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**CHARTING A NEW (DIS)COURSE: DEFINITIONS,  
METAPHORS, AND IDENTITY IN POLARIZATION  
AND POLITICS**

Greenstein, David A.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**CHARTING A NEW (DIS)COURSE:  
DEFINITIONS, METAPHORS, AND IDENTITY  
IN POLARIZATION AND POLITICS**

by

David A. Greenstein

December 2022

Co-Advisors:

Cristiana Matei  
Lauren Wollman (contractor)

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**CHARTING A NEW (DIS)COURSE: DEFINITIONS, METAPHORS,  
AND IDENTITY IN POLARIZATION AND POLITICS**

David A. Greenstein  
Captain, City of Tamarac Fire Rescue  
BS, University of Florida, 2015

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
December 2022**

Approved by: Cristiana Matei  
Co-Advisor

Lauren Wollman  
Co-Advisor

Erik J. Dahl  
Associate Professor, Department of National Security Affairs

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## ABSTRACT

The United States is more politically divided than any other wealthy democracy in modern history. This thesis examines the role of discourse in the polarization process and suggests a way to change course. Using a social constructionist approach and an analytical framework focusing on definitions, metaphors, and identity, it analyzes the discourse of the Civil War and 9/11 to understand how these elements influence the understanding and outcomes of sociocultural events. It then examines the current political landscape, including the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, through the same discursive lens. This thesis finds that today's political discourse is strikingly similar to that of the Civil War and 9/11, pitting the "true heirs" of the nation against an evil "other" using the same rhetorical devices. This similarity suggests that the language of division is consistent, and that the framework is broadly applicable. Given the catastrophic outcomes of the Civil War and 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror (GWOT), the nation must take steps to change its discourse. This thesis concludes by providing recommendations that take advantage of the transformative potential of the framework's components, which include pragmatic definitions, generative metaphors, and complex identities.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CDA	critical discourse analysis
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DA	discourse analysis
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GRID	gay-related immunodeficiency disorder
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IT	identity theory
JTB	justification, truth, and belief
SIT	social identity theory
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On January 6, 2021, a group of Americans breached the United States Capitol to prevent a joint session of Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election, giving citizens a glimpse of what is possible in a deeply divided nation. Despite being what *Time* magazine describes as “the most documented crime in U.S. history,” almost two years later, there is still handwringing over what to call the event.<sup>1</sup> Is it a coup, a riot, an insurrection, or something different altogether? The initial intent of this thesis was to determine whether it matters what January 6 is called, leading to the first research question, which asks: How does language influence the understanding and outcomes of sociocultural events? However, it became apparent during the research process that a more pressing concern was what January 6 meant for the country’s future, leading to the second research question: What role does language play in the polarization process? This thesis attempts to answer both questions and demonstrates that events, be they a breach of the U.S. Capitol or extreme polarization of the nation, are best understood through a discursive lens.

This thesis begins by laying out the nature of the polarization problem. Although a certain degree of polarization is expected within a pluralistic democracy, McCoy and Somer describe the present level as “pernicious.”<sup>2</sup> At this stage, polarization is no longer confined to politics and has extended to all aspects of society, resulting in “mutually antagonistic ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ camps.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, as McCoy et al. put it, “partisan

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<sup>1</sup> Vera Bergengruen and W.J. Hennigan, “The Capitol Attack Was the Most Documented Crime in History. Will That Ensure Justice?,” *Time*, April 9, 2021, <https://time.com/5953486/january-capitol-attack-investigation/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies,” *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 2019): 234, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818782>.

<sup>3</sup> Murat Somer and Jennifer McCoy, “Transformations through Polarizations and Global Threats to Democracy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818058>.

identity [has] become a social identity.”<sup>4</sup> As January 6 illustrates, polarization positively correlates with democratic backsliding, posing a severe problem for the country.<sup>5</sup>

Next, this thesis describes the shortcomings of theoretical approaches that place “canonical value” on truth and facts.<sup>6</sup> As Murray Edelman cautioned decades ago, such methods “take for granted a world of facts that have a determinable meaning and a world of people who react rationally to the facts they know.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, it advocates for a social constructionist perspective that challenges common and deeply entrenched beliefs about knowledge, reality, and truth. Considering that polarization is predicated on simple binaries of true and false—right and wrong—social constructionism offers an alternative epistemology that considers there are different “ways of knowing.”<sup>8</sup>

Shifting to discourse, this thesis suggests that language is never neutral. Instead, as Schiappa puts it, language represents a particular view of how “the world ‘really is.’”<sup>9</sup> That is, while an unbounded world exists “out there,” language is inherently limiting, highlighting specific features of reality while obscuring others. While many linguistic elements contribute to the framing effect of language, definitions, metaphors, and identity are most prevalent throughout the literature. Combined, they form a rudimentary framework for discourse analysis, which this research utilizes throughout the rest of this thesis.

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer McCoy et al., *Reducing Pernicious Polarization: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Depolarization* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/05/reducing-pernicious-polarization-comparative-historical-analysis-of-depolarization-pub-87034>.

<sup>5</sup> McCoy et al.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 110.

<sup>7</sup> Murray J. Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 37.

Analysis begins with the discourse of the Civil War, which left 750,000 Americans dead at each other's hands.<sup>10</sup> Despite slavery being “somehow, the cause of the war,” as Lincoln puts it, analysis of the discourse reveals a process of division relying more on rhetoric than objective differences.<sup>11</sup> As Edward Ayers writes, “The ‘North’ and the ‘South’ took shape in words before they were unified by armies and shared sacrifice.”<sup>12</sup> As this analysis suggests, definitions, metaphors, and identity are integral to the polarization process and influential in the outcome and understanding of the war.

This thesis continues by analyzing the discourse of 9/11 to determine how language led the country to embark on a Global War on Terror (GWOT). At the time, for many Americans, the path from a terrorist attack to war seemed self-evident. However, the speeches of political leaders reveal that the “war on terror” that has left nearly a million dead and cost the United States more than 8 trillion dollars was not inevitable.<sup>13</sup> Like the Civil War, the language chosen by the nation's leaders influenced its outcome. And, although less evident than in the previous case, it too involved a process of division that pitted “innocent” Americans against “a cult of evil” using the same rhetorical devices.<sup>14</sup> When juxtaposed, these events suggest that the language of division is consistent, whether an enemy is internal or external, and that unity and division are two sides of the same coin.

Finally, after synthesizing the findings of the previous analyses, this thesis returns to the present. Through the same discursive lens, it examines the current political rhetoric. It finds that today's discourse is strikingly similar to the previous events, suggesting that

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<sup>10</sup> Guy Gugliotta, “New Estimate Raises Civil War Death Toll,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2012, sec. Science, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/civil-war-toll-up-by-20-percent-in-new-estimate.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 8.*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 333, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln8>.

<sup>12</sup> Edward L. Ayers, “What Caused the Civil War?,” *North & South* 8, no. 5 (September 2005): 16, <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/history-faculty-publications/132/>.

<sup>13</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *The U.S. Budgetary Costs of the Post-9/11 Wars* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, Brown University, 2021), [https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Costs%20of%20War\\_U.S.%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Post-9%2011%20Wars\\_9.1.21.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Costs%20of%20War_U.S.%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Post-9%2011%20Wars_9.1.21.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> George W. Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001 – 2008* (Washington, DC: White House, 2009), 80, [https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected\\_Speeches\\_George\\_W\\_Bush.pdf](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf).



the nation is on a dangerous path. This thesis concludes by describing how definitions, metaphors, and identities can be part of a strategy to decrease polarization by transforming discourse. Suggestions include pragmatic definitions, which consider the persuasive effects of definitions; generative metaphors, which enable different ways of “seeing” a problem; and adding complexity to identities to prevent the simple binaries that underlie polarization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

On January 6, 2021, a large group of Americans breached the United States Capitol to prevent Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election. Nearly twenty-nine million viewers watched the event unfold live on cable and network television.<sup>1</sup> *Time* magazine even described it as “the most documented crime in U.S. history.”<sup>2</sup> Given the abundant evidence, what happened on January 6 should be relatively clear. Yet, as *Politico* editor Joshua Zeitz puts it, “More than 18 months after the events of Jan. 6, 2021, Americans are still struggling to understand what happened that day.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite the obvious shortcomings of empiricism revealed by January 6, America has not wavered in its commitment to the belief that there is a single version of truth if we can just agree on the facts. On July 1, 2021, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol was established to do just that. Its purpose is “to investigate and report upon the facts” surrounding the events that took place at the Capitol.<sup>4</sup> Although recent polling suggests that the committee’s eight televised hearings have had no influence on public opinion, when asked about its next steps, California Democratic Representative Pete Aguilar reiterated their “commitment to find the facts, to chase the truth.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, while the committee continues “pursuing emerging information on multiple fronts,” according to vice chair Liz Cheney, the country is growing more deeply

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Joyella, “Attack on Capitol Pushes CNN to Its Most-Watched Day in History,” *Forbes*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markjoyella/2021/01/07/attack-on-capitol-pushes-cnn-to-its-most-watched-day-in-history/>.

<sup>2</sup> Vera Bergengruen and W.J. Hennigan, “The Capitol Attack Was the Most Documented Crime in History. Will That Ensure Justice?,” *Time*, April 9, 2021, <https://time.com/5953486/january-capitol-attack-investigation/>.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Zeitz, “Ask the ‘Coupologists’: Just What Was Jan. 6 Anyway?,” *POLITICO*, August 19, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/08/19/jan-6-coup-authoritarianism-expert-roundtable-00052281>.

<sup>4</sup> “About,” Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://january6th.house.gov/about>.

<sup>5</sup> Claudia Grisales, “The Jan. 6 Committee Isn’t Done. Expect More Hearings, Revelations and Reports,” NPR House Jan. 6 Committee Hearings, July 23, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/07/23/1112940708/jan-6-committee-whats-next>.

divided.<sup>6</sup> This thesis suggests that the possibility of changing course depends on reconsidering commonly held assumptions about the nature of knowledge, truth, and most importantly language.

## A. PROBLEM SPACE

### 1. The Polarization Problem

A certain degree of polarization is normally present within democracies, which Robert A. Dahl calls “conflictive pluralism.”<sup>7</sup> Particularly in the United States, which is characterized by a heterogeneous population, a multitude of political cleavages is expected. However, as Dahl points out, “strict bipolarity” is unusual within democracies and especially rare in those as diverse as this one.<sup>8</sup> Still, the United States defies historical precedent and has reached a level of polarization unseen in advanced democracies.<sup>9</sup> Since 2015, the country has experienced what Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer call “pernicious polarization” which is “polarization that divides societies into ‘Us vs. Them’ camps based on a single dimension of difference that overshadows all others.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the normal cross-cutting cleavages characteristic of “conflictive pluralism” have collapsed and have been replaced by “strict bipolarity” based on political identity. While it is unclear why 2015 was the year the nation reached the pernicious level, the continuing trend likely reflects a confluence of factors including the global trend of populism and the rise of Donald Trump, whose rhetoric is particularly divisive, even by Washington standards.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Grisales.

<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Dahl, “Pluralism Revisited,” *Comparative Politics* 10, no. 2 (1978): 191, <https://doi.org/10.2307/421645>.

<sup>8</sup> Dahl, 192.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer McCoy et al., *Reducing Pernicious Polarization: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Depolarization* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/05/reducing-pernicious-polarization-comparative-historical-analysis-of-depolarization-pub-87034>.

<sup>10</sup> McCoy et al., 234.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies,” *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (January 2019): 234, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818782>.

Among wealthy democracies, the United States is one of only three to reach the “pernicious” level and the only one to remain at such a level for so long.<sup>12</sup> As McCoy and Benjamin Press warn, “the United States is in uncharted and very dangerous territory.”<sup>13</sup> In their study looking at democratic countries experiencing polarization since 1950, McCoy and Press found that fifty-two reached pernicious levels, half of those experienced “democratic backsliding,” and only nine were able to reduce and maintain lower levels after reaching the pernicious stage, a process the authors refer to as “depolarization.”<sup>14</sup> Of all the countries that exhibited depolarization, three quarters came as a result of “systemic shocks,” which include wars and regime changes, primarily from autocracies to democracies.<sup>15</sup> To make matters worse, compared to the prevalence of polarization literature, depolarization research is limited, meaning there is barely a map, let alone directions on how the country might navigate its way out of the crisis.<sup>16</sup>

## **2. The Epistemological Problem**

### ***a. National Epistemology***

RAND Corporation attempted to address the issue of polarization and embarked on a project it calls *Countering Truth Decay: A RAND Initiative to Restore the Role of Facts and Analysis in Public Life*.<sup>17</sup> As the name implies, “truth decay” is a process whereby democratic bedrocks, including trust in institutions and political debate, are eroded by a variety of factors related to society’s relationship with facts.<sup>18</sup> According to RAND Corporation CEO Michael Rich, “Polarization inflamed by Truth Decay is the gravest

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<sup>12</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization.”

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Benjamin Press, “What Happens When Democracies Become Perniciously Polarized?,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 18, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/18/what-happens-when-democracies-become-perniciously-polarized-pub-86190>.

<sup>14</sup> McCoy and Press.

<sup>15</sup> McCoy et al., *Reducing Pernicious Polarization*.

<sup>16</sup> McCoy et al.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2314.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2314.html).

<sup>18</sup> Kavanagh and Rich.

threat facing America.”<sup>19</sup> Phrases that have entered the public lexicon like “bottomless Pinocchio” and “alternative facts” are evidence of the relevance of Rich’s thesis.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Rudy Giuliani’s infamous quip, “truth isn’t truth” which he uttered during a *Meet the Press* interview, reinforced RAND’s commitment to tackling the problem.<sup>21</sup> Giuliani’s comment was the latest in a series of claims that were widely ridiculed throughout the media. Prior to his *Meet the Press* interview, he appeared on CNN’s *Chris Cuomo* where he argued with the host about the meaning of “facts.”<sup>22</sup> In what was most likely a response to Giuliani’s comments, former FBI Director James Comey tweeted, “Truth exists and truth matters.”<sup>23</sup> Given Giuliani’s questionable decision-making while serving as President Trump’s personal attorney, and his frequently incoherent arguments, he may not be eminently qualified to argue the inherent complexities of objectivity.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, to the extent that his premise was how concepts of truth and facts are taken for granted, it may have some validity.

The sentiments expressed by the Select Committee, along with the RAND Corporation, the news media, and the former FBI Director, provide evidence of the “canonical value” placed on objectivism, positivism, empiricism, or any of the other philosophical schools that lean heavily on a single version of truth.<sup>25</sup> Western culture was founded on the principles of rational thought and those values are reinforced through

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<sup>19</sup> Michael D. Rich, “‘Truth Decay’ Makes Facts Subjective and Polarization More Extreme,” *The RAND Blog* (blog), November 12, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/11/truth-decay-makes-facts-subjective-and-polarization.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Kristine Phillips, “‘Truth Isn’t Truth’: Rudy Giuliani’s Flub Tops 2018’s Quotes of the Year,” *Washington Post*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/12/11/truth-isnt-truth-rudy-giulianis-flub-tops-s-quotes-year/>.

<sup>21</sup> Caroline Kenny, “Rudy Giuliani Says ‘Truth Isn’t Truth,’” *CNN Politics*, August 19, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/19/politics/rudy-giuliani-truth-isnt-truth/index.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Cillizza, “This Exchange between Rudy Giuliani and Chris Cuomo Is Our Current Politics in a Nutshell,” *CNN Politics*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/15/politics/rudy-giuliani-chris-cuomo-trump-facts/index.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Kenny, “Rudy Giuliani Says ‘Truth Isn’t Truth.’”

<sup>24</sup> “‘Normal’ Scrutiny: Rudy Giuliani Failed in Federal Court,” *Law & Crime* (blog), November 18, 2020, <https://lawandcrime.com/2020-election/when-applying-normal-scrutiny-rudy-giulianis-court-appearance-was-a-total-flop/>.

<sup>25</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), 110.

common discourse like that surrounding the spree of comments by Rudy Giuliani. Suggestions that “truth is truth” and “facts are facts” represent a kind of “national epistemology,” or how Americans understand knowledge. In this case, knowledge is thought to exist “out there” waiting to be discovered; facts can be “found,” and truth can be “revealed.” However, as Melvin Pollner puts it, social life “is not the province of the scientist.”<sup>26</sup> So when it comes to the temperature at which water boils, few would argue; indeed, in this case “facts *are* facts.” However, such incontrovertible truths are rarely found within the context of society. Unlike the laboratory, reality is an environment with countless uncontrollable variables. If there is a solution for the nation’s growing polarization, finding one begins by questioning what it means “to know.”

***b. A New National Epistemology***

Several decades ago, Murray Edelman wrote about the futility of applying a positivist, or science-like, philosophy to politics suggesting that such approaches “take for granted a world of facts that have a determinable meaning and a world of people who react rationally to the facts they know.”<sup>27</sup> Despite a common belief that knowledge is detached from emotion, the two are intertwined. Explained by Robert Burton, former chief of neurology at Mount Zion-UCSF Hospital, humans are largely driven by “feelings of certainty, rightness, conviction, and correctness,” or what he calls “the feeling of knowing.”<sup>28</sup> In *Denying to the Grave: Why We Ignore the Facts that Will Save Us*, Sara Gorman and Jack Gorman support Burton thesis by describing how scientific data, the gold standard of facticity, has had little impact on public opinion concerning polarizing political issues including gun control, vaccinations, and climate change.<sup>29</sup> Considering the complex nature of “knowing,” the possibility of moving past the current impasse and towards

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<sup>26</sup> Melvin Pollner, *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr, 1987), xi.

<sup>27</sup> Murray J. Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Alan Burton, *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You’re Not* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2009), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Sara E. Gorman and Jack M. Gorman, *Denying to the Grave: Why We Ignore the Facts That Will Save Us* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

depolarization is predicated on a willingness to adopt an alternative perspective that challenges common and deeply entrenched beliefs about knowledge, reality, and truth. Taken seriously, the idea that truth is not truth forces a critical look at taken-for-granted aspects of society including how language and discourse influence our understanding of the world. From this vantage point, the purpose of research and inquiry is redefined from a process of “truth-seeking” to one intended “to see what we can learn.”<sup>30</sup>

Of myriad theoretical perspectives, social constructionism provides the greatest potential for what Sara Crawley calls “epistemic gain,” or “what can be learned by viewing a social phenomenon via various epistemological lenses.”<sup>31</sup> Social constructionism holds that while an independent and objective world exists, the self-evident reality that humans experience is filtered through various lenses. As Kenneth Gergen puts it, “To be sure, *there is something*, but when you try to describe what that *something* is, you will inevitably rely on some tradition of sense making.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, instead of knowledge reflecting how the world *really is*, it represents an agreement among members of a group. Therefore, research from a social constructionist perspective focuses on the social processes involved in the construction and maintenance of knowledge, rather than its ultimate validity or invalidity.

### 3. The Discourse Analysis Problem

Among the processes involved in the construction and maintenance of knowledge, communication is paramount, which makes social constructionism’s emphasis on language its most distinctive feature. Naturally, the field of discourse analysis, which explores the relationship between language and society, most often utilizes this approach. Likewise, because of the centrality of language in most human interaction, many other fields within social science have benefitted from the perspective including the study of media and social

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<sup>30</sup> Sara L. Crawley, “Reality Disjunctures and Epistemological Encampment: Addressing Relevance in Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems,” *American Sociologist* 50, no. 2 (June 2019): 264, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-018-9398-9>.

<sup>31</sup> Crawley, 264.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 5.

movements. The same can be said of polarization, which can be better understood when viewed as a discursive process, rather than the inevitable result of objective differences.

Although discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are distinct, discourse analysis in the social sciences literature generally refers to the latter. According to Dianna Mullett, CDA “derives from a number of overlapping theoretical perspectives” including poststructuralism and Critical Theory.<sup>33</sup> While linguistically-centered, CDA draws from many disciplines including philosophy, anthropology, political science, and sociology, making it a truly interdisciplinary qualitative research method. Its aim is to uncover, among other things, sources of power, inequalities, ideologies, and beliefs, by examining spoken and written language. For instance, analyzing political discourse can reveal how the choice of language used to describe poverty or drug use can contribute to racial disparities. Discourse analysis can also help explain how seemingly objective concepts such as gender or “nation” are social constructions. In essence, CDA attempts to reveal the consequences of discourse including why, within a given society, certain “truths” may be considered self-evident.

A problem is that CDA tends to remain esoteric, confined to what Donald Schon calls the “high ground” of academia.<sup>34</sup> As the nearly one-thousand-page, two-volume *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* illustrates, discourse analysis requires a lot of unpacking.<sup>35</sup> In fact, despite its authors’ attempts “to offer a comprehensive sense of the scope and possibilities of discourse analysis,” they apologize for likely leaving many significant components out.<sup>36</sup> Some researchers, like Mullett, have attempted to make the subject more approachable by synthesizing the works of pioneering CDA scholars such as Ruth Wodak, Teun Van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough, in order to provide a framework for

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<sup>33</sup> Dianna R. Mullett, “A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research,” *Journal of Advanced Academics* 29, no. 2 (May 1, 2018): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X18758260>.

<sup>34</sup> Donald A. Schon, “The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology,” *Change* 27, no. 6 (1995): 27, <http://bonnernetnetwork.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/59896448/Schoen%20Scholarship%20New%20Epistemology.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Deborah Tannen, Heidi Ehernberger Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Tannen, Hamilton, and Schiffrin.



discourse analysis.<sup>37</sup> Still, Mullet concludes, even with an analytical framework, “CDA is a difficult, complex, and time-consuming approach.”<sup>38</sup> She cautions that her framework is only a starting point “intended to guide the design of more specific analytical frameworks tailored to the researcher’s goals.” Despite its broad applicability and utility within professional practice, discourse analysis is likely to remain abstruse until it can be more readily operationalized.

The rare exception in the largely abstract field of discourse analysis is securitization theory, described by the Copenhagen School as “the intersubjective and socially constructed process by which a threat to a particular referent object is acknowledged and deemed worth protecting.”<sup>39</sup> In this case, the referent object is not a physical entity but an idea, often abstract or ill-defined such as “our way of life” or “traditional family values.” However, the significance here is not a particular referent object, but how securitization is a call to action. As J.L. Austin explains in *How to Do Things With Words*, utterances are not always merely descriptions or statements of fact, they can be performative or what he terms “speech acts.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, the discursive process of securitization constructs enemies, establishes relationships among participants, and necessitates solutions to eliminating the threat. In other words, securitization is a means of discursively constructing a particular reality by those in power. Although its significance and influence within discourse studies is apparent, its focus on security can limit its applicability outside of specific contexts. Perhaps, because of its coherence and practicality, it has been applied beyond its initial intent, running the risk of viewing all political discourse as securitizing.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mullet, “A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research.”

<sup>38</sup> Mullet, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Catherine Charrett, “A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security,” working paper, International Catalan Institute for Peace, 2009. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1884149> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1884149>.

<sup>40</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed (Harvard Univ. Press, 1975, n.d.), 40.

<sup>41</sup> Volker Franke, “The Emperor Needs New Clothes: Securitizing Threats in the Twenty-First Century,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 2002): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.46743/1082-7307/2002.1024>.

The ever-expanding “homeland security” discipline is a case in point.<sup>42</sup> As Catherine Charrett points out, Ole Waever, one of the architects of the theory, cautions against defining and redefining security until the concept becomes meaningless.”<sup>43</sup> Still, securitization theory offers an example of how discourse analysis can be operationalized by focusing on a few key elements drawn from an otherwise unwieldy approach.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Utilizing a social constructionist approach, and drawing inspiration from securitization theory’s focused approach to discourse analysis, the purpose of this thesis is to answer two related questions: How do definitions, metaphors, and identity influence the outcome and understanding of sociocultural events? And how can definitions, metaphors, and identity explain polarization as a discursive process?

## **C. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis was inspired by the events at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. More than the event itself, I found the debates regarding what constituted an appropriate description of it most interesting. Was it a riot, a protest, an insurrection, or something different altogether? I intended to determine if such debates mattered, or if it was a case of “potato, *potahto*,” which in the end, had no practical significance. My curiosity led to the primary research question: To what extent does language influence the outcome of sociocultural events? However, the problem of practical relevance and what that might look like remained. While there is no shortage of scholarship on discourse analysis, pragmatic research is less abundant. In other words, the literature often fails to answer, “so what” or “now what”? Given that January 6 reflected the deeper problem of division within the country, it was a short step to analyze discourse within the context of polarization, providing the practical significance this thesis lacked. As Donald Schon puts

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Bellavita, “Changing Homeland Security: What Is Homeland Security?,” *Homeland Security Affairs* 4 (June 2008), <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/118>.

<sup>43</sup> Charrett, “A Critical Application of Securitization Theory.”

it, it was a way to bridge the “high ground” of academia with “the swampy lowlands” of practice.<sup>44</sup>

The research methodology used for this thesis is best described as grounded theory, first proposed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. As Kathy Charmaz summarizes, when using this method, “the researcher’s analytic focus emerges during the research process, rather than being determined before empirical inquiry begins.”<sup>45</sup> As an “unformed researcher,” the flexibility and openness encouraged by grounded theory makes it the most suitable method for this project.<sup>46</sup>

I began by studying the more abstract concepts of discourse reflected in the works of Foucault and Derrida. This version of discourse is more philosophical than linguistic, and required that I familiarize myself with many of its theoretical underpinnings, including pragmatism, constructivism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and postmodernism. By and large, these parallel philosophies fall under the social constructionist umbrella, the theoretical perspective from which I approach my research. To fully appreciate the significance of language and discourse requires the researcher to question assumptions about knowledge and reality, a tenet of social constructionism.

Once I understood the social constructionist approach and the more abstract concepts of discourse, I transitioned to more specific research on discourse analysis, including the work of Wodak, Fairclough, and van Dijk. Though their writing is still largely esoteric, it incorporates more traditional aspects of language which required that I become familiar with foundational linguistic concepts introduced by the likes of Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Grice, and Ferdinand de Saussure.

When I was able to navigate discourse scholarship confidently, I sought research that applied the previous concepts in a relatable context. I leaned heavily on the writing of David Zarefsky, Murray Edelman, and Edward Schiappa, whose publications on political

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<sup>44</sup> Schon, “The New Scholarship Requires a New Epistemology,” 27.

<sup>45</sup> Kathy Charmaz and Robert Thornberg, “The Pursuit of Quality in Grounded Theory,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 305, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1780357>.

<sup>46</sup> Barney G. Glaser, “The Future of Grounded Theory,” *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 6 (November 1, 1999): 837, <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973299129122199>.

rhetoric are instrumental to this project. This research phase also includes the study of polarization, drawing from Jennifer McCoy, Murat Somer, Liliana Mason, and others. Considering the lack of a coherent and approachable framework for discourse analysis and encouraged by grounded theory, I looked for themes that emerged during the research process. Of all the common threads throughout the literature, definitions, metaphors, and identity are most salient. Further research on these elements suggests they are ubiquitous, interdependent, and especially significant within the polarization process. The result is a rudimentary analytical framework that I utilize to answer my research questions.

Next, I selected two events for case analysis based on several criteria. First, they must be familiar and consequential events in American history. One of the purposes of this thesis is to demonstrate that viewing an event through a discursive lens can provide a new perspective which requires that the reader hold existing views of the event. Second, there must be sufficient discourse relevant to the event to enable a thorough analysis. Third, the events must contain elements of division which is needed to ensure that the findings are relevant to the study of polarization. While many options meet these criteria, I chose the Civil War and 9/11 because they provide a more comprehensive view of division. One represents an internal division between fellow citizens, while the other an external divide between citizens and a foreign enemy.

Finally, I applied the framework to the Civil War and 9/11 to analyze how definitions, metaphors, and identity contribute to their outcomes and influence how they are perceived. Following these analyses, I synthesized my findings and related them to the nation's current division. The intent is to understand the polarization process better, which could lead to potential remediation strategies.

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter begins by reviewing literature on epistemology and relativism. Both topics are foundational to social constructionism, a perspective that enables language to be appreciated beyond a simple communication medium. Likewise, epistemology and relativism are important to the study of polarization which can result from conflicting versions of truth. The review follows by examining the scholarship on definitions, metaphors, and identity which comprise the analytical framework that will be applied in subsequent chapters.

### A. EPISTEMOLOGY

Countless philosophical traditions have sought to answer age-old questions about the meaning of life, the nature of reality, and other similar abstractions. Twenty-five hundred years ago Plato asked one of those questions in *Theaetetus*: “What is knowledge?”<sup>47</sup> The seemingly simple question began an exceedingly complex journey by philosophers to come up with an answer. Traditionally, epistemologists characterized knowledge as the result of justification, truth, and belief, or the so-called “JTB concept.”<sup>48</sup> Simply put, knowledge was thought to consist of ideas that are true, believed to be true, and arise from some reasonable grounds for believing them. However, challenges to the trivariate concept of knowledge abound, including what is termed the Gettier problem, or Gettier cases, named after Edmund Gettier, who upended the longstanding consensus among epistemologists by proposing that JTB is insufficient to support a claim of knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Gettier’s cases, which he presents in a three-page paper, demonstrate how one could meet all of the criteria for knowledge required by the “JTB concept” and, yet, be

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<sup>47</sup> Sophie-Grace Chappell, “Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/plato-theaetetus/>.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>49</sup> Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), ProQuest Ebook Central.

“intuitively not cases of knowledge.”<sup>50</sup> According to Laurence Bonjour, Gettier’s cases meant that the JTB concept “was at the very least seriously incomplete and quite possibly even more badly mistaken.”<sup>51</sup> Essentially, it was back to the drawing board for epistemologists. Gettier proved that concepts like knowledge and truth cannot always be explained by logical formulas.

Some scholars, like cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner, have reconciled logical notions of truth with its practical aspects by suggesting there are “ways of knowing.”<sup>52</sup> The first he calls the “logico-scientific mode” or “paradigmatic mode” which describes a rational mind driven by a need for empirical truth.<sup>53</sup> The other is the “narrative mode” which describes humans’ affinity for storytelling and drama.<sup>54</sup> Each of the modes, according to Bruner, “differ radically in their procedures for verification.”<sup>55</sup> However, his point is that while the “ways of knowing” can be conceptualized and validated separately, as he says, they “come to live side by side.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, everyday reality is an amalgamation of subjective and objective experiences with no way to separate the two. Recognizing the significance of both “ways of knowing” leads to a more complete and accurate understanding of knowledge within society.

In a similar light, Berger and Luckmann propose “the sociology of knowledge.”<sup>57</sup> However, unlike Bruner, who maintains a distinction between kinds of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann contend that a proper understanding of reality “must concern itself with whatever passes for knowledge in society, regardless of the ultimate validity or

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<sup>50</sup> Bonjour, *Epistemology*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Bonjour, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Bruner, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Bruner, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Bruner, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Bruner, 43.

<sup>57</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 3.

invalidity.”<sup>58</sup> At first, the idea to consider all knowledge as legitimate might seem absurd. However, as the authors explicate in *The Social Construction of Reality*, most aspects of everyday life that are considered objective are no more than taken-for-granted agreements by a society about how things “really” are.<sup>59</sup> Like Bruner and Gettier, Berger and Luckmann’s notion of knowledge suggests that Plato’s question, “What is knowledge?,” remains unanswered.<sup>60</sup>

## B. RELATIVISM

The notion that there are versions of the truth or perhaps *truths* naturally invites thoughts of relativism. Outside of philosophy circles, the term is typically associated with moral relativism or the idea that nothing is inherently wrong or right. In this context, relativism has come to mean “anything goes,” rendering justifications seemingly irrelevant.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, this oversimplification and relationship with morality can prevent relativist approaches like social constructionism from being considered valuable theoretical perspectives. However, relativist scholars are quick to dispel these common misconceptions. As Kenneth Gergen argues, “Just because you understand that there are many different moral traditions does not lead to the conclusion that ‘it’s all equal.’”<sup>62</sup> Other scholars such as Derek Edwards, Malcolm Ashmore, and Jonathan Potter, also push back on the misconceptions about moral relativism, suggesting that the difference between relativism and other philosophies is that the merits of a particular moral tradition are the result of critical analysis, rather than a foregone conclusion.<sup>63</sup> Still, as Hugh Miller suggests, perhaps because of such colloquialisms like “anything goes,” “the word relativism seems burdened with connotative baggage that synonymous terms such as

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<sup>58</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

<sup>60</sup> Chappell, “Plato on Knowledge in the Theaetetus.”

<sup>61</sup> Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 2002), 19.

<sup>62</sup> Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 226.

<sup>63</sup> Derek Edwards, Malcolm Ashmore, and Jonathan Potter, “Death and Furniture: The Rhetoric, Politics and Theology of Bottom Line Arguments against Relativism,” *History of the Human Sciences* 8, no. 2 (1995): 25–49.



perspectivism are not forced to bear.”<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, relativism remains an essential philosophical perspective and a much-needed counterbalance to less broad-minded approaches.

The counterproposal to relativism is often objectivism or realism, which suggests that things exist “independent of anyone’s beliefs, linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, and so on.”<sup>65</sup> The problem, according to Vivien Burr, is not with realism or relativism, *per se*, but the way common understandings pit the two against one another.<sup>66</sup> As Burr suggests, this false dichotomy results in a fruitless “realism-relativism debate.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Gergen suggests that relativism is often wrongly disparaged because of the way it is contrasted with terms that exploit the privilege given to objectivity by Western culture, such as realism.<sup>68</sup> As Saussure, and later Derrida and Deleuze suggest, language is characterized by binaries, meaning that because realism connotes attributes such as scientific, rational, and factual, relativism is synonymous with qualities such as unscientific, emotional, and opinion-based.<sup>69</sup>

Relativists would argue that, contrary to the philosophical perspective’s reputation, their approach adheres to virtues of science and reason more so than realism or other objectivist approaches. As Edwards et al. suggest, when “truths become sacred objects,” the grounds on which realists claim superiority become unfounded.<sup>70</sup> In other words, the theoretical position of realism is itself a “belief” or “conceptual scheme,” the very things to which realists consider themselves immune.<sup>71</sup> For some scholars, most notably Thomas

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<sup>64</sup> Hugh T. Miller, “Relativism: Shedding the Stigma,” *Critical Policy Studies* 13, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 443, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2019.1671885>.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Miller, “Realism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/realism/>.

<sup>66</sup> Vivien Burr, “Social Constructionism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015), 222–27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.24049-X>.

<sup>67</sup> Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 88.

<sup>68</sup> Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Baugh, “Making the Difference: Deleuze’s Difference and Derrida’s Différance,” *Social Semiotics* 7, no. 2 (August 1997): 127–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350339709360376>.

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter, “Death and Furniture,” 40.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter.

Kuhn, Bruno Latour, Harry Collins, Stephen Woolgar, and Karin Knorr-Cetina, the practice of science itself is seen as a version of relativism.<sup>72</sup> Kuhn, for instance, introduced the concept of “paradigms” to explain how science is reflective of the particular culture in which it is produced.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the common image of science as a process of discovery, Kuhn argues that “normal science” is more about working within the boundaries established by the paradigm.<sup>74</sup> Rather than face ridicule or criticism from peers, Kuhn suggests scientists often reject or ignore conflicting or anomalous data because it is not considered acceptable knowledge as defined by the paradigm.<sup>75</sup> According to Kuhn, it is not until the accepted truths are challenged that scientific revolutions occur, and new paradigms emerge.<sup>76</sup> If science, which epitomizes objectivity, facts, and truth are not outside the reach of social influence, it stands to reason that such concepts are particularly questionable when viewed within the province of everyday life.

### C. LANGUAGE

It is hard to find a more salient and consequential example of the role of language in the construction of reality than the AIDS crisis in the United States that began in the early eighties. While this example is but one among many in the literature, it provides a relatable context and highlights the elements that will be covered in the rest of the chapter.

In 1982, the *New York Times* reported on a new disorder physicians and researchers were calling “gay-related immunodeficiency disorder,” or GRID.<sup>77</sup> Known colloquially as “gay plague,” early theories attributed the disease to what Steven Epstein captured as

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<sup>72</sup> K. Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge: An Essay on the Constructivist and Contextual Nature of Science* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn and Ian Hacking, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>74</sup> Kuhn and Hacking, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Kuhn and Hacking.

<sup>76</sup> Kuhn and Hacking.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence K. Altman, “New Homosexual Disorder Worries Health Officials,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1982, sec. Science, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/11/science/new-homosexual-disorder-worries-health-officials.html>.

“‘excesses’ of the ‘homosexual lifestyle’.”<sup>78</sup> Even as cases of heterosexuals and children exhibiting similar signs and symptoms were reported, many researchers and physicians remained focused on homosexuality as the “cause.”<sup>79</sup> As James Curran and Harold Jaffe note, an epidemiological study done in early 1982 showed strong evidence of an infectious agent, but “because of competing hypotheses or merely denial, many scientists and the public were skeptical.”<sup>80</sup> For much of society, including members of Congress, it remained a “gay disease” well after human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) was discovered.<sup>81</sup>

The AIDS epidemic illustrates how sociocultural and political events are as much about the language used by participants as the events themselves. As Paula A. Treichler suggests, AIDS was “both a material and linguistic reality.”<sup>82</sup> At times, research and treatments were guided more by stereotypes of gay men than the science.<sup>83</sup> Public perception of the disease drew from the same generalizations which were amplified by the media’s selective reporting.<sup>84</sup> News reports, if they existed, often emphasized “blame,” or what Nelkin calls “language of reprobation, censure, and rebuke.”<sup>85</sup>

The definition of the illness as a “gay disease,” the metaphor of “plague,” and the male homosexual identity enabled and reinforced one another creating a self-perpetuating discourse. Were the disease not defined as “GRID,” it would certainly not have evoked the

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<sup>78</sup> Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 48.

<sup>79</sup> Epstein, 52.

<sup>80</sup> James W. Curran and Harold W. Jaffe, “AIDS: The Early Years and CDC’s Response,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 60, no. 4 (October 7, 2011): 64–69, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su6004a11.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Edward I. Koch, “Senator Helms’s Callousness toward AIDS Victims,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1987, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/07/opinion/senator-helms-s-callousness-toward-aids-victims.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions,” *The Journal of Business* 59, no. 4 (1986): S251–78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2352759>.

<sup>83</sup> Epstein, *Impure Science*.

<sup>84</sup> Dorothy Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” *Milbank Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1991): 293–307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350206>.

<sup>85</sup> Nelkin, 299.

“gay plague” metaphor; that much is obvious.<sup>86</sup> However, without the conceptual framework of a “gay disease,” it likely would not have been called a plague at all. The word has biblical implications of punishment or retribution for wrongdoing. Homosexual males were already social pariahs, seen as abominations; a “plague” seemed, to some, like a fitting comeuppance. Unlike most diseases, which have “victims,” in the discourse of the “gay plague” this disease had “perpetrators.” According to a 1985 issue of *Discover* titled “AIDS: The Latest Scientific Facts,” AIDS sufferers were paying “the fatal price” for their transgressions.<sup>87</sup> The discourse surrounding AIDS did more than reinforce existing prejudice and social identities: it influenced how the disease was conceptualized, studied, and treated.<sup>88</sup>

As a “gay” disease, AIDS was not a concern for most of the public, who differentiated themselves from the “others” they believed to be susceptible. Although the fact that many of the first AIDS patients were homosexual males makes the “GRID” label appear reasonable, more insidious metaphors that underlie culture and morality encouraged the leap from correlation to causation. As George Lakoff explains, the concept of morality is awash in conceptual metaphors. “Morality is a physical object” is the conceptual metaphor on which “Morality is Strength” is based.<sup>89</sup> In turn, this metaphor supports a “cluster” of others, including “moral health,” which lent plausibility to the idea that AIDS was caused by “immune overload,” rather a virus.<sup>90</sup> If morality represents strength and health, as Lakoff argues, immorality is understood to be weak and unhealthy, rendering the idea of AIDS originating from within the gay body a reasonable hypothesis.<sup>91</sup> In fact, many physicians admit they failed to make accurate diagnoses of AIDS having been influenced

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<sup>86</sup> Raymond A. Smith, ed., “GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency),” in *Encyclopedia of AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 650.

<sup>87</sup> Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse,” 37.

<sup>88</sup> Epstein, *Impure Science*.

<sup>89</sup> George Lakoff, “Metaphor, Morality, and Politics, or, Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals in the Dust,” *Social Research* 62, no. 2 (1995): 185, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40971091>.

<sup>90</sup> Lakoff, 188; Epstein, *Impure Science*, 48.

<sup>91</sup> Epstein, *Impure Science*.

by the disease’s myopic gay-focused discourse.<sup>92</sup> As Wittgenstein writes, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world,” a point that the AIDS epidemic clearly illustrates and one that this thesis hopes to make, as well.<sup>93</sup>

#### D. FRAMING

In 1974, Erving Goffman published *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, for which he owed a debt to the earlier work of Gregory Bateson.<sup>94</sup> Goffman borrows Bateson’s “frame” metaphor to describe “principles of organization which govern events.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, frames provide a particular way of interpreting experience. By all accounts, Goffman was a constructionist and sought to provide “another analysis of social reality” in the tradition of William James.<sup>96</sup> His work was instrumental in the pioneering research of David Snow et al. on social movements and group mobilization.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Goffman’s focus on framing within face-to-face interactions lent itself well to psychological and behavioral research.<sup>98</sup>

Although the concept of framing was embraced by many disciplines because of its potential to explain social phenomena, it remained what Robert M. Entman called a “fractured paradigm.”<sup>99</sup> As he states, there were “pieces here and there but no comprehensive statement to guide research.”<sup>100</sup> Using the following definition to establish

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<sup>92</sup> Ronald Bayer and Gerald M. Oppenheimer, *AIDS Doctors: Voices from the Epidemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 158.

<sup>94</sup> Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification,” *October* 43 (1987): 37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3397564>.

<sup>95</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 10.

<sup>96</sup> Goffman, 2.

<sup>97</sup> David A. Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986): 464–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581>.

<sup>98</sup> Goffman, *Frame Analysis*.

<sup>99</sup> Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.

<sup>100</sup> Entman, 51.

a more unified concept, he captured the characteristics of framing that were common to disparate fields of research:

To frame is to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.<sup>101</sup>

While Entman's definition enables a more coherent conceptualization, some scholars have noted that it remains far from a unified theory.<sup>102</sup> This is not surprising considering the process relies on the interplay of numerous linguistic, psychological, and sociological factors. Entman himself acknowledges the difficulties inherent in framing and offers a model he describes as "one attempt to reduce confusion and imprecision in the scholarly literature about the nature and functions of framing."<sup>103</sup> For example, Snow and Robert Benford describe a process of framing in the context of social movements.<sup>104</sup> In another line of research, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman apply the concept of framing to the study of rational choice and decision-making.<sup>105</sup> Using his earlier definition, Entman introduces "cascading activation" as a "shortcut guide" to analyze the ways in which a frame spreads from those within positions of power to the public by way of media.<sup>106</sup> Keenly aware of the abstract, yet widely applicable notion of framing, Entman quips, "It is not the only way to, as it were, frame framing."<sup>107</sup>

In essence, Entman describes a frame as a "version of reality" or a particular way of "seeing" a phenomenon. The rest of this chapter builds on Entman's foundational definition of framing by distilling the concept down to three discursive elements. Together,

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<sup>101</sup> Entman, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>.

<sup>103</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11," *Political Communication* 20, no. 4 (October 2003): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244176>.

<sup>104</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223459>.

<sup>105</sup> Tversky and Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions."

<sup>106</sup> Entman, "Cascading Activation," 419.

<sup>107</sup> Entman, 418.

these elements construct *a* reality by identifying the who, the what, and the why of sociocultural events and, in turn, influence their outcomes, and how they are understood.

## 1. Definition

Although definitions are often taken for granted as statements of fact, they represent what Schiappa calls “rhetorically induced social knowledge.”<sup>108</sup> In other words, they support a particular view of how “the world ‘really is.’”<sup>109</sup> Typically, in Schiappa’s view, definitions are uncontested because users of a language tacitly agree on meaning, a view he shares with Wittgenstein. Such agreement is what allows language to function efficiently despite the relative complexity inherent in definitions, a characteristic which Wittgenstein calls “meaning as use.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, while a dictionary will provide a definition, what a word means depends on its use within a discourse.

However, disputes may arise when there are competing definitional claims, which, according to Edelman, is a common occurrence in politics.<sup>111</sup> As Edelman points out, “If there are no conflicts over meaning, the issue is not political, by definition.”<sup>112</sup> Some of the most persistent, divisive, and emotionally charged arguments in American history (e.g., abortion) have featured definitions in which the definitions of “human being” and “liberty” are central.<sup>113</sup> Schiappa refers to such instances in which meaning is unable to be resolved as “definitional ruptures.”<sup>114</sup> Schiappa’s choice of terms is fitting considering the ability of language to tear society apart.

The significance of definition applies not only to objects or ideas, but also to events or situations. Unlike some responses to stimuli, such as pulling a hand away from a hot

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<sup>108</sup> Edward Schiappa, *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>109</sup> Schiappa, 37.

<sup>110</sup> Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar, “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/wittgenstein/>.

<sup>111</sup> Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*.

<sup>112</sup> Edelman, 104.

<sup>113</sup> *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, No. 19–1392. Slip Opinion (2022).

<sup>114</sup> Schiappa, *Defining Reality*, 7.

stove, Herbert Blumer argues that most human actions are based on “the process of definition and interpretation”—in that order.<sup>115</sup> This argument is especially true of group conduct which, according to Blumer, depends on individuals aligning their actions based on “common understandings” represented by definitions.<sup>116</sup> The definitions “sporting event” or “wedding,” for example, establish what actions are appropriate, as well as the relationship between participants. In these examples the “definition of the situation” may seem obvious, but that is precisely Blumer’s point.<sup>117</sup> Like Schiappa, Blumer suggests that definitions represent widely accepted social knowledge by condensing a complex array of ideas into simple words. In much the same way that agreement on definitions enables language to function efficiently, Blumer suggests society operates largely based on a set of defined social situations.<sup>118</sup>

In some cases, a situation defies simple definition because of its complexity or novelty, such as war, social upheaval, or other unexplainable events, leading to what Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach describes as “pervasive ambiguity.”<sup>119</sup> According to Ball-Rokeach, “pervasive ambiguity” begins because “there is insufficient information to construct a definition of a situation or to select the most appropriate definition from two or more alternatives.”<sup>120</sup> For example, despite being widely televised, the unprecedented nature of January 6 left the viewing public, as well as the news media struggling to make sense of what was occurring. As NPR podcast host Audie Cornish remarked the day after, during the breach of the Capitol it was “a scramble just to find the language...to describe

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<sup>115</sup> Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>116</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, 86.

<sup>117</sup> Robert K. Merton, “The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect,” *Social Forces* 74, no. 2 (1995): 384, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2580486>.

<sup>118</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*.

<sup>119</sup> Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, “From Pervasive Ambiguity to a Definition of the Situation,” *Sociometry* 36, no. 3 (1973): 379, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786339>.

<sup>120</sup> Ball-Rokeach, 379.



what was going on.”<sup>121</sup> Without a definition, the normal process of interpretation is interrupted leaving participants unable “to establish meaningful links.”<sup>122</sup> In other words, individuals are unsure what is happening or how they relate to the situation and others.

Although, according to Ball-Rokeach, “pervasive ambiguity” begins as a “cognitive problem,” it can become an emotional problem “when the need to make sense of one’s world is threatened.”<sup>123</sup> Dawn Liu Holford et al. illustrate Ball-Rokeach’s point in their article describing how risk communications contributed the uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>124</sup> As Holford et al. highlight, descriptions such as “vulnerable” and “at increased risk” fail to answer “what exactly is risky.”<sup>125</sup> During a pandemic, the definition of risk *is* the definition of the situation. Whether COVID-19 presented a public health emergency, a crisis, an existential threat, or simply a prolonged disruption of normal life depended on who and what was at risk.

As David Altheide argues, identity is neither singular, nor static, but “emerges and is acknowledged in situations,” suggesting that without a definition of the situation, identity remains in flux.<sup>126</sup> Normally, Blumer explains, the interpretation that proceeds from definition is largely a process of determining which social identity is appropriate for a given situation.<sup>127</sup> Without the ability to draw from one of many “situated” identities such as victim, mother, physician, or American, Ball-Rokeach found ambiguity leads participants to seek out others whom they perceive to be like themselves.<sup>128</sup> David A. Hogg, who

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<sup>121</sup> Eric Deggans and David Folkenflik, “A Look at How Different U.S. Media Outlets Covered the Pro-Trump Riot on Capitol Hill,” *NPR*, January 7, 2021, sec. Media, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/07/954562181/a-look-at-how-different-u-s-media-outlets-covered-the-pro-trump-riot-on-capitol->.

<sup>122</sup> Ball-Rokeach, “From Pervasive Ambiguity to a Definition of the Situation,” 379.

<sup>123</sup> Ball-Rokeach, 379.

<sup>124</sup> Dawn Liu Holford et al., “Ambiguity and Unintended Inferences about Risk Messages for COVID-19,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 28, no. 3 (20220519): 486, <https://doi.org/10.1037/xap0000416>.

<sup>125</sup> Holford, 487.

<sup>126</sup> David L. Altheide, “Identity and the Definition of the Situation in a Mass-Mediated Context,” *Symbolic Interaction* 23, no. 1 (2000): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2000.23.1.1>.

<sup>127</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*.

<sup>128</sup> Ball-Rokeach, “From Pervasive Ambiguity to a Definition of the Situation.”

proposed uncertainty-identity theory to explain various forms of extremism, had similar findings and suggests that uncertainty encourages “social categorization” in order to “know how one should feel and behave.”<sup>129</sup> The ability of definitions to influence group behavior makes them important rhetorical devices, leading many scholars including Alicia Cast, Zarefsky, and Altheide to suggest that the ability to define a situation is synonymous with power.<sup>130</sup>

## 2. Metaphor

In their seminal book, *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors are more than linguistic expressions, but rather are an integral part of human cognition.<sup>131</sup> In fact, according to Lakoff and Johnson, most abstract concepts are understood metaphorically, including time, which is conceptualized as a “moving object.”<sup>132</sup> They argue that notions of progress, future, and past, all stem from this “conceptual metaphor.”<sup>133</sup> Likewise, because time is understood as a moving object, expressions like “moving along,” “towards the future,” “falling behind,” or “stuck in the past” all make sense. According to Lakoff and Johnson, other examples such as life, love, and anger are also conceptualized using similar physical metaphors.<sup>134</sup> As their research demonstrates, the reach of metaphorical language extends well beyond literature and poetry and has the potential to limit or expand how the world is understood.

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<sup>129</sup> Michael A. Hogg and Janice Adelman, “Uncertainty–Identity Theory: Extreme Groups, Radical Behavior, and Authoritarian Leadership,” *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 3 (2013): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12023>. Hogg expands on Henri Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory by describing how uncertainty motivates individuals to seek out groups with extremist tendencies.

<sup>130</sup> Alicia D. Cast, “Power and the Ability to Define the Situation,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2003): 185–201, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519821>; David Zarefsky, *President Johnson’s War on Poverty* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1986); Altheide, “Identity and the Definition of the Situation in a Mass-Mediated Context.”

<sup>131</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>132</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 42.

<sup>133</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 4.

<sup>134</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

According to Zoltan Kovecses, metaphors involve “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain,” making them well-suited to a variety of applications.<sup>135</sup> As Reddy explains (metaphorically), a metaphor can be thought of as a “conduit” suggesting that metaphors enable the transfer of complex or not easily articulated concepts from one entity to another.<sup>136</sup> Examples of metaphors are myriad, including in computer science where complicated ideas are ubiquitous. As Timothy Colburn and Gary Shute illustrate, “computer users have incorporated folders, directories, files, registries, and pages into their language.”<sup>137</sup> The concept of a “virus” is used to conceptualize the less familiar concept of malicious software. Thus, the “health” of a computer depends on its ability to “protect” itself against “infection.” As Kovecses explains, these “mappings,” or “conceptual correspondences” between one concept and another are what enable metaphors to facilitate understanding.<sup>138</sup>

The ubiquity of metaphors and their tendency to be overlooked makes them particularly relevant when conducting discourse analysis from a social constructionist perspective. It is not uncommon for metaphorical language to define a discourse, including that of everyday life. This is particularly true of political discourse, which depends on metaphor both to persuade and to communicate complex ideas more easily. Some expressions, like “war,” become so pervasive that they are no longer recognized as metaphorical, but rather standard and even literal political terminology. Over the past fifty or so years, there has been a “war” on poverty, drugs, terror, and most recently on a virus. The problem is, according to Josh Kerbel, that “war” and other supposedly “dead” or banal metaphors remain influential despite their overuse.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Zoltan Kovecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>136</sup> Michael J. Reddy, “The Conduit Metaphor: A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 164.

<sup>137</sup> Timothy R. Colburn and Gary M. Shute, “Metaphor in Computer Science,” *Journal of Applied Logic*, *The Philosophy of Computer Science*, 6, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 526, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jal.2008.09.005>.

<sup>138</sup> Kovecses, *Metaphor*, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Josh Kerbel, “The Dead Metaphors of National Security,” *Defense One*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/05/dead-metaphors-national-security/147887/>

The cognitive influence of metaphor is abundant in national security discourse. In *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age*, David Singer discusses the ways the digital age has introduced a new domain of warfare and how the U.S. military and political leaders have struggled to conceptualize the novel threat.<sup>140</sup> In order to understand cyber warfare, they have largely relied on metaphor, drawing from the more familiar conventional warfare and Cold War domains.<sup>141</sup> Kerbel refers to these metaphors as “Newtonian metaphors,” which are those related to physical force such as “inertia,” “momentum,” and “trajectory.”<sup>142</sup> As Kerbel points out, metaphors like these encourage “linear” thinking which is rarely conducive to the current security environment.<sup>143</sup> That is, while traditional wars have a beginning and end, current threats “will intersect and interact in unpredictable ways,” according to *The Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*.<sup>144</sup> As Donald Schon suggests, solutions to problems are greatly limited by the metaphors used to understand them.<sup>145</sup>

As Paul Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky’s research demonstrates, the inverse is also true, which invites metaphor as a transformative tool that can encourage novel solutions.<sup>146</sup> In their experiment, a city’s crime was described to one group of participants as “a beast” and to another group of participants as “a virus.”<sup>147</sup> Participants in the “beast” group tended to suggest “enforcement-oriented approaches” while the “virus” group preferred

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<sup>140</sup> David E. Sanger, *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age* (New York: Broadway Books, 2019).

<sup>141</sup> Sanger.

<sup>142</sup> Kerbel, “The Dead Metaphors of National Security.”

<sup>143</sup> Kerbel.

<sup>144</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “2022 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community,” February 7, 2022, 4, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2022/item/2279-2022-annual-threat-assessment-of-the-u-s-intelligence-community>.

<sup>145</sup> Donald A. Schon, “Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137–63.

<sup>146</sup> Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky, “Metaphors We Think With: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning,” *PLoS One* 6, no. 2 (2011): 1–11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0016782>.

<sup>147</sup> Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky, “Natural Language Metaphors Covertly Influence Reasoning,” *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 1 (2013): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0052961>.

“reform-oriented approaches.”<sup>148</sup> While the “facts” about crime in their experiment remained unchanged, proposed solutions were dramatically different.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, in his thesis titled *Adopting Immunological Metaphors in Cybersecurity Applications*, Robert Duncan III explores how the choice of metaphors used by practitioners within the cybersecurity domain can influence how they approach problems and, therefore, what solutions seem logical.<sup>150</sup> The research of Thibodeau and Boroditsky, as well as Duncan, illustrates not only the relationship between metaphorical language and cognition, but the material effects that can result from their influence.

### 3. Identity

For much of philosophical history there was a tendency to focus on the individual mind, reducing the notion of “other” to a byproduct of “self.” That is, until Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel broke from tradition by suggesting that the “other” is foundational to the “self.” In his view, consciousness may arise within individuals, but self-consciousness is only possible by viewing oneself from the perspective of another.<sup>151</sup> Later philosophers expanded on the notion of the relational “self” including George Herbert Mead, who introduced the concept of the “generalized other,” which is an aggregate of the dominant “attitudes” and “values” of a group.<sup>152</sup> By adopting the role of the “generalized other,” individuals are able to interact within a particular group or social situation.<sup>153</sup> For example, Mead illustrates this idea utilizing the idea of a baseball team. For a player, “each one of his own acts is determined by his assumption of the action of the others who are playing the game.”<sup>154</sup> Wodak utilizes Mead’s concept of the “generalized other” to describe

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<sup>148</sup> Thibodeau and Boroditsky, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Thibodeau and Boroditsky, “Metaphors We Think With.”

<sup>150</sup> Duncan III, Robert J., “Adopting Immunological Metaphors in Cybersecurity Applications” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2022).

<sup>151</sup> Frances Berenson, “Hegel on Others and the Self,” *Philosophy* 57, no. 219 (January 1982): 77–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100069540>.

<sup>152</sup> George Herbert Mead and Charles William Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), xxxii.

<sup>153</sup> Mead and Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society*.

<sup>154</sup> Mead and Morris, 154.

national identity which she describes as “a complex of common or similar beliefs or opinions.”<sup>155</sup>

Like Hegel, Mead’s characterization of identity enables the conceptualization of self-consciousness which distinguishes humans from other animals. According to Mead, identity is comprised of both the “I” and the “me” for which the “I” represents the internal “self,” and the “me” represents the social or objectivated “self.”<sup>156</sup> As he explains, social interaction consists of an ongoing “conversation of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’,” suggesting that identity is continually negotiated.<sup>157</sup> The interaction between these two components of self is an important component of symbolic interactionism, proposed by Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead. Likewise, the development of identity theory (IT), and to a lesser extent social identity theory (SIT), which both maintained the social aspect of identity construction, were inspired by Mead’s ideas.<sup>158</sup>

National identity is a unique form of collective identity that is based on a narrative, or a story of “us.”<sup>159</sup> As an example of Bruner’s “ways of knowing” which “come to live side by side,” national identity is replete with both historical data, such as dates and statistics, as well as stories which provide their context.<sup>160</sup> National identity is utilized by political leaders to promote unity by emphasizing a shared history that positions subjects in relation to what Paul Ricouer describes as “linked plots” within the story.<sup>161</sup> This shared history can encourage broader support for a national agenda by discursively homogenizing diverse populations such as President Trump’s speech on the coronavirus pandemic in which he suggested “history has proven time and time again, Americans always rise to the

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<sup>155</sup> Ruth Wodak, ed., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>156</sup> Mead and Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 174.

<sup>157</sup> Mead and Morris, 179.

<sup>158</sup> Michael A. Hogg, Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White, “A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1995): 255–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127>.

<sup>159</sup> Wodak, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*.

<sup>160</sup> Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Paul Ricouer, *Oneself as Other* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) quoted in Wodak, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 14.

challenge and overcome adversity.”<sup>162</sup> However, when internal groups compete to ascribe meaning to the past or promote differing views of the nation’s future, national narratives can also stoke division as in the case of Presidents Trump and Biden who have both attempted to define “the real people... that built this nation.”<sup>163</sup> In either case, according to Edelman, the ability of national narratives to promote political ideologies without appearing ideological makes them powerful rhetorical tools.<sup>164</sup>

Two significant and familiar consequences of national identity are patriotism and nationalism. Since both depend on the relational aspect of identity in their construction, they “imply inclusionary and exclusionary processes,” according to Wodak.<sup>165</sup> However, as Marlene Mußotter explains, much of the research ignores patriotism’s exclusionary characteristic, considering it “a civic virtue” and a means of unity.<sup>166</sup> According to Mußotter, patriotism and nationalism lack a clear distinction calling the two concepts “fuzzy.”<sup>167</sup> Like Mußotter, Igor Primoratz, has also acknowledged that “discussions of both patriotism and nationalism are often marred by lack of clarity due to the failure to distinguish the two.” He points out that some scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre have attempted to distinguish patriotism from nationalism with the help of adjectives such as “robust patriotism.”<sup>168</sup> However, many of the versions that Primoratz considers “political patriotism” are so similar to nationalism that any distinction is largely semantic.

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<sup>162</sup> New York Times Staff, “Read President Trump’s Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic: Full Transcript,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-speech.html>.

<sup>163</sup> Brian Naylor, “Read Trump’s Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part of Impeachment Trial,” *NPR*, February 10, 2021, sec. Politics, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/966396848/read-trumps-jan-6-speech-a-key-part-of-impeachment-trial>; Biden expressed a similar sentiment referring to “true heirs” during his *Soul of the Nation* speech.

<sup>164</sup> Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*.

<sup>165</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2021), 101.

<sup>166</sup> Marlene Mußotter, “We Do Not Measure What We Aim to Measure: Testing Three Measurement Models for Nationalism and Patriotism,” *Quality & Quantity* 56, no. 4 (2022): 2177–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01212-9>.

<sup>167</sup> Mußotter, 2177.

<sup>168</sup> Igor Primoratz, “Patriotism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/patriotism/>.

One of the distinctive characteristics of nationalism/patriotism is “Othering,” which is a discursive process that characterizes differences between groups in terms of a superior-inferior relationship. According to Lajos Brons, othering is based on the philosophical concepts of self proposed by Hegel and later expanded by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.<sup>169</sup> Othering gained more prominence when identity research took a decidedly poststructuralist turn in the latter half of the 20th century including the development of postcolonial theory, and more specifically Orientalism, based on the work of Edward Said.<sup>170</sup> Drawing on Michel Foucault, Said describes the hegemonic practices of the West in terms of a relationship between power and knowledge.<sup>171</sup> According to Said, the West built its identity by discursively constructing the “Orient” as a strange, foreign, and inferior “Other.”<sup>172</sup> As Said explains, the claims of Western superiority were founded on differences.<sup>173</sup> In other words, “good” simply means “not like them.” Much like Said, other scholars including Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe were similarly concerned with the role of identity in Western hegemony and the construction of the “Other” as a necessary ingredient in the process.<sup>174</sup>

More recently, scholars have recognized the role of identity and othering in the polarization process. James Druckman et al. describe the rise of “affective polarization” which is characterized by “the goal of confirming partisan identities and differentiating themselves from the other party.”<sup>175</sup> Unlike previous “issue-based” divisions, Druckman et al. suggest “affective polarization” is the result of “out-party animus.”<sup>176</sup> Like Druckman et al., Matt Howard demonstrates the effects of identity in his research on mask

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<sup>169</sup> Lajos L. Brons, “Othering, an Analysis,” *Transcience, a Journal of Global Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 69–90.

<sup>170</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage books, 1979), 5.

<sup>171</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>172</sup> Said, 2.

<sup>173</sup> Said.

<sup>174</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards A Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>175</sup> James N. Druckman et al., “Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, no. 1 (2021): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-01012-5>.

<sup>176</sup> Druckman et al., 30.



wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic, finding that the decision whether to wear a face mask was the result of “political party affiliation,” not “political ideology.”<sup>177</sup> Wearing a mask, or not, was in large part, an opportunity for partisans to publicly reinforce the Us/Them dichotomy that defines the country’s current polarization.

In most cases, however, the process of division relies on othering language. According to Powell and Menendian, othering language can be overt and derogatory such as President Trump’s suggestion that a border wall with Mexico was needed to “keep out ‘criminals and rapists.’”<sup>178</sup> Other times, as Murphy suggests, it may be so implicit that it is hardly recognized.<sup>179</sup> Murphy points out the use of “the” as a subtle, but powerful way of othering frequently employed by former President Donald Trump.<sup>180</sup> As she explains, “The African-Americans” and “the Latinos” convey a sense of distance, homogeneity, and a distinctly “other” quality that is absent when “the” is removed.<sup>181</sup> By analyzing discourse, these and other ways language contributes to division can be identified and studied as part of the polarization process.

## E. CONCLUSION

For centuries, the traditional concept of knowledge, or JTB, was widely accepted until Gettier came along and presented his cases.<sup>182</sup> Acknowledging that the study of knowledge remains a work in progress, relativism and other relativist approaches like social constructionism recognize that not even truth and reality should be taken for granted. However, while self-described relativists like Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter suggest that

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<sup>177</sup> Matt C. Howard, “Are Face Masks a Partisan Issue during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Differentiating Political Ideology and Political Party Affiliation,” *International Journal of Psychology* 57, no. 1 (February 2022): 153, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12809>.

<sup>178</sup> John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian, “The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging,” *Othering & Belonging: Expanding The Circle of Human Concern* (Journal) 1, Summer 2016, 16. <http://live-otheringandbelonging.pantheon.berkeley.edu/the-problem-of-othering/>

<sup>179</sup> Lynne Murphy, “Linguistics Explains Why Trump Sounds Racist When He Says ‘the’ African Americans,” *Quartz*, October 11, 2016, <https://qz.com/806174/second-presidential-debate-linguistics-explains-why-donald-trump-sounds-racist-when-he-says-the-african-americans/>.

<sup>180</sup> Murphy.

<sup>181</sup> Murphy.

<sup>182</sup> Bonjour, *Epistemology*.

the theoretical perspective represents the spirit of inquiry and open-mindedness propounded by science, relativism is often criticized because of its association with relative morality and colloquialisms like “it’s all relative.” Nonetheless, relativism epitomizes what some scholars, including Whitcomb et al., describe as “intellectual humility” and represents an epistemological stance critical to the study of discourse.<sup>183</sup>

As the scholarship on language demonstrates, what we know and how we understand the world depends on language. As Blumer argues, definition is the beginning of interpretation, not the outcome.<sup>184</sup> Likewise, the literature on metaphors, particularly the work of Lakoff and Johnson, demonstrates how cognition is largely metaphorical. Concepts that defy simple explanation are understood and communicated metaphorically which introduces a specific lexicon based upon language transferred from one domain to another. Finally, the literature suggests identity is integral to discourse analysis because of its relationship to society, including the process of othering and the construction of knowledge and power. Given the interplay between definitions, metaphors, and identity, and their potential to influence the way people understand their worlds, these elements will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

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<sup>183</sup> Dennis Whitcomb et al., “Intellectual Humility: Owning Our Limitations,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94, no. 3 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12228>.

<sup>184</sup> Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*.

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### III. THE CIVIL WAR

Few historians would disagree that the issue of slavery was central in the Civil War. Even Abraham Lincoln acknowledged its role, remarking in his second inaugural address during the latter days of the conflict, “All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war.”<sup>185</sup> However, as Edward Ayers argues in *What Caused the Civil War?*, simple questions encourage simple answers.<sup>186</sup> To truly understand how disagreements between political adversaries became a four-year-long war that left roughly 750,000 Americans dead requires an appreciation for what Ayers calls “deep contingency.”<sup>187</sup> In other words, what are the relationships and interdependencies that are revealed when complexity is embraced rather than avoided for the sake of certainty? When viewed through a discursive lens, the war was not an inevitable clash of civilizations over objective differences, but a long process guided by language. This chapter explores the role of definitions, metaphors, and identity in the path to war, its outcome, and its lasting influence. It begins by exploring how Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis utilized definitions to further their causes and the significance of “Civil War.” It follows by exploring how metaphors were integral to Lincoln’s election success by enabling him to convey complex ideas about slavery to an electorate with diverse views about slavery. Finally, it describes the construction of identity in the pre-war years and the role it played in the course of the war.

#### A. DEFINITION

Abraham Lincoln appreciated the significance of definition, once remarking during an interview how he painstakingly researched the word “demonstrate” to be sure he

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<sup>185</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 8.*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 333, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln8>.

<sup>186</sup> Edward L. Ayers, “What Caused the Civil War?,” *North & South* 8, no. 5 (September 2005): 16, <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/history-faculty-publications/132/>.

<sup>187</sup> Ayers, 13.

understood what it meant and how it differed from similar terms.<sup>188</sup> Considering Lincoln exceeded his presidential authority by exercising war powers before they were granted by Congress, when he used “rebellion” or “insurrection” early on to describe the conflict, his selection of terms was intentional.<sup>189</sup> Both terms were found in the Constitution and justified Lincoln establishing a militia and suspending *habeas corpus*.<sup>190</sup> In his *Message to Congress* on July 4, 1861, shortly after the start of the war, Lincoln requested that Congress authorize the “legal means for making this contest a short, and a decisive one.”<sup>191</sup> The legality and legitimacy of Lincoln’s request depended on his definition of the South’s actions.

While Lincoln knew that convincing the remaining members of Congress that his preemptive decisions were constitutional, he also knew that he was competing with the Confederacy to “define the situation” for an uncertain public. Having once noted that “public sentiment is everything,” he was well aware that naming the South’s actions a “rebellion” would weigh heavily in the court of public opinion.<sup>192</sup> Unlike an “act of war,” “southern aggression,” or other similar terms like “rebellion” made it clear that the Union remained the only legitimate government despite the creation of a Confederate States of America. As a lawyer, Lincoln was sure to address the Confederacy’s counterargument, which he described as an “ingenious sophism.”<sup>193</sup> He warned, “It might seem, at first thought, to be of little difference whether the present movement at the South be called

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<sup>188</sup> J.P. Gulliver, “Mr. Lincoln’s Early Life.; How He Educated Himself.,” *New York Times*, September 4, 1864, <https://www.nytimes.com/1864/09/04/archives/mr-lincolns-early-life-how-he-educated-himself.html>.

<sup>189</sup> Daniel A. Farber, “Lincoln, Presidential Power, and the Rule of Law,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144115>.

<sup>190</sup> Frank J. Williams, “Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties: Then & (and) Now - The Southern Rebellion and September 11,” *New York University Annual Survey of American Law* 60 (2004): 463–90, [http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ecm\\_pro\\_064660.pdf](http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ecm_pro_064660.pdf).

<sup>191</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 4*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 432, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln4>.

<sup>192</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 3*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 26, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln3>.

<sup>193</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 4*, 433.

‘secession’ or ‘rebellion.’ The movers, however, well understand the difference.”<sup>194</sup> According to Lincoln, the South had trouble reconciling their claims of “law and order” and “moral sense” with their actions.<sup>195</sup> By naming their act a “secession,” they were deliberately defining the situation in a way that allowed them to maintain their feelings of righteousness while committing what others considered treason.<sup>196</sup>

The South was not the only party accused of using “definitions-as-arguments.”<sup>197</sup> In Jefferson Davis’ first inaugural address, he suggested that it was “by abuse of language that their act has been denominated a revolution,” referring to the Union’s characterization of the secession of the Southern states.<sup>198</sup> Unlike the Union, which capitalized on its existing legitimate power, the newly formed Confederacy needed to assure its constituents that it was also a bona fide government. “Revolution” implied a subordinate relationship to the North and ran counter to Davis’ depiction of secession as a “new alliance” rather than a wholesale change of governments.<sup>199</sup> As Drew Gilpin Faust puts it, “The Confederacy was the consummation, not the dissolution, of the American dream.”<sup>200</sup> In other words, the Confederacy, not the United States was what the nation’s founding fathers had envisioned. In a telling edit of his first inaugural address, Lincoln replaced “treasonable” with “revolutionary,” suggesting that Davis was correct to assume that Lincoln meant “revolutionary” as a pejorative term.<sup>201</sup> For the South, who viewed themselves as the superior people and co-creators of the Republic, “revolution” was both inaccurate and insulting.

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<sup>194</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 4*, 432.

<sup>195</sup> Lincoln, 432.

<sup>196</sup> Lincoln.

<sup>197</sup> Edward Schiappa, “Arguing about Definitions,” *Argumentation* 7 (1993): 404, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00711058>.

<sup>198</sup> Jefferson Davis, “Jefferson Davis’ First Inaugural Address,” *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, February 18, 1861, <https://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/archives/documents/jefferson-davis-first-inaugural-address>.

<sup>199</sup> Davis.

<sup>200</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1998), 27.

<sup>201</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Volume 4*.

The evolving rhetoric of Union and Confederate leaders highlights what Robert Perinbanayagam calls a “continued responsive discourse” which describes the interactive process of meaning-making through language.<sup>202</sup> Rather than a static and objective definition, the two sides constructed the definition of the situation in response to one another. As Zarefsky posits, in political discourse, “acknowledging the legitimacy of the alternative presumption” is necessary to remain credible.<sup>203</sup> In other words, if a definition of the situation is to be accepted, it must be plausible, or as Zarefsky puts it, “square with experience.”<sup>204</sup> Lincoln’s *Message to Congress* was widely circulated in newspapers including those throughout the South. Davis risked losing credibility by ignoring what was a reasonable accusation, so he sought to reframe secession from a political remedy to a moral imperative. He reassured his constituents that, “if instead of being a dissolution of a league, it were indeed a rebellion in which we are engaged, we might find ample vindication.”<sup>205</sup>

While the Union and Confederate armies warred for four years, their leaders battled to construct reality through definition. Though the conflict ended, what it would be called in its aftermath remained a source of contention for many decades.<sup>206</sup> Even today, some continue to refer to the Civil War as the “War Between the States” or “War of Northern Aggression.”<sup>207</sup> These names reflect a particular Southern view, but in the decades following the war, Northerners, too, preferred alternatives to “Civil War” such as “War of

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<sup>202</sup> Robert S. Perinbanayagam, “The Definition of the Situation: An Analysis of the Ethnomethodological and Dramaturgical View,” *Sociological Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1974): 538, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1974.tb00912.x>.

<sup>203</sup> Zarefsky, *President Johnson’s War on Poverty*, 12.

<sup>204</sup> Zarefsky, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Jefferson Davis, “Jefferson Davis to Congress of the Confederate States,” The Papers of Jefferson Davis, November 18, 1861, <https://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/archives/documents/jefferson-davis-congress-confederate-states>.

<sup>206</sup> Gaines M. Foster, “What’s Not in a Name: The Naming of the American Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 3 (2018): 416–54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26483634>.

<sup>207</sup> Edward Rothstein, “Not Forgotten,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2011, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/arts/design/in-the-south-civil-war-has-not-been-forgotten.html>.

the Rebellion,” or “War of Secession.”<sup>208</sup> As Schiappa argues, definitions always make a claim: this explains why the name of the war was not taken lightly.

For years, groups like the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) campaigned to influence the naming of the war, even lobbying textbook companies to remove any mention of “rebellion.”<sup>209</sup> Although the UDC advocated unsuccessfully for “War Between the States,” the group pursued the goal of making it “the dominant public name.”<sup>210</sup> Ultimately, after several congressional debates and public polls, “Civil War” became the official name in 1911.<sup>211</sup> As Gaines M. Foster chronicles in his article, *What’s Not in a Name*, “Civil War” was chosen as a means of compromise.<sup>212</sup> Unlike other names, it was wholly “generic” and implied neither responsibility, nor motive.<sup>213</sup> Most importantly, it avoided any intimation of wrongdoing, which Congress agreed was necessary to avoid rekindling “anti-Southern animus of the war.”<sup>214</sup> Although Congress’ intention was admirable, Foster suggests it came “at the great cost of obscuring the war’s causes and consequences.”<sup>215</sup> On one hand, as Foster argues, “Civil War” left its specifics subject to interpretation, which feeds into the hands of proponents of the Lost Cause narrative. On the other hand, the Republic was able to reconcile after 750,000 of its citizens were killed at each other’s hands, and has remained intact for roughly the past one hundred and sixty years.

Lincoln’s untimely death prevented him from weighing in on the matter, but a possible opinion could be gleaned from the sentiments he expressed throughout the war, including his last public address given in the days between the Confederate surrender at

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<sup>208</sup> Foster, “What’s Not in a Name.”

<sup>209</sup> Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die for: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>210</sup> Foster, “What’s Not in a Name,” 438.

<sup>211</sup> Foster.

<sup>212</sup> Foster.

<sup>213</sup> Foster, 443.

<sup>214</sup> Foster, 436.

<sup>215</sup> Foster, 443; The Lost Cause narrative reflects attempts to portray the cause and actions of the Confederacy in a positive light.



Appotomax and his assassination. As he always maintained, preservation of the Union was paramount to all other endeavors. In response to questions surrounding readmitting states that had seceded, Lincoln rejected the basic premise out of hand stating, “Finding themselves safely at home, it would be utterly immaterial whether they had ever been abroad.”<sup>216</sup> Such a question, according to Lincoln, “could have no effect other than the mischievous one of dividing our friends.”<sup>217</sup> It is unlikely that Lincoln would have supported a definition of the war that fueled animosity, rather than one that gave the best hope of unity.

## **B. METAPHOR**

Abraham Lincoln spoke with great clarity, especially compared to his counterpart Jefferson Davis.<sup>218</sup> He often advocated using simple and direct communication, once sarcastically mocking the “decided superiority” of “court language” which he found unnecessarily complicated.<sup>219</sup> In an 1861 interview, Lincoln described his longstanding “passion” for such plain language commenting, “I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I don’t think I ever got angry at anything else in my life.”<sup>220</sup> Some scholars have argued that his ability to communicate abstract ideas in a way that was easily grasped played an important role in the Union’s victory.<sup>221</sup>

Lincoln’s fondness for plain language did not mean that his rhetoric was mundane. In fact, it was just the opposite. His speeches were characterized by pervasive use of figurative language which he likely came to admire through his penchant for Shakespeare,

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<sup>216</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 8*, 404.

<sup>217</sup> Lincoln, 404.

<sup>218</sup> James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>219</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 1*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Digital Library Production Services, 2001), 62, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/lincoln1>.

<sup>220</sup> Gulliver, “Mr. Lincoln’s Early Life.”

<sup>221</sup> McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*.

fables, and the Bible.<sup>222</sup> Of his many rhetorical strengths, his use of metaphorical language stands out. Although his “House Divided” speech remains one of his most well-known examples, metaphors permeated his public and private correspondences.

Slavery was a complex and divisive issue socially and politically, one which Lincoln called “the all-prevailing and all-pervading question of the day.”<sup>223</sup> Yet, as he acknowledged, it remained unsettled because of the competing views about its moral, political, and practical implications. Even Lincoln, known as the great emancipator, shared opinions that today would be considered profoundly racist by any measure. In his fourth debate with Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln affirmed his support for “the superior position assigned to the white race,” later receiving cheers and applause from the Northern crowd.<sup>224</sup> Reconciling white supremacy with the inherent evils of slavery while simultaneously arguing the merits of limiting its spread was no easy task, but it was critical to Lincoln’s election hopes.

In the run-up to the presidential election, Lincoln gave his *Speech at Hartford, Connecticut* in which he explicated the case against the expansion of slavery. As opposed to the more famous address he had given at Cooper’s Union a week earlier, which was “devoid of all rhetorical imagery,” his Hartford speech is rich with metaphors.<sup>225</sup> In the following passage, the presidential candidate argues against the expansion of slavery, but explains why it is necessary to allow it to remain where it is currently practiced. Lincoln extends the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE PHYSICAL ENTITIES to entail SLAVERY IS A DANGEROUS ANIMAL.

For instance, out in the street, or in the field, or on the prairie I find a rattlesnake. I take a stake and kill him. Everybody would applaud the act and say I did right. But suppose the snake was in a bed where children were sleeping. Would I do right to strike him there? I might hurt the children; or I might not kill, but only arouse and exasperate the snake, and he might bite the children. Thus, by meddling with him here, I would do more hurt than good. Slavery is like this. We dare not strike at it where it is. The manner in

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<sup>222</sup> McPherson.

<sup>223</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 4*, 2.

<sup>224</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 3*, 147.

<sup>225</sup> John Channing Briggs, *Lincoln’s Speeches Reconsidered* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 239.

which our constitution is framed constrains us from making war upon it where it already exists. The question that we now have to deal with is, “Shall we be acting right to take this snake and carry it to a bed where there are children?” The Republican party insists upon keeping it out of the bed.<sup>226</sup>

Using a different metaphor that combines NATION IS A BODY and SLAVERY IS A DISEASE, Lincoln recalls an experience he had to explain the same dilemma of maintaining slavery and limiting expansion. Only this time, he hints at its long-term effects:

I met Mr. Cassius M. Clay in the cars at New Haven one day last week, and it was my first opportunity to take him by the hand. There was an old gentleman in the car, seated in front of us, whose coat collar was turned far down upon the shoulders. I saw directly that he had a large wen on his neck. I said to Mr. Clay, That wen represents slavery; it bears the same relation to that man that slavery does to the country. That wen is a great evil; the man that bears it will say so. But he does not dare to cut it out. He bleeds to death if he does, directly. If he does *not* cut it out; it will shorten his life materially.<sup>227</sup>

In a subtler use of metaphor, Lincoln conveys the seriousness of the mere question of slavery, describing it as a physical presence rather than an abstract concept. According to Lincoln, “It has been settled many times; but each time it has risen it has come higher and higher.”<sup>228</sup> Once again invoking the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS, slavery discourse can be understood as a liquid. As an idea, it can be ignored, just as any thought can come and go. However, by conceptualizing slavery discourse as a physical entity, Lincoln makes the case that in the public sphere there is a threshold at which speech will undoubtedly lead to action.

Later in his speech, Lincoln builds on earlier remarks and extends his metaphor to caution those who may be indifferent, or those who feel far removed from the issue of slavery. Like a flood breaching a levee, Lincoln describes the material effects of slavery discourse, warning, “Public opinion against it gives way. The barriers which protected you from it are down; slavery comes in, and white free labor that *can* strike will give way to slave

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<sup>226</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume 3, 6.

<sup>227</sup> Lincoln, 6–7.

<sup>228</sup> Lincoln, 3.

labor that *cannot!*”<sup>229</sup> For the Union workers in Hartford and the rest of the public who read the speech in newspapers, Lincoln’s metaphorical language provided another means of understanding a divisive and confusing subject. It also redefined the identity of many Northerners from bystanders to potential victims which helped galvanize support of his run for the presidency.

### C. IDENTITY

In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville wrote to a friend who inquired about the “beliefs” of the Americans whom he was studying. He replied, “As to what we generally mean by ‘beliefs’—ancient mores, venerable traditions, deep-rooted memories—so far I have seen no trace of them.”<sup>230</sup> Tocqueville’s observations are not surprising considering the country was still in its infancy. Still, as Cecilia O’Leary notes, “the growth of a unifying national culture...proved to be unusually slow.”<sup>231</sup> Of the many factors she cites two are most pertinent: “a heterogeneous population” and “the absence of threatening neighbors.”<sup>232</sup> Thus, the United States lacked both a sense of sameness among its citizens, and an external “other” against which to consider themselves unique.

In addition to the factors above, the “composite polity” created by federalism resulted in hyperlocal politics.<sup>233</sup> Festivals, holidays, and parades that are meant as a public display of national unity and political consensus had the opposite effect.<sup>234</sup> As O’Leary explains, even the Fourth of July was “reinterpreted in support of diverse causes.”<sup>235</sup> Some groups used the commemorative day to promote “their anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic

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<sup>229</sup> Lincoln, 8–9.

<sup>230</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville and Frederick Brown, “Impressions of America: Three Letters,” *New England Review* 30, no. 4 (2009): 142, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25656095>.

<sup>231</sup> O’Leary, *To Die For*, 15.

<sup>232</sup> O’Leary, 15.

<sup>233</sup> John L. Brooke, “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 1 (2009): 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40208237>.

<sup>234</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>235</sup> O’Leary, *To Die For*, 18.

campaigns.”<sup>236</sup> Others used July 4 to support abolitionist or labor movements.<sup>237</sup> Throughout the nation, local politicians and religious leaders competed with one another to define the country’s identity, taking advantage of the void left in the absence of a national narrative.

At the same time, ordinary citizens craved a uniquely American identity now that they were far removed from the Revolutionary War and British influence. Americans were especially self-conscious and wondered how they were viewed from abroad.<sup>238</sup> To find out, they “hungrily and indiscriminately consumed...descriptions of America” which they found in books and magazines.<sup>239</sup> Throughout the eighteen thirties and forties, the number of publications concerned with “‘national character’—or their equivalent” was striking, according to William R. Taylor.<sup>240</sup> Though they were largely fictional depictions meant as entertainment, Americans embraced what Taylor describes facetiously as “this legendary past...and fictional sociology.”<sup>241</sup> What emerged was anything but a national identity. Instead, archetypes like the “genteel southerner” or the “industrious northerner” became characters in opposing narratives which both claimed to represent the American ideal.

Though historians agree that slavery played a central role in the war, the construction of identity and the resulting Northern and Southern nationalism was responsible for transforming adversaries into enemies. As McCoy and Rahman suggest, polarization does not result from “the hardening of opinion on a single issue” but instead it occurs because of “the alignment of interests under a single identity.”<sup>242</sup> Scholars have argued about the extent of “actual” objective differences prior to the war, but such differences mattered little as each

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<sup>236</sup> O’Leary, 19.

<sup>237</sup> O’Leary, *To Die For*.

<sup>238</sup> William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>239</sup> Taylor, 19.

<sup>240</sup> Taylor, 20.

<sup>241</sup> Taylor, 16.

<sup>242</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Tahmina Rahman, “Polarized Democracies in Comparative Perspective: Toward a Conceptual Framework,” International Political Science Association conference, 4. Poznan, Poland, 2016.

side constructed the “other.”<sup>243</sup> As Edward Ayers writes, “The ‘North’ and the ‘South’ took shape in words before they were unified by armies and shared sacrifice.”<sup>244</sup>

By the time war began, Northern and Southern nationalism was in full bloom, although leaders relied on different rhetorical strategies. Confederate nationalism capitalized on the Southern identity that developed in the preceding decades to promote an antagonistic view of the Union as the evil “other.” On the other hand, Lincoln had the more difficult task of galvanizing Northerners without further alienating the South. To that end, he relied on the “exclusionary processes” of identity in the form of “patriotism” which avoided overtly characterizing Southerners in negative terms.<sup>245</sup> In other words, by Lincoln extolling the virtues of the Union and its governance, by implication the Confederacy and all it stood for was inferior. As James Rawley contends, “Lincoln’s political nationalism stemmed from a belief in the uniqueness of the United States.”<sup>246</sup> Despite the lack of conspicuous othering language, it was clear that for Lincoln “patriotism” meant seeing the country the way he did.

In his *Speech at Jackson Mississippi*, Jefferson Davis spoke of “characteristics of the Northern people” which he described as “a traditionless and homeless race.”<sup>247</sup> Davis’ description was not random; rather, it represented the antithesis of “southernness” which was characterized by a romanticized agricultural society that proudly resisted modernity.<sup>248</sup> The construction of identity in the preceding years enabled Davis to characterize the war as an existential threat to the Southern way of life.

To reinforce the significance of the present and convince Southerners that their future was worth the sacrifices of war, Davis needed to construct a “cultural memory” which did

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<sup>243</sup> James M. McPherson, “Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question,” *Civil War History* 50, no. 4 (December 2004): 418–33, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.2004.0072>.

<sup>244</sup> Ayers, “What Caused the Civil War?,” 16.

<sup>245</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 101.

<sup>246</sup> James Rawley, “The Nationalism of Abraham Lincoln,” *Civil War History* 9, no. 3 (September 1963): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.1963.0058>.

<sup>247</sup> Jefferson Davis, “Jefferson Davis’ Speech at Jackson, Miss.,” *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, December 26, 1862, <https://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/archives/documents/jefferson-davis-speech-jackson-miss-0>.

<sup>248</sup> Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

not exist for the newly formed Confederacy.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, Davis described the “historical wounds” suffered by the South which linked the past to the present creating an uninterrupted national narrative.<sup>250</sup> In his speech, he tells a story of betrayal describing “dirty Yankee invaders” and “barbarous enemies” who “formed a union and a solemn compact” with their ancestors.<sup>251</sup> According to Davis, Southerners now had the choice: “Will you transmit to your children the freedom and equality which your fathers transmitted to you or will you bow down in adoration before an idol baser...?”<sup>252</sup> Throughout his speeches, including his last official proclamation, Davis continued to reference the past, present, and future as way of reinforcing Confederate nationalism.<sup>253</sup>

#### D. CONCLUSION

Suggesting that changing the discourse of the Civil War would have altered its course is speculative. However, as Ayers suggests, “The Civil War came by a number of small steps;” certainly, language played a role in many of them.<sup>254</sup> For instance, had the young nation developed a more robust national identity through narrative, it may have deterred the construction of a distinctly Northern and Southern identity that fueled divisive rhetoric. Were Lincoln not a gifted orator with a command of metaphorical language, he may have been unable to secure the presidency and lead a nation through war and reconciliation. Or if, instead of “the Civil War,” the war’s official name became “War of Rebellion,” it may have spurred continued antagonism resulting in another conflict. Although the war was a century and a half ago and much has changed within the United States, its discourse and the lessons it provides are still relevant.

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<sup>249</sup> Maida Koso and Dženana Husremović, “Neurobiology of Memory in Trauma Survivors,” in *Social Trauma—An Interdisciplinary Textbook*, ed. Andreas Hamburger, Camellia Hancheva, and Vamik D. Volkan (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 25, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47817-9_19).

<sup>250</sup> Koso and Husremović, 28.

<sup>251</sup> Davis, “Jefferson Davis’ Speech at Jackson, Miss.”

<sup>252</sup> Davis.

<sup>253</sup> Jefferson Davis, “To the People of the Confederate States of America.,” *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, April 4, 1865, <https://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/archives/documents/people-confederate-states-america>.

<sup>254</sup> Ayers, “What Caused the Civil War?,” 13.

## IV. 9/11 AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

According to Brown University's *Cost of War Project*, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) has cost the United States government eight trillion dollars.<sup>255</sup> A *New York Times* article revealed the government spends 468 million dollars a year housing the remaining 36 prisoners at Camp Justice in Guantanamo Bay alone.<sup>256</sup> More than nine hundred thousand lives have been lost as a direct result of combat operations, thirty million people have been displaced, and several million civilians are estimated to have died from "reverberating effects."<sup>257</sup> Afghanistan, the main battleground for much of the war, has more poverty, hunger, and malnourished children today than prior to 2001.<sup>258</sup>

As these numbers suggest, the GWOT has had devastating consequences in its twenty-year campaign. Its benefits, on the other hand, are less easily measured and articulated. As Erik Dahl points out in his assessment of the Department of Homeland Security, the success of the GWOT remains a point of contention among experts.<sup>259</sup> Some argue that future 9/11-like attacks were never likely, while others attribute the lack of large-

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<sup>255</sup> Neta C. Crawford, *The U.S. Budgetary Costs of the Post-9/11 Wars* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, Brown University, 2021), [https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Costs%20of%20War\\_U.S.%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Post-9%2011%20Wars\\_9.1.21.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Costs%20of%20War_U.S.%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Post-9%2011%20Wars_9.1.21.pdf)

<sup>256</sup> Carol Rosenberg, "At Millions Per Detainee, Guantánamo Prison Stuck in a Cycle of Costly Delays," *New York Times*, September 16, 2022, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/us/politics/guantanamo-bay-prison-cost.html>.

<sup>257</sup> Neta C. Crawford and Catherine Lutz, "Human Cost of Post-9/11 Wars: Direct War Deaths in Major War Zones, Afghanistan & Pakistan (Oct. 2001 – Aug. 2021); Iraq (March 2003 – Aug. 2021); Syria (Sept. 2014 – May 2021); Yemen (Oct. 2002-Aug. 2021) and Other Post-9/11 War Zones" (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, Brown University, September 1, 2021), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/WarDeathToll>.

<sup>258</sup> Costs of War Project, "Afghanistan before and after 20 Years of War (2001-2021)" (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2022), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/Afghanistan%20before%20and%20after%2020%20years%20of%20war.pdf>.

<sup>259</sup> Erik J. Dahl, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the Department of Homeland Security, 20 Years after 9/11" (Providence, RI: Watson Institute, Brown University, 2021), [https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Assessing%20DHS\\_Dahl\\_Costs%20of%20War.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Assessing%20DHS_Dahl_Costs%20of%20War.pdf).



scale incidents to counterterrorism efforts.<sup>260</sup> As Dahl notes, “counting negatives” is inherently difficult which makes any assessment somewhat speculative.<sup>261</sup>

In either case, evaluations of the GWOT tend to focus on its outcome which takes the problem for granted as if it were an objective fact, rather than one of many possible constructions. Like any problem, how 9/11 was defined prevented certain solutions from being considered, while making others, like the GWOT, appear self-evident. Much like the discourse of the Civil War, the way language has been used to discuss 9/11 reflects a similar process of negotiating meaning—albeit a shorter one. This chapter will explore how President Bush’s definition of 9/11 as an “act of war” shaped the future of the nation. Next, it illustrates how the “war” metaphor provided the lexicon for 9/11 discourse which further fixed the country’s trajectory. Finally, it describes the role of identity in the construction of the enemy, and the ways America’s national identity supported the Bush administration’s narrative.

## A. DEFINITION

Although the *9/11 Commission Report* describes the period preceding 9/11 as “The Summer of Threat,” the attack was still unexpected, which created an unparalleled level of confusion among public officials and citizens alike.<sup>262</sup> “Pervasive ambiguity” permeated the country, leaving Americans struggling to understand what happened and who was responsible. On the evening of September 11, 2001, President Bush delivered his *Address to the Nation* which answered those preliminary questions and laid the foundational definition on which he and others would build.

From his opening line, Bush describes 9/11 in emotionally charged and abstract terms stating, “our way of life, our very freedom came under attack.”<sup>263</sup> Cast in those

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<sup>260</sup> Dahl.

<sup>261</sup> Dahl, 5.

<sup>262</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/911-commission-report>

<sup>263</sup> George W. Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008* (Washington, DC: White House, 2009), [https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected\\_Speeches\\_George\\_W\\_Bush.pdf](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf), 57.

terms, the event represented a threat to what are likely the only two ideas that could make any nation willing to accept the sacrifices of war. What is the purpose of a military if not to protect “freedom” and “way of life?” Although Bush mentioned “war” in the context of allied support—stating, “we stand together to win the war against terrorism”—nevertheless, the prospect of a literal war was implied.<sup>264</sup> In retrospect, it may be easy to dismiss his language as figurative or “presidential,” but the march from terrorist attack to the GWOT began here, not when the planes struck the World Trade Center or the Pentagon.

The next day, as foreshadowed by his address the night before, Bush declared that the terrorist attacks “were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.”<sup>265</sup> The statement was made immediately following a meeting with his national security team. Bush declared the new definition directly after stating, “we have just received the latest intelligence updates,” implying a causal relationship between the updates and the definition.<sup>266</sup> The timing of the statement also gave the impression that the new definition was based on a consensus, rather than being a personal decision made by the President. Finally, it legitimated his claim by implying that military and security officials, or “war experts,” critically examined the evidence and concluded that the attacks were, in fact, “acts of war.” Despite Secretary of State Colin Powell admitting hours earlier that the legality of the “acts of war” definition was questionable, Bush invoked the term without hesitation or contextualization, setting in motion what became the GWOT.

In the rest of his remarks, Bush did not support his claim by describing how an “act of war” was a more appropriate definition because he was unable to do so. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were no more a “nation” or “military force” then than they had been the day before—such a finding would have justified his new definition.<sup>267</sup> Nonetheless, Bush discursively constructed a new reality by building on the groundwork he laid the night

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<sup>264</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 57.

<sup>265</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team,” President George W. Bush White House, September 12, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html>.

<sup>266</sup> Bush.

<sup>267</sup> “18 U.S. Code § 2331 – Definitions,” LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed September 17, 2022, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2331#4>.

before. Through his rhetoric, Bush made it appear that war was a foregone conclusion by again invoking “way of life” and “freedom,” stating, “But we will not allow this enemy to win the war by changing our way of life or restricting our freedoms.”<sup>268</sup> In a matter of three minutes, “9/11” was transformed from “acts of terror,” to “acts of war,” and finally, to “war.”<sup>269</sup> Bush’s definition was reinforced by his administration and the media, whose headlines echoed the President’s conclusion; the front pages of *The New York Post* and *USA Today* contained the phrase “Act of War.”<sup>270</sup> Within days, the problem was set and in less than a week Congress made it official, granting the President sweeping war powers through a joint resolution authorizing the use of military force.<sup>271</sup>

## B. METAPHOR

Hours after President Bush announced that the terrorist attacks were an “act of war,” White House Press Secretary Ari Fleisher was asked to clarify what exactly the president meant in the following exchange:

**QUESTION:** On the phrase “act of war,” are you saying that is just a phrase describing what happened? Or does it carry any legal or political or constitutional significance?

**FLEISCHER:** I think the American people know that when the United States is attacked in the manner it was attacked, this is an act of war. And I think there is no other way to describe it. And I think that’s what the American people expect from their president, is a president who will talk with them straight and direct about it.<sup>272</sup>

In a similar fashion, Secretary of State Colin Powell responded to the question of war in an ABC News interview in the following exchange:

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<sup>268</sup> Bush, “Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team.”

<sup>269</sup> Bush.

<sup>270</sup> Australian Broadcasting Company, “Gallery of Sept 12, 2001 Newspaper Front Pages,” ABC News, September 5, 2011, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-05/september-11-newspaper-front-pages/2870784>.

<sup>271</sup> “Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces against Those Responsible for the Recent Attacks Launched against the United States,” Pub. L. No. 107–40, § 115 Stat. 224 (2001), <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/pub140/PLAW-107publ40.pdf>.

<sup>272</sup> “Text: White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 2001, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/transcripts/fleischertext\\_091201.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/transcripts/fleischertext_091201.html).

**Diane Sawyer:** But we know there is so much anger welling up in the country right now. I've got the *Daily News* here, the *New York Daily News*, which has a headline: 'It's War'. First of all, is it war, as you see it? And if it's Osama bin Laden, what is going to work against him?

**Secretary Powell:** Well, the American people had a clear understanding that this is a war. That's the way they see it. You can't see it any other way, whether legally that is correct or not.

**Diane Sawyer:** You do, too?

**Secretary Powell:** Yes, I do. And we've got to respond as if it is a war, and we've got to respond in the sense that it isn't going to be solved with a single counterattack against one individual. It's going to be a long-term conflict, and it's going to be fought on many fronts – the military front, the intelligence front, the law enforcement front, the diplomatic front. And it's a war not just against the United States. It's a war against civilization. It's a war against all nations that believe in democracy. Democracy can't be defeated, but now it's going to require all nations who believe in democracy to come out and condemn this kind of activity, to work together to go after those who perpetrate such activity. And it requires that kind of coordinated, complete response on behalf of the civilized communities of the world.<sup>273</sup>

Like Fleischer's comment "there is no other way to describe it," Powell's remark, "you can't see it any other way" could have been another figure of speech to convey the obviousness—the validity—of the president's characterization of 9/11 as war. It could also point to a larger problem, which is the inherent limitations of language. The unprecedented nature and scale of 9/11 presented a challenge for those attempting to lexically represent its complexities. "Deadly terrorist attacks," "despicable acts of terror," and "acts of mass murder" were insufficient descriptors to reduce ambiguity. On the other hand, "war" was a familiar metaphor and provided the conceptual domain from which to construct a coherent narrative.

It was only after 9/11 had been metaphorically framed as a "war" that the much-needed vocabulary had been provided. In Bush's immediate remarks upon news of the

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<sup>273</sup> Martin Montgomery, "The Discourse of War after 9/11," *Language and Literature* 14, no. 2 (2005): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947005051286>.

attacks, he referred to the perpetrators as “folks.”<sup>274</sup> In later comments, the actor was called a “faceless coward.”<sup>275</sup> Even in his national address on the evening of September 11, Bush lacked the vocabulary to describe the perpetrators and instead focused on the act, only mentioning “terrorists” and “enemies” once near the end.<sup>276</sup> However, once war was invoked the following morning, Bush mentioned “enemy” eight times in his brief remarks as he embarked on the dehumanizing process enabled by “othering” discourse.<sup>277</sup> Likewise, Bush was empowered to draw from jingoistic rhetoric of “war.” Unlike the previous night when Bush spoke of safeguarding the nation, the United States was now engaged in “a monumental struggle of good versus evil” in which the nation would “conquer this enemy” and “win” at any cost.<sup>278</sup> The opportunity to reflect quickly passed as President Bush discursively reconstructed “a different world” in simplistic binary terms.<sup>279</sup>

Although it is now hard to imagine a different metaphor, given the persistent centrality of “war” in the discourse of 9/11, there were in fact other options. In fact, Bush himself offered an example during his *Address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress* just a week and a half after the attacks, suggesting analogically that, “Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime.”<sup>280</sup> How might the country have responded differently if 9/11 was not conceptualized using the “war” metaphor? “Seeing” terrorism as “organized crime” would have introduced an entirely different lexicon focused on investigations, legislation, and prosecution, rather than retaliation and conquest. The United States would

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<sup>274</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks in Sarasota, Florida, on the Terrorist Attack on New York City’s World Trade Center,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush (2001, Book II)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002), 1098, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2001-book2/pdf/PPP-2001-book2-doc-pg1098.pdf>.

<sup>275</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, on the Terrorist Attacks,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush (2001, Book II)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002), 1, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2001-book2/pdf/PPP-2001-book2-doc-pg1098-2.pdf>.

<sup>276</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 57.

<sup>277</sup> Bush, “Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team.”

<sup>278</sup> Bush.

<sup>279</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 66.

<sup>280</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 66.

have arrested international criminals subject to United Nations General Assembly resolution 3074 which outlines the process for extraditing and punishing those suspected of “crimes against humanity.”<sup>281</sup> Instead, the U.S. government has been accused of committing their own crimes against humanity, including the alleged abuse of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>282</sup> Had the nation viewed 9/11 as a crime, it might have lived up to Bush’s claim made in response to the attacks, suggesting that America is committed to “hope and order, law and life.”<sup>283</sup> Instead, the U.S. was forced to make a series of what Jordan Paust describes as “schizophrenic claims” as the Bush administration attempted to circumvent the law by trying to reconcile the idea that the nation was at war with terrorists, except when it came to their treatment if captured.<sup>284</sup> Although “crime” is an obvious alternative to “war,” and one among many, it demonstrates how metaphors can influence discourse and, in turn, how problems are resolved.

### C. IDENTITY

In less than twelve hours, the first chapter of “The Story of September 11” was written.<sup>285</sup> It was a familiar plot with equally familiar characters, which made constructing the narrative a simple task for President Bush. Unlike the Civil War era, when the United States was struggling to define its national identity, in 2001 this identity was well-established. Still, as Wodak suggests, “national identity...sometimes lies dormant and has to be awakened from this slumber.”<sup>286</sup> On the evening of 9/11, Bush reminded citizens that America is “the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world” in his

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<sup>281</sup> “Principles of International Co-Operation in the Detection, Arrest, Extradition and Punishment of Persons Guilty of War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity,” OHCHR, accessed November 26, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/principles-international-co-operation-detection-arrest>.

<sup>282</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, “Doctors and Torture,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 351, no. 5 (July 29, 2004): 415–16, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp048065>.

<sup>283</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 85.

<sup>284</sup> Jordan Paust, “War and Enemy Status After 9/11: Attacks on the Laws of War,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 28, no. 317 (2003): 326, <https://openyls.law.yale.edu/handle/20.500.13051/6472>.

<sup>285</sup> Donileen R. Loseke, “Examining Emotion as Discourse: Emotion Codes and Presidential Speeches Justifying War,” *Sociological Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2009): 499, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40220142>.

<sup>286</sup> Wodak, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 24.

*Address to the Nation*.<sup>287</sup> In fact, according to Bush, that was the very reason for the attacks, a sentiment which became a staple throughout his speeches pertaining to 9/11.<sup>288</sup> America's identity was no longer merely canned political rhetoric, but an impetus for war.

The "melting pot" analogy so often evoked by politicians to highlight the diversity of the United States was replaced with homogenizing discourse. Throughout his address, Bush reinforced national identity by peppering his remarks with "our" and "us," and reminded Americans that they are "a great people."<sup>289</sup> Bush likewise turned to "temporal axes" to discursively bolster national identity, evoking a sense that America has always been and always will be.<sup>290</sup> By speaking of "enemies before," "this day," and going "forward," Bush connected the past, present and future of America.<sup>291</sup> Although this enemy was new, they "follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism," which placed citizens in the center of the ongoing story of America.<sup>292</sup>

Bush discursively exerted social control of individuals as they learned how Americans *should* feel, reflecting Mead's concept of the "generalized other."<sup>293</sup> Viewers of the primetime address were provided emotional cues about 9/11 as Bush suggested the attacks "filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger."<sup>294</sup> Even though 9/11 likely evoked a wide range of emotions, in order to be "American," individuals had to adopt the "single attitude or standpoint" of their social group as defined by Bush.<sup>295</sup> With the "war" frame still emerging, anger was a particularly important emotion to cultivate among the public. As Shweder posits, "anger suggests explosion, destruction, and

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<sup>287</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 57.

<sup>288</sup> Bush.

<sup>289</sup> Bush, 57.

<sup>290</sup> Wodak, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 26.

<sup>291</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 58.

<sup>292</sup> Bush.

<sup>293</sup> Mead and Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society*.

<sup>294</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 57.

<sup>295</sup> Mead and Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 90.

revenge.”<sup>296</sup> When the President announced the next morning that 9/11 was “war,” the transition appeared natural, as if the event “spoke for itself” rather than having a meaning that arose discursively.

While not possible to conclude that the President’s rhetoric was responsible for public opinion, several Pew Research polls conducted in the weeks following the attacks revealed that it was consistent with Bush’s discourse. In one poll conducted in the days following Bush’s declaration that 9/11 was an “act of war,” eighty-two percent of Americans polled were “supportive of a military response to the terrorist attacks.”<sup>297</sup> Likewise, seventy-seven percent supported a military response “even if it [meant] thousands of casualties” would be suffered by ground troops.<sup>298</sup>

In the weeks following the attacks, Bush mentioned the “anger” of Americans in every major address. A Pew Research poll conducted in the first days of October unsurprisingly revealed that eighty-two percent of respondents “felt angry.”<sup>299</sup> Bush’s frequent reminders that this war would be a “lengthy campaign” was, too, reflected in public polling.<sup>300</sup> Only 18 percent of respondents predicted that the response would take days or weeks, while the majority believed that it would take months or years.<sup>301</sup> Given that the last war fought by the United States in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf War, had been short and decisive, it is unlikely that Americans would have come to such a conclusion were it not for Bush’s rhetorical influence.

During times of conflict, the construction of the enemy plays an important role in political rhetoric, and 9/11 was no exception. Since the GWOT was, according to Bush,

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<sup>296</sup> Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 245.

<sup>297</sup> Pew Research Center, *American Psyche Reeling from Terror Attacks* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2001), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2001/09/19/american-psyche-reeling-from-terror-attacks/>.

<sup>298</sup> Pew Research Center.

<sup>299</sup> Pew Research Center, *Americans Open to Dissenting Views on the War on Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2001), 2, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2001/10/04/americans-open-to-dissenting-views-on-the-war-on-terrorism/>.

<sup>300</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 69.

<sup>301</sup> Pew Research Center, *American Psyche Reeling from Terror Attacks*, 4.



going to be “unlike any other we have ever seen,” he had to construct an enemy that warranted such an unparalleled response.<sup>302</sup> Like an animal, “this enemy hides in shadows” and “preys” on its victims, Bush remarked on September 12th.<sup>303</sup> A month later, the enemy was further debased as Bush ascribed attributes befitting an otherworldly monster, suggesting the enemy “dwells in dark corners of the earth,” “thrives on human suffering” and “is fed...by tears.”<sup>304</sup> Reminiscent of Jefferson Davis’s characterization of Northerners as “a traditionless and homeless race,” Bush said “terrorists have no true home...or culture.”<sup>305</sup> Terrorists, Bush’s comments suggest, are subhuman, for even the nation’s worst enemies have a home and culture. Bush’s rhetoric set the stage for a war that could lead anywhere and utilize any measures to “win.”<sup>306</sup>

The construction of an inhuman enemy helped bolster Bush’s claim that the United States needed “to wage an unprecedented war.”<sup>307</sup> As he remarked five years into the GWOT, the actions taken were necessary because terrorism represented “an enemy unlike any we had fought before.”<sup>308</sup> Such actions included “enhanced interrogation techniques,” or what Bush referred to as the “CIA program for questioning terrorists.”<sup>309</sup> In 2006, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the “questioning” of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay violated terms of the Geneva Convention forcing Bush to justify the actions in his *Address on the Creation of Military Commissions*.<sup>310</sup> The President, whose speeches were characterized by a Manichean worldview and a distinct moral clarity, found aspects of the Geneva Convention ambiguous. He suggested that prohibiting “outrages upon personal dignity” and “humiliating and degrading treatment” were “vague and

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<sup>302</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 69.

<sup>303</sup> Bush, “Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team.”

<sup>304</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 80.

<sup>305</sup> Bush, 80.

<sup>306</sup> George W. Bush, “Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, on the Terrorist Attacks,”

<sup>307</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 409.

<sup>308</sup> Bush, 409.

<sup>309</sup> Bush, 420.

<sup>310</sup> “*Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, 548 U.S. 557 (2006),” Justia Law, accessed September 19, 2022, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/548/557/>.

undefined” and “could be interpreted in different ways.”<sup>311</sup> As a remedy, the Bush administration constructed their own definition which would allow them to continue the program, calling those captured during the war “unlawful enemy combatants.”<sup>312</sup> Although Congress supported the new definition by signing the *Military Commission Act of 2006*, the act was later found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court as it violated detainees’ rights to *habeas corpus*.<sup>313</sup> During 9/11 and the GWOT, relying on the rhetorical influence of identity proved to be a valuable source of power for President Bush and his administration.

#### D. CONCLUSION

The language of 9/11 and the GWOT has been a popular subject of analysis among scholars within discourse studies. However, outside of the linguistics community, the linkage between the discourse of 9/11 and the failure of the GWOT is less appreciated. In “Whose Version of the War on Terror Won?,” Joseph Stieb sums up the current opinion about the GWOT suggesting it is “widely discredited in Washington” which is not surprising considering its devastating impacts and its relatively few positive outcomes.<sup>314</sup> Yet, as Stieb suggests, “[Washington] still can’t agree on why.”<sup>315</sup> Some have argued that the nature of the enemy was misunderstood or that the terms of success were ambiguous.<sup>316</sup> Others have argued that it represented flawed ideology based on Western hegemony.<sup>317</sup> This chapter suggests that the Bush administration’s definition of 9/11 as an “act of war”

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<sup>311</sup> Bush, *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*, 420.

<sup>312</sup> Leila Nadya Sadat, “A Presumption of Guilt: The Unlawful Enemy Combatant and the U.S. War on Terror,” *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 37, no. 4 (2008): 539.

<sup>313</sup> “*Boumediene v. Bush*, 553 U.S. 723 (2008),” Justia Law, accessed September 19, 2022, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/553/723/>.

<sup>314</sup> Joseph Stieb, “Whose Version of the War on Terror Won?,” *War on the Rocks*, July 20, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/whose-version-of-the-war-on-terror-won/>.

<sup>315</sup> Stieb.

<sup>316</sup> Robert R Leonhard, “The Evolution of Strategy in the Global War on Terror,” n.d., 33, The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

<sup>317</sup> Stieb, “Whose Version of the War on Terror Won?”

and its use of the “war” metaphor made the GWOT seem like the most appropriate solution, whether it was or not.

## V. JANUARY 6TH

As the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol continues its investigation, recent polling suggests that the hearings have not changed public opinion. A Monmouth University poll conducted in August 2022 found that 89% of respondents said that the Select Committee hearings have not changed their minds about what happened at the Capitol.<sup>318</sup> Opinions on whether January 6 was a riot, insurrection, or legitimate protest also remain unchanged.<sup>319</sup> Despite what the *Washington Post* describes as “damning testimony,” when asked about Donald Trump’s role in January 6, 79% of Republicans said he deserves little to no blame, according to a poll conducted by Marist in 2022.<sup>320</sup> The same poll revealed 83% of Republicans still held, at that time, a favorable view of the former President compared to 8% of Democrats.<sup>321</sup> There is, however, one important point on which both Republicans and Democrats agreed: the current division within the country “is a serious threat to the future of our democracy.”<sup>322</sup> If the intent of the Select Committee is “to strengthen the security and resilience of the United States and American democratic institutions,” it does not appear that the members are achieving their goal, considering the inverse relationship between polarization and the strength of democracy.<sup>323</sup>

Like any crisis, the immediate goal in a dangerously polarized environment should be to prevent the problem from worsening. It seems, however, that instead of avoiding the practices that contribute to polarization, politicians are doubling down. According to a *New York Times* report analyzing political discourse since 2010, “Republicans have more than

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<sup>318</sup> Patrick Murray, “Jan. 6 Hearings Have No Impact on Opinion,” Polling Institute, August 9, 2022, [https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll\\_us\\_080922/](https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll_us_080922/).

<sup>319</sup> Murray.

<sup>320</sup> Marist National Poll, *The January 6th Hearings, July 2022 NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist National Poll* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Marist Institute for Public Opinion, 2022), 6, [https://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/NPR\\_PBS-NewsHour\\_Marist-Poll\\_Jan-6th\\_USA-NOS-and-Tables\\_202207191134.pdf](https://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/NPR_PBS-NewsHour_Marist-Poll_Jan-6th_USA-NOS-and-Tables_202207191134.pdf).

<sup>321</sup> Marist National Poll, 13.

<sup>322</sup> Marist National Poll, 2.

<sup>323</sup> Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, “About.”

quadrupled their use of divisive rhetoric.”<sup>324</sup> Although Republican politicians are an easy target of criticism, Democrats are responsible for what Somer et al. call “reciprocal polarization,” which responds to divisive language with more of the same.<sup>325</sup> Given the weight of a president’s rhetoric, the words of Joe Biden are especially significant. In fact, because he took office following President Trump, a uniquely polarizing figure in recent American politics, his rhetoric is critical in disrupting the “vicious cycle” of polarization.<sup>326</sup> However, what Biden claimed would be “A Presidency for All Americans” has proven to have limitations.<sup>327</sup>

In a January 2021 article, McCoy and Somer provide prescient advice for newly elected leaders who follow polarizing figures into office. They argue that “treating the polarizer’s supporters with dignity, avoiding denigration and revanchist behavior, and emphasizing collective values and interests are crucial... to avoid stoking resentment and renewed conflict.”<sup>328</sup> Unfortunately, the current administration has not heeded their advice. On September 1st, 2022, President Biden described “MAGA Republicans” as a “threat...to the very soul of this country.” Reminiscent of President Bush’s characterization of terrorists after 9/11, Biden suggested MAGA Republicans “embrace anger,” “thrive on chaos,” and “live...in the shadow of lies.”<sup>329</sup> With striking contradiction, the President claimed that democracy depends on “the willingness to see each other not as enemies but

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<sup>324</sup> Jennifer Valentino-DeVries and Steve Eder, “For Trump’s Backers in Congress, ‘Devil Terms’ Help Rally Voters,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 2022, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/22/us/politics/republican-election-objectors-rhetoric.html>.

<sup>325</sup> Murat Somer, Jennifer L. McCoy, and Russell E. Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (July 4, 2021): 936, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1865316>.

<sup>326</sup> Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Overcoming Polarization,” *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 1 (January 2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0012>. Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, “Overcoming Polarization,” *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 1 (January 2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0012>.

<sup>327</sup> “A Presidency for All Americans,” Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign website, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://joebiden.com/presidency-for-all-americans/>.

<sup>328</sup> McCoy and Somer, “Overcoming Polarization.”

<sup>329</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Biden on the Continued Battle for the Soul of the Nation,” The White House, September 2, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/01/remarks-by-president-bidenon-the-continued-battle-for-the-soul-of-the-nation/>.

as fellow Americans” while he simultaneously vilified untold numbers of citizens.<sup>330</sup> Finally, after excoriating the ill-defined “MAGA Republicans” for much of his speech, Biden confidently predicted that “we’ll come together as a nation.”<sup>331</sup> More likely than unity, the country will experience deeper division and “the gradual erosion of democratic quality” characteristic of highly polarized democracies.<sup>332</sup>

In another unheeded warning, McCoy and Somer argue that attempts by leaders to restore the status quo by ignoring “underlying grievances... that gave rise to polarization in the first place” are not only futile but strengthen divisions.<sup>333</sup> In a textbook display, Biden remarked during his speech, “we need to focus our energy—not in the past, not on divisive culture wars, not on the politics of grievance, but on a future we can build together.”<sup>334</sup> History suggests that rather than encouraging a brighter future, ignoring grievances leaves the door open to greater polarization.<sup>335</sup>

Although the odds are stacked against the United States, there remains an opportunity to depolarize the dangerously divided nation. The potential remedies, however, depend on abandoning conventional methods. As researcher Lilliana Mason suggests, the United States is well beyond the point of “reasoned political discussions.”<sup>336</sup> Methods like those proposed in *Truth Decay*,<sup>337</sup> which appeal to objectivist approaches, may seem logical but ignore the current environment which is characterized by identity, not policies.<sup>338</sup> At a time when Republicans and Democrats drink different beverages, watch different television shows, and frequent different fast-food restaurants, it is unlikely that

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<sup>330</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Biden

<sup>331</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Biden

<sup>332</sup> Somer, McCoy, and Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” 929.

<sup>333</sup> McCoy and Murat Somer, “Overcoming Polarization,” 16.

<sup>334</sup> The White House, “Remarks by President Biden

<sup>335</sup> McCoy and Murat Somer, “Overcoming Polarization.”

<sup>336</sup> Lilliana Mason, “Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization,” *The Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2018-0004>.

<sup>337</sup> Kavanagh and Rich, *Truth Decay*.

<sup>338</sup> Mason, “Losing Common Ground.”

depolarization will occur if everyone could just agree on the facts.<sup>339</sup> As Mason argues, “American partisans are speaking different languages.”<sup>340</sup> If there is any hope of reversing course, it will depend on a new and transformative discourse, beginning with January 6.

## A. DEFINITION

Several hundred years ago, philosopher David Hume proposed “that an ‘ought’ cannot be deduced from an ‘is.’”<sup>341</sup> In other words, one cannot logically arrive at a moral judgment based entirely on statements of fact.<sup>342</sup> Hume’s Law, as it is known, has been a mainstay within moral philosophy, but social constructionists and language scholars have also taken an interest in the is/ought distinction. In *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning*, Edward Schiappa applies the concept to definitions. He argues that because definitions make a claim, they should always be treated as a question of “ought” rather than “is.” In other words, rather than considering definitions as objective descriptions, they should be acknowledged as value-laden rhetorical devices. In this light, how things are defined has less to do with getting the definition “right,” and more to do with what the definition will mean for society.

Case in point is January 6, which continues to stir debate more than a year and a half later.<sup>343</sup> As *Politico* journalist Joshua Zeitz suggests of the events at the Capitol, “without a name for it, figuring out why it happened is that much harder.”<sup>344</sup> Part of the problem of defining January 6th is a simple one: definitions are imprecise. As the expert panelists in Zeitz’s article explain, the event was more than a riot, not quite a coup, and

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<sup>339</sup>Thomas B. Edsall, “Let the Nanotargeting Begin,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2012, sec. Opinion, <https://archive.nytimes.com/campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/let-the-nanotargeting-begin/>.

<sup>340</sup> Mason, “Losing Common Ground,” 49.

<sup>341</sup> G. R. Grice and R. Edgley, “Symposium: Hume’s Law,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 44 (1970): 89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4106736>.

<sup>342</sup> Rachel Cohon, “Hume’s Moral Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2018 (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/hume-moral/>.

<sup>343</sup> Zeitz, “Ask the ‘Coupologists.’”

<sup>344</sup> Zeitz.

somewhat like an insurrection.<sup>345</sup> Thus, any definition is not a reflection of reality, but an approximation subject to the limits of our lexicon. A more complex problem is that defining January 6 makes a claim that ascribes values, morals, motives, and meaning to an event that, on its own, lacks any inherent qualities. In short, what January 6 will be called is more a question of “ought” than “is.”

In the cases explored in previous chapters, definition proved to have lasting effects. The Bush administration’s characterization of the 9/11 attacks as an “act of war” paved the way for a twenty-year campaign known as the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Had it remained an “act of terror,” or been defined as a mass murder or a transnational crime, the response might have been very different. Similarly, long after the Civil War was over, the struggle to define the conflict continued. In the end, an intentionally generic name was chosen which helped the bitterly divided and war-torn nation reconcile after fighting the deadliest conflict in our history. Although the events of January 6 have passed, how the event is defined will likewise have long-term implications. With recent polls showing that nearly one-third of all Americans and nearly two-thirds of Republicans believe that the 2020 election was illegitimate, a belief that inspired January 6 in the first place, it is an obvious place to begin what McCoy and Somer call “active-depolarizing and transformative-repolarizing strategies” which, they say, are the keys to long-term results.<sup>346</sup> Considering that the country remains split on its definition of January 6, there is a chance to decide what it “ought” to be called rather than argue about what it “is.”<sup>347</sup>

## **B. METAPHOR**

As Somer et al. argue, depolarization is not achieved by “preservative” methods which “are aimed at restoring the status quo ante.”<sup>348</sup> Inevitably, such methods worsen

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<sup>345</sup> Zeitz, “Ask the ‘Coupologists.’”

<sup>346</sup> McCoy and Murat Somer, “Overcoming Polarization,” 14.

<sup>347</sup> “One Year Since the Unrest at the U.S. Capitol, January 2022,” NPR, PBS NewsHour, and Marist National Poll, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://maristpoll.marist.edu/polls/npr-pbs-newshour-marist-national-poll-one-year-since-the-unrest-at-the-u-s-capitol-january-2022/>.

<sup>348</sup> Somer, McCoy, and Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” 936.



division as existing fault lines are substantiated by “reciprocal polarization.”<sup>349</sup> President Biden’s speech in Philadelphia is one such example. In this case, his rhetoric represents a strategy that relies on garnering support by opposing former President Trump’s supporters and other “MAGA Republicans.” When compared to the speech Trump gave on the Ellipse on January 6, Biden’s message is the same: the opposing side is a threat to democracy and must be stopped.<sup>350</sup> Unless the current rhetorical strategies employed by politicians on both sides of the aisle are abandoned, polarization will continue.

Of the many possible ways to affect political discourse, changing metaphors is a promising means. As the previous chapters demonstrated, the choice of metaphors influences how problems are understood. The use of the “war” metaphor by the Bush administration to make sense of 9/11 was one example. What was an unprecedented and complex event was conceptualized by drawing from the familiar, though limited, domain of war. Likewise, its lexicon—which includes enemies, sacrifice, victims, and retaliation—were used to construct the 9/11 and GWOT narratives. From a strategic national security perspective, the metaphor had similar limiting effects. “War” and its “linear attributes,” proved unable to capture the complex and fluid nature of terrorism, which resulted in relatively few positive outcomes of the GWOT.<sup>351</sup> As Chapter IV discussed, even “crime,” the obvious alternative to the “war” metaphor may have resulted in a different outcome.

Other more unconventional metaphors may have led to entirely different actions. If, for instance, instead of committing an “act of war,” the terrorists “set fire to the nation,” the country might have “mitigated” the emergency, “investigated” and “prosecuted” those responsible for the intentional act, and implemented “prevention,” “protection,” and “education” strategies to make future events less likely. An unrealistic suggestion perhaps, but then again, General Stanley McChrystal, Commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, attributes the success of military operations to a metaphor that might also be

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<sup>349</sup> Somer, McCoy, and Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” 935.

<sup>350</sup> Naylor, “Read Trump’s Jan. 6 Speech, A Key Part of Impeachment Trial.”

<sup>351</sup> Kerbel, “The Dead Metaphors of National Security.”

considered unrealistic were it not for its use.<sup>352</sup> As McChrystal recalls, strategy during the war relied on the traditional military metaphor of “chess” in which military leaders are the “chess masters.”<sup>353</sup> Such a metaphor entails “moves,” “turns,” “pieces,” and most importantly “rules” which suggests finite possibilities. While these concepts may be relevant in a conventional war, the war in Afghanistan was characterized by its unconventionality, making such concepts ineffective, counterproductive even. It was not until a new metaphor was used to reconceptualize the battlespace that the tide of the war began to change.<sup>354</sup> As McChrystal puts it, once he “stopped playing chess, and...became a gardener,” an entirely new perspective was possible.<sup>355</sup> As a gardener, not a chess master, the function of leadership became a process of “enabling rather than directing,” according to McChrystal.<sup>356</sup> As a gardener, a new lexicon and new possibilities emerged that focused on “cultivation,” “growth,” and “pruning.”<sup>357</sup> Commanding a war as a “gardener” may seem unrealistic, but as McChrystal argues, the effects of his novel metaphor were real indeed.

In contrast to Bush and 9/11, Lincoln provides several examples of the potential of novel metaphors to reconceptualize existing problems. As Lincoln articulated, the question of slavery was an issue for decades prior to his presidential campaign.<sup>358</sup> Yet, it remained unanswered because, as he put it, “Each [political faction] pulls in a different direction.”<sup>359</sup> How did Lincoln convince a public that had been listening to a slavery argument that was “rife before the Revolution” that they could no longer be indifferent?<sup>360</sup> Or, that those who considered the institution abhorrent should consider it necessary for slavery to

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<sup>352</sup> Stanley A. McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York, New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015).

<sup>353</sup> McChrystal et al., 5.

<sup>354</sup> McChrystal et al.

<sup>355</sup> McChrystal et al., 226.

<sup>356</sup> McChrystal et al., 232.

<sup>357</sup> McChrystal et al., 226.

<sup>358</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 4*.

<sup>359</sup> Lincoln, 2.

<sup>360</sup> Lincoln, 2.

continue where it already exists, but not be permitted to expand?<sup>361</sup> It was by using novel, or “generative” metaphors like discourse as a fluid, and slavery as a rattlesnake, that Lincoln enabled voters reconsider existing beliefs.

The idea of “generative metaphor” was introduced by Donald Schon as a way of “seeing” problems differently.<sup>362</sup> As he explains, conflicts are often immune to fact-based or routine solutions. Common sense suggests that continuing to view a problem in the same way is unlikely to yield different results. The failure of conventional approaches is most apparent when the meaning of the problem is itself contested, as is the case with most social problems. The problem of school violence, for instance, is viewed as a gun problem, a security problem, a societal problem, and a mental health problem, to name a few. However, if humans think metaphorically, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, it is reasonable to assume that different metaphors entail different ways of thinking, which is exactly what Schon proposed. Using metaphor to “see” one thing as another provides a new perspective and one in which normally opposing groups may find common ground.

Schon provides a simple example of a paintbrush as a pump to illustrate his point before moving on to more complicated social problems. In Schon’s scenario, a design team was working on new synthetic bristles which had different characteristics than natural ones. The team struggled to improve the new bristles as they continued to view the paintbrush as a tool to apply paint to a medium. Finally, one of the members conceptualized a paintbrush as a “pump” based on tacit knowledge of how the paintbrush worked. In other words, the designer recognized the similarities in the actions of a paintbrush and the actions of a pump but was unable to fully articulate the idea. Once the rest of the team thought of a “paintbrush-as-pump,” it opened the door to a new vocabulary and an entirely new ways of solving the existing problem.<sup>363</sup> The space between bristles, which were previously ignored, became a key component, as they became “channels” for the movement of

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<sup>361</sup> Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume 4, 2.

<sup>362</sup> Schon, “Generative Metaphor and Social Policy,” 137.

<sup>363</sup> Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141.

paint.<sup>364</sup> The potential metaphorical mappings from pump to paintbrush created a “kind of riddle,” as Schon puts it.<sup>365</sup> Metaphor enabled the designers to solve the problem without solving *the* problem.

In another example, Barrett and Cooperrider apply the principles of generative metaphor to the field of organization development which they suggest is notorious for having a myopic view of problems. They describe the typical approach as “the conventional deficiency perspective” which identifies what is “wrong” in the hopes that those involved can agree on and implement solutions.<sup>366</sup> In the following example, they illustrate the obvious shortcomings of such an approach in the context of a marriage counselor who asks his patient: “So, what seems to be the problem you are having in bed with your wife? We must discover the causes of this dysfunction because it appears you’re not making her happy.”<sup>367</sup> While the flaws in this line of questioning are apparent, this is precisely the authors’ contention about “direct problem-solving.”<sup>368</sup>

When the authors were faced with an organization “divided by competition and turfism,” rather than asking employees to identify who and what were the problems, they relied on generative metaphor in the form of another organization.<sup>369</sup> Using the framework of “appreciative inquiry,” employees conducted field research by observing and interviewing members of the model organization’s staff. By allowing the members to “see” their organization as another, the employees were able to overcome their division by avoiding the blame that is inherent in traditional methods of conflict resolution. As Barrett and Cooperrider note, during the process, they observed “a shift from the language of problem solving to the language of learning.”<sup>370</sup> Through the use of generative metaphor,

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<sup>364</sup> Ortony, 141.

<sup>365</sup> Ortony, 141.

<sup>366</sup> Frank J. Barrett and David L. Cooperrider, “Generative Metaphor Intervention: A New Approach for Working with Systems Divided by Conflict and Caught in Defensive Perception,” *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 26, no. 2 (1990): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886390262011>.

<sup>367</sup> Barrett and Cooperrider, 224.

<sup>368</sup> Barrett and Cooperrider, 224.

<sup>369</sup> Barrett and Cooperrider, 226.

<sup>370</sup> Barrett and Cooperrider, 230.

participants were free to abandon the mindset of “truth-seeking” that is characteristic of problem-solving, and instead were encouraged “to see what we can learn.”<sup>371</sup>

### C. IDENTITY

Scholars have introduced many terms to describe the extreme level of polarization in the United States. McCoy and her colleagues suggest “pernicious polarization” to highlight its corrosive effects on society and democracy.<sup>372</sup> Druckman et. al have termed it “affective polarization,” meaning that partisan division is no longer about policies: Democrats and Republicans are emotionally invested and actually “dislike” one another, to put it mildly.<sup>373</sup> Mason calls it “social polarization” to emphasize its extension beyond politics into every aspect of society and the amplification of “groupish” behaviors. In each of their definitions, polarization has nothing to do with policies, issues, facts, or truth; it has to do with identity. Any remedies must, therefore, be focused on limiting discourse that constructs or amplifies an Us/Them dichotomy. However, such a feat is easier said than done.

Extreme polarization is essentially what conflict researchers call an “intractable conflict,” or a sustained, pervasive conflict that is resistant to conventional methods of resolution in which identity plays an outsized role.<sup>374</sup> One of the distinguishing features of intractable conflicts is that they are characterized by oversimplification.<sup>375</sup> Complexity, nuance, and contextualization collapse into a single narrative based on stereotypes and simple motivations.<sup>376</sup> The process was evident in the political rhetoric of President Bush and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. After 9/11, Bush distilled the identities of Americans and the terrorists into “good” and “evil.” With child-like simplicity, he

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<sup>371</sup> Crawley, “Reality Disjunctures and Epistemological Encampment,” 264.

<sup>372</sup> McCoy and Somer, “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization,” 234.

<sup>373</sup> Druckman et al., “Affective Polarization, Local Contexts,” 28.

<sup>374</sup> C. Marlene Fiol, Michael G. Pratt, and Edward J. O’Connor, “Managing Intractable Identity Conflicts,” *Academy of Management Review* 34, no. 1 (2009): 33, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27759984>.

<sup>375</sup> Amanda Ripley, “Complicating the Narratives,” *The Whole Story*, January 11, 2019, <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/complicating-the-narratives-b91ea06ddf63>.

<sup>376</sup> Ripley.

suggested that America was attacked because the terrorists disliked freedom while ignoring the complex motivations of terrorism. Likewise, Davis built on existing stereotypes that had emerged in the years preceding the Civil War, which characterized Northerners and Southerners in broad strokes, despite the fact that they arguably had more similarities than differences. The current polarization follows the same format.

There is a tendency to characterize those who breached the Capitol on January 6 as “the mob,” or “extremists” as President Biden and the Select Committee have done. By doing so, the group is relegated to a faceless, nameless “Other.” As is the case with all othering discourse, the participants are made to seem not only different, but inferior—they are un-American. However, as Robert Pape’s study, *American Face of Insurrection*, reveals, the individuals charged with crimes committed at the Capitol represent “a cross section of America” and a distinct “ordinariness.”<sup>377</sup> In other words, they are as American as apple pie, not the fringe of society. By describing the group as “the mob” and “extremists,” the polarization characterized by a division between “us” and “them” is worsened, and its true extent is masked.

The point is not that Biden or anyone else should condone the events of January 6, or that those who committed crimes should not be held accountable. Rather, it is that such terms as “the mob,” or “extremists” represent the simplified narrative that Amanda Ripley cautions against. As Ripley suggests, “The idea is to revive complexity in a time of false simplicity.”<sup>378</sup> President Biden could have dispelled many falsehoods about those involved at the Capitol including that they were largely unemployed, or from rural or predominantly Republican areas.<sup>379</sup> He could have “complicated the narrative” by highlighting that participants were not uneducated social misfits or anti-American, but physicians, CEO’s, politicians, and veterans.<sup>380</sup> Instead, he proliferated what Pape calls “a common narrative

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<sup>377</sup> Robert Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, Chicago Project on Security & Threats, 2022. [https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/Pape\\_-\\_American\\_Face\\_of\\_Insurrection\\_\(2022-01-05\).pdf](https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/Pape_-_American_Face_of_Insurrection_(2022-01-05).pdf)

<sup>378</sup> Ripley, “Complicating the Narratives.”

<sup>379</sup> Robert Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*.

<sup>380</sup> Ripley, “Complicating the Narratives.”

amongst the political left” to compete with a similarly common narrative amongst the political right.<sup>381</sup> The result is simplicity and certainty on both sides, or “pernicious equilibrium,” as Somer et al. describe the phenomenon.<sup>382</sup> While comforting in the short-term, it is the precursor to conflict as the previous cases demonstrated. With no room or reason for discussions or compromise, the possibility of coexisting becomes implausible, and eventually the only remedy is that the “enemy...be vanquished.”<sup>383</sup>

#### D. FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

There is limitless potential for future research to expand on any, or all of the elements identified in this thesis. One recommendation is to continue polarization research by looking at countries that have depolarized before experiencing a “systemic shock” to determine if or how definitions, metaphors, and identity contributed to the process.<sup>384</sup> Another possibility is to pick up where this thesis left off by exploring what depolarizing discourse might look like. That is, how can definition, metaphor, and identity contribute to a political environment characterized by constructive disagreement, rather than destructive identity-based polarization.

A further recommendation is to shift from polarization research and continue broadening the application of discourse analysis by examining more concrete and specific cases including those within public safety. For example, research may consider how definitions, metaphors, and identity influence risk-taking behavior by reinforcing a fire service culture that values “sacrifice” and “heroism.” Or research may explore how the fire service’s adoption of militaristic metaphors such as “battle” or “enemy” influence its operations, or its ability to adapt its mission to reflect the dynamic public safety environment. Another option is to explore how regional, or in many cases, company-level

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<sup>381</sup> Robert Pape, *American Face of Insurrection*, 17.

<sup>382</sup> Somer, McCoy, and Luke, “Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies,” 938.

<sup>383</sup> McCoy and Rahman, “Polarized Democracies in Comparative Perspective,” 2.

<sup>384</sup> McCoy et al., *Reducing Pernicious Polarization*.

jargon, rather than a standard fire service lexicon may reduce the effectiveness of training and operations.

This thesis revealed the potential of definitions, metaphors, and identity to explain polarization as a discursive process. More broadly, it demonstrated how these features of language can influence the course of consequential sociocultural events. As the analysis of the Civil War and 9/11 discourses illustrate, reality is far from an objective phenomenon. Rather, it is comprised of both material elements, and discursive and social constructions. The problem is that we often fail to recognize the latter half of reality's composition, resulting in a fundamentally flawed understanding of truth and missed opportunities to change the nation's trajectory. To reshape our world, we must first understand how it is shaped. This research has demonstrated that definitions, metaphors, and identity are a good place to start.



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