HEROES AND VILLAINS: POLITICAL RHETORIC IN POST-9/11 POPULAR MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

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President George W. Bush experienced a drastic rise in popularity after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, and this popularity continued through his first term and enabled him to be reelected for a second. In this thesis, I seek to explain some of President Bush's popularity by examining American popular entertainment media produced between 2001 and 2004. I look at ways that this media reinforced White House rhetoric and encouraged Bush's continued popularity with the American people. I analyze television shows (*24* and *Alias*), romantic comedy and superhero movies (*Two Weeks Notice*, *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, *Maid in Manhattan*, *Spider-Man*, and *Spider-Man 2*), and war-themed video games (*Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Halo 2*, *Call of Duty*, and *Freedom Fighters*) to examine how they contributed to the establishment of an "Us vs. Them" mentality and the construction of the wealthy white man (i.e. Bush himself) as the American savior, as well as created an environment in which any questioning of the Bush Administration or the War on Terror could be interpreted as traitorous.

To Damien.

Thanks for putting up with my crazy while this was being written and for always

reading/editing/proofing everything I write without complaint. You're my favorite.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2000 Presidential Election, the closest in this nation's history, resulted in the election of George W. Bush. After a recount in Florida, Bush was appointed the 41st president of the United States through the Electoral College despite having lost the popular vote to Al Gore. Bush began his first term in office with an approval rating of 57%, according to Gallup, Inc., and, for the larger part his first year, saw a decline in this approval rating (Presidential Approval Ratings). According to Gallup, Inc., Bush scored an approval rating of 51% for the week of September 7-10 (Presidential Approval Ratings). However, after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, Bush's approval rating skyrocketed. The week of September 14-15 saw Bush with an approval rating of 86% (Presidential Approval Ratings). This rose to 90% the following week, the highest approval rating of any president to date (Presidential Approval Highs and Lows). Although it did not stay in the 80-90%, Bush's approval ratings remained high for the remainder of his first term, and he was thus reelected for a second (Presidential Approval Ratings). This is despite the lack of justification for the War in Iraq, what Judith Butler calls the "extra-legal" components of the USA PATRIOT Act (Butler 92), and his inability to eliminate Osama Bin Laden.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence,* Butler explores "the rise of censorship and anti-intellectualism that took hold in the fall of 2001 when anyone who sought to understand the 'reasons' for the attack on the United States was regarded as someone who sought to 'exonerate' those who conducted the attack" (xiii). Butler suggests that hegemonic control of the media was attained through the establishment of distinct binaries in Post–9/11 American consciousness (2). These distinct binaries, such as "West vs. East," "Christian vs. Muslim," and

"America vs. Terrorists," among others, reinforced the Bush Doctrine by creating an "Us vs. Them" mentality in which it was seemingly impossible to question the actions of the Bush administration without appearing to sympathize with the terrorists (2-3).

Laura Shepherd's essay, "Veiled References: Constructions Of Gender In The Bush Administration Discourse On The Attacks On Afghanistan Post-9/11," provides an analysis of many White House speeches made by President Bush, the First Lady, and other members of the Bush administration during the months directly following the attacks. Shepherd focuses on ways in which the Bush Administration constructed "the identities of 'the nation,' 'the enemy,' and 'the intervention' [what we were doing in Afghanistan and why]" as presented through these speeches. She also explores " not only the ways in which [these constructions] are created and perpetuated, but also the ways in which they make certain responses, actions and attitudes permissible and censor others" (19).

Butler and Shepherd focus their arguments largely on news media and White House rhetoric. Their ideas, however, can be applied to popular entertainment media as well. The close relationship between the government and popular media existed long before the terrorist attacks. For example, in 1996, the CIA hired Chase Brandon as a formal liaison to Hollywood. His job was to work closely with film and television companies, providing "advice, technical consultants, shooting locations, props, and equipment" (Jenkins 230). According to Tricia Jenkins,

> Brandon [was hired] to transform the CIA's image [from that of] a 'negative,
>
> Machiavellian conspiratorial organization full of trench coat wearing, suspicious
>
> people who assassinated folks' and […] soon after Brandon was hired, the
>
> agency began negotiations with 20th Century Fox Television to create a weekly

series based on CIA case files that would portray the agency in a positive manner. In other words, in an era where the future of the CIA seemed uncertain, the agency finally decided to place more importance on its Hollywood endeavors and set out to revamp decades worth of film and television programs that depicted the CIA as either buffoonish (think *Get Smart*) or as a rogue agency operating with little congressional oversight and a penchant for assassinations, torture, internal conspiracies, and brainwashing (think *The Good Shepherd, The Manchurian Candidate, In the Line of Fire,* the Jason Bourne trilogy, *Three Days in the Condor, 24,* and others.) (234)

Brandon's services were considered "free" to those in Hollywood looking to make films and television shows about the government agency, yet came with the price of only depicting the American military in a positive light (230). The CIA often "leverage[d] access to its equipment to get entertainment professionals to change facts, dialogue, and scenes according to military discretion" (230).

After 9/11, the role of the CIA Liaison became even more critical. Brandon worked closely with series creator Michael Frost Beckner on the television show *The Agency* and functioned as a consultant on the first season of the television show *Alias*, both of which premiered in the weeks following 9/11 (Jenkins 235). *The Agency* depicted CIA operatives "competently defeating terrorists on a weekly basis," and often featured the tagline "Now, more than ever, we need the CIA" (236). In this way, *The Agency* "helped… reassure Americans that the CIA was indeed capable of stopping terrorist attacks and that the outfit was alert and ready should another occur" (236).

Both the CIA and the military not only influenced entertainment media to carefully control their images within popular culture, they also utilized entertainment media as a form of recruitment. Brandon was also hired as a technical consultant during pre-production of the film *The Recruit*, which was released in 2003 (236). The film depicts CIA recruitment practices and training methods, and features a DVD special feature titled 'Spy School: Inside the CIA Training Program,' which features Brandon "describing the recruitment and training processes undergone at the CIA, as well as the IQ tests, personality assessments, and background checks the agency conducts for potential employees" (237). Jennifer Garner, the star of the television show *Alias* – on which Brandon had served as technical consultant – filmed a recruitment video for the CIA in 2004, asserting that the agency needed more people of integrity, who were "smart, patriotic, [and] courageous" – the type of people, Garner explains, "who have always worked for the Agency" (Hayden). When talking about the video on *Good Morning America*, Garner stated that she felt it was "her patriotic duty to participate by helping the organization she greatly respect[ed]" and which "safeguard[s] America and its people ("Innovative Additions..."). Film and television were not the only media used in order to ingratiate American citizens with the military and boost recruitment after 9/11. In 2002, the armed forces produced a first-person shooter videogame, titled *America's Army*, which was released online for free as a recruitment tool for the U.S. military (Allison 192).

In this thesis, I examine ways in which popular entertainment from the first term of Bush's presidency reinforced White House rhetoric and contributed to the establishment of an "Us vs. Them" mentality and the construction of the wealthy white man (i.e. Bush himself) as the American savior, as well as created an environment in which any questioning of the Bush Administration or the War on Terror could be interpreted as traitorous.

In the first chapter, I explore the idea of "the enemy" – the formation of an "Us v. Them" mentality after 9/11. Focusing predominantly on the television shows *24* and *Alias,* I look at the construction of a Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorist as the enemy of the American people and the American (Super)Heroes presented to fight this threat. The creation of a Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorist within the American psyche, through shows like *24* and *Alias*, allowed the nation to unify against a common enemy after 9/11 and encouraged Americans to accept acts of violence that would not have been acceptable towards real people with faces and families of their own.

In the second chapter, I examine the construction of "the nation" – looking at romantic comedies and superhero movies released within the first three years after 9/11 in order to explore how the use of New York City iconicity within these movies created distinctly patriotic cues, as well as how each film presents a rehabilitated wealthy (or superpowered) white man as the hero – both of America as a whole and of New York City in particular. I then explore ways in which this reinforces the White House's construction of Bush as the reformed hero who would deliver America from the threat of the terrorists.

In the third and final chapter, I look at "the intervention" – the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror – and examine how the use of World War II imagery reinforced the construction of the War on Terror as both valid and winnable. I then argue that war-themed videogames became the perfect medium for pro-war rhetoric in the years directly after 9/11, as they present a construction of war as valid, justifiable, and even desirable.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMERICAN [SUPER]HERO AND THE FACELESS, AMBIGUOUS TERRORIST:

US VS. THEM IN POST-9/11 POPULAR TELEVISION

"On September the 11ᵗʰ, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country," President George Bush stated in an address to a joint meeting of Congress on September 20ᵗʰ, 2001. "…Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government.   Their leaders are self-appointed.   They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. […] Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

Only nine days after the terrorist attacks, the Bush Administration had constructed a fully formed enemy for America to blame and fear. This enemy set itself against the very principles by which America was founded – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and democracy. Constructing an enemy that set itself against America's most sacred beliefs not only gave American citizens a common enemy to rally against, but also allowed them to come together in the shared experience of hating and fearing that enemy. Bush then stated, at the end of the address to Congress, that "[e]ither you are with us, or you are with the enemy," meaning that if you didn't buy into the White House's construction of the American "Us," you were automatically one of "Them" – a terrorist.

The "Us vs. Them" mentality is not a new concept. Esra Cuhadar and Bruce Dayton use Social Identity Theory, originally developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, to explain the "Us vs.

Them" mentality in order to better understand the psychological bases of intergroup discrimination (274).

> [I]ndividuals have a basic need to view the groups they belong to in a positive light in order that they can view themselves in a positive light as well. This need for self and group esteem provides a motivation for individuals to evaluate their own group more favorably than they do other groups. By degrading the image one holds of out-groups, in-group esteem is enhanced as individuals within that group feel more positive about their own virtues, capabilities, and motivations and, by extension, more negative about the virtues, capabilities, and motivations of out-groups. In so doing, the psychological need for a positive self-image is met, the individual's sense of wellbeing is enhanced, and social cohesion within the in-group is strengthened. (Cuhadar 274-5)

This is why patriotic feelings and displays often increase greatly in times of national trauma, or when the national way of life is perceived as being threatened – such as in times of war (Carter 345). Displays of the American flag and demonstrations of national unity increased exponentially in the months and years after the 9/11 attacks (355).

Displays of "Us vs. Them" dichotomies also increased in American media during the years directly following the 2001 terrorist attacks. Ideas and attitudes that first appeared within addresses from President Bush himself and members of his administration quickly became present in news coverage, magazine and talk show fodder, and even fictional entertainment media (Butler 12-13).

Although hour-long police procedural dramas existed as a television genre long before the September 11th attacks, the formula was particularly effective in creating and reinforcing

distinct binaries, such as "Good vs. Evil," as well as establishing a world in which good always triumphs over evil and perpetrators of violence are punished for their crimes. This genre grew exponentially both in popularity and existence after the attacks. Numerous police and military procedurals, such as *Crossing Jordan* (2001), *Boomtown* (2002), *Fastlane* (2002), *Hack* (2002), *Keen Eddie* (2002), *Monk* (2002), *The Shield* (2002), *The Wire* (2002), and *NCIS* (2003), all premiered in the first two years after 9/11. The police dramas *Law & Order* (1990), *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999), and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000) all experienced their highest Neilson ratings to date between 2002 and 2004 ("How Did Your Favorite TV Show Rate?"). *CSI* generated two direct spinoffs during this period, *CSI: Miami* (2002) and *CIS: NY* (2004), as well as inspired two other crime dramas on the same network (CBS), *Without a Trace* (2002) and *Cold Case* (2003), which take place in the same fictional universe and feature crossover episodes within the *CSI* franchise.

Along with police procedurals, spy or anti-terrorist procedurals, such as *The Agency* (2001), *Alias* (2001), and *24* (2001), also experienced an increase in popularity and existence between 2001 and 2004. Like police procedurals, these shows featured clear-cut depictions of good and evil in a world where good always triumphs in the end. These shows also feature protagonists operating within real or imagined branches of the U.S. government, working hard to combat terrorism and preserve the American way of life. Because of this, these shows also fostered and reinforced the American population's need to reaffirm what it means to be American, while hating and punishing any outside "Others."

The Fox television show *24*, for example, premiered in the fall of 2001 and features the exploits of Counter Terrorist Unit agent Jack Bauer. Every season of *24* is own narrative unit, with each hour-long episode depicting one hour of "real time" within one 24-hour period. The

first season follows Jack as he attempts to save his family, and the nation at large, from a terrorist organization through the course of a single day. The ABC drama *Alias* also premiered in the fall of 2001, and revolves around Sydney Bristow, who begins working as a double agent with the CIA. *Alias,* unlike *24*, features a story arch that continues through the first three seasons of the show, as Sydney works to bring down an international terrorist organization and keep her country and her loved ones safe.

In this chapter, I will examine *24* and *Alias* in the context of rhetoric produced by the White House in the months directly following 9/11, exploring ways in which both shows reinforce much Bush Administration rhetoric. I will demonstrate ways in which these two shows work to establish a common American hero, or "Us," and a common American enemy, or "Them," by presenting heroes with strong morals and who work hard to keep America safe from foreign nations, religions, and other "Othered" enemies. These shows also imply an interconnectedness between the macro and the micro – where the hero's interests and the national interests are closely aligned – reinforcing the notion that what is good for the government is also good for the individual, thus establishing the importance of supporting the government's agenda no matter what.

Establishing the Us: An American (Super)Hero

In late 2001, the speeches of President Bush began to introduce the concept of what Laura Shepherd describes as the "Ordinary Decent Citizen" (21). Yet this ordinary decent citizen was portrayed as anything but ordinary. "A hero is somebody you look up to, of course," Bush stated on October 3, 2001 (Shepherd 22). In the following months, the Bush administration worked hard to instill the concept of an American Hero into the National psyche. "[T]he strength

of this nation is founded in the character and dedication and courage of everyday citizens," Bush said in a speech on September 17, 2001 (Shepherd 21).

Bush went on to depict "the daring of our rescue workers" who "have worked past exhaustion," and "are struggling so valiantly to deal with" the tragedy of September 11 (Shepherd 22). The Bush Administration worked hard to construct the concept of an American Hero, both an "everyman" and a "superman," who presses past exhaustion in order to help out his neighbors and his country. This hero was charged with "defend[ing] not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedoms of people everywhere" by "doing everything [he] can to make America safe" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 23). Thus the American (Super)Hero, as I call him, worked to keep America safe by any means necessary, working both inside and outside the law. My concept of the American (Super)Hero, constructed around the rhetoric of heroism Shepherd identified within the speeches of President Bush, is personified within the television shows *24* and *Alias*.

Jack Bauer, the protagonist of the television show *24*, is the quintessential American (Super)Hero. The show premiered on November 6, 2001, and the initial season ran during the months directly following the 9/11 attacks – months filled with speeches and press releases from the Bush administration outlining the concept of the American (Super)Hero. It is hardly coincidental, then, that Jack Bauer epitomizes this archetype.

Jack, played by Kiefer Southerland, is an ideal model of the American (Super)Hero. With blond hair and blue eyes, Southerland's Jack appears in every way American, standing in sharp contrast with the dark skinned terrorist enemies. He is ruggedly handsome without being alienating – he is strong and powerful, yet relatable – like the everyday citizens championed by

the Bush administration. Jack fits right in with the "police, firemen, and rescue workers," and other "heroes of New York" described by the White House.

Although painted as an "everyman," when faced with the threat of terrorism, Jack seems to be suddenly possessed with superhuman strength and endurance. Each season of *24* is set within a 24-hour timeframe, with each hour acted out in real time. Within the 24 hours of the first season, Jack must recue his kidnapped wife and daughter, save a presidential candidate from assassination, and uncover a multilayered international terrorist plot. He does so seemingly without need for food or sleep, working tirelessly for both the good of his family and for the nation. Much like the American (Super)Hero, who "worked past exhaustion," and "struggle[ed]…valiantly to deal with" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 22) tragedies both personal and public, Jack also works tirelessly to deal with crises both within his family and the nation at large.

Also like Bush's American (Super)Hero, Jack functions both inside and outside the law in order to protect his family and his government. Jack is a member of the Counter Terrorist Unit, known as CTU, a law enforcement agency working to uncover and prevent acts of terrorism within the USA. For most of the season, Jack works inside the law, as an agent of CTU. However, when the agency refuses to accept Jack's explanation of what is going on, during Episodes Nine and Ten, he is forced to flee and work as a fugitive to uncover the terrorists' plan.

At the end of the season, when Jack is led to believe that his daughter has been killed, he destroys his phone, breaking all contact with CTU, and drives his van through a shipyard warehouse. Believing that he can no longer rescue his daughter, Jack guns down every member of the terrorist cell, unloading an entire round into the body of Victor Drazen, the leader of the

organization. He does this at close range, where only one bullet could have killed Drazen. But Bauer uses any means necessary to accomplish his goals and, even when he believes that he is unable to save his daughter, he seeks retribution through gratuitous violence. However, the show does not portray this act of extreme violence as gratuitous and the audience is meant to celebrate Jack's revenge. The character of Jack Bauer not only exemplifies the idea of the post-9/11 American (Super)Hero, but also encourages the idea that one should use whatever means necessary in order to protect one's own family as well as the nation. His exploits imply that acts of violence can only be met with other, more severe acts of violent retribution.

Much like Jack Bauer, *Alias*' Sydney Bristow is a great example of this American (Super)Hero. The first three seasons of the show, which premiered on September 30th, 2001 and ran through most of Bush's first term, also reinforced much of the White House rhetoric regarding the American [Super]Hero. In the pilot episode of *Alias,* Sydney is established as an ideal "Ordinary Decent Citizen," such as Shepherd describes. Sydney may work as a secret government operative, but her main vocation is that of student. Sydney is working on a graduate degree in education in order to become a teacher, just as her deceased mother had been. Sydney surrounds herself with ordinary people – friends and loved ones who are in no way part of the secret life of espionage that she lives part-time. Her best friends Francie Calfo and Will Tippen, a restaurateur and journalist respectively, are unaware of Sydney's real day job, believing instead that she works for a bank. Sydney's boyfriend, a doctor named Daniel Hecht, is also unaware of Sydney's true occupation. This changes, however, when Daniel proposes to Sydney in the pilot, prompting her to reveal to him the truth of her double life. This revelation by Sydney provokes her employers into assassinating Daniel. Sydney begins to question the agency that she works for, discovering that she is not working for the CIA, as she has been lead to believe, but an

international terrorist organization known as SD-6. With this revelation, Sydney decides to dedicate herself to bringing down SD-6, as well as the larger Alliance of Twelve that oversees the organization, thus both avenging Daniel's death and keeping America safe from international terrorist plots.

Much like the American (Super)Hero, Sydney has her world completely turned upside down in the course of a single day. Her goals are personal, in avenging the wrongful death of her fiancé Danny, as well as public, in defeating an international terrorist ring and making the world – and America specifically – a safer place. Similar to Jack Bristow, Sydney works tirelessly when faced with a threat either personal or national until that threat has been resolved. In the face of terrorism, Sydney seems to suddenly become possessed with superhuman strength and endurance. She is able to fight off the attack of four villains simultaneously then run two miles and jump onto a moving helicopter, all in a short skirt and five inch heels. She is able to withstand constantly increasing amounts of torture without breaking and can go days in the field without tiring. In the two part episode "The Box," in the first season, for example, Sydney is able to rescue the entire staff of SD-6 from a gang of armed mercenaries almost singlehandedly. And yet Sydney always makes it home to meet up with her friends and finish her schoolwork. Much like Bush's American (Super)Hero, Sydney is both an everyman (or woman) and a superman at the same time.

Also like Bush's American (Super)Hero, Sydney functions both inside and outside of the law in order to protect her friends and her government. In "The Box," the CIA does not want Sydney to risk her life in order to stop the takeover of SD-6 – a known terrorist organization. Yet Sydney's friends and coworkers are in the building, and most of them believe that they are working for the CIA, not a terrorist organization. Also, Sydney is aware that the head of the

mercenaries, McKenas Cole, is a threat not only to SD-6, but also to the American government. And so Sydney works outside of the jurisdiction of the CIA in order to thwart the mercenaries and rescue her coworkers.

Bush's "heroes of New York," the "police, firemen, and rescue workers" he described in his speeches, are depicted as very masculine in nature (Shepherd 22). On the surface, as a strong female heroine, Sydney seems to subvert the gendered American (Super)Hero described by the White House. Yet the closer one looks at the show, the more one can see how closely *Alias* actually adheres to these gendered stereotypes. Although Sydney is a strong female hero, she is the only female protagonist in the show presented with any level of personal autonomy. All other women who are presented as strong and/or independent within the first three seasons of the show are either introduced as villains or are revealed to be a villain later on.

Even Sydney herself is not altogether independent and autonomous. Although Sydney is presented with a certain level of personal agency, she is always governed by and/or aided by a male or masculine figure. First and foremost, Sydney is answerable to the CIA. The government agency, headed by a man and staffed almost exclusively by men, gives Sydney all of her directives. Even when Sydney chooses to function outside of the law, she is still subjected to patriarchy. Sydney's father, Jack Bristow, plays a large part in her life, often traveling with her, giving her direction, rescuing her, and providing help and protection. When her father is not able to direct or help her, Sydney often turns to her handler, Michael Vaughn. On becoming a double agent for the CIA in the pilot episode, Sydney is presented with this handler – a man who gives her directions and aid. Sydney is answerable to Vaughn in everything she does. Even when going against CIA directions, Sydney usually includes Vaughn in her plans and seeks his aid. Sometimes, Sydney works with both her father and Vaughn in order to complete her goals. In

"The Box," for example, both Vaughn and Jack aid Sydney in defeating the mercenaries and rescuing her coworkers.

This patriarchal influence is similar to what Shepherd calls the "Figure of Authority" (23). According to Shepherd, the "Ordinary Decent Citizen," looks to this "Figure of Authority" when making decisions regarding their heroic actions. "If the Ordinary Decent Citizen was the embodiment of valorized masculinity, literally re-presented as the corporeal form of 'the nation', then the Figure of Authority was his cerebral counterpart, represented as the brains of the body politic" (23). Shepherd argues that the White House worked hard to present President Bush and his administration as the all-knowing brains of the nation – always able to comprehend and execute the required actions. This "Figure of Authority" is represented in *24* as the Counter Terrorism Unit that Jack works for. In *Alias,* however, this "Figure of Authority" is much stronger, presumably because the hero is a woman. Sydney's father, Jack, and her handler Vaughn, as well as the CIA and the government at large, all function as "Figure of Authority" in Sydney's life.

Despite their differences, both Jack Bauer and Sydney Bristow exemplify the Bush Administration's careful construction of the American (Super)Hero – an everyman (or woman) who responds to tragedy with superhuman abilities, working selflessly and tirelessly to defend his family and his country. In a country as large and diverse as the United States, creating an ideal American (Super)Hero unified the country through the sense of a shared "Us" experience – a common understanding of what it means to be a true American.

Establishing the Them: A Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorist

Along with the American [Super]Hero, the Bush Administration also began to introduce the idea of an ambiguous enemy – a faceless foreign terrorist – after 9/11. These Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorists are identified by the Bush administration by their "barbaric behavior." They are men who "slit [the] throats of women." They "plan, promote and commit murder," and "no rules govern their behavior." "They have no justification for their actions." And yet, despite their barbaric behavior, these men are "faceless cowards." They are ambiguous "terrorists" who are nowhere in particular and yet everywhere around us, just waiting to perpetrate more "heinous acts of violence" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 25-26).

Judith Butler, paraphrasing Emmanuel Levinas, discusses the importance of creating a "faceless" enemy. "[T]he face [is] a figure that communicates both the precariousness of life and the interdiction on violence" Butler writes (xviii). Removing the face "of those against whom war is waged," makes it easier to perpetuate violence against them (Butler xviii-xix). By depicting a barbaric, violent enemy that threatens the American way of life, yet keeping this enemy ambiguous and removing his face, the Bush administration was creating the optimal environment for the American public to accept war and violence perpetrated by the American government. Indefinite detention centers, such as Guantanamo Bay, as well as highly contested military operations, such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, were much easier to accept and support when deployed against ambiguous, faceless enemies. Both *24* and *Alias* featured faceless and/or ambiguous villains who threatened not only the loved ones of the American (Super)Hero, but also the entire American way of life.

The terrorist cell from the first season of *24* is intricately layered, featuring ambiguous enemies both foreign and domestic. The first third of Season One revolves around a group of

American mercenaries who have kidnapped Jack's wife and daughter and threaten to kill them if Jack does not comply with their request to assassinate a presidential candidate. As the second act of Season One progresses, however, Jack discovers that the mercenaries were actually hired by Serbian terrorists, establishing a foreign threat to both the hero's family and his country. The final third of the season revolves around the terrorists' successful attempt to break their leader, Victor Drazen, out of an indefinite detention center, as well as identifying a mole inside CTU. Every time Jack defeats an enemy, another, more despicable enemy appears. With an unidentified mole inside CTU, it becomes unclear as to who is and is not the enemy. The terrorist cell is large, with countless connections, motivations, and faceless antagonists – Jack's struggle is somewhat similar to Bush's ambiguous "War on Terror."

The terrorists from the first season of *24* seek retribution for a perceived act of terror perpetrated by the United States, in which the Drazen's wife and children were murdered during an American operation. It is revealed late in the season that both Jack himself and the presidential candidate he is being forced to assassinate were involved in that operation, and were thus directly responsible for the death of Drazen's family. However, this is not portrayed as a valid reason for seeking retribution against Jack and the US government. And yet Jack's retribution at the end of the season, when he believes his daughter is dead, *is* portrayed as valid. No matter what the reasoning these terrorists use to validate their plots, it is depicted as invalid and they are portrayed as barbarians. However, when Jack commits similar actions, killing every single person on the docks indiscriminately with gratuitous violence, he is seen as a hero. No matter what the circumstances, the terrorists are depicted as "hav[ing] no justification for their actions" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 26), similar to how they are depicted by the Bush Administration.

At the end of Season One, the mole kills Jack's wife, reinforcing the White House construct of terrorists who "slit [the] throats of women" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 25). These terrorists, both foreign and domestic, are similar to the terrorists presented by the Bush administration, in that they "plan, promote and commit murder," with "no rules govern their behavior" (26). They are evil men and women, and when Bauer guns them down in the end, the audience can't help but cheer, even if Jack's daughter is not actually dead. The enemy has been defeated.

Alias also features faceless, ambiguous enemies. In *Alias,* enemies are made faceless by being depicted as Othered in some way. In order to be faceless, and thus inhuman and evil, it must first be established that these people are not like "Us." These people are in some way different. This can be depicted through religion, nationality, race, or gender. In fact, *Alias* employs all of these tactics when characterizing the major villains within the show.

One way in which the show Others its villains is through the depiction of foreign religions. Arvin Sloan, the head of SD-6 during the first season, then a member of both the Alliance and the Covenant, is Sydney's main antagonist throughout all five seasons of the show. Sloan is the man who initially persuades Sydney to join SD-6, convincing her that it is a government organization. He is also the one who ordered Sydney's fiancé, Danny, killed when she revealed her secret occupation to him. Sloan is a follower of Milo Rimbaldi, a renaissance-era inventor and prophet who is modeled around both Leonardo Da Vinci and Nostradamus. As the show progresses, Sloan is revealed to be an obsessive, fanatical disciple of Rimbaldi. He believes that Rimbaldi saw the future and has a plan and a purpose for Sloan that he must adhere to no matter what. Sloan is willing to do anything, including sacrifice those he loves, such as his wife and daughter, in order to follow the path he believes that Rimbaldi has laid out for him. And

Sloan is not alone in this. Many members of both the Alliance and the Covenant are followers of Rimbaldi. In fact, the Covenant's main goal is to establish a new world order based on the teachings of Rimbaldi.

Sloan's fanatic adherence to a foreign belief system, and the destruction and terrorism that is caused because of it, can be directly compared to the fear many Americans had of the Islamic religion after 9/11. Sloan's fanatic belief in a foreign religion is what drives him to commit many atrocities. According to *Alias,* Americans, with their traditional Christian beliefs, would never commit the acts of terrorism perpetrated by someone motivated by a foreign, fanatical belief system. This fanatic belief in a foreign religion is what Others Sloan and many of the other terrorists – it is what sets them apart from the everyday American citizens.

Another way in which *Alias* presents Othered villains is by giving them a nationality other than that of American. Almost all of the main antagonists within the show are presented as non-American, and/or given foreign accents, even if the actors portraying those characters are American themselves. Introduced in the third episode of the first season and returning sporadically throughout the series as a nemesis of Sydney's, Anna Espinosa is the first antagonist depicted as foreign in nationality. Although portrayed by an American actress, Espinosa is a Cuban-born Russian operative who works for K-Directorate, a rival organization of SD-6. Much like Sloan, Espinosa is a Rimbaldi zealot. Julian Sark is another character Othered through a foreign accent, despite also being portrayed by an American actor. Sark is introduced in Episode Fourteen of Season One, and is a series regular for the following four seasons. With a British accent and a father who descended from the Romanov family in Russia, Sark's nationality is ambiguous – but decidedly un-American. In the third season, Michael Vaughn's wife, Lauren Reed, who is revealed halfway through the season to be a traitor working for Rimbaldi fanatics,

is presented with a British accent. Despite the fact that she claims to be an American who happened to spend most of her childhood abroad, her accent depicts her as something other than truly American. Sydney's mom is also foreign, as it is revealed in the middle of Season One that she is actually a Russian spy by the name of Irina Derevko. Like Reed, Sloan, and Espinosa, Derevko is a follower of Rimbaldi and she makes many of her un-American choices based on her loyalty to her foreign nationality or her religious beliefs.

Alias also Others antagonists through the use of race. Francie Calfo is one of only two good characters who are not white – and the only woman of color – depicted as good in the first three seasons of the show. Anna Espinosa is also a woman of color, but she is decidedly not good. And, when an antagonist decides to take the form of one of Sydney's close friends and act as an undercover agent for The Alliance (an organization made up of Rimbaldi fanatics), Francie is the person she clones and then kills in order to take her place. Thus Francie spends the second half of Season Two as an evil spy. The only character of color depicted as a hero is Sydney's partner, Marcus Dixon. Yet even Dixon is questionable at times, suffering a major breakdown after the death of his wife and trying to seek revenge in any way he can.

Although the villains within the first three seasons of *Alias* seem unique and diverse, they are all "Othered" in some way, allowing the audience to see them as a "Them" instead of an "Us." The terrorists of *24* and *Alias* are very different villains, yet all fit the description of the Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorist constructed by the White House. This conception of a common enemy helped unify the country by giving them a common enemy to rally against.

Us vs. Them: If You're Not With Us, You're Against Us.

In "Explanation and Exoneration, or What We Can Hear," first published as an essay in the fall of 2002, Butler discusses "the binarism that Bush proposes" which has "only two positions [that] are possible – 'Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists'" (2). Butler argues that "the use of the flag as an ambiguous sign of solidarity with those lost on September 11 and with the current war" creates an environment where "sympathy with the one translates, in a single symbolic stroke, into support for the latter" (3). In other words, by expressing sympathy for those lost on September 11, one was automatically required to support the ambiguous War on Terror. Hence the opposite was also true – to speak out against any of the actions of the Bush Administration was to lack sympathy for everything lost during the terrorist attacks.

"Stand with the civilized world or stand with the terrorists." Bush announced on September 29, 2001 (Shepherd 27). The "civilized world," of course, was Bush's own administration. The following year, the White House made it very clear that those were the only two stances available. Bush emphasized, "This is the world's fight. This is civilizations fight" (27). This implied that anyone opposed was not civilized, and thus would be considered a terrorist. The War on Terror was described as "the fight of all who believe in progress and…freedom" as well as "a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (34). If you did not stand with the President and the War on Terror, you did not stand for progress and freedom, or the rights of women.

While the Bush administration emphasized the importance of unity and support for the government's actions during the months after 9-11, popular media emphasized the ways in which doing what was good and right for the country equated to achieving things that were good and

right in one's personal life and family. Both *24* and *Alias* emphasized the interconnectedness of national and personal responsibility, and the personal dangers of neglecting one's civic duty.

During the first season of *24,* Jack must race the clock to rescue his kidnapped family and stop a plot to assassinate a politician. These two threats are linked and he cannot accomplish one without also accomplishing the other. The same terrorists who have kidnapped his family are also trying to assassinate the presidential candidate, implying that the same danger that threatens the government also threatens the individual family. Terrorists that threaten the "progress and…freedom" of the United States also "slit [the] throats of women" (Shepherd 25, 34).

According to *24,* terrorists may have grandiose plans about toppling the U.S. government, but they will accomplish those plans by kidnapping and killing innocent citizens. By disagreeing with the Bush Administration's actions after 9-11, one was not only turning one's back on the good of the nation, but on the good of his or her individual family as well.

At the end of the season, Jack refuses to follow the orders of CTU and goes off on his own to rescue his daughter, more concerned with her life than with the good of the country. His daughter is actually able to escape on her own though and in the end he does not need to save her. While he is gone, the mole inside of CTU kills his wife. The lesson here is that what is best for the country really is best for the individual and if one puts the needs of his own family ahead of what is best for the country, there will be dire personal consequences as well as national consequences.

This same moral is illustrated in the first episode of *Alias.* The show begins with the assassination of Sydney's fiancé by the terrorist organization she has been unknowingly working for. In fact, much of the bad that befalls Sydney's friends and family comes at the hands of religious fanatics and terrorist organizations. Her friend Will is kidnapped by SD-6 at the end of

Season One. In order to save his life, Sydney must destroy a mystical Rambaldi device, which is being used by his disciples for some unknown purpose. As mentioned earlier, Sydney's friend and roommate, Francie, is also caught up in Sydney's fight against terrorism. She is cloned and then murdered in Season Two by a follower of Rimbaldi. It is revealed in the episode "Double Agent" that a machine designed by Rimbaldi is what enabled the cloning of Francie in the first place. The threat to Sydney's friends is directly linked to terrorism motivated by the fanatical practicing of a foreign religion. Thus, the show reinforces the idea that if Sydney isn't working to stop these enemies – and doing so successfully – not only will her government suffer, her loved ones will suffer as well.

The interconnectedness of government and family is also depicted in *Alias* through Sydney's relationship to her father, Jack, and Jack's relationship to the US government. Jack Bristow holds a high position within the CIA and is privy to a lot of information that Sydney is not. Sydney often disagrees with her father and questions his directives. However, Jack is always portrayed as being right in the end, and Sydney's rebellion against him often results in embarrassment, if not harm. In the episode "Reckoning," from Season One, for example, Sydney becomes convinced that her father is a former KGB agent and that he murdered her mother. She then discovers, in a later episode, that her mother was the actual KGB agent, and that her father has been working to protect Sydney. For Sydney, doing what her father tells her to do and doing what her government tells her to do is the same thing. And when she questions her directives, it often leads to placing her father in direct danger. Like *24, Alias* reinforced this idea that the macro and the micro were connected, and that supporting the government and opposing foreign enemies directly correlated with the health and wellbeing of one's family and friends.

Conclusion

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were what many sociologists have labeled cultural trauma – "a traumatic event that fundamentally alters the lived and subsequent experiences of a collectivity" (Hill 485). In a country as vast and diverse as the United States, the unifying rhetoric after the trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which sought to establish a national identity, an "Us," was crucial in unifying the country as well as establishing support for the Bush Administration and the War on Terror. The concept of the American (Super)Hero, who worked tirelessly to save his family, as well as his nation, allowed Americans to feel safe and comfortable at home as well as accept the idea that it was important to seek retribution and quell terrorism by any means necessary. The construction of a faceless, ambiguous terrorist allowed the nation to unify against a common enemy and excuse acts of violence that would not have been acceptable towards real people with faces and families of their own. By creating an environment in which citizens accepted that the good of one's personal life hinged on the good of the nation at large, as well as reinforcing the idea that to question the actions of the government would be to sympathize with the enemy, the government successfully established an environment in which the majority of citizens wouldn't and couldn't question the actions of the Bush Administration.

CHAPTER II.

CONSTRUCTING A FIGURE OF AUTHORITY:

THE REHABILITATION OF THE WEALTHY (OR SUPERPOWERED) WHITE MALE

On September 14, 2001, President George W. Bush stood upon a fire truck amongst the rubble that had, less than a week before, comprised the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. With one hand slung over the shoulders of a firefighter and a bullhorn in the other, Bush addressed his crowd of rescue workers and city officials.

"Thank you all," Bush began. "I want you all to know..." Here he motioned towards his bullhorn, stating, "It can't go any louder." He then turned back to the crowd and continued. "I want you all to know that America today… America today is on bended knee, in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. The nation stands with the good people of New York City and New Jersey and Connecticut as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens."

"I can't hear you," yelled one rescue worker.

"I can hear you!" Bush replied, eliciting a roar from the crowd. "I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people -- and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!"

At this point, the crowd begins to roar even louder, eventually evolving into a chant of "U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

In his book, *Bush at War,* veteran investigative journalist Bob Woodward discusses this speech and the reaction from the crowd. "This was an amazing moment … eloquent, simple, the perfect backdrop, a moment for the news magazine covers, the communications hall of fame and

for history" (Roper 136). A previously contested president with a low approval rating, Bush flourished in the weeks and months after 9/11, as his team worked to portray him as *the* savior of the American people. "I've never felt more comfortable in my life," Bush stated on September 19th (136). David Frum, a political commentator who served as a speechwriter for President Bush, asserts "Bush's oratory in the ten days after the terrorist attacks transformed his leadership" (Malphurs 191).

When the White House was threatened a few days after 9/11, Bush refused to be evacuated to a bunker (Roper 136). Instead of fleeing, he presented a figure that was dauntless and unafraid, reinforcing the iconic cowboy image he had cultivated during his presidential campaign. While the American press had paid little attention to this cowboy image during the 2000 Presidential Campaign, the imagery became extremely popular after the terrorist attacks (Malphurs 188). Discussing the media's construction of President Bush, legal analyst Ryan Malphurs writes,

> Clearly the idea of frontier justice and retribution is central to the president's frontier ideology. September 11 reinvigorated President Bush's connection to cowboy mythology and as the cowboy rises to his mythical status through conflict, so too did President Bush rise to the conflict. Renshon notes that ''unlike his father, George W. obviously doesn't avoid conflict;'' in fact, according to Senator Schumer, President Bush ''is staking his entire presidency on . . . whether he can succeed in his goal of wiping out terrorism.'' (191)

As well as utilizing cowboy and western motifs, the Bush Administration used distinctly post-9/11 imagery, such as Bush at Ground Zero, surrounded by rescue workers right after 9/11 and in a Fighter Pilot uniform as he arrived on a U.S. Navy carrier in the co-pilot's seat of a Navy S-3B

Viking during the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom, in order to reinforce the construction of Bush as *the* American Hero.

Unlike the "Ordinary Decent Citizen" of the previous chapter, this heroic image is what Laura Shepherd calls the "Figure of Authority."

> The Ordinary Decent Citizen was constructed as an image of national identity, and in a similar way an alternative emerged, recognizable as the Figure of Authority. 'I've got a job to do', claimed Bush (2001p), 'and that's to explain to the American people the truth'. If the Ordinary Decent Citizen was the embodiment of valorized masculinities, literally re-presented as the corporeal form of 'the nation', then the Figure of Authority was his cerebral counterpart, re-presented as the brains of the body politic. (Shepherd 23)

Bush stands with the firefighters of New York and the fighter pilots of the Iraqi war, but he stands in front of them, as their head, their leader – their Figure of Authority.

The trope of the white, wealthy (or at least powerful) man as the Figure of Authority was reinforced throughout popular culture in the years directly following the terrorist attacks. In "Structural Integrity, Historical Reversion, and the Post-9/11 Chick Flick," Diane Negre examines this motif in the context of romantic comedy films. In this chapter, I take Negre's examination a step further, offering further analysis of romantic comedies, as well as two superhero films. I also examine the way in which New York City was used as an implicit nationalist cue, creating more conservative, pro-government feelings within the audience. I then look at how the Bush Administration used this trope – Shepherd's "Figure of Authority" (23) – to reinforce the image of George W. Bush as this authority, who will rescue the American people from the threat of terrorism.

From romantic comedies to superhero movies, the construction of the rehabilitated wealthy (or superpowered) white male as the savior became a popular motif. Although the rehabilitated man is not a new trope, what is special about many films released in the first few years after 9/11 is the male protagonist's transformation not just into a better superhero or partner for a woman, but also into a civic-minded hero who helps change, transform, and/or preserve a part of New York City. By using distinctly American and New York City iconography, these films promote the rehabilitated white man as the true American Hero, who will save the city and, consequently, the nation.

"Manipulative Iconicity": Building Nationalism Through New York City Iconography

System Justification Theory posits that after a large-scale cultural trauma, such as the one experienced with the terrorist attacks of September 11, "people have a motive to support the larger system of which they are a part, and to see the status quo as legitimate and good" (Carter et al 342). That is to say, after the system to which they belong is threatened, people feel the need to reassert the value and importance of said group. This is why, directly after 9/11, there was a substantial rise in the display of American flags, as well as images of New York City and items of clothing that display NYPD and NYFD logos (341). These icons not only allowed those who were displaying them to assert their support of the nation at large, but also reaffirmed nationalism in those viewing the icons. Carter et al argue, "After implicit exposure to an American cue (such as the American flag), participants have shown a greater desire for power… and they became more likely to hold positive implicit and explicit attitudes toward, and even

more likely to vote for, conservative politicians" (345). The authors conclude that much of the ideology connected to American iconography is associated with aggression, power, and politically conservative beliefs (345).

The use of New York City iconography became a way to instill nationalism and reinforce the ideology of the Bush administration. In *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration,* David Simpson discusses the way in which even the language surrounding the attacks and New York City encouraged nationalism and support for the conservative politics.

> In arguing that the culture of 9/11 has a longer history than many have supposed, even as we must recognize its disruptive forms, my inquiry takes very long views – of the culture of epitaphs, obituaries, and of the naming of the dead, of the building of the shelter and the monuments – and relatively short views – the framing of the dead, the war in Iraq, the rebuilding at "Ground Zero." Language itself is a major resource in the naming of what cannot be named, in the location of 9/11 within the longstanding rituals and short term political strategies that embodies and enables: so we have *sacred ground*, *Ground Zero*, the *heroes* of 9/11, the careening hyperbole that shifted from *shock and awe* to *infinite justice to enduring freedom* to the *Freedom Tower* itself… The normalization of these terms within the standard lexicon so that they can be repeated without question is precisely one of the most effective ways in which culture is remade. No responsible intellectual should fail to notice and respond to this process. (17).

Through the use of what Simpson dubs "manipulative iconicity" (16), in the months after 9/11, the Bush Administration was able to use rhetoric surrounding the terrorist attacks to create an

implicit American cue out of New York City itself, reinforcing conservative political values and support for the White House.

New York City has always been a popular setting for romantic comedy films. However, as Negre asserts, the years directly following the September 11 attacks seemed to "conjoin fantasies of romantic transcendence with direct or oblique invocations of the integrity of the Manhattan infrastructure" (52). The city became less of a setting and more of an actual character in and of itself, where "the couple and the city stand in particular relation to one another, that the union of one is somehow bound up with the unity of the other" (51-52). In other words, the city itself plays a large part in the characters' individual redemptions as well as their eventual union as a couple.

The film *Two Weeks Notice*, released on December 18, 2002 – a little over 15 months after 9/11 – reinforces the Bush Administration's rhetoric regarding the sacredness of New York City architecture. The protagonists of the film, Lucy Kelson (Sandra Bullock) and George Wade (Hugh Grant), first meet as Lucy attempts to halt the demolition of the Coney Island community center. Lucy is a lawyer working to preserve the city's historical architecture, while George is a real estate tycoon. Finishing each other's sentences, they state that historical buildings "can turn strangers into neighbors" and that "the right design for a park can make people feel secure" (Negra 52). Although they are on different sides of this argument at the beginning – George is arguing that it is important for him to construct a new building while Lucy is arguing for the preservation for the current building – they both agree on the importance of the city's architecture. Near the end of the movie, George issues a statement in which he announces his plans to preserve the community center as well as declares his love for Lucy, who, he states, is

"rather like the building she loves so much" (52-53). George is reformed as he comes to understand the "new moral value of Manhattan real estate" (53).

While *Two Weeks Notice* stresses the "moral value of Manhattan real estate" (53), the film *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* (2003) reinforces President Bush's ideology concerning the heroes of New York. During numerous speeches in the months after 9/11, Bush spoke of the "heroes of New York… police, firemen, and rescue workers," who "have worked past exhaustion," and "are struggling so valiantly to deal with" the tragedy of September 11 (Shepherd 22). *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* reaffirms the Bush rhetoric regarding the "heroes of New York" and their ability to offer salvation – moral, as well as physical. Ben Barry (Matthew McConaughey) is an advertising executive trying to land a new account by making women fall in love with him; Andie Anderson (Kate Hudson) is a journalist attempting to write a feature on "How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days." The couple begins dating to further their own careers without any consideration about the feelings of the other. Not until they visit Ben's family in Statin Island, however – a brother who is a uniformed NYPD Officer, a sister who is a nurse, and a father who is a navy veteran – do they begin to establish legitimate feelings for one another (Negra 53). Being exposed to these hardworking heroes of New York transforms Ben and Andie into people who are loving and considerate.

The end of *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* takes place on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, between Brooklyn and Staten Island. Andie is attempting to flee the city after their relationship has fallen apart. Ben asks her to stay in New York City, implying that they will leave Manhattan and move to Staten Island, like his authentic family. This scene utilizes the physical iconography of New York City while also alluding to the moral fiber of the heroes of

New York like Ben's family. By deciding to stay in New York but move nearer to his family, Ben is showing that he has been transformed by their moral goodness.

Maid in Manhattan (2002) reaffirms the rhetoric of hardworking New Yorkers to offer moral salvation, as in *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days,* as well as displays the iconography of New York City as it pertains to the romance of the protagonists, as was the case in *Two Weeks Notice*. Senatorial candidate Chris Marshal (Ralph Fiennes) is a self-involved politician with no understanding about what it is really like in New York City. Chris learns "that he has a broader responsibility to serve [the] public" from hardworking New York City maid Marisa Ventura (Jennifer Lopez). Being exposed to a hardworking hero of New York transforms Chris into a better politician, a better man, and a better suitor for Marisa. New York iconography is also present in the courtship of Chris and Marisa. When Chris first meets Marisa's son Ty, they are in an elevator together standing directly in front of a picture of the Flatiron Building (Negra 60). Chris and Marisa's first meeting is a stroll around Central Park. At the end of the film, when Chris proclaims his love for Marisa, the two are standing in front of a wall-sized mural of New York City, the Empire State Building jutting out distinctly between them. New York City iconography is present, at least in pictures, during all of the important parts of their courtship.

Although *Spider-Man*, which was released in May of 2002, was written and filmed predominantly before 9/11, certain scenes were added or reshot after the terrorist attacks, and the film itself was digitally edited in order to present a distinctly post-9/11 New York City (Koh 744). One scene, re-shot after the attacks, features an angry mob of New Yorkers throwing rocks at Spider-Man's (Toby Maguire) nemesis, the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe) (744). "He's a New Yorker," one member of the mob asserts to the Green Goblin, "You mess with one New Yorker, you mess with all of us!" Director Sam Raimi stated that he purposefully changed the dialogue

and reshot the scene after the attacks because he wanted it "to be a tip of the hat to those brave rescue workers who risked their lives to be heroes" (Koh 744). The film suggests that Spider-Man's success is linked with that of other New Yorkers – that they're all in this together. Peter Parker's transition from meek human into a superhero is also directly linked to the city itself (Richmond 116). The camera follows Peter as he takes the first leap off of the roof of a building and begins climbing and soaring from building to building, truly becoming Spider-Man for the first time. Spider-Man's very mobility and power comes from New York, as the film follows him through the city, swooping through the skyscrapers that cut New York City's skyline.

Other *Spider-Man* scenes were changed digitally in post-production, such as the erasure of the World Trade Center and the addition of an American flag in the last shot of the movie (Koh 744). This final scene of the film has Spider-Man swinging between the skyscrapers of New York City, eventually landing on the pole of an enormous American flag, high above the city. Despite attempts to create a more post-9/11 film, *Spider-Man* also features a very nostalgic, romanticized version of New York City – a New York City free from the terror of 9/11. As Wilson Koh writes, "Spider-Man resolutely patrols a gloriously golden version of New York which is free from dark expanses of decay and purple clouds of pollution. The wide-angle lens used further invests this comforting image with an epic grandeur" (737).

Released in June of 2004, *Spider-Man 2* features even more distinct post-9/11 iconicity. In the scene that prompts the film's main antagonist, Dr. Otto Octavious (Alfred Molina), to become a villain, his wife is killed in an accident wherein a building begins to collapse. As Jeanne Holland notes,

In a scene reminiscent of the collapsing towers of 9/11, beams and iron bars fall

as the building begins to crumble. People scream and flee in terror. Glass shatters

in the front window and shards fly through the home, killing [the wife]. The scientist turns to find his wife dead and is hit in in the back with a laser beam, which […] renders him unconscious. […] Spider-Man stops the reaction and saves New York City, initially averting a 9/11-like catastrophe. (296)

However, Spider-Man is not able to prevent catastrophe altogether. Dr. Octavious becomes physically bonded to the mechanical tentacles he was using in his work, turning him into an Octopus-like monster. When he wakes up during surgery, while the doctors are trying to remove his artificial limbs, he becomes enraged and begins attacking them.

Doc Ock's hybrid identity evokes the 9/11 terrorists as hideous cyborgs who used jets as their prostheses of choice to cause destruction. Furthermore, the film reenacts scenes of falling bodies, images that comprise for many their most traumatic memories of 9/11. Viewers witness the first falling body during the arms' mass killings in the operating room. One nurse tries to climb the wall to escape. The camera looks down and focuses on her face as her desperate expression fills the screen. Viewers watch as she falls, pulled by one of the arms, to be murdered. In this particular scene, the victim dies. However, in all others, Spider-Man catches the falling bodies, reversing the horrific visual imagery seared into so many persons' memories. (Holland 297)

Giving Spider-Man a nemesis reminiscent of the post-9/11 terrorists, who leaves devastation in his wake as he makes his way through Manhattan, emphasizes the impression that Spider-Man is a distinctly New York City hero. By rescuing many of the falling bodies, throughout both movies, Spider-Man only reinforces this idea.

Utilizing of New York City iconography, as well as the Bush Administration's construction of the hardworking heroes of New York, *Two Weeks Notice, How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, *Maid in Manhattan* and both *Spider-Man* movies offer distinct nationalist cues that motivated Americans to "support the larger system of which they were a part, and to see the status quo as legitimate and good" (Carter et al 342) in the years following the September 11 terrorist attacks. This "Manipulative Iconicity" reaffirmed nationalism and reinforced the ideology of the Bush Administration.

The "Happy Shopper": The Woman's Place in Post-9/11 America

Negra, discussing the White House's highly gendered rhetoric after the terrorist attacks, argues that "because national boundaries [had] been so conspicuously breached through terrorism, the ideological boundaries of gender and family need[ed] to be shored up" (52). Thus the rhetoric from the Bush Administration concerning women's roles in post-9/11 America was that of homemaker and mother. During one speech, President Bush stated that "the greatest gift… [a] girl could give was her father" (Bush quoted in Shepherd 23). Thus, while a girl or woman was expected to give up her father, brother, or husband, she was not expected to be an active participant in the War on Terror. Negra goes on to describe the shift in gender construction after 9/11.

> In the months and years after the attacks, newspapers, magazines, and a variety of
> other media highlighted a return to hearth and home. Attendance at religious
> services rose nationally and it was widely reported that Americans felt a new
> sense of the value of family. An October 2001 *New York Times* article observed
> that 'home sewing and needle arts are thriving in these jittery times,' and cited a

Manhattan sewing instructor observing that 'In the wake of 9/11 people are

beginning to re-examine themselves. They are reassessing what is important to

them, what was important to their grandparents, and which traditions they are

going to bring forward to the next generation.'" (55-56)

Many films produced during the years directly following the terrorist attacks reinforced this shift

back to traditional gender roles. Negra describes what she calls a "miswanting formula" present

in many romantic comedies after 9/11, whereby a woman is punished for wanting the wrong

things and is then transformed into the type of person who wants the "correct" things out of life –

i.e. to be a wife and mother (53).

In *Two Weeks Notice,* Lucy is a Harvard educated environmental lawyer bent on saving

the Coney Island Community Center. Lucy is smart and driven, yet she is unable to accomplish

any of her goals. During the opening scene in which Lucy is introduced, she is attempting to save

a historic building from demolition. Lucy not only fails to preserve the building, but also ends up

in jail for her efforts. Not until she meets George and agrees to work for him is Lucy able to do

anything significant with her life. As Negra writes, "*Two Weeks Notice* tweaks the miswanting

formula a bit by validating Lucy's aspirations but showing that they are fundamentally

unachievable without wealth and a male patron" (54). Throughout the film Lucy is portrayed as

being unable to accomplish much of anything on her own without messing it up. She accidentally

interferes with a Mets game, causing the stadium to publicly boo her, and her attempt to aid a

homeless man results in throwing change into someone's coffee (55). Through her relationship

with George, however, Lucy is able to effect social change. She is able to do so "on safer, non-

confrontational terms (i.e. within the traditional constraints of patriarchy)" (55). Lucy realizes

that "her efforts are best directed towards a private version of social change" (55) – by

rehabilitating George and then helping him accomplish his goals. This is how she becomes happy and fulfilled. Throughout the film Lucy is portrayed as sad and lonely. The staff of a local Chinese restaurant often mocks her for ordering takeout "for one." In the final scene of the film, Lucy calls in an order for Chinese food, smiling as she tells the operator that the order is "for two." Despite being an intelligent educated lawyer, Lucy's greatest accomplishment is ordering food for her *and* her boyfriend.

In *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days,* Andie is also subjected to the experience of miswanting. Andie is mildly more successful in her career choices than Lucy in *Two Weeks' Notice*. However, like Lucy, Andie is highly educated – she holds an M.A. in journalism from Columbia University. Yet, like Lucy, Andie is relegated to writing vapid articles in a woman's magazine about dating, cosmetics, plastic surgery, and fashion (Negra 53). Also important to note here is the fact that, because it is depicted as *a women's magazine*, the editors are only interested in vapid topics. By the end of the film, Andie has become disenchanted with her career choices and quits her job. She has come to realize that her "professional and romantic interests do not… coincide" (54), thus Andie must find another career path. Although both Ben and Andie come to see the error of their ways and experience a change of heart, only Andie realizes that her professional and personal goals are divergent and that she must make a career change. Andie plans on leaving the city to pursue a new career, yet Ben convinces her to stay for him, even though she will not have any means to support herself. For Andie, a successful relationship is more important than a successful career.

Unlike Lucy and Andie, Marisa in *Maid in Manhattan* is not burdened with the problem of miswanting. Instead, Marisa works as a maid in order to provide for her son. She is not focused on a career, but on the protection of her family. Marisa's entire role, throughout the film,

is to act as a rehabilitating force on Chris. Unlike Lucy and Andie, who experience failure and must give up their careers, Marisa is only rewarded for her actions, eventually marrying the wealthy senator. Marisa is able to quit her job as a maid and further herself professionally by opening a catering company. Because Marisa's number one goal was always her family, she gains instead of sacrifices professionally. However, although Marisa does experience a rise in her career status, as a caterer she is still performing a very domestic, very traditional female job.

Unlike the romantic comedies, which featured women in principal roles, the female protagonists in the *Spider-Man* films are relegated to supporting roles. Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst), for example, predominantly functions as a love interest for Peter, yet she still embodies the Bush Administration's rhetoric concerning women's roles in post-9/11 America. At the end of *Spider-Man*, Mary Jane must sacrifice her relationship with Peter in order for him to effectively function as a better superhero. This reinforces the Bush Administration's assertion that the greatest thing a woman can do for her country is give up the men in her life in order for them to go out and be heroic. In *Spider-Man 2*, Mary Jane is also punished for miswanting, similar to the protagonists in *Two Weeks' Notice* and *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*. Early in the film, Mary Jane becomes alienated from Peter, as his secret job as a superhero causes him to appear unreliable in her eyes. Mary Jane seems unwilling to sacrifice her loved one to the noble cause of keeping New York City safe, deciding instead to marry another man. This causes Peter to question the worth of his superpowers, which he then subconsciously begins to repress. Without his superpowers, Spider-Man can't keep New York City safe and the crime rate rises by 75%. Spider-Man is unable to defeat Dr. Octopus, who eventually kidnaps Mary Jane. Thus, Mary Jane's inability to sacrifice the man in her life results in negative effects for both her and the city. And yet it is learning that Mary Jane has been kidnapped that allows Peter to once again

access his powers, implying that Mary Jane's role is simply to inspire and help rehabilitate the hero.

Laura Shepherd calls this traditional model of gender presented by the White House "the Happy Shopper" (Shepherd 24). "She [The Happy Shopper] assumes a maternal position, taking responsibility for the welfare of American children… [The Happy Shopper] was discursively permitted to mother, care, shop, and support" (24). Her job was to continue to spend money and support the capitalist system. She was expected to care for her husband and children. Much like the rest of the culture at the time, the romantic comedies of the early aughts mirrored the return to more traditional roles and values for women. The films of the 90's that encouraged strong, career oriented women were replaced with films about a woman whose career goals get in the way of her personal life and must to learn to let go of the miswanting (Negra 54) of success as a career woman by "realiz[ing] that her professional aspirations are misplaced" (53) and that the success she truly desires is that of the home, through marriage and family.

An American Hero: The Rehabilitation of the Wealthy (Or Superpowered) White Male

As Matthew B. Hill points out, "George W. Bush gained enormous popularity in the months following the September 11th attacks by deploying his rustic 'cowboy' persona, vowing to get Osama bin Laden 'dead or alive'" (488). Through both White House rhetoric and the demeanor of President Bush, the Bush administration presented a romanticizing of the wealthy white male as *the* American Hero.

Much like the Bush administration's American Hero, the films *Two Weeks Notice, How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days,* and *Maid in Manhattan* also present the construction of a common American hero in the form of the rehabilitated wealthy white male (Negra 53). These men – a

politician, an advertising executive, and a real estate tycoon – are all reformed by the love of a good woman and working-class, "All American" values. They are then able to use their money and power as a force for good.

At the beginning of *Two Weeks' Notice,* George is an irresponsible playboy only concerned with making money. He has no care for other people or the history of New York City architecture. Through the film, with exposure to Lucy as well as the "moral value of Manhattan real estate" (Negra 53), George decides to put his wealth and power to good use by working to save the Coney Island Community Center. "Maybe if you work for me, you'll win occasionally," George tells Lucy when he first asks her to give up her nonprofit work and come work for him instead. Only with George's help is Lucy able to get anything done. Without George, Lucy is unable to accomplish any of her goals. Even the Coney Island Community Center, a building that Lucy is dedicated to protecting, is not safe until George decides to intervene. Despite the fact that Lucy is an Ivy League educated lawyer, her role in the film is not to actively solve problems through her own volition, but to reform the wealthy white man and allow him, in his new state of moral consciousness, to fix these problems for her. It is only with the assistance of the reformed wealthy white man that anything gets done.

At the end of *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, both Ben and Andie are reformed from their previous amoral state. However, upon her change of heart, Andie quits her job and attempts to leave the city. Ben, despite having come to the same moral conclusion as Andie, is honorably able to keep his job and still pursue Andie. He flags her down on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and tells her to stay in New York City. He suggests that they remain in the city, but that they move out of Manhattan and find a place in Staten Island. All of this is Ben's idea. Andie simply goes along with his suggestions. Ben is the one who moves along the action, who pursues not

only Andie but also a more moral life, like that of his family in Staten Island. He becomes in charge of Andie's morality as well as his own by deciding for both of them how they would best be able to live their lives. At this point Andie has no job – she is simply there to help Ben. Much like Lucy, Andie's role is simply to help rehabilitate the wealthy white male and then allow him to make the decisions and fix all of the problems.

Like *Two Weeks Notice* and *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days, Maid in Manhattan* reinforces the concept of reforming the wealthy white male. Senatorial candidate Chris Marshal is hoping to be "the third Marshall to serve New York in the Senate" and yet he has no real-world experience by which to lead. "Spend some real time in the projects," Marisa tells Chris, "and then you wouldn't have to make up speeches and have to memorize them. It would be coming from someplace real." Through his interactions with Marisa, a poor single mother working as a maid, Chris is able to "learn that he has a broader responsibility to serve the public" (Negra 57). He is able to use his wealth and privilege to more fully serve the people of New York. As with Lucy, Marisa's sole job is to help reform the wealthy white man, enabling him to then go out and accomplish great things. The end of the movie finds Chris, a year later, serving as a senator for the state of New York. Marisa and he are still together, and the implication is that her influence as a *real* New Yorker has enabled him to more fully serve those who elected him.

Unlike the leading men of the romantic comedies, Spider-Man's alter ego, Peter Parker, is not wealthy. His parents are both deceased and he has been raised by his aunt and uncle, a working-class couple living in an outer borough of New York City. However, what Peter lacks economically, Spider-Man makes up for with power – fantastical superpowers, to be exact. These powers, much like the wealth of George, Ben, and Chris, allow Spider-Man to rise above his fellow working-class New Yorkers and reside amongst the skyscrapers along with the

wealthy elite. Also like George, Ben, and Chris, Spider-Man is reformed through the interactions with real, working class New Yorkers. Instead of love interests, these *real* New Yorkers come in the form of Uncle Ben (Cliff Robertson) and Aunt May (Rosemary Harris). "With great power comes great responsibility," Uncle Ben tells Peter in the first film. It is Uncle Ben's advice, along with his murder soon after, that inspires Peter to become a superhero. Peter allows a convict to escape after having robbed a wrestling venue. At the time of the robbery, Peter already has the superpowers to stop this criminal. However, angry that the venue has ripped him off, Peter lets the convict escape. This same criminal goes on to steal Uncle Ben's car, killing Ben in the process. Peter realizes that it really was his duty to fight crime and keep the city safe – with great power really does come great responsibility.

In *Spider-Man 2,* Aunt May is the one who offers the words of wisdom that enable Peter to become a hero. Midway through the film, Peter loses his superpowers. He begins to feel like a failure both as a person and as Spider-Man, and decides to give up the life of a superhero altogether. Instead of going after Dr. Octopus, Peter returns to the borough to visit Aunt May. Aunt May's young neighbor Henry is helping her move when Peter arrives. He asks Peter about Spider-Man's recent absence from the news, and the subsequent rise in crime across the city. This prompts Aunt May to speak about heroism.

> Henry and I agree. We don't see [Spider- Man's] picture in the paper anymore. You'll never guess who [Henry] wants to be. Spider-Man . [. . .] He knows a hero when he sees one. Too few characters are out there, flying around like that, saving old girls like me. Lord knows, kids like Henry need a hero. Courageous, self-sacrificing people setting examples for all of us. Everybody loves a hero. People line up for them, cheer them, scream their names. And years later they'll

tell how they stood in the rain for hours just to get a glimpse of the one who

taught them to hold on a second longer. I believe there's a hero in all of us . . .

that keeps us honest... gives us strength . . . makes us noble . . . and, finally,

allows us to die with pride. Even though sometimes we have to be steady and—

and give up the thing we want the most.

"This speech is the turning point for Peter," notes Brent Yergensen (24). Yergensen continues

by pointing out exactly how Aunt May's speech transforms Peter.

First, Peter's eyes begin to water up as he listens to Aunt May offer the words that

will free him from the pain of… not knowing what to do with his identity.

Second, as he is tearing up Peter lightly nods at the words of Aunt May, hinting

that he agrees with her and accepts the call that her words are asking him to do.

Third, the very next scene in the film is where Peter takes a leap from a tall

building as he screams, "I'm back! I'm back!" showing that Spider-Man will

reemerge from retirement. In essence, this interlude is the turning point of the

main character and (therefore) the turning point of the film. (24)

Much like the heroes of the romantic comedies, Aunt May's words work to transform Peter into

the hero he needs to be in order to keep New York City safe.

In each of these films, the *real* New Yorker simply "acts to soften and humanize inherited

power" (Negra 57). The man in each movie – the real estate tycoon, the advertising executive,

the senator, and the superhero – never has his wealth, power, or privilege questioned. Instead, he

is simply reformed to the point where he is able to function as a proper American Hero. Negra

described this as "the (re)masculinization of moral, cultural and financial authority" (51).

Conclusion

Important to note about these male protagonists is each man's similarities to President George W. Bush himself. The son of President George H. W. Bush and the grandson of Connecticut Senator Prescott Bush, George W. Bush was born into a family with both wealth and political power. Having admitted to struggles with alcoholism and substance abuse earlier in his life, Bush presented himself as a reformed, Christian man dedicated to serving the people and doing what was best for America. The presentation of wealthy (or otherwise powerful) white men as rehabilitated heroes who are ready to use their power for a greater good helped to unify the country through the construction of a single American Hero under threat from the enemy terrorist yet ready to do what needed to be done in order to keep America safe. This specific construction of the American Hero as the rehabilitated wealthy (or superpowered) white man, along with the shoring up of traditional gender roles and the visual cues of New York City as a reminder of what had been lost, reinforced the credibility of President Bush and bolstered the American people's confidence in both his ability and his legitimacy to lead the country.

CHAPTER III.

PROCEDURAL RHETORIC:

VIDEOGAMES AND THE WAR ON TERROR

On September 20th, 2001, during his address to a joint session of Congress, President Bush issued an aggressive, albeit ambiguous, call to arms.

Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. […] On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. […] Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. […] Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us. Our Nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. (Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress…")

During this speech, Bush enacts what John Oddo describes as his "President-as-Superman persona," in which he "neither deliberates about war nor declares his dislike for it" (524). Instead, his declaration of war, although vague, boldly asserts America's moral authority and responsibility to "bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies."

In The Footsteps of the Greatest Generation: Constructing a *Noble* or *Just* War

Bush assigns responsibility for 9/11 to "unnamed actors," as Oddo describes them, defined only as *terrorist* and *enemy* (515). In fact, Bush uses the term *terrorist* eighteen times in this speech, and the word *terror* thirty-one times, while only referring to al Qaeda by name six times and mentioning the Taliban only five times (528). By doing this, Bush "gives himself space to attack anyone he can reasonably classify as an 'enemy of freedom'" (515). These terns are juxtaposed against the rhetoric of "American Heroism" and many mentions of America's innate goodness (522). This clear delineation between "Us" and "Them" – between Good and Evil – strengthens Bush's rhetoric of a noble or just war.

Another way in which Bush reinforces the idea of a noble or just war is by relying heavily on World War II imagery and ideology. Bush's assertion that "We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail," is very reminiscent of a speech by Winston Churchill, in which he concludes, "We shall not fail not falter; we shall not weaken nor tire. Neither the sudden shock of battle, nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down. Give is the tools and we will finish the job" (Bostdorff 306). Bush also directly links America's current threats with those of WWII. As soon as the attacks took place, commentators and news correspondents began to draw parallels between the recent acts of terrorism and that of Pearl Harbor (299). In his

address to congress, Bush reiterates this comparison, stating "Americans have known wars – but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941" (Bush). He then takes it even farther by comparing our modern enemies to those of WWII.

> We are not deceived by [the terrorists'] pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions -- by abandoning every value except the will to power -- they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. (Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress…")

Here, Bush is drawing a direct link between present terrorists and the Axis powers of World War II. This link becomes even clearer in his State of the Union address the following January, where he refers to America's current threats – Iran, Iraq, and North Korea – as the "axis of evil," drawing even further parallels between modern enemies and those of WWII.

> 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. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. (Bush, "State of the Union Address")

Bush also uses the term *allies* when discussing those countries who have supported the War on Terror, additionally reinforcing the comparison between the War on Terror and WWII.

This World War II imagery was particularly meaningful in 2001 because, as Denise Bostdorff points out,

…[T]he middle-aged and the youth of the U.S. at the time of September 11 had been reminded for several years about the greatness of their elders, more of whom were dying each day. Tom Brokaw's popular books, 1998's *The Greatest Generation* and 1999's *The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections*, exalted the World War II generation for its courage and accomplishments, as did Steven Spielberg's 1998 film, *Saving Private Ryan*. Actor Tom Hanks, the star of *Saving Private Ryan*, also appeared in television and radio spots that first began airing in April 1999 to ask for funds to build a World War II memorial in Washington, DC, before "the last veterans of that great conflict are gone." […] On June 6, 2000, the fifty-sixth anniversary of the D-Day invasion, the National D-Day Museum opened in New Orleans. In the summer of 2001, *Pearl Harbor* premiered in movie theatres, while the media campaign heralding its arrival dominated advertising and entertainment news. On Sunday, September 9, just two days prior to the terrorist attacks, Home Box Office (HBO) aired a special two-hour premiere of its mini-series, *Band of Brothers*, based on historian Stephen Ambrose's book of the same name that told the heroic story of Easy Company, the 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division of the U.S. Army. Even people who did not subscribe to HBO could not avoid knowing about the series because of the highly visible media campaign that accompanied it. All in all, then, the cultural context leading up to September 11 was one in which younger Americans were made highly aware of the contributions of their "elders." (299)

Not only had the years preceding 9/11 been inundated with WWI stories and imagery, but that imagery had very decidedly positioned WWII as "the last good war" (Alison 183). It was a war

in which there was a clear delineation between good and evil. This differentiated WWII from the more recent, more ambiguous wars of the 20th century, such as Korea and Vietnam (Bostdorff 305). This is why, even though Bush describes an ambiguous, "lengthy campaign," he follows that statement with the promise that it will be a war "unlike any other we have ever seen" in order to eliminate any comparison to Vietnam, another lengthy, ambiguous campaign. By using WWI imagery, Bush encouraged the nation to look upon the war in the "same black and white fashion" with which they viewed WWII (305). Framing the War on Terror as another good war and calling this generation to live up to the example set for them by the greatest generation also discouraged the questioning military action, as was the case in many of the wars in the latter half of the twentieth century (305).

The use of WWII imagery also offered the Bush Administration an example of a war in which there was a clear victory by the United States and its allies. In WWII, the Allies defeated "fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism" as Bush pointes out. He then promises that the terrorists of 9/11 "will follow that path all the way to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies" (Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress…"). In other words, Bush is asserting that there will be a definite victory over our enemies, such as there was in WWII. When he speaks about the upcoming war, it is in short, declarative statements, affirming what will and will not be done. "Our Nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail" (Bush). Bush leaves no room for failure in the American psyche.

Procedural Metaphors: Video Games as the Perfect Medium for the Rhetoric of War

As illustrated in earlier chapters, much of the American popular media in the years directly following the September 11th terrorist attacks and Bush's declaration of war on terror reinforced Bush Administration rhetoric. One medium that proved particularly helpful in propagating the idea of noble, just war was that of video games. Video games, in which the player is actually a key participant within the narrative, present a completely different kind of rhetoric than that of other media. As Tanine Allison writes,

> The fact that in the case of the video game the "viewer" becomes a "player"
> means that the relationship between the user and the media changes. The
> interactivity of the video game appears to promise a different relation to the
> narrative and experience of the game, as well as a different relation to history.
> (183)

Verbal and written forms of rhetoric rely "on our intrinsic experiences with metaphor," thus it is not always "immediately obvious that conceptual metaphor underlies what we say and write" (Bogost 172). For example, when Bush stated in 2004 that we need to "shoot down" Presidential Candidate John Kerry's proposed tax hikes, the listener knew that he meant vote against his opponent and did not generally give much thought to the metaphor of "shooting." However, the rhetoric presented within a game is different, in that it is a more procedural kind of rhetoric. As Ian Bogost points out, "procedural metaphors operationalize the figures of the verbal metaphor into a functional system whose very function represents the desired position (172). In *Tax Invaders*, for example, the rhetoric of the 2004 GOP campaign is operationalized into the form of a video game. Based on the 1980's game *Space Invaders, Tax Invaders* replaces aliens with potential John Kerry tax hikes, depicted them on screen as small rectangles "bearing the

numerical value of the proposed tax"(169). The player must use President Bush's head to "shoot down the tax hikes and defend the country" (169). Instead of metaphorical language about the dangers of tax hikes, in which Bush speaks about "shooting down" the rival's proposed changes, a game operationalizes the rhetoric by giving the player the ability to literally fire projectiles into the oncoming taxes.

When utilizing this framework (Bogost 172), war games in particular become the perfect medium for presenting pro-war rhetoric, as the war is both metaphorical and material within the game. War themed videogames, for example, communicate through verbal communication and narrative aspects of the game, as well as through the combat itself. Each player is convinced that the battle he or she must fight is valid and important and that he or she is on the side of good. In first-person and third-person shooter videogames, the players spend most of their time within battle settings and must engage in combat centered predominantly on gun and projectile weapon-based warfare through either a first-person perspective (in first-person shooters) or by directing their avatar to do so (in third-person shooters). Many videogames, whether set in the far off future (*Halo*), the historical past (*Call of Duty*), or an alternate-history New York City (*Freedom Fighter*), all depict a very modern mode of warfare. Each of these games features a world in which good and evil function in very black and white binaries, with the player unquestionably fighting on the side of good. These games also feature formats in which victory is assured, nullifying the actual consequences of war, as well as construct positive moral associations with the act of shooting and killing one's enemy. In this way, the first few games in the *Halo* series, *Call of Duty*, and *Freedom Fighters* all reinforce the Bush Administrations pro-war rhetoric.

A Noble War: Constructing An Evil Enemy That Threatens the Greater Good

One quality that makes a videogame about war (or an actual war) popular is the presence of an undisputable enemy – an enemy that isn't just an enemy of the player (or the nation), but an *evil* enemy, threatening *goodness* throughout the entire world (Merskin 181). After 9/11, the enemy of the American people – and the Western World at large – became the Muslim Terrorist. The Bush Administration identified these Muslim extremists by their "barbaric behavior" (Shepherd 25). They "slit [the] throats of women" (25), "plan[ned], promote[d] and commit[ted] murder," and had "no rules [to] govern their behavior" (26). Because most of the game play within war videogames focus around actual combat, as opposed to narrative aspects of the story (as is the case with movies, television series, and books), a sense of purpose within the game is important. A characteristic that made videogames such as *Call of Duty, Freedom Fighters,* and the *Halo* franchise so popular, as well as such good media for pro-war rhetoric, was the inclusion of an unquestionably evil threat to civilization as a whole.

The initial *Call of Duty* game, released in 2003, capitalizes on the World War II rhetoric produced in the nineties and early aughts, which had then been reinforced by the Bush Administration within their call-to-arms propaganda. The enemies of *Call of Duty* are the easily-recognizable enemies of *Saving Private Ryan, Band of Brothers,* and *Schindler's List.* They are, as Bush described them, benefactors "of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century." The enemies of *Call of Duty* are not just opponents, but the *evil* Nazi regime – responsible for mass genocide and endeavoring to conquer the world as a whole. They are "sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions [and] abandoning every value except the will to power" (Bush). Because WWII had been constructed in the American psyche as "the last good war" (Alison 183), with a clear, unquestionably enemy, *Call of Duty* also presents the notion of a good or

noble war, where the enemies are indisputably evil. Because of this, players can make their way through the game, killing as many enemies as possible without questioning the morality of such actions.

Like *Call of Duty*, *Freedom Fighters* also presents a war waged against an easily-recognizable enemy. Released in 2003, *Freedom Fighters* is set within a modern, alternate history in which the Soviets ended World War II by dropping an atomic bomb on Berlin, effectively allowing the Soviet Union to quickly rise as a world superpower. Utilizing the domino theory – a prevalent conspiracy theory during the Cold War, which asserted that if one country fell to the communist regime, all countries in the surrounding area would eventually follow – *Freedom Fighters* depicts a world in which communist states began rising throughout the world after WWII, ultimately surrounding the United States with Soviet countries. Set in modern New York City, the story begins as Soviet soldiers launch a surprise attack against the city, swiftly seizing New York from the United States. Although the threat of communism was far in the past by the time this video game was developed, the use of an iconic enemy, which is easily recognizable and which plays upon the fear of the spread of a conflicting, dangerous ideology that threatens the American way of life, was still very applicable in 2003. The Soviet threat of *Freedom Fighters* provides a suitable stand-in for the Islamophobia that was rapidly proliferating in the years after 9/11. Offering enemies that directly threatens the American way of life provides a way in which the player can moralize the acts of war violence perpetrated within the game, further reinforcing the idea of a just war.

Released in 2001, the initial *Halo* game, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, was completely developed before 9/11. The conceit of the series revolves around a collective of alien races, known as the Covenant, who decide that the human race is an affront to their gods and must be

destroyed. However, *Combat Evolved* does not rely heavily on religious imagery or religious themes. The only real description of the Covenant as a whole, or their beliefs, comes in the form of an opening crawl, in which the backstory of the game is given. The opening crawl explains that, after humanity overpopulates the earth, they begin to expand out into the universe, colonizing every inhabitable planet. Eventually, humanity comes into contact and conflict with alien life, which attacks and annihilates much of the human forces. According to the opening crawl,

> This was humankind's first encounter with the group of aliens they eventually came to know as the Covenant, a collective of alien races united in their fanatical religious devotion. Covenant religious elders declared humanity an affront to the gods, and the Covenant warrior caste wanted a holy war upon humanity with gruesome diligence. (Bungie 4)

However, the Covenant as a whole does not feature much within the plot of the initial game. *Combat Evolved* follows the story of a human warship, which comes out of faster-than-light travel and crashes into an alien space station. This station is surrounded by a large ring, or "halo," causing this station and the others that are eventually discovered to be called Halos. The survivors of the crash must negotiate their way through the Halo station, dodging both Covenant members and "the Flood," a parasitic alien race that infests other races. The Covenant had been studying the Flood, which is released when the human ship crashes into Halo. The objective of the first game is to stop the spread of the Flood, while also preventing the Halo from self-destructing and killing every living thing in the universe in order to prevent the Flood from spreading to other universes.

Released in 2004, *Halo 2* spends a lot more time exploring the Covenant both as a political organization and as a religious institution. The game begins with a cut-scene in which Thel 'Vadamee, the commander in charge of protecting the Halo station in the first game, is being tried by the Hierarchs, the religious prophets and leaders of the Covenant, for failing to do just that. Although found guilty, Thel 'Vadamee is eventually given the chance to redeem himself to the Covenant by taking up the position of Arbiter – a position that functions as a right hand of the Hierarchs, enforcing their will throughout the universe – and is sent off to kill those whom the Hierarchs believe to be heretics. Although the player operates on the side of humanity, numerous cut scenes bring the narrative of the game back to the Covenant. Thel 'Vadamee discovers that the Hierarchs have been manipulating their people and actually plan on annihilating the Elites, an entire alien race within the Covenant itself. Thel 'Vadamee takes this information to Tartarus, the chieftain of another alien race within the Covenant, but Tartarus is too blinded by his faith to believe Thel 'Vadamee. Throughout the game, the Covenant is revealed to be a corrupt institution, ruled by a few charismatic, yet manipulative prophets. These prophets, the Hierarchs, are the ones who have decided that the human race is an affront to their gods, and have charged their followers with annihilating them.

Even more so than the Nazis of *Call of Duty* and the Soviet menace in *Freedom Fighters*, the religious threat of the Covenant – particularly as it is depicted in *Halo 2* – can be read as a direct substitute for Islamic extremism, particularly as it was presented by the White House in the years directly following 9/11. The Hierarchs, much like leaders of the Taliban or Al-Qaeda, can be seen as corrupt prophets indoctrinating their people with dangerous ideologies and false orthodoxies, commissioning them to annihilate all who stand in their way. Each of these videogames is able to operationalize White House rhetoric, not only encouraging the player to

accept war against "enemies of freedom," but also allowing each player to wage war through the act of in-game combat.

An Assured Victory: Depicting War Without Consequences

Videogames also present a depiction of war in which the player is incapable of losing. As Allison puts it, "video games present war as something that can be controlled and mastered, without post-traumatic stress disorder or real death" (192). More importantly, these videogames present a battlefield in which combat can be conducted over and over again, until victory is assured. There is no way to lose while playing a video game, other than to give up. Difficulty settings can be lowered and sequences can be replayed until the desired outcome is reached. In this way, video games, much like Bush's promises of what America *will* and *will not* do, present war as something in which the outcome is assured.

The *Halo* series, *Freedom Fighters*, and *Call of Duty* all feature campaigns that are basically unlosable. *Halo: Combat Evolved* features an avatar equipped with energy shields, which will nullify the damage created by enemy weaponry up to a certain point and automatically recharge when the avatar is not in combat (Bungie 12). Only if the shield becomes depleted does the avatar begin to experience damage to their health (Bungie 13). If the player is unable to get out of combat long enough to recharge the avatar's shield or replenish his health through the use of health packs, the avatar *does* die. However, this only results in the game reloading to the last checkpoint and the player is able to go through the sequence again. *Freedom Fighters* functions in a similar manner, with the manholes, which are located throughout the city, that function as checkpoints throughout the game. Every time the avatar goes in or out of a manhole, the game automatically saves. If the avatar dies in combat, the player is automatically

taken back to the last manhole passed through and the sequence restarts. Although the player is technically in charge of controlling all of the non-playable characters (NPCs) within his or her squadron, simple commands such as "follow," "attack," and "defend" are all that is required, and the NPCs are able to take care of themselves during most combat sequences. *Call of Duty* features a system in which death is even less of a hindrance. Players can save the game at any time, rather than waiting to go through a checkpoint of some kind. Within battle sequences, players can constantly save the game, meaning that if the avatar dies, he or she can reload the game to almost the exact same place.

Call of Duty is also able to reinforce this idea of an assured victory through the use of WWII iconography. Much like the Bush administration's use of WWII symbolism in order to evoke imagery of a war whose outcome resulted in definite victory for the United States and its allies, *Call of Duty* allows past Ally victories to be "literally played over and over again" because "levels and gameplay are repeated over and over again until they are beaten" (Allison 183). Important to note here is that every single one of the historical battles that take place within *Call of Duty* is a battle in which the Allies experienced a monumental success that led to eventual victory in the war overall. Even the rank and placement of the avatars are significant. American avatar Joe Martin, although fictional, is a member of the actual 506th Parachute Infantry, which included the legendary and highly decorated "Easy Company" (Kingseed) The majority of the American campaign in *Call of Duty* consists of battles actually fought by the "Easy Company" during WWII, which were chronicled in the book *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose in the early 90s, then through an HBO series of the same name a decade later (Kingseed). The first part of the British Campaign of *Call of Duty* takes place during Operation Tonga, an aerial operation during the Normandy Invasion that dropped soldiers along the Caen Canal in order to protect the

Pegasus Bridge (Gilbert 428). The Pegasus Bridge, previously known as the Bénouville Bridge, actual got its name from the emblem upon the uniform of the 6th Airborne Division infantrymen who successfully secured the bridge against the Nazis, which limited the effectiveness of the German forces (Gilbert 428). Much of the Soviet Campaign takes place during the Battle of Stalingrad, one of the bloodiest battles in the history of war (Gilbert 365). Yet the game does not depict the actual horrors of war, instead focusing on how this battle was considered one of the main turning points of the war (Gilbert 365). In fact, the final combat mission within the game, played through the Soviet avatar, features the Battle of Berlin, the final battle of the Western Theater of WWII, which resulted in the suicide of Hitler and the surrender of the German forces (Gilbert 680). The final objective of the game is for the player to make his or her way through the Reichstag building – a symbolic building for the Germans and an important target for the Soviets during thee Battle of Berlin (Gilbert 681) – and raise the Victory Banner, signifying the end of the war and the Ally victory.

The act of replaying battles over and over until the outcome is victorious – especially if these battles are simulations of actual historical battles in which the United States and its allies were victorious – reinforces the image of war as "something that can be controlled and mastered" (Allison 192). When one thinks of war as assuredly victorious, as well as without extreme consequences, such as massive amounts of death and destruction of infrastructure, war becomes a much more viable option.

A Valid Fight: Building Moral and Narrative Associations with Combat

Discussing the difference between WWII films and WWII videogames, Alison argues,

World War II shooting games are fundamentally about combat—with an intensity and singular focus that war films could never sustain, nor do they have any interest in doing so. Producing a sixteen-hour film of pure combat would be a piece of avant-garde cinema, not a popular narrative film, but this is exactly what a combat video game aims to do. But even more than combat per se, these video games are about shooting, as the name first-person shooter makes dear. Regardless of how they are packaged as history and as a justified fight against fascism and imperialism, these games are fundamentally about aiming weapons at digital reconstructions of people and firing until they fall down (and usually disappear). These games exist to simulate the activity of shooting weapons. (190)

Although discussing WWII games, Allison's argument can be expanded to include most first-person shooter videogames. Allison acknowledges this, stating that

[A]ll first-person shooters share the same basic form, meaning that World War II shooters have more in common with fantastical shooters, like *Doom* or *Halo,* than they do with games of different genres that take World War II as their setting, such as a strategy game (which takes a God's eye view and asks players to make broad strategic decisions). (190)

As first-person shooter games, both the *Halo* series and *Call of Duty* present an avatar that functions as a direct cypher for the player. Both games feature a combat zone that is viewed almost exclusively through the player's eyes – the avatar itself is barely a character within the narrative of the game.

In *Call of Duty,* which is set within World War II, the player controls three separate characters from three different Allied countries – America, England, and the Soviet Union. Each

character is fictional, though all function within military regiments that fought in WWII, and each fights historically accurate battles. Private Joe Martin, an American paratrooper of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, is dropped into the Manche department in Normandy on D-Day and must secure Sainte-Mère-Église and Sainte-Marie-du-Mont. Later in the war, Private Martin participates in the Battle of the Bulge. Sergeant Jack Evans, a British infantryman of the 6th Airborne Division, takes part in Operation Tonga, then infiltrates the German battleship Tirpitz and destroys German V2 rockets in Burgsteinfurt, Germany. Corporal Alexei Voronin is a Soviet soldier who must cross the Volga River and fight the Battle of Stalingrad. Later, Voronin and his unit battle their way through Berlin and raise the Victory Banner atop the Reichstag building, ending the war. As the player sees through the eyes of all three characters, it is as if the player him or herself is immersed within the war. The player navigates these characters through each battle, using era and country appropriate weapons, such as multiple Frag Grenade launchers, a Colt .45, an MI Garand, a Lee-Enfield rifle, a Sten gun, and a Mosin-Nagant, just to name a few. Although each avatar is equipped with WWII-era weaponry, the game emulates the "remote guidance systems, automated weapons, and digital technology being used on the battlefield" today (Allison 191).

The protagonist of the *Halo* series is Master Chief John-117, a cyborg super-soldier. These super-soldiers are the only effective weapon humanity has against the Covenant, yet there are not enough of them to destroy the Covenant completely. In fact, at the beginning of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, Master Chief is "all that remains of [the] classified military project to build a series of genetically enhanced super-soldiers" (Bungie 12). Unlike most first-person avatars, Master Chief has absolutely no dialogue during game play and speaks very little during cut scenes. Because of this, Master Chief is even more a cypher for the player than the *Call of Duty*

avatars. Master Chief has no personality of his own, so the player can more easily assimilate him or herself into the game. Master Chief – thus the player – engages in melee, projectile, and firearms combat, operating grenades, a pistol, an assault rifle, a shotgun, a snipe rifle, a rocket launcher, and an anti-aircraft gun (Bungie 16-19). On top of this, there are numerous alien weapons that the player can scavenge and utilize (Bungie 20-21). Battling his or her way across the Halo station, the player must shoot members of multiple alien races, as well as humans who have been affected with the Flood.

Though the weaponry in *Call of Duty* and the *Halo* series are slightly different, the act of combat is extremely similar. In fact, whether the game is played on an Xbox or a Playstation, the controllers – and thus the act of fighting – are also alike. The player is responsible for aiming the weapon using the thumbsticks on the controller, then fires the weapon using another "trigger" button. If the player is playing the game on a PC, the act changes slightly, as the player must use a combination of mouse and keyboard controls to aim and fire, but the process of aiming and firing on the enemy is still there.

While Allison's argument only applies to first person shooters, I maintain that this framework is also applicable to third-person shooters – especially *Freedom Fighters*, which depicts modern warfare in an alternate history New York City. Although the protagonist of *Freedom Fighters* is a much stronger character than the avatars of *Halo* and *Call of Duty*, and less of a cypher for the player, the game is no less efficient at indoctrinating the player with procedural rhetoric. In fact, because of the nature of this game in particular, I contend that the third-person format is actually the best possible format for producing procedural rhetoric within *Freedom Fighters*. Chris Stone, the protagonist of the game and the main avatar controlled by the player, is an average New York City plumber when the game begins. As the Soviets take

control of New York, he and his brother become embroiled within the resistance movement. Chris eventually becomes known as the "Freedom Phantom," transforming over time from a simple civilian into the leader of the entire movement.

The use of New Yorkers as the main characters and New York City iconography in general is, in and of itself, another form of pro-war rhetoric. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the use of New York City iconography became a way to instill nationalism and reinforce the ideology of the Bush Administration after 9/11. The use of "manipulative iconicity" (Simpson 16) allowed the Bush Administration to use rhetoric surrounding the terrorist attacks to create an implicit American cue out of New York City itself, which reinforced conservative political values and strengthened support for the White House. So, as *Freedom Fighters* progresses and the in-game New York City becomes more demolished and decayed, the player becomes more and more justified for his or her acts of war. And, much like the Bush Administration's "heroes of New York," Chris Stone "work[s] past exhaustion," and "struggl[es] so valiantly […] defend[ing] not only [America's] precious freedoms, but also the freedoms of people everywhere" by "doing everything [he] can to make America safe" (Shepherd 23).

As Chris transforms into a war hero, so too must the player. Much of the game revolves around charisma and leadership skills required to recruit new team members and lead the squadron into battle. The player earns charisma points by successfully completing missions, which can then be used to increase the number of members allowed within his or her squad, as well as convince new members to join the team. The player must also make decisions as to which tasks to complete first, which often have consequences for later missions. For example, if the player decides to take out the Soviet helipad *before* completing other missions, helicopters will not be able to constantly supply reinforcements, making some future missions slightly

easier. As well as making strategic leadership decisions, the player must also engage in frequent combat. At the beginning of the game, Chris is equipped with only a wrench, which he can use to engage in melee combat. As the game progresses, Chris and the other rebels are able to procure or create other handheld or projectile weapons, such as Molotov cocktails, grenades, C4 shotguns, sniper rifles, and 9 mms. In this way, the combat in *Freedom Fighters* is similar to that of first-person shooters like *Halo* and *Call of Duty*. Though the way in which combat is performed is slightly different than those of first-person shooters, the act of aiming and firing weaponry is still similar to that of *Call of Duty* or *Halo*.

Referring to World War II videogames in particular, Allison states, "video games combine the moral and narrative associations of the war with the physical activity of shooting, creating a sense of mastery and control" (183-4). Even though Allison's discussion is limited to WWII shooters, each of these games creates "moral and narrative associations with war" that are combined with "the physical activity of shooting," allowing narrative rhetoric to thus become procedural. The act of aiming and firing a weapon – thus killing an enemy – becomes associated with enforcing morality or goodness within the game.

Conclusion

War games proved such a good medium for pro-war rhetoric that in 2002 the United States Armed Forces actually developed a first-person shooter, called *America's Army*, which was released free online as a recruitment method for the military (Allison 192). These games, whose target demographic are teenage and young adult males, create a perfect training field for modern battle tactics (191). As Alison notes,

Even if the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan do not fit the model that is

propounded by these games—a war of precision aiming and firing in which

enemies are clearly located and there is no collateral damage—these games still

reflect the fantasy of what modern war is: clean, precise, fast-paced, and with

quantifiable success. Video games present war as something that can he

controlled and mastered, without post-traumatic stress disorder or real death.

World War II shooters present this scenario with the added morale booster of

recalling the last great American success story, presented simply and misleadingly

as winning the fight for freedom against fascism. (192)

Those who play these videogames are more likely to establish a positive association with

shooting and killing those viewed as enemy (Allison 190). They are also less likely to associate

war with PTSD, injury, or death (192). In short, war themed videogames present a world in

which war is always noble as well as winnable, making them a great medium for pro-war

propaganda in the years after 9/11.

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CONCLUSION

By 2004, the Bush Administration had failed to eliminate Osama Bin Laden, Operation Iraqi Freedom had yet to garner any Weapons of Mass destruction, and the Abu Graib prison scandal was still hot in the news. And yet Bush was reelected for a second term and the War on Terror was still viewed in a positive light by the American people. According to Gallop, almost 60% of Americans were at least somewhat satisfied with the War on Terror in 2004, with over 50% of those polled believing that the United States and its Allies were winning the war, and 98% believing that international terrorism was still a critical or important threat to the American way of life ("War on Terrorism").

David Simpson, in *9/11: Culture of Commemoration*, discusses what he calls "manufactured consent" (4). "In less than two years, we went from the fall of the Twin Towers and the attack on the Pentagon to the invasion of Iraq," Simpson writes, "a process marked by propagandist compression and manufactured consent so audacious as to seem unbelievable" (4). In other words, Bush's approval was manufactured through careful manipulation of media.

The television shows *24* and *Alias* present a clear construction of what Shepherd dubs "The Enemy" within White House rhetoric – a Faceless, Ambiguous Terrorist depicted as *the* enemy of the United States. These shows also encourage the formation of an "Us v. Them" mentality after 9/11, which allowed the American people to accept acts of violence and war that they might not otherwise have condoned.

Romantic comedies and superhero films from the early aughts reaffirm Shepherd's concept of "The Nation" – the construction of a singular American experience and a singular American hero – by exploiting New York City iconography and presenting the rehabilitated

wealthy (or superpowered) white man as the hero of both New York and the nation. This wealthy (or superpowered) white masculine hero reinforces the White House's construction of Bush as the reformed hero who would deliver America from the threat of the terrorists.

War-themed videogames from the years directly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, such as the *Halo* series, *Call of Duty,* and *Freedom Fighters*, generate acceptance for what Shepherd calls "The Intervention," – or the War on Terror – by creating positive associations with combat and presenting an image of war as both without casualty and with no possibility of defeat.

All of these media examples – and more – worked together in the final three years of Bush's first term as president, generating "manufactured consent" for the "extra-legal" components of the PATRIOT Act, indefinite detention centers, and other aspects of both the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as producing positive perceptions of Bush himself, contributing to his reelection in 2004.

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