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Exploring Classical and Contemporary Conception of Ethos Applied Case-The Rhetorical Ethos of President George W. Bush

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EXPLORING CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF ETHOS
APPLIED CASE—THE RHETORICAL ETHOS OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Abstract

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By Bobby J. Antrobus, M.A.

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Major Director: Dr. James J. Kinney
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By exploring classical and contemporary conceptions of rhetorical ethos, this thesis
assembles theories of analysis and then applies them in the form of rhetorical analysis of
the rhetorical ethos exhibited by President George W. Bush in his presidential speeches.

The theoretical investigation reveals the extensive use of the ethical appeal in all
manner of rhetorical situations in the contemporary world but especially focuses on how
political rhetoric has come to rely predominantly on this persuasive appeal.
The study examines several speeches given by President Bush and concludes that his success as president is attributed largely to the sophisticated rhetorical strategies executed by his administration, especially its construction of a presidential ethos. However, the inquiry also reveals a disconcerting degree of misleading and deceptive rhetoric, which the author argues has resulted in a serious decline in public support for President Bush as he approaches his sixth year in office.
CHAPTER 1  
Introduction: Presidential Rhetoric and Ethos

The power to persuade, or the artful use of rhetoric, is an indispensable success factor for any American president. One of the primary means of persuasion is ethos, or the "ethical appeal," which is also often referred to as the appeal to estimable, worthy character or credibility. "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion," declares Aristotle in the Rhetoric, and he considers the speaker's ethos, as conveyed through the totality of the speaking performance, "as the most effective means of persuasion" (1355b-1356a). The primacy of ethos as a persuasive appeal can be better understood against the backdrop of the Aristotelian concept of rhetoric as an art that deals with the probable or contingent—not with certainty, scientific fact, or the absolute. In this realm of uncertainty, opinions, and educated guesses, the audience especially will attempt to perceive whether the speaker is credible and trustworthy. The better the speaker can impress the audience with his (in Aristotle’s time, a public speaker would have been male) competence, good character, and goodwill, the better he can convince the audience to accept not only his version of reality ("worldview") but, importantly, his proposals for dealing with it. On the other hand, if the audience feels he is untrustworthy, incompetent, or mean-spirited, the rhetor will face serious difficulty in persuading them to both his point of view and proposed courses of action.
Political rhetoric deals with issues where exact certainty is generally impossible and opinions are divided. Thus the citizenry’s perception of a president’s *ethos* or character is crucial to his ability to persuade them to follow his lead in general but especially to embrace his worldview and support policies that devolve from his ideology. Moreover, several national trends in the U.S. have greatly increased the demands on a president to deploy a robust rhetorical strategy. *First*, society has become so highly diverse, pluralistic, and heterogeneous that finding common ground or values is increasingly difficult. Office holders must wrestle with value conflicts, a shortage of resources, and nearly intractable problems as they attempt to address the major issues of the day. *Second*, as the average citizen tries to comprehend highly complex issues, they can become overtaxed by the amount of raw information and number of opinions that are churned out daily within our media-saturated world. As a result of these two factors, political majority-building on the basis of policy deliberation is difficult and tests not only the leadership but also the communication skills of the president and the executive branch. *Third*, partially in reaction to the preceding two circumstances, the modern presidency has taken over nearly the entire role of setting the national agenda and marshalling the public and the institutions of government to support it, as claimed by Jeffrey K. Tulis in his book *The Rhetorical Presidency* (145-147).

From this discourse, two basic terms arise. The term “the rhetorical presidency” speaks to the historical expansion of the presidency’s national leadership role vis-à-vis the Congress, an enlargement that demands a requisite increase in the exercise of the power of
persuasion, that is, the effective use of “presidential rhetoric,” to achieve success in today’s environment of governance.

Each president, with the aid of his political handlers, sets his own rhetorical style and tone; to be sure, in the administration of George W. Bush, this component of governing strategy takes a back seat to nothing. Ironically, while some pundits ridicule Bush as a stumbling, clumsy speaker, he leads a White House communications apparatus that produces highly sophisticated rhetoric. Moreover, by most accounts, President Bush and his team have enjoyed a considerable degree of success in the critical area of presidential rhetoric, having persuaded the Congress to pass several pieces of landmark legislation and having persuaded sufficient numbers of voters to reelect him to a second term in 2004.

Bush’s rhetoric, however, falls within the context of a rhetorical tradition that stretches back twenty-five-hundred years to its origin with pre-Socratic Sophists in ancient Greece, a history which includes an enduring debate about whether rhetoric is helpful or harmful, inherently evil or simply an amoral tool that a rhetor can use for good or bad based on her own choices flowing from her own motives. On opposing sides of this divide, for example, were the classicists Aristotle and Quintilian. In fourth-century B.C.E. Greece, Aristotle advocated a pragmatic rhetoric that allows for “the ends justify the means” approach, whereas in first-century C.E. Rome, Quintilian argued for the virtuous “good man who speaks well.”

Drawing from this rich tradition, this inquiry asks several key questions about Bush’s rhetoric. What are the mainstays of Bush’s rhetoric in the pivotal area of ethos?
What approaches and techniques has he used in order to persuade the populace on the basis of character and other key aspects of the ethical appeal? How does he use either pathos (appeal to the emotions of the audience) or logos (appeal to logic) to complement or bolster his ethos? Is his ethos genuine or fabricated? Is he trustworthy? Where does Bush fall in the long-standing debate about the moral use of rhetoric? How does the audience, the American people, respond to his rhetoric?

To answer these questions, I analyze several of Bush’s speeches on the basis of classical and contemporary theories of persuasion as well as research findings of other experts. Also, I strip the veneer of rhetoric from several policy initiatives in order to view the reality of what his administration has actually done. My primary conclusion is threefold. One, in his extensive speaking schedule, Bush skillfully employs rhetorical devices to build identification with the American audience on the basis of shared values and common heritage, including an appearance of goodwill and sincerity about any topic that he addresses. Two, before 9/11, Bush primarily employed a broad rhetorical strategy that emphasized a presidential ethos of good character, moral values, and honor and dignity—an ethos that is cleverly constructed through language and image management. Three, after 9/11, while continuing his predominant emphasis of the ethical appeal, Bush adopts a one-two punch of pathos and ethos on matters related to war, which he leverages into other areas of presidential ideological action. In this model, Bush employs the language of the pathetic appeal to set up a negative frame of a pessimistic, dangerous, evil world, which engenders emotions of fear, helplessness, and dependency among Americans, against which he superimposes an ethos or persona of himself as a strong war
president and moral leader who alone knows what is right and what should be done to save Americans from the forces of evil in the world. As he executes these three strategies, Bush attempts to frame the basis of the public’s consciousness or way of thinking about the country, the world, and his presidency. Thus, in large measure, the Bush White House is rhetorically constructed. Much of Bush’s success, including his election and reelection, the election of his party’s candidates, and the advance of his ideologically-driven, partisan political agenda and governing strategy, has flowed directly from the skillful execution of these rhetorical strategies.

Last, despite the fact that Bush has built much of his electoral and governing appeal to the citizenry with the language and vocabulary of moral values, which falls into the realm of ethos, I found that Bush’s rhetoric demonstrates a preponderance of Aristotelian pragmatism and manipulation, as opposed to the authentic, virtuous “good man who speaks well” advocated by Quintilian and others.

* * * * *

The organization of my thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 constitutes the preceding introduction. In Chapter 2, I explicate classical and contemporary theories of how rhetors bring the quality of ethos to bear in the process of persuasion, particularly in the political arena. Next, in Chapter 3, I apply theories of ethos in the form of rhetorical analyses of several of Bush’s speeches and briefly describe communications approaches within his administration. Then, in Chapter 4, by examining several key policy outcomes and gauging audience response, I provide a reality check on Bush’s rhetoric. Finally, in Chapter 5, I offer conclusions.
CHAPTER 2
Theories of Analysis: *Ethos* in the Age of the Rhetoric of Manipulation

Robert J. Connors and Edward P. J. Corbett in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* call the ethical appeal the "hidden persuader" in the contemporary world because today's advanced practices of public relations, motivational psychology, advertising, and political communications embody a core emphasis on searching for effective stimuli and creating a desired image (77). Yet many of the formulations for the rhetoric of manipulation that has characterized American society from the middle of the twentieth century to the present are grounded in the theories of the classical rhetoricians, especially those of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) and to a lesser extent of the quintessential Roman orator, Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.). Although many theorists contributed to the discursive development of the rhetorical tradition during the past twenty-five hundred years, in this section I explicate relevant theories of rhetorical *ethos* from classical and contemporary theorists, which will form the basis for analysis of President Bush’s rhetorical *ethos* in Chapter 3.

To provide a larger context for this theoretical inquiry, it is useful to characterize communicative influence in terms of the modern conception of the rhetorical situation in which the speaker, audience, and subject interact together dynamically through the efficacy of language to effect persuasion. Of course, in the political arena, the speaker is a person campaigning for public office or holding such an office; the audience is the citizenry; and
the subject is comprised of a host of policy issues requiring government deliberation and decision. In terms of the role of the speaker in the process of persuasion, whether general or specific to the political sphere, two essential questions about motives arise. First, in the treatment of the subject, do the rhetor’s ends involve a benefit for the audience as opposed to personal, commercial, institutional, or political gain at the expense of the audience? To choose her ends or objectives, the speaker taps into her personal worldview, or the way she frames reality (ideology), which is based on her attitudes, beliefs and values. Ends devolve from the motives engendered by ideology, whether personal, corporate, institutional, or political. Second, are the rhetor’s selected means for persuading the audience ethical or manipulative? As this work will show, the rhetorical term and usage of “ethical appeal” (ethos) as opposed to the term and usage of “ethical” in the modern lexicon in a moral sense have two very different definitions.

A. CLASSICAL THEORIES OF ETHOS

Pertinent to understanding the evolution of ethos is to consider its ancient semiotic source. William M. Sattler explains in “Conceptions of Ethos in Ancient Rhetoric” that ethos is “derived from the Greek word for custom, habit, or usage . . . and ethos, in its earliest signification, may be said to refer to the usages, habits, and traditions of one social group as distinguished from another” (55). In this connotation, ethos was involved with accepted and approved practice in groups or society. Sattler also compares ethos to the Latin word mores, the latter indicating standards of morally approved conduct, and he notes that mores are included in or are a subset of ethos or group character. He adds that
the “traits or qualities which make up ethos are of course approved and respected by the society in question but such traits do not necessarily have the status of [mores],” because in some cases ethos refers to qualities or customs that are without moral import. Thus ethos originally signed both moral and amoral connotations.

**Aristotle**

Sattler’s conception parallels implications of ethos in ancient Greek epic poetry and the writings of pre-Socratic Sophists as well as of Plato (ca. 428-347 B.C.E.). Plato’s student, Aristotle, in his encyclopedic treatise, *Rhetoric*, originates the rhetorical conception of ethos, the ethical appeal of the speaker’s character and authority, by which, along with pathos, the emotional or pathetical appeal wrought in the minds of the audience, and logos, the logical appeal of proof found in the factual content of the message, a rhetor persuades his audience to embrace his viewpoint. Aristotle’s emphasis on these three appeals is readily evident from his definition of rhetoric, which is, simply, discovering and using the available means of persuasion. Further, he reasons that the type of rhetoric influences the rhetor’s choices within a given rhetorical context. Thus he divides the field of rhetoric into three general types: expediency (deliberative or political rhetoric), justice (forensic or judicial rhetoric), or honor (epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric). Within these types, the orator selects not only his specific ends or objectives for treating a particular subject with a specific audience but also the most effective means to persuade them to embrace and act on his propositions.

According to Connors and Corbett, the “ethical appeal is especially important in rhetorical discourse, because here we deal with matters about which absolute certainty is
impossible and opinions are divided.” Further, the authors recount that “Quintilian felt . . .
deliberative [political] oratory had the most need for the ethical appeal . . .” (72). Making a
similar claim in “Ethos Versus Persona,” Roger D. Cherry relates how Aristotle suggests in
the *Rhetoric* that *ethos* is especially important in deliberative rhetoric (3). As political
rhetoric involves the exercise of judgment in important matters of state, generally the
audience must feel a sense of trust in the political leader before they will assent to his
proposition. Of course, as Aristotle posits, all three of the appeals support each other and
collectively create persuasiveness.

If *ethos* is a proof found in the character and authority of the speaker, *how* and
*when* is it exerted? Aristotle responds that

> there are three things which inspire confidence in the orator’s own
caracter—the three namely that induce us to believe a thing apart from any
proof of it: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill. (1378\(^a\))

Ideally, the ethical appeal is generated by *how* the speaker demonstrates these three
specific dimensions within both the content and delivery of the speech. Based on
Aristotle’s pragmatism, these portrayed qualities may be authentic or fabricated for
persuasive effect.

Aristotle goes on to emphasize the importance of *when* by directly limiting this
ethical demonstration to the actual speech performance:

> This kind of persuasion . . . should be achieved by what the speaker says,
not by what people think of [his] character before he begins to speak. . . .
[He adds that] persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. (1356a)

Breaking down Aristotle’s conception of *ethos* further, first, good sense (*phronesis*) can also be interpreted or understood as “practical wisdom,” as Sattler holds (58). In other words, good sense is comprised of intelligence and good judgment that demonstrate a certain practical wisdom in making decisions and choosing among available alternatives. The appearance of good sense is essential to engendering the trust of the audience in the speaker’s competence and judgment.

Sattler ascribes moral virtues to the second component of the ethical appeal, good moral character (59). Cherry follows a similar pattern when he describes how good sense and good moral character work together: “As Aristotle puts it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, ‘the work of man is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as moral virtue, for virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means’” (3). Aristotelian pragmatism, however, allows this division of *ethos* to rest on the rhetor’s ability simply to portray himself as virtuous, as a person of good moral character.

The final personal characteristic upon which the successful ethical appeal depends is goodwill toward the hearers. Although the basic intent of this factor is a genuine friendliness toward and interest in the welfare of the audience, Cherry expands the definition based on the following statement of J. De Romilly: “. . . *eunoia*, in Greek, is something more than goodwill: it means approval, sympathy, and readiness to help” (qtd. in Cherry 4). Further, Cherry observes that the *Rhetoric* emphasizes
eunoia [goodwill] in connection with deliberative rhetoric. For Aristotle, an important aspect of ethos involves assessing the characteristics of an audience and constructing the discourse in such a way as to portray oneself as embodying the same characteristics. He [Aristotle] suggests that “people always think well of speeches adapted to and reflecting their own character; and we can now see how to compose our speeches so as to adapt them and ourselves to our audience.” (4)

Similarly, Sattler characterizes goodwill as “an inclusive term for all respected qualities discerned in the speaker.” The qualities the audience respects, Sattler continues, are those the rhetor possesses that appear to be the same as the ones they esteem, that is, he insists, “... the speaker who conforms to the ethos of the class [or group]—who likes what [they] like—will be highly regarded” (58-59). Referring to Aristotle’s conception of ethos, Sattler describes the power of consciously understanding audience characteristics and adapting the oration to closely represent, reflect, and embrace them, to mirror and play them back in words and images to the listeners—to make the rhetor appear as one with the audience.

In this regard, as well as encompassing his larger theorem of ethos, Aristotle argues for pragmatism in his own words:

The orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind. Particularly in political oratory, ... it adds much to an orator’s
influence that his own character should look right and that he should be thought to entertain the right feelings toward his hearers. . . . that the orator’s own character should look right is particularly important in public speaking. (1377b)

To summarize Aristotelian ethos, the goal of the rhetor is to portray the three personal-based factors of ethos by representing herself in the speech as intelligent, competent, virtuous, and concerned for the welfare of the audience. Further, she adapts her persona and message to resemble the characteristics of the audience in order to appear as one of them. Her objective is to impress the audience as a person of credibility and trustworthiness, both as an individual and an authority figure, and thereby win support for her propositions. Critically, the pragmatic choices of the means of persuasion devolve from the rhetor’s ends and reflect her motives toward the audience, which are influenced by her worldview, ideology, or personal interest. Thus it boils down to a speaker’s choices about what she wants from or for the audience and how she will get it or give it. Ultimately, however, the success of the oration depends on whether the listeners favorably perceive the totality of the speaker’s ethos and whether they are persuaded to embrace and act upon her proposed ends.

Cicero

Following Aristotle by just over two hundred years, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) adapted and added to Greek rhetoric to create a unique Roman model. Although Cicero does not use the Greek term ethos, nor a single Latin equivalent, James M. May in Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos, describes how Cicero builds a
significant conception of the meaning of *ethos* through his repeated use of several Latin words to describe the ideal orator: *auctoritas* (conferred power, authority), *gravitas* (weight of character, seriousness), *existimatio* (reputation, good name), *gratia* (favor, esteem), *dignitas* (dignity, dignified position), *res gestae* (exploits, achievements, especially in public roles), and *lenitas* (restrained oratorical style). May also emphasizes that sociopolitical circumstances in Republican Rome create a special demand for *ethos* in rhetoric because the ruling Roman aristocrats place utmost importance on inherited noble-family-based-character and next to it, a strong respect for authority, which works to protect the privilege and ruling status of the nobility. By wielding the power of his superior eloquence, coupled with adopting the precepts of nobility-based character and authority, Cicero, of the equestrian (upper middle) class, breaks class barriers to gain the highest office in Rome, consul, which is comparable to the U.S. presidency (7, 9, 12, 81).

May proposes that Cicero throughout his career recognizes the power of the Romans’ high regard for character and skillfully wields *ethos* in his oratory, especially in his professional specialty, the judicial arena. Preferring and typically taking the defense role, he extols the character of the judges, the client, himself, and Rome by adopting a fitting character-infused persona for the situation; then with deadly targeting he exploits and assassinates the character of adversaries. His devices are character sketches, ethical narratives, biographical portraits, personification, and invented dialogues, all used to characterize the principals in the case in such a way as to show the innocence of his clients or to turn the tables and prosecute the wrongdoing of his opponents. May argues that “Cicero’s goal in presenting character in such a way is, of course, to lay a moral, or
‘ethical,’ foundation upon which to argue the probability of his defense.” He adds that, for Cicero, when “compelling, logical proofs are lacking, proof based on character often fills the breach, overshadowing the real facts of the case and often becoming the focal point of the speech” (164-168).

Cicero associates the orator’s use of ethos with mild emotions or a persona of a restrained oratorical style (lenitas), as opposed to pathos, which embodies the stronger, more violent emotions. However, he often concludes an oration with an escalation of ethos into fiery pathos that sets the courtroom or political meeting ablaze (167).

In his extensive writings on rhetoric, Cicero repeatedly discusses how character, authority, and other elements of the Roman brand of ethos should be exerted to persuade the audience. Sattler describes how in Cicero’s early work, De Inventione, Cicero outlines the use of ethos in the exordium (introduction), but in his later works, De Oratore and Orator, Cicero adopts more of the Aristotelian precept that ethos should pervade the entire speech, albeit Cicero generally focuses on forensic rhetoric (61-62). Echoing Sattler, May describes how Cicero extols the judges, the audience, the client, himself, and Rome as a means to utilize ethos on the basis of conciliare, that is, to conciliate the audience, to overcome distrust or animosity, especially early in the speech, a conception similar to Aristotle’s idea of portraying goodwill toward the audience (166). Although he stresses character within his conception of the ideal statesman-orator, nonetheless Cicero manipulates ethos within the Roman belief system when he deems necessary in order to achieve his ends and those of his clients and supporters.
Not all major classical rhetoricians, however, adopt the premise that a speaker's character should privilege pragmatism or situational manipulation over virtue. For example, in his *Institutes of Oratory*, Marcus Fabius Quintilian (35-96 C.E), the Roman educator who is considered the last great rhetorician of the classical period, emphasizes the genuine integrity and moral virtue of the orator, whom he defines as the “good man skilled in speaking.” (XII.1.1). Moreover, by arguing that the rhetor literally must embody the moral qualities of a good man in order to speak well, he postulates a causal relationship in terms of the essential unity of moral earnestness and effective speaking, that is, only a good man can produce truly good oratory.

**B. CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF ETHOS**

The visionary theories of the classical Greek and Roman rhetoricians held significant sway among theorists and practitioners in succeeding historical eras and are still influential in the twenty-first century.

**Kenneth Burke**

Perhaps the most influential theorist to modify and expand, as well as augment and complement, classical conceptions of ethos is Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), a preeminent theorist of rhetoric of the 20th century. In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg note how Burke develops frameworks that can be used to analyze many systems of knowledge, ranging from philosophy to science and from psychology to poetry
and popular culture—all from the point of view of rhetoric (1296-97). Burke’s voluminous works bring many new perspectives to the modern conception of *ethos*.

**Identification**

First is his theorem of “identification.” Bizzell and Herzberg define this central term as “the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by identifying with something larger and more comprehensive.” Burke himself explains in *A Rhetoric of Motives*:

> The fact that an activity is capable of reduction to intrinsic, autonomous principles does not argue that it is free from identification with other orders of motivation extrinsic to it. . . . The human agent . . . is not motivated solely by the principles of a specialized activity, however strongly this specialized power . . . may affect his character. Any specialized activity participates in a larger unit of action. ‘Identification’ is a word for the autonomous activity’s place in this wider context. . . . [For example,] the shepherd . . . acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be ‘identified’ with a project that is raising the sheep for market (27).

Writing about this Burkean concept in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp observe that

> [people as social beings form] identities through various properties or substances, including physical objects, occupations, friends, beliefs, and values. As . . . [they] ally with various properties or substances [ideas,
beliefs, persons... [they] share “substance” with whatever or whomever they associate. Burke uses the term “consubstantial” to describe this association. As two entities are united in substance through common ideas, attitudes, material possessions, or other properties, they are consubstantial.

(174)

In Burke’s usage, identification is synonymous with consubstantiality and with persuasion. In other words, shared substance such as beliefs and values and ideas constitutes identification between an individual and some other person or persons, which forms a basis for persuasion. In A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke explains that “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.” He adds that:

Rhetoric is properly said to be grounded in opinion, ... [but] not opinion as contrasted to truth. ... [For example], you may say that a person so acted when the person did not so act—and if you succeed in making your audience believe you, you could be said to be trafficking in sheer opinion as contrasted with the truth. But we are here concerned with motives, ... we are discussing the underlying ethical assumptions on which the entire tactics of persuasion are based. Here the important factor is opinion. ... The rhetorician, as such, need operate only on this principle. If, in the opinion of a given audience, a certain kind of conduct is admirable, then a speaker might persuade the audience by using ideas and images that identify his cause with that kind of conduct. (54-55)
Regarding Burke’s proposition about this connection between identity and persuasion, Foss et al suggest that Burke expands the notion of rhetoric to include a change in audience attitude or behavior solely on the basis of identification with a rhetor (175). This is a stronger hypothesis than that proposed by Sattler in the earlier reference about the operation of ethos as conforming to class or group expectations and norms.

These authors describe how identification can function in three basic ways. First, it may be used as a means to an end. For example, a candidate for office may attempt to win votes simply by telling an audience of farmers that he was raised on a farm. The second use involves the operation of antithesis, such as held by the saying, “my enemy’s enemy is my friend,” which is exemplified by how the U.S. and U.S.S.R. joined together to fight against a common enemy, Germany, in W.W. II. The third use is where identification occurs at an subconscious level—which is often the most powerful as it goes unnoticed by the one persuaded. Foss gives the example of the man who buys Marlboro cigarettes by identifying subconsciously with the image of the “Marlboro man” in the advertisements. The authors add that Burke gives the example of how “to say ‘that “we” are at war’ includes under the same heading soldiers who are getting killed and speculators who hope to make a killing in war stocks” (174-176). In these cases, identification is diffusing subtly and individuals may neither be conscious of the identifications they are making nor aware that they are being persuaded unknowingly to adopt an attitude or take an action desired by another party.

In Rhetoric and Human Consciousness: A History, Craig R. Smith concludes that “the power of this aspect of ethos derives from Burke’s ability to trace identification back
to motive and motive back to substance” (325). In other words, for members of an audience to identify with a speaker they must share a common set of motives. That is not to say that they must share precisely the same set of motives, but only that there must be a degree of overlap between the motives of speaker and audience that is sufficient in breath or depth to create the identification that leads to persuasion.

A corollary derived from Aristotelian theory is that a speaker does not have to actually share motives with the audience—he may simply create an appearance or image—a persona—that indicates certain motives but which belies his genuine motives and character. “Persona” can be defined as the role or image or characterization that a person adopts in order to portray certain conscious intentions to people while at the same time concealing other intentions, attitudes, beliefs, or degree of understanding about a matter. In other words, an oratorical persona may be a mixture of authentic and fictitious elements—at the choice of the speaker. In actual practice, á la Cicero, it is more accurate to think in the plural, since the rhetor may inhabit different personae for different audiences. If and when the speaker attempts to occupy a persona, act out a superficial role, or model an appearance or image, often his purpose is to create stronger bonds and persuade the audience on the basis of identification. Smith holds that “the better [that speakers’] personae are rhetorically constructed—that is, adjusted to audience and crafted in language—the more likely we are to identify with them and embrace their values” (24).

**Division or Alienation; Scapegoats**

Several other important concepts related to ethos devolve from Burke’s larger theory of identification. Hand in hand with identification are the related precepts of
“division” (also known as alienation or dissociation) and “scapegoat.” Each person is uniquely individual, but when consubstantial with another person, he becomes joined in some shared value or interest with another (Foss et al 175). In this way, rhetorical ethos is a tool for bridging separateness and uniting people. “‘Belongingness’ in this sense is rhetorical,” declares Burke (28). He adds that “identification . . . confront[s] the implications of division. . . . If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (22). On the other hand, rhetorical ethos is often used to create division and alienation. Craig Smith applies Burkean concepts when he observes:

For every “them,” there is an “us.” A speaker can divide an audience from “them” using strategies of alienation: “they” are different in values (ideology), or “they” are different in habits (culture, religion). Very sophisticated, and perhaps dangerous, speakers can make “them” the scapegoat, what Burke calls the ‘vessel’ of our unwanted evils or ‘our troubles.’ Using the rhetoric of the negative, speakers can symbolically or actually call for the sacrificing of the ‘scapegoats’ in order to solve ‘our problems’ or to purge ‘our guilt,’ thereby purifying ‘our cult.’

(322-323)

As an example, Smith relates how Adolph Hitler powerfully used identification (the rhetoric of the positive) under the umbrella of propaganda to unite the German people in support of the Nazi regime while at the same time he used alienation (the rhetoric of the negative) to divide off the Jews and other ethnic groups, unite the Germans against them,
depict them as the cause of Germany's problems, claim the Germans were victims, and make the Jews the hated scapegoat. Smith argues that through the repetitive communication of this dichotomous message of identification and alienation, Hitler subverted the moral compass of many Germans in his audiences (323). In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke notes that in political affairs, the situation ("scene") encompasses opposing views on an issue from partisan groups, which typically places great stress on a division between citizens. He adds, however, that the alienation can be healed or ameliorated by joining forces against a common enemy, such as a foreign war or major domestic program to promote the common welfare (51).

Thus political leaders have the choice of using identification to unite (positive rhetoric) or to divide (negative rhetoric); the logical extension of this argument is that the politician can calibrate his or her rhetorical appeal to unite sufficient numbers to secure a simple majority in order to gain and hold office—and then use its power to enact his or her ideological agenda, which may include dividing away the near-majority who espouse a different ideology with techniques of identification, division, and scapegoating. Bizzell and Herzberg conclude that "Burke examines the ways in which the terms used to create identification work to include the members of a group in a common ideology, while at the same time excluding alternate terms, other groups, and competing ideologies" (1296).

**Terministic Screens**

In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke describes to the human being as a "symbol using animal" and emphasizes how language (symbols or written signs) is often used to "defeat reality" (45). He contends that "even if any given terminology is a reflection of
reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" (45). Burke labels this factor “terministic screen,” which he defines as the way certain terms screen or deflect the audience’s attention toward or away from certain realities or ideologies. Burke proposes that a degree of deflection of reality occurs from “simply the fact that any nomenclature necessarily directs the attention into some channel rather than others” (45). Invoking such screens goes hand in hand with the technique of identification. Craig Smith contends that “our screens become projections of ourselves, and shape the ways in which we see the world” (330). Through the use of language, speakers may attempt to tap into these paradigms or worldviews held by audience members in order to build identification and thereby persuade them.

Devolving from the premise of terministic screens is Burke’s notion of how every epistemology has an “ultimate” or “god-term” that captures the fundamental essence of an area of human knowledge, belief, and action—as the name “God” does for religious epistemologies. However, much of the basis for Burke’s premise comes from Richard M. Weaver, who writes in The Ethics of Rhetoric that by “god-term” we mean that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate. . . . Its force imparts to the others their lesser degree of force, and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood. (212)

The concept of god-terms indicate a rank-ordering of terms, but an ultimate term is much more than just the most fitting or clever word in comparison to others. Weaver
explains that god-terms carry an expectation of significant human response:

The capacity to demand sacrifice is probably the surest indicator of the “god term,” for when a term is so sacrosanct that the material goods of this life must be mysteriously rendered up for it, then we feel justified in saying that it is in some sense ultimate. (214)

Weaver offers “American” as an example of a god-term, while pointing out that the way Americans use the term could be associated with an “element of national egotism.” The term finds expression in thoughts like “this is the American way” or “it is the American thing to do” (218). Importantly, it is a standard word in the vocabulary of U.S. political leaders when they ask for sacrifices not only for their domestic agenda but especially for war.

He goes on to argue that ”the counterpart of the “god term” is the “devil term,” or “terms of repulsion,” and that “‘un-American’ comes nearest to filling that role” (222). He adds that “it follows naturally that in the popular consciousness of this country, ‘un-American’ is the ultimate in negation” (219). In these examples, he shows how persuaders often establish a dichotomy between god- and devil-terms, such as American versus un-American.

Finally, Weaver observes that there seems to be some obscure psychic law which compels every nation to have in its national imagination an enemy, . . . [the] need for a scapegoat, or for something which will personify “the adversary.” If a nation did not have an enemy, an enemy would have to be invented to take care of those
expressions of scorn and hatred to which peoples must give vent. . . a class will be chosen, or a race, or a type, or a political faction, and this will be held up to a practically standardized form of repudiation. (222)

In the political arena, politicians incorporate a jargon of god-terms as a means of identification and persuasion. On the other hand, they may label opposing parties, factions, countries, and the like with the negative rhetoric of devil-terms, terms of repulsion, that identify the odious or reprehensible beliefs and behaviors of competing groups or ideologies, which they desire to dominate, control, thwart, eradicate—or just make themselves appear good by way of comparison. For example, liberals may assign repulsive terms to far-right conservatives and to their political agenda, and conservatives may try to appropriate the terms “Christian” or “Christian values” to their cause. Returning to Burke, who expands upon Weaver’s theories of ultimate terms, Bizzell and Herzberg conclude that Burke sees such terms and the language systems that envelop them as key resources for rhetorical strategizing and action (1296).

Introducing another form of a terministic screen, Renana Brooks, in “A Nation of Victims: Bush Uses Well-Known Linguistic Techniques to Make Citizens Feel Dependent,” writes about the common device that she calls “empty language.” She argues that this technique provides an easy and slick way for a speaker not only to control the terms of debate but also to exert dominance over the audience. She proposes that empty language
is like empty calories. Just as we seldom question the content of potato chips while enjoying the pleasurable taste, recipients of empty language are usually distracted from examining the content of what they are hearing. Dominators use empty language to conceal faulty generalizations; to ridicule viable alternatives; to attribute negative motivations to others, thus making them appear contemptible; and to rename and ‘reframe’ opposing viewpoints. (20)

She gives the example of how President Bush, in his 2003 State of the Union speech, on the issue of tort reform reduces the proof of the alleged causal relationship between malpractice insurance and skyrocketing healthcare costs to “No one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit” (20). This statement begs several questions. Where is the explanation? Where is the rationale? Where is the analysis? Where is the proof? This kind of language screens audience attention to a meaningless catch-phrase while it obfuscates any honest, intelligent, open discussion of the facts or circumstances of the issue.

**Definition; Redefinition**

Within the context of Burke’s concept of terministic screens, as part of the larger topic of language use in rhetoric, Craig Smith discusses the concept of “definition.” He refers to the practice of many politicians who spend more effort defining their opponent than their own policy platforms and values, and he concurs with Kathryn Olson, who declared that “a rhetor using a definition is not merely presenting an undisputed concept, but is advocating adherence to the particular definition and the perspective sponsoring it” (qtd. in Craig Smith 331). Another rhetorician, Chaim Perelman (1912-1984), in the essay
"The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," theorizes parallel to Burke, Weaver, Smith, and Olson when he states:

Definitions . . . in argumentation, . . . determine the choice of one particular meaning over others. . . . Definition is regarded as a rhetorical figure—the oratorical definition—when it aims, not at clarifying the meaning of an idea, but at stressing aspects that will produce the persuasive effect that is sought. It is a figure relating to choice: the selection of facts brought to the fore in the definition is unusual because the *definiens* is not serving the purpose of giving the meaning of the term. (291-292)

As an example, Craig Smith describes how in the 1988 election, then Vice President George H. W. Bush successfully redefined Governor Michael Dukakis, after Dukakis gave a very vague acceptance speech at the Democratic convention that August—which gave Bush I strategists an opening. Bush I defined Dukakis’ position for him—pro gun control, light on the death penalty, pro-abortion, pro-taxes, membership in the ACLU and the like. Smith insists that Dukakis “accepted Bush I’s ‘terministic’ screen [i.e., baiting] and agreed to confront Bush I on Bush I’s terms” (330). The result is history.

Definition also includes the concept of redefinition. Smith proposes that “transformational redefinition” changes the boundaries of a dispute whereas “transcendental redefinition” occurs when elements of opposing sides are blended to overcome differences or when a redefinition uses ambiguity to overcome division. An example of the latter was President Richard Nixon’s “peace with honor” slogan for ending America’s military involvement in Vietnam. Under the same general heading of definition,
Smith holds that the “strategic use of language often leads to what Burke calls ‘pontificating thirds,’ that is, third terms that are added to the two terms of the polarity to effect denial of one side, denial of a polarity, or to effect compromise or transcendence. Again, Nixon’s "peace with honor" phrase exemplifies this technique as does a point from a 1964 speech by Ronald Reagan in which he said, "There is no left or right, there is only an up or down." Such usage attempts to create by simple rhetorical definition a "higher synthesis" based on what Weaver and Burke call an "ultimate term" (331).

**Subliminal Symbology**

Craig Smith explains how Burke, in his 1941 book, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, explores symbolic action. He observes that Burke “argues that dialectics exist in almost all communication and that they are often subliminal. To expose them, a critic must examine the symbolic action, such as imagery, which takes place in a speech because it may reveal what is going on ideologically” (316). Smith adds that Burke is proposing that the speaker often uses imagery in this context as a means to convey symbolic meaning at a subliminal level, which is another aspect of Burke’s concept of identification.

Smith illustrates how this construct of symbolism was successfully used in a nationally televised speech given by Ronald Reagan in 1964 on behalf of the Republican presidential candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater. *First*, Reagan establishes a dichotomy through the manipulation of images: “up” is “good” and “up” is “us” or “we,” whereas “down” is “bad” and “down” is “they” or “them.” Then he creates identification by dividing various images between the two, for example, “private enterprise” is “up” and “big government” is “down,” linking the images to values that supplement the ideological
basis of the message. Going further, Reagan tags the two sides with god- and devil-terms. For example, he describes “government handouts” with the devil term “temptation.”

Second, Reagan uses imagery to reinforce the message by localizing ideas, bringing them into immediate focus for the audience. In the picture he paints, the government is seen as “‘laying its hand... tends to grow and take on weight,’... and begins to ‘hold life-and-death power.’” Smith asserts that “Reagan’s objective is to alienate his audience from its government so the audience will support the conservative candidacy of Goldwater, which is committed to reducing the size of the federal government.” Third, he explains how Reagan uses the imagery to persuade the audience to his point of view or at least to make them receptive to his message, to his ideology, to everything on his side of the dichotomy. The author concludes that “since Reagan’s imagery says symbolically what the speech says ideologically, it reinforces the message of the address and explains its success” (318-319).

Rhetorical Form

Craig Smith reasons that Burke, in Counter-Statement, “built on the Greek notion of kairos (fitting timing) and the Roman notion of decorum (meeting expectations) by arguing that form arouses and fulfills desires and expectations” (313). In A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke argues that the audience feels exalted when they feel a sense of collaborating in an assertion or idea set forth in a speech. He affirms that “at least, we know that many purely formal patterns can readily awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us,” and he explains how form can be used to involve the audience in a collaborative way with the orator (58). In his example, the device of climax (gradation) is used for political import in the Berlin crisis of 1948: “Who controls Berlin, controls
Germany; who controls Germany controls Europe; who controls Europe controls the world” (58). Although this proposition may or may not be true, Burke explains that by the time the listener arrives at the second of the three stages, the listener already senses how it is destined to conclude—and mentally collaborates to round out its symmetry of form and complete the utterance—which constitutes a measure of assent. In other words, the form of the message has captured not only the auditor’s attention but also his involvement, and assent to the form subtly, even subconsciously, invites assent to the proposition in the statement. Burke concludes that “[thus] we . . . establish the principle . . . [that] these rhetorical forms would involve ‘identification,’ first by inducing the auditor to participate in the form, as a ‘universal’ locus of appeal, and next by trying to include a partisan statement within the same pale of assent” (59). In their book *Power Persuasion: Moving an Ancient Art into the Media Age*, Mary Rose Williams and Martha D. Cooper suggest that “audiences have a strong psychological need to see form ‘played out’ or completed” (113). Thus by the skillful use of form, which builds psychological anticipation in the hearers’ minds and then gratifies it, the speaker can build audience participation, which leads to identification and assent to propositions.

**Mary Rose Williams and Martha D. Cooper**

The preceding paragraph references these authors in regard to the power of form to persuade. However, their treatise, *Power Persuasion*, contributes many insights to the study of persuasion and the ethical appeal in the contemporary context.
Comparison to Aristotelian Good Sense, Good Moral Character, and Goodwill

Whereas Aristotle proposes that the audience’s perception of *ethos* or character results from the rhetor’s portrayal of good sense, good moral character, and goodwill *within the specific speech performance,* Williams and Cooper submit that “not all contemporary research agrees that character only matters insofar as it is strategically exploited in the persuasive message itself” (87). Thus they agree with the classicist, Cicero, that the speaker’s past reputation is also a factor in the audience’s assessment of an orator’s credibility in the current rhetorical situation.

Somewhat troubling, in contrast to another classical tenet, these authors discovered from their research that reasoning from evidence and discussing both sides of an issue do not seem to aid the audience’s perception of competence (good sense) in a speaker. Another difference they point out is that good moral character has been reduced to a general sense of trust or trustworthiness in today’s contemporary world (90).

To Aristotle’s three personal-based characteristics of ethical appeal, Williams and Cooper add the personal characteristic of *dynamism,* which they relate to the speaker’s delivery and bearing, to an appearance of being “interesting, strong, aggressive and active” (91). Similarly, Martin E. P. Seligman, a psychologist and professor well-known for his bestseller, *Learned Optimism,* correlates winning presidential elections with the personal factor of “sounding optimistic.” With the help of one of his graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, Harold Zullow, Seligman analyzed nomination acceptance speeches by Democratic and Republican presidential candidates and found that
in the twenty-two presidential elections from 1900 through 1984, Americans chose the more optimistic-sounding candidate eighteen times [82 percent]. In all elections in which an underdog pulled off an upset, he was the more optimistic candidate. The margin of victory was very strongly related to the margin in pessrum\(^1\), with landslides won by candidates who were much more optimistic than their opponents. (192)

The two researchers went on to predict in the fall of 1988 that, based on the application of their optimism models to the candidate’s nomination speeches, Vice President George H.W. Bush would beat Governor Michael Dukakis by 9.2 percent in 1988. He won by 8.2 percent. Using the same modeling techniques to predict who would win the thirty-three Senate races in 1988, but applied in this case generally to speeches announcing their senatorial candidacies, they called 86 percent of the races correctly (197-198). Thus the appearance of personal dynamism, including its core element of can-do optimism, has proven ethical—and electoral—appeal.

**Symbols**

Earlier, it was noted that Burke characterizes the human being as “the symbol-using animal.” Williams and Cooper place most of Burke’s theories under their “symbolist perspective” of rhetoric and propose that

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\(^1\) Seligman coined “pessrum” to represent an analytical score of a candidate’s optimism-pessimism profile. It incorporates measures of pessimism and rumination (hence “pessrum”) as well as optimism and action-orientation. The higher the pessrum score, the worse the candidate’s style, that is, the lower his or her optimism index (189).
persuasion is the process by which we become motivated to act or believe in a particular way through our communication with others, as a product of our own human inclination to interact with symbols together with the form and structure of the symbolic messages to which we are exposed.

Symbols are words, objects, or actions that come to represent something else.” (108-109)

One of the best known symbols is the American flag, which represents many important ideals and remembrances central to our version of patriotism. For example, it calls to mind such diverse ideas as the millions who have served America, the Constitution, the principles of law, and liberty and equality, to name only a few. Further, they propose that identification, rhetorical form and verbal content (language), along with nonverbal symbols and constructed media images, all interact and comprise the very real “symbolic world” that exists side by side with the “empirical world” comprehended by human sensory perception. In the empirical world, “objects move, have texture, make noise and cause pain or ease hunger,” whereas in the symbolic world, “conceptual connections form the associations . . . [and] shape our human response to situations just as surely as do the physical and empirical connections.” Both of these worlds affect or provide inputs to the process by which the human mind determines reality. Moreover, an argument could be made that in today’s world of ideas and images bombarding human consciousness 24/7 from a competition-driven media coupled with near virtual reality, the importance of the symbolic world supersedes that of the empirical world in the thinking of many Americans (120).
Exploring nonverbal symbols further, Williams and Cooper cite research by scholar Ray Birdwhistell that 65 percent or more of meaning is the product of nonverbal elements of the conversation. They argue that nonverbal symbols like emblems and icons have developed conventionalized meanings. For example, the visual image of a mushroom cloud commonly symbolizes nuclear war. The authors also explain how symbols not only function “instrumentally,” such as the knife-and-fork sign for a restaurant in the airport, but they also “hold powerful potential for identification, . . . [that] evoke[s] powerful motives and interests,” such as the religious symbol of the crucifix or the political symbol of the Statute of Liberty. Based on a statement by Burke that “symbols are verbal parallels of experience” (qtd. in Williams and Cooper 162), these theorists maintain that “it is fair to add that symbols can also be nonverbal parallels of experience, both denoting and connoting meanings that serve as the basis for identification...for example, the well-known photograph of the fireman in Oklahoma city holding the burned infant who died in the explosion of the federal building there in 1995. . . .” Further, they submit that “many people may identify themselves as belonging to a particular generation, reference group or culture” through selective nonverbal symbols (162). For example, to an aging soldier of the Vietnam era, the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial in Washington, D.C., may connote honor to the dead and legitimacy and acceptance of the efforts of those who fought (161).

Perhaps “constructed images” are of the greatest impact among all symbols in today’s world. Williams and Cooper catalog the more predominant ones, ranging from the translation of “complicated statistics into bar graphs or pie charts” in PowerPoint presentations, to the episode of Ronald Reagan bringing a “copy of the several-thousand-
page federal budget to Congress to show them and the viewing public just how huge it was,” to the awesome variety of images, sounds, and words, radiating from computer graphics, filmed scenes, TV advertisements, animation, and mixed audio tracks. The authors argue that these messages are strategically designed to appeal to several senses simultaneously and hook the viewer with synthetic, manufactured images that “are believable because they seem realistic,” whether the TV ad with a “steaming cup of coffee” to which “dishwashing detergent is added so that when it is stirred it has that frothy, just-brewed look” or the carefully crafted political campaign TV spot showing voters applauding the candidate while upbeat music plays in the background, or the close-up shot of the model in the magazine whose face has been “airbrushed to eliminate any sign of wrinkles, blemishes or even skin pores.” Thus constructed images “alter reality to present more appealing effects” and persuaders use these fictitious realities to create identification with audiences who see or feel that their “interests, motives and values are re-presented in [these] symbolic acts.”

In effect, when the persuader fabricates images that strike a “responsive chord” that resonates with the viewer’s or listener’s experience, “then all the associations that accompany that experience can be invoked,” opening the door wide to multiple persuasive effects, such as conveying information, inducing moods, transferring the affect of the nonverbal element to the product or idea being discussed, and attracting particular target audiences. Williams and Cooper find that these practices that manufacture “reality-fictions” for ethical appeal are often in fact ethically questionable, because they distort
reality, subtly manipulate and heighten emotions, reduce human choice, and undermine respect for fundamental humanity (167-172).

Image Management

Building on the centrality of ethos to persuasion and the application of the specialized aspect of constructed images as symbols, Williams and Cooper set forth the principles of the modern day practice of image management, which is merely an attempt to construct or refurbish a speaker’s ethos and continually maintain and embellish it. Most commonly, public relations firms are employed for such objectives. Based on the work of social theorist Max Weber, the authors contend that society longs for heroes and messiahs and that the image management industry has responded to supply the demand. But all they can offer up are poor substitutes—“notables” who are famous for what they achieved (even that outcome is questionable in many cases)—well-known public figures or celebrities with manufactured images (95).

Next, based on the work of historian Daniel Boorstin, Williams and Cooper expound several qualities of these image-made personalities. First, the “media images are synthetic, the product of planning and strategic creation.” For example, although Ronald Reagan was naturally telegenic, his image handlers took great care to place him in only those “situations where his aptitude would appear in the best light”—clearly not a practice of transparency or authenticity (95).

Second, the “media images are believable from the audience’s point of view.” The authors give the example of the McDonalds commercial that featured basketball stars Larry Bird and Michael Jordan making “unbelievable” shots off a bridge and across a river. But
there is a thread of plausibility “because of the legendary athletic prowess on the court of both Bird and Jordan.” Image-producers create a contextual backdrop to the images that is at least partially if not significantly representative of the audience’s conceptions of values and expectations, and the artificial context acts as a “frame of reference” for identification with the portrayed individual or corporation and their messages. But these portraits are fictional—mere fabrications that are foisted on viewers—even though they may be anchored in audience conceptualizations of expected or plausible reality (95).

Third, “media images invite passivity and a sense of completeness.” The candidates or causes or organizations are pawned off as near perfect, bigger-than-life ideals while they are but fabled imitations of heroes of earlier ages. Yet their made-up images ask the audience to embrace the person or organization and their worldviews, to join with them “in great labors and sacrifice,” to vote for them, or to support the cause or buy the product without performing one’s own due diligence or critical analysis of the ideology, propositions, or value of what is offered.

Finally, Williams and Cooper propose that media images are vivid and concrete, often appealing to the senses. They are generally simplified, compared to the reality they are supposed to represent. Media images are supported by a catchy slogan or phrase. Perhaps most interesting of all, media images are ambiguous, capable of reinterpretation in new situations to prevent giving offense and to accommodate the changing needs of their creators. (95)
They cite the examples of product advertisements by Philip Morris and Nike that “present vivid and concrete images of rugged individualists or heartwarming community and family connections in order to suggest that the corporation represented embodies these characteristics” (95-96).

The authors conclude that “image management centers upon strategic choices by persuaders [that are] designed to enhance them as persuaders in [the] perceptions of their audience” (96). Whereas classical ethos features a rhetorical situation in which a speaker makes direct, specific ethical appeals in-person to an audience, image management portrays and communicates in general themes and with abstract values, which are frequently not clearly tied to specific proposals, and often does so without the direct presence of the one whose image is being managed. Thus image management adds a new dimension to the discursive development of ethos—a dimension that heightens the ability of the persuader to, on the one hand, help and benefit more people, or on the other hand, manipulate reality for personal, corporate, or political gain (96).

Charisma

“Charisma” may be a part of an authentic ethos. Or it may be intertwined with image management, as some contemporary, would-be heroes try to capitalize on nationally recognized events or accomplishments and ride a wave of fabricated images to charismatic status. Williams and Cooper associate charisma with ethos when they suggest that “the enormous persuasive power of charisma makes it an essential concept in contemporary studies of persuasion that begin with the classical concept of ethos” (94). They assert that history contains many examples of persuaders who had bigger-than-life influence, not
because of the position they occupied in specific institutions of power, but because of a strong or forceful personality coupled with unique situational opportunity. As examples of charismatic leaders, they offer Ronald Reagan, Adolph Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt, Lee Iacocca, General Douglas McArthur, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi. The authors hold that charismatic persuaders seem to be able to amass nontraditional “extraordinary” power and to instigate “wide-sweeping change in the social or institutional status quo.” However, as Williams and Cooper go on to show, “charisma is only charisma if others perceive it as such,” meaning the audience’s perception is ultimately deterministic (92).

Other Relevant Theories

Language Frames; Framing

Another aspect of language that contemporary researchers associate with rhetoric and persuasive appeal is the “language frame” or “framing.” Although I place it here in the organization of this work, framing is actually another subheading under Burke’s theory of terministic screens and it is a relative of the techniques of definition and redefinition.

In Don’t Think of an Elephant!, George Lakoff relates how in his introductory course in cognitive linguistics at the University of California at Berkley he asks his students to do the following exercise:

Don’t think of an elephant. Whatever you do, do not think of an elephant. I have never found a student who is able to do this. Every word, like elephant, evokes a frame, which can be an image or other kinds of knowledge. (3)
Don’t think of an elephant—it cannot be done, of course, and that’s the point. In order not to think of an elephant, you have to think of an elephant. Lakoff adds:

When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame. Richard Nixon found that out the hard way. While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on TV. He stood before the nation and said, “I am not a crook.” And everybody thought about him as a crook. (3)

In this exercise, Lakoff illustrates how a language frame works. We cannot not think of an elephant—once the word enters our consciousness. According to Glenn W. Smith, writing in The Politics of Deceit, a frame consists of a whole array of images, words, or concepts that appear in our conscious or subconscious minds when we hear a term. He suggests that frames are “like logical word associations, contexts that determine the meaning of a term. Frames are reference points in the communal imagination. Without them, terms would float free of context and meaning” (194-195).

Glenn Smith gives the example of the political term “tax relief,” and explains how the choice of the word “relief” is intended to impart a very precise, connotative meaning because it implies the presence of a victim (or someone who is afflicted), an evil villain who caused the affliction, and a good hero or rescuer who will save the afflicted victim. So when the term ‘tax relief’ is used, we immediately place it in a context that assigns to the taxpayer the role of victim, to tax proponents the role of evil villain and to the proponents of tax relief the role of hero. (195)
Framing the idea of a cut or reduction in taxes in this way tends to eliminate any consideration of the many critical benefits to citizens from the taxes they pay. It shows the power of framing to control the terms of debate.

Further, Smith points out how the principle of framing is the basis for many negative political attacks because they can “force the target of the attack to invoke the negative frame while denying it” (195). As an example, the author relates how in the 2004 election President Bush was put on the defensive, not by any real evidence that he did not complete his National Guard duty, but by mere questions and suppositions to that effect. He could not answer the questions without raising the negative implication, even though it was an unproven allegation. This tactic is a relative to definition for it acts to negatively define the opponent’s ethos, which can have the collateral effect of enhancing the proponent’s ethos in comparison.

Smith goes on to argue that two types of frames have become paramount in American political discourse: one, communal myths and legends coupled with the rituals by which we celebrate them and which bind us together as a people, and two, the organization of the family, which is superimposed metaphorically on the discourse of politics (196). The ethical appeal makes heavy use of both.

Frame #1—Myths and Ideographs: Cornerstones of Ethos

In his article “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” contemporary theorist Michael C. McGee discusses how shared ideographs help people make sense of the world and bond them together into a community with, at a minimum, a loose, common ideology, which he refers to as “public motives” (14). McGee lists key
American ideographs as freedom, liberty, the rule of law, trial by jury, right of privacy, freedom of speech and religion, and the like. They are similar to Weaver’s and Burke’s “ultimate” terms. He says this vocabulary forms “the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology” while adding that myths are often wrapped around these ideographs (7). McGee gives the following definition of an ideograph:

An ideograph is an ordinary-language term found in political discourse. It is a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal. It warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable. (15)

McGee adds that “each member of the community is socialized, conditioned, to the vocabulary of ideographs as a prerequisite for ‘belonging’ to the society.” Finally, he argues that politicians often use the vocabulary of ideographs to provide a persuasive link between rhetoric and ideology or to conceal the latter by the former in political discourse (7).

Craig Smith says these specialized symbols or ideographs “ground public storytelling” and are well-known to the vast majority of the public. He emphasizes that ideographs are “pieces of sacred text taken from our civic religion.” To McGee’s list he adds ideals and values like the right to vote, equal protection under the law, free enterprise, and the American dream. Based on Smith’s premises, speakers attempt to align the ethical appeal of their communications to these ideographs in order to persuade a wider group of
people to embrace their causes. Conversely, offending the values represented in the ideographs tends to cause a loss of support (23).

Turning to the related concept of myths, Craig Smith relates how rhetoric emerged in myth and narrative storytelling in ancient cultures. He quotes Walter Fisher who explains that myths are powerful because they embody “‘symbolic actions [which] have a sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them’” (qtd. in Craig Smith 23). In other words, Smith says, “stories are adapted to people’s values and then reconstitute that people into a public—a coherent audience with fairly consistent beliefs, a coherent audience that can deal with the absurdities of the world.” Smith argues that the public always needs the social crutch of some mythology to live by—the only question is whose mythology will prevail (23).

Looking deeper at the operation of myths, Smith emphatically asserts that “rhetoric can remake reality and recreate a sense of publicness because it maintains the power of myths. He adds that “presenting a narrative of events is important to the message one wishes to convey.” He relates the example of how, after months of testimony in 1996 in the Whitewater case, the investigating committee issued two reports, one by Republicans and one by Democrats, each with its own story or narrative account of what happened, the Republican one denigrated First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton while the Democratic one exonerated her. Smith submits it this way:

Republicans believed the evidence demonstrated that First Lady Hillary Clinton had instructed her aides to cover up her involvement in Whitewater, while Democrats wove a story that placed the First Lady above suspicion. . .
In the Republican story, the First Lady was identified with powerful and manipulative archetypal women such as Lady MacBeth or the Queen in the fairy tale *Snow White*. In the Democratic story, the First Lady was identified with abused and misunderstood archetypal women such as Joan of Arc and Eleanor Roosevelt. (23-24)

Smith observes that “the public was free to interpret each story as it saw fit.” Whether either contains a measure of truth and fiction and are, therefore, part myth and part reality, this account is a good example of how mythmaking occurs in American politics and how myth is often tapped for the purposes of identification and *ethical appeal*. Frequently, public spectacle is involved in the creation of public myths as well. Arguably, in the instances of the highly orchestrated state funerals of Presidents Kennedy and Reagan, families and proponents wanted to turn these two men into larger-than-life legends, some for personal motives, others for partisan political motives.

*Frame #2—George Lakoff: Family-Based Metaphors Adapted for Political Language*

George Lakoff applies cognitive linguistics to political behavior in order to add another dimension of understanding about how politicians build identification and connection with voters. In *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, he explains that he “studies how people conceptualize the world. . . . [and his theory is] concerned with issues of worldview, that is, with everyday conceptualization, reasoning, and language. . . . how we conceptualize our everyday lives and how we think and talk about them” (3). He defines a conceptual metaphor as “a conventional way of conceptualizing one domain of experience in terms of another, often subconsciously” (4).
For example, an argument about balancing the federal budget may be couched in terms of a metaphor: “just as a family’s budget must be balanced, so must a nation’s,” which is a commonplace way to conceptually think and reason about this topic (3-4).

This example segues into a key Lakoff premise: that the “Nation as Family metaphor is what links conservative and liberal worldviews to family-based moralities” (154). Lakoff breaks it down as follows:

The nation is a family.

The government is a parent.

The citizens are the children.

In another book, Don’t Think of an Elephant!, Lakoff points out that that we have “Founding Fathers,” “Daughters of the Revolution,” and we “send ‘our sons’ to war” (5). Picking back up in Moral Politics, he explains that the “Nation as Family” metaphor provides a means for people to reason about governance of the nation on the basis of what they can easily perceive about approaches to governance as exhibited in two different family models of parenting children, each of which is based on different moral systems.

Lakoff associates conservative political ideology with the Strict Father model of parenting, and its related morality system, which features: the traditional nuclear family that revolves around the father as head, provider, protector, and authority, and the mother as upholding the father’s authority. Self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority are the crucial behaviors a child must learn. Competition and the pursuit of self-interest are encouraged; by applying self-discipline to become self-reliant in the pursuit of self-interest in competition against others is how young people become mature, moral
adults. Survival is a matter of winning in competition. Mature children have to sink or swim by themselves; they are on their own; parents don’t meddle. The Strict Father model could be summarized as a family in which an authoritarian father exercises dominance (an aspect of competitiveness) and expects his children to learn to do what is right and to compete and win, and to live on their own by embodying these approaches when they reach adulthood.

In contrast, Lakoff likens liberals to the Nurturant Parent model and its related morality system, which features a family of preferably two parents, but perhaps only one; if two, the parents share household responsibilities. Open, two-way, mutually respectful communication is crucial. Parents explain to children why their decisions serve the cause of protection and nurturance. Proper questioning of parents by children is positive, since children need to learn why their parents do what they do, and since all family members should participate in important decisions. Responsible parents, of course, make the ultimate decisions and that must be clear. Children become responsible, self-disciplined, and self-reliant through being cared for and respected, and through caring for others. The principal goal of nurturance is for children to be fulfilled and happy in their lives and to become nurturant themselves. A fulfilling life is assumed to be, in significant part, a nurturant life, one committed to family and community responsibility. When children are respected, nurtured, and communicated with from birth, they gradually enter into a lifetime relationship of mutual respect, communication, and caring with their parents. The Nurturant Parent model could be summarized as a family in which the parents are authoritative but approach each other and their children on the basis of cooperation,
empathy, understanding, and mutual concern, and they expect their children to learn and exhibit the same approach to life with each other, their parents, and others while they are growing up and when they reach adulthood.

Before proceeding, it is useful to stop and think about the frames activated by the two terms: strict father and nurturant parent. Given the historical acculturation of parental role models, the term for liberals, “nurturant parent,” may seem weaker to many and more difficult to identify with or imagine than “strict father,” which perhaps creates a disadvantage for liberals before they get out of the starting gate.²

In this system, Lakoff lays out the theoretical development that ties in the areas of moral action and corresponding model citizens for both the conservative and liberal worldviews. He translates these family values into morality systems that politicians tap into not only to define their worldviews but, more importantly, to select the language with which to communicate them to the populace. Matching the right language to the particular microsegment of the population targeted is important as well. In Don’t Think of an Elephant!, Lakoff relates how it is not just conservatives who subscribe to the strict father family model of parenting; in fact, many people move back and forth between strict father and nurturant parent in different areas of their lives. For example, he explains how

² None of this is to argue, however, that either the strict father or the nurturant parent model is always best for parenting every child in every family situation, even as many citizens recognize that neither of the polar positions of the Republican and Democratic parties are always best for America. Indeed, a third alternative or middle way or centrist position may offer the more optimum solution in both family and civil government.
Reagan knew that blue-collar workers who were nurturant in their union politics were often strict fathers at home. He used political metaphors that were based on the home and family, and got them to extend their strict father way of thinking from the home to politics. . . . The goal is to activate your model in the people in the middle. . . . [who] have both models, used regularly in different parts of their lives. (21)

Many would argue that common sense dictates that people will make decisions and voting choices based on some rational analysis of their self interest. However, Lakoff insists that

people do not necessarily vote their self-interest. They vote their identity. They vote their values. They vote for who they identify with. . . . It is not that people never care about their self-interest. But they vote their identity. . . . It is a serious mistake to assume that people are simply always voting their self-interest. (19)

Lakoff’s precept of identity parallels Burke’s identification and both are linked primarily to the persuasive appeal of ethos and to a lesser extent to pathos, whereas determination of self-interest requires more of the analytical, cerebral logos. For the past twenty-five years or longer, conservatives have worked diligently to master this aspect of political strategy; hence their emphasis on the ethical appeal, especially the framing of positions in the language of family and moral values.

Issue analysis is not the focus of this paper; my purpose is only to recognize what Lakoff’s system portends for the operation of ethos in persuasion. Lakoff argues that
conservatives have been successful in framing the national metaphor as the strict father model, which supports the operation of conservative ideology. He holds that liberals, on the other hand, have failed to effectively frame the moral basis of their ideology. This is a key reason, he asserts, why conservatives as a whole have been more persuasive recently than liberals and hold majority power in government.

Based on the theories of ethos already expounded, the practice of framing most political issues in terms of an underlying moral system ties closely to the ethical appeal. To align to such a moral system, a conservative leader must portray an ethos of character, authority, and discipline, that is, a strict, moral person ("strict father"), and must use the language of moral values, especially family values, to frame all debate. When he does, he produces identification at multiple levels, including connection at the subconscious conceptual level based on these deeply embedded beliefs. Thus the appearance of moral character and the skillful use of language frames go hand in hand to persuade the audience to embrace the political speaker and to accept his propositions for governing the country—sometimes without questioning—even when, at times, contrary to their own best interests.

Bruce E. Gronbeck—The Electronic Presidency Raises the Bar on Ethos

In the essay “The Presidency in the Age of Secondary Orality,” in Beyond The Rhetorical Presidency, Bruce E. Gronbeck argues that a major shift in the treatment of presidential character has occurred hand-in-hand with the development of what he calls “the electronic presidency.” Central to this premise is his concept of the “age of secondary orality.” Gronbeck acknowledges Walter Ong as the one who originally characterized this current era as the age of secondary orality, and then Gronbeck observes that:
the notion of secondary orality suggests that our electronic public sphere has restored some of the characteristics of ancient oral culture. We are not talking about actual oral transactions, of course, but virtual intimacy, a verbal-visual-acoustic construction of a sense of conversation . . . a par-social interaction. Ong's metaphor of secondary orality usefully captures what has happened to the American presidency; although not actually oral in the sense of face-to-face communication, our political conversations have the feel of face-to-faceness, and our televised political spectacles are constructed to give the electorate a virtual presence—a ticket to what looks like a front-row seat to the political history of our times. (35)

In other words, the medium of television brings the president, whatever presidential duties he may be doing, virtually into the family rooms of Americans, where he can convey messages directly to citizens and they can observe his persona, hear his words, and see carefully prepared images ("photo shoots") of his behavior. Of course, this facility does not apply to radio speeches and other communications media that are not televised.

Gronbeck holds that the multi-mediated world has remade or at least drastically altered the dynamics of American politics, from the first "radio broadcast of gavel-to-gavel coverage of the party conventions" in 1924, to the 1952 party conventions at which Walter Cronkite popularized the concept of the television commentator, from the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates and the 1963 coverage of Kennedy's assassination and funeral and the civil rights march on Washington, to the highly glamorized convention films of Reagan, Clinton and the Bushes. He adds that the media seems to be destroying the symbolic distance
between the president and the people, which tends to humanize the president (whoever is in office) and thereby to weaken his political power. He likens this situation to how Dorothy "discovered the mundaneness of the Wizard [which] destroyed his ability to govern Oz" (31-34, 39-40).

The response from the handlers of several presidents has been to tightly orchestrate the president's image-making opportunities and to make full use of the potential of constructed images mixed with other symbols to infuse the full range of sense perception, similar to what was discussed earlier under the heading of symbols. Gronbeck suggests that political rhetoric in our time is multimediated in that all three codes [ocular, verbal and phonic] contain signs that taken together or agglomerated become the meanings upon which we act. Unstated propositions—but propositions nonetheless—riddle our political environment. Meaning making is a multichannel activity. . . . [Therefore,] depiction rather than wordsmithing is now the main task of the president's key aides. . . . The ability of leaders to control all three channels in today's mediated world is absolutely essential to political survival. (42-43)

So what does this have to do with ethos? Gronbeck suggests that Americans have too much information about everything, including problems at all levels of government. They cannot make sense of it all. He concludes that "gridlock" characterizes our times and attributes it not only to the "pigheadedness of political parties playing zero-sum games but also the multiplication of centers of information and expertise that feed their analyses and solutions into the public sphere via the mass media." He goes on to say that "people may
not know what’s what, but at least they know what’s right [emphasis mine].” Sensing this, politicians have taken steps to condense problems and their solutions to simplistic moral and patriotic themes such as articulation of family-value issues, a conclusion aligned to Lakoff’s family-morality frames. On this basis, Gronbeck claims that much of American politics has been calibrated down to the moral and the patriotic—which is the realm of ethos. He asserts that:

The word ethos itself stand[s] for both community as well as individual character [and it] perfectly captures the primary criterion for presidential success in the age of secondary orality. If the electorate cannot comprehend the multiple facets of issues, it has little choice but to select leaders on the basis of character. Logos has been disempowered by the complexities of the information age. Pathos has always been distrusted as a basis for political decision. Ethos is the one element of the classic trilogy left. Character can mediate . . . cutting through the mountains of information to find the krisis, or point of decision, that allows action to occur. (44)

Continuing, the author holds, as does Aristotle, that in presidential rhetoric ethos is more than reputation—it is a performance that dynamically portrays the key characteristics of ethos. He refers to this facet as the “performative dimension” of presidential rhetoric, which is a key part of an expanded context of rhetorical discourse in politics (44-45).

Thus Gronbeck hypothesizes the “centrality” of ethos in presidential rhetoric and provides convincing evidence for this important claim. However, his dismissal of pathos as a presidential tool of persuasion conflicts with the hypothesis, which will be discussed in
Chapter 3, that Bush’s rhetorical strategy includes a significant measure of the pathetical appeal (it should be noted that Gronbeck’s essay was written before Bush became president). Moreover, his assumption-based premise that the average citizen is incapable of grasping the significance of both sides of the major issues of the day, meaning they cannot be trusted to participate in democratic choice-making beyond some broad identification with an abstract moral-connotative bloc basically argues for a totalitarian or at best a totalizing oligarchy or duopoly party system of government with a cosmetic face of ethos pinned on it—not a democratic one.

C. A LIMITED SURVEY OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF PATHOS

Although I focus predominantly on how rhetors wield the appeal of ethos, the pathetic appeal or pathos is often intertwined with ethos as well in the process of persuasion. This section provides a brief discussion of relevant concepts of pathos.

When Aristotle catalogues the persuasive appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos in the *Rhetoric*, he emphasizes that the effective speaker should use these three modes together to persuade the audience:

\[
\ldots \text{the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief [logos]; he must also make his own character look right [ethos] and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind [pathos]. (1377b)}
\]

Aristotle explains that pathos, the pathetical appeal, is the appeal to the emotions, of putting the audience in the right emotional state of mind:
The man who is to be in command of [the means of persuasion] ... must . . . be able . . . to understand the emotions . . . to know their causes and the way in which they are excited. (1356a)

...The Emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites. (1378a)

Aristotle lists and discusses a series of emotions, one of which is “fear”:

To turn next to Fear, what follows will show the things and persons of which, and the states of mind in which, we feel afraid. Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future, . . . And even these only if they appear not remote but so near as to be imminent. . . . From this definition it will follow that fear is caused by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain. Hence the very indications of such things are terrible, making us feel that the terrible thing itself is close at hand; the approach of what is terrible is just what we mean by “danger.” (1382a)

Aristotle points out that in order for some anticipated event or matter to truly make one afraid or fearful of danger, it must be perceived as 1) terribly destructive or harmful, and 2) near at hand or imminent. It is equally important to point out his hypothesis that “the very indications of such things are terrible, making us feel that the terrible thing itself is close at hand.” This psychological tendency provides an opportunity for a manipulative
rhetor to fire the audience’s emotions into a state of fear by skillfully heaping on gruesome depictions of impending danger and doom and gloom that are false, exaggerated, not imminent, or partially or wholly framed out of context.

Echoing Aristotle’s tenet, contemporary theorists Williams and Cooper argue that persuaders who wish to move their audience to feel fear must not only create images of pain or destruction for their audience, but they must also make these dangers seem likely to happen. They must make their audience members feel that they are likely to be victims of these events . . . that these unpleasant images represent a very real and likely danger. . . . (68).

These authors incorporate modern research in psychology into the discursive development of pathos. They describe how “equilibrium theory” proposes that when people experience a cognition that is unpleasant or uncomfortable, they will naturally take action to eliminate the source of tension, thereby reestablishing equilibrium. They assert that:

The general strategic principle . . . [for] persuaders . . . is as follows:

Persuaders can influence their audiences by first creating cognitive imbalance. . . . Then the persuaders can link their own proposals with the reduction of that inconsistency. (69)

Building on this basic concept of equilibrium theory, Williams and Cooper expound a theorem called “cognitive dissonance,” which has the ability to answer more specific questions about how audience members respond to emotional appeals. Regarding this behavioral model, they propose that
it is not enough to create the tension of cognitive dissonance in an audience. In addition, cognitive dissonance theory advises the persuader to anticipate other possible means by which an audience could reduce dissonance—other than changing their attitude or behavior in accordance with the persuader’s purposes—and to take steps to neutralize or eliminate these alternative means of tension reduction. For example, if a particular audience is apt to attempt to reduce dissonance by discrediting or derogating the source [persuader], the persuader must devote extra attention to shoring up her perceived credibility [ethos]. If a particular audience might be likely to reduce dissonance by deliberately not perceiving the discrepant message . . . then the persuader must take care to be clear and unambiguous in the presentation of the case. If a persuader anticipates that an audience might attempt to avoid the tension of cognitive dissonance by treating the course of tension as relatively unimportant, the persuader must take care to stress the importance of the issue, showing why it cannot be dismissed or ignored. (73)

In these passages, Williams and Cooper theorize how peoples’ psychological motivations and behaviors can be affected, even controlled, through a rhetorical process that, first, employs emotional appeals to create a cognitive state of disequilibrium, and then applies one or more of the persuasive appeals to frame the persuader’s tension-removal mechanism as the one and only solution.
Summary: Theories of Analysis

This exposition of fundamental theories of ethos and, to a lesser extent, pathos, from classical and contemporary rhetoricians speaks to three critical elements. First, it defines what ethos is and identifies the main elements and techniques by which it is manifest, how it developed discursively from ancient times, and how it is used in the process of persuasion within a rhetorical situation in the postmodern world. A formal definition of ethos would list the following characteristics. In the process of persuasion, ethos represents the totality of a speaker’s multiplex of characteristics, whether genuine or artificial, intentional or unintentional. It encompasses her known reputation from the past, although she strives to make her present, audience-adapted persona of character, competence, credibility, and goodwill—the performative dimension—pervasive and exclusive. It includes her audience-adapted message, with a plethora of persuasive techniques to portray her desired persona and to produce identification with the audience, at both the conscious and subconscious levels. All of these characteristics are conveyed through language and images or through other symbolic actions in order to exert an “ethical” appeal that frames and influences the subsequent choices of the audience in her favor.

However, although the speaker crafts a persona and presents an ethos that may be composed of real and fabricated elements, it is the judges, the audience, who ultimately must assess what that ethos is, what it means to them, and whether it is credible. Further, the audience determines, based on both their perception of the whole rhetorical situation and their attitudes, beliefs and values, whether to embrace the speaker’s message and act
on his requests, either because they consider them reasonably true to reality, or beneficial, or simply for reasons of identity and affinity. Ultimately, the nature of the interactive rhetorical situation is inherently dynamic, organic, ever-changing.

The second vital aspect speaks to how the rhetor’s motives influence her as she confronts the array of speaker choice presented by the rhetorical situation. This essential facet deals with the moral and ethical questions raised about how a speaker uses rhetoric strategically in her choices of ends and means in persuasion. Are choices of ends based on a narrow, self-serving, corporate-serving, institution-serving, political-party-serving ideology? Is a fictional persona portrayed, serving to veneer the real ethos, motives, and agenda of the rhetor? Are choices of means pragmatic and situational for mere appearance sake, that is, Aristotelian, with little genuine regard for universal principles? Or do they reflect the ideals, espoused by Quintilian and implied by Burke, Williams, Cooper, and others, of the ethical orator who is, first, authentic and virtuous and, second, a skilled speaker, that is, the good person who speaks well? The former allows the worst of human nature to predominate and impose a rhetoric of manipulation; the latter bridles human nature so that rhetoric is subservient to moral ends and means.

The period of the past fifty years has been called the age of the rhetoric of manipulation because of the predominance of speakers/leaders/sellers, who, using advanced knowledge of psychology and rhetoric along with techniques of public relations and constructed visual images, often try to dictate the ends and the means of rhetoric within human interactions, meaning that they make the choices, they set the agenda, they impose their worldview, they entice the purchase of their products. In other words, they
drive a process that dominates and exploits the rhetorical situation to the advantage of their personal, ideological, institutional, or commercial interests—while they attempt to deplete or take away the free will, critical analysis, and independent choice of the audience. When this approach is pursued, the result is a rhetorical situation purposely manipulated for speaker/leader/seller dominance and advantage! Such behavior arises largely from the age-old paradigm of win-lose in human interaction. In other words, in order for me/us to win, for my/our selfish personal or political advantage, for my/our power, control, and accumulation of prestige and wealth—you/yours must lose—and manipulation of the means is justifiable in order to achieve these ends. When persuaders choose to follow this pattern, customarily they construct an ethos of character, credibility, and win-win goodwill as a façade to enhance the persuasive effect.

In contrast, the authentic, virtuous individual who speaks well would seek to create openness and mutuality through discourse. Her ethos would be genuine, authentic. Her performative dimension would stress actual results as well as the rationales for goals for the future. Her agenda would be clearly communicated, for doing so would advance the participation of all in the work of promoting the common welfare, whether family, workplace, community, or government. A key goal would be to inform and educate the audience so they can participate effectively in the process of persuasion and decision-making, and politically, in the larger process of democracy. Courage and capable leadership would be required to build consensus based on reality and hard analysis among difficult and uncertain courses of action instead of relying on myth and rhetorical manipulation. In such a rhetoric, the authentic speaker would encourage the audience to
engage in sound critical analysis of each viable option for personal and public choice-making, while working to promote consensus as to what constitutes the common welfare. The rhetorical ethical appeal of the authentic, virtuous man or woman emanates from such moral motives and ethics.

Thirdly, this study explains how pathos may be combined with ethos to heighten the persuasive appeal. Specifically, it elucidates how a leader can frame an appeal to a negative emotion, in this case fear, as a means to create cognitive dissonance in the audience’s minds and thereby prepare them to actively or passively accept the leader’s proposed solutions.
CHAPTER 3

Applied Analysis: The Rhetorical Ethos of President George W. Bush

In this section, by applying the theoretical principles and techniques from Chapter 2, I analyze the rhetorical ethos portrayed by President Bush and how he adjusted his rhetoric after 9/11 to use pathos to set up his ethos. For this investigation, I choose several of his campaign and presidential speeches that set forth his primary rhetorical personae and major policy pronouncements. Regarding the latter, Bob Woodward in Plan of Attack affirms how “policy was made in speeches” in the Bush administration through the process of “[circulating] drafts . . . ironing out details and reaching consensus” (216). Woodward offers this conclusion in the context of Bush’s state of the union speeches—all of which I have included in the sample. The selected speeches fall in the category of “deliberative rhetoric” and the president generally intended them for consumption, directly or indirectly, by the mass American audience. In addition, I take a brief look into the communications strategies of the Bush administration.

A. Bush Speeches

To aid the reader’s orientation to actual historical events and to how Bush’s rhetoric has evolved over the past five years, I have ordered the analysis chronologically, starting with the oldest Bush speech.
Bush Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention, August 3, 2000

The first rhetorical element exhibited in this speech is the creation of the persona of Bush as “a compassionate conservative,” a theme that he stresses repeatedly in the 2000 election campaign.

Single moms struggling to feed the kids and pay the rent. Immigrants starting a hard life in a new world. Children without fathers in neighborhoods where gangs seem like friendship, where drugs promise peace, and where sex, sadly, seems like the closest thing to belonging.

Bush commences the construction of the persona of “compassionate conservative” by tapping the power of pathos. With words like “single moms,” “immigrants,” and “children without fathers,” he creates images of the downtrodden, of those who are struggling, of those who need a hand of compassion. In addition to describing their general circumstance in life, he pours forth more emotional appeal by referencing “gangs,” “drugs,” and abuse of “sex,” intensifying the negative image of these unfortunate people, painting a scene of near desperation. He works to place the audience in an emotional state of deep concern, caring, even troubled, to the point of cognitive disequilibrium.

When these problems aren't confronted, it builds a wall within our nation. On one side are wealth and technology, education and ambition. On the other side of the wall are poverty and prison, addiction and despair. And, my fellow Americans, we must tear down that wall.

Against the backdrop of the sad, desperate scene and with the audience in an edgy emotional state, Bush creates another image, a wall of inequality and injustice, which
figuratively blocks the unfortunate from escaping their plight. With this device, Bush brings the emotional appeal to a peak—he has put the audience in a receptive frame of mind to believe that he is empathetic to people’s needs. Now he implies that he is the man with the plan for tearing down this wall. This metaphor echoes President Reagan’s famous statement: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” during the cold war against communism. Of course, Bush’s admiration of Ronald Reagan is well-known. It is unclear whether this phrase in Bush’s speech was intended to copy Reagan’s metaphor for explanatory purposes or to build identification by association with Reagan, or both. Nevertheless, the point is that the pathos is intertwined with and sets up several elements of ethical appeal: decrying inequality and showing empathy are associated with goodwill toward the audience, as is the inclusive “we”; describing the problem (the wall) and asserting that it needs to be torn down shows leadership and use of authority to effect change; and the potential identification that accrues from audience connections to Reagan.

Big government is not the answer. But the alternative to bureaucracy is not indifference. It is to put conservative values and conservative ideas into the thick of the fight for justice and opportunity. This is what I mean by compassionate conservatism. And on this ground we will govern our nation.

There is a lot going on in these few sentences. With two empty words “big” and “bureaucracy,” Bush dismisses all the vast capabilities of the federal government from a direct role in helping citizens that are in sore need. The words are empty or devoid of meaning because no explanation, no rationale, no evidence, are given for the conclusion.
Next, after having hooked the audience to believe he is compassionate, in the italicized words in the quote, he uses a terministic screen, specifically the technique of transformational redefinition, à la Craig Smith, to create an entirely new meaning of the concept “compassion,” which is simply to use the power of the presidency to spread conservative values and ideas. Bush is establishing new boundaries and new approaches for how the country will be governed—the conservative ideology of limited government—rhetorically supported by an *ethos* of compassion.

We will support the heroic work of homeless shelters and hospices, food pantries and crisis pregnancy centers—people reclaiming their communities block-by-block and heart-by-heart. . . . Government cannot do this work. . . . Yet government can take the side of these groups, helping the helper, encouraging the inspired. My administration will give taxpayers new incentives to donate to charity. . . .

Bush reveals more of the plan, which calls for individuals and communities to provide the help and services needed by the less fortunate. He induces the American audience with emotional appeals to accept his approach by referring to them as “heroic” people who reclaim “their communities block by block,” which conjures up an image of heroic soldiers at war. And he adds the phrase, “inspired helpers,” which conveys the idea of divine inspiration, engendering an identification appeal to religious constituents. Government’s role in the work of compassion, he declares, is to provide tax incentives for private donations.
Bush continues to transform the meaning of compassion:

Instead, we must usher in an era of responsibility. In a responsibility era, each of us has important tasks—work that only we can do. Each of us is responsible . . . to love and guide our children, and help a neighbor in need. Synagogues, churches and mosques are responsible . . . not only to worship but to serve. . . . And to lead this nation to a responsibility era, a president himself must be responsible.

In the persona of the strict father of the nation, Bush exercises authority by telling the citizens of the nation that they as well as religious institutions need to be responsible. Both should do the tasks or work that only they can do, implying that the government cannot do that work; instead, they must get out there and compete and win the rewards for themselves and serve and help others. When the audience hears the carefully framed language from several of the quoted passages above, the conceptual metaphor of the strict father-and-obedient children and all of its related branches of thoughts are triggered in their conscious and subconscious minds. For those in the audience who value the strict father model of parenting, which Lakoff shows can extend well beyond conservatives, identification and persuasion are generated.

Looking at the big picture again, what started out as compassion has been redefined to personal responsibility. And Bush has implicated responsibility, and thereby competence, as well as authority to the make-up of his ethos.

It is interesting to note that in succeeding speeches early in his first term as president, such as his “President Promotes Compassionate Conservatism” speech in San
Jose, Calif., on April 30, 2002, Bush is quick to emphasize that his brand of compassionate conservatism does not mean “sink or swim” responsibility. If the electorate were to perceive it as such, it could draw criticism; therefore Bush attempts to create a favorable interpretation.

Returning to Bush’s convention acceptance speech, my second area of focus is the construction of a persona of a man as a strong leader with character, optimism, and resolve.

I am proud to have Dick Cheney at my side. He is a man of integrity and sound judgment, who has proven that public service can be noble service. America will be proud to have a leader of such character to succeed Al Gore as Vice President of the United States. . . . Our current president [Bill Clinton] embodied the potential of a generation. So many talents. So much charm. Such great skill. But, in the end, to what end? So much promise, to no great purpose. . . . They had their chance. They have not led. We will. . . . [America’s founders’] highest hope, as Robert Frost described it, was “to occupy the land with character.” And that, 13 generations later, is still our goal . . . to occupy the land with character. . . . And so, when I put my hand on the Bible, I will swear to not only uphold the laws of our land, I will swear to uphold the honor and dignity of the office to which I have been elected, so help me God.

In this excerpt, Bush stresses the ethical appeal of good moral character, ascribing righteousness, integrity, honor, and dignity to himself and vice presidential candidate Dick
Cheney, while at the same time seizing the opportunity to deploy the techniques of definition and framing to make Clinton and Gore, the latter his opponent, sound like unethical, untrustworthy politicians who abused the public trust. In fact, he uses the word character seven times in the speech, and words of similar meaning many more times. In the last sentence quoted in this excerpt, he tries to nail the lid on Clinton’s, and by extension, Gore’s, political coffins by strongly implying that unlike Clinton-Gore (here he uses the negative rhetoric of “division”), he would bring honor and dignity back to the White House (here he uses the positive rhetoric of “identification”).

Bush stresses another aspect of his strong leader persona:

Our opportunities are too great, our lives too short, to waste this moment. So tonight we vow to our nation. We will seize this moment of American promise. We will use these good times for great goals. We will confront the hard issues—threats to our national security, threats to our health and retirement security—before the challenges of our time become crises for our children.

... In Midland, Texas, where I grew up, the town motto was "the sky is the limit" and we believed it. ... Optimistic. Impatient with pretense.

... I believe the presidency -- the final point of decision in the American government—was made for great purposes. It is the office of Lincoln's conscience and Teddy Roosevelt's energy and Harry Truman's integrity and Ronald Reagan's optimism.
In these comments, Bush portrays the impression of a can-do strong leader who wants to lead America to make quantum leaps forward. Incorporating Seligman’s tenet that the appearance of optimism is decisive in winning elections, Bush tries to appear as though he is bubbling over with exuberance. He repeats the word “optimism” twice and uses its kin, “energy,” as well as other words and phrases like “opportunities,” “great goals,” “seize the moment,” “the sky is the limit,” “impatient,” “great purposes,” and “point of decision,” which help paint the picture of positiveness, vigor, and decisiveness. He includes the referential value of Teddy Roosevelt, the exuberant, big-thinking 26th president, whom Bob Woodward in Plan of Attack describes as one of Bush’s role models for his own presidential style (52). Further, Bush emphasizes his resolve with the phrase “we vow . . .” and repeating several times “we will. . . .” Woodward adds that “little [is] more appealing to President Bush than showing resolve” (81). And by alluding to “Lincoln’s conscience” and “Harry Truman’s integrity,” Bush concurrently maintains the emphasis on character.

Thus this speech constitutes one of Bush’s many attempts to build, using audience-adapted language, a persona of the strong leader who possesses good character, an optimistic view of the country’s possibilities, and the resolve to demand results.

President Bush’s Address to the Joint Session of Congress, February 27, 2001

This address is the first major deliberative speech, that is, one that addresses the legislative agenda, given by Bush as president, because his January inaugural would be classified as a ceremonial speech. This Joint Session address is a foundational speech of the Bush presidency in that he lays out themes and proposals of legislation for the entire
first term; therefore I devote the broadest analysis to it. Since the Congress invited Bush to address them in the chamber of the U. S. House of Representatives regarding his first-year budget, it is virtually the same as a State of the Union speech (which is not given in the first year of the term of a newly elected president). The immediate audience is the senators and representatives present, but the real audience is the American people watching by television.

He begins as follows:

I want to thank so many of you who have accepted my invitation to come to the White House to discuss important issues. We're off to a good start. I will continue to meet with you and ask for your input. You have been kind and candid, and I thank you for making a new President feel welcome. . . . I hope America is noticing the difference, because we're making progress. Together, we are changing the tone in the Nation's Capital. And this spirit of respect and cooperation is vital, because, in the end, we will be judged not only by what we say or how we say it, we will be judged by what we're able to accomplish.

In these opening remarks, Bush follows the classical pattern when he employs the ethical appeal of goodwill to conciliate the immediate audience as well as the entirety of the American public watching on television. Words and expressions like “thank you for making a new President feel welcome,” “we’re off to a good start,” “you have been kind,” “together, we are changing the tone,” and “spirit of respect and cooperation,” all work to reduce any animosity or illwill and to imply cooperativeness and likability. In the last
sentence, however, he moves quickly to incorporate competence when he asserts that “we will be judged by what we're able to accomplish.” In addition, this sentence exhibits authority, as Bush puts more edge into the discourse when he signals that he will use his office to push a legislative agenda.

Following his introduction, Bush turns to budget issues:

Year after year in Washington, budget debates seem to come down to an old, tired argument: on one side, those who want more government, regardless of the cost; on the other, those who want less government, regardless of the need. We should leave those arguments to the last century, and chart a different course.

Government has a role, and an important role. Yet, too much government crowds out initiative and hard work, private charity and the private economy. Our new governing vision says government should be active, but limited; engaged, but not overbearing. And my budget is based on that philosophy.

In the first paragraph of this passage, Bush adroitly sizes up the history of budget debates in Washington and demonstrates the ethical appeal of good sense and competence, both in his easy-to-understand assessment and in his call for moving beyond such stalemates. At the same time, in the combination of the two paragraphs, he skillfully sets up what what Craig Smith describes as transcendental redefinition and what Burke refers to as the concept of pontificating thirds, that is, Bush makes an authoritative statement, without any substantive rationale, that presumes to fairly deny the two polar positions in
order to overcome division, and constricts the debate to a supposed third alternative that he decrees for the budget issue. But close analysis reveals that, in effect, Bush has denied only one of the polarities, the liberal position, and that the third alternative is merely the second polarity, the conservative ideological budget position, shrouded in some new, ambiguous language. It is a clever ploy to gain acceptance for the original conservative objective.

Also, in the last paragraph of the above quote, Bush tenderizes the ideological meat with the loaded ideographs of “hard work,” “private charity,” and “the private economy,” usage that would tend to build identification with most Americans.

[My budget] is reasonable, and it is responsible. It meets our obligations, and funds our growing needs. We increase spending next year for Social Security and Medicare, and other entitlement programs, by $81 billion. We've increased spending for discretionary programs by a very responsible 4 percent, above the rate of inflation. My plan pays down an unprecedented amount of our national debt. And then, when money is still left over, my plan returns it to the people who earned it in the first place.

In this passage, Bush returns quickly to wield once again the tool of *ethos*, coupled with *logos*, as evidenced by the use of descriptive language like “reasonable,” “responsible,” “meets our obligations,” and “funds our growing needs,” and his emphasis on continuity of entitlement program spending and paying down the national debt. He portrays himself as a president with good sense, practical wisdom, and competence, a leader who can be trusted not to wrench the nation too far from the its present course. In the last sentence about returning money, he substitutes a positive euphemism in place of
"tax cuts." Of course, as a whole, these are just words, chosen by his speechwriters to create an image of the president, to proactively characterize his budget on his terms, and to help make the audience receptive to these budgetary propositions as well as others that follow. Taking the last several passages together, his speechwriters did an effective job of sandwiching the hard, meaty ideology (limited government, tax cuts) between tasty slices of soft, persuasive, feel-good ethos.

On another crucial issue, education, Bush advocates change:

I like teachers so much, I married one. . . . When it comes to our schools, dollars alone do not always make the difference. Funding is important, and so is reform. So we must tie funding to higher standards and accountability.

Bush begins with an ethical appeal to teachers and parents of schoolchildren as well as the general public through the technique of identification by mentioning that the first lady is a teacher and also by the use of a little levity. Then, in his persona of the authoritarian, strict father of the nation, he frames his approach in the terministic screen of reform and standards and accountability and results from schools and teachers. He continues:

I believe in local control of schools. We should not, and we will not, run public schools from Washington, D.C. Yet when the federal government spends tax dollars, we must insist on results. Children should be tested on basic reading and math skills every year between grades three and eight. Measuring is the only way to know whether all our children are learning. And I want to know, because I refuse to leave any child behind in America.
In this paragraph Bush sets up a contradictory “yes-but” discourse structure in which he states that schools should be controlled locally, an American ideograph, but then proposes legislation that will give the federal government control over much of what local schools do in the classroom where it counts. The point I make is not about which policy is best. Instead, it is that Bush understands this conflict and is intentionally trying to blur the distinction. Rhetorically, Bush is having his cake and eating it, too, regarding who calls the shots in the nation’s public primary and secondary school systems.

He closes the paragraph with a catchy slogan, which will become the title of the legislation: “I refuse to leave any child behind in America.” But it is much more than a slogan, as he draws upon the emotional power of the image of the “abandoned child,” which slices through raw nerve endings deep into the hearts and consciousness of the audience. Within the rhetorical situation, Bush successfully alters the audience’s emotional frame of mind, influencing their current and future receptivity to his substantive changes in educational policy. This bonanza of an image will not be easily forgotten—it can be recalled to the minds of hundreds of millions at any time just by verbalizing the short slogan. Also, this same expression taps into American ideographs like equal opportunity and the American Dream, substantially at the subconscious level of people’s minds. At the same time, Bush has portrayed an ethos of fairness, good character, and goodwill toward the nation’s families and their opportunities.

Having dealt with education of children, he moves to concerns of the elderly.

To make sure the retirement savings of America's seniors are not diverted in
any other program, my budget protects all $2.6 trillion of the Social Security surplus for Social Security, and for Social Security alone.

Again, in the persona of the protective father who possesses good sense and competence, as well as the pathetic appeal of caring, Bush states that he will protect the Social Security surplus for America’s seniors and not divert it to other programs.

Regarding the national debt and deficit spending, he submits:

Many of you have talked about the need to pay down our national debt. I listened, and I agree. I hope you will join me to pay down $2 trillion in debt during the next 10 years. At the end of those 10 years, we will have paid down all the debt that is available to retire. That is more debt, repaid more quickly than has ever been repaid by any nation at any time in history. . . .

We should approach our nation’s budget as any prudent family would. . . . Unrestrained government spending is a dangerous road to deficits, so we must take a different path.

With words like “I listened” and “prudent” contrasted with “unrestrained” and “dangerous,” Bush promotes an *ethos* of himself as a man of good sense, competence, and goodwill as well as appealing on the basis of logical reasoning. Bush also exhibits goodwill when he respectfully entreats: “I hope you will join me to pay down. . . .”

Further, the sentence, “we should approach our nation’s budget as any prudent family would,” shows that Lakoff’s “nation as family” metaphor is operative, once again engendering identification through these conceptual systems extant in the minds of the audience.
With superior rhetorical flourish, Bush turns to a key ideological tenet, tax cuts.

I hope you will join me in standing firmly on the side of the people. You see, the growing surplus exists because taxes are too high and government is charging more than it needs. The people of America have been overcharged and, on their behalf, I am asking for a refund.

He starts by implying a dichotomy between those “firmly on the side of the people” and those on the other side, those against the people, that is, the government, which charges too much in taxes, and presumably Democrats and others. Of course, he asserts that he stands “firmly on the side of the people.” While Bush plies the technique of identification to positively unite those on one side of the dichotomy, he applies division to negatively alienate those on the other side—the latter can be redeemed only by switching to his side, the side that favors tax cuts.

Bush erects several Burkean terministic screens. “Charging” implies a demand for payment, to hold one financially liable, or to incur a financial burden, which together create a composite negative image of the government as a big, bad creditor oppressing citizens like helpless debtors. “Overcharged” builds on and intensifies this negative image. “Refund” relates to this image but also fortifies the ethos Bush is concurrently constructing of himself as the leader/hero/strict father of good moral character and goodwill who has come to their rescue and who will use his authority to discipline the bad government and right these wrongs.

A rate of 15 percent is too high for those who earn low wages, so we must lower the rate to 10 percent. No one should pay more than a third of the
money they earn in federal income taxes, so we lowered the top rate to 33 percent.

In the first sentence, Bush allows that “a rate of 15 percent is too high for those who earn low wages, so we must lower the rate to 10 percent.” On its face, this statement engenders emotional and ethical appeal by way of showing concern for low-income people. But why is this sentence really here? Bush continues in the next sentence: “No one should pay more than a third of the money they earn in federal income taxes, so we lowered the top rate to 33 percent.” The former gives the impression of concern about tax levels for those of low income on parity with concern in the latter for those with high income. But according to an analysis of Bush’s final tax cut legislation by William G. Gale and Peter R. Orszag in Tax Notes, published by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center, the lowest 20 percent of income earners in America received less than 1 percent of the total dollars of Bush’s tax cuts while the top 20 percent income segment received 73 percent of the dollars of tax cuts. Where is the parity? The argument I make is not for or against the tax cut legislation. The purpose is to show how it appears that the first sentence is a rhetorically constructed set-up, which makes use of the Burkean tenet about the use of form to gain acceptance, in order to imply concern for low-income citizens primarily as a means to gain support for cutting taxes predominantly for higher income taxpayers.

Aside from the form-based parity construct, the statement: “No one should pay more than a third of the money they earn in federal income taxes, so we lowered the top rate to 33 percent,” is an interesting piece of rhetorical work. Bush uses the first part of the
sentence as a premise or a reason for his plan to lower the top rate to 33 percent. But the first part of the sentence is, in effect, a conclusion, one that, according to Anthony Weston in *A Rulebook for Arguments*, makes use of the non sequitur argument fallacy, that is, “a conclusion that is not a reasonable inference from the evidence” (77). It is also an inadequate argument because it begs several questions, that is, it merely assumes the conclusion to be correct without providing any evidence, which leaves the audience asking questions about how or on what basis the speaker arrived at the conclusion. Why is one-third the magic number? Back in the 1950s, for example, ultra-high income individuals (the top 1 percent) were subject to a 90 percent tax rate. Another question it begs is: who says one-third is the right threshold for a revised tax rate cap, other than Bush alone? On top of the fallacies of non sequitur and begging several questions, this is another example of empty language—it is devoid of meaning because no explanation or rationale is given. Thus Bush attempts to authoritatively decree this new tax rate cap, without any basis of analysis, reasoning, or argument.

Next, he turns to an example.

With us tonight representing many American families are Steven and Josefina Ramos . . . from Pennsylvania. But they could be from any one of your districts. Steven is the network administrator for a school district. Josefina is a Spanish teacher at a charter school. And they have a two-year-old daughter.

Steven and Josefina tell me they pay almost $8,000 a year in federal income taxes. My plan will save them more than $2,000. Let me tell you
what Steven says: ‘Two thousand dollars a year means a lot to my family. If we had this money, it would help us reach our goal of paying off our personal debt in two years’ time.’ After that, Steven and Josefina want to start saving for Lianna’s college education.

As Aristotle theorized, creating ethical appeal involves assessing the characteristics of an audience and constructing discourse in such a way as to portray oneself as embodying the same characteristics. In this text, Bush attempts to persuade the audience of the merits of his plan by identifying himself and his plan with this live, present couple, with whom many Americans can identity. Which Americans, or said another way, what audience is Bush talking to at this point? Is it wealthy taxpayers? No, they do not need any convincing. He is talking to the masses of the electorate that are middle income taxpayers—the ones who determine election outcomes. Do middle income Americans identify closely with Bush, an ultra high income, high net worth individual? Unlikely. Thus the Ramoses fill a surrogate role in this regard for Bush—this middle income audience can readily identify with this couple, who appear as a normal middle income family. This audience can identify with the Ramoses’ concern that $8,000 is a lot to pay in taxes each year. This audience can identify with the Ramoses’ goal of getting out from under personal debt. This audience can identify with the Ramoses desire to start saving for their young daughter’s college education. Thus this approach yields Bush the rhetorical draw of identification that he could not otherwise engender with his own ethos; at the same time it diverts the audience’s attention away from contemplating benefits accruing to the high income segment—Bush’s class—which could lead to thoughts of alienation.
Deconstructing this rhetorical construct further, the Ramoses are a Hispanic family—one of the groups Bush and conservatives are targeting for joining the Republican Party or at least voting Republican. This couple automatically creates identification for Bush with this ethnic group.

In the above text, Bush puts another device into the service of persuasion—the example. He carefully relates how the Ramoses pay $8,000 in taxes and will save $2,000 under his plan, which constitutes a logic-based proof. However, he uses one family—just one—out of over 100 million families in the U.S. to show how great and how fair ("my tax plan restores basic fairness") his tax cut proposal is. Anthony Weston in the third edition of A Rulebook for Arguments points out how easy it is for a persuader to mislead an audience in making the case for a proposal by manipulating examples. He explains that one example is, at best, merely an "illustration," but for "generalizations about larger sets, a representative sample is required." Since the number of taxpayers in America is definitely a "larger set," to avoid manipulating the facts, Bush would have needed to provide data on a statistically representative sample of taxpayers across the full range of income distributions in America. Weston also stresses the importance of testing generalizations by considering "counterexamples," that is, examples that are contrary to or refute a generalization (12, 17). Dozens of counterexamples were available for Bush to offer up. But Bush chose to offer a single example that painted an appealing picture of his plan. Obviously, his budgetary staff had run the numbers and knew precisely the effects of his tax plan on the full distribution range of taxpayers, but Bush chose a sole, particular one
that would appeal to the middle income audience whose support he needed to win in order to persuade Congress to pass his tax-cut plan.

In addition, according to the analysis by Gale and Orszag, a family had to be in about the top 20 percent of income of all taxpayers in order to receive a $2,000 tax cut like the Ramoses. In comparison, the average tax cut for the bottom 80 percent averaged just over $600. Thus the Ramoses are not representative of the middle of the middle—they are in the upper middle income bracket—but their personal characteristics such as working for schools make them appear as middle of the middle, which helps cement the identification. The Bush public relations team found the nearly perfect “rhetorical” taxpayer couple for embodying his ethical and logical appeals to his targeted audiences.

Bush also says:

We reduced the marriage penalty. . . . We must repeal the death tax. . . . Tax relief. . . .

“Penalty,” “death,” and “relief” are all words that act as terministic screens; they frame the terms of debate. “Penalty” and “death” channel or frame the tax items in a bad or negative connotation of a cruel tax collector taking advantage of citizens, the victims, which sets up a state of mind of cognitive dissonance, while “relief” sets up a positive image of Bush as the one who will rescue the victims and bring relief, restoring peaceful equilibrium. This loaded language directs the audience’s attention in one direction while deflecting it from asking for analysis. For example, who could favor preserving such onerous, wrong taxes? Who could be against the solution for relief?
Bush adds:

Tax relief is right. . . . We must act now because it is the right thing to do.

In case the earlier devices do not persuade, Bush now brings to bear Gronbeck’s postulate that “people may not know what’s what, but at least they know what’s right” (35). Once again, he exploits empty language with this simplistic moral theme. Once again, he ignores several questions. Why is it right? What is the rationale? Who says it is right?

Touching on another issue of the elderly, Bush asserts:

“No senior in America should have to choose between buying food and buying prescriptions.”

Who could be against this proposition regarding adding a Medicare prescription benefit? This empty, emotionally-loaded statement is framed with carefully couched, hard-to-criticize language that tends to deflect debate and skip analysis. The statement overflows with pathos, through the image of the neglected, impoverished senior who exists at the edge of survival, forced to choose between two essentials of life. People tend to react aggressively to such a pathetic image—elder care is important to Americans. Yet, where is the plan? How will it work? Who will receive what benefits? Who pays for them? What are the alternatives?

The following are excerpts from Bush’s conclusion:

“The agenda I have set before you tonight is worthy of a great nation. America is a nation at peace, but not a nation at rest. Much has been given to us, and much is expected [New Testament verse]. Let us agree to bridge old divides. But let us also agree that our goodwill must be dedicated
to great goals. Bipartisan is more than minding our manners. It is doing our duty.

. . . We can . . . earn from our conscience and from our fellow citizens the highest possible praise: Well done, good and faithful servants [New Testament verse].

Thank you all. Good night and God bless.

The ethical appeal weighs heavily in this closing with words and ideas like: “worthy,” “a great nation,” “duty,” “conscience,” and so forth. This language and the concepts embodied appeal to common heritage, nobleness, shared values and beliefs, ideographs, goodwill, group ethos, and moral character. This identification is extended, too, with the appeal of Bible verses to the religious right as well as most Christians. The sentence, “But let us also agree that our goodwill must be dedicated to great goals,” maintains an edge of competence and authority, which portray Bush as a strong leader who will push Congress to produce results for the nation. And when he connects “bipartisan” to “duty,” in effect he is attempting to strong-arm Democrats into supporting his plans.

My analysis reveals the primacy of ethos throughout the speech, although this particular persuasive appeal is used more extensively in the opening and closing sections. Pathos is also wielded effectively, along with a lesser utilization of logos. All of the appeals are ultimately directed to the American people, the primary audience. This 2001 speech is generally representative of Bush’s rhetorical style in later State of the Union addresses as well as most other presidential speeches. Purely in terms of influencing the minds and choices of the audience, it is a masterfully crafted speech, one that not only
subtly reflects key Bush ideological tenets but also capitalizes on many of the rhetorical devices of persuasion, especially techniques of the appeal of *ethos*.

Seven months later, the events of 9/11 fall from the sky on the U.S. and on the Bush presidency, leading nine days later to another critical Bush speech.

**President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress after 9/11, September 20, 2001**

Below are excerpts taken from several paragraphs of the speech:

1. I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat. . . . 2. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. . . . 3. I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. 4. The course of the conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. 5. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. [numbering mine]

In the third sentence, Bush’s extensive use of first person “I” reflects the dominance-language technique of “personalization,” according to a premise of Renana Brooks in an article in *The Nation* titled “A Nation of Victims: Bush Uses Well-Known Linguistic Techniques to Make Citizens Feel Dependent.” By this choice of pronoun Bush focuses the attention of the audience on himself as speaker, on his character, and on his role as sole, authoritarian protector, like the strict father in the family, rather than on the
audience, the American people. He includes the ideograph “freedom,” apparently because freedom represents a much larger, abstract American ideal or value, which he superimposes in order to secure a stronger bond of identification with the audience. Bush paints a character image of himself as relentless warrior/leader that the people can rely on to save their lives, their freedom, their culture. It has the same effect as Bush saying he is the only person capable of producing the results needed, in this case, protecting Americans from al-Qaeda, and they can just trust him and leave their fate in his hands—he will protect them and secure the nation.

When Bush uses the second person pronoun, “we,” as he does in the second sentence, he employs it in a way that again focuses attention on himself by making the individuals who constitute the “we” a virtual extension of himself, the strong leader who makes the decisions—the “we” is made up of those who join with him, which he attempts to persuade Americans to do.

In the fourth sentence, Bush projects what would become one of his rhetorical hallmarks: “verbal certainty,” according to Roderick P. Hart and Jay P. Childers in “Verbal Certainty in American Politics: An Overview and Extension” published in Presidential Studies Quarterly. Obviously there was a feeling of unease and uncertainty after 9/11, against which Bush postures his verbal certainty as an aspect of portraying himself as the strong leader. Although the probability of a successful outcome of planned military operations in Afghanistan would have appeared relatively high, it was by no means totally certain. The fact that Osama Bin Laden and Aiman Al Zawahri, Nos. 1 and 2 in al-Qaeda, the primary targets of Operation Enduring Freedom, managed to slip through the grasp of
the U.S. military in 2002 and remain free three years later is an obvious case in point—and one that indicates an element of demagoguery in such rhetorical certitude.

The first sentence could be viewed as an acknowledgement of “fears” in the face of a potentially “continuing threat” as well as a call to be “calm and resolute,” which presumably is Bush’s intent on this occasion. I draw attention to it here because in future speeches that I analyze, the specter of rhetorical exploitation of the circumstances and emotions of citizens relative to 9/11 becomes a topic of inquiry.

In all of these sentences, Bush piles on word after word of emotion-laden language to appeal to the hearts and emotions of Americans: “hug your children,” “wound,” “inflicted,” “not forget,” “struggle,” “freedom,” “fear,” “justice,” “cruelty,” and “God.” Of special note is the dichotomy created between good (freedom, justice) and evil (fear, cruelty). “Freedom” and “justice” appeal both ethically and emotionally, whereas “fear” and “cruelty” are words that primarily stir the emotions—on a negative level. With so much emphasis on the negative emotions, Bush seems not to only acknowledge but to stoke feelings of fear and uncertainty. Perhaps this approach, along with the heavy personalization, is rhetorically overdone.

Overall, Bush’s rhetoric to project himself as a war president with an image of strength immediately after 9/11 seems appropriate to the time and circumstance, following the example of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in World War II. Most would agree that his rhetoric in this speech, within the context of the rhetorical situation of 9/11, generally serves a right and moral purpose of building a consensus for a pivotal course of military action in Afghanistan.
Although not comprehended at the time, as 9/11 was a turning point in the Bush presidency, so was this speech in Bush’s presidential rhetoric. As will be shown in the next analysis, in the speech above Bush laid the foundation for what would become the new, signature rhetorical strategy of his presidency.

President Bush’s State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002

In this speech, Bush reiterates and builds on most of the same themes contained in the previous year’s address described above. However, the major difference is that this speech takes place a few months after 9/11 and Bush, as commander-in-chief, is leading the country in what he calls the “war on terror.”

In this context, even Bush’s application of the word “war” constitutes a terministic screen—a very important one in Bush’s rhetoric since 9/11—because it allows Bush to define himself as a “war president.” It provides rhetorical cover for Bush’s push to expand foreign military actions beyond Afghanistan. It enables Bush to declare captured foreign persons (some combatants, some not) and U.S. citizens (e.g., Yaser Esam Hamdi and Jose Padilla) captured on foreign soil or within the U.S. as “enemy combatants” and hold them indefinitely without any judicial process and without the protections against torture accorded to prisoners of war under the Geneva conventions, to which the U.S. is a signatory. And to whatever extent the Bush administration has failed to vigorously implement a full complement of specific, concrete measures to strengthen security at home, it affords a means of deflection of that reality.
Before looking at the text of the speech, it is worth noting how Bush’s delivery changes after 9/11. In a visual element, he adopts a speaking persona that is more somber (gravitas) and dignified (dignitas), along with a more restrained presence (lenitas), which is patterned in part on the Ciceronian model. Perhaps Bush’s natural personality as a speaker—somewhat reserved, stiff, tightly wound, mechanical—makes it easy to adopt this new approach to delivery. In addition, it seems that with practice over time, Bush’s speechwriters became more proficient at crafting the diction, syntax, and rhythm in the speech texts to better accommodate Bush’s natural vocalization style. Regardless, the modified delivery style works well as Bush now embodies the image of the grave “war president.” I begin with some excerpts that help form a set-up of this persona.

As we gather tonight, our nation is at war . . . and the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers. . . . We last met in an hour of shock and suffering. . . . Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies’ hatred in videos. . . . And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design. We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world. . . . Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.
[North Korea, Iran, and Iraq,] states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.

Renana Brooks, head of the Sommet Institute for the Study of Power and Persuasion in Washington, D.C., claims that Bush depicts the world in very dire, pessimistic, dark, and negative language and she argues that the Bush administration has come to rely most frequently on a negative linguistic frame of the world. She maintains that Bush and his team, using the emotionally-loaded language of the *pathos* of fear, picture to the electorate a negative, pessimistic image of a dark and evil world. She proposes that they employ catastrophic words and phrases, which are drilled into American’s minds with overwhelming repetition, to the point of breaking down independent thought and analysis, which in turn produces a sense of fearfulness and a high level of anxiety that ultimately leads to a sense of helplessness, to a feeling of loss of control over their environment (20).

Although Brooks does not connect it as such, in the context of Bush’s strategic rhetoric, this framework acts on the audience as a giant terministic screen, limiting and defining their field of mental and emotional vision to the singular, negative world image graphically painted in dark, foreboding colors by Bush. Likewise, Bush’s apocalyptic words and phrases, such as: “faces unprecedented dangers,” “hour of shock and suffering,” “confirmed our worst fears,” “the depth of our enemies hatred,” “the madness of the
destruction they design,” “axis of evil,” terrorists “seeking weapons of mass destruction,” and “grave and growing danger,” act as individual screens that add to the composite framework of the negative, evil world. His use of the metaphor about thousands of dangerous killers spread around the world like ticking time bombs mounds up yet more of the pathos of fear and dread.

Aristotle posits that the “very indications” of an anticipated event or matter can make people afraid and fearful of danger if they are led to perceive that it is terribly destructive or harmful and near at hand or imminent. Bush’s rhetoric seems to embody these characteristics.

Bush continues:

The last time I spoke here, I expressed the hope that life would return to normal. In some ways, it has. In others, it never will.

Apparently, verbal certainty can be used positively and negatively, for here Bush says life for Americans “never will” return to normal. Brooks maintains that Bush describes the nation as being in a “perpetual state of crisis” that leaves the electorate feeling powerless. She refers to the work of psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman, whose “studies of ‘learned helplessness’ shows that people’s motivation to respond to outside threats and problems is undermined by a belief that they have no control over their environment” (21).

For example, what can an individual citizen do to fight terrorists? Of course, we can be alert and young adults could volunteer for the armed forces. But there is little tangible action that the average citizen can take, other than vote someone else into office
who would address the problem differently. But even here, fear dampens the desire to take the risks that accompany electing a new president while the nation is at war—and Bush placed this very tactic of fear of change of leadership at the core of his 2004 campaign rhetoric. For example, my eighty-one-year-old mom, who admired Bill Clinton’s policies and accomplishments (although not necessarily him personally) but generally disliked Bush, told me in 2004 her reservations about changing presidents during the war in Iraq. The White House political strategists correctly gauged that senior citizens would recall how the country elected another war president, Franklin Roosevelt, to four terms and that they would respond favorably to this theme of keeping the current war president, Bush, at the helm for four more years. In time of perceived danger and fear, helpless-feeling citizens accord a president considerable latitude, as long as they trust him.

Following the construction of an emotionally fearful world, Bush says:

But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: if they do not act, America will.

... States like these [North Korea, Iran, and Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil... seeking weapons of mass destruction... We’ll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.

As with the September 20, 2001 speech, Bush returns to the device of personalization, the use of “I,” to focus the attention on himself as the strong war leader.
And when he personifies the “United States” and “America,” it is the same as inserting the word “I” for each: “[I]will not permit;” “if they do not act, [I]will,” as president and commander-in-chief. Reflecting a dominance behavior style, Bush makes clear he is calling the shots (like the strict father) and that he expects the country (the children) to follow without questioning. Brooks argues that the motive behind Bush’s use of the negative world frame is to create a relationship of dependency between the American people and himself, a dependency that allows him to operate in his natural behavioral style, which is dominance of others, and which promotes acceptance, even if grudgingly, of his agenda and policies. Brooks asserts that Bush has mastered “emotional language—especially negatively charged emotional language—as a political tool...[and that he] employs language of contempt and intimidation to shame others into submission and desperate admiration” (20).

Once Bush has worked to place the electorate into a state of mind of fear and helplessness, Brooks submits that he then attempts to convince people that he is the only one with the strength to deal with the terrible, dangerous world confronting them. This means that he is entitled to expect them, in this relationship of dependency, to transfer their power to him, to rely on and support him as sole deliverer from an evil, dangerous world (22-23).

This idea is backed up by Williams’ and Cooper’s theorem that a persuader can employ emotional appeals to create a state of cognitive dissonance (fear and dread of a hostile, evil world that poses imminent danger), which provides an opening for the persuader to sell his tension-removal mechanism as the one and only solution (Bush, the
strong war president, who can decide, nearly unilaterally, who the enemy is and direct how to eradicate them and thereby save the populace).

I summarize this new, signature rhetorical strategy, as follows: By exploiting the pathos of fear, Bush creates a negative frame, a pessimistic image, of a dark and evil world, through the language of catastrophic words and phrases, which are drilled into American’s minds with overwhelming repetition, all of which in turn produces a sense of fearfulness, or a heightened consciousness of potential danger, and a high level of anxiety, and ultimately leads to a breakdown of independent thought, analysis, and will—to a sense of helplessness. Helpless-feeling people tend to look to a strong leader to solve their problems. In such circumstances, they may accord the leader significant latitude as long as they feel a sense of trust in him. After 9/11, Bush postures himself in precisely that persona or ethos: the strong, moral leader and war president who knows exactly what needs to be done to fix the world and the one who can be relied on to get the job done.

In this strategy, I suggest that Bush successfully exerts a one-two rhetorical punch of pathos that puts the audience in the right frame of mind, followed by an artfully constructed ethos of the strong, moral leader and war president, all of which work together to narrow the choices of the American electorate and to persuade them to embrace or at least go along with his worldview and the propositions of his personal or party ideology for dealing with it.

But notice the following taken from the very beginning of this same speech:

The American flag flies again over our embassy in Kabul. Terrorists who
once occupied Afghanistan now occupy cells at Guantanamo Bay. . . . We are winning the war on terror.

Bush started the speech by relating these very positive images of success in the war in Afghanistan. He obviously was pleased to share these excellent outcomes that reflected favorably on himself as president and commander-in-chief. What seems askew, though, is how this opening positivism of success squares with all the negativism, dread, worry, unprecedented danger, and general fright-mongering that follow it. Taken together, the message that Bush seems to communicate is that on the one hand, “I am leading the country to decisive victory,” but on the other hand, “you ought to be shaking in your boots with fright from all the dangers around you.” I argue that Bush’s strategists decided to play both ends of Seligman’s work (learned helplessness and learned optimism), but to different players. While they frame a persona of optimism for Bush to occupy, they frame a consciousness of pessimism and helplessness for the public to occupy. These meanings appear incongruent.

Next, Bush turns to domestic issues in this speech. Notice the transition.

September the 11th brought out the best in America, and the best in Congress. . . . Now Americans deserve to have this same spirit directed toward addressing problems here at home. . . . As we act to win the war, protect our people, and create jobs in America, we must act, first and foremost, not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans. . . . We’ll prevail in the war, and we will defeat this recession.
After establishing and strengthening his position as war president, now the wedge that Bush brings to bear as persuasive leverage to gain assent for many of his initiatives is the “war on terror.” The sentence, “Now Americans deserve to have this same spirit directed toward addressing problems here at home,” signals his intentions. Apparently, Bush and his strategists came to realize how the power of a common enemy could serve to unite the country behind the president as strong leader and protector. They comprehended how the “war on terror” could provide a means to political advantage on other issues. Thus Bush moves opportunistically to capitalize on this opening and begins to shroud many of his initiatives in the rhetorical context of the “war on terror” and the special war powers he assumes in his war presidency. For instance, an analysis of a sample of Bush’s stump speeches on behalf of candidates in the 2002 midterm elections reveals that he devotes one-third or more of his message to describing the war on terror and what he is doing to fight it and then emphasizing that he can count on the local Republican candidate to aid the president’s efforts in this cause. Republicans gained several seats in Congress in this election.

Within the context of this dynamic rhetorical move by the White House, Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, dangerous terrorists though they are, and the “war on terror” have individually and severally become rhetorical scapegoats, the source of much that ails America, the evil enemy from which Bush will save America. They become multipurpose rhetorical punching bags, which Bush can pound away at with verbal blows whenever he wants to reinforce his persona and bolster the ethical appeal he is making. For example, when the large surpluses Bush inherited turn into the largest budget deficits in history,
Bush slams an uppercut into the punching bag, naming the “war on terror” as a major reason for the deficits while never mentioning the large tax cuts. Bush takes advantage of this enemy in order to attempt to unite the country—but apparently he wants to unite it on the basis of his conservative ideology—not consensus. He uses alienation to divide off the Democrats and tries to force them, the minority party, to swallow more and more of his ideology; when they resist, he tries to intimidate them with charges that they are assisting the enemy and paints them, by implication, as unpatriotic and un-American (devil-terms) in a clear play for power and dominance on behalf of himself and his presidency. As Gronbeck’s theory held in Chapter 2, much of national politics has been reduced to the moral and the patriotic. Bush tries to score political points on this basis.

In his conclusion, Bush declares:

[Regarding Afghanistan], we have no intention of imposing our culture. But America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property, free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance. . . . We will see freedom’s victory.

Bush reels off a list of American ideographs, such as “the rule of law” and so forth in order to further cement his ethical appeal. And he adds in some poetic interest by personifying “freedom,” another ideograph. These devices provide the best abstract cover words can buy.

Twelve months later, Bush is back on Capitol Hill for another annual address to the Congress and the nation.
President Bush’s State of the Union Address, January 28, 2003

The analysis of this speech is limited to only one of its topics: rhetoric involved in the run-up to the war in Iraq. The pivotal, underlying ideological and foreign policy revolution represented in this decision is the doctrine of “preemption”: to strike a suspected enemy before he strikes the U.S., that is, to invade a country as a means to protect ourselves from their suspected plans and capabilities to harm us. The standard U.S. practice of unprovoked first attack hitherto had been limited to the rationale that we were protecting others, such as Reagan’s invasion of Grenada and Bush I’s invasion of Panama. Moreover, not only has Iraq not attacked America, there is no evidence that she intends to, nor is she threatening her neighbors, nor is there any civil war in Iraq. This is a huge ideological as well as leadership gamble for the Bush administration but they think they have the power, including the rhetorical means, to pull it off.

You and I serve our country in a time of great consequence. . . . Days of promise and days of reckoning. . . . In a whirlwind of change and hope and peril. . . .

. . . The gravest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. These regimes could use such weapons for blackmail, terror, and mass murder. They could also give or sell those weapons to terrorist allies, who would use them without the least hesitation.

. . . Different threats require different strategies. . . . Iran . . . pursues weapons of mass destruction, and supports terror. . . . The North Korean
regime is using its nuclear program to incite fear. . . Our nation and the world . . . must . . . not allow an even greater threat [than North Korea] to rise up in Iraq.

. . . We will not deny, we will not ignore, we will not pass along our problems to other Congresses, to other presidents, and other generations.

We will confront them with focus and clarity and courage.

Not much analysis or commentary is needed for this part of Bush’s speech. It is simply more of the same of the prior speech in terms of the one-two punch of inducing fear (pathos) with images of a very dark and imminently dangerous world while projecting Bush as a strong leader (ethos) who will deal with it (last paragraph). It is the same rhetorical strategy—but a new political or ideological target—Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

[Saddam Hussein,] a brutal dictator . . . with ties to terrorism. . . agreed to disarm of all weapons of mass destruction. . . systematically violated that agreement. He pursued chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. . .

. . . The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa. Our intelligence sources tell us that he has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production.

. . . Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al-Qaeda.

. . . The dictator . . . used [WMD] on whole villages—leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured. . . torturing children while their parents are made to watch . . . Other methods used in the torture
chambers of Iraq; electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape. If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning.

With the most graphic language, Bush shovels pathos in spades, one gruesome characterization after another of Saddam Hussein. He defines Saddam Hussein with a variety of devil-terms (accurately by virtually all accounts). Examples include such words and phrases as: “brutal dictator,” “used [WMD] on whole villages,” “torturing children,” and “evil.” Bush places Saddam in the same caricature as Bin Laden; to an extent he makes Saddam the successor to Bin Laden as the evil enemy; and he connects Saddam to al-Qaeda and Bin Laden as collaborators in terrorism. Arguably, Bush makes Saddam a rhetorical scapegoat. But the semantics of these characterizations of both Bin Laden and Saddam are not of prime importance. What is important is that Bush, through the strategic use of rhetoric, chooses to name and blame Saddam as the worst enemy of America as a means to persuade Americans to support Bush’s choice of war in Iraq.

We will consult. . . . We seek peace. . . . If war is forced on us, we will fight in a just cause. . . . And if war is forced upon us, we will fight with the full force and might of the United States military—and we will prevail (emphasis mine).

. . . And we go forward with confidence. . . . Americans are a resolute people. . . . Adversity has revealed the character of our country. . . .

America is a strong nation, and honorable in the use of our strength....

Bush shows good sense in his promise to consult at the U.N. before going to war
and by suggesting that he wants peace and not war. But primarily he positions himself as a strong leader who is willing to take tough action to protect Americans from the evil dictator, who threatens them and forces Bush to choose to go to war to defend them. *Forces?* Yet another terministic screen that channels the audience’s thinking into the thought pattern of “justified.” And Bush follows it with the actual words, declaring the cause is “just.” But this characterization begs the question: “just” according to whom?

Brooks contends that she identified thirty-nine examples of empty language in this speech. An example she cites is that “the controversial plan to wage war on Iraq was simplified to: ‘We will answer every danger and every enemy that threatens the American people’” (20). As Brooks indicates, this sentence is a strong-sounding, chest-thumping over-generalization that lacks any specific, concrete meaning.

Unlike the generally moral ends and means of rhetoric that Bush put into service after 9/11 to communicate about and unite the nation for military action against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, I argue that Bush manipulates rhetoric to persuade the Congress and the citizenry to support his decision to launch the War in Iraq. It is conceivable, certainly, that the country may have backed the invasion of Iraq even without the misleading rhetoric. But by the time the war begins about two months later, Bush and his team have convinced most Americans that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks and that he possessed WMD poised to strike the U.S. The next State of the Union address shows a similar pattern.
President Bush's State of the Union Address, January 20, 2004

Bush starts this speech with some *ethos* to conciliate the audience and then moves quickly to try to dispel doubts about the lingering war in Iraq.

We’ve not come all this way—through tragedy, and trial and war—only to falter and leave our work unfinished.

In contrast to his extensive use of “personalization” with the pronoun “I” in some previous speeches about the War in Iraq, here Bush adopts the inclusive “we.” Nonetheless, he maintains an edge of leadership and authority when he incorporates an undertone of shaming the Congress and the country to not quit the war before it is finished. Of course, Congress compliantly authorized the war; he has them on a short leash and can yank their chain at will. But the American public did not participate in the go-to-war decision; Bush’s challenge is to find rhetorical devices to keep them motivated to stay with him and continue to support his course in Iraq.

Americans are rising to the tasks of history, and they expect the same from us. In their efforts, their enterprise, and their character, the American people are showing that the state of our union is confident and strong.

To the previous point, Bush’s speechwriters meld several clever devices in this excerpt as a means to shore up support. First, Bush implies that all Americans are rising up to the tasks of history, which he implies are represented in the War in Iraq. However, given that the country is split over the war, this implication overstates the case. But perhaps the grandiloquence of speech, the sense of vision, and the praise persuades some to question their opposition to the war. Second, Bush uses this exaggerated characterization of the
electorate as a stick to cajole the Congress to hold fast on supporting the war and him as the war president. Third, Bush seems to indicate that he is just trying to measure up to the expectations of the American people. However, I believe it is valid to argue that Bush thinks he has risen to some grand task (and legacy) of history and that he is trying in this speech to cajole Americans to join him, to rise up to his expectations, and to continue to back the course of action that he chose for America in Iraq. Lastly, Bush tries to win support by heaping praise on Americans. Bottomline, Bush, as strong leader in the strict father role, as a dominator, defines for the Congress and the electorate the positions on the War in Iraq that he expects them to occupy as well as the type of behaviors that he expects them to exhibit in supporting his course of action.

Some critics have said our duties in Iraq must be internationalized. . . .

America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our country.

In this quote, Bush frames what the U.S. is doing in Iraq as “our duties,” a term that implies honor, responsibility, and the ideal of sacrifice for others while at the same time it screens out many other explanations that the audience might choose to apply to what America is doing in Iraq. Second, when Bush uses the term “permission slip,” he is evoking the adult-child relationship of the strict father model for America’s relationship with other nations, as Lakoff asserts in Don’t Think of an Elephant! Bush is really communicating much more than he literally states—which exemplifies the awesome power of frames to evoke a whole realm of meaning at the conceptual level as soon as the words hit the brains of the listeners, whether at the conscious or subconscious level. The full
meaning is that the U.S is not a schoolchild that needs to get permission from the U.N. or from other nations because we are the adults, we are the schoolmaster, and metaphorically they, the U.N. and the other nations, are the schoolchildren. At home, Bush may have gained political advantage with some Americans from this talk of U.S. dominance and promotion of national self-interest as the world’s sole superpower.

Some . . . did not support the liberation of Iraq. . . . We’re seeking all the facts. Already, the Kay Report identified dozens of weapons of mass destruction-related program activities. . . . Had we failed to act, the dictator’s weapons of mass destruction programs would continue to this day.

In this text, Bush attempts to redefine his way out of the box, created by the invalid rationale of WMD in Iraq. Regardless of whether he finds himself in the box unintentionally because of the failures in the intelligence agencies or placed himself there by intentional deception and hyping of WMD and the Saddam threat, he exerts rhetorical effort to salvage his persona of a trustworthy, moral leader. Thus he changes his earlier words, “weapons of mass destruction,” the ones he used to describe the primary justification for the war in Iraq, to “weapons of mass-destruction programs,” (emphasis added) and hopes that he can revise the rationale for the war to more favorable terms. Perhaps he thought this change of words, without acknowledging that the primary reason he cited for going to war was invalid, would solve the credibility issue it presents for him. But perhaps it would have the opposite effect.
To reiterate, Bush uses “we” and “their” instead of “I” and “my” much more extensively in this speech as he now finds it more advantageous to identify himself as one of many instead of one out in front of many, since many more Americans have begun to openly question his decision to go to war in Iraq. By “we” he means right-thinking, war-rallying, pro-American citizens, who, of course, are synonymous with those who back him; to be otherwise was to be shamefully un-American.

We also hear doubts that democracy is a realistic goal for the greater Middle East. . . . I believe that God has planted in every human heart the desire to live in freedom.

“Democracy” and “freedom” are American ideographs now to be exported to the Middle East. Further, if one does not have a strong argument, one can always invoke God’s name and attribute a point of ideology to God, and the identification and shared values that it brings with the audience may still win support, at least with some of the religious base in the U.S.

The momentum of freedom in our world is unmistakable—and it is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. And in all that is to come, we can know that His purposes are just and true.
In this comment, Bush borrows a rhetorical technique from antiquity: the enthymeme\(^3\), which is another way to use rhetorical form and congruity theory to involve the audience in completing and assenting to a rhetor’s unspoken proof. To illustrate, here is Bush’s comment, which originally consisted of just two of three statements in a standard, three-part, classical syllogism, expanded to its full form:

1. In all that is to come, we can know that God’s purposes are just and true. [stated major premise]

2. The momentum of freedom in our world…is not carried forward by our power alone. We can trust in that greater power who guides the unfolding of the years. [stated minor premise]

3. My purposes are aligned with God’s purposes and you can trust that they are just and true. [unstated conclusion]

This is another clever, tactical use of ethos enhanced by the rhetorical form of an incomplete enthymeme that relies on the beliefs and values held by the audience. Bush’s speechwriters tap directly into these beliefs and values as they invoke God and refer to Old Testament scripture that appeals to Christians and Jews. They embellish the appeal within this shortened form of language and logical proof to subtly associate Bush’s purposes with God’s purposes, and thus imply that to trust Bush is the same as to trust God. They meld

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\(^3\) According to Bizzell and Herzberg, an enthymeme is “a means of proof in an argument wherein the rhetor places together probable premises about human action in order to arrive at a probable conclusion. The form of an enthymeme is the same as that of a syllogism. Rhetors usually choose a widely held belief as the first or major premise, then apply the premise to the particular case about which they are arguing” (1631). Often, a premise or a conclusion is omitted because the audience will likely supply it (i.e., the “incomplete enthymeme”).
these elements into a constructed image that creates a more favorable impression of Bush and heightens the overall persuasive effect. What's more, by using this technique, the president avoids potentially boring the audience by explicitly stating each step in his argument and, further, by not explicitly stating the conclusion, he potentially avoids alienating those hearers who would disagree or even be offended by such a self-promoting conclusion. If challenged about the implications of this statement, his talking heads could parse the response and deny that Bush ever intended the conclusion stated in step 3 above—even though it is as real to the audience members who perceive it as if he had said it verbatim.

Bush's first term nears the end, and the end nears in the campaign for the second. Campaign speeches add a little more spice—or vice—as the next speech shows.

President Bush's Campaign Speech in Cincinnati, Ohio, October 31, 2004

A review of several Bush stump speeches in the 2004 presidential election campaign reveals a standard text with a few adaptive changes for each locality or region in which the speech is given. This speech, given in Cincinnati three days before the election, is representative of Bush's 2004 campaign speeches.

Perhaps the most important reason of all to put me back into office is so that Laura will be the First Lady for four more years.

I'm proud of my running mate, Dick Cheney. I admit it, he does not have the waviest hair in the race. You all will be happy to know I didn't pick
him because of his hairdo. I picked him because of his judgment, his experience.

In the first paragraph above, Bush attempts to transfer the positive *ethos* of his wife, who had much higher favorability ratings, to himself while appealing to women voters. In the second, he makes a sly, indirect negative definition of his opponent, Senator John Kerry, when he implies that Democrats picked John Kerry for his nice hairdo (Kerry’s hair style was a commonplace talking point among conservative media and bloggers at the time) while he (Bush) picked Dick Cheney for his judgment and experience. He wraps this hardball tactic in humor, so as to ameliorate the negative politics that it represents, which helps preserve his appearance of *ethos*.

This election takes place in a time of great consequence. . . . America will need strong, determined, optimistic leadership, . . . I’ve learned firsthand how hard it is to send young men and women into battle. . . . I’ve been strengthened by my faith. . . . As Presidents from Lincoln to Roosevelt to Reagan so clearly demonstrated, a President must not shift with the wind. A President has to make tough decisions and stand by them.

. . . The role of a President is to lead based on principle and conviction and conscience. . . . Sometimes I mangle the English language. . . . But . . . you know where I stand. . . .

You cannot say that about my opponent. I think it's fair to say that consistency is not his strong suit. . . . My opponent looks at an issue and tries to take every side. . . . I pledged to lower taxes for American families. I
kept my word. . . . By reforming our public schools, I kept my word. . . . I promised to keep that commitment and improve Medicare by adding prescription drug coverage. I kept my word.

This excerpt overflows with the language of the ethical appeal as Bush stresses his persona of the strong, moral, trustworthy leader. For example he repeats “I kept my word” three times. He appeals to common heritage and attempts to build identification by insinuating himself as one among former esteemed presidents. He mentions his “faith” in order to appeal to Christians and other religious groups on the basis of identification and shared values. Even the “mangle the English language” phrase has tactical significance: to make Bush more appealing to the common man. Moreover, Bush gets double mileage from the image of ethos. It forms the backdrop against which Bush negatively defines his opponent, John Kerry, as inconsistent on the issues. Even if some in the electorate dislike him (Bush), he wants to make sure they like Kerry even less.

We'll continue to improve life for our families by making health care more affordable and available. . . . In all we do to improve health care, we will make sure the medical decision are made by doctors and patients, not by officials in Washington D.C.

. . . My opponent has a different approach . . . He's proposing a big-government health care plan.

In this text, Bush uses terministic screens to persuade the electorate to believe that his health care approach preserves patient choice of doctors while Kerry’s “big-government health care plan” would take that choice away from citizens. With Kerry, he
argues, big government in Washington would make those choices for them. The validity or invalidity of Bush’s argument is not the point; the point is how he skillfully uses a rhetorical device to portray his case favorably and his opponents case unfavorably.

On national TV, Senator Kerry said it would be irresponsible to vote against the troops. And then when the vote came around, he did the irresponsible thing and voted against the troops. And then he entered the flip-flop hall of fame by saying this—"I actually did vote for the $87 billion right before I voted against it."

Despite the problematic nature of Kerry’s own statement, one could say that this is another Bush attempt to negatively define him by use of the term “flip-flop.”

As part of his conclusion, Bush says:

> These are historic times, and a lot is at stake in this election. . . . But ultimately, this election comes down to who can you trust—who can you trust to provide security for your family? . . . And if you are a voter who believes that the President of the United States should say what he means, and do what he says, and keep his word, I ask you to come stand with me. . . . In 2000 . . . I made this pledge: I said if I got elected I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. With your help, with your hard work, I will do so for four more years.

This excerpt from the closing is drenched in the language of *ethos*, including more of the persona of the strong leader and protector, with words like “trust,” “trust to provide security for your family,” “say what he means...do what he says...keep his word,” and
“uphold the honor and the dignity of the office.” For most of four years Bush has projected the persona of a man of moral character, of trust, of honor, of principle, of a strong leader, of a national father and protector. He works that image hard with this audience, while he works equally hard to make his opponent’s image unacceptable, just as his father did with Michael Dukakis in 1988. Obviously, the strategy of negative, dirty politics is not unique to Bush—although he pushes it further than some. The unanswered question is how Bush squares his dirty politics with his self-promoted persona of religiosity and moral character. Nonetheless, the strategy of positive language to construct his audience-adapted ethos and negative language to destruct his opponent’s ethos would work for Bush again in the election of 2004.

B. Bush Administration Communications

Inquiry into the wider use of rhetoric in the Bush administration provides additional insights into how Bush constructs his rhetorical ethos.

Corporate-Style Public Relations. First, Bush relies heavily on public relations tactics borrowed from corporate America. A public relations expert, Frank Luntz, CEO of The Luntz Research Companies, is one of the conservatives’ main communications consultants. For the confidential use of conservatives only, Luntz develops and circulates playbooks in which he concisely explains for each major issue what the liberal reasoning is, what the conservative reasoning is, and how conservatives can best attack liberal perspectives. The playbooks also contain detailed language guidelines that spell out how conservatives should talk about all major issues, what words and phrases and slogans to
use as well as what not to use. Insight into one of Luntz's secret playbooks, circa 2004, can be gleaned from a twenty-page chapter dealing with the environment that was surreptitiously posted on the Internet for all to read. It details precisely how conservatives should frame the debate over global warming, arsenic in the water, smokestack pollution, and the like to their advantage—even though, as Luntz acknowledged, the science and the electorate increasingly were against them. "It's all in how you frame your argument . . . ," the Luntz playbook asserts (133). Conservatives have learned the techniques and developed the discipline to execute these linguistics-based public relations plays skillfully.

Luntz's playbooks are masterpieces of talking points. They set forth what to say and what not to say, as well as the order in which to place certain statements and rationales. The chapter on the environment includes lists of "language that works" and "words that work." In another instance, it lists "The Nine Principles of Environmental Policy and Global Warming"—specific talking points for this issue. It does the same for environmental protection in general, under the heading or label of "A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier Future." For the latter, the playbook emphatically declares that the first step must embody this principle: "...any discussion of the environment has to be grounded in an effort to reassure a skeptical public that you care about the environment for its own sake—that your intentions are strictly honorable." Another principle is: "The three words Americans are looking for in an environmental policy are 'safer,' 'cleaner,' and 'healthier.'" Another is: "Your plan must be put in terms of the future, not the past or present. . . . We are trying to make things even better for the future." A final one is: "two words that . . . Americans are expecting to hear from regulators and agencies are
‘accountability’ and ‘responsibility.’” There is much more, but this suffices to capture the essence of the public relations strategy in the Luntz playbook.

The Bush administration has taken many cues from this language-framed environment play and perfectly executed it as policy and in political communications. For instance, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) did an analysis in March 2005 of how Bush’s language promoting his energy policy in a speech in Columbus, Ohio, on March 9, 2005, which turned into legislation later that year, closely tracks the points and language in Luntz’s playbook. In its report, “Energy Policy: President Bush Talks the Talk, Doesn’t Walk the Walk,” NRDC compares Luntz’s language in one column and the corresponding Bush language in a second, adjacent column. Following are three of the many points of comparison from this article:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luntz Memo</th>
<th>Bush Speech</th>
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| • The key principle is "**responsible energy exploration.**" And remember, it's NOT drilling for oil. It's responsible energy exploration. | • "To produce more energy at home, we need to open up new areas to **environmentally responsible exploration** for oil and natural gas, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. . . .
• "Too many people in Washington and around our country seem to think we have to **pick between energy production and environmental protection**, between environmental protection and growing our economy. I think that's a **false choice**."
• "To meet America's energy needs in the 21st century, we need a **comprehensive national energy policy.**"
| • **Reject talk about "choosing between more energy and a cleaner environment."** Assert clearly that "we have to do both." |  |
| • **We need to say yes to a comprehensive, common sense energy policy for the 21st Century.** |  |

The Luntz play boils down to this: portray an *ethos* that you sincerely care about the environment, frame the debate with terministically-screened, empty words like “safer” and “cleaner,” while shifting responsibility from the president by demanding that unnamed
"regulators" become more accountable, and talk about the environment in terms of the future, which allows the administration to talk about a nice tomorrow while doing little to nothing today, or even relaxing regulations for the short term.

This overall PR approach in the Bush administration includes employment of public relations professionals in most key departments of the federal government and orchestration of tight message control about issues based on written and rehearsed talking points, all coordinated by the White House. The distribution of the talking points is deep not only within the administration but also outside to party officials and opinion leaders in conservative media and think tanks. For example, in October 2005, in “Bush Addresses Miers’ Critics,” the Richmond Times-Dispatch contained the example of how Bush and Republicans planned to handle the disaffection with his nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court:

Behind the scenes, Republican allies of the White House said they were trying to put together a public relations strategy to combat the mounting criticism over the Miers nomination. The effort, they said, would include administration officials, the Republican National Committee and conservative advocates who will carry onto television, talk radio and other forums, the message that Miers, the White House counsel and a close confidante of the president, is a strong choice and that Bush will stand firmly behind her. (A7)

I suggest that the administration uses the combination of public relations and stifling message discipline in two tactical ways. First, they offensively manage the image of
the president and of the entire administration within exacting tolerances. The other is

defensive. The best sword to pierce through a fabricated persona is truth, as in the writings
of the former Czech president, Václav Havel, Living in Truth. Unlike a transparent,
authentic ethos, to maintain a constructed ethos for the incumbent in a highly scrutinized
role such as the presidency, as well as the public face of his administration, requires
obsessive message loyalty and performative skill from all players, which shield the
president and the administration from any damaging sword thrusts of truth as well as false
charges. And it requires highly-paid public relations experts planted throughout the
executive branch to ensure that everyone is singing from the same page of the same
songbook in perfect unison and harmony as well as exhibiting preferred body language.

Leveraging the First Lady. Another interesting technique used many times by Bush
and his strategists is the attempt to transfer the positive ethos of Laura Bush to her
husband. They deployed the First Lady in this role many times in the 2004 campaign and
have used her to raise sizable sums of money. But the most memorable example was when
the First Lady took over the speaker role from Bush at the annual White House
Correspondents’ Association dinner on April 30, 2005. She gave a fabulous performance
and delivered a string of one-liners, most of which roasted the President and top
administration officials. It was obvious that this was not an impromptu affair—everything,
literally everything, rhetorical is treated strategically in the Bush White House. Bush’s
favorability ratings needed a lift, and the First Lady, with much higher ratings, had a
positive ethos that the political strategists itched to transfer to Bush in order to boost his
image. Given the length and depth of her performance, the delivery of her one-liners was
obviously choreographed and rehearsed ahead of time and she was able to wittily roast the president and make him look more like a normal, softer, average guy instead of the inaccessible, arrogant, distant, hard-nosed war president, which has tended to turn off some of the electorate. Two days later, Elisabeth Bumiller wrote in *The New York Times* that Mrs. Bush’s performance was practiced ahead of time in the White House Theater and that she had successfully softened and humanized the president’s rough edges at a critical time of sagging poll numbers. (A19)

**The Tag Team.** Another tactic of the administration is to have Bush deny a position or a rationale on an issue with vague or ambiguous language while another top administration official, most frequently Vice President Cheney, continues to verbalize an entirely different, even opposite, rhetorical position as a way to keep reinforcing a false belief among the American people. The two most repeated examples of this myth-making were Cheney’s continued linkage of 9/11 to the war in Iraq by linking al-Qaeda to Saddam Hussein and second, his continued references to WMD in Iraq—even after the 9/11 Commission concluded there was no 9/11-Iraq link and after the Kay Report concluded there were no WMD in Iraq. This tactic helps preserve the president’s *ethos* of trustworthiness, while the vice president and other officials continue the rhetorical sleight-of-hand unabated.

**Misnomers.** Lastly in regard to the rhetoric of the larger Bush administration, I raise the issue of how they take advantage of misnomers. Here are several examples:

- The label “Clear Skies Initiative” screens the audience to think of environmental action to improve air quality and visibility. But what the initiative actually did was to delay
and reduce the requirements then currently in place, taking the teeth out of them, which will dirty the skies.

- The label “The Patriot Act” screens the audience to think of citizen acts of patriotism or fidelity to country. But what this act did was to trade off certain civil liberties, for which patriots had given their lives over time in America, in order to make it easier for law enforcement officials to investigate terrorism. Maybe the trade-offs were properly balanced; maybe they were not. That is not the point. The point is that the label is a misleading terministic screen.

- The label “Smokestack Pollution Reduction Plan” implies action to reduce pollutants emitted into the air by power companies. But, according to the Clean the Air organization, it greatly weakens the previously passed bipartisan Clean Power and Clean Smokestacks Acts by significantly delaying phased in target dates and allowing much larger releases of pollutants like mercury, soot-forming sulfur dioxide, smog-forming nitrogen oxides, and heat-trapping carbon dioxide (“Bush Administration”). Again, this misnomer relies on a deceptive terministic screen.

- The label “Healthy Forests Initiative” engenders a warm and fuzzy image of taking care of America’s extensive forests. According to an analysis by The Sierra Club, an environmental advocacy group, this program takes care of corporate logging companies at the expense of citizen-owned public lands (“Healthy”). Use of such misnomers purposely deploys the Burke-theorized device of terministic screens as a means to direct the American people’s perceptions into specific, favorable channels while they simultaneously deflect our attention and thinking away from the
reality of what Bush and his administration are actually doing. This idea segues to the next section, “reality check.”
CHAPTER 4
Evaluation: Reality Check

The previous chapter primarily analyzes Bush’s rhetoric: what he says and how he says it as a means to persuade Americans to his worldview, to his version of reality, to his policy propositions. In contrast, in Chapter 4, first, I trace a few of his major policy initiatives as well as his rhetorically constructed personae as they evolve over time in order to discover and analyze what Bush has actually done. Much of the reality and many of the anticipated outcomes of Bush’s rhetorically-supported policy initiatives are easily inferred from the prior speech texts and analyses. Yet a few examples of outcomes help pinpoint the reality as compared to the rhetoric. In other words, do the two square up?

Second, within the context of the dynamic rhetorical situation, the audience, in this case the American people, provides the only meaningful reality check on the speaker’s ethos and propositions. Do they believe and trust him or her? Does this trust lead them to embrace his or her views and propositions for making their lives better, happier, more prosperous, safer, and the like? In the last part of this section I gauge the American audience members’ response to Bush’s rhetoric and realities as they see them.

A. Policy Outcomes

Compassionate Conservatism

Regarding the political jargon of “compassionate conservative,” in an Associated Press story in 1999 posted on the CNN website, Senator Lamar Alexander, Republican
from Tennessee, who competed against Bush in the Republican primary, accused Bush of using “weasel words” (“Bush Sounds”). Anthony Weston, in his A Rulebook for Arguments referenced earlier, spells out numerous techniques that persuaders use to make fallacious arguments as a way to mislead the audience. He includes “weasel words” in the list, which he defines as a technique for “changing the meaning of a word in the middle of your argument so that your conclusion can be maintained, though its meaning may have shifted radically” (78). I showed in Chapter 3 how Bush radically transformed the definition of “compassion” to mean or to fit his conservative-based ideology of responsibility. The questionable nature of exploiting the words “compassionate conservative” as weasel words is underscored in the same AP article when it reported that “former [Republican] Vice President Dan Quayle prohibited his staff from using them.”

Five years into the Bush presidency, the numbers of Americans living in poverty, without health insurance, without adequate medical care, without the means to afford home heating fuel, and without adequate housing have remained the same or increased. The gap between the rich and the poor has grown. For example, in “Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004,” the U.S. Census Bureau reports that the poverty level has steadily climbed every year from 2000 to 2004. Looking at 2004, 37 million people were in poverty, up 1.1 million from 2003. Likewise, the poverty rate increased to 12.7 percent in 2004, up from 12.5 percent in 2003. Regarding Americans without health insurance, the Census Bureau reports that the uninsured rate has climbed from 14.2 percent in 2000 up to 15.7 percent in 2003, and remained at 15.7 percent in 2004.
Although these are complex effects involving not only the federal government but also state and local governments, life has changed little for the scores of millions living at the bottom of the social and economic ladders, the ones who typically need the hand of compassion.

That Bush himself recognized that compassionate conservatism was just a persona or label with a short-term political shelf-life is evidenced by the fact that he nearly dropped it from use about halfway through his first term and almost never mentioned it in the 2004 election campaign. For example, in the October 31, 2004 campaign speech analyzed earlier, Bush never mentioned “compassionate conservative” once. Interestingly, when he resurrected the term after faring badly over his response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita in late summer 2005, his use of the label did not yield any noticeable benefit, based on poll data, among Americans’ perceptions of his handling of these disaster situations.

**No Child Left Behind**

Perhaps Bush’s image of the abandoned child is matched by many of the states’ image of an abandoned presidential commitment to fund the program mandated by this act. Present day state lawsuits and complaints against the federal government, as well as the decision of one heavily Republican state, Utah, to refuse to accept federal education funding in order not to implement the No Child Left Behind program, reflect the considerable and serious debate as to whether the tangible support for education in the Bush budget is equal to the volume of his rhetoric.
In his February 27, 2001 address to Congress, Bush said he would not divert any of the $2.6 trillion Social Security surplus to other programs but save it for Social Security alone. However, the federal government had not “lock-boxed” Social Security’s surplus funds for decades; instead it had issued government securities (I.O.U.s) and promptly used the funds for current fiscal budget needs. Even during the years of fiscal budget surpluses in the Clinton administration, the decision was made that it was more advantageous for long term fiscal management to use the annual Social Security surpluses to pay down the national debt instead of directly “lock-boxing” those funds for Social Security.

Thus the $2.6 trillion Social Security surplus had long since been diverted and Bush did not have the budgetary means to redeem it in that single fiscal year. To size the situation, the largest budget surplus, which was $236 billion in the last year of the Clinton administration, was equal to only about 9 percent of the bond assets held in the Social Security trust fund (Office of Management and Budget). Bush’s revenue and spending plans, coupled with a slowing economy, quickly wiped out the fiscal budget surplus and created the largest deficit in U.S. history. The Bush team was either incompetent regarding this aspect of Social Security or the promise to lockbox was an outright falsehood intended to deceive the American people—neither of which, if known, would have contributed to a sense of viable ethos.

Selling the 2001 Tax Cut

A signature ideological success early in Bush’s first term was passage of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, which provided a huge tax
cut, as he had promised in the campaign he would do. Of course, tax policy is fair game for political deliberation. The goal of this part of the analysis is to understand what Bush represented rhetorically about his plan in order to sell it as compared to what tax changes the plan itself actually specified. His rhetorical position was stated in the executive summary of his plan:

These are the basic ideas that guide my tax policy: lower income taxes for all, with the greatest help for those most in need. Everyone who pays income taxes benefits—while the highest percentage tax cuts go to the lowest income Americans. (qtd. in Fritz et al 75)

A distributional effects analysis of the tax cuts, based on the assumption that the cuts are permanent, by Gale and Orszag of the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center determined that:

- Lower-income Americans received much smaller reductions in dollars and percentage of tax cuts than middle or high income taxpayers.
- For the lowest three income quintiles (60 percent or about 92 million taxpayers) the tax cut averaged about $400 a year. On a percentage basis, this large group’s share of the total tax cut was 12 percent.
- In contrast, for the top 1 percent of taxpayers, the average tax cut was $56,000 annually. On a percentage basis, this very small group’s share of the total tax cut was 30 percent. (website)

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4 The Center makes its analyses, including the one referenced here, using its Microsimulation Model. The time period of this analysis is 2010, which allows all of the varying implementation dates of different provisions in the tax-cut legislation to have become effective.
In Chapter 3, regarding the February 27, 2001 speech, I show how Bush structured a rhetorical parity of concern for low-income and high-income taxpayers. When 60 percent of the taxpayers get 12 percent of the tax-cut dollars and 1 percent of the taxpayers get 30 percent of the tax-cut dollars—where is the parity? And what happened to Bush’s premise that “the highest percentage tax cuts go to the lowest income Americans?”

In addition, Bush and his surrogates offered misleading, atypical examples, such as the famous waitress/single mom with two children, whom Bush said his plan would wipe her tax liability entirely, when it wouldn’t, unless certain other unlikely circumstances in her situation occurred, according to an analysis titled “A Comprehensive Assessment of the Bush Administration’s Record on Cutting Taxes” by Isaac Shapiro and Joel Friedman of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (website). Another unrepresentative example was the average “family of four” who would save $1,600. In a report titled “Final Version of Bush Tax Plan Keeps High-End Tax Cuts, Adds to Long-Term Cost,” the Citizens for Tax Justice group found that 89.6 percent of all taxpayers would have received less than $1,600 (“Final Version”). The question is: would the 10.4 percent who would save $1,600 be properly called “typical?”

From Budget Surplus to Budget Deficit

In the same speech, after he had addressed certain other budget priorities, Bush offered: “And then, when money is still left over, my plan returns it to the people who earned it in the first place.” For each of the nearly four years since taxes were cut, there has not been any money left over. As the result of revenue and spending levels, the government has run large budget deficits during this period. According to Table 1 of the
“Historical Budget Data” of the Congressional Budget Office, for 2002-2004 combined, the deficits totaled nearly $1.5 trillion—although the Bush and predecessor administrations prefer to report the number net of Social Security fund surpluses, which in this case would reduce the total by about $500 billion or one-third. The CBO Table reflects that the deficits for 2003 and 2004 are the largest on record.

Moreover, the budget deficits lead to a contested issue of whether the government has, in effect, borrowed the money that it gives to the current generations in the form of tax cuts. One surety, however, is that Bush pushed the tax-cut legislation through Congress, which reduced government revenues substantially. A second surety is that Bush shares accountability for the deficit spending during his terms, since he has signed into law every Congressional spending bill during his presidency—and vetoed none. A final surety is that the borrowed money will have to be repaid. Will the argument that the economic stimulus generated from the tax cuts will allow the country to “grow” its way out of its deficit budget position and repay all of the debt incurred during the deficit years become a reality? Or, will future generations, our children and grandchildren, have to pay the debt back, with interest, through their taxes? This very real budgetary and debt financing outcome was never broached in Bush’s initial or subsequent tax-cut rhetoric.

In the 2000 election campaign, Bush decried budget deficits. As president, in his February 27, 2001 address to Congress, he warned against the “dangerous road to deficits” and declared that “we must take a different path.” In this speech, he also argued that we had plenty of revenues to fund a tax cut and other priorities and to pay down an “unprecedented” amount of the national debt. But eight months later in October, 2001,
Bush was singing a different tune, as he realized that after his tax cuts, followed by increased military and homeland security spending after 9/11 and a slowing economy, the federal budget was heading into deficit. Interestingly, he stole the copyright of this “new” tune from Al Gore. Here’s what happened.

Fritz et al document how in late 2001 Bush began to claim that he had said that there were three exceptions that justified not only running a federal budget deficit but also spending the entire Social Security surplus. They quote Bush’s first statement of these exceptions, which he made at a meeting with business leaders in New York on October 3, 2001:

“Well, as I said in Chicago during the campaign, when asked about should the government ever deficit spend, I said only under these circumstances should government deficit spend: if there is a national emergency, if there is a recession, or if there’s a war.” (qtd. in Fritz et al 267)

The authors note that Bush “repeated this claim thirteen times over the next nine months and made several other more oblique references to it” (121 emphasis mine). They thoroughly document all thirteen quotes and other circuitous references in Appendix C of their book.

The problem is, however, when the news media checked, there was no evidence that Bush ever made this comment in Chicago during the campaign. All of his speeches were readily available for easy fact-checking. Fritz et al relate that “the Washington Post eventually discovered that Vice President Al Gore had proposed the exceptions back in 1998.” They add that “Bush finally stopped repeating the story, reportedly at the request of
his advisors who feared it was beginning to harm his reputation for honesty. . .” (122). In this instance, Bush was caught in an outright fabrication that he used to try to explain away the burgeoning deficit that reflected poorly, at least in the eyes of many, on his tax cut initiative.

**Medicare Reform**

Another signature initiative that Bush touted was the Medicare prescription drug program he pushed through the Congress in 2003. In “Objections Grow Over Drug Benefit,” a February 2005 article, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that the Bush administration estimated the cost at a hefty $400 billion over ten years. The wire report recounts that the resistance was great even among Republicans, especially in the House, where “leaders kept a roll call open for three hours so they could persuade skeptical lawmakers to vote yes.” In February, 2005 the White House released new estimates showing the program would cost $724 billion—almost twice as much as originally stated. But here is the most troubling point from the article:

> According to a report by the Health and Human Services Department’s inspector general, the administration’s Medicare chief pressured a lower-ranking official to withhold the higher cost estimate from Congress [at the time of passage of the bill]. Richard Foster, Medicare’s chief actuary, said administration officials threatened to fire him if he told Congress he expected the program could cost $500 billion to $600 billion. (A1+)
In other words, the Bush administration falsified known data in order to persuade Congress to adopt its Medicare reform proposal, which Bush needed for the upcoming 2004 election as a means to appeal to the large voting block of seniors.

**Revising the Rationale on Iraq**

On May 1, 2003 the White House organized a flamboyant photo opportunity on the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln*, which featured President Bush flying from an airbase near San Diego in a SB-3 Viking jet and making a tailhook landing on the carrier deck with all the major news networks filming the whole affair. It was an image-making bonanza, with the President wearing a military flight suit and giving a victorious speech under a huge “Mission Accomplished” banner as cheering naval personnel surrounded him. He declared that “‘major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.’” It was a carefully and professionally staged show, designed for optimal visual impact, portraying the authority and aura of the Commander-in-Chief with his loyal troops in a victory celebration. Fritz *et al* describe how Scott Sforza, a former television producer working in the White House Office of Communications, led the team that coordinated the stage planning, which included the banner and the placement of colorfully dressed members of the *Lincoln*’s crew behind Bush in order that they would provide the background for much of the film (Fritz *et al* 188). This image-making extravaganza provided Bush the ideal opportunity to burnish his *ethos* as charismatic war leader-hero.

Soon, however, the script for the show would be changed, as the war in Iraq worsened and larger numbers of soldiers were dying than had before Bush’s victory
celebration on the carrier. All of the President’s men and women began to parse what Bush had said, basically revising the meaning, now saying the mission was not yet accomplished. They began to disavow that the White House had anything to do with putting up the banner. Bush himself told reporters on October 28, 2003 that the crew members on the carrier put it up—not his advance team—but later the very same day, as reporters continued to press the story, Press Secretary Scott McClellan parsed Bush’s words and said the White House had produced the banner, but only at the request of the ship’s crew, and the crew had put it up. As Fritz et al suggest, this was just the beginning of the “most aggressive spin campaign of his [Bush’s] term” and it carried forward into rewriting several new drafts of the rationale for the war in Iraq (187-190).

The Bush administration has transitioned through three different rationales of the war over time and the rhetorical techniques of redefinition or frame-shifting have been the means of choice for spinning the revision. Since this revisionism has been widely documented in numerous objective news accounts and books, I submit only a very brief recap.

First, as covered earlier in this work, the war was originally sold to the Congress, the American people, the United Nations, and the world as an act of self-defense against weapons of mass destruction possessed by the evil regime of Saddam Hussein. When no WMD were found, Bush and his team tried to obfuscate, spin, and falsify the facts about the WMD situation in order to find an exit out of their box of original, whether intentional or unintentional, invalid claims. For example, a pair of truck trailers became the missing mobile biological production facilities, which was soon discredited by all but one member
of a team of fifteen experts from the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Another example was Bush’s attempt to redefine “weapons of mass destruction” as “weapons of mass destruction programs,” as mentioned in the speech analysis in Chapter 3. Others instances included an effort to misrepresent the Kay Report, a claim that we had to go to war because Saddam would not allow the U.N. inspectors in (wrong—they were in Iraq until the day Bush announced the start of the war), and the ironic practice of accusing critics of revising history, which in fact the Bush team was doing. Regarding this last charge, in a June 16, 2003 speech Bush claimed that “there are some who would like to rewrite history—revisionist historians is what I like to call them. Saddam Hussein was a threat to America and the free world. . . .” (qtd. in Fritz et al 217).

Nonetheless, when this strategy of deception, obfuscation, and rhetorical trickery would not hold water, Bush came up with his second rationale for the war in Iraq: it was the “central front” or front line in the war on terror, the familiar “better there than here” line. In a September 23, 2003, address to the United Nations, Bush stated:

We are conducting precision raids against terrorists and holdouts of the former regime. These killers are at war with the Iraqi people. They have made Iraq the central front in the war on terror and they will be defeated.

(qtd. in Fritz et al 214)

All of the Bush administration and conservative talking heads began to use this new talking point regarding Iraq. By this time, Bush and his political strategists had accorded full scapegoat status to Bin Laden, al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein, and the war on
terror. The devil-words, the terms of repulsion, were multiplying against these enemies and the administration continued to link Saddam and al-Qaeda and 9/11. The rhetorical punching bags were taking ferocious blows, deflecting attention away from the administration’s problems. Cheney and others put on a full-court press to conflate the war in Iraq with the war in Afghanistan, because the latter was widely popular among Americans.

As more time passed and the Iraq war continued with limited progress, Bush went to the well of redefinition again. Concurrent with the start of his second term, Bush introduced his third rationale for the war: the U.S. is bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq. He laid the groundwork in his second-term inaugural speech on January 21, 2005, when he declared:

The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. . . . So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture. . . .

In this speech, Bush used the word freedom twenty-seven times and its relative, liberty, fifteen times, while he never mentions the words terror or terrorism, his former routine staples. By employing the word “freedom,” Bush not only communicates in abstract, indefinite terms but he also taps into one of the most sacred and deep-seated American ideographs that can be used as a means of identification and ethical appeal. Glenn Smith argues that through a technique often used by propagandists, repetition, Bush tries to break down the will of the electorate to resist this minimally useful message (37).
The author quotes foreign policy journalist Peter Slevin who observes that “Bush’s real rhetorical goal is to present himself as the very image of freedom. Oppose Bush and you oppose freedom, albeit a warm and fuzzy definition of freedom” (qtd. in Glenn Smith 35-36). Thus Bush dons the persona of “liberator,” adding to his repertoire of masks.

In the vein of Burke’s and Weaver’s hypotheses of the hierarchy of terms, Bush and his team took, first, the entire U.S. foreign policy and recast it by moving it up the hierarchy of terms, attempting to associate it with what Burke called “the ultimate term” (A Rhetoric of Motives 189). In this case, Bush et al landed on “freedom,” and to a lesser extent, “democracy,” as the ultimate terms. After having announced this major premise in his second inaugural speech, this grounding of the nation’s foreign policy in a Wilsonian worldview of spreading freedom and democracy, then they move on to the minor premise: grounding the rationale for the War in Iraq in the same ultimate terms.

Recasting of the War in Iraq takes place about two week later in the February 2, 2005, State of the Union address, in which Bush ties it up in a nice, tidy rhetorical package:

> We are standing for the freedom of our Iraqi friends, and freedom in Iraq will make America safer for generations to come. . . . We are in Iraq to achieve a result: A country that is democratic, representative of all its people, at peace with its neighbors, and able to defend itself. (White House website)

Bush and his strategists seem to have pulled together diverse policy elements, realities on the ground in Iraq, growing discontent with Bush’s rationale for and conduct of
the war, a recognition that terrorism alone could not provide a satisfactory overarching framework for foreign policy, especially in Iraq, and second-term legacy objectives—and rolled all the goals into the big abstract cocoon of freedom and democracy—trying to strike as many responsive chords as possible in the American audience with these most basic ideographs and at same time make it very difficult for critics to attack him because these shared values are both closely held and highly nebulous. This is not to say that he totally abandoned his second rationale of Iraq as the front line in the war on terror. He maintained it, too, but now he screened it terministically in the larger ideographical context of freedom.

What American could argue against freedom? Against democracy? If one attempted to, she would find it a very slippery rhetorical slope to mount. This focus on freedom created a better defensive position from which the Bush team could fend off charges of deception and hyping the case for war, allegations of incompetence in the conduct of the war, and concerns about rising death counts of American soldiers (over 2,100) and Iraqi civilians (estimate of 25,000-100,000: the Bush administration has made it extremely difficult to estimate Iraqi casualties) as well as a $250 billion price tag that is climbing by $4-$5 billion a month—with no honorable end clearly in sight—and much of the world community of nations alienated from the U.S.

These examples of actual outcomes raise serious questions about how Bush and his team have manipulated rhetoric, when politically expedient, to muddy the focus of reality for the public while pursuing their own political and ideological goals with a very clear focus. To this point, Ron Suskind, writing in the October 17, 2004 issue of The New York Times Magazine in an article titled “Without a Doubt,” tells of an interesting encounter he
had with a senior Bush adviser in the summer of 2002. Suskind had written an article in
Esquire about Bush's communications director, Karen Hughes, and the senior adviser was
dispatched to tell Suskind that the White House did not like what he had written. However,
what most startled Suskind was that

the aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based
community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge
from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured
something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off.
"That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're
an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while
you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again,
creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things
will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to
just study what we do." (website)

Suskind goes on to relate how many top principals in all parts of the administration
and the military confirmed to him that Bush, acting primarily on his version of faith as well
as his instincts while intentionally eschewing virtually all hard analysis, believes that
taking decisive, gut-based action and being resolute is all that really counts. It follows that,
for public consumption, rhetoric becomes the tool of choice used to create and maintain a
façade of favorable reality as well as the persona of confidence and certitude to back it up.

When critics disagree, such as those who charge that Bush's rhetoric misrepresents
many aspects of the reality of the War in Iraq, the Bush team often responds with furious
rhetorical assaults that overwhelmingly imply, while not using the precise word, that these critics are unpatriotic. They typically employ the tactic of saying that critics are helping the enemy and hurting not only soldier morale but the ability of the armed forces to successfully wage the war. There may be an element of truth in these charges; nonetheless, America is a democracy and dissent over war should be expected by any competent American leader who decides to wage it. And when nearly two-thirds of the electorate has come to view the war as a mistake, as now, a leader may find it doubly difficult to maintain the rhetorical position that critics are unpatriotic. On the other hand, however, American respect for and support of our soldiers at war constitutes one of the strongest held values in the public consciousness—which provides a wedge that Bush now turns to repeatedly with positive rhetoric to strengthen his ethos and negative rhetoric to weaken his critics’ ethos.

B. American Audience—The Judges

Ultimately, the only reality check that counts is the one the audience makes based on how it assesses the rhetor and his diagnosis of reality as well as his solutions for dealing with it. Regardless of how skillfully a speaker constructs an ethos, the audience members are the sole judges. They assess what the speaker’s ethos is, what it means to them, and whether it is credible. In the final analysis, they decide who to believe, what to believe, and what propositions to embrace or reject.

President Bush has enjoyed generally good “favorability” poll ratings—reaching nearly 80 percent after 9/11—as well as relatively high “strong-leader” and “honesty”
ratings for most of his presidency, which have afforded him the national support among the electorate to motivate Congress to pass several of his signature legislative proposals. With the support or acquiescence of the Congress, he has led the country to war in Afghanistan and Iraq. By most indications, his rhetoric and his outcomes played well with the majority of Americans through his first term and into the second, although his ratings declined to the low 50 percent range in 2004 and the first half of 2005, according to Ipsos polls ("President").

However, beginning in late summer 2005 the president has experienced a major reversal in public opinion. The downward trend was initiated with the lingering, nearly static war in Iraq, in which the number of U.S. casualties climbed above 2,000. Then, in the natural disaster caused by Katrina, Bush failed to maintain or promote his ethos as a sincere, strong leader and came under significant criticism. According to polling by Ipsos, Bush's favorability ratings in late summer and fall 2005 declined to between 35 to 40 percent, the lowest of his administration ("President"). The public is now openly questioning Bush's leadership and less than a third of Americans are satisfied with the way things are going in the nation, according to an AP/Ipsos poll ("Key"). Even his most erstwhile poll factor, "strong-leader," has declined significantly to less than 50 percent, according to a CBS poll ("Bush Ratings").

Why? What has caused Bush's support to erode? What factors have driven this change in perceptions by the American audience? For one, the opposition seems to have coalesced more and sharpened its rhetoric. But, in addition, Congressmen and politicians of both parties who have previously sat silent are finding voice, asking tougher questions,
and demanding answers. For example, on October 5, 2005 the Senate defied the White House and voted 90-9 to set new limits on interrogation and treatment of all detainees in U.S. custody ("Detainee"). And on November 14th, by a 79-19 vote the Senate approved a resolution calling for 2006 to be a year of "significant transition" in which Iraqis would take the lead in their security and conditions would be created for the phased departure of American forces. The Senators also requested quarterly reporting on progress in Iraq from the executive branch ("Congress").

Among the general public, polls show that a majority have begun to doubt Bush’s genuineness, competence, and trustworthiness, that is, his ethos. For example, while Bush insists that the War in Iraq is making Americans safer from terrorism, 68 percent of Americans disagree ("CBS"). In addition, the aftermaths of hurricanes Katrina and Rita revealed that the Bush administration has made little progress in the four years since 9/11 to prepare the homeland for dealing with a potential disaster caused by a major terrorist attack. Substantiating this claim, in early December 2005 the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported in "U.S. Urged to Focus More on Security" that as the bipartisan members of the 9/11 Commission prepared to disband, they "conclude[d] that the government deserves ‘more F’s than A’s’ in responding to their 41 suggested changes" in the Commission’s report issued a year and a half earlier in July 2004 (A5). In addition, many perceive that the combination of cronyism in filling top positions in FEMA and the larger Department of Homeland Security coupled with ill-advised or ill-executed organizational changes may have actually lessened capabilities.
Meanwhile, resources are continually expended overseas where returns are in doubt. The same polls peg approval of Bush’s handling of Iraq at about 38 to 40 percent and only about a third of Americans think the war in Iraq was worth the loss of American life and the other costs (“Americans”). Thus, aside from the sizable up-tick in the public’s questioning of Bush’s rhetoric versus observable reality, many have come to disdain several of the actual realities Bush has directly brought on the country, or which he has allowed by default under his presidency, from war to deficits to failure to act on illegal immigration. Hence trust is eroding. An AP-Ipsos poll in early August 2005 showed that slightly less than half of Americans think Bush is honest (“Americans”). From Bush’s perspective, it is one thing to have the country split down the middle over some policy issue, such as abortion, but it is an entirely different level of meaning and impact to have half the country believing that you, the president, are dishonest and cannot be trusted. This outcome makes ethos-maintenance much more challenging for the president.

Accusations of deception are growing louder and some question whether Bush lied to the country. The research I have cited shows that on some very important policy initiatives Bush has used deceptive rhetoric to mislead the country for his and his party’s political advantage. In one case, the tale he made up about deficit spending exceptions, he repeated an outright falsehood several times over in order to cover his political backside.

Did he lie about the case for war in Iraq? The answer depends on “what he knew when” about intelligence on WMD in Iraq. Did he believe there were WMD in Iraq until American forces found there were none? Or, as the Downing Street intelligence memo out of Britain explicitly states, did the Bush administration fix the intelligence around the
many-year-standing, well-documented neoconservative goal to take out Saddam and convert Iraq to a U.S. satellite? Or did he, as Bob Woodward argues in *Plan of Attack*, commit such huge resources to the prewar buildup in the Mid-East and give such strong assurances to friendly, supportive nations in the region and to so many supportive, clandestine groups in Iraq *that the war was coming*—before going to Congress—before going to the U.N.—that he believed he had reached the point of no return, that is, he had to pull the trigger on the gun that he had loaded, cocked, and pointed at Iraq (344)? Only Bush and a few close advisers know the truth. In addition to concerns about deception in making the case for war, charges are flying that they hyped the case or knowingly made inaccurate statements to help persuade the country to embrace the war. For example, some fault Bush, Cheney, and others in the administration for deliberately and repeatedly linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda and 9/11 as a rhetorical device to gain support for the war, when there has never been any factual connection established between Hussein and 9/11.

When one finds oneself in a hole, the first rule is to stop digging. For example, after the Iran-Contra scandal unfolded on the public in the 1980s, President Reagan gave a speech to the nation and admitted mistakes and took responsibility for them, which allowed his administration to move largely on past the problem. However, as of the date of this writing, Bush’s refusal of this option has led to a growing negative result. The sharp downturn in public opinion indicates that a majority of the American people see key realities differently than the picture Bush paints with his brushstrokes of rhetoric.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusion

The theory and practice of the ethical appeal as a means of persuasion in all manner of rhetorical situations has evolved during the 2,500-year rhetorical tradition but its importance has only expanded in the contemporary world. The last fifty years, sometimes characterized as the age of the rhetoric of manipulation, have witnessed an explosion of knowledge and practice of motivational psychology, public relations, and mass advertising as well as the prevalent use of the visual image. These developments have provided additional means for persuaders of all types—individual, corporate, institutional, and political—to manipulate the rhetorical situation for their advantage, should they choose such ends and means. In today’s world, the speaker/leader/seller often focuses on searching for effective stimuli and creating a desired image, whether for influence, profit, partisan ideological goals, or altruistic ends. In these postmodern rhetorical situations, with widely dispersed mass audiences, persuaders consistently tap ethos, the ethical appeal, in order to portray credibility and trust for themselves and their organizations as they engage in the practice of selling products, ideas, cultural values, political ideologies and the like.

Perhaps no where are these factors—reliance on the ethical appeal, extensive image management, and pressure to manipulate the audience—more applicable than in the realm of political rhetoric. This is not to totally discount the persuasive appeals of pathos and
logos, but generally they perform a lesser role in deliberative rhetoric, with some notable exceptions. As present-day politicians and elected officials in this increasingly complex world wrestle with ideological directions and policy issues about which exact certainty is impossible and opinions are frequently divided, generally persuasion has been ratcheted down to the ethos-based appeal of character, family and moral values, and patriotism.

Looking at the applied case, why has George Bush been successful as president, at least until very recently? A major cause, perhaps the determining factor, behind Bush’s success has been a series of rhetorical strategies. First, in his extensive speaking, often before groups containing only carefully preselected participants, Bush consistently conciliates and appeals to the American audience as a whole and microsegments within it by extolling American ideographs, shared values, collective heritage, and commonplace assumptions that build identification and affinity at a very abstract, conceptual level, which is basically hollow language that does not commit him to anything concrete and also provides cover for his ideological agenda. Coupled with this broad appeal on the basis of identification, he effectively exudes the appearance of both goodwill toward the audience and sincerity about whatever topic he is addressing. Second, the White House has successfully constructed an ethos of Bush as man of character, moral values, and strong leadership. Even when his behavior and actions do not reflect these ideals, he and his team exploit rhetoric in order to sustain the image. Their key channel for this image management is the unparalleled media coverage that accrues to the president, which the Bush administration has adroitly optimized through its strategic communications and tightly-controlled public relations. Third, after 9/11, taking advantage of the nation’s raw
emotional edge from these life-shaking terrorist attacks, the Bush team augmented the first two strategies with a one-two punch of the pathos of fear and the ethos of a strong war president who alone knew how to deliver the country from the forces of evil in this dangerous world that they sketched so darkly and negatively. Further, they leveraged the persona of the war president to secure additional political capital in the domestic arena.

To tactically implement these strategies, the Bush White House deploys the full spectrum of rhetorical devices. The speechwriters and political strategists are accomplished practitioners of rhetoric and they, along with an entrenched, well-funded network of conservative intellectuals, public relations professionals, and strategically placed opinion leaders in the news media, deliver superior communications products consistently and uniformly to the public. They have even propagandized through government offices, such as the well-documented payments to media executives to air favorable administration-produced “news stories.” With revelation in late fall 2005 of payments to Iraqi news media to run U.S. Defense Department-produced news stories without identifying the source, the Bush administration has extended the covert propaganda to the nation of Iraq.

Although they expertly exploit all manner of rhetorical capabilities, the mastery of the terministic screen or language frame is perhaps their crowning achievement. Through these devices of language, they have expertly controlled the terms of debate in their favor. As a result, they have attracted conservatives, a sizable portion of independents, and some centrist Democrats with their well-tuned ethical appeal of moral and family values and by exploiting the appeal to patriotism with real as well as the rhetorically-constructed elements of the war presidency. For example, in the 2004 election, a sizable number of
Catholics, who tend to vote for Democrats, crossed over to vote for Bush. Through its effective execution of these rhetorical strategies and tactics, the Bush White House has persuaded sufficient numbers of Americans to elect and support the president, at least until recently, even though he has consistently pursued the conservative ideological agenda of the right and generally resisted consensus-making in the political center. On major domestic issues, he has moved close to the center only on education and Medicare. Even then, he has approached these initiatives primarily on his terms. On the latter, his conservative constituents resisted, but Bush’s strategists knew he must calibrate his appeal to unite at least sufficient numbers of seniors and others in the electorate to form a reelection majority. Granted, Americans’ perceptions of the weak alternatives offered by the opposition may have afforded Bush extra maneuverability.

Although Bush heads a White House that skillfully employs highly sophisticated rhetoric, the downside is that they have shown little aversion to crossing the line of ethics by relying on manipulation and deception when politically expedient. Accordingly, I suggest that Bush’s rhetoric is molded largely by Aristotelian pragmatism, which embraces the concept of the ends-justify-the-means, as opposed to Quintilian’s model orator who puts fidelity to ethics first.

Following a relatively successful first term, more recently Bush has experienced a major reversal in public support. In Chapter 2, I noted how Connors and Corbett call the ethical appeal the “hidden persuader,” given its contemporary flavor of image management, public relations, advertising, and the like. And so it is. But Bush has made overt ethical appeals the centerpiece of his persuasion, especially based on an ethos of
character and moral values as well as competence. However, in the context of a
democracy, persuasion that relies heavily on an ethos constructed through language and
images can be fragile; it may entail higher risk. Once the facade of ethos comes under
scrutiny and starts to erode, the fall from grace may be faster and deeper than where
consensus has been built through a compelling, factual case and candid debate. Once lost,
personal trust is very difficult to regain. Moreover, once the electorate concludes that the
public trust has been betrayed, the option of recovery may be off the table. The populace
may allow spin, half-truths, deceit, and the like as typical “political hardball,” but most
will not accept betrayal of the public trust by any political leader. Only the umpires,
Americans themselves, however, can determine what is in play and what is foul. For
example, Bill Clinton had his own ethos problems because of personal scandal and public
deceit, but he maintained public support because the citizenry apparently liked his
governing approach and outcomes—his governing success relied more on competence and
less on personal, character-based ethos, more on governing in the center and less on
ideology at the extreme.

While Bush is presently facing the situation in which a majority of the electorate is
feeling a sense of generalized loss of trust and confidence, the real specter that haunts him
is that these perceptions could dip further to the more dire evaluation—betrayal of the
public trust. His challenge, along with his administration, is to search for and execute
meaningful new strategies and tactics that would help restore his ethos. Of course, Bush
can count on his core supporters on the right who will stand behind him virtually no matter
what the results—about a third of the electorate. But in terms of the majority, he skates on
the thin ice of grudging support that melts away at the edges into alienation under the heat of a skeptical, even cynical, populace. Now in early December 2005, as I finish this writing, Bush has embarked on a campaign-style speaking schedule as a way to shore up support. In his speeches, he emphasizes that he has a sound plan for the war in Iraq while accentuating the positives he sees in the economy. As a result, he has received a bounce of 3-5 percentage points in the polls.

In the enduring debate about whether rhetoric is moral, immoral or amoral, Bush’s rhetoric provides plenty of evidence for the prosecution that rhetoric must be, by its very nature, manipulative, and therefore immoral. Indeed, rhetoric has been abused in the political field to the point that in contemporary usage it is customary for commentators and news people to refer to most political statements as “rhetoric,” assigning to this valuable art a very negative connotation. I contend, however, that it is not “rhetoric” that should bear the negative stigma but the politicians, including Bush, who manipulate rhetoric for political advantage and ignore the democratic principle of educating the electorate. I hold that political rhetoric can be employed ethically to great benefit of the governed—if the elected official’s persuasion embodies ethical as well as democratic ends and means.

Historian Eric Alterman in *When President’s Lie* chronicles the lies and deceptions, put forth through the vehicle of carefully crafted rhetoric, of presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman regarding the outcome of the Yalta Conference; John Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis; Lyndon Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin incidents; and Ronald Reagan and the Central America and Iran-Contra scandal. In the concluding chapter, “George W. Bush and the Post-Truth Presidency,” he likens Bush’s rhetoric around the
War in Iraq to “the same manufactured atmosphere of crisis [fostered by] President Johnson during the period when Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August 1964” (302). Alterman asks the question: “Why do American Presidents [Democrats and Republicans] feel compelled to deceive Congress, the media, and their country about their most significant decisions?” (306) He answers that they rely on deception “largely for reasons of political convenience.” He concludes that “the result, more often than not, is that when deals must be struck and compromises made on behalf of large purposes, presidents tend to prefer deception over education” (307).

When a president fails to level with the citizenry, both the country and the individual president are harmed, Alterman argues. Bush and his administration are no exception. Polls show that the majority of the public no longer buys all or even most of Bush’s constructed ethos, although Bush and his team may believe their own rhetoric. The rhetorically constructed Bush White House is developing serious cracks and faults in not only its edifice of policy outcomes but also its foundation of basic ethics. Aside from the topics raised in this work, serious charges of torture, rendition of prisoners, outing CIA agent Valerie Plame, and other illegal or unethical actions dominate the headlines.

When considered in terms of any independent, transparent, honest assessment, it seems that Bush’s ethos, buttressed by clever language and image management, can no longer bear the weight he would have it support on behalf of his administration’s agenda.
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VITA

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Bob completed an undergraduate degree in Political Science at the University of Kentucky, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1973. Following graduation, he worked in the banking field for over thirty years in Kentucky and Virginia. Most recently, he held the title of Senior Vice President at SunTrust Bank.

In 2003, Bob said farewell to SunTrust. In the spring semester of 2004, he began full-time graduate studies toward a master’s degree in English with a specialization in writing and rhetoric at Virginia Commonwealth University. From the fall of 2004 through the summer of 2005, he held a graduate assistantship under which he performed as an academic mentor for freshmen and sophomore students in the College of Humanities and Sciences.

In the summer of 2005, Bob completed a writing internship at Media General in Richmond, Virginia, during which he wrote and published several articles in the company’s Virginia Business Magazine.

Bob is married and has two children and three step-children, all of whom are grown. He and his wife, Judi, reside in Richmond, Virginia.