq on December 15, 2011. According to Pentagon statistics, the war in Iraq alone had claimed 4,487 American lives, with 32,226 more Americans wounded in action (Shanker, Schmidt, & Worth, 2011).

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Due to its origin, however, Islam is most commonly associated with Arabs despite the fact the nations with the largest Muslim populations are non-Arab (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008).[4] Iranians, also, are neither ethnically nor culturally considered to be Arab—an important fact to remember when discussing the modern history between the United States and the Muslim world, as well as the subsequent perceptions some Americans have about those regions.[5]

The Muslim world is comprised of people and places with exceptionally rich histories, so it is not entirely implausible to assume that some people might find it difficult to understand the wide range of cultural, political, and socio-economic dynamics within them, let alone news professionals working to produce articles or broadcasts by tight deadlines. These difficulties are compounded by declining interest in traditional news/public affairs programs and an increasing appreciation for "infotainment" (Stockwell, 2004), which blurs the line between news and entertainment content in an attempt to enhance popularity with audiences and consumers (Demers, 2005), emphasizing sensationalized content that is highly speculative and glossy but low on actual substance. This is compounded even further by the idea that the American public has been conditioned by popular entertainment (e.g., films, television shows, cartoons, etc.) over the last century to be highly wary of Arabs and Muslims, whose culture and faith are viewed as being completely antithetical to and incompatible with U.S.—and by extension, Western—culture (Shaheen, 2003). "American popular wisdom has alienated itself from Islam" (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008, p. 6), viewing Christianity and

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[4] Those countries are Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (p. 69).

[5] Although the terms of the definition are varied, Arabs are generally defined to be those peoples whose primary language is Arabic. The official and primary language of Iran is Farsi.

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Judaism as "Western religious traditions" and Islam as an "Eastern religious tradition." This dissimilarity is problematic due to the fact all three traditions share a common monotheistic ancestry through the prophet Abraham.

Such arbitrary, seemingly uneducated distinction facilitates an atmosphere of "otherness," whereby news stories involving Arabs or Muslims are presented within a framework of socio-cultural deviance, if not imminent danger (Deeprawat, 2002; Shaheen, 2003). In 2007, former National Security Council Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski echoed this sentiment, saying the term "War on Terror" creates a culture of fear because it "obscures reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue." With this in mind, it is unsurprising that more than one-third of Americans think unfavorably of Islam (Gallup, 2009).[6] Such connotative disparities can have dramatic effects on the socio-political economy of the United States and until they are examined, these groups might continue to feel isolated, insulted, or threatened.

Role of the Researcher

As a Muslim and an Arab-American, I have a particular interest in the subject matter of this research. Since the September 11 attacks, many people in the Arab and Muslim communities have felt marginalized by news media and the industry's unawareness of certain tenets of the Islamic faith and apparent obliviousness to the cultural diversity present in Muslim populations. Whether it is due to socio-political agendas, newsroom routines, or simple academic ignorance or negligence, news professionals have misrepresented many aspects of a faith practiced by nearly one-

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[6] It should be noted that this Gallup poll occurred between October 31 and November 13, 2009—a period spanning the Ft. Hood incident. It is conceivable that the timing of the poll influenced responses.

seventh of the world's population, often associating secular cultural practices like female genital circumcision (otherwise known as "female genital mutilation") or "honor killings" as parts of proper Islamic doctrine.

News media networks appear quick to portray Islam in a negative light or at the very least, one that inadequately describes the historicity and historiography of Islam and the cultural and practical diversity within the religion. I can say this confidently because I am a member of these communities and have had several discussions with other members of these communities about the place of Arabs and Muslims in modern American society, as well as about the effects of such glaring omissions on the national dialogue and the development of domestic and foreign policy.

To be clear, this research is neither an attempt to reduce the discussion of terrorism-like events to a simplistic causal relationship, nor is it intended to be a lengthy diatribe lamenting the oppressive actions of "The Man" against disaffected minority groups, Muslim or otherwise. Without question, the fundamental intent is to explore possible incongruities in the news coverage of terrorism-like events when circumstances between events are analogous. Therefore, to reduce the potential for this research to serve as an example of confirmation bias, the following literature review will examine the ways in which the increasing consolidation and corporatization of media organizations has blurred the lines between journalism, entertainment, and special interests, affecting newsroom routines and creating sensationalized "infotainment." Further, it will examine the ways in which infotainment has cultivated an atmosphere in which traditional portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. popular media have influenced public discourse and perceptions about terrorism and the ways in which such portrayals have influenced

opinions of the Muslim world and identity. It also will examine the ways in which the U.S. has legally defined terrorism and the ways in which news media have traditionally framed and contextualized coverage of the Middle East and Muslims as a binary narrative depicting "Good Guys vs. Bad Guys." Following these explanations, there will be a description of the methodology used for this research and finally, a discussion about its findings.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Political Economy and Hegemony

The relationship between a government and its media, especially its news media, is a critical one. A nation's general media structure serves as a vital component in the machinations of government and social power structures, regardless of where those entities exist on the socio-political spectrum. Media systems reflect the political philosophies of the state (Merrill, 1974). From this idea, political economy refers to the manner in which media organizations reinforce or challenge the existing socio-cultural norms within a given society; it can also be considered as the power processes occurring in a society (Smythe, 1960). These processes become evident not only through the manner in which content is produced (i.e., the structure of content), but also through the manifest and latent meanings and symbols present within that content (Mansell, 2003). Similarly, hegemony refers to the "power or dominance that one social group holds over others, referring to the 'asymmetrical interdependence' of political-economical-cultural relations between and among nation-states or differences between and among social classes within a nation" (Lull, 1995, p. 61). Hegemony is also "a method for gaining and maintain power" (p. 61), with mass media being the tools used by elites to perpetuate and further their status, influence, and philosophies (Boggs, 1976). These processes dictate the ways in which media messages are relayed to the public, as well as the ways in which they are understood and contextualized through the normative standards within society.

It is important to note that socio-political norms are not always consistent with cultural norms; indeed, these two sets of norms can be in conflict, with reinforcement of

the former being due to the benefits and privileges they award to select individuals. In Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1988), media systems—specifically news media systems—serve as lap dogs subservient to the socio-economic and political elite (e.g., multinational organizations or media conglomerates); these systems legitimize the unjust policies and privileges of the state and corporations. News media systems silence or squelch voices of dissent, marginalizing ordinary citizens and positioning them as passive spectators (Hackett, 2001, p. 197). While radical speculation might lead one to believe that such deliberate silence is due to some grander, worldwide conspiracy that endeavors to subvert the population, a more practical and plausible reason behind why news media might align itself with the socio-economical and political elite is because it is simply better for business or more efficient operationally. "Control over the space of communication has thus always ebbed and flowed out of complementary and contradictory changes in regulation, economic markets, the political environment, and technological innovations" (Arsenault & Castells, 2008, p. 711).

Editorial distortion occurs because of the fundamentally dependent relationships news media organizations have with private and governmental sources (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). For example, if a news organization happens to feature stories or content counter or detrimental to the interests of its sources or advertisers (or the messages they release), that organization runs the risk of having its access to information restricted or, perhaps, excluded completely.[7] This results in a downward spiral for the

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[7] Consider news coverage of Apple, Inc.'s highly anticipated iPhone 4: In April 2010, technology blog Gizmodo featured a number of articles about a prototype iPhone 4 that had come into its possession—much to Apple's dismay. The articles revealed numerous photos and technical specifications. When Apple announced plans to release the iPhone 4 on carrier Verizon Wireless in 2011, Gizmodo was noticeably excluded from the release party, despite Gizmodo's previous attendance at Apple events and writer Matt Buchanan's claim the blog had, until then, a "great" friendship with Verizon.

news organization, which has now insulted or completely alienated its sources or advertisers and disabled itself from performing its duties in a satisfactory manner; this subsequently results in lower readership/circulation. Thus, in order to minimize significant threats to their overall business models and missions, news media organizations will distort their editorial positions to favor corporate policies or government interests. "Newspeople put their services at the command of anyone who promises to be a fertile source for future news or who can provide an attractive publishable story" (Graber, 2006, p. 161). In addition, broadcast networks are eager to deliver hyped-up scoops during "sweeps," when ratings services tabulate viewership in order to configure advertising rates. Larger audiences mean higher prices (p. 161) and this is well known to special interest groups and public officials, who will exploit access to the public to further their respective socio-political agendas.

When news media organizations release press counter to messages propagated by elites or corporate sponsors, those organizations might experience campaigns manufactured by those influential entities that attempt to subvert the information or otherwise deter them from publishing more (e.g., letters to the editor, legislative actions, lawsuits, etc.). This sort of interference is referred to as "flak"—one of the five filters of editorial bias (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). [8] Although the industry has changed dramatically in the three decades since he noted the increasing convergence of (news) media with more powerful socio-economic and political entities, critic Raymond Williams appeared prescient in 1977 when describing the relationship between

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[8] The other four biases are: Size, Ownership, and Profit Orientation; The Advertising License to Do Business; Sourcing Mass Media News; and Anti-communism, which has been modified to account for the "War on Terror."

government or corporate interests and media and the significance of that relationship in any capitalist system:

> *The major modern communication systems are now so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalist societies that they require the same kind of attention, at least initially, that is given to the institutions of industrial production and distribution. Studies of the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state capitalist radio and television interlock, historically and theoretically, with wider analysis of capitalist society, capitalist economy and the neo-capitalist state.* (Garnham, 1979, p. 123).

Due to the continued integration of information and entertainment technologies into the everyday realities of contemporary societies, it becomes increasingly difficult to measure, discuss, or criticize the socio-political and socio-cultural influence of mass media. This is especially true for societies in which the overall standard of living is relatively high; thus, hegemonic structures can go unnoticed (Lull, 1995).

Consolidation and Corporatization of Media Organizations

The media industry is a mammoth enterprise, evolving constantly and becoming more interactive and efficient due to advances in new media technologies and services that give more choice, on-demand content, and control to consumers. However, this apparent freedom of choice is a bit deceptive, as the wealth of options is offered by a select few organizations. Approximately 50 media firms dominated the U.S. media market in 1983; by 2004, this number had been reduced to five (Bagdikian, 2004). Not only do these companies control the production of various consumer goods, but also the messages that inform society and influence its culture and social norms. Arguably, these

companies maintain similar economic and political interests and possess the ability to promote or curtail various messages. Referring again to the ability for such entities to establish social norms, it is important to note "relationships between and among the major information-diffusing, socializing agencies of a society and the interacting, cumulative, socially accepted ideological orientations they create and sustain is the essence of hegemony" (Lull, 1995, p. 62).

Although broadcast content (either online or television) is far more diversified than at any point previously, the fact these networks are owned and operated by larger multinational conglomerates subjects them to the political economic structures existing within those conglomerates, which primarily revolve around the creation of revenue and the promotion of special interests deemed commercially beneficial.[9] Financial pressures prompt news media organizations to give favorable coverage to their own interests and those of "Corporate America." Additionally, advertisers influence content by encouraging news tailored to white audiences, which they presume to be the most lucrative demographic (Greco Larson, 2006). Consistent with Herman and Chomsky's ideas about the emphasis major media companies place on the generation of revenue over the production of quality (news or entertainment) content (1988), it is important to note the significance of making a substantial return on investment without upsetting the status quo:

> *All these businesses—whether local, regional, or global—seek out optimal*
>
> *corporate strategies that take advantage of the potential created by the shifting*

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[9] It could be argued this is common sense. Although there were broadcast programs aimed toward specific demographics 30 years ago, especially toward the end of the network era (1939 to 1980), there did not exist fully formed networks geared toward those demographics (e.g., BET, LOGO, Lifetime, etc.). This is in addition to the numerous channels geared toward a particular interest (e.g., Food Network, History Channel, E!, Disney Channel, etc.).

balances between mass communication and mass self-communication networks.

The leading multi-national media conglomerates and diversified Internet/digital

companies (i.e., Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft, and Apple) have developed strategies

to ensure that the Web 2.0 Internet environment reinforces rather than

undermines existing power configurations (Arsenault & Castells, 2008, p. 710).

All of these pressures and motivations eventually pave the way for a media industry promoting "infotainment," whereby content is produced and manipulated in order to elicit responses from audiences that favor the interests of the socio-political elite.[10]

The current state of the news media industry seems designed to keep the public distracted by dramatic narratives, inconsequential "fluff" pieces at the local level (e.g., "Old man yells at cloud") and over-analysis of social "wedge issues" (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, etc.) at the national level (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This is compounded by the characteristics of American popular culture, which glorifies success (e.g., "the American Dream"), hard-fought, dramatic victories (e.g., major league sports—especially the NFL—action stars and blockbuster movies, etc.), and extravagance (e.g., the *E!*, *MTV*, and *Bravo* television networks). Such dramatic narratives are critical elements in the creation of media content (especially television content), relying on thematic simplicity and the establishment of adversarial structures. These stories reflect some of the institutionalized norms of the broadcast media industry, which spoon-feeds information to the audience and constructs adversarial storylines or themes in order to maintain viewer interest (Hallin, 1986). These distractions keep the public from reflecting

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[10] During a May 2012 appearance on an episode of HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher*, former CBS News anchor Dan Rather noted the "constant consolidation of media," saying, "very big business is in bed with very big government in Washington and has more to do with what the average person sees, hears, and reads than most people know." This relationship, he said, occurs "whether it's Republican(s) or Democrat(s)" in positions of power.

upon news stories they might find disheartening or disturbing; counteractive to their preconceived opinions and beliefs; or otherwise challenging to the socio-political status quo. In essence, the journalism industry has gone from watchdog to mad dog, avoiding harder news stories "in favor of scandals, celebrities, and 'infotainment'" (Hackett, 2001, p. 197).

Still, the limits and pressures on the news system (i.e., the effects of gatekeeping and multilevel newsroom routines) are broader than the commonsensical notion of media ownership and advertiser influence, simply due to the nature and inherent constraints of the industry. High costs have routinely contributed to the weakness of international news coverage and the scant coverage of more complex issues, perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and poor understanding (Seib, 2004). Noting the closure of numerous foreign bureaus and citing a pair of 2002 Pew Research Center studies, Seib adds that ratings given to international news coverage were substantially lower than ratings given to coverage of sports, national, local, and business news:

> *Another survey, conducted for the Project for Excellence in Journalism, found that by spring 2002, network television news had largely reverted to its pre-9/11 lineup of topics. The amount of hard news had dropped from 80 percent of stories in October 2001 to 52 percent in early 2002. Meanwhile, the number of "lifestyle" stories made a comeback. Such stories made up 18 percent of total network news stories in June 2001, only one percent in October 2001, and back to 19 percent during the first 13 weeks of 2002. This continued a trend that has been noticeable for more than a decade* (p. 77-78).

Furthermore, the "findings indicate that in this age of globalization, when the news media's view of the world could and should become ever broader, intellectual isolationism has taken hold, at least in journalism and presumably in other fields as well" (p. 77-78). Indeed, there is only so much time available during a typical 30- or 60-minute news broadcast; however, that does not dismiss the necessity for news professionals to either avoid arbitrary speculation or ignore adherence to classical journalism ethics.[11]

Framing and Agenda-Setting

"The boundary between ordinary reporting and manipulative journalism can blur" when news professionals and government officials or advertisers collaborate (Graber, 2006, p. 160). For example, consider journalist David Barstow's Pulitzer Prize-winning report about the convergence of mainstream news media operations and government interests in the months prior to and following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 (2008).[12] In the report, he discussed the dilemma of news media organizations using retired military officers as military analysts:

> *Most of the analysts have ties to military contractors vested in the very war*
>
> *policies they are asked to assess on air. Those business relationships are hardly*
>
> *ever disclosed to the viewers, and sometimes not even to the networks themselves.*
>
> *But collectively...(the military analysts) represent more than 150 military*

---

[11] According to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, journalists should: Seek truth and report it; Minimize harm; Act independently; and Be accountable. Although additional principles are considered under these guidelines, these four values represent the key tenets of the Code (Straubhaar, LaRose & Davenport, 2010).

[12] Barstow's articles reported an initiative developed by the Pentagon to cultivate favorable news coverage of the Bush administration's wartime performance. After successfully suing the Department of Defense, the *New York Times* gained access to "8,000 pages of e-mail messages, transcripts and records describing years of private briefings, trips to Iraq and Guantánamo and an extensive Pentagon talking points operation" revealing "a symbiotic relationship where the usual dividing lines between government and journalism have been obliterated." Barstow writes that the Pentagon refers to the military analysts as "message multipliers" or "surrogates," whose main task is to "deliver administration 'themes and messages' to millions of Americans 'in the form of their own opinions'."

contractors either as lobbyists, senior executives, board members or consultants. The companies include defense heavyweights, but also scores of smaller companies, all part of a vast assemblage of contractors scrambling for hundreds of billions in military business generated by the administration's war on terror. It is a furious competition, one in which inside information and easy access to senior officials are highly prized. Records and interviews show how the Bush administration has used its control over access and information in an effort to transform the analysts into a kind of media Trojan horse—an instrument intended to shape terrorism coverage from inside the major TV and radio networks.

The report said many military analysts denied that they had allowed outside business interests to affect their on-air comments, making sure to keep network officials informed about their outside endeavors and potential conflicts of interest, even using their platforms to criticize the conduct of the war. However, some network officials acknowledged they did not hold military analysts to the same ethical standards as their news employees regarding outside financial interests. Such integration reveals "the merger between the American media and the military establishment" (Greenwald, 2012).

This is just one way in which news media professionals can act as political partisans who use their access and influence to foster or direct conversation about pet causes or controversial subjects, causing stories to be framed in subjective, if not unconventional, ways. Framing is the process by which individuals collect anecdotal and stereotypical information to understand and respond to events. Essentially, it is the series of mental filters people create due to cultural and biological influences (Goffman, 1974). News media professionals use framing as a function of the gatekeeping process to present

information from a particular perspective, so that some details of content are emphasized and others remain obscured or hidden in the background (Graber, 2006). In an effort to create cognitive efficiency, frames are constructed individually and socially within a culture built through values, ideologies, narratives, and professional norms, helping journalists to convey information because they facilitate simplification of complex issues (Entman, 1993; Cuillier, 2012). Although frame selection varies from journalist to journalist and from situation to situation, instances of selective framing do occur, particularly with those stories deemed "uncontroversial" by decision-makers in the newsroom. "Journalists tend to exercise least control over the framing of uncontroversial news coming from official sources and most control over the framing of news about unexpected events or events unearthed by journalists through their own efforts" (Graber, 2006, p. 162). News and media professionals greatly influence public debate and action regarding certain issues deemed important; and they do this in ways they might not realize due to their respective social identities (Graber, 2006; Cuillier, 2012).

Social identity theory predicts intergroup behaviors on the basis of the perceived status, legitimacy and permeability of the intergroup environment. It also suggests people "associate with certain groups to bolster their self-esteem" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Cuillier, 2012, p. 7) and classify others as either part of their ingroup or outgroup based on various demographic factors, including sex, race, religion, social status, and political beliefs. Intergroup bias occurs when "members of competing groups favor their own group and oppose those in the outgroup" (p. 7). It is the idea that people are most comfortable when they are around other people or cultures that reinforce or appear to validate their perceptions of themselves or the world. Similarly, people tend to retreat and

cling to their opinions when they are faced with their own mortality; this is the basis for terror management theory. Unlike other animals, "humans are aware that they will die…this fear would be paralyzing if it were not for defense mechanisms developed over time: clinging more strongly to cultural worldviews, increased affiliation with ingroups, and increased hostility toward outgroups" (p. 8).[13]

Following these lines of thought, journalistic bias is often apparent when the subjects of stories involve an ingroup or outgroup; this bias might manifest itself latently or evidently. Thus, in a stratified media landscape, it is not unreasonable to assume that some media professionals might make extraordinary efforts to appear as "objective" as possible when they report news stories, disregarding any premise that might lend itself to criticism about "biased coverage." This leaves deeper explanation of critical issues up to the whims of politicians or demagogues, who might or might not have enough time to go over the details with the public prior to any legislative action. (This claim could also extend to pundits, polemicists, and other individuals who might manipulate the constraints of contemporary news media to broadcast select viewpoints.) This, in turn, makes the public ignorant about certain policy issues; this is considered "one of the damaging consequences of such framing…public cynicism is another" (Graber, 2006, p. 162.). Such cynicism could be argued as conducive to a stratified media landscape, whether it is from the point of view of consumers who want their opinions and values re-affirmed or media organizations that would want to capitalize on fragmented markets.

In many cases, news media organizations create the climate that spurs political action (Graber, 2006). Furthermore, agenda building tends to occur around a precipitating

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[13] People might also cling strongly to familiar behaviors. For example, late ABC News anchor Peter Jennings said he had resumed smoking as a means to cope with the September 11 attacks. A long-time smoker, Jennings had given up the habit for about 20 years until that point.

event and begins when news and media professionals decide to publish stories they believe deserve national attention or scrutiny. This involves several steps, including the application of an interpretive frame that will capture the attention of the audience. For example, Watergate was seen as a mere partisan political tiff until news media and members of Congress began to depict it as an issue of "pervasive corruption and dishonesty at the highest levels of government" (p. 165). Without such attention, the public would never have accepted penalties for the offending Watergate participants or even President Richard Nixon. The attention to detail given to the language of the adversarial narrative is fundamental to the public's acceptance of the message within the conceptual framework:

> *When newspeople and politicians switched from writing and talking about the Watergate "caper" or the "bugging incident" and began to discuss the Watergate "scandal" and "tragedy," a once trivial incident became a very serious matter. The particular sources that journalists choose to cite for their story are important. Skewing inevitably takes place when one human source, rather than another, provides information and interpretation* (p. 165).

This does not belie the potential seriousness and severity of terrorism or any event of mass violence, nor is it an attempt to classify such wantonly violent incidents as being "trivial." Rather, it demonstrates the ways in which media organizations can manipulate and be selective about the terms they use to describe events, as they are aware of the effects such terms might have on public opinion regardless of intent. At the same time, by conveying stories in certain ways, news media can shed light on underreported stories; promote solutions to problems; and rectify serious grievances that might otherwise have

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gone ignored by the public. "When the media make events seem important, average people as well as politicians discuss them and form opinion. This enhances the perceived importance of these events and ensures even more public and, possibly, political action" (p. 197). However, audiences do exercise degrees of judiciousness when it comes to the agendas proposed to them by news media organizations.

Concepts of "Whiteness"

The institutional routines of news organizations and the foreign policy interests of corporations or other influential specialty groups play important roles in the production and presentation of news content. Culture also plays an important role in how the public consumes and contextualizes media messages. Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which matters of race, prejudice, and bigotry do or do not factor into the aforementioned research questions, it is important to examine the ways in which they operate within the framework of "whiteness." The term "whiteness" does not refer to skin color but instead, to the set of social and political standards whose cultural meanings have ideological and material consequences (Kincheloe, 1999). These are considered "normative" standards within U.S. society and are not challenged as the source of "bad" or otherwise "deviant" behaviors (Anselmi, 2000). Whiteness is "intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between white and non-white people" and thus, the concept "cannot be separated from hegemony" (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 162).

Racially, whiteness is an ambiguous construct, if not one that is defined subjectively:

Defining whiteness is really difficult because it is a default category. It's something that we don't define. And part of Whiteness is the fact that Whites don't

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have to think about race. Ethnicity might matter but race doesn't matter to White

people. And that is part of what whiteness is (Conley, 2003).

"Whiteness" also refers to feelings of entitlement and the privilege of "not having to think about being in the norm or dominant group" (Conley, 2003). Furthermore, it is the understanding the United States' social, political, and economic systems are designed for and operated by the dominant group. Regarding race and identity, these feelings remain unchallenged until they are juxtaposed against non-whites (Anselmi, 2000); conflict arises when non-white narratives enter the mainstream, facilitating the creation of tautological links to bridge dialectical gaps. For example, "if statistics show that blacks commit more street crimes than whites, some researchers immediately attribute a causal linkage between blackness and criminal activity," but this "correlational evidence is not universally applied" (p. 51). If "evidence showed that whites engage in more embezzlement or illegal stock dealings than blacks, 'whiteness' would hardly be given as the explanation for this finding" (p. 51). This results in the creation of stereotypes that "ignore individual differences by creating a generic image of a group that is applied to all of its members" (Greco Larson, 2006, p. 83). News and entertainment media organizations have awarded such caricatured stereotypes a degree of factuality by not challenging them in their coverage and creative content, which already exhibits a lack of perspective and depth:

> *Newsworthiness criteria used by journalists help explain why positive stereotypes*
> *are less prevalent than negative ones. One of the criteria is that news be familiar*
> *to the viewers. Because a racist history generates stereotypes, familiar stories are*

more likely to be negative. The criteria of conflict and violence also draw reporters to stereotypes that demonize groups (p. 83)*.*

Although the prevalence of non-whites in news coverage has increased, "hard news" stories (i.e., non-sports or entertainment content) featuring racial minorities often emphasize their threat to the social order and their opposition to whites, or reinforce the idea they are a direct threat to the interests of the status quo (Greco Larson, 2006). This is the case even when news stories depict minorities in positive ways, creating a paradox in the minds of white audiences through coverage that shows minorities as being "similar but different" to them. Non-whites gain acceptance by assimilating to the social order, working hard, and adhering to the rules of the established socio-cultural system; however, they are different in that minorities often will not or cannot do these things. "The two messages allow the news to celebrate American values and justify inequality at the same time" (p. 84).

In regard to news coverage, the consequence of such paradoxical depictions is the establishment of a dichotomy that classifies minorities as "good" or "bad." "Good" minority groups are those who accomplish (or demonstrate aspects of) "the American Dream" (i.e., "pick themselves up by their own bootstraps;" "from rags to riches;" etc.) The achievements of these "good" minority groups not only promote prejudicial and discriminative social practices as outdated, but also ideas of assimilation by demonstrating that "those who escape their designated place are not a threat to society because they manifest the same values and ambitions as the dominant culture and overcome the deficits of their home communities" (p. 84).

Contrarily, "bad" minority groups are those who are "either creating problems for others or plagued by their own difficulties" (p. 84). This idea is compounded further by the lack of depth, perspective, and historical context news media organizations give to stories about minority groups, making their actions appear "pathological, self-defeating, irrational, and due to inherent character flaws" and concurrent with the assumptions of white audiences (pp. 84-85). Thus, an impression is given to audiences that control of these "problem" minorities is a good thing because it preserves the socio-cultural norms enjoyed by whites and the "good" minorities who emulate them. "The politics of whiteness has been enormously, and often terrifyingly, effective in the formations of coalitions that unite people across cultural differences, across class and gender relations, and against their best interests" (Apple, 2006, p. 236). Naturally, such socio-cultural inequality and disparity facilitates an atmosphere of "Us" versus "Them"—or "Otherness."

Concepts of "Otherness"

U.S. popular media often portray minority groups within a framework of "otherness," a construct that contextualizes them as being "deviant" from the normative standards of the status quo. Even in today's ever evolving, increasingly interactive media environment, xenophobic ideologies and content persist and remain influential despite the capabilities of new media technologies to disseminate information quickly and connect people to one another (Esposito & Kalin, 2011). Otherness depends on an audience's implicit understanding of what is "normal" (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008). This is critical due to the socio-economic, cultural, and political benefits awarded to the members of the dominant groups within society. Arguably, people who are least affected

by the hegemonic structures are likely to be the least aware of the influence it has on people affected the most. As comedian Dave Chappelle said during a 2006 appearance on an episode of A&E's *Inside the Actors Studio*:

> *America needs an honest discourse with itself. This is, like, the greatest country in the world by default…but we could actually be the greatest country that ever existed if we were just honest about who we are, what we are, where we wanna go—and if we learn how to have that discourse. Things like racism are institutionalized, it's systemic. You might not know any bigots—you feel like, "Well, I don't hate black people, so I'm not a racist"—but you benefit from racism just by the merit of the color of your skin. There's opportunities that you had—you're privileged in ways that you may not even realize because you haven't been deprived in certain ways.*

"The Other" ("them") is distinguished from the mainstream, rational community ("us") by characteristics seen as aberrant from conceptions of civility, morality, and restraint. Furthermore, "the 'other' is one that poses a threat to a sense of national security, which often hinders on an existing notion of the national image" (Deeprawat, 2002, p. 10), ultimately demonstrating an imminent threat to a sense of social order. It is an enemy image created through a binary dynamic of "us" versus "them."

For example, consider professional wrestling—a popular form of entertainment that has used the "Us vs. Them" narrative routinely during its boom periods in the 1980s, late-1990s, and as recently as 2005. During the golden age of pro wrestling in the 1960s and '70s, stylized "foreign" villains (often portrayed by Americans) like Fritz Von Erich

and Baron Von Raschke,[14] The Sheik and Abdullah the Butcher,[15] Kamala the Ugandan Giant,[16] Ivan Koloff,[17] and Tojo Yamamoto[18] antagonized audiences while brutalizing their American flag-waving heroes inside the ring.[19] The morality plays that took place inside the "squared circle" drew huge audiences, who gladly paid to watch their heroes vindicate American values against these egregiously foul foreign fanatics.

Even when portrayals of minorities are framed in ways that could be assumed as being positive (at least outwardly), they are still portrayed as being subservient to dominant themes of whiteness (Entman & Rojecki, 2000); this is especially true for portrayals of African-Americans. In movies such as *The Legend of Bagger Vance, The Green Mile,* and *The Family Man*, the "simple" African-American protagonist supplies folksy assistance to the white protagonist, whose world is too complicated by the demands of industry and empire building to devote any time toward his spiritual and emotional well being. Although such portrayals have positive, racially harmonious connotations, they also link African-American culture and knowledge with the supernatural world. By contrast, films like *Jerry Maguire, Men of Honor,* and *Finding Forrester* convey images in which African-Americans are in need of whites to make sense of the world, save them, or manage their affairs.

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[14] Nazi Germany

[15] Pan-Arabia

[16] Pan-Africa

[17] Soviet Russia

[18] Japan

[19] Minority characters, regardless of their status as "good guys" or "bad guys" often exhibited similar traits. For example, characters hailing from any of the Pacific islands (e.g., "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka, the Wild Samoans, etc.) were often described and portrayed as being "savage" and "animalistic" in their manner and in-ring prowess. Similarly, African-American characters were portrayed as being "hard-headed" and thus, immune to attacks to that area (e.g., the Junkyard Dog, Koko B. Ware, etc.).

Such portrayals demonstrate gaps in the "social status, economic resources, cultural influence, and political power between white Americans as a whole and Black Americans as a whole" (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. xxiv). The constructs of political economy extend this growing disparity to other minorities, too. These gaps persist not only due to historically manifest hegemonic factors, but also because of latent factors of otherness:

> *Real multiculturalism is an ideal that is yet to be realized, although societies can congratulate themselves on having managed to become conscious of the existence and validity of the 'Other,' mainly on a purely humanitarian level, which, though at times protected by legislation, does not percolate down to the national consciousness or collective unconscious...deeply held ideas, underscored by nationalism and xenophobia, still motivate societal systems—no matter how insidiously—and therefore continue to be exploited in wider elements of popular culture today* (Al-Shaikh-Ali, 2011, p. 144).

For example, there is no ethnically equivalent racial slur that can be used to describe whites as a whole in the same way the words "(sand) nigger," "camel jockey," or "dune coon" could describe Blacks or Arabs (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. xxv). Further, as Western society encounters groups less assimilated to "white culture," there exist words and stereotypes that "can injure by contributing to others' prejudices, and might ultimately be translated into adverse resource allocations for group members" (p. xxv). As will be explicated in the next section, such disparities have affected Arab and Muslim populations both before and after the September 11 terror attacks.

Portrayals of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims in U.S. News and Popular Media

For more than four decades, the United States has maintained a rather adversarial relationship with the culture, socio-political constructs, and people of the Middle East. "The Arabs and the Middle East did not and do not always respond to (American) desires as we expect them to in our political designs and schemes, i.e., our ideologies and myths" (Semmerling, 2006, p. 23). Within the American psyche, this has cultivated an atmosphere of fear, one that "upsets the entire binary system of (America's) Orientalist project" (p. 23). In this atmosphere, the most egregious acts and images of destruction are made rational in the contextualization of narratives in which Arabs—and by extension, Muslims all over the world—"threaten our ideological mythic structures" (p. 23). In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, these fears receive additional nourishment by notions that despite the United States' political and military efforts within the Middle East (as well as in Afghanistan and Pakistan), it remains unclear (in the minds of Americans) as to which ideology has proven itself superior: the righteousness of the American, or the wickedness of the "evil" Arabs.

Arabs and other socio-cultural nuances of the Middle East have long been subjects of caricature and ridicule in Western art, literature, and other popular media and entertainment. Arnold Schwarzenegger defeated the "Crimson Jihad" in the 1994 blockbuster *True Lies*; Doc Brown powered his time machine using plutonium stolen from Libyan nationalists in 1985's *Back to the Future; s*pecial agent Jack Bauer routinely battled Islamic militants throughout the duration of the television series *24*; and even Richie Rich and Bugs Bunny have matched wits with smarmy Arab sheiks. News organizations, too, appear quick to frame stories of conflict in the Middle East or

involving persons of Arab ancestry using terms such as "extremists," "fanatics," and "terrorists" (El-Farra, 1996). These terms received increasing attention after the September 11 attacks, when news organizations were reporting the first stages of crisis coverage.[20] News media organizations also tend to employ different strategies when covering an anti-American terrorist act than when covering other foreign policy issues (Nacos, 1994). Instead of relying on traditional administrative sources, news media organizations call upon a variety of sources to help make sense of the situation, including terrorists and their allies, families of the victims, and critics of the establishment.

Arab stereotypes, depicting them as inherently oily (figuratively and literally) and threateningly different people, have remained constant over time and fostered feelings of mistrust and disdain in the American psyche (Shaheen, 1984).[21] Even in the caricaturized world of professional wrestling, the narrative of the devious, crazed Arab is routinely told within a jingoistic framework. One of the most enduring portrayals of such villainy transpired during the Iran hostage crisis, which occurred from November 1979 to January 1981. Audiences around the country jeered the Iron Sheik, an Iranian nationalist who insulted American values and came to the ring waving a flag emblazoned with "the virtual face of Islam in Western popular culture," Ayatollah Khomeini (Nasr, 2006, p. 138)—Iran's newly established, staunchly conservative political and religious authority who *Time Magazine* named "Man of the Year" in 1979. Of course, the Iron Sheik

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[20] Although the shift was more pronounced in local news coverage (specifically in New York City), both local and national news made an overwhelming shift from episodic to thematic framing patterns in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Before September 11, "support for protecting the civil liberties of American Muslims and Arabs was more often expressed in national reporting than in New York metropolitan area news" (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2006, p. 16).

[21] In "100 Years of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotyping," Mazin B. Qumsiyeh of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee comments that traditionally, Arabs and Muslims are depicted in art and literature as one of three "Bs": Billionaires, Belly-dancers, and Bombers.

eventually received his comeuppance from Sgt. Slaughter, a camouflage-wearing drill instructor whose signature hold, called the "Cobra Clutch," hearkened back to the revolutionary patriotism reflected in the Gadsden flag.[22] The Iron Sheik's defeat inside the ring symbolized the superiority of the United States over the idea of pan-Arabian nationalism (and by proxy, the superiority of "Judeo-Christian" American/Western culture over Islam and Arab culture)—despite the fact that Iranians are neither ethnically nor culturally considered to be Arab. The reasons behind this assertion could be found by furthering Shaheen's hypothesis (1984) of the logical fallacy employed by producers of contemporary news and entertainment:

1. The Middle East is comprised of Arabs;

2. All Arabs are (practicing) Muslims;

3. All Arabs/Muslims are uncivilized, enslaving rulers of kingdoms;

4. Kingdoms are incompatible with democracy and Western values;

5. Democracy and Western values promote reasoning, equality, justice, and individualism.

6. Therefore, Arabs/Muslims are enemies to promoters of reason, equality, justice, and individualism.

Despite periods of genuine scholarship and awareness, "ignorance, conflict, and demonization have also been present, namely through the Crusades, imperialism, and colonialism" (Abbas, 2011, p. 65). Throughout these periods, Muslims have been

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[22] Interestingly enough, when Sgt. Slaughter portrayed an Iraqi-sympathizer during the first Gulf War, he and the Iron Sheik would join forces to combat the wrestling world's new red, white, and blue-blooded, all-American hero: Hulk Hogan. During Slaughter and Hogan's match at WrestleMania VII in 1991, announcer Gorilla Monsoon's commentary seemingly defined "the Iraqis" as fundamentally different than the "overwhelming majority of Arab-Americans" who disagreed with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's tactics. The World Wrestling Federation—now known as WWE—revisited the Iraqi-sympathizer gimmick in 2004 with the introduction of "Muhammad Hassan," who riled audiences during the early years of the second Iraq war.

portrayed as "savage," "moronic," "small minded," or "fanatical religious militants." These negative characterizations and treatments of the "Muslim other" still exist today as part of an effort to aggrandize established powers and, in the process, "legitimize existing modes of domination and subordination in social, economic, and political life" (p. 65). Current fear of Muslims "has its own idiosyncratic features that connect it with more recent experiences of neocolonialism, decolonization, immigration and postwar racism" (p. 65). This cultivates "Islamophobia," a concept that denotes "acts of intolerance, discrimination, unfounded fear, and racism against Islam and Muslims" (Esposito & Kalin, 2011, p. 4). The premises of Islamophobia are as follows:

1. Muslim cultures are seen as monolithic;

2. Islamic cultures are substantially different from other cultures;

3. Islam is perceived as implacably threatening;

4. Adherents of Islam use their faith to gain political or military advantage;

5. Muslim criticism of Western cultures and societies is rejected out of hand;

6. The fear of Islam is mixed with racist hostility to immigration; and

7. Islamophobia is assumed to be natural and unproblematic.

Furthermore:

> *This typology conveniently provides a range of descriptors in relation to Islamophobia, where the concept captures primary functions that are historical, cultural, and policy oriented in scope. The characteristics of Islamophobia relate to how it is defined by "the other" so as to become further "othered" by the very same "otherer," where this "othering" is related to racist fear and hostility, as well as to the apparently irredeemable nature of Islam and Muslims…While*

racism on the basis of "Race" is still present, the anti-Muslim shift suggest markers of difference of a social and religio-cultural nature (Abbas, 2011, p. 66).

Another way in which Arabs, Muslims, and the greater Middle East receive scrutiny is within a framework of Orientalism, a term redefined by Said (1978) to describe the manner in which Western (or Occidental) powers create images and perceptions—both artistic and academic—of non-Western peoples to further imperialistic goals:

So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression (Said, 1980).

Citing the 1992 Disney animated film *Aladdin*, based on the classic tale from the *One Thousand and One (Arabian) Nights*, Addison (1993) expands on the erasure of nuance and the amalgamation of diverse cultures by Western producers:

Venal vendors, half-dead hash-smokers, sword swallowers, veiled women, nearly naked veiled women, belly-dancers, acrobats, camels, elephants, Bengal tigers, cobras, Arabian steeds, desert, garden, scarab, fez, turban, khufiyyah, pyramid, pagoda, Taj-Mahal, suq, classical ruins, Allah, the djinn, and the Chinese New Year are fused to represent the Orient created by the European academy. By combining this material undistinguished into one field, the distinctive signatures

of these cultures (China, India, Arabia, Morocco, et al.) are erased and replaced

by a familiar ideological configuration (p. 7).

Though cautious not to attribute the situation to an environment of anti-intellectualism or a simplistic causal relationship, Said (1980) notes that political authority evolves by identifying new places of "national interest" and then classifying them as inherently inferior to the predominant system.

It is important to note, however, that such feelings change in accordance with the geo-political relationship between individual Arab or Muslim nations and the United States. Positive images exist as long as these nations are supportive of the United States or its policies (Ghareeb, 1983)—the Saudi royal family, or the Afghan freedom fighters that stood against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, for example. News and media professionals have traditionally done a poor job of describing the nuances of Arab culture, Islam and Muslims, and the overall historicity of the socio-political and economic conditions of the Middle East (Said, 1997)—not to mention the effects of nearly a century of United States foreign policy that cannot be considered to have always been in the best interests of Middle Easterners. Media organizations tend to reduce Middle East affairs—especially those involving Islam—to matters of extremism (or "fundamentalism" or "radicalism"), without any consideration for the various cultural differences present throughout the Muslim world, many of which have no practical basis in Islam; also, without any concrete methodology for defining such abstract terminology:

Does every one of the billion Muslims in the world feel rage and inferiority, does

every citizen of Indonesia, Pakistan, or Egypt resent "Western" influences? How

would one set about getting answers to such basic questions? Or is it the case that

"Islam" cannot be investigated as we would any other culture or religion because, unlike all the others, it stands outside "normal" human experience . . . as if it, and everything within it, resembles a psychopathological human being? (p. xviii).

Long before September 11, 2011, Arabs and Muslims were portrayed in popular media as womanizing, misogynistic, anti-Western zealots who were out to destroy everything that was good, wholesome, and apple pie loving about America. In some cases, they also were presented as otherworldly purveyors, avatars, and vessels of the occult. Furthering notions of otherness inherent within Orientalist frameworks and citing the classic 1973 horror film *The Exorcist*, Semmerling (2006) describes the antagonist demon's origins and language as "within the heredity of the Arab" (p. 56), pervading the dimension of normative language and commandeering "the conceptual orders and modes of action of our culture to which we have become so inclined and accustomed" (p. 57). [23] The prologue, in which the demon is unearthed in Iraq, present "disjunctive Orientalist caricatures of Arab people," and "an entextualization of the Arab landscape, Arab bodies and faces, Arabic language, Islamic practices, and slices of Arab life" (pp. 57-58). Since such "entextualized elements work within the traditions and parameters of Orientalism, a perceived reality in our Western minds, they become plausible" (p. 58).

Drawing a parallel to Walt Disney's animation theory of the plausible impossible—the process by which impossible elements within a narrative can happen if they are prepared as possible—he goes on to say that many of these perceptions fermented during the political turmoil of the early 1970s. In essence, the past is prologue:

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[23] *The Exorcist* is based on William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel of the same name by. In 1999, *Entertainment Weekly* ranked it as "the scariest movie of all-time."

This was the period of the Egyptian and Syrian surprise attack on Israel, the rise of Palestinian international terrorism striking Western Europe, a bellicose Libyan leader calling for Pan-Arabism and an Islamic Revival, and Middle East oil embargoes against the West. Magazines and newspapers were replete with stories and images of conspiring and plotting Arab leaders; masked Palestinian guerrillas attacking Western institutions like airliners, airports, and the Olympics; fantastically rich Arabs draining the treasures of oil-consuming nations and unable to spend the proceeds fast enough; prototypes of American gas ration coupons; and Midwestern children dressed in winter coats, hats, and gloves studying in their cold classrooms. The American public had been primed to believe that the Arabs were rising up from their 'dusty and dingy' capitals, infiltrating the security of American lives, and demanding to be treated with 'deadly seriousness' (p. 58).

However, Americans did not have to worry too much about their values being overthrown or children being possessed or indoctrinated because they had actors like Denzel Washington, Bruce Willis, and Harrison Ford defending America's honor (and, arguably, the honor of the free world) from the likes of unscrupulous Arab radicals[24] and Nazi-sympathizing, gun-toting Egyptians.[25] "These scenarios and others depicted us as perfectly good angels killing them perfectly evil infidels. They assured audiences that God was on our side, that we were good Clint 'Make my day' Eastwood guys, sure to win easily over bad Arab guys" (Shaheen, 2008, p. xix). Of course, popular media portrayals of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims intensified after September 11, although there

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[24] *The Siege* (1998)

[25] *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)

were instances in which popular media portrayed Arabs as worthy individuals. Still, for every episode of *The Simpsons* depicting friendship between Bart Simpson and his new Muslim neighbors,[26] there exist films like *Executive Decision* (1996) in which the protagonists must save Washington D.C. from the supporters of fictional terrorist El Sayed Jaffa, or *Iron Man* (2008), which was re-tooled for contemporary audiences to feature antagonists of supposedly Arab and Afghan descent.[27]

Islamophobic discourse has long masqueraded in Western media as art and literature (Abbas, 2011).[28] Arabs are the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood (Shaheen, 2008). While African Americans could argue this sentiment because of overt racism, Arabs and Muslims could argue based on overt bigotry toward their beliefs and culture, which are seen as inferior to Western values, philosophy and (perhaps) Judeo-Christian historicity. It is one thing to portray negatively an ethnic or minority group because of a characteristic they have no control over (skin color, for example), as such portrayals can obviously be dismissed due to their blatant rhetorical absurdities, but it is something else entirely to portray negatively the particular beliefs of a given group. Arguably, this is a gray area because unlike skin color or ethnicity, a belief (or non-belief) set is subjective and can be discarded, critiqued, changed, or adapted by a person at any time, especially if "civilized" populations perceive them as being

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[26] "Mypods and Broomsticks" is the seventh episode of the twentieth season of *The Simpsons*.

[27] Published by Marvel Comics, *Iron Man* debuted in March 1963 as an anti-Communist hero. The character's origin story involved his alter ego, American billionaire Tony Stark, becoming a prisoner of war to the Vietcong, who hoped to use his expertise to design their weapons. Maintaining the core narrative of his abduction, Iron Man's origin story would be re-imagined in subsequent releases of the comic book.

[28] Speaking of art, "political cartoons, in particular, demonstrate quite vividly the Islamophobia that has been alternately latent and manifest in the United States for more than two centuries" (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2011, p. 196). Furthermore, "the oil crisis of the 1970s and the concomitant rise of Arab purchases of American real estate and business interests compelled many cartoonists to portray Arabs as omnivorous gluttons who threatened to consume the United States" (p. 206). This causes Muslims to play a negative and unwitting role in defining the American norm.

antithetical to "modernity" or ultimately and categorically wrong. "Islamophobia is particularly pernicious because, like sexism, racism, and homophobia, the fear of Islam has become normalized within American and other Western cultures. In other words, news organizations, entertainment businesses, political discourse, and everyday conversations of individuals express anxiety about Islam by using conclusions so taken for granted that they become truisms—neither needing substantiation nor likely to be challenged" (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2011, p. 196).

"Hate rhetoric, the War on Terror, the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East have generated damaging new media stereotypes and new government law enforcement policies" (Shaheen, 2008, p. 7). With the collapse of the Soviet Union effectively ending the Cold War, the socio-political and economic elites of the United States were in need of a new social control mechanism, one they could use to maintain the status quo perpetuated by the constant emphasis of the "Us vs. Them (Soviet Russia/Communism)" media narrative; this was done by modifying the socio-political norms of the Cold War to create the "War on Terror" (Chomsky, 2001). This conceptual re-configuration was mentioned by the *New York Times* in January 1996 with the headline, "The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam" (Said, 1997, p. xix). Said contends that such an idea is, by its nature, absurd by its "unprovable, purely polemical essentials" (p. xx).

Defining Terrorism to the Public

Although terrorism might be an intangible, abstract concept within socio-political frameworks, legally speaking, it has an established definition. The U.S. government codifies terrorism as involving "(a) acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of

the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; (b) appear to be intended—(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (c) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States" (DeFoster, 2010, p. 3-4). This is a rather broad definition as, theoretically, any act that is in violation of this outline could be considered an act of terrorism, regardless of the greater circumstances surrounding the event or the motivations behind it.

Yin (2012) expands on the technical definition of terrorism, saying the tactic is not always about clandestine attacks designed to kill as many innocent people as possible. Further, that terrorism has "encompassed left-wing, right-wing, and religions terrorists…with different tactics and goals" (p. 4). He also emphasizes the importance of intimidation and coercion in quantifying the definition, noting a different subsection on immigration includes "'highjacking or sabotage of any conveyance,' hostage taking 'in order to compel a third person (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing any act,' and assassination, use of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapon" in its definition (p. 4).[29] "A third section defines terrorism as 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents" (p. 5).[30] These definitions are important due to the ways in which terrorism is understood and contextualized socio-politically:

> *These definitions presume that there will be some statement from the alleged*
>
> *perpetrator of an act, or demand, or at the minimum, indication of responsibility,*

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[29] 8 U.S.C. § 1182.
[30] 22 U.S.C. § 2656f.

from which we can determine whether the violent act was "intended to intimidate

or coerce" the public, to "influence the policy of a government by intimidation or

coercion," or to "compel [the government] to do or abstain from doing any act";

or if it was otherwise politically motivated (p. 5).

The tactic of suicide bombing, which is often associated with Arab Muslim

groups, "has been practiced by a variety of terrorists, including secular terrorists," and

that definitions of terrorism throughout the 1980s and earlier, "appear to fit federal

definitions of terrorism better than that of the 1990s and later" (p. 4). It would be naïve

and unreasonable to ignore the number of high profile cases of terrorism perpetrated by

Arab or Muslim groups; however, "when publicly labeled instances of terrorism are

disproportionately linked to Arab-Americans and/or Muslim-Americans, there may be an

undue temptation to assume that the perpetrators of any new apparent act of terrorism are

probably members of those groups" (p. 25). Thus, "reflexively labeling Arab- or Muslim-

American criminal suspects as terrorists, but not other suspects accused of similar

conduct, creates a self-reinforcing loop. Each Arab or Muslim terrorist 'confirms' the

(erroneous) public impression that while not all Arabs/Muslims are terrorists, all (or

most) terrorists are Arabs/Muslims" (p. 26).

Although it would be equally as naïve to claim terrorism committed by whites or

non-Muslims was not labeled as such by the public, examples like Timothy McVeigh or

"The Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski would appear to be exceptions to the rule—ones that

might allow someone to "henceforth consider all terrorists to be Muslim, without being

racist or bigoted" (p. 27). This self-reinforcing loop further reinforces cognitive biases,

creating a priming effect about crimes perpetrated by "others" and leading to faulty

conclusions. "A fixation on Muslims as the only terrorists leads to an unhealthy feedback mechanism, whereby the government and public believe that efforts should be focused on the Muslim community, which in turn results in arrests that reinforce the initial belief" (p. 28).[31]

Regarding the ways in which terrorism-like violence is communicated to the public, it is important to consider that "events deemed 'terrorist attacks,' are often filtered through the lens of September 11" (DeFoster, 2010, p. 4). This suggests the public has been primed to consider acts of violence as acts of terrorism only when committed by Muslims or individuals of Middle Eastern ancestry.[32] People consume news media about acts of terrorism with pre-conceived notions about groups they see as outsiders and "are more likely to ascribe external responsibility for criminal events to white, in-group individuals in news coverage, and to ascribe internal, personal responsibility to non-white, out-group individuals in news coverage" (p. 7).

Excessive news coverage of certain events of violence or terrorism affects the public psychologically, too. The more people hear and talk about terrorism, the more likely they are to let emotion and fear, rather than reason, dictate their actions (West & Orr, pp. 93-105). This sort of irrationality behooves agencies looking to implement new anti-terrorism strategies and news organizations competing for viewers. Additionally, a

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[31] Yin cites the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, as one example of this type of cognitive bias. It was assumed Arab terrorists were responsible for the attack, arresting an Arab-American named Ibrahim Ahmad on suspicion of involvement. Even after Ahmad was released and authorities identified McVeigh and accomplice Terry Nichols as the perpetrators of the attack, some public figures and officials attempted to link it to former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. McVeigh's lawyer also attempted to link the incident to Osama bin Laden and other Arab terrorists who were responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing (p. 29).

[32] Despite news media's deployment of pro-Muslim messages in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, fringe anti-Muslim organizations dominated mass media via displays of anger and fear, becoming mainstream in the process (Bail, 2012). Inattention to condemnations of violence from prominent Muslim organizations created "a very distorted" representation of the community of organizations and entities "competing to shape the representation of Islam in the American public sphere" (Clark, 2012).

by-product of such coverage results in increased levels of socio-political anxiety—an unintended consequence of the news selection process that could be considered one of the intended goals of terrorists (Traugott & Brader, 2003). Wittebols (1991) argues media coverage and analyses of terrorism are matters of hegemonic influence. News media classify acts of terrorism as either *grievance* or *institutional* terrorism.

Grievance terrorism refers to the ways in which government sources utilize news media to establish agendas hostile to groups with interests in conflict with those of the United States. Institutional terrorism refers to attempts to decrease coverage and conceal the degree to which the United States supports repressive regimes. News coverage of terrorism often emphasizes grievance terrorism against the state and tends to ignore institutional terrorism (Brooten, 2006). In either case, the goal of the relationship between the government and news media is to create a narrative in which terrorism is a black-and-white concept discussed within frameworks beneficial to government interests (p. 263). This distinction matters because "'terrorist' is the mother of all damning labels in this post-9/11 age. And beyond politics and public relations, ideas about what constitutes terrorism and who commits it can have a significant effect on law enforcement and court outcomes" (Krattenmaker, 2012).

However, news coverage is not merely a matter of manifest text; any analysis of coverage of terrorism must also consider the latent cues news media organizations provide the audience through their methods of production. From a production standpoint, television media is far more engaging emotionally than any other medium (Cho, et al., 2003); it is understood that audience interpretation of news varies considerably based on the method of consumption. The same story could be interpreted differently, depending

on the medium, so one could only imagine the impact the current stratified broadcast news landscape has on certain news stories. For example, a 2006 Washington Post study concluded that a person is more likely to consume pieces of news that come from sources coinciding with their preconceived opinions about the world (Manjoo, 2008). Viewers tend to choose media messages featuring values and opinions consistent with their group memberships. Ultimately, this leads to specialized media environments in which people become defined by the media they consume rather than a shared national identity, uniting around a specific identification that can influence intergroup dynamics and tensions. Media content represents critical territory and identity battles between particular groups, reflecting group status and vitality and conveying societal values about diversity and intergroup relations. This conclusion also extends to selection of entertainment content: individuals prefer television shows featuring in-group members or stars (Harwood & Roy, 2005).

Perception is reality in the world of television news and the ways in which news stories are presented have profound effects on the ways in which information is interpreted and processed by the audience. Heavy television users experience greater emotional responses to news stories involving terrorism (Cho et al., 2003). Certain tropes of television news production (e.g., split screens, lead-in music, and interspersed footage) also evoke strong emotional responses in viewers; additionally, footage of the aftermath of the September 11 attacks generated retaliatory responses (Reynolds & Barnett, 2002, p. 19). Such presentation serves to promote and further the idea that within the United States, news coverage of terrorism is conveyed through a simplistic narrative of "Good vs. Evil" (Wittebols, 1991).

This binary narrative is problematic for Muslim-Americans, who have roundly rejected and condemned terrorism as a legitimate means of achieving socio-political goals. Despite claims by various U.S. politicians in the decade since September 11, "the terrorist threat posed by radicalized Muslim-Americans has been exaggerated" as "such communities often self-police—confronting those who express radical ideology or support for terrorism and communicating concerns about radical individuals to authorities" (CNN Wire Staff, 2010a). According to a 2011 Pew Research Center study, there have been no signs of support for extremism in Muslim-American communities since its last survey of Muslim-Americans in 2007. More than 80 percent of Muslim-Americans believe "suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians are never justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies" (p. 65). (This percentage is comparable with two of the largest Muslim-majority countries, Pakistan and Indonesia, both of which rejected suicide bombing and other violence against civilians by more than 75 percent.) Such beliefs would also be consistent with an oft-quoted principle of Islamic theology that equates the murder of one person with the murder of all mankind.[33]

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[33] Qur'an 5:32 (*Surat Al-Ma'idah*)

CHAPTER III

Method

Sampling

This qualitative research study was a textual analysis of 35 news clips from three U.S.-based cable news media organizations: MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News Channel. Using a Grounded Theory approach to conceptualize coverage vis-à-vis "otherness," Muslim stereotypes, and anti-Muslim rhetoric, these clips were examined through a lens of political economy. Although a quantitative approach might have set each event against its counterpart in a more concrete manner vis-à-vis the explicit language used to describe the circumstances of each event or the stated motives of each suspect, a qualitative methodology was preferred to account for and organize the latent content present within each clip. In other words, to complement the explicit texts and examine the underlying tones and non-verbal cues present within each discussion and the ways in which each event was contextualized rhetorically vis-à-vis terrorism or notions of Islam as an "other" ideology allegedly antithetical to American socio-cultural norms. This content would refer to everything from the ways in which anchors or correspondents described or discussed each situation (e.g., cadence, incredulous tone of voice, facial expressions, etc.) to any anecdotal and descriptive information displayed on screen. These are significant cues that might go unaccounted for quantitatively, even though they provide considerable context in regard to the construction of the socio-political narrative of each event.

MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News are the predominant U.S. cable news channels currently available, providing news information and commentary to millions of Americans every day (Pew Research, 2009). They also present news through particular

socio-political lenses (or at the very least, tend to attract certain types of viewers), with Fox News and MSNBC purportedly representing conservative and liberal viewpoints, respectively (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006; Steinberg, 2007), and CNN acting as relatively left-leaning moderate (Weatherly et al., 2007).[34] It was important to observe the ways in which each network reported each incident and the alleged suspects during the first stages of crisis coverage, when information was scant, as well as when the nature of the newsgathering process yielded more information in the subsequent days following each incident (i.e., during the second and third stages of coverage).[35]

News clips were gathered from the official websites of each network (MSNBC.com; CNN.com; and FoxNews.com), as well as from the official YouTube channels of each network, YouTube.com, and the "TV News Archive" website.[36] As Graber's (2006) explanation of the three stages of crisis coverage provided an additional framework in which to examine these events, timeliness served as the basis for clip selection: three "breaking news" and six "analysis" clips were used from each network.[37] The date and categorization of these clips was determined by noting either the upload

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[34] Despite various polls indicating CNN as a channel with a just-left-of-center bias, it is still one of the most recognized and established broadcast news organizations in the world, and has seniority amongst the three networks in terms of cultural relevance.

[35] In the event of extraordinary phenomena or violence (e.g., natural disaster, terrorism, school shooting, etc.), news organizations report information in three stages. During the first stage of "crisis coverage," information is reported to facilitate the relief efforts and is limited primarily to descriptions of the incident. During the second stage, news coverage focuses on making sense of the situation. It is during the third and final stage that news media organizations attempt to quantify the incident within a greater perspective (Graber, 2006).

[36] The TV News Archive (archive.org/details/tv) is part of The Internet Archive project—a non-profit website that attempts to collect and transcribe various television clips for use by the public, including researchers, scholars, and historians.

[37] The only exception to this parameter will be found in MSNBC's coverage of the Federal Reserve bomb plot. Using the aforementioned channels, the researcher was unable to find any "breaking news" clips of MSNBC's coverage from the day of the sting.

date, readily apparent on-screen information (e.g., news ticker, "breaking news" lower third graphics, etc.), or through context clues provided by anchors or guests over the course of a broadcast (e.g., "yesterday's attack," "last week's shooting," etc.). Coverage was categorized as "breaking news" if, and only if, it was broadcast as the event occurred (or as information became immediately available during the day); similarly, coverage was categorized as "analysis" if it was broadcast in the subsequent days after the event occurred (up to one week). Care was given to ensure the selected clips focused on a general discussion of each incident and later, the identity and possible motivations of the suspect.

Data Collection

Collection and examination of the data occurred from approximately March 2011 to approximately November 2012. Thirty-five total clips were watched for the purpose of this research; for each incident, three "breaking news" and six "analysis" clips were examined. The 11 total "breaking news" clips were chosen based on the ability to provide information about the situation (as it happened or as information became available in real-time) or the alleged suspect, as well as information about the relationship between the alleged suspect and the incident (i.e., a cursory evaluation of the reasons behind the event's occurrence). The remaining 24 "analysis" clips were chosen based on the ability to place each incident within greater socio-political and historical frameworks, as well as the ability to understand and explain "why" or "how" they happened—at least, according to news anchors, guests, or reporters/correspondents (i.e., a deliberate discussion about the reasons behind the event; the motivation of the suspect; and the ways in which it did

or did not relate to a previous incident). These clips were transcribed and then imported into NVivo software for coding.

The code strategy focused primarily on instances in which concepts or references relating to terrorism or religion were mentioned or not mentioned by news anchors, reporters, special correspondents (e.g., foreign policy officials, terrorism experts, etc.) or other guests (former co-workers, family members, witnesses, etc.) during a broadcast. These concepts and references included any mention of the September 11 attacks; the words "terrorism" or "terrorist;" Al-Qaeda; "radical Islam" (or people often associated with "radical Islam"); Islam or Muslims; and words such as "jihad" or "infidel." Codes were also taken for concepts and references to the mental health of the suspects, as well as for concepts and references to their manifest or latent political affiliations or beliefs and the use or misuse of hyperbole to describe each situation or suspect.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The key strengths in the design of this research exist in the multitude of clips available for review and the wealth of information about racial disparities present in contemporary news and popular media. The 24-hour news media networks provide a plethora of information; however, this also is a weakness, as clips are sometimes filled with content irrelevant to the main topic of discussion. Additionally, there are too many clips to analyze in order to get the most accurate results, though the researcher did attempt to reach theoretical saturation as best as possible.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Although the methodology of this research was based on the common thread shared by these four incidents, a more efficient strategy for this section might be to describe coverage of analogous events. Therefore, coverage of the Ft. Hood shooting will be compared to coverage of the Tucson shooting and similarly, coverage of the Federal Reserve bomb plot will be compared to coverage of the Austin plane crash. Further, as the fundamental premise of this research is the notion that acts of violence committed by Muslims are reported by news media within different frameworks than those committed by non-Muslims, the Ft. Hood rampage and Federal Reserve bomber incident will serve as the focal points of discussion, with the Tucson rampage and Austin plane crash serving as loci of comparative analysis.

Ft. Hood Rampage

Comparing the Ft. Hood and Tucson shootings, it appears as though only the Ft. Hood incident was contextualized as "an attack," with Hasan framed largely as a thin-skinned fanatic fueled by his religious beliefs rather than as a mentally ill individual. Contrarily, the Tucson incident was contextualized as an isolated act of gun violence, with Loughner framed largely as a mentally disturbed young man whose political affiliation was unknown. Whereas Loughner's actions were discussed within a framework of mental illness (or at the very least, sociopathic behavior) and partisan political rhetoric, Hasan's actions were both explicitly and implicitly contextualized to have been inspired in part by his religious and religio-political beliefs, which were reported to be within the Islamic tradition.

Breaking news of the Ft. Hood incident progressively uncovered various pieces of information about Hasan's identity and possible motivation, with early reports suggesting he had been killed in the subsequent gunfight. With information about the suspected shooter and the casualties sparse and (relatively) unconfirmed, anchors, reporters, and analysts attempted to contextualize the magnitude of the rampage. Fox News, for example, reported that Ft. Hood was the largest active duty post in the United States, surrounding approximately 340-square feet and capable of supporting two full-armored divisions. Fox News also noted the rampage began near the base's readiness center, where soldiers are processed and prepared to be deployed overseas, adding, "the loss of 12 soldiers on a U.S. military post on American soil, practically unprecedented."[38]

CNN's breaking news coverage revealed Hasan had expressed to others that he was under a substantial amount of stress in the days prior to the rampage:

We've also learned from Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison that the alleged shooter was about to be deployed to Iraq and that he was unhappy about that. She also said that in the shooting he was targeting people that he knew. Also, his cousin has told some media that Hasan was born and raised here in the U.S. and was a "good American." He said he never expressed tendencies like these but that he did get "flak for being Middle Eastern" and was harassed by some in the military.[39]

After airing a portion of an address by President Barack Obama, in which he described the event as a "horrific outburst of violence" and also evoked the seemingly

[38] National correspondent Steve Centanni, reporting from the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

[39] CNN correspondent Randi Kaye.

(and seemingly understood) inherent sanctity of "American soil,"[40] Fox News reported information about the other alleged suspects and then broke the news of Hasan's identity. Based on information it had received in the midst of coverage, Fox News initially dismissed the idea that Hasan was distressed or mentally ill, noting the methodology of the rampage suggested a calculated effort. Retired Army Major General and Fox News correspondent Bob Scales, reporting to network anchor Bret Baier:

Right, Bret, what I heard was, this was a very—this was not the act of a crazy. This was a very deliberate act. Uh, it was, it was very precise execution style is what one soldier told me—that this particular army major went about his business with great precision. So, it wasn't just a random act of violence or apparently not just some soldier, um, you know, uh, being affected by something like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Instead, this was a—this was a deliberate act of execution.

Moments later, Scales amended this statement, saying he did not believe the incident was an act of terrorism or that Hasan was mentally unstable:

Well, I think the first thing that came to my mind as, I guess, most soldiers who have been overseas would attest to is, uh, that it would be an act of terrorism. Because after all, uh, Ft. Hood is the largest force projection post in the army, so it would be a natural place for a terrorist to commit an act of this sort—but I don't think there's any evidence that this is, that this is a terrorist act. And the second suspicion, of course, is that it's the act of a guy who's a nut and it doesn't appear to be that either. So, we'll have to wait and see how all this plays out.

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[40] President Obama: "These are men and women who have made the selfless and courageous decision to risk and, at times, give their lives to protect us on a daily basis. It's difficult enough when we lose these brave Americans in battles overseas; it is horrifying that they should come under fire on American soil."

Speaking with former FBI profiler Clint Van Zandt, MSNBC's Ed Schultz inquired about Hasan's psychological state, wondering about his profession as an Army psychiatrist and if he had internalized the multitude of traumatic stories from other soldiers. Van Zandt, at first, suggested that Hasan might have very well "succumbed to that which he was supposed to heal," quoting the Biblical proverb, "Physician heal thyself."[41] However, he quickly dismissed this notion, asserting that Hasan had a method to his madness and (rather subtly) alluding to the concept of a "suicide bomber:"

> *In a situation like this, Ed, you—you cannot believe that he expected to get away with this. It looks to me like some terrible statement that he was making in the midst of his own personal suicide. In essence, we may find out that he well planned to die in doing this by making whatever horrible statement he did by taking all these other lives.*

Making an appeal to (his own) authority and experience as a former FBI operative and a former counselor, Van Zandt concluded that although the idea he had over-empathized with his patients was plausible, the scope and scale of Hasan's rampage suggested something else—something strong—must have served as his principle motivation:

> *Well, number one: I've experienced Post Traumatic Stress as an FBI agent. I've been through it, and I was also a Post Traumatic Stress counselor. And many times, there is a cumulative effect of this, Ed, where one incident may or may not cause that. But it may be something that happened in his life or…yourself in his place, where he was listening to men and women come in and tell about the horrific situations they were involved in—that, in itself, could have lent some*

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[41] Luke 4:23

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psychological weight to what he was doing. But there's still gotta be some other reason than just beyond a terrible statement. There's gotta be something beyond him that allowed him, that caused him, to act out like this, Ed.

Following his conversation with Van Zandt, Schultz welcomed to the program Texas Congressman John Carter, whose district includes Ft. Hood, to provide new information about the situation on the ground. At the time of this coverage, Hasan (who was still believed to have been killed) was the only suspect officially identified by the local authorities; it was still unknown as to whether or not he had been the only shooter, although other possible suspects were questioned and then released, according to Carter. None of these other possible suspects, however, were identified in any way.

Schultz then welcomed NBC News terrorism analyst Roger Cressey, who reiterated the information about other suspects that Carter had just stated, speculating on the possible ways in which authorities might or might not address the situation (i.e., a rather banal conversation that could have, arguably, happened with any other member of NBC News or MSNBC's team of correspondents):

SCHULTZ: Joining me now is NBC News terrorism analyst Roger Cressey. Roger, uh, your thoughts on that new information that we just got from John Carter. Now there…this is the first time, I believe, that we've reported there were four people involved uh…a shooter who is dead, two suspects were picked up and a third suspect, two have been released and one is still in custody. This is the picture of the shooter, Army Major Malik Hasan, who was shot and killed by civilian police on the scene after taking the lives of 12 people and injuring 31 others. Roger, your thoughts on this most recent information?

CRESSEY: Well, Ed, we're probably gonna see additional individuals being brought in for questioning for probably two reasons: one is individuals who associated with, uh, Major Hasan, who might have known him to find out what was he thinking, what was he talking about in the hours leading up to this terrible act and second, whether or not there are any other individuals who might be, uh, under suspicion. So I think both of those are possibilities right now.

SCHULTZ: And to clarify, that interview that I just had with Congressman Carter, that is his information, NBC News has not confirmed that, but Congressman Carter telling us that the two suspects have been released and there is another one that is in custody, so we will obviously follow up on that. There is supposed to be a press conference coming up, you're seeing a live shot of the press conference at the post at Ft. Hood and we'll bring that to you. Roger, this is obviously going to follow up with a very intense investigation that will be overseen by the military, but the chances of new regulations and new safeguards putting in place in the world that we live in right now in the wake of this, I imagine, would be very good.

CRESSEY: There's no doubt, because even if this was an isolated incident, there'll be lessons learned from it of applicability across the military, so those lessons will be applied and you'll see additional measures come out as a result of the investigation.

SCHULTZ: Just recapping here tonight, our coverage, we're awaiting a live press conference. This man, Army Major Malik Hasan, today walked into the facility at the post at Ft. Hood, at the soldier ready processing center, which was, uh, a graduation was about to take place and opened fire with two handguns, killing 12 people. Our coverage will continue, that's our show, a breaking…a break in news continues here with "Hardball" on MSNBC.

Although details were scarce (as later reports indicated Hasan was, in fact, alive), it appeared as though the fundamental, foundational narrative of the Ft. Hood shooting was established: something other than mental illness had caused Hasan to open fire and target his fellow soldiers—the same people to whom he was entrusted to provide care and support. As the story continued to develop over the following days, allegations of mental illness were, for lack of a better description, dismissed or downplayed contextually in favor of allegations that suggested Hasan had become "radicalized" due to his religious beliefs. Using such evocative language as "jihadism" and "attack" to describe the massacre and drawing parallels to other incidents—particularly the terrorist attacks of September 11—some anchors, guests, and correspondents appeared quick to downplay allegations of mental illness and instead, contextualized Hasan's actions as representing an attack on the United States and Americans, as opposed to an isolated incident. There also appeared to be a political (or otherwise socio-ideological) element present during analysis coverage, as some news anchors and guests attempted to discredit the coverage provided by the other networks.

CNN's Anderson Cooper, addressing Michigan Congressman and member of the House Intelligence committee Pete Hoekstra:

This week, your office issued a statement in which you said the shootings are, "…a tragic reminder of the potential deadly consequences of the threat posed by homegrown jihadism, and the failure of the government to adequately respond to it." Do you believe the government failed in regards to this attack?

Cooper later asked:

CNN has learned that intelligence officials actually had Hasan on their radar…they even intercepted but later dismissed communications that he sent to a radical Islamic cleric. I mean, do you think the government dropped the ball here?

Hoekstra expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which information about the breadth and depth of Hasan's alleged radicalization was shared between intelligence agencies and legislative officials. After a rather detailed explanation from Hoekstra, describing exactly when and how the information was delivered to the House Intelligence committee, he gave his opinion as to whether or not the incident should be considered an act of terrorism. While hesitant to jump to any concrete conclusions about the incident, given the information available at the time, Hoekstra disregarded the idea that Hasan might have suffered from any distress or mental illness.

HOEKSTRA:…I think we gotta be very, very careful about jumping to conclusions until we have all of the information. I do believe there's indications here that this is more of an act of terrorism than just a criminal act or someone cracking. This

might give us a little more insights into how these kinds of individuals become

radicalized.

The conversation then turned to the issue of "jihadism," which appeared to be a special sub-category of terrorism:

COOPER: Do you see, when you say "an act of terrorism"—and you describe it as "homegrown jihadism" before—um…do you see potentially, I mean, in that, in that definition, do you also see this possibility that this guy not having connection with a foreign group or others, but just, ideologically motivated, deciding to do this by himself?

HOEKSTRA: I think if, if you take a look at the strategy that radical jihadists are using—their use of the internet, their use of, you know, mass communications tools that are available to them—this is exactly what they're trying to create. Individuals willing to go out, you know, give them the education off of their websites, give them the motivation, then allow these people creatively to develop their own tactic as to how they will carry out (cough)—excuse me—a jihadist activity or jihadist event in their site, in their community.

Cooper then aired a clip of General George Casey, who emphasized the importance of avoiding speculation about Hasan's motives:

CASEY: You can't jump to conclusions now based on little snippets of information that come out…I'm concerned that this increased speculation could cause a backlash against some of our Muslim soldiers.

The conversation ended with Cooper and Hoekstra verifying the validity of Casey's statement.

The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer aired an interview by CNN Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta with Ft. Hood victim Logan Burnette, an Army Specialist. Summarizing his interview, Gupta said many people tend to forget certain details when they have experienced a traumatic event, but Burnette remembered everything in "fine detail." Gupta appeared to ask Burnette questions about the rampage in a manner similar to that of a police detective, bluntly asking Burnette, "Did you see the guy?" With an almost-distant look on his face, Burnette provided Gupta with a vivid, but otherwise cold, description of the incident:

BURNETTE: First thing I saw were the laser sights on his, uh, handgun.

GUPTA: You noticed the laser sights.

BURNETTE: Yup.

GUPTA: What did he look like? I mean, what was he, was he, did he look angry? Did he look mad and...

BURNETTE: Serious and intent. He stood up, screamed, "Allah akbar," and then just started shooting.

GUPTA: He screamed, "Allah akbar."

BURNETTE: He did. Top of his lungs...

GUPTA: "God is great..."

BURNETTE: Yup...

GUPTA: In, in the Muslim language.

BURNETTE: Right...

Burnette said the rampage caught people off-guard, as the soldiers in the room were going over clinical reviews and that no one had even noticed Hasan until he stood up and opened fire "like a pop-up target." He added that Hasan was "reloading and firing again, and reloading and firing again," to which Gupta replied, "against defenseless soldiers." Burnette also recalled the horror of seeing blood splatter all over the room and fellow soldiers in pain from their wounds, "It's a pretty hard thing to see—and not have any way of defending yourself." It also was hard to deal with the breach of trust and broken bonds that were a result of the rampage, he said.

Fox News' tone was observably less diplomatic with some of its analysis coverage. Discussing the potential legal and punitive consequences for Hasan with the hosts of *Fox & Friends*, Senior Judicial Analyst Judge Andrew Napolitano emphasized the importance of evidence that would indicate the rampage was pre-meditated:

If, for example, he just snapped with no plan or plot, no contemplation—he can't be executed no matter how much damage he caused and no matter how many innocents he killed, because capital murder requires planning, plotting, pre-meditation, and targeting. In terms of treason: treason is defined as waging war on the United States of America. That would depend, again, on what was in his brain when he, when he pulled this trigger.

Host Gretchen Carlson then asked if Hasan's alleged internet activity (presumably, his correspondence with radical clerics overseas), if true, would constitute as pre-meditation, putting her hand on her chin in a contemplative manner.

NAPOLITANO: Oh, sure. If he, if he, had two handguns on his person, which his highly unusual…

MALE VOICE (OFF-CAMERA): Right there!

NAPOLITANO: …that would be considered, uh, pre-meditation. So, it really depends on what the facts are.

Napolitano then explained the potential jurisdictions and punitive histories of the state of Texas and the military, respectively. He also agreed with host Peter Johnson when he said he felt information about the rampage was "limited," to which Carlson opined that law enforcement officials might intentionally withhold information to preserve the integrity of an open case. Johnson then remarked, somewhat incredulously, about the potential efficacy of an "insanity defense" from Hasan:

JOHNSON: Two, two quick questions on this, on this phony insanity defense, in my opinion, that's being built up at this point: Is fear of deployment, uh, to Iraq or Afghanistan, is that insanity defense?

NAPOLITANO: I can't imagine that it would be. He, he would have to—here's how insane he would have to be: He would have to think that they were shooting at him. Or he would have to think he was shooting at a sack of potatoes rather than a human being, that's how depraved his mind would have to be, and a jury would have to believe that, in order to find him insane.

The theory the rampage was pre-meditated was echoed during an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*. Speaking with host Bill O'Reilly, author and retired Army Lt. Colonel Ralph Peters bluntly referred to the rampage as being of the same magnitude as the September 11 attacks and placed blame squarely on the ideology of "radical Islam" (if not Islam, in general) and an overemphasis on political correctness:

PETERS: Bill, we just need to get a grip on this and put it in perspective. Very straightforward: What happened yesterday at Ft. Hood was the worst terrorist attack on American soil since 9-11. It was committed by a Muslim fanatic who shouted, "Allah is Great," and gunned down 44 unarmed innocent soldiers and civilians. And our president tells us not to rush to judgment, to wait until all the facts are in. What facts are we waiting for? This was an Islamist terrorist act and, I'm sorry if it's inconvenient for Washington to face the facts, but there's no question about it: It was a terrorist act. It was committed by an Islamist; we knew

he was an Islamist—military did nothing about it out of political correctness. So,

Bill, what am I missing?

On the topic of Hasan's mental state at the time of the rampage, O'Reilly's language appeared to equate terrorism and terroristic endeavors as fundamental to the "Muslim cause." Neither O'Reilly nor Peters appeared to specify any differences between "radical" Islam (and related terms like "Islamist") and what would be considered to be "moderate," or otherwise non-violent, Islam. O'Reilly's language (specifically, his use of the term "rabid Muslim") and method of questioning appeared to be indicative of that:

O'REILLY: Okay, let me tell you what, what you might be missing—because I'm not disagreeing with you because I simply don't know—but I think there is a possibility that while this guy was a rabid Muslim and obviously sympathetic to the Muslim cause—whatever it was in his mind—okay? There is a possibility this guy was so troubled personally, that he just snapped. And that the Muslim thing wasn't the primary motivator for him killing all of those people. Now, I think we'll learn whether, what your theory, is right or whether the snap theory is right, from his computer analysis, which they're doing now.

Peters immediately discredited the idea Hasan suffered from any extraordinary mental illness, making (what appeared to be) a rather overt theological statement about the fundamental beliefs of terrorists and the fundamental beliefs of what could be described as "non-terrorists:"

Bill, I don't think there's any contradiction. I mean terrorists, by definition, are not by nature happy campers. Suicide bombers aren't necessarily from the middle

of the belt curve. There are a lot of crazy people who become terrorists and terrorist masterminds play on them...

O'Reilly then stated the key difference, in his opinion, between a terrorist and a normal criminal (or rather, someone who acted violently due to either emotion or mental illness):

O'REILLY:...But, but, but—a snap is more of a spontaneous act, you see. Now, if they can prove that this guy planned this out for weeks, then he's a terrorist, as I said in a "Talking Points Memo."

PETERS: Bill, he, he, he, he acquired the weapons, that takes a couple days. He gave away his possessions...basically closed his apartment. He clearly was planning it for at least several days. It was a cold-blooded act, it wasn't a crime of passion—you know, a husband coming home and discovering his wife in bed with her girlfriend. This was something very, very different. It was a terrorist act. Now, you don't have to be plugged directly into Al-Qaeda to be an Islamist terrorist...

The tone of Peters' language became increasingly polemic at this point, as he derided not only the Obama administration for its political correctness,[42] but also the "lamestream media" for its failure to objectively report (and thus, validate) Hasan's connections to Islamist terror networks.[43] O'Reilly appeared to agree with Peters'

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[42] "Look, this guy was a nutcase, but he was also an Islamist extremist. I want our president to take a stand—stop this, 'Oh, there is no Islamist terrorism.' Ft. Hood: The new 9-11 act of Islamist terrorism on our soil. Let's be honest about it."

[43] "…What troubles me beyond the fact that this was a terrorist act and the media—the mainstream, lamestream media—won't deal with it as such. It troubles me that our army has become so politically correct that they didn't get rid of this guy."

assessment, promoting the journalistic integrity of Fox News and dismissing the idea Hasan committed his actions due to any stress or mental illness:

> *The only network and maybe, the only program discussing how the media is covering this mass murder, is Fox. And "The Factor"—and maybe somebody will do it later on—um, but you're not going to this kind of analysis in any of the other media, they're not gonna do it. So that, the American people, unless they're tuned into us—increasingly more and more are—not gonna hear any of this. It's gonna be a total blackout that they've had that, you know, it's "Post Traumatic Stress…" that caused the guy to do it. I mean, crazy stuff like that.*

Peters scoffed at the idea Hasan had experienced any extraordinary harassment because of his ethnicity or religious affiliation and subsequently "snapped" because of it, saying, "Good God, every soldier goes through a little harassment." Peters added that even if someone had harassed him due to his ethnicity or religious beliefs, the military would be quick to terminate the offender's career. He also referred to Hasan as a longtime "troublemaker" and "sad sack" who was not discharged earlier "because he was part of a protected species, a protected minority." The interview concluded with Peters, again, deriding mainstream media's coverage of the incident and the Obama administration's failure to respond to it adequately:

> *No, it's time to get rid of the "P.C." culture in the Army, in society, in the media and Bill, I believe your viewers understand that this was an act of Islamist terror. And the media's not gonna fool them and President Obama's not gonna fool them and at some point, we need to stop focusing on, "Oh, how tormented this poor Major Hasan was," and remember what—how many of the names do we know of*

the dead? What about the names of the wounded? Have the media covered the family lives that've been destroyed? The lives have been destroyed? No, it's all about "poor Major Hasan" and I am ready to puke.

Comparatively, MSNBC's analysis coverage was observably more tactful than Fox News' coverage. Host Alex Witt first read a statement from Hasan's brother, Eyad, who said he always knew Hasan to be peaceful and "he has never committed an act of violence and was always known to be a good, law-abiding citizen." She was then joined via satellite by Hasan's uncle, Rafiq Hasan, who echoed Eyad's statement, saying Hasan chose psychiatry because he wanted to help people and fainted at the sight of blood. When asked if the nature and rigors of his profession caused him to lash out, Rafiq said Hasan was particularly empathetic toward people and sometimes cried about the conditions of his patients, adding, "This is not the Nidal we know. Something happened…"

Witt acknowledged Rafiq's claims and then asked about Hasan's religiosity and his feelings about being sent to Iraq:

WITT: Some suggest that this came from his religion, that there was a conflicted…can you tell me the kind of devout Muslim that he was and if this may have bothered him—being deployed to Iraq?

RAFIQ: No, I don't think religion has much to do with it, as far I know. I think, if something bother him—I don't know for sure what bothered him. But if something bothered him the way I see it—the suffering of his patient and, uh, he was really in pain and he suffers as much as they did--and maybe that's one of the reason,

uh, but there is nothing to do with the religion. As far we know, the Islam, it's to help anybody; this is one of the Islam rules—if somebody need help you have to help him. If he's sick you have to help him—even if he's your worst enemy— because this is Islam. So I don't think anything has to do with his religion. I think it is something...

WITT: No, it's very true—the Muslim religion is, is, is known to be very peace loving, outside the extremist views, sir.

Again, Witt asked about Hasan's thoughts about being sent to Iraq and reports that said he had attempted to hire a lawyer. Rafiq said he had only heard such reports second-hand, reiterating that Hasan was empathetic toward his patients and a "sensitive, emotional man." Witt then asked Rafiq to shed light on allegations claiming Hasan was frustrated due to being harassed about his faith:

RAFIQ: Yes, not in this space, he mention a few times he was harassed. His response was, you know, these people—excuse me for my language—ignorant or they don't know. It hurt him, but didn't make him very upset at the time...

WITT: ...But Mr. Hasan, I want to make it clear, sir, you just said he was not harassed by people on the base, but by others outside the base?

RAFIQ: No, no—I'm, I'm saying the base where this incident happened. Because I didn't see nor did I hear from him when he was in that base. But before, when he was in the Washington area, he mentioned that something that sometime, one

incident, they put a diaper in his car and say, "This is your head-dress." Another

time, they draw camel, say, "camel jockey;" they were making some fun. But it

upset him that much and, uh, what happened, I really til now, I, I'm in denial—I

don't believe he can do that. One time, he has a bird and that bird died, he

mourned, he cried for three months. I don't know he's capable of doing it…

The interview concluded with Rafiq expressing his "deepest sympathy" and support for the families of the victims. He said Hasan was a loving man who loved his country, adding he did not know how Hasan could commit such an act and if he really had, that he hoped an investigation would discover what caused him to do it.

MSNBC's diplomatic approach toward analysis coverage was on display, again, during host Rachel Maddow's brief interview with Suhail Khan of CAIR—the Council on American-Islamic Relations. In what could be described as a meta-analysis of the ways in which news media had covered the Ft. Hood rampage, Maddow noted the apparent disregard for comments that called for pragmatism:

Even as the FBI and the commanding officer at Ft. Hood have said that the

evidence does not necessarily suggest that this is an act of terrorism or should be

viewed that way, the arguably premature discussion about terrorism and whether

or not our military has been infiltrated—it's happening not only in

WorldNetDaily Wingnutville, it's happening all over the place, even in the

mainstream media.

She then noted and inquired about the apparent disparity between news coverage and public opinion of Ft. Hood and another shooting that had occurred in Orlando, Florida:

You know, Suhail, there was another horrible mass shooting today, this one was in an Orlando office building. Police say, in that case, the alleged gunman opened fire at a company he had been fired from a couple of years ago. Of course, in that case, no one is talking about that as an incident of terrorism. Do you think the contrast in the speculation about the motives in these shootings is important? Obviously, the timing appears to be purely coincidental, but is it instructive in terms of the different ways these have been responded to?

The interview concluded with Khan expressing his disgust with the ways in which some people and media organizations used the incident to further their respective political goals.

Tucson Rampage

In contrast to coverage of the Ft. Hood rampage, in which mental illness was generally dismissed as the reason behind Hasan's actions, the overall narrative of the Tucson massacre seemed to be constructed around the notion that Loughner was psychologically disturbed and might not have been fully cognizant of his actions. Although mentioned briefly, the possibility Loughner was influenced by an ideology did not become a topic of discussion until later. As the perpetrator, Loughner was discussed separately from the ideologies to which he was allegedly subscribed. Like Ft. Hood, breaking news of the incident revealed various details about the casualties and potential suspects. Soon after Loughner was taken into police custody and identified, CNN's Jeanne Meserve revealed information about Loughner's alleged internet activity, which included numerous YouTube videos and "rambling" and "incoherent" posts on various online forums and message boards:

(The postings)…*indicate some unhappiness with the U.S. government, concerns with the currency system and also, with the U.S. constitution. Let me give you some samples, in one, entitled "this student at pima community college," he says every police officer in the United States, as of now, is unconstitutionally working. Pima Community College police are police in the United States, therefore, Pima Community College police are unconstitutionally working, the police are unconstitutionally working. As you can see, a little bit different, a little bit unusual, hard to make exact sense of what he's trying to get across here. Uh, but it does indicate something about the issues of concern to him…And in another, called "introduction Jared Loughner," it begins: "My final thoughts, Jared Loughner."*

Meserve continued, providing information about Loughner's thoughts about the concept of terrorism and its use as a political tool:

Also, one I wanted to bring your attention to, in which he talks about terrorism, he says, "If I define terrorist, then a terrorist is a person who employs terrorism, especially as a political weapon; I define terrorist. Thus, a terrorist is a person who employs terrorism, especially as a political weapon. If you call me a terrorist, then the argument to call me a terrorist is ad hominem; you call me a terrorist, thus, the argument to call me a terrorist, if ad hominem." So, rambling, difficult to understand but obviously, indicating some unhappiness with the state of, of affairs vis-à-vis the police, the constitution—he even talks about grammar.

Despite this information, Meserve emphasized that law enforcement officials did not believe the rampage was, in any way, associated with terrorism. The segment concluded

with Blitzer reiterating the facts about Loughner's "very disturbing, very disturbing…rambling" notes on the internet.

Fox News correspondent Doug McKelway provided an update about the condition of Giffords and noted comments from high-profile politicians who wished for her speedy recovery. He also addressed Loughner's alleged internet activity and anti-government views, saying Loughner "had thoughts and expressions that were so clearly beyond the range of normal thinking and rationality:"

> *His favorite books included "Mein Kampf," "The Communist Manifesto," "Animal Farm"—one, in one of his writings, he said, "The government is employing mind control and brainwash on the people by controlling grammar." That, that's just one little snippet of a large array of wildly bizarre, perhaps psychotic, ramblings. He posted a video of himself on YouTube, apparently posing as the grim reaper—at least as some other eerie, masked figure.*

Drawing a parallel to the mass shooting at Virginia Tech University in 2007, McKelway said Loughner's actions would "undoubtedly renew the debate over…access to guns by people who have mental problems. Both sides in the gun control debate have advocated bans on gun ownership by people who have a history of mental instability."

In inverse relation to O'Reilly and Peters' discussion about Hasan's motives and the ills caused by the political correctness of the "liberal media," MSNBC host Keith Olbermann and guest Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center ascribed Loughner's motives and actions to radical right-wing philosophies. Loughner seemed to be "quite mad" and "out of his mind," according to Potok:

But there is a thread through the (internet) *material that really seems pretty clear; that thread has to do with seeing the government as an enemy. The books you mentioned, there's a theme that runs through all of them, the idea of the individual against the state. There are ideas like the idea of the only legitimate currency being backed by gold and silver. The idea, weirdly enough, of controlling grammar—of somehow the government using grammar to control the people—is an idea that exists on the radical right.*

He added, "it is not entirely surprising…that someone like this acts out," given "the amazing level of vitriol out there on the airwaves." Citing Loughner's alleged internet activity and early statements from local authorities, Potok said it was clear Loughner's intended target was Giffords and his rampage was meant to be "a political act, at least in some way." In Potok's estimation, Loughner, like many other individuals at the time, seemed to have been a victim of "very hot" right-wing rhetoric:

I think it's worth remembering, what? About a year ago, when that fellow, Joseph Stack, flew an airplane into the IRS building in Austin; it's the same kind of thing. He may well have been mentally ill. He had been influenced by the tax protesters on the radical right. We've seen this again and again—the episode of bricks being thrown through Congress peoples' windows, democratic headquarters and so on.

When asked if derisive political language—irrespective of its direction—absolved such disturbed individuals from responsibility, Potok said there is "no exoneration for the people who…repeat these kinds of falsehoods on the air and in public squares." Further, that it was "entirely natural that some people out there who are disturbed" could hear

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some of the socio-economic and political theories espoused by conservative media and then be inspired to act upon them.

Thus, breaking news coverage established the fundamental narrative of the Tucson rampage: An unfortunate incident carried out by a disturbed young man who might or might not have been influenced by radical right-wing ideologies or fringe socio-political conspiracies. Although early evidence suggested Loughner's rampage was pre-meditated and ideologically motivated—two critical elements asserted previously to be indicative of terrorism (or terroristic intent)—each network's discussion appeared to rationalize Loughner's actions as the product of a troubled and isolated young mind, disregarding any notions or insinuations of terrorism. The incident was most certainly tragic and horrific, but it was not an act of terrorism; and Loughner was most certainly not a terrorist. This position was reinforced further during analysis coverage, when hosts and guests attempted to contextualize and understand Loughner's apparent psychosis.

CNN's Randi Kaye reported that Loughner's internet activity in the months prior to the rampage displayed "disappointment and resentment," and he seemed to be "dealing with rejection and searching for a purpose." His posts on an online gaming forum were difficult to comprehend and seemed to be "filled with aggression."[44] After reciting some of Loughner's "hate-filled" rants, Kaye and (later) psychologist Gary Schwartz discussed Loughner's fascination with "lucid dreams:"

> *KAYE: Another friend, Bryce Tierney, told the online publication "Mother Jones"*
> *that Loughner viewed dreams as his alternative reality. Tierney said he even kept*
> *a dream journal. "That's the golden piece of evidence," Tierney said. "You want*

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[44] Information about Loughner's internet activity was provided to CNN by the *Wall Street Journal*. At the time of the broadcast, CNN had yet to independently confirm the posts were made by Loughner.

to know what goes on in Jared Loughner's mind, there's a dream journal that will tell you everything." Strange ramblings, apparently posted on YouTube by Loughner, paint the picture of a young man losing his grip on reality...Is it possible he was dreaming when he allegedly shot Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and all those other people?

SCHWARTZ: It is conceivable from what we know about his history, that he was...he could have been confusing when he was in a dream and when he wasn't in a dream—we have to be open to that possibility.

CNN also addressed the topic of gun control and the potential consequences of irresponsible gun ownership.[45] In an interview with 24-year-old Joe Zamudio, an armed man who helped subdue Loughner, hosts Kathleen Parker and Eliot Spitzer commended Zamudio and asked if he was worried about firing his gun amidst the chaos, to which Zamudio responded bluntly, "No." Spitzer then rephrased the question:

Does it worry you at all—I mean, look, we don't want to do anything to diminish the heroism and the wisdom of your decision—but with too many people carrying guns, doesn't it increase the odds somebody might make the wrong decision and shoot an innocent person, even with all the good intents to actually shoot only somebody who was actually committing the crime?

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[45] This clip, entitled "Arizona hero, Joe Zamudio nearly shot wrong person?", came from CNN's official YouTube channel. This is important to note because that specific question was not the main focus of the conversation between Parker, Spitzer, and Zamudio. It is also interesting to note the lower-third graphics during the interview, which read: "A TRAGIC MISTAKE, AVOIDED: Zamudio nearly shot the wrong person."

Spitzer continued to ask Zamudio for his thoughts on various gun control issues, which Zamudio said was, ultimately, not the real issue; rather, the issue was about helping (mentally ill) people before they can commit acts of violence.

Just as MSNBC's breaking news coverage had shifted focus away from Loughner to political rhetoric so, too, did Fox News with its coverage. Speaking with O'Reilly, who referred to Loughner's mugshot as "bizarre," Fox News political analyst Dr. Charles Krauthammer said "all the evidence (about Loughner) points to someone who is deeply and mentally disturbed," and "not a shred of it would support the paranoid ravings of people who blame it on (former Republican vice presidential candidate) Sarah Palin, Fox News, the health care debate or whatever." Krauthammer, who O'Reilly said was a certified psychiatrist educated at Harvard Medical School, said Loughner appeared to suffer from paranoid schizophrenia and might have been hallucinating:

> *I haven't practiced in a long time, but I have been in the presence of and had patients who were paranoid schizophrenics and lemme tell you, it's something you don't forget. In his case, he's got all the signs and I think it's simply crazy that we are debating the irrelevant, the political climate that supposedly caused these actions, when this is a guy who lived in his own self-created climate, his own world.*

O'Reilly and Krauthammer then discussed the ways in which the system failed to treat the needs of mentally ill people or prevent them from doing harm to others (due to bureaucratic laws). Krauthammer noted Loughner had five previous encounters with various law enforcement authorities but none of them could do anything until he did something severe. O'Reilly's next question appeared to imply that anyone (i.e.,

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politicians, news media professionals, pundits, etc.) who would exploit the rampage for political gain was mentally ill, too:

> *O'REILLY: Alright, let's transfer your psychiatric insights over to the people who have exploited this, uhm, for political gain. Number one: We established last night that this is just morally repugnant to do that; we have a 9-year-old girl dead and you're trying to make political points? What is their neurosis?*

> *KRAUTHAMMER: Well, I'm not gonna analyze (New York Times columnist) Krugman—he can't afford my rates. I do only people like Loughner—I don't want to talk about the psychology of, uh, writers who obviously, who are not psychotic. I think psychiatry has a lot to say about serious mental illness and psychosis, I don't think it has a lot to say about neurosis, which is a term that's not even used. Let me just approach them as people who are writing—public figures. What they have done is to cynically seize upon a terrible tragedy and to willfully ignore the evidence and use it as a political club. I think, actually, it's not working—there's a poll now that 57 percent of Americans disagree with this idea that somehow there's a climate out there which compelled Loughner to act. And I think it's very healthy that a majority of Americans see that. And therefore, I think they would see how cynical are the attempts on the left to turn this into a political event.*

> *O'REILLY: Alright, so you'd ascribe it to cynicism, nothing more?*

> *KRAUTHAMMER: Yeah—cynicism, willful ignorance and in some cases, malice.*

O'REILLY: Okay, Charles, thanks very much, we appreciate it.

The shift toward partisan political rhetoric was more pronounced during a conversation between host Sean Hannity and Palin. Palin called the rampage "atrocious" and "evil," expressing sympathy for the families of the victims and paraphrasing Biblical scripture. When asked about the notion conservative rhetoric had inspired Loughner, Palin said she was puzzled as to why "the mainstream media would start accusing and using such a tragedy for, what appeared to be right off the bat, some political gain." Hannity then addressed the controversial map Palin's political action committee, SarahPAC, promoted during the 2010 election cycle to illustrate specific "targets" to be defeated. Palin, again, responded incredulously, saying the "crosshairs" featured on the map had been used similarly "by Democrats for years." Furthermore, the map had "absolutely nothing to do with an apolitical or, perhaps even, left-leaning criminal who killed these innocents and injured so many." Hannity then referred to a similar map issued by the Democratic Leadership Council:

HANNITY: …all these war analogies—Clinton's had a "war room"—it's very common in politics. Why do you think you were singled out, and the left singled you out in this, Governor?

PALIN: I know that it isn't about me, personally, but it is about the message that I am not hesitant at all to spread across this country—and that is that our country is on the wrong track. We've got to get put back on the right track and we have to elect those officials who can adopt and enact policy to allow us to be prosperous

and healthy and safe again. And, uh, I know that a lot of, uh, those on the left hate my message and will do all that they can to stop me because they don't like the message. But again, we know that it's not just me, it's all who seem to embrace the time-tested truths that, uh, helped build our country. They do not like to hear that message. And as many of them have promised to do, they'll do what they can to, uh, destroy the message and the messenger.

The segment concluded with Palin saying the "republic would be destroyed," if "they" succeed and stifle "the truth" or other functions of democracy.

Although it reinforced the idea Loughner was mentally unstable, MSNBC, like Fox News, engaged in partisan political rhetoric, attempting to anchor the incident to radical right-wing hysteria and socio-political causes. Like CNN, MSNBC also attempted to understand the depth of Loughner's mental instability, reporting that he had failed to join the military due to repeated use of marijuana and was banned from Pima Community College due to frequent disruptions and suspensions. According to reports, Loughner was banned to such an extent he was not allowed to return unless a mental health professional could confirm he posed no threat to the greater campus community. Speaking with host Lawrence O'Donnell, former classmate Steven Cates said he sympathized with Loughner's sense of isolation and tried to connect with him:

CATES: I knew what it felt like to be ostracized and isolated, and I didn't want him to feel that in a poetry class, of all places.

O'DONNELL: And what about his poetry? Was there anything in his, in his poetry or anything in the classroom that would give you an indication about either his political thinkings or impulses toward violence?

CATES: No, not at all. His poems were actually very much the opposite of what people are, have been hearing about him. One of his poems was about tending to a garden and the relationship a gardener has with the earth and a beautiful flower—that beautiful bond. Another one was called "Meathead" and it was a satirical poem making fun of the guys that go to the gym and spend all day at the gym, and their weight machine is the equivalent of their girlfriend, but nothing, nothing violent or political.

O'DONNELL: Now, what do you make of the discussion you've been hearing about, you know, was he influenced by comments by politicians and talking about targeting, uh, elected officials? Targeting them in the sense of trying to beat them in campaigns—would he transfer that in his brain into, "now it's time to target them with a gun"? Do you think he could be influenced by any of that kind of thing?

CATES: Uh, like I said, he lacked the stability that was apparent with most other people, so I could see where there could be that, that disconnect between what is heard and what is meant.

O'Donnell asked if, perhaps, violent music had inspired Loughner to go on a shooting spree, to which Cates responded dismissively, saying, "That music has been around for quite a while and lots of people listen to that…I personally don't see a connection between those." Based on this particular exchange, it almost seemed as if O'Donnell's curiosity was specious and meant to setup his final remark, which took a subtle jab at Palin:

I think when people start talking about outside influences—like, maybe, some speech Sarah Palin gave—you have to start to include all the outside influences that might have affected him.

Maddow expanded the issue of gun control to include the topic of gun culture and the wanton violence it allegedly produces, opening her show with a recitation of casualties from similar gun violence from the last two decades—Ft. Hood included. Despite the apparent severity of the rampages, Maddow did not refer to any of them as being instances of "terrorism." However, she made a curious connection when describing U.S. gun culture:

As of 2007, the second most heavily armed society in the world—the second most—was the nation of Yemen. Remember? Like, Al-Qaeda and Somalia and Yemen? Yemen, the second most heavily armed nation in the world. For every 100 people in Yemen there are 61 guns. Here in the United States, for every 100 people there are 90 guns.

Federal Reserve Bomb Plot

The perpetrator's connection to other anti-government groups (foreign or otherwise) was a critical topic of discussion during coverage of Nafis and Stack III's

respective attacks. This connection appeared to be the key factor (for both federal authorities and news commentators) in determining whether or not each attack was, in fact, an act of terrorism. Speaking with host Erin Burnett the day of Nafis' arrest, CNN correspondent Susan Candiotti said he came to the U.S. "with terror on his mind," according to federal authorities. Furthermore, he came "to wage jihad, to destroy the American economy" and "possibly disrupt, or even stop, the (2012) presidential election." She explained Nafis' attempts to recruit collaborators, one of which was an FBI source, who recruited other undercover agents to help further the plot. The agents helped Nafis design a (fake) bomb "that really wouldn't have harmed anyone" but could have killed "a lot of men, women, and children" if it "had been the real deal."

When asked if Nafis operated as a "lone wolf," Candiotti replied that it appeared to be, according to sources, although "he came here seeking help from others, other Al-Qaeda people who could help him." Of course, "those people turned out to be…undercover agents." A clip of New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly aired, in which he said Nafis "was motivated by Al-Qaeda" and the New York Police Department (presumably) saw "this threat" as being present "for a long time to come." Candiotti concluded the segment by saying:

> It turns out right before they set off this bomb, (Nafis) wanted to stop at a hotel, prosecutors say, to make a suicide tape and, in fact, that's what they did. And he said, on this tape, according to court papers, quote, "We will not stop until we attain victory or martyrdom." Well, it appears he achieved neither one.

Fox News' breaking coverage reported that Nafis tried to "attack" and "blow up" the Federal Reserve building, which is "just blocks away from the World Trade Center

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site." Host Shepard Smith said Nafis "raised some red flags after he had posted online some stuff about jihad, or holy war." Smith then speculated about the way in which the situation occurred:

> *This Middle Eastern guy starts saying stuff, uh, an informant or FBI guy gets in touch with him. Uh, the FBI agent then met him and—the guy, I believe, that the FBI agent was not an FBI agent but an accomplice—got him all this stuff together. Uh, the suspect and the FBI agent planned a fake attack for months, and this morning it went down.*"[46]

Smith was then joined by correspondent Rick Leventhal, who described Nafis as a "Bangladeshi national who…traveled to the U.S. in January for the sole purpose of carrying out a terrorist attack," according to the FBI. Nafis, "in his own words," wanted to "allegedly destroy America," adding that the undercover FBI agent supplied him with "20 50-pound bags of, what was supposed to be, explosive material." Leventhal, too, made note of Nafis' suicide video and the fact the bomb was never designed to actually work.

Correspondent Jonathan Hunt joined the program to read a statement from acting FBI Assistant Director Mary Galligan, in which she said, "Attempting to destroy a landmark building and kill or maim untold numbers of innocent bystanders is about as serious as the imagination can conjure" but the "public was never at risk in this case." Smith reiterated the situation, again referring to Nafis as a "Middle Eastern man" who came with the "sole intention of destroying America." He said the incident sounded like "a major, major thing."

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[46] Smith said, "for months," emphatically.

Claiming the entire situation sounded "very familiar," Smith then welcomed Napolitano, who provided a brief explanation of how officials perform sting operations to capture people who "have expressed a hatred for the United States or of American institutions and a willingness to attack them." Napolitano said there were two ways to look at the situation:

One is, this is a guy with very evil intention, who on his own traveled from Pakistan to come to the United States, expressed a hatred and antipathy to our institutions, and a willingness to destroy them. And if the FBI had not engaged him in this, he would have been free to engage on his own in some act of terror that would have harmed people. The other way to look at it is, this is the eighteenth person since 9-11 that the FBI has found and persuaded to go along with a plot that it created, it controlled, and that never endangered anybody. How do they find people?

He added that Americans have to determine whether or not they want the FBI to profile people and perform sting operations, asking, "Is it a good thing, or is it pushing the limits of what the law enforcement should be doing?" Smith again reiterated the incident and concluded, "Think of it: If the Federal Reserve Bank in Manhattan had blown up this morning, where would our economy be at this moment? Of course, it was never going to happen. Did the FBI create this, or did the FBI help to stop this?"

The researcher was unable to find any breaking news clips from MSNBC. Instead, coverage existed from CNBC—an NBC-affiliated station that provides headlines and information of financial markets. As CNBC's coverage was outside the scope of this research, these clips were not used as sources of applicable data.

More details about Nafis' personality and possible motivation emerged the next day. CNN host Zoraida Sambolin reported Nafis was in the U.S. on a student visa, majoring in cyber-security at Southeast Missouri State University, where he studied from January 2012 to May 2012. She added he was in federal custody and charged with "attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction." Co-host John Berman added the Federal Reserve was "just a few blocks east of the World Trade Center and all that rebuilding that is underway at Ground Zero." Candiotti joined the show to, again, explain the event, adding that Nafis used social media to connect with potential collaborators. According to prosecutors, said Candiotti, Nafis' motivation was "all about jihad," "destroying America," and "wrecking the economy." [47] The previous clip from Commissioner Kelly aired alongside information that Nafis shifted his target from the New York Stock Exchange to the Federal Reserve. After Candiotti noted other statements attributed to Nafis, she concluded the segment with a quote from his alleged suicide video:

> *I just want something big. Something very big…that will shake the whole country…and will make Muslims one-step closer to run the whole world.*

In another segment, author and CNN national security analyst Peter Bergen compared Nafis' plot to those of Najibullah Zazi, who attempted to bomb a New York City subway in 2009, and Faisal Shahzad, who attempted to detonate a bomb in Times Square in 2010. Nafis, said Bergen, did not seem "particularly too bright," especially for believing he could be connected so easily with Al-Qaeda operatives. He believed it was significant *The New York Times* did not put the story on the front page, as it was not of

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[47] Candiotti said, "wrecking the economy," as she turned away from Sambolin and Berman and directly toward the camera.

"seismic importance." Nafis was "sort of a wannabe" who wanted to be in-touch with Al-Qaeda—and claimed to be in Bangladesh—but that was unclear.

Host Soledad O'Brien reiterated previous reports that Nafis had acted alone, which prompted contributor and TheBlaze columnist Will Cain to ask incredulously why "we" should be taking a lone wolf less seriously than someone who is coordinating with someone overseas and if it was due solely to logistics. Bergen replied there was "a natural ceiling to what a lone wolf can do," citing Hasan's rampage, which "killed 13 people," and the September 11 attack, which involved "dozens and dozens of people" from all over the world. From a law enforcement perspective, he said, it is much "easier to break up something with larger numbers…because there are more connections between people that you can detect," which is why lone wolves can get through the system. Of Nafis' assessment of the Federal Reserve's influence, host Ali Velshi said it reinforced Bergen's view that he "wasn't all that bright," as parts of his manifesto were lifted "straight from Wikipedia." Velshi said not too many Americans would be able to explain the primary functions of the Federal Reserve because it is "not a well known landmark."

Fox News host Neil Cavuto opened his interview with "terror expert" Michael Scheuer, a former chief of the CIA's "Bin Laden Unit" by teasing, "A suspected terrorist with ties to Al-Qaeda and a plan to put 9-11 to shame." He, too, took issue with the mainstream media's apparent dismissal of the story, saying, "Forget 'front page news;' this thing was 'barely any news.'" Although he found the sting operation slightly problematic, Scheuer asserted the incident undermined the "Obama scenario…that Al-Qaeda died with Osama," adding that Nafis was enticed by Al-Qaeda's mission "and the memory, or at least the inspiration, of Osama bin Laden." He said *The New York Times*,

Washington Post, and "the major news channels have really hidden the expansion of Al-Qaeda in the years since President Obama has taken office."

Fox News' Bill Hemmer opened *America's Newsroom* with quotes from Nafis' manifesto, which included statements about his "mission to destroy America" for his "beloved Osama bin Laden." Reiterating the details of the incident, co-host Martha MacCullum referred to Nafis as a "self-professed martyr" before airing an earlier clip from Republican Congressman Peter King. King, the House Homeland Security Chairman, said Nafis was "a very strong supporter of Al-Qaeda," who claimed to know people in the group. Hemmer noted the proximity of the Federal Reserve to the World Trade Center site before being joined by Leventhal, who called Nafis a "young, wannabe jihadist." Leventhal said Nafis had been under surveillance by a "room-full of law enforcement officers" who were watching events unfold on "big screens in their operation center downtown." During his appearance in federal court, Nafis appeared "soft-spoken and subdued," noting his responses "could barely" be heard. Among other things, Nafis was charged with "attempting to provide material support to Al-Qaeda." If the bomb had been real, it could have caused significant damage, according to officials.

Like Bergen and Velshi had done, Cavuto also questioned Nafis' intelligence, saying people like him and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the "Christmas underwear bomber") and Richard Reid ("the shoe bomber") were not "MENSA candidates." For every one of them, he said, "there is a Mohamed Atta…the mastermind of the 9-11 attacks" planning attacks far more severe; he wondered if people like Nafis were "deflections." Scheuer said it was "a good thing" the FBI performed the operation, but

that "it clouds the issue," which he believed was the continued growth of Al-Qaeda (or otherwise anti-U.S. entities) throughout the world. He concluded:

The Obama era, in terms of Islamic, uh, Islamist militancy has been a "your-head-in-the-sand"-era—and America is going to pay for it very dearly.

Cavuto ended the segment solemnly, saying, "I hope you're wrong, Michael, but you've been spookily prescient."

Extended clips from MSNBC's analysis coverage were not immediately available to the researcher; again, CNBC appeared to be the lead network covering the story. However, in the short clips that were available, the network appeared to be more measured with its framing of the story. For example, host Chuck Todd described the attack as "an elaborate, Al-Qaeda-inspired plot," putting emphasis on the word "inspired." Todd also described Nafis as "not very bright." In another excerpt, host Tamron Hall reported that Nafis' family in Bangladesh was "stunned" by his actions, making MSNBC the only network to attempt to place the suspect within a greater context beyond "Bangladeshi national."

Austin Plane Crash

The issue of "lone wolf attacks" was also addressed during discussions of Stack III's crash. CNN initially reported that the Department of Homeland Security believed there was neither a nexus to criminal activity nor terrorism, though this opinion changed over the course of its breaking news coverage. After reporting about other possible problems on concurrent commercial flights bound for San Francisco, Velshi asked guest and flight instructor John King to quantify the damage based on the type of plane, amount

of fuel in the tank, and other factors—all of which King dismissed as somewhat irrelevant:

> *Well, if you're flying an airplane, it's going to be at a lethal speed. If you do decide—and we'll assume that this is a suicide attempt—it's a certain way to do it. But it's a very unfortunate way because it puts other people at risk. I wish he had chose some other method of doing this. But it's a certain way to commit suicide in almost any airplane.*

Due to the lack of information at the time, Velshi and King then discussed three possible explanations for the crash. They began with the idea the pilot somehow lost control of the plane, which King dismissed:

> *KING: You might be making a maneuver and lose lift on the wings because you stalled the wings, but that's not what was happening here. This airplane came in at high speed. This was a deliberate.*

> *VELSHI: Let's look at a couple possibilities. Let's say you lose lift on a plane. A trained pilot would know that, if you lose lift on a plane, you actually have to point your nose downward to regain that lift. Is that a possibility?*

> *KING: That's correct. But let's assume that you weren't flying low to begin with. There's—you would have plenty of room. That's the reason for the 1,000-foot of minimum altitude, is to give you plenty of room to recover.*

> *VELSHI: He'd have 900 feet to fix the problem.*

KING: Absolutely. I mean there's no reason why a person would be at that altitude unless they're doing some kind of deliberate misbehavior.

VELSHI: Let's do problem number two: He lost power.

KING: Well, normally, you would come in very slow if you lose power. You'd put it in a good glide speed, which is a much slower speed than your cruise speed, and look for a place to land—and it gives you time to land. So you would be going much slower if you lost power.

VELSHI: And I don't know the area—what it would be like for a pilot in Austin— but if he's come 15 miles from an airport, he could probably swing around and find someplace that looks less occupied than this office park.

KING: And even if you lost power, you're still under control of the airplane. There's no reason you would hit a seven-story building.

VELSHI: Okay, number three, option number three: Something happened to him. He was not conscious.

KING: That is a possibility. It's pretty unlikely. I don't know how old this person was. But that's—that's a rare likelihood, but possible, that he lost consciousness and lost control of the airplane that way and flew into something.

Meserve rejoined the broadcast, identifying Stack III as the pilot as saying he had set his house on fire earlier that morning. Although federal authorities maintained there was no nexus to terrorism, Meserve said they were investigating a possible nexus to criminal activity. The segment concluded with a brief conversation about the speed and impact of the crash with witness Mike Ernest:

ERNEST: It was like a fireball, basically—fireball, black smoke. People, you know, people let out screams all around me—a few people were crying. It was—I mean, it was a pretty crazy scene.

Providing more information from the FBI and National Transportation Safety Board, Fox News' Megyn Kelly said unconfirmed reports suggested the pilot "may have had a beef with the IRS; may have set his own house on fire; gotten into a small plane—single-engine—and flown it into this building that housed, among other offices, the IRS." After a brief conversation with witness Thadd Lindsey, who said the crash resulted in a "massive explosion" from "anywhere from 30 to 50-(feet) wide," Kelly said Fox News' Department of Justice Producer had confirmed Stack III as the pilot:

KELLY: …We had heard earlier from our sources that his name was an American-sounding name—indeed it is. Andrew Joseph Stack. And we are looking for more details on him, but that is coming to us from officials.

MSNBC's breaking news coverage did not identify the name of the pilot in the clip used for this portion of the research. However, its coverage reported the plane had

struck an IRS office building and firefighters were in "a defensive position," being ordered to retreat from the scene due to potential danger. Its coverage also noted the crash was like an explosion and police had closed off portions of the road due to excessive black smoke billowing across the highway.

Analysis coverage appeared to demonstrate attempts to attribute Stack III's actions to frustration and, perhaps, mental instability. Speaking with Velshi, anchor Rick Sanchez said a six-page suicide note allegedly written by Stack III "reads like a very angry person," and that he "had very serious problems with the IRS:"

> *SANCHEZ: He said, "There was a storm that was raging inside my head." He said, "Desperate times call for desperate measures." He says we are brainwashed to believe that there is freedom in this place. Remember one of these was no taxation without representation? He addresses that several times here—makes reference to the Wall Street situation, something you and I have talked about. "Handful of thugs and plunderers can commit unthinkable atrocities and when it's time for their gravy train to crash under the weight of their gluttony and overwhelming stupidity, the force of the full federal government has no difficulty coming to their aid within days if not hours…"*

> *VELSHI: Wow…*

> *SANCHEZ: …Isn't that interesting? I, I knew that you'd think about that as I read it to you. Lemme get you through this and then we can break it up. I don't wanna just do a read-a-thon here for the viewers but, it's, it's interesting to see what's in*

this guy's head. "The joke we call the American medical system"—talking about

health insurance—"the joke we call the American medical system, including the

drug and insurance companies are murdering tens of thousands of people a year

and stealing from the corpses of the victims they cripple and the country's leaders

don't see this as important as bailing out a few of their vile and rich cronies."

What are you hearing here?

AV: Yeah, he's, he's...

RS: ...Anti-government, anti-government, anti-government, anti-Wall Street.

In another interview, Sanchez asked Stack III's former co-worker, software

engineer Michael Crawford, if he condoned the incident. Crawford had read Stack III's

alleged suicide note and while he did not condone his actions, said "his own hard

experience as a software consultant (was) very much like his." Sanchez then asked about

Stack III's alleged grievance with a tax reform act, "something that happened in 1986,"

which made "a lot of folks (like Stack III) angry" about the loss of their exemption status:

SANCHEZ: We often hear Americans complain about (the) *IRS, Uncle Sam,*

taxes, "get your hand out of my pocket." Uhm, how many people would you say

were affected by this law that were just as angry or upset or frustrated with the

government for doing this?

CRAWFORD: Just right here in Silicon Valley, where I live, I'd have to say just a

couple hundred thousand and, uh, several hundred thousand across the country.

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There have been many people who have urged Congress to change the law. But, uh, it just sounds silly to a congressman, I'm sure, to hear a software engineer talking about some arcane facet of tax law that needs to be changed. But what is most important is that that law prevents people who want to be self-employed and want to run their own businesses from determining their own destinies.

Crawford continued to say the work of self-employed software consultants is "a very hard life," subject to peculiarities and intermittent periods of inactivity. Sanchez responded by saying the situation sounded like "the story of the little guy kinda feeling like he's getting put upon by the big guys who are in cahoots with the government." Crawford said his experience was very much like that scenario and if one were to browse industry message boards online, they would find software engineers "talking about it like that." Sanchez closed the segment with, "It's interesting to know what some of the frustrations are in this case—so deep-rooted that it would cause this man to do what he did on this day."

On Fox News, Smith also described Stack III as having a "beef with the IRS" and said approximately 200 people worked in the office he attacked. He added that emergency crews had found a body amongst the wreckage but would not give any information as to its identity. Smith then aired a series of comments from witnesses whose comments could be described as reminiscent of the surrealism of the September 11 attacks:

WITNESS A: It came, actually right over top of us, which is the only reason we noticed it because it was flying so low…

WITNESS B: It looked like he was just flying as smooth as could be…

WITNESS C: That plane was going full-blast…

WITNESS D: We're thinking, "Where's he gonna land?"…

WITNESS A: It's looping in and getting closer and closer to the apartments, but it, like, it's gonna crash…

WITNESS D: Next thing you hear is this really loud explosion…

WITNESS A: Just from the explosion we knew the people in the plane didn't make it, or however many people were in there, but it hit an office building…

WITNESS E: We heard a loud sound and felt a thud and thought a big bird just hit our building and sure enough, you see the tail sticking out, the plane on the ground, the building was engulfed…

WITNESS D: Everybody was pulling over on the side of the road, and there were people running out of the building…

WITNESS E: We just thought it was a completely random occurrence, and so we just assumed there were people working in that building and, all of a sudden, that

plane lost control and crashed into that building and there was nothing anyone

could have done about it…

Smith reported information about the destruction of Stack III's house and that the Red Cross was helping two people who had lived with him. Correspondent Nancy Zambrano of affiliate station KTBC joined Smith and reported the two people as possibly being Stack III's wife and 12-year-old daughter. She added Stack III's house was located in a quiet, "very tight-knit community" where "you'd see people jogging, people walking their dogs," and "mothers with their strollers."

Fox News returned to polemics during an interview with Republican Congressman Scott Brown of Massachusetts. Speaking with Cavuto, who referred to the incident as "this crazy plane crash" and Stack III as "a guy who's just ranting at the system," Brown expressed sympathy for the affected families and said he could "just sense, not only in my election but being here in Washington, people are frustrated." He added, "I'm not sure if there's a connection—I certainly hope not—but we need to do things better." When asked if it would be extreme for people to consider the crash to be a result of "populist rage," Brown lauded his campaign:

Yeah, of course it's extreme. You don't know anything about the individual; he

could have had other issues. Certainly, no one likes paying taxes, obviously. But

the way we're trying to deal with things, at least have been in the past, at least

until I got here, is there's such a log-jam in Washington. And people want us to

do better; they want us to solve the problems that are affecting Americans in a

very real way. And I think—I'm hopeful—we can do that with a lot of things that

are coming forward, at least from what I'm hearing speaking with my colleagues.

There seems to be a different feel, uh, there was kind of a message that was sent with my election—the fact that I, you know, elected by a substantial margin and taking the former Ted Kennedy's seat. They want somebody different.

Again, Maddow attempted to piece together the various details of the incident, bringing NBC News correspondent Andrea Mitchell onto the program to confirm "clearly" that authorities had determined the crash, which she referred to as "crazy" and "tragic," to be a criminal act, not terrorism. Prior to Mitchell's comments, Maddow discussed messages posted on social media website Facebook in which users ("people on the right") expressed support for Stack III's actions and anti-government views, including "a quote from Thomas Jefferson: 'The tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants.'" There also were reports Stack III had left an explosive device in his car, but they were later dismissed.

Regarding the ways in which an incident like this is investigated, Mitchell said the FBI and CIA work together at the counterterrorism center to examine possible connections to other threats or "some foreign connection." For example, she said, "(Federal authorities) very quickly figured out that Major Hasan had a foreign connection. In this case, it was not." She noted Stack III's lengthy manifesto indicated "clearly…years and years, decades of grievances against the IRS." Maddow appeared confused as to Stack III's motivation:

I think people instantly—which was the case with this Facebook (inaudible)— were looking for some clear political message or clear political signal here. You can't find that in the Unabomber manifesto, I don't believe you can find that here.

The segment concluded with another discussion about Stack III as a "lone wolf" operative, which appeared to imply that terrorism is dependent on the existence of "foreign connections:"

> *MADDOW: In terms of this being a lone wolf action and as you say, not seeming to have any foreign connections, seeming to be a troubled, mentally-ill man with a lot of grievances—some seemingly real, some seemingly imagined. What happens in law enforcement in terms of the next steps in dealing with lone wolf threats like this?*

> *MITCHELL: Well, had he survived there would be a clear series of events. I think this will be an investigation to see what led up to it, to make sure there is no conspiracy, that there are no other people involved. His wife, and there is a child involved, there had been a domestic dispute, according to neighbors and other authorities—so there's a lot of sadness here and some tragic survivors. So they'll have to nail all this down but if he was in fact a lone wolf, then there won't obviously be any, any criminal prosecution...*

> *MADDOW: ...No loose ends to tie up, yeah.*

The possibility of defining the event as an act of terrorism was discussed explicitly on *The Dylan Ratigan Show*, which featured a segment entitled, "Terror from within?" The anti-government views Stack III espoused in his alleged manifesto were discussed immediately, with Ratigan reading a portion that called for a revolution:

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"I know there have been countless before me and there are sure to be many after...I can only hope that the numbers get too big to be white washed and ignored, that the American zombies wake up and revolt." Still, the White House and law enforcement authorities say this does not appear, in their view, to be terrorism. The Austin Fire Department, quote, "categorically denied" that fear this afternoon.

Ratigan then displayed a graphic with the definition of terrorism (as defined by the U.S. Department of Defense), which stated it as being, "The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological." To discuss whether or not it was "terror, anti-government anger gone too far, or something else," Ratigan was joined by Associated Press reporter Devlin Barrett and Van Zandt. Ratigan said he was "no expert" but that it "certainly looks like" a case of domestic terrorism based on the aforementioned definition and available information, to which Van Zandt replied, "Well, I think if you go by the strict definition, it does." The issue of labeling the crash as an act of terrorism became dependent upon Stack III's status as either a lone wolf operative or member of a greater conspiracy. Comparing the event to the Oklahoma City attack, Van Zandt said, "In this, everything that you've reported…suggested this is one angry, challenged, demented, frustrated, angry person who was mad and he just wasn't going to take it anymore." Crashing the plane into the IRS building, Van Zandt opined, was Stack III's attempt to "make his case and get someone to pay attention," adding it was a shame he took his own life and (clearly) tried to take the lives of others.

Addressing the issue of classification (and subsequent government action), Ratigan asked Barrett:

> *How does the government even begin, whether it's somebody like this or you go to Ft. Hood in a different instance, when you have an individual that becomes angry—and Ft. Hood is different in many ways because, I know, there have been so many flags that have been revealed to us subsequently—but the angry self-starter for whatever reason seems to be a very difficult thing to do with. How does the justice department or the government in general even being to try to defend itself from that?*

Barrett, who covered the U.S. Department of Justice, reiterated the importance federal authorities place on the nexus to other entities, saying it was unclear at that point but "for all practical purposes…you could say it appears…that (Stack III) tried to do with a plane what Timothy McVeigh tried to do with a truck."

Ratigan and Van Zandt then discussed the history of American displeasure with taxes, with graphics displaying a *Wall Street Journal* poll that claimed 83 percent of Americans were dissatisfied with the state of the economy, as well as a statistic from the Southern Poverty Law Center that said there had been 75 "domestic terrorist plots and rampages" since 1995. Van Zandt said the government's main concern would be whether or not Stack III's manifesto and actions represented "an on-going movement" of massively destructive anti-government sentiment; however, he reiterated his belief that the crash was an isolated incident:

> *Is he is a domestic terrorist? I don't think so—by definition, he may be; my gut says he's not. My guts says, as we just discussed, that he's a lone wolf—but that*

lone wolf is expressing the same feelings, maybe the same howls, that many

Americans would like to make at the same time.

Barrett thought Van Zandt's assessment of the opinions about the tax system was valid, saying, "If you ask anyone on the street, 'What do you think of the IRS?' there's going to be a fair bit of negative in that, and there's lots of people who write very angry things about the IRS online." Ratigan interrupted by noting other issues Americans criticize and express frustration over but "luckily, for all of us, very few will get in a plane and fly it into a building as a result." Barrett said the challenge for investigators is finding the "needle in the haystack that's willing to act on that anger," saying it is a very difficult thing to do. Ratigan ended the segment by asking Van Zandt if there existed a system in which officials (such as "the Israeli guy") could determine "the difference between someone who's angry and somebody who's willing (to carry out such an attack)," to which he responded:

> *The answer is many times we can't. We try to measure; we try to assess threat*
> *based upon what the individual writes. You know, psych 101 tells us the best*
> *predictor of future behavior is past behavior. But you look at somebody like this,*
> *who had been the CEO of two software companies, he lost them; he's been*
> *through a couple of bad marriages; he's been through many financial*
> *challenges—hey, you know, you're probably talking about 25 percent of America,*
> *right there.*

Ratigan chuckled and replied, "Exactly."

CHAPTER V

Discussion

All four of the events examined in this thesis could be considered acts of terrorism, especially if considered under the parameters defined by the United States. Comparing the Ft. Hood and Tucson rampages, both Hasan and Loughner had expressed frustration with the government and allegedly had an appreciation for anti-government or anti-American dissidents or groups. Further, they both targeted people and entities that could reasonably be seen as extensions of the greater U.S. government. Similarly, both Stack III and Nafis acted as lone wolf operatives who intended to strike severe blows to the American financial system and public, hoping their actions would either inspire others to take action or at least realize the problems and injustices faced by others in society or in other parts of the world. Although some consideration was given to the possibility Hasan had internalized the emotional anguish and distress of his patients and subsequently cracked under that pressure, no consideration was given to other factors that might have led Nafis to plan his attack, regardless of the validity of those factors. Further, despite the fact Bangladesh is located nowhere near what is traditionally considered as the Middle East, it did not stop Smith from referring to Nafis as being from that region— twice.

Other peculiarities of coverage included: the continued rhetorical hostility expressed by both MSNBC and Fox News anchors, who engaged, at various points, in the promotion of certain political ideologies—especially during coverage of the Tucson rampage. The use of hyperbole and polemics was also apparent. For example, the way in which Fox News' Peters referred to the Ft. Hood rampage as the worst case of terrorism

since the September 11 attacks, despite it being nowhere near the scale or scope of that incident. It would have been interesting to see whether or not Peters classified Stack III's attack in a similar manner, as it was at the very least the same method of attack. Also of note was the way in which Van Zandt seemingly dismissed Stack III's motivation as merely an extreme manifestation of the rampant socio-economic and political unrest going on at the time; in this instance, Stack III was the exception, not the rule. This sort of consideration was not observed during coverage of Nafis' plot, despite the fact a number of Muslims (both in and outside the U.S.) feel belittled and isolated by various American domestic and foreign policies. These Muslims, like the overwhelming majority of Americans, do not pursue violence as a legitimate means to change these policies but rather, persevere and attempt to engage their communities in positive ways to bring attention to various issues.

These four incidents were selected and analyzed due to the apparent similarities that existed between them. Still, at the heart of this research is the question, "What if…?" This question would appear to be bolstered by Van Zandt's "it is but it isn't"-approach to the concept of terrorism during coverage of the Austin plane crash. What if Loughner or Stack III had been Muslim—instead of non-denominational (or otherwise non-religious), outwardly generic white men? Would Van Zandt, for example, have been as quick to dismiss the "strict definition" of terrorism? Similarly, what if Hasan or Nafis had not been Muslims or not attributed their actions to what they believed to be precepts of Islamic doctrine? What if Hasan had never said "Allahu akbar" before he started shooting his fellow soldiers? What if Stack III had been a member of some organized anti-government group or in contact with known political dissidents and not a lone wolf?

What if his plane had caused more casualties and damage, or merely had the potential to have done more?

How might news media have contextualized these incidents had these and other circumstances been different? Obviously, none of these questions can ever be answered, nor could any sane person ever possibly hope for similar situations to occur in which these questions could be answered. In addition, no sane person could look at these extraordinary instances of violence, given their respective circumstances, and not condemn them as anomalously horrific. However, consider the following four scenarios:

On July 22, 2011, 32-year-old Anders Behring Breivik disguised himself as a police officer and bombed government buildings in Oslo, Norway. A short time later, he gunned down numerous attendees of a Norwegian Labour Party summer youth camp, killing 76 and injuring 151 total people in both attacks (BBC, 2011). In an online manifesto that included "an extreme, bizarre and rambling screed of Islamophobia, far-right Zionism and venomous attacks on Marxism and multi-culturalism" (Hartman, 2011), Breivik lamented the loss of European identity and nationalism due to growing populations of Muslims in Western Europe.[48] He added, "once you decide to strike, it is better to kill too many than not enough, or you risk reducing the desired ideological impact of the strike. Explain what you have done (in an announcement distributed prior to operation) and make certain that everyone understands that we, the free peoples of Europe, are going to strike again and again." After his arrest, a psychiatric evaluation

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[48] Interestingly enough, Breivik noted he didn't hate Muslims in any way and he "had several Muslim friends over the years, some of which I still respect" (Hartman, 2011).

diagnosed Breivik as a paranoid schizophrenic suffering from psychosis—a judgment to which he took great offense, believing it undermined the righteousness of his mission.[49]

On May 1, 2012, federal authorities arrested five white men and charged them with plotting to blow up a bridge in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio. Described by authorities as anarchists who were once associated with the Cleveland branch of the anti-corporate "Occupy" movement, the men planted what they believed to be real C-4 explosives at the base of the bridge. According to U.S. Attorney Steven Dettelbach, the men "talked about making a statement against corporate America and the government as some of the motivations for their actions" (Sheeran & Franko, 2012).

On July 20, 2012, James Eagan Holmes opened fire on patrons at the midnight premiere of the film *The Dark Knight Rises* at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, killing 12 and injuring 58 total people—the largest mass shooting in U.S. history (Sandell, Dolak, & Curry, 2012). Dressed in tactical assault gear, Holmes opened fire on the moviegoers after throwing two smoke canisters into the theater. Upon his arrest, which occurred without any significant incident, Holmes informed police he had booby-trapped his apartment prior to his rampage. According to some people who knew him, Holmes "seemed like a nice guy" and was studious and "very bright" (Burnett & Fender, 2012).

Finally, on August 5, 2012, Wade Michael Page killed six people after opening fire at a Sikh gurdwara located in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Page, who killed himself at the end of the rampage, allegedly had ties to various white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups, and was involved with several neo-Nazi bands. According to an ex-friend, Page was

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[49] After repeated psychiatric evaluations, prosecutors declared Breivik to be insane, stating in reports that he lived in his "own delusional universe where all his thoughts and acts are guided by his delusions" (BBC, 2011).

"always the loner type" and spoke about an impending "racial holy war" in the years prior to the rampage (CNN Wire Staff, 2012b). U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said the rampage was "an act of terrorism, an act of hatred, a hate crime" (CNN Wire Staff, 2012c), whereas Oak Creek Police Chief John Edwards said Page's motives "died with him" though he did not believe the incident was "a well-thought out planned type thing" (Quijano, 2012).

Although none of these incidents were examined for the purpose of this research, they serve as other potential examples of the socio-cultural and socio-political dissonance contemporary American society experiences when confronted by the concept of terrorism or when terrorism-like events occur. Given perceptions and portrayals of Arabs and Islam in the post-September 11 era, how might these tragic events been discussed and contextualized by broadcast news media (cable or otherwise) had the names of the perpetrators instead been Muhammad, Ali, Omar, or Abdullah? How might news commentators, pundits, and law enforcement authorities discuss their opinions about each case on national television had the motivations of the perpetrators been associated, however tenuously, with various precepts of Islamic doctrine or culture? Imagine a scenario in which a perpetrator's motivation was not the result of some perceived religious edict to "kill the infidels" but rather, was due to having had a terrible day and an abundance of stress. How might mainstream broadcast news media cover and contextualize such an event?

As the findings of this research appear to indicate, television news media would likely contextualize the incident within frameworks of terrorism—or at the very least, within a framework of either societal or "anti-American" otherness—simply due to the

pre-established socio-cultural and socio-political narratives that automatically equate Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim world with anti-American sentiment and violent behavior. Even if later news reports clarified the incident as an isolated act of aggression, the norms and routines of mainstream news media production during breaking news coverage and the modern historicity of the relationship between the U.S. and the Muslim world would have likely primed the public to internalize the incident as another example of Islam's alleged antipathy toward "the West."

For example, if Loughner or Stack III were members of the Arab or Muslim communities, as Hasan and Nafis were identified to be, would news media (and subsequently, the public) have examined their actions through a different lens—one that was not colored, perhaps naturally, by Judeo-Christian norms and historicity? To elaborate, in an interview with *The Hill*, CAIR executive director Nihad Awad expressed confusion as to why organizations were slow to categorize Stack III's attack as an act of terrorism, saying, "Terrorism is terrorism, regardless of the faith, race or ethnicity of the perpetrator or the victims." He added, "If a Muslim had carried out the IRS attack, it would have surely been labeled an act of terrorism" (Yager, 2010). Contrarily, international relations and terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman of Georgetown University defined Stack III's very public suicide as a "cathartic outburst of violence"—not terrorism—saying his attack did not appear to be politically motivated (Madigan, 2010). This is in spite of Stack III's alleged suicide note, which expressed anger toward the IRS and various aspects of the global financial crisis of 2008 (Plohetski, 2010).[50] Regardless of his motivations, Stack III still committed an incredibly dramatic suicide, one that had profound effects on the people who were unfortunate enough to be in his line of fire.

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[50] See Appendix A for Stack III's alleged suicide note/manifesto.

Writing about the Tucson shooting as a guest columnist for CNN in 2010, comedian Dean Obeidallah remarked:

What if a Muslim-American had made anti-government statements and shot a U.S. congresswoman at a political event? Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier this week called the suspect Jared Loughner an "extremist"—but not a terrorist. Would Clinton and others be so hesitant to apply the terrorist label to an American Muslim or Arab-American? By the way, what is Loughner's religion? It's not part of the news coverage, but we certainly know he isn't Muslim. If he were, the media, elected officials and law enforcement would be discussing that issue extensively. When a terrible crime in America is committed by a non-Muslim, the suspect's religion is simply not relevant.

This apparent disparity in contextualization even extends itself, as Yin explained, to the courtroom. During a court appearance in April 2012, Breivik said of the aforementioned psychiatric evaluation: "These are not just misunderstandings—they are evil, fictional inventions to support their assumptions…I think that you couldn't comprehend that a normal person could do something like that. You think that a person who does something like that…must be sick." While Breivik's mental state before, during, or even after he performed the massacre is debatable, perhaps his most salient point of contention with the report was his claim that had he been "a bearded jihadist, there wouldn't have been any psychiatrists whatsoever" (Gibbs, 2012). Although the tirade of a murderer would be the last place in which to find evidence for this research, Breivik's assumption does underscore the idea that in the absence of factors related to or associated with Islam or the Muslim world, mass-scale violence has been established on

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some social or cultural level to be the product of extreme mental illness and not an instance of terrorism. Again, as Anselmi (2000) and DeFoster (2010) claimed, such internal reasons are not ascribed to non-whites (or perhaps, non-minorities) when they commit similar crimes.

Some might argue disparities in coverage are due primarily to the presence or lack of political affiliation or motivation associated with the perpetrator. This argument, however, seems to be more of a connotative understanding based on contemporary views and portrayals of the concept of terrorism and is nearly an example of the fallacy of the single cause, since it assumes no other motivation other than Islamic doctrine as the reason why a person might feel compelled to commit such a heinous attack on innocent people.[51] Further, it fails to consider the method of attack or the scope of the damage; the severity of either cannot be ignored or discarded textually. It, too, underscores the idea that terrorism and terrorism-like behavior are understood socially, culturally, and politically to be fundamental tropes of Islamic doctrine or Muslim culture. This is in spite of the numerous condemnations from Muslim leaders and scholars—in both the Western and Muslim world—that disavow terrorism and indiscriminate, unjustified violence or aggression as legitimate expressions of Islamic beliefs, principles, or even rules of engagement or war. While it cannot be ignored that, certainly, there exist Muslims who find in various verses of Qur'an,[52] the holy text of Islam, justifications for wanton violence against non-Muslims, such individuals would appear to be as guilty as anti-

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[51] Some polemicists use similar arguments to "prove" the inherently violent nature of Islam, citing civil unrest throughout the Middle East as proof of Islam's incompatibility with peace or notions of "modernity." Such arguments, however, fail to consider other possible factors contributing to discord in the region such as secular cultural practices or social norms, government corruption, the consequences of foreign policies or diplomatic sanctions, or simple failures inherent within human nature. Thus, such arguments are invalid.

[52] Qur'an is often transliterated as "Koran."

Muslim polemicists of deliberately ignoring the greater literary or historical contexts in which those verses are believed to have been revealed. Thus, it could be said that many of these individuals commit terrorism *in spite* of Islam, not because of it; it is no different than radical anti-abortion activists who act violently against abortion clinics or doctors "in the name of Christianity."

Consider other instances of massive social unrest that occurred during the post-September 11 era: the England riot in August 2011; the Vancouver riot in June 2011; the Los Angeles riot in June 2009; or the University of Minnesota riot in April 2003. With the exception of the first example, which occurred as a result of increasing racial tension, the others occurred in reaction to the outcome of a championship sports game. Despite the deaths, injuries, and excessive property damage, there did not seem to be any sort of implication that these rioters were representative of some aspect of their various cultural, religious, or social identities—they were simply rioters. In discussions about Islam, Muslim behavior, terrorism-like events, or the continued unrest in the Middle East, analysis and opinion appears to be given not only vis-à-vis "otherness" and September 11, but also vis-à-vis Judeo-Christian belief, contextualization, and historicity—largely ignoring the effects of years of imperialistic foreign policies or the lingering influence of colonialism on inter- and intra- socio-political dynamics and religio-cultural identities within the region. This in no way excuses or condones the behaviors or reactions of Muslims in these areas to certain stimuli seen as antagonistic to their beliefs or cultural norms (e.g., anti-Islamic opinions or works of art and literature), but their reactions cannot be explained simply as being part and parcel of their "inherently violent" religious beliefs or apparent socio-cultural backwardness.

Although the public might assume or expect journalists to work under the strictest conditions of objectivity, the reality is they are still human beings and subject to instances of poor judgment, error, and self-interest the same as any other person, interest group, or organization/corporation. This natural by-product of news production is complicated further by a mainstream media system, hegemonic structure, and political economy that appears slow to address or adequately explain complex narratives of socio-political, socio-cultural, and religious significance—especially when those narratives involve minority groups. However, this does not excuse the tendency of major broadcast news media organizations to speculate the details about news stories due to relentless pressure to "scoop" other networks, provide exclusive information, or generate ratings—to essentially forego the basic ethical frameworks taught to undergraduate journalism students. In a post-fact society, good journalism cannot be sacrificed for the sake of increasing ad revenue or a quarterly pop in viewership; there is no shame in waiting for more information to become available if the result is a more accurate story.

Academia might also benefit from additional study of media portrayals of Muslims and the Muslim-American identity, at least at the undergraduate level. Substantial attention is paid to discussing media coverage of other minority groups and philosophies and although such discussions are no less important, communications and journalism students might especially benefit from increased emphasis on coursework that examines media messages about Arabs, Islam, and Muslims. Given the current socio-political climate, such emphasis might aid the next generation of media professionals when they cover those topics and the complexities that sometimes surround them.

Still, caution must be exercised when discussing the influence or pervasiveness of media messages on perceptions of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim-Americans, lest such discussions commit the aforementioned fallacy. Certainly, whatever shortcomings mainstream American media might have, public perceptions and media messages/images of Muslim-Americans will not change until Muslim-Americans become more active socio-cultural participants in American society. Muslim-Americans, young and old, must continue to be active participants in the public discourse about their identities if they wish to curtail or eliminate the stereotypical or otherwise negative perceptions and media images of them presented over the last decade. In addition, they must continue to contemplate, discover, and examine the ways in which their identities either coincide or conflict with certain American cultural norms, and they must embrace and become courageous enough to speak to others about the validity of their identities as both Muslims *and* Americans. This must occur and be initiated at all levels of social engagement and awareness.

At the individual level, Muslims must learn to embrace their identities as American citizens and not be "immigrant" citizens—fully cognizant of all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities inherent to the former.[53] This means they must begin to move away from certain "old country" socio-cultural norms and attitudes seen as rude, inconsiderate, or out of place in American society. However, this does not at all mean they should completely discard their identities as immigrants, or embrace subjective standards of "modernity" incongruent to key tenets of their faith. Rather, it means it is

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[53] In this case, "immigrant" could be defined as the feeling that no matter how many years a person might live outside his or her native country, a person might always consider him or herself as being, fundamentally, an outsider.

imperative they accept and understand the positive role Islam and Muslims can and should have in American society, discarding antiquated notions that either is fundamentally antithetical to certain aspects of that society.

At the social level, Muslim-American communities must encourage and facilitate scholarship and social engagement beyond the realms of engineering, medicine, and law. Although it is important for Muslim-Americans to continue to pursue and excel in those fields, it is also crucial that communities promote career paths in the arts, hard sciences, and humanities—three fields that enabled the Muslim world to flourish in a time when the rest of the known world was experiencing a severe drought in academic and social achievement. Dominance, achievement, and excellence are critical elements of American history, the American narrative, and media culture—from sports team dynasties to scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements—thus, it is vital that the utility of Muslim-American achievement extends beyond the immediate needs of the community and into the mainstream. American culture and media values "bootstrap"-like narratives and characters—the stories and people that exemplify the work ethic, strength of will, and commitment to the common good that underscore the concept of the "American Dream."

The necessity for Muslim-Americans to contribute to causes beyond their own communities assumes a greater importance at the organizational level. Indeed, some Muslim-Americans believe much of the anti-Muslim rhetoric expressed in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks was the result of years of self-imposed insulation from the greater American consciousness and media. For many years, Muslim-Americans (and some individuals from Arab and Southeast Asian descent) were content to live below the

public radar, going about their everyday business and generally avoiding discourse or activity that would bring attention to their religion or cultural heritage, especially if such engagement had anything to do with the politics of the region. Given the stereotypes some Americans might have believed due to years of ill-informed or otherwise poorly constructed media messages about the Middle East and Muslims (i.e., the aforementioned images based largely on concepts of Orientalism), it would seem reasonable for Muslim-Americans to have reservations about displaying aspects of their faith or ethnicities. In the aftermath of September 11, the by-product of such disengagement was a society that believed Muslim-Americans were attempting to usurp the laws, freedoms, and socio-cultural norms of America, replacing them with the standards of a supposedly antiquated theocracy in which "infidels" receive severe punishments for their various indiscretions.

Although the active, continuous work of numerous mosques and Muslim-American and civil rights organizations has done much to correct misconceptions about Islam and combat anti-Muslim rhetoric and media messages, this culture of isolation is, to a degree, still apparent within the greater community. This is why it is also important for Muslim-American communities to address issues beyond those related specifically to Muslims and be proactive in showing support of their fellow citizens. Sometimes, Muslim-American organizations will only address tragedies and issues that pertain to the community itself, ignoring or finding it outside the scope of the organization's essential focus to tackle other matters. This rigidity only helps to reinforce ideas that the Muslim-American community (or at the very least, its community leaders) views itself as being, in some way, outside the frameworks of contemporary American society. It also helps to reinforce ideas in the minds of pundits (anti-Muslim or otherwise) and politicians that the

community's silence is somehow tacit approval of violent activities or widespread indifference toward events unrelated to the community at-large.

Therefore, it is vitally important for leadership and civil rights organizations within the greater Muslim-American community to not only reach out to other civil or minority organizations but to also express support for the efforts of those communities, especially during times of tragedy. This support must come in the form of practical, straightforward public relations campaigns and media initiatives that emphasize solidarity with the victims and reaffirm the community's commitment to American standards of justice. While the Muslim-American community should in no way seek to abandon the beliefs or norms established by Islam, it should not disregard the importance of being active participants in the public dialogue about matters beyond Middle East foreign policy and racial/community profiling.

However, there still exists a great need for Muslim-Americans to inject themselves into stories about their communities. Individuals outside the greater Muslim (and Muslim-American) community tell much of the narrative about Islam and Muslims. Obviously, this is problematic because it allows others to dictate the contextualization of the Muslim identity and define various tenets of Islamic doctrine in the minds of news media professionals and the public. This might be the reason why certain words like "jihad," for example, are still misunderstood by some to mean "holy war."[54] Therefore, it is critical that Muslims actively engage media outlets and volunteer to serve as sources for stories about Islam or the community. By organizing and executing a number of

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[54] "Jihad" literally means "to struggle/strive for" in Arabic. Although armed resistance is considered jihad, it is not the primary definition of the term, at least not as it is used by news media. Speaking against oppression; improving one's practice; being patient in the face of adversity; and acquiring knowledge also qualify as jihad.

concerted media initiatives that establish firmly the place of Muslim-Americans in the greater public conscious, both media organizations and the public will be better equipped to understand the broad scope of issues faced by the community.

Future Research

Future research of this subject would benefit from an examination of additional clips or all-day coverage from the various networks to observe other ways in which broadcast news media contextualize violence done by other minority groups. This could be extended to coverage of violence that happens in other countries, particularly in Europe and North Africa (especially in the aftermath of the revolutions that occurred throughout 2011). Research might also benefit from an examination of the ways in which network television stations covered these (and similar) incidents; in fact, this coverage might be more pertinent because such coverage has the potential to be seen by a wider segment of the population, as over-the-air networks like NBC, CBS, ABC, and Fox are standard channels received by every television owner. An examination of coverage by well-known international networks like the BBC might also prove beneficial.

Given the cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, and political diversity present in the Muslim-American community, a twist on this research would be to present these or similar clips to Muslims to glean their opinions. Further, to compare and contrast those opinions with those of other minority (or otherwise non-Muslim) groups. Similar to the aforementioned *Washington Post* study, these clips could be shown sans any identifiable information about the networks or the perpetrators or altered to present the perpetrators as being from different ethnic, socio-economic, or political groups.

APPENDIX A
Andrew Joseph Stack III's Suicide Note

The following is the alleged suicide note of Andrew Joseph Stack III. This note was written and published online to a site domain registered to addresses linked to Stack III prior to the plane crash:[55]

If you're reading this, you're no doubt asking yourself, "Why did this have to happen?" The simple truth is that it is complicated and has been coming for a long time. The writing process, started many months ago, was intended to be therapy in the face of the looming realization that there isn't enough therapy in the world that can fix what is really broken. Needless to say, this rant could fill volumes with example after example if I would let it. I find the process of writing it frustrating, tedious, and probably pointless... especially given my gross inability to gracefully articulate my thoughts in light of the storm raging in my head. Exactly what is therapeutic about that I'm not sure, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

We are all taught as children that without laws there would be no society, only anarchy. Sadly, starting at early ages we in this country have been brainwashed to believe that, in return for our dedication and service, our government stands for justice for all. We are further brainwashed to believe that there is freedom in this place, and that we should be ready to lay our lives down for the noble principals represented by its founding fathers. Remember? One of these was "no taxation without representation". I have spent the total years of my adulthood unlearning that crap from only a few years of my childhood. These days anyone who really stands up for that principal is promptly labeled a "crackpot", traitor and worse.

While very few working people would say they haven't had their fair share of taxes (as can I), in my lifetime I can say with a great degree of certainty that there has never been a politician cast a vote on any matter with the likes of me or my interests in mind. Nor, for that matter, are they the least bit interested in me or anything I have to say.

Why is it that a handful of thugs and plunderers can commit unthinkable atrocities (and in the case of the GM executives, for scores of years) and when it's time for their gravy train to crash under the weight of their gluttony and overwhelming stupidity, the force of the full federal government has no difficulty coming to their aid within days if not hours? Yet at the same time, the joke we call the American medical system, including the drug and insurance companies, are murdering tens of thousands of people a year and stealing from the corpses and victims they cripple, and this country's leaders don't see this as important as bailing out a few of their vile, rich cronies. Yet, the political "representatives" (thieves, liars, and self-serving scumbags is far more accurate) have endless time to sit around for year after year and debate the state of the "terrible health

[55] Editors. (2010). Internet note posted by man linked to plane crash. *Austin-American Statesman*. February 18, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/blotter/entries/2010/02/18/internet_note_posted_by_man_li.html/?cxntcid=breaking_news

care problem". It's clear they see no crisis as long as the dead people don't get in the way of their corporate profits rolling in.

And justice? You've got to be kidding!

How can any rational individual explain that white elephant conundrum in the middle of our tax system and, indeed, our entire legal system? Here we have a system that is, by far, too complicated for the brightest of the master scholars to understand. Yet, it mercilessly "holds accountable" its victims, claiming that they're responsible for fully complying with laws not even the experts understand. The law "requires" a signature on the bottom of a tax filing; yet no one can say truthfully that they understand what they are signing; if that's not "duress" than what is. If this is not the measure of a totalitarian regime, nothing is.

How did I get here?

My introduction to the real American nightmare starts back in the early '80s. Unfortunately after more than 16 years of school, somewhere along the line I picked up the absurd, pompous notion that I could read and understand plain English. Some friends introduced me to a group of people who were having 'tax code' readings and discussions. In particular, zeroed in on a section relating to the wonderful "exemptions" that make institutions like the vulgar, corrupt Catholic Church so incredibly wealthy. We carefully studied the law (with the help of some of the "best", high-paid, experienced tax lawyers in the business), and then began to do exactly what the "big boys" were doing (except that we weren't steeling from our congregation or lying to the government about our massive profits in the name of God). We took a great deal of care to make it all visible, following all of the rules, exactly the way the law said it was to be done.

The intent of this exercise and our efforts was to bring about a much-needed re-evaluation of the laws that allow the monsters of organized religion to make such a mockery of people who earn an honest living. However, this is where I learned that there are two "interpretations" for every law; one for the very rich, and one for the rest of us... Oh, and the monsters are the very ones making and enforcing the laws; the inquisition is still alive and well today in this country.

That little lesson in patriotism cost me $40,000+, 10 years of my life, and set my retirement plans back to 0. It made me realize for the first time that I live in a country with an ideology that is based on a total and complete lie. It also made me realize, not only how naive I had been, but also the incredible stupidity of the American public; that they buy, hook, line, and sinker, the crap about their "freedom"... and that they continue to do so with eyes closed in the face of overwhelming evidence and all that keeps happening in front of them.

Before even having to make a shaky recovery from the sting of the first lesson on what justice really means in this country (around 1984 after making my way through engineering school and still another five years of "paying my dues"), I felt I finally had to take a chance of launching my dream of becoming an independent engineer.

On the subjects of engineers and dreams of independence, I should digress somewhat to say that I'm sure that I inherited the fascination for creative problem solving from my father. I realized this at a very young age.

The significance of independence, however, came much later during my early years of college; at the age of 18 or 19 when I was living on my own as student in an apartment in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. My neighbor was an elderly retired woman (80+ seemed ancient to me at that age) who was the widowed wife of a retired steel worker. Her husband had worked all his life in the steel mills of central Pennsylvania with promises from big business and the union that, for his 30 years of service, he would have a pension and medical care to look forward to in his retirement. Instead he was one of the thousands who got nothing because the incompetent mill management and corrupt union (not to mention the government) raided their pension funds and stole their retirement. All she had was social security to live on.

In retrospect, the situation was laughable because here I was living on peanut butter and bread (or Ritz crackers when I could afford to splurge) for months at a time. When I got to know this poor figure and heard her story I felt worse for her plight than for my own (I, after all, I thought I had everything to in front of me). I was genuinely appalled at one point, as we exchanged stories and commiserated with each other over our situations, when she in her grandmotherly fashion tried to convince me that I would be "healthier" eating cat food (like her) rather than trying to get all my substance from peanut butter and bread. I couldn't quite go there, but the impression was made. I decided that I didn't trust big business to take care of me, and that I would take responsibility for my own future and myself.

Return to the early '80s, and here I was off to a terrifying start as a 'wet-behind-the-ears' contract software engineer… and two years later, thanks to the fine backroom, midnight effort by the sleazy executives of Arthur Andersen (the very same folks who later brought us Enron and other such calamities) and an equally sleazy New York Senator (Patrick Moynihan), we saw the passage of 1986 tax reform act with its section 1706.

For you who are unfamiliar, here is the core text of the IRS Section 1706, defining the treatment of workers (such as contract engineers) for tax purposes.

Visit this link for a conference committee report (http://www.synergistech.com/1706.shtml#ConferenceCommitteeReport) regarding the intended interpretation of Section 1706 and the relevant parts of Section 530, as amended. For information on how these laws affect technical services workers and their clients, read our discussion here (http://www.synergistech.com/ic-taxlaw.shtml).

SEC. 1706. TREATMENT OF CERTAIN TECHNICAL PERSONNEL.

(a) IN GENERAL - Section 530 of the Revenue Act of 1978 is amended by adding at the end thereof the following new subsection:

(d) EXCEPTION. - This section shall not apply in the case of an individual who pursuant to an arrangement between the taxpayer and another person, provides services for such

other person as an engineer, designer, drafter, computer programmer, systems analyst, or other similarly skilled worker engaged in a similar line of work.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE. - The amendment made by this section shall apply to remuneration paid and services rendered after December 31, 1986.

Note:

· "another person" is the client in the traditional job-shop relationship.

· "taxpayer" is the recruiter, broker, agency, or job shop.

· "individual", "employee", or "worker" is you.

Admittedly, you need to read the treatment to understand what it is saying but it's not very complicated. The bottom line is that they may as well have put my name right in the text of section (d). Moreover, they could only have been more blunt if they would have came out and directly declared me a criminal and non-citizen slave. Twenty years later, I still can't believe my eyes.

During 1987, I spent close to $5000 of my 'pocket change', and at least 1000 hours of my time writing, printing, and mailing to any senator, congressman, governor, or slug that might listen; none did, and they universally treated me as if I was wasting their time. I spent countless hours on the L.A. freeways driving to meetings and any and all of the disorganized professional groups who were attempting to mount a campaign against this atrocity. This, only to discover that our efforts were being easily derailed by a few moles from the brokers who were just beginning to enjoy the windfall from the new declaration of their "freedom". Oh, and don't forget, for all of the time I was spending on this, I was loosing income that I couldn't bill clients.

After months of struggling it had clearly gotten to be a futile exercise. The best we could get for all of our trouble is a pronouncement from an IRS mouthpiece that they weren't going to enforce that provision (read harass engineers and scientists). This immediately proved to be a lie, and the mere existence of the regulation began to have its impact on my bottom line; this, of course, was the intended effect.

Again, rewind my retirement plans back to 0 and shift them into idle. If I had any sense, I clearly should have left abandoned engineering and never looked back.

Instead I got busy working 100-hour workweeks. Then came the L.A. depression of the early 1990s. Our leaders decided that they didn't need the all of those extra Air Force bases they had in Southern California, so they were closed; just like that. The result was economic devastation in the region that rivaled the widely publicized Texas S&L fiasco. However, because the government caused it, no one gave a shit about all of the young families who lost their homes or street after street of boarded up houses abandoned to the wealthy loan companies who received government funds to "shore up" their windfall. Again, I lost my retirement.

Years later, after weathering a divorce and the constant struggle trying to build some momentum with my business, I find myself once again beginning to finally pick up some speed. Then came the .COM bust and the 911 nightmare. Our leaders decided that all aircraft were grounded for what seemed like an eternity; and long after that, 'special' facilities like San Francisco were on security alert for months. This made access to my customers prohibitively expensive. Ironically, after what they had done the Government came to the aid of the airlines with billions of our tax dollars ... as usual they left me to rot and die while they bailed out their rich, incompetent cronies WITH MY MONEY! After these events, there went my business but not quite yet all of my retirement and savings.

By this time, I'm thinking that it might be good for a change. Bye to California, I'll try Austin for a while. So I moved, only to find out that this is a place with a highly inflated sense of self-importance and where damn little real engineering work is done. I've never experienced such a hard time finding work. The rates are 1/3 of what I was earning before the crash, because pay rates here are fixed by the three or four large companies in the area who are in collusion to drive down prices and wages... and this happens because the justice department is all on the take and doesn't give a fuck about serving anyone or anything but themselves and their rich buddies.

To survive, I was forced to cannibalize my savings and retirement, the last of which was a small IRA. This came in a year with mammoth expenses and not a single dollar of income. I filed no return that year thinking that because I didn't have any income there was no need. The sleazy government decided that they disagreed. But they didn't notify me in time for me to launch a legal objection so when I attempted to get a protest filed with the court I was told I was no longer entitled to due process because the time to file ran out. Bend over for another $10,000 helping of justice.

So now we come to the present. After my experience with the CPA world, following the business crash I swore that I'd never enter another accountant's office again. But here I am with a new marriage and a boatload of undocumented income, not to mention an expensive new business asset, a piano, which I had no idea how to handle. After considerable thought I decided that it would be irresponsible NOT to get professional help; a very big mistake.

When we received the forms back I was very optimistic that they were in order. I had taken all of the years information to XXXX XXXX, and he came back with results very similar to what I was expecting. Except that he had neglected to include the contents of Sheryl's unreported income; $12,700 worth of it. To make matters worse, XXXX knew all along this was missing and I didn't have a clue until he pointed it out in the middle of the audit. By that time it had become brutally evident that he was representing himself and not me.

This left me stuck in the middle of this disaster trying to defend transactions that have no relationship to anything tax-related (at least the tax-related transactions were poorly documented). Things I never knew anything about and things my wife had no clue would ever matter to anyone. The end result is... well, just look around.

I remember reading about the stock market crash before the "great" depression and how there were wealthy bankers and businessmen jumping out of windows when they realized they screwed up and lost everything. Isn't it ironic how far we've come in 60 years in this country that they now know how to fix that little economic problem; they just steal from the middle class (who doesn't have any say in it, elections are a joke) to cover their asses and it's "business-as-usual". Now when the wealthy fuck up, the poor get to die for the mistakes… isn't that a clever, tidy solution.

As government agencies go, the FAA is often justifiably referred to as a tombstone agency, though they are hardly alone. The recent presidential puppet GW Bush and his cronies in their eight years certainly reinforced for all of us that this criticism rings equally true for all of the government. Nothing changes unless there is a body count (unless it is in the interest of the wealthy sows at the government trough). In a government full of hypocrites from top to bottom, life is as cheap as their lies and their self-serving laws.

I know I'm hardly the first one to decide I have had all I can stand. It has always been a myth that people have stopped dying for their freedom in this country, and it isn't limited to the blacks, and poor immigrants. I know there have been countless before me and there are sure to be as many after. But I also know that by not adding my body to the count, I insure nothing will change. I choose to not keep looking over my shoulder at "big brother" while he strips my carcass, I choose not to ignore what is going on all around me, I choose not to pretend that business as usual won't continue; I have just had enough.

I can only hope that the numbers quickly get too big to be white washed and ignored that the American zombies wake up and revolt; it will take nothing less. I would only hope that by striking a nerve that stimulates the inevitable double standard, knee-jerk government reaction that results in more stupid draconian restrictions people wake up and begin to see the pompous political thugs and their mindless minions for what they are. Sadly, though I spent my entire life trying to believe it wasn't so, but violence not only is the answer, it is the only answer. The cruel joke is that the really big chunks of shit at the top have known this all along and have been laughing, at and using this awareness against, fools like me all along.

I saw it written once that the definition of insanity is repeating the same process over and over and expecting the outcome to suddenly be different. I am finally ready to stop this insanity. Well, Mr. Big Brother IRS man, let's try something different; take my pound of flesh and sleep well.

The communist creed: From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.

The capitalist creed: From each according to his gullibility, to each according to his greed.

Joe Stack (1956-2010)

02/18/2010

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VITA

Adam Yehia Elrashidi was born to Yehia and Khadiga Elrashidi on May 24, 1985 in Edina, Minnesota. Raised in the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington, he graduated from Thomas Jefferson Senior High School in 2003 and received his Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Minnesota in 2007. After three years in the professional field, he enrolled in the Media Studies program at Syracuse University, graduating with a Master of Arts in 2012. He is a recipient of two regional Society of Professional Journalists awards and has produced artwork and editorial content for CNN, *Time Magazine*, *Game Informer Magazine*, *The Minnesota Daily*, and Aslan Media.

"The only way you know where the line is is to cross it. And I think, 'What is life if nobody is crossing the line?' You just want to try to be on the right side of history. Sometimes what's going on in the immediate present is not as important as the long-term. The truth is permanent and then everything else will fall by the wayside."

— Dave Chappelle

إِنَّا لِلّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعونَ