NEWS MEDIA NARRATIVE AND THE IRAQ WAR, 2001-2003:

HOW THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD NARRATIVE STYLE DICTATES
STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES IN MAISTREAM DIGITAL NEWS MEDIA AND
CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

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Abstract

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Mainstream news media organizations have adopted classical Hollywood narrative storytelling conventions in order to convey vital news information. In doing so, these organizations tell news stories in a way that paints political realities as causal agents, delicate international crises as sensational conflicts, and factual profiles of public figures as colorful characterizations. By establishing artificial narrative lines and unnecessarily antagonistic conflict, the press has at times become an unwitting agent of government policy and, in part, altered the course of international events. The classical Hollywood narrative is the storytelling model on which the American media based its coverage of United States foreign policy after September 11, 2001. The sensationalized coverage culminated in a cinematic presentation of events that led to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Since September 11, a narrative plot unfolded, the characters were defined, and the tension rose. The news media primed the audience as if the American people were watching a well-executed and often predictable Hollywood narrative. And though there was no evidence that proved Iraq had played a role in the September 11 attacks, by March of 2003 the war seemed inevitable and possessing of seemingly perfect narrative logic.

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Introduction

"I have said…that we have in this country a free enterprise system of radio and television which is superior to any other. But to achieve its promise, it must be both free and enterprising. There is no suggestion here that networks or individual stations should operate as philanthropies. But I can find nothing in the Bill of Rights or the Communications Act which says they must increase their profits each year, lest the Republic collapse." [1]

Edward R. Murrow
October 12, 1958

When journalist Edward R. Murrow said this, he was referring to the hesitancy of television network executives to confront vital news issues in a straight-forward and honest way. He was urging not only for truth but for the practice of reporting on the most important stories in a truthful way. In a time when broadcast journalism remained unsure of its future, Murrow warned of the possible irrelevancy of the press as dictated by market forces. He lamented the challenge to fundamental journalistic ethics posed by the drive to dominate the marketplace. Murrow, who earned a reputation for fighting a number of battles with lawmakers as well as with network executives, foresaw network profitability as eclipsing the responsibility a free press has to a society. Over forty years later, broadcasting has far exceeded the scope even Murrow could have imagined, yet his warnings continue to have relevance.

While screenwriting and journalism are both means of telling a story, they are quite different in purpose. Journalism is the conveyance of real-life information from one party to another, while the classical Hollywood narrative—arguably the most dominant mode of writing a film—is designed to progress an audience through a story toward a logical ending. The news reader, on the other hand, merely consumes what actions and

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[1] Edwards, *Edward R. Murrow*, 134.

events have factually taken place at the time of the story's telling. But the trend toward immediate, marketable news has blurred the line between the kind of storytelling employed by news journalists and the kind used by Hollywood screenwriters. The use of causal motivators, conflict-resolution dynamics, and the cultivation of antagonistic characters in news storytelling undermines the complexity of real-life events. It also adds to another phenomenon which, while magical in the cinema, is quite dangerous in real life; and that is it allows the audience to foresee and accept an outcome based not on factual events but on how these events are framed. According to one Hollywood screenwriter, "a story must build to a final action beyond which the audience cannot imagine another."[2] This is precisely the side-effect when the media needlessly creates fictionalized drama out of real-life events in order to compete in the marketplace.

In adopting, intentionally or not, classical Hollywood narrative storytelling conventions to tell a story, news organizations have made it a routine practice to paint political realities as causal agents, delicate international crises as sensational conflicts, and factual profiles of public figures as colorful characterizations. By establishing artificial narrative lines and unnecessarily antagonistic conflict, the press has at times become an unwitting agent of government policy and altered the course of international events. The classical Hollywood narrative is the model on which the American media based its coverage of United States foreign policy after September 11, 2001. The sensationalized coverage culminated in a cinematic presentation of events that led to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. By the time President George W. Bush had made clear his decision to invade Iraq, the media had already cultivated the fitting and convincing scenario in which to do so. Since September 11, a narrative plot was unfolding, the

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[2] McKee, *Story*, 140.

characters were being defined, and the tension continued to rise. The audience had been primed just as it is during a well-executed and often predictable Hollywood narrative. And though there was no evidence that proved Iraq had played a role in the September 11 attacks, by March of 2003 the war seemed inevitable and possessing of seemingly perfect narrative logic. The following is an analysis of how the news media covered the period between the New York and Washington D.C attacks through the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Essentially, this thesis is about how the American news media covered the run up to the Iraq War is if it were a Hollywood movie.

Chapter I

Immediate, Accessible, Disposable: Defining digital media, its relationship to democracy, and its effect on how journalists tell stories

The Internet, along with digital video and editing technologies, has intensified our ability to organize, disseminate, and receive information quickly and inexpensively. In the 1990s these technologies would have been referred to as "new media." Today this term seems outdated and in this and subsequent chapters, what is normally thought of as "new media" will be referred to simply as digital media. Digital media refers in part to news being transferred, via satellite technologies, to a televised format, the bulk of which is made up of 24-hour news network programming. Digital media also includes Internet news web sites with news dissemination features such as live streaming broadcasts, digital news clips, and constantly updated electronic headlines and stories. In this chapter, I will argue that it is precisely the nature of these technologies which has intensified the journalistic trend toward news as a form of entertainment. News as entertainment certainly is not a new concept. But digital media has allowed for a more efficient method of news storytelling and, in some cases, has resulted in a breakdown on the part of the press to report news accurately and responsibly. Martin Hirst and Roger Patching elaborate on this trend toward "infotainment":

> New forms of media technology, such as cable, satellite, and the Internet have two things in common. The first is that they share a digital platform that makes them convergent and interactive. And they share the potential to blur the boundaries between ethical and unethical behavior because of the way in which information and images can be processed or reproduced…the style of news presentation is no longer 'political'—that is, it is not focused on issues of importance and citizenship, but on being *entertaining*.[3]

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[3] Hirst and Patching, *Journalism Ethics*, 270.

This quote underscores the dramatic effects that digital media has on traditional journalistic ethics regarding storytelling. Internet and digital media has accommodated perfectly the direction of news as a form of entertainment because it provides a dissemination structure that is immediate, accessible, and disposable. The disposable nature of digital media is itself important because it allows for a more simplified restructuring of a failed or non-marketable news narrative. Essentially it is easy to reframe uninteresting, unprofitable news stories in the oversaturated environment digital media creates. Furthermore immediacy, accessibility, and disposability provide the technological thrust for the market-driven paradigm on which contemporary news storytelling is based—storytelling aimed at maintaining an audience and increasing on-air advertising revenues. Moreover, they are key to the standardization of a news-framing technique lifted from the classical Hollywood narrative style, itself a reliable and profitable form of storytelling.

Internet and digital media differ greatly from traditional forms of media. By traditional, I mean newspapers and television news prior to satellite broadcasting and Internet technology. Throughout the 1990s Internet use grew exponentially. According to the Congressional Research Service, a non-partisan branch of the Library of Congress, Internet traffic expanded by nearly 100% in the early years of the 1990s, indicating the popularity of non-traditional media forms.[4] The Internet proved a sea change in the immediacy, accessibility, and disposability of visual and narrative news information. Moreover, television news networks capitalized on Internet popularity by further incorporating the Internet in news coverage.

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[4] Congressional Research Service, "Internet Statistics," 9.

Immediacy

One might argue that the free press is merely a society's instrument for gathering and disseminating information. But, the news media is also an industry based on economic competition, and there has not been a time in U.S. history that one newspaper did not try to outdo another for first access to a story. However, profitability and corporate consolidation have only increased the viciousness of this competition. Media theorist Robert W. McChesney states it another way:

> …many problems result from the enhanced corporate pressure to make journalism a source of huge profits; this leads to easy-to-cover trivial stories and an emphasis on the type of news that will have appeal to the upper and upper-middle classes.[5]

Put another way, McChesney is saying that there has been a conscious drive within news organizations to make news marketable and in so doing, network decision-makers have changed the fundamental rules and ethics of traditional journalistic practices. In other words, in an effort to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace, news organizations have changed the way they choose which stories to cover and how they will cover them. While ultimately, the inherent drive to be the first organization to break a story remains, the stakes now appear higher and the bar for accuracy lower in a 24-hour digital media news society.

The drive to break a story first has been exemplified in a number of high-profile instances in the digital age demonstrating that the competitive move toward immediacy is becoming an industry standard. One instance came during the 2000 U.S. presidential election in which all major media organizations, clamoring to be the first to announce any "breaking news," made inaccurate statements about the election's outcome. In January

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[5] McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, XV.

2006 the American press duplicated this mistake in the Palestinian elections. Several press outlets including *The New York Times* web site as well as Foxnews.com and CNN.com, along with their 24-hour television counterparts, called the election in favor of the ruling Fatah party. By the next morning, each ran headlines announcing the truth, which is that Hamas had won by a landslide. Mistakes are made in journalism but both of these instances represent extraordinarily important circumstances. Ultimately, one of the fundamental ethical concerns, accuracy, had been supplanted not by human error but by a systematic breakdown within the journalism industry. Again, the breakdown in accuracy was brought on by the compulsion to disseminate the story first. One need look no further than news organizations' promises for fresh and fast headlines (one MSNBC promotion boasted new headlines every fifteen minutes) as evidence there is a race to be first. But in both of these election cases, major issues of national security, international relations, and the integrity of the press were at stake. In short, while news agencies in answering public demand have always wanted their reporting to be immediate, increased market competition has compelled the news industry to adopt a culture of immediacy. Moreover, digital media has exacerbated this competition by enabling faster and more diverse methods of gathering, framing, and disseminating news information.

One might assume the aforementioned embarrassments suffered by major news organizations would force a period of self-examination. Though the most recognizable media outlets—NBC, CBS, and ABC—did self-criticize after the 2000 election debacle, the coverage and consumption of news stories has nonetheless remained generally unchanged. In fact the recency of the confused reporting of the Hamas election only

proves that media organizations have placed the profit-motivated drive for immediacy over the ethically-motivated dependence upon accuracy.

Accessibility and Disposability

But the quest for immediate information is being made more possible because digital media allows for more accessibility to and easier disposability of news stories. Disposability refers to the high saturation quality of digital media and the subsequent ability of stories to be lost in the shuffle, so to speak. Given the proliferation of media images and sounds in our lives from cable television, Internet, and radio, there has been cast a wider net of information over society. News and information is accessible via a number of means—television, Internet, cell phones, radio—at all times. Columbia University's, Todd Gitlin describes this phenomenon as "supersaturation." Gitlin asserts:

> …the Internet redistributes the flow of unlimited media but does not dry it up. When one considers the overlapping and additional hours of exposure to radio, magazines, newspapers, compact discs, movies (available via a range of technologies as well as in theaters), and comic books, as well as the accompanying articles, books, and chats about what's on or was on or is coming up via all these means, it is clear that the media flow into the home—not to mention outside—has swelled into a torrent of immense force and constancy, an accompaniment *to* life that has become a central experience *of* life.[6]

Gitlin's claim that these media "torrents" are so "central" to our lives also indicates that the companies and organizations responsible for the flow of information are in a state of high competition to gain our attention. Essentially, the market is flooded and news organizations must figure out a way to get their product seen and bought. Though Gitlin no doubt includes in his analysis a number of more traditional media forms it can be stated that the surge of digital media in our lives has only intensified the validity of his claims.

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[6] Gitlin, *Media Unlimited*, 17.

News organizations have therefore resorted to further flooding the market with stories, some of which will captivate an audience and some of which will not. Digital media makes this easy, inexpensive, and above all immediate. Digital video, editing software, and Internet technologies allow news organizations to write and disseminate a news story as it happens. Internet news readers can refresh a web page and receive updates on stories as well as notice a different ordering of importance to stories themselves. Twenty-four hour television news networks provide such an onslaught of news stories in such a constant stream that there is seemingly no break in the storylines. Oftentimes news organizations are even ahead of stories, inching them along as they occur or endlessly repeating whatever information has been confirmed in anticipation of an update. The media is, therefore, reporting on any number of news stories at one time in an attempt to keep the audience tuned in. And the nature of digital media is such that, if the news stories are not captivating the audience, they can be discarded or ignored by the network. Of course the story itself continues to flow despite the fact that the content has shifted. But, news disposability becomes an issue because the storylines may collapse on their own accord or are allowed to die out altogether based on an editorial decision to maintain an audience. Stated another way, supersaturation allows news organizations to make a choice, based on audience levels, as to what end a story will be taken.

Significantly, media supersaturation is what lends news stories a quality of disposability, allowing for an almost instantaneous erasure from the public mind. News stories simply cover up other news stories, one on top of the other, until the public has either forgotten or simply moved on to another narrative line. For example, this thesis will later examine how news organizations reported on the Iraq War as having essentially

ended by May 1, 2003 not only because public officials cast it as such, but because this end satisfied a marketable narrative requirement that a story be neatly encapsulated. The reality that the war was actually intensifying did not seem to disrupt the three-act (beginning, middle, and end) narrative structure, and the media simply moved onto a new post-war narrative characterized as the insurgency which brought about a new set of characters, debates, and narrative expectations. The ability to collapse and re-frame a narrative in this way is due in part to supersaturation. And the multitude of news dissemination outlets offered by the Internet compounds the disposability of news stories by adding to the white noise of news coverage. Moreover, the state of contemporary journalism is such that no longer do families tune in to evening newscasts for an organized docket of stories. Instead, as the theory of supersaturation dictates, individuals are inundated with thousands of stories that seem to appear and disappear at random. And more often then not, the shelf life of these stories is determined by ratings and profitability over public interest and import. Ultimately, the disposability of digital media allows for stories to be shaped, stretched, truncated, or discarded entirely for something more sensational or profitable.

A look at digital media and democracy

Digital media technologies have by some accounts increased the democratization of news information. At the very least, the Internet has provided a platform for a more pluralistic, globalized discourse. Internet technology has allowed for the creation of news groups, online communities, and web logs known as "blogs." Everyone who has an opinion can express it on the Internet. Furthermore, the increased affordability of digital media technology has no doubt provided accessibility to a large swath of Americans that

previously had no means to express themselves beyond local city hall meetings and letters to the editor.

And people are expressing themselves. Those who formerly wrote letters to the editor can now build their own virtual newsrooms. Inexpensive hardware and software and the simplicity of design programs have created the image of legitimacy for otherwise amateur journalists. Internet journalists such as Matt Drudge and bloggers such as Ana Marie Cox, aka the Wonkette, ignited a flurry of Internet copycats who seemed to be reporting and, at the same time, editorializing news. The Internet has clearly opened a floodgate of democratic participation but also has increased the competition among news organizations to be edgy, immediate, and attractive to the most lucrative demographics.

Nevertheless, there have been historic results in the capability of these online "news outlets." It was muckraking journalist Matt Drudge on his web site Thedrudgereport.com who first broke the story of President Clinton's affair with a White House intern which, ultimately, led to his impeachment. The presence of amateur journalism has become so forceful in fact that 24-hour news networks now run regular updates as to what types of stories are buzzing in the "blogosphere." And it is now regular practice for the so-called legitimate press to first discover and notify their audience of "breaking stories" that actually broke first on a web site or blog. Even the familiar and revered pulpits of the three original major broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—have given rise to legions of interchangeable 24-hour news hosts and millions of pulpits in the form of web sites.

The democratic nature of the Internet is rivaled only by its usefulness as a tool for commerce and political fundraising. The ease and affordability with which information

can be disseminated using Internet technology and the entrepreneurial spirit has given rise to miniature news outlets and activist organizations with far-reaching impacts. The Internet also plays an increasingly prominent role in each election cycle. Aside from political surrogates bantering back and forth on blogs and chat rooms, the Internet has provided a new avenue for record-breaking fundraising and grassroots organization. For example, during the 2003 Democratic presidential primary, former New Hampshire governor Howard Dean wielded the power of the Internet to raise $7.4 million in the third quarter of that year alone.[7] Dean was lauded far more for his ability to organize and raise money using the flexibility and accessibility of the Internet than for his political skills or policy proposals.

But the issues surrounding non-traditional Internet journalism raise important questions about the state of journalistic ethics in a highly competitive market. Can, for instance, the ethics of traditional journalism survive the death of the traditional means by which news is disseminated? And what of this diversity or plurality of free press outlets: Are they a natural progression for a technologically advanced democracy or are they merely diluting the more traditionally centralized press of its ability to remain dignified, expert, and fair?

When media tell serious stories in cinematic ways

Journalism is about telling stories. News organizations choose which stories to tell based on any combination of reasons ranging from public importance, mass appeal, entertainment, and profitability. The focus here, however, is exactly how stories are told. All stories have a beginning, middle, and end or in classical Hollywood narrative terms,

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[7] Schneider, "Dean's Fund-Raising Success," http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/10/17/ip.pol.opinion.dean.fundraising/.

three acts. Telling stories in three acts with characters, events, actions, and re-actions—whether reality or not—is a practice that made its way into oral histories, Greek theater, Elizabethan literature and nineteenth-century stage plays. But it is the twentieth-century technology, the cinema, that seems to have had the most powerful impact on the way twenty-first century news organizations tell the stories that have the most profound effect on our lives as well as on the policies and practices of our governments. In other words, the universality—the simplicity, so to speak—of this narrative practice allows for a two-way storytelling participation between government and the press. Essentially, when the White House attempts to characterize an event in a certain way, the media has the choice to honor this political characterization or to ignore it and frame the story in an entirely different way. The give-and-take style of conveying information to the public is discussed throughout this analysis. Further, as a demonstration of this, I will attempt to analyze exactly how the media has told the story of perhaps one of the most defining events of our time—the United States' invasion of Iraq—by utilizing one of the most influential storytelling techniques of our time, the classical Hollywood narrative. The contention here is that contemporary journalism defaults its storytelling processes to the classical Hollywood narrative style. The ethical backlash that results is that the reality-based importance of engaging in a war is diluted by its being framed using the same recognizable narrative elements that characterize Hollywood movies.

Adapting news stories to the classical Hollywood style is an attempt on the part of news organizations to create a compelling, engaging, and profitable news product not unlike a successful Hollywood film. But Hollywoodizing a story in such a way is a fundamental violation of the journalistic principle of reporting facts—even if those facts

are routinely placed in a news narrative. In discussing news as narrative, Karen S.

Johnson-Cartee writes:

> For the most part, journalists still hold to the notion that they simply reflect reality
> in their news accounts…Journalists will argue time and again that they simply
> report the facts, nothing but the facts, maintaining that they are mere recorders of
> human events.[8]

This is of course the ideal of journalistic integrity. But Johnson-Cartee goes on to say:

> …journalists often justify their "mirror on reality" perspective by arguing that "if
> you put six journalists in a news event, all six will produce the same news story";
> they offer this as proof of their objectivity…but researchers find such evidence
> not indicative of either journalistic objectivity or their mirroring of reality; rather,
> they find the sameness in news products to be evidence of "formulaic narrative
> construction"…[9]

And such a narrative formula is the stuff of Hollywood success. Over the past 100 years

Hollywood screenwriters and filmmakers have refined the classical Hollywood narrative

style to a scientific series of conventions based on audience expectations. Screenwriting

gurus like Robert McKee offer seminars and write books on executing the perfect

Hollywood narrative. McKee's book, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the

Principles of Screenwriting*, outlines a number of Hollywood narrative standards:

"Structure and Character," "Crisis, Climax, Resolution," and "The Principle of

Antagonism" to name a few.[10]

Though there are many classical Hollywood narrative conventions ranging from

character issues to three-act structural techniques, I will look at the run up to the Iraq War

from three narrative perspectives. First I will examine the media coverage and

politicization of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the context of the "inciting incident,

the first major event of the telling." In other words, September 11 was the causal

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[8] Johnson-Cartee, *News Narrative and News Framing,* 157.
[9] Ibid., 159.
[10] McKee, *Story*, vii.

component which drove all events that followed including the debate over the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Second, I will examine how mainstream media outlets utilized the convention of narrative causation—specifically, "that a cause should lead to an effect and that effect in turn should become a cause…in an unbroken chain…," according to film theorist Kristin Thompson.[11] And third, I will examine the media's creation of real-life character archetypes based on the protagonist-antagonist model so crucial to the Hollywood storytelling process. This examination will include events that began with the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States through President Bush's declaration of the end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003.

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[11] Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 12.

Chapter II

"The Inciting Incident" in Hollywood storytelling and September 11 as narrative motivator

Near the end of the first act of the 1975 film *Jaws*, the film's antagonistic shark attacks and nearly kills the protagonist's son. Prior to the attack, shark warnings went unheeded. After the attack, the film moves into high gear, becoming a tightly wound, at-sea revenge tale. Most viewers would agree that it is a captivating and satisfying cinematic journey. *Jaws* is so captivating, in fact, that it is a textbook example of a successfully executed screenplay written in the classic Hollywood narrative tradition. In this tradition, that initial shark attack is key. It is an example of what Robert McKee refers to as an "inciting incident." Hollywood screenplays contain certain recognizable storytelling conventions that define the classical Hollywood narrative. One such convention is that the story must have a powerful trigger mechanism, usually in the form of a specific episode, that strongly initiates the narrative line. In the three-act structure of a Hollywood film, this decisive moment usually comes around the end of the first act or beginning of the second act. This is significant because as consumers of Hollywood films, we have come to expect certain actions to follow the inciting incident. We, as viewers, may not know exactly what *will* happen but we know the framework of what *should* happen based on our prior knowledge. We know that the shark in *Jaws* must die and we know that the protagonist must kill it. The incident, in effect, justifies the events that follow. As was mentioned earlier, the inciting incident and other conventions allow viewers to follow a film to a logical conclusion. In an attempt to captivate an audience, and capitalize on high viewership, the mainstream media often follows this paradigm with real-life stories.

In the story of the Iraq War, the media framed the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States as the inciting incident in a larger narrative that concluded with the ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and, subsequently, with President Bush's claim of victory in Iraq. The 9/11 attacks kicked off a series of international events including the U.S. declaration of war on terrorism, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq. As this chapter will discuss, the major media networks concluded almost immediately after the attacks of September 11 that a conflict with Iraq was a distinct possibility and viable option. The United States' past clashes with Iraq and the mysterious anthrax attacks that occurred after 9/11 became elements that the media used to effectively prime the pumps for an Iraq War. After 9/11, rather than simply reporting on events (e.g. the anthrax scare, the debate over WMD) as they unfolded, the media began to frame a compelling story of a coming war by shaping a traditional cause and effect narrative triggered by this inciting incident.

Before moving on, it is important to state that there are obvious geo-political, ideological, and historical reasons for the Iraq War that transcend the Hollywood storyline adapted by the media. Accordingly, it is not my intention that this argument take on a conspiratorial tone suggesting an explicit cooperation between the U.S. government and major media organizations to drum up support for the Iraq War. Rather, the media merely dramatized rapidly unfolding events set in motion by the September 11 attacks in order to captivate an audience, increase viewership, and take a wider slice of the advertising market share. In the process of doing so, the media dubiously influenced public opinion, trivialized the realities of warfare, and abandoned the ethical obligation to

provide a complete, cohesive picture of gravely serious international events including the 9/11 attacks, the anthrax scare, and the Iraq War.

So, how did the media dramatize the story of the Iraq War after September 11 and why Iraq in particular? Both President Bush's administration and the media were more than aware of Iraq's back story. In the classic Hollywood narrative, the inciting incident is often linked with an implicit back story. This back story is crucial to understanding the development of a Hollywood-style narrative and why events happen when and how they do. Screenwriting expert Robert McKee explains that "…we do not bring characters [or events] out of a void. We landscape character biographies, planting them with events that become a garden we'll harvest again and again."[12] In the case of the real-life conflict between Iraq and the U.S., the media did not write the back story, but some news organizations certainly capitalized on the contentious history between the two nations, framing elements of this history into a more sensationalized narrative. The seeds of the classical Hollywood narrative are conflict, and the back story as it existed between Iraq and the U.S. was fertile ground for the media to exploit to a dramatic end. In his book *The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq*, George Packer describes Iraq as "an unfinished war," providing ample material for the media to frame as a first-rate drama:

> …throughout the decade between the end of the first Gulf War and the morning of September 11, 2001, Iraq remained an irritant and a reminder of unfinished business. Saddam paved the lobby of an upscale hotel with a mosaic of [George H. W.] Bush's face, so that guests had to walk over the features of the American president; apparently needing greater satisfaction, Saddam tried to have Bush killed on a visit to Kuwait…[Saddam] had defied America and gotten away with it.[13]

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[12] McKee, *Story*, 183.
[13] Packer, *The Assassin's Gate*, 9.

Packer goes on to describe the dramatic relationship between Iraq and the U.S. as it existed prior to the 2003 Iraq War:

> The fates of the two countries remained entangled, with brief hope, cruel disappointment, hatred born of relentless propaganda, humiliation, and ruin. All this was on the Iraqi side. On the American side, we lapsed back into our characteristic state of inattention.[14]

As Packer indicates, long after 1991 Gulf War, Iraq remained an "irritant" and by September 11, 2001, Iraqi antagonism pervaded American consciousness and culture. Saddam's image and likeness as an enemy of the United States was well-known and even appeared in popular Hollywood films such as the animated satire *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (1999). Additionally, there were debates about how the U.S. should engage Iraq since the Gulf War. In fact, in the late-1990s, President Bill Clinton ordered several bombing campaigns in Iraq. Most importantly, out of this tenuous relationship between Iraq and the U.S. grew a pre-emptive war ideology adopted by neo-conservatives who assumed the White House in January 2001. So, yes, news organizations began to more openly explore the conflict between these two nations after 9/11, but this was not entirely without warrant. The Bush Administration certainly gave the media cause to speculate about post-9/11 relations between the U.S. and Iraq. By the time President Bush took office, it was well-known that his administration assumed a tough posture with Iraq. Many members of the Bush Administration—including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, and former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz—openly called for Saddam Hussein's removal before Bush was elected president. These men along with other Bush appointees were members of an organization known as the Project for the

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[14] Ibid., 11.

New American Century and signed a 1998 letter to President Clinton calling for a change in U.S strategy which, "…should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power. We stand ready to offer our full support in this difficult but necessary endeavor."[15] So, clearly the Bush Administration provided agency for the notion that Iraq could have had a hand in 9/11, but the media seemed to welcome any innuendo that Iraq may have been involved.

Journalists welcomed suggestions of Iraqi involvement because, from the media's perspective, the U.S. had to go to war and it was only a matter of whom to invade and when. Indeed, journalists recognized that the nature of the 9/11 attacks lent themselves to utilization in a Hollywood-like narrative line. In other words, while the attacks were factual events carried out by terrorists, news organizations saw them as the initiation of a sustainable, marketable storyline. When terrorists attacked New York City and Washington D.C., the media covered it, at first, like it would any extraordinarily newsworthy event. The constant coverage of the 9/11 attacks—complete with a growing catalog of ever more revealing digital video footage—reflected the national sense of shock and concern. But, in the weeks and months after the attacks, the mainstream news media began to set the stage for war. International diplomacy and the activation of a U.S. war machine is a nuanced and complicated process. But the news media assumed the position of a classical Hollywood narrative in which causation (9/11 as the inciting incident) mobilizes the narrative (the road to war). Some prominent journalists were quite open about this both as private citizens and as agents capable of moving forward a real-life narrative. In an interview on September 17, 2001, CBS anchor Dan Rather

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[15] The Project for the New American Century, "Letter to President Clinton," http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm.

proclaimed, "George Bush is the President, he makes the decisions and, you know, as just one American, he wants me to line up, just tell me where…"[16] Rather is just one of thousands of print, television, and Internet journalists but his statement is indicative of the motivational power of 9/11 as an inciting incident which sets into motion a series of events. For this argument, it is recognized that 9/11 was a real event which logically would require a response from any nation, but the media recognized not only its historic relevance but capitalized on its narrative thrust. And it is precisely here where the nature of digital media's effect on market competition came into play; for it was the race to get the complete story which led media organizations to provide false narrative conclusions before the real story unfolded.

This makes sense considering the climate of the news media industry by 2001. Coverage of the Iraq War was much different than that of the first Gulf War. While the first war was covered almost exclusively by CNN, a shift in the media industry, most clearly represented by the advent of the Internet as well as the FOX News Channel juggernaut, resulted in an increase in competition. James Der Derian explains:

> From the start, it was apparent that 9/11 was and would continue to be a war of networks. Whether terrorist, Internet, or primetime, most of the networks were linked by a push/pull propagation of violence, fear, and dis/mis/information. For a prolonged moment, in the first week of confusion and chaos when there was no detached point of observation, these networks seemed almost neurally attached, immersing viewers in a 24/7 cycle of tragic images of destruction and loss. A national state of emergency and trauma reached into all levels of society. It was as if the American political culture experienced a collective Freudian trauma, which could be reenacted (endlessly on cable and the Internet) but not understood at the moment of shock…Moving at the speed of the news cycle and in the rush to judgment, there was little time for deliberation, for understanding the motivations of the attackers, or for assessing the potential consequences, intended as well as unintended, of a military response.[17]

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[16] Massing, "Press Watch", http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011015/massing
[17] Der Derian, "9/11 Before, After, and In Between." In *Terrorism, Media, Liberation*, 325-26.

Der Derian's point is relevant here because he demonstrates exactly how networks could in fact make a "rush to judgment" on so many issues including the suggestions that Iraq may have been involved in the attacks. Der Derian may be suggesting journalists and network hierarchies were experiencing a kind of psychological trauma but he also suggests a rush to competition among networks. Essentially, major media outlets hungry for dramatic, audience-building stories not only saw market opportunities in September 11 as an event but also began to see the narrative line toward a long, sustainable story. Vienna University scholar Christian Fuchs puts it this way:

> The competition for topical news and ratings between large channels such as Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, and MSNBC didn't automatically result in a more democratic and pluralistic type of coverage. Driven by the run for ratings, such competition can easily result in a media competition for who can present the war in the most sensationalistic and spectacular way. The result won't be the representation of alternative views, but mass one-dimensional coverage.[18]

While Fuchs is referring to the Iraq War, specifically, his analysis can be applied to the media environment during 9/11 as well. The September 11 attacks were, as President Bush has maintained, the start of a larger war, albeit without clearly defined participants and objectives, and the media was aware of the narrative possibilities early on.

The most visible connection the media made between Iraq and 9/11 came via the anthrax scare that began in September 2001 when a series of anthrax-laced envelopes were sent to U.S. Senate offices and media outlets. The anthrax scare resulted in speculation that Saddam Hussein was somehow involved. And it was the din of conversation on 24-hour news networks that perpetuated this belief. Take for example, a quote by *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist and former CNN contributor Robert Novak from a transcript of the October 17, 2001 edition of CNN's *Crossfire:*

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[18] Fuchs, "The Mass Media, Politics, and Warfare." In *Bring 'Em On*, 200.

…when we come back we will explore whether the person responsible for the anthrax is none other than our old enemy Saddam Hussein.[19]

After Novak raises this question, Saddam Hussein's name is brought up over thirteen more times in the transcript, despite the lack of any evidence of his involvement. Yes, the discussion also included the notion that the Saddam-anthrax connection might be an overreaction but the sound byte connecting Saddam Hussein with anthrax and thusly Saddam with an attack on the U.S. had already been manufactured. This is a form of narrative causation as scripted by media organizations. Journalists are certainly permitted to speculate on any number of issues, but it is the post-9/11 environment and the context and volume of the speculation that is so dangerous. As Fuchs claims:

> The mass media make use of the blurring of the boundaries between truth and fiction, making it hard for the viewer to decide what is right or wrong, what corresponds to reality and what does not.[20]

The Saddam-anthrax connection illustrates this blur between fiction and reality. Similar conversations took place on other CNN shows as well as on MSNBC, FOX News Channel, and on the Internet. Given the lack of truth behind this connection, the media thusly blurred the line and, in so doing, unwittingly prepared the nation for a possible Iraq conflict by peppering post-9/11 reports with Saddam's name. The story of the lead-up to the Iraq War was constructed with these types of sensationalized narrative events and accompanied by a sensationalized visual aesthetic (see chapter four) on both television and on mainstream Internet news sites. Considering Fuch's claim above, the grief, shock, and fear that followed in the months after September 11 provided a perfect environment for media outlets to sensationalize a storyline that ultimately resulted in bolstering President Bush's policies regarding force against Iraq.

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[19] "Panel Discusses Potential Involvement," *CNN: Crossfire*, (transcript).
[20] Fuchs, "The Mass Media, Politics, and Warfare." In *Bring 'Em On*, 201.

While September 11 was the inciting incident that propelled the U.S. closer to war, the anthrax scare pushed the narrative further, resulting in a debate about weapons of mass destruction, and ultimately the Iraqi threat. During this September 12, 2002 exchange between FOX News anchor David Asman and former United Nations weapons inspector Scott Ritter, the television anchor clearly pushes the Iraqi connection by raising alarm about the prospect of Saddam having weapons of mass destruction:

> ASMAN: Nevertheless, for a madman like Saddam Hussein, who you just said you'd be for getting rid of in a heartbeat, for him to have 5 percent of that [biochemical] arsenal is still a dangerous thing.
>
> RITTER: Again, let's put this in the proper perspective. Biological weapons—everybody's concerned about that. Anthrax—we suffered a horrific anthrax attack here in the United States. Iraq produced liquid bulk anthrax, that's all they ever produced, not the dry powder that we saw here in the United States.
>
> ASMAN: How are you sure about that? You're saying inspectors weren't sure of what happened. How do you know it did?
>
> RITTER: Because this is the finding of the United Nations.
>
> ASMAN: But, Scott, you just said that we're not sure.
>
> RITTER: I'm going to deal with the facts that we know of. I'm not going to get into the hypothetical. What we know is that Iraq only produced liquid bulk anthrax. There is no evidence --
>
> ASMAN: I gotta stop you Scott. You just said we don't know that, we don't know that they didn't produce powdered form of anthrax. How do you know? How?
>
> RITTER: No, we do know that they didn't produce powdered form of anthrax. Because we inspected the facility, we did the testing on the facility.
>
> ASMAN: It could not have been a facility you didn't know about?
>
> RITTER: Well, now you're going off the map.[21]

Neither of what these men say, in regards to specific details, is as important as the words they are using and the suggestions that are being made. In the months after 9/11, media coverage seemed to often include insinuations and inclusions of the idea that Saddam

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[21] "FOX News Interviews Scott Ritter," Foxnews.com, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,62916,00.html.

Hussein was somehow involved with the attack. So, though the media had no control over the factual occurrence of 9/11, it did have control over the speculation about Saddam's involvement. Therefore, media discussion about Saddam indicated a willful desire to further the narrative toward some form of climactic confrontation with Saddam. No matter what, it seemed the narrative needed to move toward a conclusion that two opposing forces—the United States and Iraq—must clash.

The anthrax scare was only one element of the narratively logical chain of events that characterize both the classical Hollywood narrative and the run up to the Iraq War. While the mystery of the anthrax scare eventually died down, the rhetoric about Iraq's biological and chemical weapons program gained momentum. So, the meritless discussion about a Saddam-anthrax connection then became the more plausible, narratively motivating discussion about the Iraqi weapons threat. Given the supersaturation of political rhetoric, media coverage, and subsequent analysis of that rhetoric as well as the media's desire to create a cohesive, sensational story, it is no wonder that by September 2003, polls indicated 70% of Americans believed Saddam Hussein "was personally involved" in the September 11 attacks.[22] And the media, along with but not in concert with, the Bush Administration, perpetuated this notion based on our willingness and desire to follow a logical narrative. In short, the expectations we bring to the classical Hollywood narrative, and the pervasive standardization and profitability of that narrative form in our culture, resulted in the media providing a causally motivated storyline after September 11. When Novak went to commercial break promising a discussion about "our old enemy" Saddam Hussein's possible involvement in anthrax he was doing so with the understanding that we would tune back in to follow

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[22] "Bush Rejects Saddam 9/11 Link," BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3118262.stm.

that familiar conflict. And the climactic payoff, of course, was to revisit and complete the war previously begun with a familiar enemy, and to rectify the problem created by September 11 as the inciting incident.

Chapter III

Showdown: Creating conflict and sensationalizing debate in the 24-hour news era.

Contemporary mainstream news media, particularly television media, often promotes conflict based on binary oppositions. The television news format pits conservative versus liberal, Democrat versus Republican, pro-war versus anti-war. This has developed into a paradigm in the journalism industry for framing a story. FOX News' *Hannity and Colmes*, CNN's *Crossfire*, and MSNBC's *Hardball* all subscribe to this paradigm of pitting two ideologically opposite guests against one another under the guise of spirited debate. While this arrangement leaves no room for the nuance and complexity that often accompanies debates on major international issues, it does make for a media landscape filled with conflict and, presumably, higher advertising revenues. Rather than introducing rationality to the debate, the fever of 9/11 and the wars that followed seemed only to feed the success of this model. The inclination of news organizations to seek out and sensationalize conflict seemed only to trivialize the seriousness and unpredictability of world events following September 11. But the highly competitive corporate environment of contemporary news media led to the narrative framing of an already engaging story into a sensationalized one in which the predictable conclusion was a full scale war against Iraq with unfettered American victory. There are a number of reasons for the elevation of sensationalized, conflict-based journalism in the run up to war, but the reason most relevant here was the competition among media executives, producers, editors, and journalists to get the biggest story first. Media critic Kevin Williams claims that, "Such competition is increased in wartime," and that "[w]ar is a 'big story' in which

reporters can establish a reputation quickly and advance their careers."[23] And as the popular conflict-based model described above indicates, news workers sometimes have the inclination to make the story more sensationalized than it already is. And this is why mainstream media has adopted its conflict-based paradigm from the classical Hollywood narrative; because it has a proven track record of profitability and loyal viewership. In other words, movies are popular and movie storytelling draws an audience. So, while there is no evidence indicating that newsroom employees make conscious decisions to mimic Hollywood narrative conventions, the resemblance between media storytelling techniques and classical Hollywood narrative is uncanny.

All compelling Hollywood narratives must contain conflict. Conflict is the force that propels the narrative forward; it is what keeps the viewer engaged. "When the protagonist steps out of the Inciting Incident," Robert McKee writes, "he enters a world governed by the Law of Conflict…*Nothing moves forward in a story except through conflict.*"[24] The mainstream media certainly did not invent conflict; life is consumed by it. But it can be said that media organizations, in an attempt to attract and maintain viewers with engaging stories, certainly welcome conflict and even intensify it. This chapter will look at how the media did just this following the September 11 attacks. The media exploited through narrative and aesthetic means the conflict between the United States government and Iraq as well as between the U.S. and its traditional allies. The media's well-spring of conflict was the debate among allies about the course of action required for war and the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. This chapter will examine media organizations' roles in setting up rivalries and stoking conflicts in

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[23] Williams, "Something More Important Than Truth," In *Ethical Issues*, 166.
[24] McKee, *Story*, 210. (McKee's italics)

order to maintain a compelling storyline that glorified and glamorized war between the United States and Iraq in an effort to compete in the media market place.

Though national security and international relations experts were generally certain that the United States would invade Afghanistan after 9/11, the marketable and sustainable story was the rivalry between the United States and Iraq. As stated in the previous chapter, rumblings about a possible conflict with Iraq were occurring as early as October 2001. But while the press mulled over an Iraq conflict, the media is not solely responsible for raising the specter of conflict itself. President Bush did that when he named Iraq as being part of an "axis of evil" during his 2002 State of the Union address.[25] So, given the openly aggressive stance that characterized the neo-conservative ideology pervading the White House along with the media's previously described frenzy over a possible link between Iraq and the anthrax attacks, the possibility of a war with Iraq became more realistic. Essentially, the laws of conflict were both built into the story and intensified by the media and the Bush Administration. It is difficult to say whether the media made it easier for President Bush to move forward with his neo-conservative Iraq agenda or whether his agenda merely buttressed the story already being told by the media. While the truth is that it is probably a two-way street, evidence indicates that the media organizations cultivated U.S.-Iraq conflict to their profitable, narrative conclusion: there was going to be war with Iraq.

There is no smoking gun that indicates an executive decision to sensationalize the potential for a war with Iraq, but there are indications that the mainstream news editorial environment is dictated by competitive, sensational storytelling. So, how did the editorial environment allow for the trivializing and sensationalizing of this war? Although, the

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[25] Bush, "The State of the Union," http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html.

media's march to war applies to all the major news organizations and their Internet counterparts, it is FOX News Channel (FNC)—because of both its popularity and its reputation as setting a new industry standard—which requires a closer analysis. As is discussed at greater length in chapter five, FNC was founded in 1996 by Rupert Murdoch in an attempt to balance what he felt was a liberal bias in mainstream news reportage. Murdoch hired Roger Ailes, a former consultant to Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush, to run FNC.[26] Given this information, it is not entirely unfair to assume a pandering to Republican and neo-conservative ideologies in the network's war coverage, i.e., intensified and speculatory stories about Iraqi weapons threats and al Qaeda connections. Though pandering may be true to some extent, the broader reason for sensationalizing a war conflict was to increase market share for the network which by 2001 was a major force in 24-hour cable news. One analyst explains:

> Contrary to its current stature, FNC had a very humble beginning…To compensate for this disadvantage, Ailes and Murdoch instead resorted to a marketing approach that eventually proved to be successful—segmentation strategy. Fundamentally, the only way that FNC could compete with its rival stations was for it to offer a "flashier" television product than other news channels. This brought forth brighter graphics, crisper presentation, and more opinionated and combative personalities—a more tabloid–style edge than any other news network on U.S. cable.[27]

FNC's flashier approach apparently worked. By January 2002—only four months after the 9/11 attacks—FNC overcame the long-dominant CNN as television's highest-rated 24-hour news network, beating it not only in the ratings race but also in viewer loyalty.[28] It seems that viewers not only were compelled to tune into FOX's sensationalized conflict-based storytelling, but to continue watching it.

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[26] Iskandar, "The Great American Bubble." In *Bring 'Em On*, 156.
[27] Ibid., 157.
[28] Ibid.

FOX News Channel is calculated and almost brazen in the manner in which it executes a narrative in order to maximize conflict and excitement. John Du Pre, a former FNC reporter, describes the journalistic climate in the FOX newsroom:

> In short order, the bosses, the news directors, the general manager and the executive producers were instructing us to "foxify" our newscast. We wanted it to be punchier; we wanted it to be faster paced; we wanted it to be more conversational; we wanted it to be pithier; [and] we wanted it to have more of an edge than the standard sort of traditional newscast delivery. So it was a style question more than anything... "We want you to 'foxify' your newscast," simply meant "we want you to take most of the verbs out if you can, and read the news in a faster pace with more energy, with more urgency or at least seem that you have more urgency with as few verbs as you can in a sort of headline fashion."[29]

Real-life stories do not always lend themselves to such a telling, especially stories relating to national security and public well-being because accuracy is so very crucial to public safety in a time of war. But, FOX News then adopted a sensationalized approach—particularly regarding stories of national security—in order to captivate a loyal audience. Just as it does in the classical Hollywood narrative, the sense of urgency and conflict makes a viewer feel the tension in a story and, thusly, expect a suspenseful build up, an archetypal conflict, and an ultimate action.

Sensational conflict is often required for a captivating storyline in the classical Hollywood narrative and is a convention of the type of story which has dominated Hollywood, and American culture, for the better part of the last century. Consider again Robert McKee's take on how the classical narrative should work:

> As long as conflict engages our thoughts and emotions we travel through the hours unaware of the voyage. Then suddenly the film's over. We glance at our watches, amazed. But when conflict disappears, so do we. The pictorial interest of eye-pleasing photography or the aural pleasures of a beautiful score may hold us briefly, but if conflict is kept on hold for too long, our eyes leave the screen. And when our eyes leave the screen they take thought and emotion with them.[30]

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[29] as quoted in Kitty's *Outfoxed*, 69.
[30] McKee, *Story*, 211.

As a fixture of a corporate entity, it is a television and Internet news organization's goal to captivate an audience in the same way McKee describes a successful Hollywood narrative as doing. If an organization fails to do this, it will have lost the ratings race. When the buffet of cable and Internet news programming is so vast and distracting, it is therefore only within a news organization's interest, whether it is FNC, CNN, or MSNBC or its Internet counterpart, to maintain the consistent, loyal focus of an audience. It must keep all viewers' eyes on the possibility of war, not because it is the news organization's responsibility to keep the public informed but because the news organization must keep the public tuned in. And amplifying conflict is one way to do this. Take for example, the following conversation between FOX's caustic commentator Bill O'Reilly and Dr. Mimi Goss of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Note specifically, how O'Reilly contextualizes the debate according to the familiar and historical conflict between the U.S. and Iraq. Also, note the use of the word "dove" to characterize then Secretary of State Colin Powell, a decorated veteran with a long, distinguished career in the military and in public service. The conversation took place September 20, 2001, just nine days after the 9/11 attacks, and the focus of the discussion is what the nature of the U.S. response should be:

> O'REILLY: There are two problems. Number one, today, Iraq made very insulting statements to the United States, saying basically, "We could have done it better if we did it," you know?
>
> […]
>
> O'REILLY: So that's really good. And Iran said, "Hey, we're not letting you use our airspace. You try to get across our airspace, you're going to have trouble with us."
>
> Dr. Goss, I mean, you can't, I don't believe, if you're the president of the United

States in a climate that we're in right now, with 6,000 bodies in the street, you can't let those nations insult us and just shrug your shoulders, can you?

GOSS: I don't think we have to think about those nations, but I think we do have to think about the 80 nations that were represented at the World Trade Center who lost people.

O'REILLY: All right. Well, let's stick with Iran and Iraq for a minute. I mean, you -- you're striking a conciliatory note and suggesting that the president be that, but you got insulted today by Iraq, and Iran says, "We're not helping you. You come across our airspace, there's going to be trouble." What do you do with those countries, Doctor?

GOSS: I believe that we should bring bin Laden to justice, which is what...

O'REILLY: Doctor, you're dancing. You're doing -- you're doing the cha-cha. I asked you a very simple question. I went to this school. You taught there. You know. Come on. What do you do with those countries?

GOSS: I think you listen to people like Colin Powell, who is a voice of restraint right now, and he's the man who is the military man. He's a man who's fought wars before and fought protracted wars before.

O'REILLY: OK. And he's also the man that let Saddam Hussein live when we could have taken him out in the Gulf War, so...

GOSS: I think that's debatable myself.

O'REILLY: That's not debatable. That's exactly what happened. He did not want to go in. In fact, Schwarzkopf was the hawk, and he was the dove.[31]

This example is demonstrative of a conflict-based format that is common to FOX News programming and can be seen also in *Hannity & Colmes*, *The Big Story with John Gibson*, and *Your World with Neil Cavuto* among others. *The O'Reilly Factor*'s format is admittedly commentary-based, but given the proliferation of this programming format as a normal feature of 24-hour news networks, it is nonetheless evidence of a willingness to create conflict. But more specifically, O'Reilly's discussion of Iraq—a topic found in countless FOX News transcripts from the period between September 11, 2001 and the

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[31] *The O'Reilly Factor*, "President Bush to Address Congress," (transcript).

start of the Iraq War—demonstrates an editorial purpose to cultivate the well-known antagonistic relationship between Iraq and the U.S. Furthermore, his mentioning of Iraq as unfinished business ("…he's also the man that let Saddam Hussein live when we could have taken him out in the Gulf War…") dramatized the potential for a U.S.-Iraq conflict. Such drama has the tendency to draw an audience and apparently O'Reilly's tactics worked because *The O'Reilly Factor* was (and currently remains) the highest rated program in cable news.[32] So, in attempting to win the market share through this tactic, FOX News was, in essence, preparing viewers for a war that may not have necessarily needed to take place. This market approach to journalism is, at best, ethically questionable during peacetime, but particularly troubling during a time of war. At worst, this arrangement places media in a position of actually encouraging war as fuel for a sustainable story with a high enough viewership to draw top advertising revenues.

Showdown: Iraq

Regarding the employment of a conflict-based style of narrative framing, FNC is not the exception to the rule. On the contrary, it has helped establish the rule as the accepted form of journalistic presentation. FOX News Channel may have aggressively sought out this populist narrative style, but as competition dictates, other news organizations soon followed. So, the responsibility for hastening the onset of the war did not lie solely with FNC as some critics have contended. Instead, market forces drove *all* mainstream digital media outlets, with the possible exception of PBS, toward a Hollywood narrative-based storytelling paradigm. And as the Bush Administration's war rhetoric became more frequent and direct, so did the narrative framing in the news media reflect this in the choice of stories, headlines, and on-screen production techniques.

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[32] "Bill O'Reilly," Foxnews.com, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,1256,00.html.

News media organizations, in order to compete in the market place, used digital capabilities to report post-9/11 news in a more sensational, more immediate manner than their opponents. In many ways, networks simply mimicked one another in terms of production and programming. Often finding itself in third place in the ratings race behind FNC and CNN, MSNBC sought to retool after September 11 and is reported to have made a conscious decision to mimic FNC's conflict-oriented, patriotic, and opinion-based programming in an attempt to gain ratings. In 2002, *MEDIAWEEK* magazine reported that:

> Even Erik Sorenson, MSNBC's 46-year-old president and general manager, admits that the post-attacks news environment threw the five-and-a-half-year-old network for a loop. "We did great in the first month or two after the crisis, but when we got into the op-ed debate stage, MSNBC did not have the assets," says Sorenson. "We did not have the programming, we did not have the unique personalities for which viewers make appointments in cable talk news to compete with CNN and Fox. That's why we've fallen behind." In recent weeks, MSNBC has renamed itself "America's News Channel," adding stars and stripes to its on-air logo and using the phrase "fiercely independent" in its promos. The new patriotic image is an obvious effort to re-brand the currently indistinct entity…[33]

The patriotic climate after the September 11 attacks only served to boost FOX News' ratings and it can be assumed that when Sorenson laments MSNBC's lack of "unique personalities" he is referring to combative hosts like Bill O'Reilly who draw large audiences. So, in the months leading up to the Iraq War, MSNBC cancelled Phil Donahue's admittedly liberal and less confrontational program and added in its place a show hosted by a charismatic conservative Republican and former U.S. Representative Joe Scarborough.[34]

The networks also began to mimic one another in the manner of their aesthetic presentation. By the start of the war in March 2003, all 24-hour news networks crowded

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[33] Foege, "*Was MSNBC Ever Meant To Be.*"
[34] Iskandar, "The Great American Bubble." In *Bring 'Em On*, 168.

their screens with a variety of graphics designed to intensify the narrative with conflict, urgency, and populist patriotism. Some networks had, by now, incorporated the American flag in a number of incarnations as seen in the two examples below.

The first, a screenshot from a FOX News report on March 23, 2006, incorporates the American flag in three distinctive ways. First, there is a flag in the upper-left hand corner of the screen which, as it exist on television, waves continuously. Second, the FOX News logo in the bottom left-hand corner is stamped in red, white, and blue directly identifying the network as essentially American. Third, the banner at the bottom of the screen also utilizes the red, white, blue imagery to identify the Pentagon's codename for the Iraq invasion: "Operation: Iraqi Freedom."

Figure 1: FOX News Channel.

The next screenshot, from an MSNBC report on March 24, 2003, demonstrates the editorial choice to decorate the entire background of the on-screen image with an American flag (which would be waving on a telecast). Like FOX, MSNBC also fixes another, more recognizable, flag in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen, the effect of which is to frame the entire image in American patriotic iconography:

Figure 2: MSNBC.

Networks especially emphasized the conflict inherent in warfare by using an ever-changing rotation of on-screen graphics incorporating Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in the crosshairs of a weapon, or even an image of Iraq itself in the crosshairs. CNN, for example, soon placed its television and Internet coverage of Iraq under the rubric "Showdown: Iraq," as seen in web site banner below:[35]

Figure 3: CNN.com.

The following ad from CNN.com speaks volumes about framing the U.S.-Iraq tensions in the context of a Hollywood narrative. The question "What Happens Next?" suggests a tease to the audience which serves to build suspense and enhance the drama of the conflict. Likewise, the promise to "Be the first to know," is a clear indication of network competition to break the news; as if one network has the ability to predict how complicated global events will unfold.

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[35] Blank, "CNNing and SHOWDOWN: Iraq," http://reconstruction.eserver.org/052/blank.shtml.

Figure 4: CNN.com.

But beyond market competition, CNN—along with MSNBC and FOX—was continuing to build a narrative by playing up the laws of conflict. Placing the Iraq story in the context of a "showdown" is in itself a cinematic act. The showdown is a classic form of conflict in American cinema, seen most often in the Western genre. But what is most crucial about this narrative and visual framing is its creation of an "us versus them" dynamic. The decision makers in media organizations, whether consciously or not, allied themselves not with the enemy, not with the people, but with the attacking force of the war, the military, and with the Bush Administration as the ideological presence behind that force. Additionally, this alliance reveals the level of ferocity in the media ratings war during the supersaturated era of digital media when the competition for an audience can be so driven. After all, in what other era would the news media be required to sensationalize conflict in a time of war—a story that has already built within it more conflict than any film could ever hope to have?

As Hollywood has proven, the conflict-driven narrative formula is profitable, and it appears as though media outlets—with FOX itself having strong roots in Hollywood history—have adopted this storytelling style. Conflict and sensation are the keys to success in the media market and the media's concentration on these elements continued

throughout 2002 as a rift formed between the United States and other United Nations members including Germany and France. Rather than framing this as a crucial diplomatic period, many media organizations simply adopted the us versus them model with France often serving as the proxy for American frustration. After 9/11 Bill O'Reilly called for a boycott of French products and tourism, claiming on Foxnews.com that "the Chirac government actively supported Saddam Hussein."[36] Sensational coverage of the international debate about the war only served to enhance the drama of the coming war itself. This is not to say that coverage of other wars in the past has not been sensational. War itself is sensational. But, the extent to which FNC and its competition has mimicked Hollywood narrative has, in a sense, robbed international conflict of its crucial import as an event that affects the world's people in numerous and profound ways. The debate over war is so important to a citizenry that to sensationalize war in a narratively dramatic way is to trivialize it. And the practice of dramatizing and enhancing conflict to create a marketable news product reduces the efficacy of American journalism as a democratic institution the goal of which should be to inform and educate the public.

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[36] O'Reilly, "The Power of the American People," http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,184659,00.html.

Figure 5: President Bush speaking at Ellis Island.

Chapter IV

Character Development: How the media styles the public images of political leaders by adopting the protagonist-antagonist model used in the classical Hollywood narrative

On September 11, 2002, President Bush addressed the nation to mark the one-year anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. In preparation for the televised event, White House image makers—a team hired directly from the network television talent pool—arranged for three barges hauling large, Musco spotlights to be anchored in New York harbor, illuminating the Statue of Liberty so that it could be seen on television. In an article entitled, "Keepers of Bush image lift stagecraft to new heights," *The New York Times'* Elisabeth Bumiller called the image "the ultimate patriotic backdrop for Mr. Bush."[37] On CNN.com, the next morning's official coverage of the high profile speech included a description of the important day:

> The day—crisp and clear just like the skies of one year ago—was full of symbolism and sorrow for Bush. Joined by the first lady, he visited each of the three sites where the planes crashed.

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[37] Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush image," http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/05/16/nyt.bumiller/.

The attacks transformed Bush's presidency, moving it well beyond one colored by a disputed election to one, as indicated by polls, largely supported by the American people. He is seen, as several experts have said, as a wartime president.[38]

Any president who serves during a period of war is a wartime president, but the characterization of Bush as a "wartime president" in the abstract sense, by both his image makers and the media, is significant to the narrativization of the Iraq War. It is no modern phenomenon that political figures—particularly during election campaigns—employ strategies to create a specific public image of themselves. And it is an efficient method in a media-dominated culture to distill a public figure to his or her basic qualities in order to connect with the public. Of course, human beings, particularly those driven enough to assume positions of high leadership, are more complex than this. But, the nature of politics and mass media is such that a leader must maintain a consistent, accessible public image—a character. This character is created both by the leader and by the media, but as will be demonstrated in this chapter, the contemporary state of mainstream media has dictated more than ever that journalists and media executives, themselves, take the initiative to create compelling character archetypes out of real-life political leaders.

It is difficult for news organizations to resist the temptation to use the convenience of digital media technologies—instant multi-format sound bites, video bites, and Internet coverage—to create characterizations that satisfy audience expectations. Of course, the temptation to create characters has always existed in the media, but digital technologies offer a large pallet of resources which allows for more creative and exciting characterizations. So, the media does not only have the means to create characters but the motivation that comes with media competition. By 2002, networks made editorial choices

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[38] "Bush Tells Nation: 'A Mission Goes On'," http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/09/11/ar911.bush.speech/index.html .

to present President Bush as how they felt the audience wanted to see him. At the time of his Ellis Island speech, a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll put President Bush's job approval rating at 70%.[39] At the time, these strong numbers were translated by the media as a public mandate to paint President Bush as not just the wartime president, but a fearless heroic protagonist in a post-9/11 narrative. Journalists not only subscribed to the character put forth by President Bush's image makers, but they themselves perpetuated a great, sustainable character that enabled a more compelling, sellable narrative.

Take, for instance, an August 2002 MSNBC report entitled "How did Presidency change after 9/11?" which aired one month before the President's Ellis Island speech. In this report, White House Correspondent David Gregory describes the President's image in relation to the September 11 legacy:

> The country and Mr. Bush's presidency were instantly transformed. The president assumed new authority. Quickly ending were the jokes about his intelligence, questions about his experience, and jabs that it was the Vice President Dick Cheney secretly pulling the strings in the White House. By Friday, September 14, when he toured the destruction at Ground Zero, he became a wartime president.[40]

As is indicated by the official transcript, Gregory's statement was punctuated by the video tape of President Bush's appearance at Ground Zero three days after the attacks.[41] Gregory was only one of the many journalists characterizing President Bush as the wartime president but his word choice is important. He summarily dismissed the idea that doubts remain not only about the legitimacy of the 2000 election but also about the president's competency to lead. Moreover, in addressing President Bush as the wartime president, journalists co-opted the image building process usually left to the image makers. And this raises great concerns over the state of journalistic ethics after 9/11. In

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[39] "President Bush: Job Ratings," Pollingreport.com, http://www.pollingreport.com/BushJob1.htm.
[40] "How Did Presidency Change After 9/11?" *Ashleigh Banfield: On Location*, (transcript).
[41] Ibid.

creating a heroic, nationally unifying character out of President Bush, news organizations were placing the narrative and the audience over the reportage of facts. Essentially, the journalist, the editor, and the news producer were consciously choosing to cast the most dramatic light possible onto both the character and the narrative in an effort to satisfy the audience and, by extension, maintain viewership.

Karen Johnson-Cartee explains how journalists might come about this process:

> News stories are not told from the standpoint of political institutions, economic forces, or laws and bureaucratic regulations: rather, news stories involve people, individuals engaged in conflict and seeking resolution of disputes…In order for news narratives to be effective or understandable, news reporters believe that the audience must somehow relate to the story; in other words, the audience must identify with the players in the narrative.[42]

Johnson-Cartee is referring to how journalists choose to frame a story about a political leader in a manner which will most appeal to audiences on a personal. So, when journalists filed reports about President Bush during his high-polling years between September 11 and the invasion of Iraq, they allowed the President's personal characteristics, such as the resolve and patriotism ordinarily underscored by his image makers, to dictate the thrust of the news story. In effect, news organizations fleshed out an image of Bush as a wartime, and by extension, warrior president leading the nation toward a more secure and stable future.

Johnson-Cartee elaborates on the tendency for journalists to focus on personal characteristics of political leaders at the expense of providing the audience with what she calls "knowledge of public events:"

> The journalists' emphases on individual leaders and their struggles in resolving issues among themselves produce what have been called personalistic encapsulations…Such routine encapsulations produce significant consequences

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[42] Johnson-Cartee, *News Narrative and News Framing*, 255

not only for the character of the news product but also for the ultimate definition or knowledge of public events. [43]

In the case of the media's emphasis on President Bush's warrior qualities, the "consequences" were the mis-representation of the difficult and complicated process of going to war—an "actual event" that was much discussed by September 2002. But, what Johnson-Cartee does not discuss is that the state of contemporary mainstream journalism is such that personal characterizations are emphasized in an attempt to compete in the media market place. So, just as sensationalizing conflict is used to bolster ratings, so is emphasizing popular, recognizable character archetypes. The remainder of this chapter will include an analysis of how mainstream media cultivated classical Hollywood character archetypes by contextualizing President Bush as a classic protagonist in the post-9/11 run up to the Iraq War.

Positioning the protagonist and defining his enemies

In a memo issued by John Moody dated June 3, 2003, the FOX News Senior Vice President informs his journalists that, "[President Bush] is doing something that few of his predecessors dared undertake: [pu]tting the U.S. case for mideast peace to an Arab summit. It's a distinctly [sk]eptical crowd that Bush faces. His political courage and tactical cunning ar[e] [wo]rth noting in our reporting through the day."[44] This memo, presumably one of thousands issued by managing editors in all of the major news organizations, reveals a direct attempt to characterize President Bush as a bold, courageous character. Moody and the others may or may not have been aware of it, but they were following the most basic laws of the classic Hollywood narrative when it

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[43] Ibid., 265
[44] Media Matters for America Staff, "33 Internal FOX Editorial Memos," http://mediamatters.org/items/200407140002 (bracketing provided by MMFA staff).

comes to establishing a protagonist. McKee calls the protagonist "a willful character" and writes that the protagonist's:

> Quality of will is as important as quantity. A protagonist's willpower may be less than that of the biblical Job, but powerful enough to sustain desire throughout conflict and ultimately take actions that create meaningful and irreversible change.[45]

There is no doubt President Bush's image makers have always attempted to cast him as a willful, action-oriented leader, particularly making use of his status as a decisive, wartime president. Indeed, Bush's most recognizable traits—resolve, determination, and faith—are well-known and often referred to in his speeches. But, McKee's description also fits the type of character cultivated by the media. In an August 2002 CNN report, Wolf Blitzer characterized the President as having the will and foresight to proceed with an Iraq invasion:

> Now on *Wolf Blitzer Reports,* target Saddam; while President Bush sets his sights on Iraq, many who have commanded U.S. forces in battle are reluctant warriors.[46]

By contrasting President Bush's resolve against even that of experienced American generals, Blitzer was, in effect, legitimizing a president unfamiliar with battle as a determined warrior unburdened by "reluctance" or second guessing. Blitzer and other journalists repeatedly incorporated President Bush's warrior character in their reports not because it was in the public's interest to do so—it is arguable that such details have no bearing on the news content whatsoever—but because it served to satisfy viewer expectations.

President Bush's public image is, for all intents and purposes, based on a cowboy model. Many presidents had taken on the cowboy imagery prior to Bush, including

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[45] McKee, *Story*, 137.
[46] "Generals Reluctant on Iraq War," *CNN Wolf Blitzer Reports*, (transcript).

Ronald Reagan who was often photographed horseback riding and Lyndon Johnson who played up his past as a Texas rancher. The media did not invent Bush's cowboy image. The cowboy imagery is iconic in American history and culture—and particularly in the American cinema. Cowboy boots, hats, Western-styled shirts, ranch settings, and outdoor imagery are all components of the cowboy character in film and were adopted by George W. Bush long before he ascended to the presidency. The image was a logical character for Bush to adopt. He is a Texan, he fancies himself a rancher, and he possesses a philosophy of life that mimics the over-simplified, good-versus-evil nature of iconic Western figures such as John Wayne in *The Searchers* (1956) who seeks to right a wrong done against his own. Or Gary Cooper who has on his side a tremendous sense of pride and duty in the film *High Noon* (1952). Had President Bush not adopted this imagery, it is quite possible his political career may never have gotten off the ground.

Figure 6: President Bush speaking at Ground Zero.

Bush may have sold the resolute cowboy image during his election campaigns but the media ran with it after September 11. The type of coverage such as that represented by the 2003 FOX memo quoted above (we can assume similar memos circulate on a daily basis, including in the months following 9/11) positioned Bush to assume greater power, achieve greater ambitions, and turned him into a bold, decisive protagonist in a larger narrative marked by the desire for justice and revenge. Regarding the fictional

Hollywood version of the protagonist, Kristen Thompson claims that, Hollywood cinema requires, "characters with clearly established traits for both causality and comprehensibility."[47] And so apparently does network and major Internet media outlets. President Bush's physical presence, his personal philosophies, and the nature of the attacks themselves allowed for media characterization of him as a resolute commander-in-chief to intensify. As the memo suggests, the media was not *only* reporting the character traits Bush's image makers were presenting. In fact, the media cultivated the warrior character and contributed to the process of contextualizing President Bush as a protagonist and, more specifically, as "a war president;" a term he would later use to describe himself.[48]

So, by the time President Bush decided to oust the Taliban in Afghanistan, a form of revenge narrative was underway with Bush as the resolute warrior. As Bush declared on the WTC wreckage that retaliation was immanent ("I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon."[49]), the media appropriately followed suit in narratively framing Bush, the leader, against terrorists. Furthermore, the fact that all nineteen hijackers were of Arab descent only simplified the media's narrative model, as American-Arab antagonism existed in American popular culture long before 9/11. The history of the American revenge narrative against Arab aggressors is important because its success as a profitable Hollywood storyline in films like *True Lies* (1994) and *The Seige* (1998) provides ample motivation for the media to exploit American unease with the Arab image. After the 1995

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[47] Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 45.
[48] "Meet the Press with Tim Russert," MSNBC.com, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4179618/.
[49] Giuliani, "Getting it Right at Ground Zero,"
http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101020909/agiuliani.html.

Oklahoma City bombing, for example, the media openly suggested that Arab and Muslim extremists were responsible. An April 20, 1995 article from *The Washington Post* supports this claim:

> While hundreds of leads were being investigated, a number of law enforcement sources and private terrorism experts said that the bomb apparently used bore the basic characteristics of devices that Muslim extremists have detonated in such places as Beirut, Lebanon and Buenos Aires. One source familiar with the investigation said that the FBI had received claims of responsibility from at least eight groups, seven of which seemed to be of Middle Eastern origin.[50]

The Oklahoma bombing, as it turned out, was perpetrated by a white American apparently angry with the federal government over a number of issues. But the speculation of Arab involvement comes on a tide of American suspicion about Arab culture and motives which, in American cinema, can be dated as far back as the 1921 orientalist film *The Sheik*. And this trend continued through September 11, 2001, when the media characterized President Bush as leading the country in a revenge scenario of justifiable American retaliation. Take for instance the following banner from a major news web site during the period when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan:

Figure 7: ABCnews.com.

ABC News visually frames the story with the heroic iconography of the American flag. And the slogan "AMERICA FIGHTS BACK" positions any military action as not only justified but possibly inspiring or adventurous. Additionally, the message in this banner presupposes a national anticipation for the fight itself. Though it was widely accepted

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[50] Thomas and Devroy, "Clinton Condemns 'Evil Cowards' for Blast," A01.

among people across the political spectrum in the U.S., as well as in much of the world, that the strikes on terror camps and Taliban strongholds were indeed justified after 9/11, the media's characterization of the fight as a revenge tale with President Bush cast as the chief protagonist was in effect a conscious effort to narrativize the news story as a cinematic spectacle.

The 24-hour news networks were bolder in their narrativization of post-9/11 retaliation and followed a cinematic narrative style that would remain influential as the Iraq War drew closer. As seen below, MSNBC (top left), CNN (top right), and FOX News outlets made similar decisions and even went so far as to allude to the culturally iconic 1980 film *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*:

Figure 8: MSNBC.   **Figure 9: CNN**

Figure 10: FOX News Channel.

Aside from the trivializing of a major military movement by distilling it to a popular film title, these news organizations fueled the "us versus them" approach outlined in President Bush's November 6, 2001 declaration that, "Over time it's going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity. You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror."[51]

For the news networks, which are in the business of increasing and maintaining viewership, President Bush's warrior character was crucial to the development of a sustainable narrative. Over the following two years, President Bush and the media functioned almost symbiotically—though not in organized concert—in bolstering and maintaining an image of a principled, compassionate, and bold leader assuming the mantle of both the fictionalized image of John Wayne and the real-life historical reverence of President Franklin Roosevelt.

'The Principles of Antagonism'

The media further re-enforced the image of President Bush as the protagonist by adopting an appropriate antagonist in the tradition of the Arab and Muslim revenge tale described above. As was mentioned earlier, the media speculation over Iraqi involvement in September 11 simply gained in intensity over the two years following the attacks. Saddam Hussein was not only a familiar face to the American audience but also had a built-in antagonistic relationship with the Bush family. President Bush provided the media with just the kind of narrative fuel it required when in September 2002, he spoke of Saddam as "the guy who tried to kill my dad."[52] Though this was clearly a moment of

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[51] "Bush Says It Is Time For Action," CNN.com,
http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/ret.bush.coalition/index.html.
[52] "Bush Calls Saddam 'The Guy Who Tried to Kill My Dad," CNN.com,
http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/09/27/bush.war.talk/.

presidential political rhetoric, the major news networks no doubt welcomed the continuation of this type of antagonism. Accordingly, in taking up this line of discussion on antagonism, the months leading up to the Iraq War saw more protagonist-antagonist framing.

ABCnews.com, for example, personalized the conflict between two individual men, President Bush and Saddam Hussein, by incorporating their opposing images on web site banners:

Figure 11:ABCnews.com

Figure 12:ABCnews.com

One can assume a specific intentionality in the way banners like these are designed. For example, notice that in the top banner the faces of President Bush and Saddam are positioned close to one another and are superimposed over cascading sparks indicating conflict. The second banner depicts a slightly smirking President Bush over a cool blue American flag pattern, while Saddam wears a bemused expression in front of a menacing reddish-orange background. The colors, images, and compositions in these banners are reminiscent of Hollywood narrative conventions that often include one protagonist and one antagonist in a personalized confrontation. These Internet banners, both from ABC

News's web site, speak volumes about how the media intentionally positioned and personalized the conflict between the United States and terrorism in the context of President Bush versus Saddam Hussein.

These images also exemplify what McKee calls the "Principle of Antagonism," which he expresses as follows: "A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them."[53] The U.S. relationship (more specifically the Bush relationship) with Saddam satisfied these emotional requirements. And though Saddam Hussein was widely considered a brutal dictator, media outlets often disregarded that the nuance of international diplomacy and complexity of military action reaches beyond individual personalities and historic grudges. Another memo by FOX News's Moody again demonstrates the intention of narrativizing the Iraq War in the context of good versus evil, a well-known aspect of President Bush's personal philosophy:

> Do not fall into the easy trap of mourning the loss of U.S. lives and asking out loud why are we there? The U.S. is in Iraq to help a country brutalized for 30 years protect the gains made by Operation Iraqi Freedom and set it on the path to democracy. Some people in Iraq don't want that to happen. That is why American GIs are dying. And what we should remind our viewers.[54]

Though this memo comes after the Iraq War had begun, it highlights yet again the intentionality of the press to remind the audience of the antagonism represented by Saddam Hussein's rule ("a country brutalized"). Though neither Bush nor Saddam are mentioned by name in the memo, the reminder of Saddam's legacy reinforces the protagonist-antagonist model. Additionally, its request to "remind viewers" of Saddam's legacy actually continues the process of personalizing the worldviews of individual

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[53] McKee, *Story*, 317.
[54] Media Matters for America Staff, http://mediamatters.org/items/200407140002.

"characters" (Saddam and President Bush) over the intellectual realities of war and diplomacy. Using the model also plays into the audience's desire for a conflict and a resolution because, in the classical Hollywood narrative, the audience progresses through the story with a conclusion in mind. Along with capitalizing on conflict-oriented storylines and the power of the "individual incident" as analyzed in previous chapters, the media's adoption of the protagonist-antagonist model in news storytelling undermines the complexity of real-life events.

Chapter V

Corporate structure and leadership: How media ownership promotes unique ideologies and posits news information as a consumer product

While the previous three chapters dealt primarily with how a news story is told using the classical Hollywood narrative as a sensationalizing device, this chapter will explore how the current state of media ownership might have encouraged this market-driven storytelling model. News organizations have always competed for an audience but in the age of media supersaturation and intense marketplace competition, profit motives often outweigh sound editorial judgment. And therein lies the ethical breach that confronts the practice of contemporary journalism. Ideally, traditional journalism ethics dictate that the press keep the public informed as accurately and objectively as possible. Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick refer to journalism as a "quest for quality" and maintain that the press has particular obligations regarding global politics:

> The opportunities arise from the global need for information as human beings assess the chances of their own survival as a species, or, at a less fateful level, just worry about what sort of world and what sort of life for its inhabitants there will be in the future. Global politics presents daunting challenges, but authoritarian structures are no longer regarded as an acceptable means to political ends. The sort of alternative democratic participation and involvement that is required is impossible without information. Here, then, as the people of the world struggle for a worthwhile way of life within a sustainable future, is a role for the media, especially those media that can still be called the press, whether they are part of print or broadcast journalism, so long as they follow the traditional role of the press as providers of information.[55]

The media is indeed still a provider of information—perhaps more information than ever before—but the temptation to make a story more compelling for competitive purposes negates the press's "traditional role." So, framing stories, such as that which is described in previous chapters, raises questions about the fundamental principles of

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[55] Belsey and Chadwick, "Ethics and Politics of the Media," 2.

journalism and the complicity of the press in advocating, directly or indirectly, a political agenda while pursuing a profitable narrative. Indeed profit and politics are so closely related in the mass media business that noted media critics Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman refer to corporate ownership as one in a series of filters affecting the way news reaches the public. They describe this filter as follows:

> …the dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks and government. This is the first powerful filter that will affect news choices.[56]

Chomsky and Herman's description is part of a larger picture of how market competition has the capacity to invite government involvement and political ideology and contaminate the free press in a democratic society. And corporate control over the news media is only enhanced by digital media technologies. The Internet and digital video technology allow us to send and receive news information faster and more predictably than news develops. Further, the demand for all types of information is high and thus the business of supplying it is highly competitive. The news media, therefore, has transformed news information into an identifiable product and we now have the tools needed to create an unending, unbroken stream of these information products. And if world events and human stories, based on their inherent unpredictability as "real," do not develop in a manner which satisfies the demand, then this technology can allow the media to shape it as something that will.

As is maintained in the previous chapters, news stories are often told in way that seems to follow the path of least resistance in which the end (ratings victories and profitability) is justified by the means (telling a story in the most entertaining way). Much

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[56] Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Dissent.* 14.

has been made about the role of corporate media's complicity in drumming up support for the Iraq War but the subjectivity of storytelling and the unpredictability and complexity of war and international relations makes this a difficult case to prove. There is no smoking gun in the form of an official corporate stance supporting war but there is something to be said for media leaders as conduits of political ideology. Looking at the structures, leadership styles, and motivations of some of the world's largest media organizations reveals that not only do the political ideologies of wealthy, powerful elites trickle down through the various editorial channels, the corporate-ownership model, by its very nature, favors profit over public interest. As the previous chapters examined the textual nature and narrative strategies of the news media, this chapter will focus on how a sensationalized news narrative—such as that illustrated by the Iraq War analysis— may result from an editorial environment dictated more by corporate control than traditional journalistic ideals.

The mass media industry has, like many industries over the last twenty-five years, gone through a dramatic process of corporate consolidation. Once smaller, more ideologically diverse companies have been bought up and placed under the control of fewer and larger corporations. In 1983, a study of media ownership revealed that "fifty media conglomerates dominated the entirety of U.S. mass media" and a 1997 update of that study estimated that number to be "around ten."[57] Mergers—some successful, some not—between large media corporations have created uniform conditions under which news and other information is gathered, interpreted, and disseminated to a news-hungry public. No doubt, corporate consolidation has evolved quickly and efficiently along side

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[57] McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 19. McChesney is referring to a study conducted by noted media analyst Ben Bagdikian.

media technology itself. The rapid development of new technologies, namely digital video and audio technology, enhanced satellite technology, and the Internet ushered in a larger, more lucrative media economy. Additionally, an aggressive desire among corporate leaders to control the lucrative mass media market—as this chapter examines— has created a media environment wherein a few, mammoth multi-national corporations control numerous news media outlets.

While competition is still robust among these few organizations, some argue that increased media consolidation results in a narrower journalistic focus leading to ethical lapses and political partisanship in news reporting. It is, therefore, important to examine how journalistic decisions are made and how journalistic environments are formed within a media institution. So, how do corporate leaders determine the editorial direction of a news outlet? I argue that corporate ownership and specific leadership personalities inevitably create a competitive newsroom environment. Media organizations assume certain attitudes—corporate cultures—based upon leadership reaction to market forces. This chapter will include a general examination of leadership characteristics in two major media organizations—News Corporation and Time Warner Inc. Like many organizations, corporate or political, these media companies are led by a particular individual or a small group. News Corp and Time Warner have leadership structures that are no different than those of any other corporation—chief executive officers, boards of directors, etc. Both companies are publicly owned and respond to shareholders. Nevertheless, these companies are run by individuals—some more hands-on than others—whose personal leadership styles and political ideologies invariably have an effect on the direction of editorial policy.

Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and the FOX News editorial environment

FOX News Channel is referred to often in previous chapters as a great force in the narrativization of real-life news and specifically that of the Iraq War story. News Corporations' Rupert Murdoch, who owns FOX News Channel, has maintained power for a number of years but he has done so in a way that illustrates a skilled and effective political agility. Murdoch is not hindered by the worries of public perception in the same way a political leader is—after all, this is business not electoral politics—but News Corp has been as powerful as it is for as long as it has been because Murdoch understands the value of strategic maneuvering. Murdoch is known, in fact, for "his instinct for strategic advantage."[58] Throughout his career, Murdoch has certainly acted in such a way and, though there has been much criticism, his and News Corporation's ascent have gone on relatively unchecked for more than a quarter of a century. Founded only in 1996 (CNN was founded in 1980), FOX News Channel hit the airwaves aggressively and reported its stories in much the same sensational and confrontational way as other media outlets owned by News Corporation. And News Corp owns many outlets. Since the 1970s, Murdoch built News Corporation into one of the world's most powerful media empires amassing ownership in all major media markets including cable and satellite television, film, newspapers, and book publishing. News Corp owns and controls significant shares in Fox Broadcasting, Fox Sports, *TV Guide*, *The New York Post*, HarperCollins books, Twentieth Century Fox film studios, DirecTV satellite, and a number of other media interests.[59]

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[58] Fallows, "The Age of Murdoch," 89.
[59] Fallows, "The Age of Murdoch," 82.

According to a 2003 *Atlantic Monthly* article by James Fallows, "The Fox News organization is under blanket orders not to talk to the press unless pre-cleared."[60] Fallows points out the obvious hypocrisy—he refers to it as "incongruity"—of this company policy but the position speaks to how executive policies are implemented at FOX News Channel. Executive policies, it appears, are strictly adhered to because of the respect that Murdoch commands. In fact, "Murdoch is said to be popular and admired within his own organization, rather than resented, mocked, or gossiped about behind his back."[61] This type of expectation of strong support for a corporate leader can, at the very least, lead to confusion over editorial responsibility when it comes to reporting a story accurately as opposed to framing it in a way that will align with that leader's political position. Simply put, if producers, journalists, and editors are aware that Murdoch feels there is a liberal bias in media it is only natural to assume they would want to accommodate a more conservative journalistic approach.

New Yorker journalist Ken Auletta, when asked what he had observed after four months researching FOX News Channel, responded that he "saw a news network that was not, as advertised, free of bias. This is not to say that FNC does not do some things well. It is to say that the network, like many political candidates, is not always what it claims to be."[62] Auletta appears to be alluding to a particularly notable characteristic of FNC's much discussed journalistic policies. Essentially, FNC claims the highest moral plane of journalistic integrity with its oft repeated slogans, "Fair and Balanced" and "We report. You decide." But FNC has received its lion's share of criticism for being bias in

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[60] Ibid., 84.
[61] Ibid., 89.
[62] Tubke-Davidson, "Q & A: Broadcast News," http://www.newyorker.com/online/content/articles/030526on_onlineonly01.

favor of conservative values. According to a 2003 study of FNC's flagship nightly news program "Special Report w/Brit Hume," conducted by media watchdog FAIR.org over a six-month period, "conservatives accounted for 72 percent" of the ideological guests.[63] This type of statistic is not surprising considering the personnel Murdoch hired to run FNC. Some powerful figures in the FNC organization are Roger Ailes and *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol, two conservative Republican party operatives.[64]

Regarding the Iraq War and the policies of the Bush administration, it is possible to assume that the presence of pro-Republican contributors and executives at least creates a pro-invasion environment if not endorses invasion outright. And FOX News has a controversial relationship with the Bush White House and criticism of cooperation between the two appear in a number of articles, books, and documentaries. This is one possible explanation for FNC's contribution to the pro-invasion narrative as it has been analyzed in previous chapters. Furthermore, as a FNC conservative commentator, Kristol himself is also a member of the Project for the New American Century who, in the previously mentioned letter to President Bill Clinton, recommended serious action against Iraq as early as 1998. Other members of the organization—Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and former chairman of the DOD's Defense Policy Board Richard Perle—are considered chief architects of the Iraq War. Incidentally, by 2003, the year the U.S. invaded Iraq, FNC earned higher ratings than any of the other 24-hour cable news networks. And as recently as April 2006, the close relationship between the White House and FOX News came

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[63] Rendall and Holler, "Still Failing the "Fair & Balanced" Test," http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1187.
[64] Fallows, "The Age of Murdoch," 89.

under renewed scrutiny when President Bush named conservative FOX News commentator Tony Snow as White House press secretary.[65]

Time Warner Inc.: A giant among giants

Time Warner is the world's largest, most powerful media conglomerate. Formed in 1990 when Time Inc. merged with Warner Communications, Time Warner's holdings far surpasses that of News Corporation's both in sheer volume and diversity. With stakes in Internet, film, book publishing, and telecommunications, Time Warner owns a host of familiar media companies. Some of Time Warner's holdings include CNN, HBO, Time Warner Cable, *TIME* magazine, *People* magazine, *Fortune*, Warner Bros. studio, New Line Cinema, *Money* magazine, America Online, Castle Rock Entertainment, and Turner Entertainment. According to its 2004 annual review, Time Warner's revenues topped $42 billion making it a giant among giants in the media industry.[66] But, Time Warner has experienced its share of leadership struggles. Unfortunately for Time Warner, leadership struggles have resulted in confusion over the direction of the company, reduction in profits, and increased shareholder weariness. But as an institution providing a public service, Time Warner's lumbering corporate structure and quest for higher revenues only results in loss for the news seeking public. As Time Warner steers its many news outlets toward competitive profitability, the quest for high ratings dictates the narrative framing of news coverage along the lines of the analysis provided in previous chapters.

The company is a particularly interesting case of contemporary media ownership by virtue of the fact that it has been created by a number of well-known, diverse leadership personalities. Before its initial 1995 merger with Time Warner, Turner

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[65] Rutenberg, "Fox News Commentator Joins White House," http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/26/washington/26snow.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.

[66] Time Warner, "2004 Annual Review," ftp://ftp.timeinc.net/pub/corp/2004_Annual_Review.pdf.

Broadcasting Systems was headed up by billionaire and CNN founder Ted Turner. Turner, who is still with Time Warner in a smaller capacity, is a charismatic, opinionated leader whose outspoken viewpoints have often collided with those of other, more traditional personalities within the company. Indeed, Turner, admittedly more liberal in his ideology, has publicly compared Rupert Murdoch to Adolph Hitler and chastised the News Corp leader as a "dangerous man" who helped lead the country into the Iraq War.[67] Though Turner is not the only one to accuse Murdoch of using his media power to endorse Bush administration policies, Time Warner's consolidation has hardly led to improvements in the journalistic direction of its own news outlets. After all, Time Warner, like News Corp is a business seeking profits for all its companies across the board, and as such, its news organizations are simply additional sources of revenue.

CNN, for example, went from revolutionizing the media industry as the first 24-hour television news network to becoming yet another competitor in a field where sensationalized news dominates the airwaves. As Robert McChesney claims, companies like Time Warner treat news as simply another product and "the main concern of the media giants is to make journalism directly profitable."[68] And this really means that Time Warner's board of directors cannot possibly be concerned with the journalistic integrity of every news company it owns. In fact, the board oversees a global empire of media organizations, directing the company—as any board would—to respond to market forces rather than journalistic principles. And the pressure to profit then trickles down to these media organizations who must respond or suffer the consequences of layoffs and cutbacks. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky elaborate:

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[67] Mermigas, "Turner on War, Murdoch, and Media."
[68] McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 54.

> Many of the large media companies are fully integrated into the market, and for the others, too, the pressures of stockholders, directors, and bankers to focus on the bottom line are powerful. These pressures have intensified in recent years as media stocks have become market favorites, and actual or prospective owners of newspapers and television properties have found it possible to capitalize increased audience size and advertising revenues into multiplied values of the media franchises—and great wealth. This has encouraged the entry of speculators and increased the pressure and temptation to focus more intensively on profitability.[69]

And the "temptation" has certainly had an affect on the editorial direction at CNN. For example, some believe responding to the popularity of FOX News Channel's conservative programming is what compelled Time Warner's leading cable news station to hire the highly conservative radio commentator Glenn Beck.[70] Another glaring conflict between ethical journalism and corporate profitability is the cross-promotional nature of a corporation that owns several media outlets. The fact that Time Warner owns both CNN and *TIME* magazine—two wholly unique editorial environments—leads to, at least, a conflict of interest in how the two companies promote themselves and each other. One author claims that "if…media conglomerates discourage their news divisions from examining their corporate operations, these giants have fewer qualms about using their control over journalism to promote their other media holdings."[71] So, in the case of Time Warner, CNN's editors and journalists may feel pressure to use airtime to promote stories about other Time Warner holdings such as *TIME* magazine features, Warner Bros. Film releases, or HBO programming. Given this arrangement, there is a danger that news stories will be chosen, emphasized, and told based on ratings and profitability rather than on accuracy and objectivity.

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[69] Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing* Dissent, 7.
[70] "Glenn Beck Joins CNN Headline News," CNN.com, http://edition.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/TV/01/17/glenn.beck/.
[71] McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 53.

As this chapter illustrates, there are a number of dangers inherent in the corporate consolidation of media companies. As more news rooms and editorial environments fall under the control of fewer and fewer companies, the chances of crucial news information either becoming or being sacrificed for a more sensational, sellable product increases. Yes, news has always been a business and as Murrow's quote in the introduction indicates, there is certainly no need in a capitalist society to divorce news from profitability. Further, there is no real evidence to suggest that individual leaders at Time Warner, News Corp, or any other media conglomerate purposely conspire to control the ideological tone of news framing. But the danger here is in the institutional make-up of the contemporary news media company because there are so many opportunities for a conflict of interest. These companies can and should be profitable but nowhere does it say that a news organization, which is vital to the public, should be treated the same as any other company. For instance, CNN, a news organization, must not be treated as a revenue source in the same manner as Warner Bros studios. Because it is not the responsibility of a news organization to entertain the public for profit. Furthermore, news organizations, in order to fulfill their important role in a democratic society can only be editorially independent if they are allowed to compete in the market place as such.

Conclusion

"Iraq Is All but Won; Now What?"

headline, Los Angeles Times
April 10, 2003

On May 1, 2003 President Bush landed aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in a Navy jet to declare the fall of Baghdad as "one victory in a war on terror that began on Sept. 11, 2001, and still goes on."[72] The President did not say that the war in Iraq was over but he did declare an end to "major combat operations in Iraq" and claimed that "in the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed."[73] And as they had done for his address to the nation on Ellis Island one year after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush's image makers provided him with a heroic and quite cinematic backdrop. The *New York Times* Elisabeth Bumiller describes how White House Deputy Director of Communications for Production, Scott Sforza, arranged the event:

> Media strategists noted afterward that Mr. Sforza and his aides had choreographed every aspect of the event, even down to the members of the Lincoln crew arrayed in coordinated shirt colors over Mr. Bush's right shoulder and the "Mission Accomplished" banner placed to perfectly capture the president and the celebratory two words in a single shot. The speech was specifically timed for what image makers call "magic hour light," which cast a golden glow on Mr. Bush." If you looked at the TV picture, you saw there was flattering light on his left cheek and slight shadowing on his right," Mr. [John] King [an aide to former President Clinton] said. "It looked great."[74]

As the quotation above indicates, the event aboard the USS Lincoln was clearly a White House creation. The "Mission Accomplished" banner and the President's declaration of victory was a clear attempt by the White House to effectually end the war in the public's

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[72] Sanger, "Aftereffects: The President," sec. A6.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush Image," http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/05/16/nyt.bumiller/.

mind. Though there was much debate about the validity of the President's declaration—after all the insurgency was underway and Saddam Hussein was still at large—the news media interpreted the event as an ending to the narrative it had cultivated since the attacks on New York and Washington D.C two years before.

But it is difficult to tell who declared victory first: President Bush or the mainstream news media. A month before Bush spoke on the carrier, the *Los Angeles Times* ran the headline, "Iraq Is All but Won; Now What?" On April 19, 2003, FOX News Channel contributor and *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer suggested to deny victory was a matter of partisan politics: "The only people who think this wasn't a victory are Upper Westside liberals, and a few people here in Washington."[75] And speaking days after the president's speech, CBS reporter Joie Chen said:

> Now that the combat phase of the war in Iraq is officially over, what begins is a debate throughout the entire U.S. government over America's unrivaled power and how best to use it.[76]

When President Bush himself declared victory, the media continued to lionize him as the protagonist in a narrative that began on 9/11. Commentating on the President's speech, MSNBC's *Hardball* host Chris Matthews gushed over the heroic imagery President Bush adopted: "He won the war. He was an effective commander. Everybody recognizes that, I believe, except a few critics…He looks great in a military uniform. He looks great in that cowboy costume he wears when he goes West."[77] And the comparisons to Hollywood films were abundant. *New York Times* columnist David E. Sanger compared the imagery

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[75] "'The Final Word Is Hooray!,'" Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2842.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Media Matters for America Staff. "Mission Accomplished," http://mediamatters.org/items/200604270005.

to the 1986 blockbuster *Top Gun*. And while one CNN host declared that legendary filmmaker, "Cecil B. DeMille couldn't have done better,"[78] another characterized President Bush as "commander in chief, rock star, movie star, and one of the guys."[79] But despite the media's apparent attempt to neatly frame the fall of Baghdad as a climactic ending to a two year narrative, the Iraq War actually intensified. In the three years since, no amount of narrative framing, symbolic onscreen graphics, or televised shouting matches have been able to mask the painful realities of the Iraq War. In May 2003—when the President delivered his speech—139 American soldiers had been killed in Iraq. Since the President and the media declared victory that spring, over 2,300 more U.S. soldiers have been killed.[80] And by December 2005, President Bush himself estimated that over 30,000 Iraqis have died in the war.[81] These staggering numbers have resulted in an extraordinary loss in public support for the war. According to an April 2006 poll, only 13% of those questioned agreed the Iraq War was going "very well." The war also eroded President Bush's approval rating which by May 2006 hovered in the low thirties.[82] In the spring of 2006, the news media's Iraq War narrative—as it has been described in these pages—had all but completely disintegrated. The shift in public opinion had weakened the kind of patriotism that provided much of the media's narrative thrust. And despite its best efforts to cast the war as a revenge tale, the debate began to revolve around whether the Iraq War was justified and when, if ever, the U.S. could bring its troops home. But, the manner in which the news media told stories did not change and with the insurgency

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[78] Ibid.
[79] "'The Final Word Is Hooray!,'" Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2842.
[80] "Iraq Coalition Casualty Count," Icasualties.org, http://icasualties.org/oif/.
[81] "Bush: 30,000 Iraqis Killed in War," CBS.com. http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/12/12/politics/main1117045.shtml.
[82] "President Bush—Overall Job Rating," Pollingreport.com, http://www.pollingreport.com/BushJob.htm.

still raging in Iraq, the media began to construct a new, broad narrative. This time the focus was another long-time enemy of the United States: Iran. Iran has long harbored desires to develop its own nuclear capabilities which it maintained were for peaceful means. Meanwhile, the United States and other nations claimed Iran was attempting to develop a nuclear weapon. By April 2006, tensions between the U.S. and Iran continued to grow with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad openly threatening Israel. Accordingly, President Bush declared that if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon it would pose a "grave threat to the security of the world."[83] President Bush's comments were strikingly similar to those he made about Iraq prior to the invasion. But the media, too, began to frame a possible conflict with Iran in much the same way it had with Iraq.
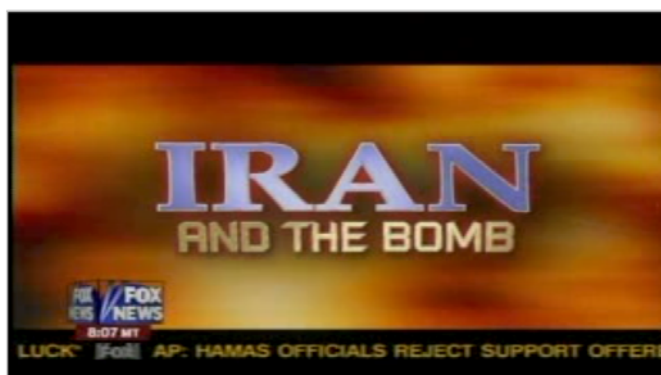

Figure 13: FOX News Channel.

Once again, CNN, for example, narrativized the Iran story in the context of a showdown. On the April 9 edition of *CNN Sunday Night*, host Carol Lin advertised the program by asking the question: "Coming up, a military showdown with Iran?"[84] And FOX News Channel also used suggestive on-screen graphics, like the one seen above. The phrase

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[83] Baker, Linzer, and Ricks, "U.S. Is Studying Military Strike Options on Iran," http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/08/AR2006040801082.html.
[84] "Severe Weather Hits Southeast Again," *CNN Sunday Night*, (transcript).

"Iran and the bomb" in front of a background seemingly engulfed in flames brings to mind Cold War-like images of nuclear annihilation.

As the Iraq War grinded on with no real end in sight, the debate over the media's coverage of the period between 9/11 and the Iraq invasion continued. Some blamed the media for not being more skeptical of the Bush government while others accused the media of outright propaganda. Many media analysts and critics bring Hollywood films into their arguments but only as visual comparisons not as storytelling models. Author Paul Rutherford describes the media's coverage of Iraq as a "propaganda war" which "was rooted in the tragedy of September 11, 2001," an event he characterizes as "a horrible replay of disaster movies like *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) or *The Towering Inferno* (1974). The authors of *Shoot First and Ask Questions Later*, criticize the invasion coverage for what it did not reveal to the audience:

> …what viewers saw was a very partial picture. They saw correspondents reporting live, in full biological and chemical gear, they saw reports on the discovery of potential WMD facilities (reports that were never followed up), and they heard military sources asserting the inevitability of the discovery of such facilities in time. Yet while viewers saw a lot of coverage assuming the existence of something that we now know didn't exist, there was a lot they did not see. So, for example, viewers might well have imagined that the war was won solely through aerial bombardment and infantry movement.[85]

Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber take a harder line as to the complicity of the press in helping the Bush Administration sell the war by emotionalizing the coverage. In citing a FOX News Channel anchor who harshly criticized an anti-war guest on his show, the authors put forth that:

> Viewers may have *felt* that the coverage on TV was better than the coverage in newspapers, but there was actually an inverse relationship between the amount of

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[85] Lewis, Brookes, Mosdell, and Threadgold, *Shoot First and Ask Questions Later*, 188.

emotional entertainment on display and the amount of factual information that viewers received.[86]

Rampton and Stauber also comment on the visual aesthetics of Iraq coverage—similar to those analyzed in this thesis—by pointing out the intentionality on the part of an MSNBC producer to narrativize and sensationalize using previously unavailable technology:

> As in Gulf War I, the coverage of Gulf War II featured engaging visuals, some of which were familiar, such as the green nightscope shots of Baghdad. Others were new, such as the live videophone images from embedded reporters of troops advancing through the desert. "The characters are the same: The president is a Bush and the other guy is Hussein. But the technology—the military's and the news media's—has exploded," said MSNBC chief Erik Sorenson…TV coverage, he said, "will be a much more three-dimensional visual experience, and in some cases you may see war live. This may be one time where the sequel is more compelling than the original."[87]

Again, cinematic comparisons often dominate the discussion of the media's war coverage. In many ways, this very quotation encapsulates much of the media's motivation as outlined in this thesis—the intention to draw viewers in by making the war look like a movie. But, while much has been written about September 11 imagery and the Iraq invasion and subsequent war coverage, few have looked at the macro-narrative that took place between these two events. In this thesis, 9/11 and the Iraq War are linked in a deliberate narrative line.

What some of the above observations and other analyses have in common with this thesis is that the news media tried to tell a compelling Iraq story using new, highly effective broadcasting technologies. But, what is taken into consideration throughout the previous chapters is that the news media's narrative approach may not be all that original. Given the contemporary goal of corporate news media to increase profits in a particularly saturated market, they have turned to Hollywood with its proven track record of success

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[86] Rampton and Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception*, 176.
[87] Ibid.,180.

in telling engaging profitable stories. But in addition to its profitability, Hollywood storytelling is recognizable and beloved in this country. American citizens have a strong connection to the classical Hollywood narrative style. The Hollywood film was born out of and remains a deeply ingrained part of American culture. Just as the Bush Administration has openly adopted the Hollywood style in order to sell its policies, so has the media co-opted the classical Hollywood narrative in order to sell its news products. So, when the news media fawned over Bush's dramatic staging aboard the USS Lincoln, it was merely welcoming what seemed a perfect Hollywood ending to its Iraq War narrative. News organizations did not plan the event but they certainly packaged it and sold it to the news audience. They did so because the image of the President on a flight deck at "magic hour" resonated with the media establishment as a fitting end to a story that began when President Bush stood amidst the World Trade Center ruins two years before. And the fact that the war, for all intents and purposes, was just beginning by 2003 mattered little to a media industry blinded by the lucrative marketing of a well-packaged story.

Given the narrative framing of the run up to the Iraq War as it has been analyzed throughout these pages, the prospect of the media repeating (as it appeared to be doing with Iran) the same process—using the same elements from classical Hollywood narrative—says a great deal about how the American media industry works. Rather than learning from its mistakes in reporting news events of major national and international importance with the attention and respect these events warrant, the media continues to allow market competition to trump ethical, responsible journalism. Perhaps most alarming—as this analysis has indicated—is that the breakdown in ethical journalism has

not been the sole responsibility of one media owner, executive, producer, editor, or reporter. Rather the sensationalizing of the Iraq War, the tensions with Iran, or any major international event that affects world security is a result of an institutional defect within the contemporary media order. And until media organizations re-adopt the fundamental principles that have made the free press a cornerstone of this democratic nation, market place competition will continue to dictate the narrative flow of a story and the role of the American news media will continue its steady decline toward irrelevance.

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