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Presidential Epideictic Rhetoric During Times of Crisis: Barack Obama's "9/11" Moment

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PRESIDENTIAL EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC DURING TIMES OF CRISIS: BARACK
OBAMA'S "9/11" MOMENT

By

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts – Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs
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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Abstract

Presidential Epideictic Rhetoric During Times of Crisis: Barack Obama's "9/11" Moment

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Epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric, in its most basic and essential function, praises or blames an object. Ceremonial speakers seek to articulate why those particular objects are worthy of honor or the reverse. In the unfortunate event of a national tragedy, citizens may be confused or troubled, presenting the need for clarification and reassurance. Often times, concrete political solutions do not satisfy these needs because they do not explain what has occurred in terms the public can understand and proceed from. Presidents often inject memories of the past into public address to define these troubling situations in ways that broad, national audiences can make sense of them. It is important to identify the socio-political and cultural institutions that presidents rely on when they engage in epideictic rhetoric so that critics can have a more articulate explanation of why society defines itself the way it does and how future events are likely to be shaped. Close textual analysis of Barack Obama's September 12, 2012 Rose Garden Address and the second presidential debate with Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney revealed that the public memory of September 11 has become commonplace in ceremonial discourse as a way to explain to citizens the magnitude of contemporary troubling events. September 11, 2001 has become ingrained in the collective memory of U.S. citizens to such a degree that it inescapably serves as the backdrop before which we tend to view all events even

remotely related to terrorism. Each of the texts analyzed in this thesis provide ample opportunity to draw new conclusions about this phenomenon. The Rose Garden Address illustrates how *crisis rhetoric* and *eulogies* are strategically utilized by presidents to refine our sense of community and urge perseverance in the face of threats to its stability. Analyzing the town hall debate provides insight on the rhetorical strategies of *campaign orations* and how they influence the degree to which the public becomes ingratiated by presidential candidates. Given those analytical devices, this thesis proposes to refine the functions of presidential epideictic rhetoric by updating them to reflect how presidents enhance their *ethos* in contemporary rhetorical situations.

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In my first year as an undergraduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I was given the opportunity to compete across the country in intercollegiate policy debate as the very first member of the Sanford I. Berman Debate Forum. Each year at the end of the season, a series of awards are given out to select competitors on the team. At the end of our first season, I was awarded with the “Thomas R. Burkholder Most Improved Award.” I had no way of knowing then that eventually I would have the privilege of working closely with the man this award was named after and that he would become the director of my advisory committee for this project.

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I would also like to thank Dr. David Henry. Dr. Henry gave me the opportunity to enroll in a graduate-level seminar as an undergraduate student, and that course convinced

me that I belonged in graduate school. As a professor, Dr. Henry has had the most challenging courses I have ever taken; and I thank him immensely for pushing me to work my very hardest and maximize my potential. Put another way, Dr. Henry gave me the single most important tool for a post-graduate education; I learned to learn in his classes. School was never the same again after I took my first class with Dr. Henry. His Rhetorical Tradition course taught me what it takes to be not only a successful student, but a successful academic in the Communication Studies discipline. Most of all, I have dedicated my teaching style to emulating the way Dr. Henry runs his courses. If a professor could have such a spectacular effect on my studies, I wanted to devote my career to offering that same experience to as many students as possible.

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DEDICATION

Statistically, I should have never made it to this point. Growing up in a working class family, I watched my parents bend over backwards to make ends meet so that I could travel to debate competitions, attend conferences and camps, and remain competitive in the activities I participated in. I can never begin to thank my parents Sam and Debbie Eisenstadt enough for how hard they have pushed me to succeed in school. Without their love and commitment to my education, this project would have proven impossible. Neither of them completed their undergraduate education. My father left school to serve our country in the Vietnam War and my mother obtained an A.A. in Education but chose not to pursue a career in it. Growing up, they constantly told me about how much they regretted not finishing school and told me that an education is an invaluable tool. Until graduate school, I did not fully understand how right they were. All of the late hours in the office, the gargantuan stacks of reading, and the rigorous refinement of my written work have been driven by my desire to have them see me realize the goal they have set for me since I began my education 21 years ago.

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with all my heart, and this thesis project is not just blood, sweat and tears. It is inspired by and infused with all of the love and support my family has given me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING PRESIDENTIAL EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

The Rhetorical Artifacts

September 11, 2001 is a day which annually reminds Americans that the United States is not invulnerable to tragedy. On the 11th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the pentagon, the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya was assaulted resulting in the death of four American diplomats. Chris Stevens, America's ambassador to Libya, was one of the fallen envoys. This spectacle created a situation requiring a special type of response that needed to quell the fears of citizens while affirming and honoring the lives lost in the battering. A day after the incident, President Barack Obama delivered a speech at the Rose Garden to achieve these ends.

Relative to other speeches delivered by Obama, this address has received little attention. The pointed reaction to the attacks in Benghazi has focused on whether sufficient intelligence existed to prevent the deaths of American diplomats. This task has mostly been at the hands of politicians and their media outlets for disseminating sound-bite information. Such a focus distracts from an important investigation of the intricacies of Obama's speech and the implications for both the immediate situation and its development.

Because 2012 was a presidential election year, Stevens' death prompted public comment not only by President Obama but also by former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee. Obama's address at the Rose Garden was the first official statement by the government following the events in Libya. The public

was aware of the attack already; a leadership figure of appropriate stature had yet to speak on the event. Preliminary analysis suggested two primary purposes of the Rose Garden speech.

President Obama was motivated by two interrelated rhetorical situations. The first was the Benghazi attack itself. As the country's top leader, the President's address needed to define and explain the event so that U.S. citizens could digest and understand the spectacle and its consequences. Obama's task was significant because the attack occurred on the same date that the people of the United States of America will forever remember as the anniversary of burning towers collapsing to the ground in New York. This attribute of the event alone created complications for fostering a public understanding of the incident. Discourse related to 9/11 has seeped into American society in a variety of ways, ranging from a new-found era of patriotism to the constant paranoia of imminent terrorism. Before Obama had the chance to address the nation, media outlets had already proliferated rumors of the Benghazi attacks having direct relation to Al-Qaeda, the group claiming responsibility for 9/11. Political scientists have characterized the situation as part of a game of cat and mouse in an election year, but this moment may signify something more important about terror-related crisis discourse in American Presidential Rhetoric.¹

The second, but related, situation motivating Obama's address was the death of four U.S. diplomats, including the American Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens. In defining the Benghazi attack and assigning meaning to its aftermath, Obama needed to recognize those lives which were lost and affirm their existence as disciples of U.S. values and beliefs. Although friends or family members likely experienced a more

intimate relationship with the fallen diplomats, they were not positioned to eulogize their loved ones for an audience as large as the entire United States population.

Obama was the only suitable aspirant for delivering the eulogy. Although the immediate family and close friends of the diplomats may have more to say about the envoys as individuals, only the President possesses the capacity to speak to the “community” composed of a large swath of the people of the United States. Particularly in troubling times, a strong leader is needed to affirm the fundamental values and beliefs of the country to reduce audience anxiety and provide an optimistic vision of the future. This is also the case because only the President has the political and moral authority to link the diplomats, the countries values, and its citizens to the event creating widespread confusion.

Each of the two purposes for Obama’s Rose Garden address tested the President’s leadership skills. Fostering a public understanding of the phenomenon required Obama to achieve identification with listeners and viewers by using terminology which connects the people of the United States directly to the event. If the general populace lacked an understanding of the attack, shrouds of mystery would be left looming above. There is no guarantee that the people of the United States would agree with the President’s stance on the issue, but accessing the audience based on shared communal experiences and values at least creates the potential for pervasive adherence. Eulogizing murdered diplomats also tests Obama’s leadership expertise because it must unequivocally mourn human losses and encourage the country that its resolve is not on the verge of collapse.

Given these two goals, this thesis interprets Obama’s Rose Garden address as an epideictic event. At no point in the text does the President make explicit his

Administration's deliberative policies that ought to follow the attack. Although policies regarding embassy and consulate security were later discussed, they were not a part of the conversation in the immediate aftermath. Instead, the country's leadership was primarily concerned with nurturing a public definition and thus understanding of a spectacular event that were not immediately clear because of its geographical and geopolitical distance from U.S. soil. Nevertheless, epideictic speech need not serve an exclusively ceremonial function. In fact, ceremonial rhetoric can function to prepare an audience for making a deliberative decision. The values and beliefs a speaker chooses to attach to the meaning of a text influence the type of community it will create and motivate.

In the wake of Obama's Rose Garden address, a controversy arose over the way the President chose to characterize the attacks in Benghazi. Criticism from political opponents targeted the Obama Administration's inability to secure the embassy and diplomats in advance. The Executive branch of government, including the President, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and other members of the administration initially claimed that the attack had been spontaneous, but a controversy arose when Clinton and others shifted away from the explanation that Obama offered. Initially, the President articulated the attack as one of the "acts of terror" which pose a threat to the values and national security of the United States.² This phrase sparked disagreement about whether the attack was spontaneous or planned, since if it turned out to be politically-motivated, the Obama Administration's claim about being unaware of the attack would instead paint the picture of a lapse in intelligence.

Just over a month after Obama's Rose Garden address, the second presidential debate between Obama and Romney was held in a "town hall" format where audience

members asked each candidate questions about their policies on a variety of issues. Despite the wide variety of topics addressed, Benghazi warrants particular highlighting. The debate was intended to be exclusively about domestic topics, but when Kerry Ladda asked Obama whether “the State Department refused extra security for our embassy in Benghazi, Libya, prior to the attacks that killed four Americans,” a question of responsibility emerged demanding to know “Who was it that denied enhanced security and why?”³

Televised presidential debates provide citizens a sort of illusion that policy issues are actually being argued and contested. None of the questions asked, including the one on Benghazi, *produced* a literal policy from either Obama or Romney although policy details were hashed out. Instead, each candidate used political issue talking points as a means of building the type of *ethos* or personal credibility that would win over the votes of undecided citizens. In other words, both the Democrat and Republican nominees used their comments on the Benghazi attacks to burnish their own images as strong, forceful leaders. The intense focus of the Benghazi “debate” was over the use of the word “terror” to describe the attack. For Obama, the primary goal was to maximize his credibility by delivering an answer that conveyed a sense of dedication to national security and confidence in the ability of the United States to combat terrorism.

All three debates between Obama and Romney were geared towards building support for the *candidates* and not their *policies*. Although the town hall meeting is formally characterized as a debate, the Benghazi question and the responses following it exemplify a spectacle intended to illustrate the leadership character of the presidential contenders. For this question in particular, the candidates’ statements served more of a

ceremonial than a genuine deliberative purpose. As such, this thesis examines the text of the debate as epideictic speech because its purpose is more about establishing the desirability for either Obama or Romney to become the president instead of one for creating and enforcing particular policies. Both Oval Office aspirants are enacting a persona of leadership to form a community, campaigning to show their value and worth as a president, and using debate over the Benghazi crisis as a pivot to demonstrate they *already* possess the necessary leadership skills.

Obama's Rose Garden Address and the town hall debate are distinct because they are motivated by different rhetorical circumstances. However, these situations are connected to one another in two important ways. First, they are directly related by topic. The chronological and topical developments of the Benghazi issue are made transparent and visible by investigating these two texts. Second, analyzing the two speeches holds the potential for providing new insight into the epideictic genre of rhetoric. Neither of these texts have been investigated thoroughly for their epideictic (or even rhetorical) functions, but instead for their political values in an election cycle. There are valuable discoveries to be unearthed about presidential strategies for epideictic occasions and how they differ from one environment to another.

Analytical Framework

As mentioned previously, this thesis views both Obama's Rose Garden speech and the presidential debate as examples of epideictic rhetoric. Prior to constructing and deploying this analytical scheme for the thesis, this analysis first thoroughly investigates each text to discover its unique attributes and messages. Therefore, the first step in the critical process is performing a close textual analysis of the pieces. A deep textual study

satisfies two necessary components of rhetorical criticism. First, the texts are closely examined for their intrinsic properties, highlighting the unique characteristics that inform their purposes through supporting materials, overall tone, and structure. Second, such investigation locates the texts in relation to their historical settings.⁴ This process considers equally the language properties of the document with the audience and situation which brings a rhetor forward. Engaging in this sort of analysis demonstrates that speech acts are not simply *responses* to a situation, but instead delicately crafted *strategies* to confront and resolve them. Second, these strategies are treated thoroughly, ranging from the purposeful use of emotional appeals, artistic use of language, and attempts to strengthen the institutions the rhetor seeks to use in resolving a public issue.⁵

After the completion of a close textual analysis and after placing the two texts within their historical and cultural contexts, an analytical framework is necessary for testing and theorizing the initial findings. To argue simply that this project uses “epideictic” as a lens for illustrating the text’s properties is far too broad an interpretation of the genre. Instead, a working definition of “epideictic” must be formulated. A proper understanding of epideictic rhetoric must trace back to Aristotle, who named the initial three divisions of oratory.

For the ancients, rhetoric was confined almost exclusively to oral pleading which Aristotle divided into three categories: deliberative or political, forensic or judicial, and epideictic or ceremonial.⁶ In that taxonomy, deliberative speech seeks to establish either the expediency or in expediency of some future course of action. In a contemporary sense, deliberative speeches may occur when a president argues that the country ought to go to war or when a member of Congress believes that the Affordable Care Act ought to be

repealed because of its financial burdens. Any time a policy objective is being debated, a deliberative element is at least present if not predominant in the way arguments are delivered.

Forensic speeches are those which seek to establish either the justice or injustice of some past action, as in the courts.⁷ In forensic speeches, legal advocates seek either to convict or acquit individuals who are charged with some crime. Again in a contemporary sense, defense attorneys and prosecutors perform forensic speech acts in a courtroom every day.

Aristotle's third category of oratory, epideictic rhetoric seeks either to honor or dishonor someone or something. To do so, it "either praises or censures somebody" in what he calls a "ceremonial oratory of display."⁸ A ceremonial speaker must craft a definition of what qualifies as worthy of praise or censorship. One cannot simply ask an audience to celebrate or disregard an object without some rationale. This rationalization of praise or blame need not emerge from scientific data, but it must succeed in compelling an audience that participating in the acceptance or rejection of an object is beneficial and necessary. Therefore, an epideictic speaker is not necessarily aiming to "prove" a point, but instead to demonstrate "that the good or the harm, the honour [sic] or disgrace" of the object under scrutiny.⁹ The speaker is tasked with convincing an audience that the object of their focus is worthy of honor or shame.

While Aristotle's ceremonial oratory is foundational to understanding the epideictic genre, it is incomplete. This is not because Aristotle lacked precision or breadth; it is simply an outdated perspective. What once satisfied the eulogies and celebrations of ancient Greece cannot account for the sheer number of objects and events

receiving commemoration and honor in the 21st century. Contemporary epideictic studies are guided but not completed by the assumption that all ceremonial speeches contain some degree of praise and/or blame, but these two terms cannot alone explain all of the possible perspectives and functions of epideictic rhetoric.¹⁰

Celeste M. Condit provides an update to Aristotle on studies of epideictic rhetoric. Condit identifies three possible perspectives from which a ceremonial speaker may approach a situation. First, a message-centered perspective is most similar to a classical interpretation, where the primary goal of the speaker is to praise or blame an object.¹¹ A speaker-centered orientation occurs when a rhetor develops an argument or performance to satisfy ceremonial functions. Orators adopting a speaker-centered perspective “forms a central part of the art of persuasion” since it builds the “intensity of adherence” an audience has to a series of arguments or purposes.¹² Finally, an audience-centered focus on epideictic examines instances where spectators make a judgment of a speaker’s presence and ability or the types of experience viewers have as a result of some ceremonial discourse.¹³ Together, these three perspectives offer a range of functions that a wide spectrum of various epideictic speeches execute to achieve a purpose. At least one of the three perspectives can be located in an epideictic text; often more than one is present.¹⁴

Epideictic situations, Condit argues, emerge when some distressing event creates a need for both a community and its leadership. The community needs to know what the event is, what it means, and how to proceed. A leader needs to calm any hysteria, bring the community affected together, and convince them that they will endure the situation. To account for the ways leaders satisfy these needs, Condit identified a “‘family’ of

characteristics shared by epideictic speeches” that locates ceremonial discourse through “three functional pairs.”¹⁵ These pairs of functions demonstrate that epideictic speech is the means leaders use to bring a community up to speed with the situation they are wary of. In each pair, the first term is a function that the text serves the speaker, while the second is a corresponding function for the audience.

The first functional grouping of epideictic rhetoric is creating “definition/understanding” of a “confusing or troubling” “event, person group, or object.”¹⁶ An orator explains that a troubling issue exists, often directly connecting the event to spectators. A troubling event need not be some gargantuan catastrophe, it may be as large as September 11 or as beneath the radar as the Benghazi attack or even a funeral or commencement. To help clarify and resolve the confusion of the audience, the rhetor creates an understanding through values and beliefs that connect the audience to the problem when a speaker inculcates “a common vocabulary of excellence among its witnesses.”¹⁷ By using these belief systems to explain the troubling phenomenon, the speaker eases the audience’s anxiety and clarifies the state of the event. If successful, the capacity to make an audience understand situations also gives a rhetor *definitional authority*. This phenomenon is seen in Obama’s Rose Garden address; there is an explicit allusion to September 11 immediately before the President deems the attack on the U.S. consulate an act of terror.

Given that most audiences of important nation-wide addresses are politically, culturally, and spatially separated, in order to shape a sense of community which members of that diverse audience can share, an orator must look for a collective identity rooted in “a conjoint remembrance of a certain event, no matter where those who

remember are located or how otherwise unrelated they are to each other.”¹⁸ Thus, a rhetor *shapes* a community by targeting objects or values to which the aggregate audience has a relationship to, and *shares* with that community a vision of what it will come to be in the future. Generally, this strategy invokes a community with a renewed “conception of itself and of what is good by explaining what it has previously held to be good” and establishes this relationship to the audience “through the relationships of those past values and beliefs” which influence the new situation.¹⁹

Condit’s third functional pair of epideictic features is “display/entertainment.” An orator must *display* eloquence, the combination of truth, beauty and power in speech, while also *entertaining* an audience by expanding the meaning of some important value or belief system they hold.²⁰ Entertainment is perhaps a misleading term in this instance, because the aim is that the audience recognizes, acknowledges, and accepts the leadership of a speaker. If speakers demonstrate that they are knowledgeable, influential, and artistic in their judgments, then their audience may esteem them as leaders. An eloquent orator “stands a good chance of being a desirable leader for the community,” and presidential debates in particular are “one of our best chances to judge the eloquence . . . of a would-be leader.”²¹ This is because the policy arguments and special interest appeals are present, but they are springboards for a demonstration that the nominee has leadership capacity and a strong vision of where the country ought to be headed.

The Benghazi attack was a “troubling event” because information surrounding the event was made public before *any* official government response had occurred. Rumors whirled around the internet about who was responsible for the attack, the possibility of additional assaults, and the inability of the country’s leadership to respond to these issues.

Presidents respond to these types of situations by using their *ethos* “to create ‘crisis’ situations” that attempt to exonerate the nation from guilt while strategically framing the issue to garner support from the audience.²²

Bonnie J. Dow extended Condit’s theory of contemporary ceremonial rhetoric, arguing that some forms of presidential “crisis” rhetoric are most appropriately viewed as epideictic. Dow argues that when a president “responds to events already seen as serious, even critical,” they are engaging in “crisis rhetoric.”²³ When a speech responds to a crisis, it is an epideictic strategy presidents use to create a communal understanding of a troubling problem where “the *primary* audience” is the American public.²⁴ Such crisis speeches have three characteristics; they must present evidence that defines a situation as a crisis; they must compare and contrast the “pure motives of the United States and the evil motives of the enemy;” and finally must attempt to promote “a practical, political context” by using a “moral, ethical” one.²⁵

A “crisis” may include a wide range of rhetorical situations, but with the assumption that the American people are the primary audience, there are few crises more troubling or confusing than the sudden death of United States citizens. This is because although “the audience is not personally involved,” they need a meaning of the event “for the nation as a whole” in order to “know how the nation will proceed.”²⁶ Mixed emotions of paranoia, anger, and anxiety may stir up in the event that sound-bites of American deaths sweep the nation without a response from the government. When a crisis situation emerges in which the audience is aware of the troubling events before the President speaks, the discourse resembles the epideictic rhetoric described by Condit in that it seeks to promote understanding of the event and thus calm the public. Summarily, the President

employs crisis discourse in an epideictic situation to amalgamate a large audience using communal values, fostering an understanding of an event in relation to those principles, and urges public determination through a troubled time.

Although the Rose Garden address seems even at first glance to fit within the epideictic genre, this is not as clear for the presidential debate. Nevertheless, a close examination of campaign rhetoric—which the debate surely was—reveals that it, too, attempts to achieve epideictic aims. Michael Leff and Gerald P. Mohrmann provide the final element necessary for understanding how a contemporary theory of epideictic discourse can help illuminate the presidential debate between Obama and Romney. Leff and Mohrmann argue that campaign discourse is essentially a rhetorical hybrid, employing deliberative means to achieve epideictic ends. This analysis concerns itself with the ways that audience members judge the leadership skills and eloquence of the candidates. Therefore, to investigate how Obama and Romney displayed their leadership, this thesis proceeds from Robert Rowland’s characterization of American voters and how they “now have little tolerance for detailed and/or complex arguments” and thus “judge such debates toward a more theatrical standard.”²⁷

In the town hall debate, the epideictic goal changes; instead of seeking to move the nation beyond some trouble or confusion, presidential nominees are flexing their eloquence to promote themselves as worthy of the presidency. A debate is not the same type of “praise or blame” as eulogies, commemorations, addresses, and so forth. Argument contests in presidential campaigns have “the actual purpose . . . to gain votes” and “the ostensible purpose . . . to gain acceptance” of the particular policies discussed.²⁸

In other words, campaign debates mirror the functions of commemoration or address for the *audience* but serve a different purpose for the *speaker* instead.

To this extent, campaign rhetoric is something of a rhetorical hybrid; the debate uses seemingly deliberative means via the discussion of policies to achieve epideictic ends, enhancing the ethos of the candidates through strong presentation and defense of their principles. Presenting their policy platforms is simply a way for candidates to seem better suited for the position of President of the United States. For this to succeed, candidates must generate an image of themselves as an acceptable and attractive alternative to their opponents. The argumentative contest between Obama and Romney, then, “is best characterized as a campaign oration, a speech designed to win” enough votes to secure the election.²⁹ Although both candidates put forth passion into their policy arguments, “the treatment of issues is subsidiary to the purpose of creating a general identification between the speaker and the audience,” making the ultimate objective of a campaign oratory “ingratiation.”³⁰

Much like crisis rhetoric, campaign oratory too may serve both deliberative and epideictic ends. Paul Rosenthal calls this the distinction between “non-personal and personal persuasion.”³¹ Non-personal persuasion seeks to alter spectator’s attitudes about a situation using substantive arguments which are enhanced by ethos. When a president wishes to declare war on another nation, the data to support the Executive’s arguments and the ethos of the speaker becomes secondary to the outcome. Personal persuasion inverts this prioritization; the speaker *becomes* the object and uses the message as a catalyst for augmenting their ethos. The presidential nominees may in fact still be seeking

acceptance or approval of an object through belief, but their *immediate rhetorical motive* is to ascertain enough votes to ascend to or retain their position in the Oval Office.

Framing the town hall debate as a back-and-forth of “personal persuasion” enables the project to narrow the text to study an important segment while preserving its purpose, functions, and style. The working definition of epideictic presented fits both texts suggested in this proposal for deep analyses with the screens of “crisis rhetoric” and “personal persuasion” to guide them. These screens will illuminate the Rose Garden address and second presidential debate in ways that have yet to be explored by scholars. In doing so, there are a wide variety of possible outcomes, each with their own implications for the field of rhetoric, and more precisely, presidential epideictic speech.

Benefits of the Study

There are two objectives this thesis project seeks to complete. First, in a narrow sense, this thesis will increase our understanding of two rhetorical events that were important for the 2012 U.S. presidential election. Currently, both of these texts are treated pre-dominantly by political scientists, understood and criticized as deliberative speech acts. This project points out not only that these are epideictic events, but also that there is more going on here than historians or political scientists may give credit for.

More broadly, this scholarship enhances our understanding of the epideictic genre. The project examines and compares a speech that contains both crisis discourse *and* delivers a eulogy to explain a troubling object with a town hall debate where the speaker *is* the object. Obama’s Rose Garden Address sheds light on how epideictic texts are constantly engaged in praise *and* blame for an overarching purpose, while the debate

confirms that Aristotle's conception of the three divisions of oratory are more fluid than they appear.

Order of Chapters

This thesis is broken into five chapters. Chapter two consists of a socio-cultural and political introduction to the aftermath of the attacks in Benghazi. The contextual events surrounding the texts, before and afterward, are important for framing the arguments of the thesis. It is also important to understand the positions of relevant political figures and media outlets since they are crucial to the concatenation of screens between speaker and audience in both occasions.

Chapter three develops the analytical framework that will guide analysis of the texts in much more depth, fully exploring the uses and functions of epideictic, crisis rhetoric, and campaign orations. This section addresses the needed updates from previous works for moving forward with new case studies of epideictic events. Chapter four applies the theoretical framework developed in the prior chapter, performing an in depth analysis that digs deep into the crevices of Obama's Rose Garden Address and the town hall debate between President Obama and Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Finally, Chapter five contains concluding remarks and outcomes of the project, offering advice for future research as well as identifying the strengths and limitations discovered throughout the project.

Notes

¹ David Brock, "Benghazi Another Clinton Witch Hunt," *USA Today* 13 May 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/05/13/benghazi-congress-hillary-clinton-column/2155365/>

² Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," 12 September 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/12/remarks-president-deaths-us-embassy-staff-libya>. Paragraphs numbered. Paragraph 10.

³ "Second Presidential Debate," *National Public Radio*, 16 October 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/10/16/163050988/transcript-obama-romney-2nd-presidential-debate>. Paragraphs Numbered. Paragraphs 10-11.

⁴ Amy R. Slagell, "Anatomy of a Masterpiece: A Close Textual Analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address," *Communication Studies*, 42 (1991): 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, *Rhetoric*, (Chelmsford: Dover Publications, 2004), [1358b].

⁷ *Rhetoric*, [1368b].

⁸ *Rhetoric*, [1358b].

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly*, 33 (1985): 285.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969), 49.

¹³ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 285.

¹⁴ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 288.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gerard A. Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 29 (1999): 19.

¹⁸ Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁹ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 289.

²⁰ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 290.

²¹ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 291.

²² Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53 (1989): 294.

²³ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 296.

²⁴ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 295-296.

²⁵ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 294.

²⁶ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 297.

²⁷ Robert Rowland, "The First 2012 Presidential Campaign Debate: The Decline of Reason in Presidential Debates," *Communication Studies*, 64 (2013): 542.

²⁸ Michael C. Leff and Gerald P. Mohrmann, "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 60 (1974): 348.

²⁹ Leff and Mohrmann, "Lincoln at Cooper Union," 347.

³⁰ Leff and Mohrmann, "Lincoln at Cooper Union," 348.

³¹ Paul I. Rosenthal, "The Concept of Ethos and the Structure of Persuasion," *Speech Monographs*, 33 (1966): 120.

CHAPTER 2: FROM ONE 9/11 TO ANOTHER, CONTEXTUALIZING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. These are the words of Aristotle, and the key to digging deep into textual artifacts. Much can be said about President Barack Obama's Rose Garden address and the town hall debate between Obama and Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney on their own. However, these artifacts cannot be investigated in great detail without understanding the contextual elements which shape their rhetorical situations. Each artifact examined in this thesis must be framed by the social, cultural, and historical issues from which they emerged. A historian might examine the speech and debate as simply two points on a constellation of occasions which map out a broader story. Rhetoricians perform the study inversely; the wider background illuminates the properties of texts to better inform readers on the goals and strategies rhetors employ. Therefore, this chapter examines how the Rose Garden Address and presidential debate are situated within a larger, ongoing, historical context, complete with obstacles that must be overcome if Obama is to achieve his rhetorical purpose.

The Origins of "9/11" Discourse

On the morning of September 11, 2001, the United States experienced the most traumatic attack since the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon, just outside Washington, D.C., were struck by commercial airliners full of passengers whose lives were taken. Another plane, possibly targeting the White House or the U.S. Capitol, crashed into a field near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, after

passengers tried to overcome the hijackers, killing all onboard. Thousands more died in New York and Washington. Emergency responders and rescuers also risked and sacrificed their lives in the process of dousing flames and carrying scorched bodies. Institutions were shut down, classes canceled, and flights grounded. The nation was stunned. Our innocence and our sense of invulnerability were shattered.

Memory scholar Barbie Zelizer makes the general comment that complex historical events “become used up as resources for the establishment and continued maintenance of memory in its social, collective form.”¹ The lives lost, the economic damage, and emotional carnage endured by the people of the United States on that day has not been forgotten. Functioning as a referent, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have continuously framed social, cultural, and political American issues. Events that ring of terrorism, Al-Qaeda, Afghanistan, or even the World Trade Center all trace back to that fateful day in recent United States history. In this case, September 11, 2001 has become ingrained in the collective memory of U.S. citizens to such a degree that it inescapably serves as the backdrop before which we tend to view all events even remotely related to “terrorism.” Kendall Phillips, another memory scholar, explains that this emerges from “the instantaneous framing” of the attacks on the World Trade Center “by the media in relation to other national tragedies” to create “the overwhelming feeling that no one would ever forget,” September 11, 2001.²

In a wide variety of ways, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon continue to influence the way we think about, and talk about events that we see as somehow related. Of particular significance, as public memory academic Edward S. Casey argues, is the way September 11 “linked everyone present in a common concern

and that the imagistic, gesticulatory, and linguistic practices in which we engaged all addressed this concern in one way or another.”³ Further, Casey articulates that September 11 is a *flashbulb* memory. This term has two implications. First, the event links U.S. citizens together because they “remember exactly where they were on hearing of” the attacks.⁴ Second, and more importantly, the destruction of the World Trade Center has become a screen or filter through which later events are interpreted by the public at large. Acts of politically-motivated violence on the United States, either by citizens or unknown individuals, are branded as subjects of the broader War on Terror.

Both the Shoe Bomber and Christmas Bomber attacks demonstrate the media’s urge to create linkages with September 11. On September 22, 2001, just 11 days after the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Richard Reid attempted to ignite a bomb on a packed flight from Paris to Miami. News reports had mixed reactions to the motive behind Reid’s attempt to attack the United States. The *BBC* reported that although links had not “yet been established between Mr. Reid and Osama Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network,” there was a distinct possibility that he “may have been recruited for terrorist acts” which gave “this whole campaign an additional dimension.”⁵ Another *BBC* article further reports that “at some point Reid began to get involved with extremist elements” including Zacarias Moussaoui, an individual “charged in the US with conspiracy over the 11 September attacks.”⁶ Matthew Miller, the Director of Public Affairs for the Justice Department, explicitly labeled Reid an al-Qaeda terrorist, although such evidence at the time did not exist.⁷

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, better known by U.S. citizens as the Christmas Bomber, attempted to detonate plastic explosives in his underwear on a flight from

Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day, 2009. In response to the attack, 9/11 Commissioner Tom Kean expressed “an ugly, but familiar, ring.”⁸ Kean expressed that “it feels like after 9/11,” “no one is connecting the dots” because it was immediately apparent that the incident was “the same thing all over again.”⁹ The symbolic weight of the airplane as a weapon is directly situated by September 11, 2001. However, commercial airliners are not the only type of attacks which are framed by September 11.

The Eleventh Anniversary of the 11th

Exactly eleven years after the attacks on New York and Washington, the United States was attacked again, this time at its consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Media coverage in the immediate aftermath was scarce since word of the attack did not reach the United States until late evening on September 11, 2012. *CNN* correspondents received information at 10:00 PM, EST, confirming that “someone at the American Consulate in Benghazi is dead,” but it was “unclear if that person” was “an American citizen.”¹⁰ Although there was speculation about who may have been killed, there were “conflicting reports” and the State Department said “it doesn’t have independent confirmation of that death.”¹¹ What was clear was that the attack was a “huge event” because a “breach of an embassy or consulate’s walls or security on any given day would be tremendous” and the date of the attack, September 11, instantly sparked “increasing concerns about al Qaeda presence.”¹²

CNN also reported that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton confirmed “that a State Department officer was killed in an attack on the American consulate in Benghazi” based on “word from the Libyans” but that there were no “details as of yet as to how this gentleman met his death.”¹³ Speculation suggested that the attack was likely inspired by

“an armed mob protesting a film deemed offensive to Islam” that began in Cairo and continued in Benghazi.¹⁴ Despite this initial conclusion, “it was not immediately clear” whether this was the cause of the attack or if the event reflected more generally “how much the ground in the Middle East has shifted” away from U.S. influence due to the instability of the Arab Spring.¹⁵ Wanis Sharef from Libya’s Interior Ministry informed U.S. intelligence that “hundreds of protestors . . . broke into the consulate building” but could not clearly articulate who had been killed or who led the attack.¹⁶ In the wee hours of September 12, the public learned that American ambassador J. Christopher Stevens had been killed and there were likely other American diplomats slain as well.

Despite the paucity of information about the Benghazi attack at this point, the people of the United States began immediately to interpret it against the backdrop of the 2001 attack. Without the initial attack, Benghazi might have drawn less public attention for a shorter period of time. However, the framing of September 11 ensured that the assault on the consulate in Benghazi would sustain and re-constitute the ongoing uncertainty and paranoia that was felt a decade prior. After all, as John W. Jordan notes, “each conversation about 9/11 brings about interpretations designed to reframe its meaning in line with a specific purpose.”¹⁷ Similar to the attack in 2001, the looming fear presented important questions to U.S. citizens that needed an answer. Who was responsible for the Benghazi attack? Was it al-Qaeda? Why did they do it? Why were we unable to prevent it? Will they strike us again? These questions *demand* an answer.

Less than twenty-four hours after the attack, the first official and extended answer came from President Obama in a speech in the White House the Rose Garden. Hillary Clinton had made comments to the press prior to Obama’s speech, but they were not

addressed *to the nation*, nor were they *delivered as a speech*. Greg Miller and Michael Birnbaum characterized Obama's address as "unusually emotional" for both its commemoration of Chris Stevens and the promise to avenge their deaths and bring to justice all parties participating in the attack.¹⁸ Close administration aides recalled the speech as a signal of "heartfelt prayers" to the loved ones of the fallen envoys and not the type of typical polarized "contrasting speech" America had been bombarded with because of campaign advertising for the upcoming presidential election.¹⁹ However, the speech *did* contrast two important matters. Obama began the speech by eulogizing Stevens and making it clear that other diplomats had also been slain; but he continued by linking the Benghazi attack to the September 11, 2001, attacks, making an explicit allusion to that earlier, tragic time in connection with bringing justice to the perpetrators. It is this portion of Obama's address that became the intense loci of political talking points for the weeks following it.

In the wake of Obama's address, the media provided more detailed coverage of the attack. Government officials quoted in newspapers, on television, and online offered tentative explanations but remained anonymous due to the "sensitivity of the situation."²⁰ The *Washington Post* collected a large sample of this commentary on the same day as the speech. Officials' remarks were puzzling and ambiguous, doubtless reflections of uncertainty due to the immediacy of the situation:

A senior U.S. intelligence official said, "We haven't seen any significant indication of al-Qaeda involvement in this attack," adding that there are conflicting indications of the extent to which it was planned. "We've seen some indications that point us in that direction and others that do not," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation. He declined to elaborate, except to say that U.S. spy agencies had seen no intelligence indicating such an attack was coming. U.S. officials said the CIA, the FBI and other agencies were mobilizing to identify and pursue the attackers,

an effort that could be aided by U.S. drones that have continued to conduct surveillance flights over the country since Tripoli fell 13 months ago. Officials said the assault may have been carried out by an affiliate of al-Qaeda, perhaps seeking to avenge the death of a Libyan who had served as the terrorist group's No. 2 operative until he was killed in Pakistan in June by a U.S. drone strike.²¹ These expert accounts became the source of intense debate about the true cause of the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi.

One “senior U.S. intelligence official” argued that although *no significant evidence* of al-Qaeda’s participation is present, there were “some indications that point us in that direction and others that do not.”²² When pressed about what those indications might be, the “official” failed to elaborate except for one important detail, “that U.S. spy agencies had seen no intelligence indicating such an attack was coming.”²³ Other officials, not necessarily of “senior” stature, held positions that “an affiliate of al-Qaeda” seeking vengeance was involved.²⁴ These “experts” had a number of warrants for their claim, but one in particular stands out, that “the suspicion of al-Qaeda involvement was supported by the Sept. 11 timing.”²⁵ Succinctly, some expert testimony was purposefully vague describing the suspected attacker(s), but did not resist making the claim that “fingers pointed to possible al-Qaeda affiliates,” justified by the anniversary of the “attack on Sept. 11.”²⁶ Instead of a blunt statement that the details of the attack were still unknown, a debate was initiated over who was responsible for the infiltration of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi.

Commentary clearly illustrates that people viewed the Benghazi attack through the filter or screen of the 2001 attacks. The utility of flashbulb memory lies in connecting as many people with the simplest understanding of a tragic event possible. Projecting the image of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon instantly framed the issue in the angst, anxiety, and emotion that the U.S. felt that day. We may seriously

underestimate the psychological power this image holds. People make snap decisions based on their memory of past events without bothering to understand the facts of the new situation.

Gary Ackerman and William Potter argue that these snap decisions have drastic consequences. They suggest that the “scapegoating of population groups” with repeated blame for terror attacks “might even lead to behaviors encouraging social reversion and the general deterioration of civil society” should a major attack succeed.²⁷ The paranoia experienced across the nation in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, is only a miniscule reaction compared to what would result from the use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist organizations. Although Benghazi is certainly not an example of this, the attack still feeds into a well-sustained set of exigencies surrounding the War on Terror. Despite the unlikely probability of a large-scale terrorist attack involving weapons of mass destruction, Theodore Caplow notes that the nation must be prepared for the social calamities that would ensue in its aftermath.²⁸ Of importance here is the persuasive and constitutive weight the September 11 frame carries. Whether or not proof is ever obtained, this structure has been compelling across the board. Justifications for invading Afghanistan and Iraq, the securitization of commercial airports, and intervening in politically volatile states are all, at least in part, built on the narrative of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

With regard to September 11, 2012, the uncertain and anonymous testimony about responsibility remained unsettling because of the failure of a significant, identifiable orator to confirm or deny the unnamed “officials” allegations of terrorist activity. Further complicating the matter, the leader of Al-Qaeda was reported to have

“praised the assault on the American Consulate in Benghazi . . . but stopped short of claiming responsibility.”²⁹ Surely the praise of the attack supports claims that Al-Qaeda may have been involved, but falls far short of direct proof.

In the days following the President’s address at the Rose Garden, a blame game emerged with explicit and polarized explanations. More “officials” came forward after Obama’s address with new allegations. David Ignatius reported in the *Washington Post* that “what’s happening in . . . Benghazi appears to be a case of political opportunism . . . by Salafist Islamic extremists” that were “linked to al-Qaeda.”³⁰ As David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Meyers of the *New York Times* wrote, other “officials” contested these accounts, cautioning that “it was too soon to tell whether the attack was related to the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.”³¹ Even testimony that disavowed al-Qaeda’s involvement, however, did agree that the attackers “appeared to have at least some level of advance planning.”³² Who then, carried out the attacks on the U.S. Consulate if “reports from some terrorism experts that the attack may be linked to the recent death in drone strikes of senior Qaeda leaders . . . were unsupported?”³³

Competing testimonies began questioning the legitimacy of connections between the Consulate in Benghazi and Islamic extremists affiliated with al-Qaeda. Interestingly enough, the opposition to the “Sept. 11” argument relies on equally troubling evidence. The “preliminary reports” which “speculated that the violence grew spontaneously” were dismissed by “U.S. and Libyan officials” because of the finesse and nuance of the attack.³⁴ A mystery remained not only surrounding *who* attacked the consulate, but also *why* they were motivated to do so.

Witness reports from *Morocco World News* documented “an armed mob protesting over a film” outside of the U.S. Consulate in the moments before the attack.³⁵ This film was, as *Africa News* characterized it, a Youtube video that deemed Islam a “cancer” and depicted the Prophet Mohammed as an adulterous figure.³⁶ However, members of the protest admitted that while they rejected the video “in the strongest possible terms,” they “were not officially involved or were not ordered to be involved” with the attack on the consulate.³⁷ Given that intelligence officials across the board agreed that the attackers had some type of expertise, their response to blaming the protestors was that terrorists, as Greg Miller and Michael Birnbaum explain, “joined protestors outside the consulate” but they “neither chanted slogans nor carried banners,” instead opening and spraying gunfire.³⁸ Although the film sparked a massive outrage, officials perceived it as an underwhelming reason for a group to form and take down a U.S. Consulate. If a terrorist group had “cannily taken advantage of the protest at the consulate,” what was their motivation?³⁹ What was the diversion *for*?

Acts of terrorism are intended to create fear, instability, and a looming paranoia. Terrorists require a target that symbolizes their enemy’s greatest, strongest assets. In other words, as David Ignatius of the *Washington Post* described it, factions were “battling for power in a fluid political situation” that presents an ample opportunity for inducing horror and anxiety by seizing a U.S. Consulate in a politically unstable environment.⁴⁰ The attack worried policy-makers so much that it was expected “any minute” after reports came in, according to Mark McDonald of the *New York Times*, that a demand for “more rigorous security at American embassies and consulates around the world” would follow.⁴¹ Still, this did not provide a significant reason to target the

consulate for a terrorist agenda because although it would trigger a reaction from policy-makers, it might not reach U.S. citizens in the way desired.

The announcement that Chris Stevens was a victim of the traumatic experience prompted Kirkpatrick and Meyers to point out that “it was the first time since 1979 that an American ambassador” had been violently murdered.⁴² This was significant for two reasons. First, Kirkpatrick and Meyers argued that Stevens had “become a local hero for his support to the Libyan rebels” during the 2010-2011 uprising against Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Qaddafi.⁴³ As such, the *New York Times* writers concluded that the murder would stir up Libyan activists who supported U.S. diplomats, including “lots of the sheiks in town and a lot of the intellectuals.”⁴⁴ According to the *New York Times*, pro-democracy revolutionaries “had no better friend than J. Christopher Stevens” because of his work to “build partnerships among . . . disparate groups and guide” new fragile democracies during difficult transition periods.⁴⁵

Second, Stevens was a significant figure to diplomats. As a “career officer with the US foreign service,” the U.S. ambassador had been responsible for many developments between the United States and other nations.⁴⁶ However, Stevens’ “friendships extended well beyond the diplomatic community;” as Harvey Morris from the *International Herald Tribune* notes, he was well known for his time in the Peace Corps, holding the delicate task of “dealing with the Palestinian Authority leadership” in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, and being an “American who understood and empathized” with the Arab world.⁴⁷

It is clear that Chris Stevens played a major role as a diplomat and ambassador to the Arab world, and Steven Lee Meyers argued few could legitimately contest that

“Stevens acted as President Barack Obama’s main interlocutor . . . in Benghazi.”⁴⁸ To cause the type of trigger in U.S. public discourse the attackers desired, Stevens’ death would have to exemplify more than just the death of a diplomat. Stevens “had a level of candor that was unusual for a diplomat” and was high-profile even though “he had no pretensions” and “didn’t take himself too seriously, but he took his job very seriously.”⁴⁹ As a U.S. citizen, Stevens was “a husband and father of two,” making his sacrifice for the country the “ultimate” one; Stevens represented “extraordinary service . . . around the globe.”⁵⁰ Therefore, the lives of Stevens and other diplomats, said Mary C. Curtis from the *Washington Post*, “needed to be celebrated and their deaths mourned,” especially since the violence in Benghazi coincided “with the anniversary of a horrific terrorists attack that – for a moment – united Americans,” only this attack “triggered not clarity of purpose and revolve, but squabbling.”⁵¹

The attack on Benghazi by no means shredded the fabric of civil society, nor did it approach the affective experience from September 11, 2001. Yet, the memory as a backdrop for the attack on the U.S. Benghazi Consulate had a significant political outcome. Even in the midst of the contentious presidential election campaign, the Obama Administration “quietly won” congressional approval for what Eric Schmitt of the *New York Times* described as a hefty budget increase in “counterterrorism aid” supposedly already underway “before the assault that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.”⁵² This is despite the fact that the best evidence at the time of the budget increase approval came from anonymous “officials” who could only offer that the assault suggested “the bad guys are making plans and organizing” and that requires taking on “new urgency.”⁵³

Confusion over whether the attack on the U.S. Consulate was spontaneous or deliberately planned was further complicated by Obama naming it an “act of terror.” This language directly contradicted other high-ranking government officials who spoke publically on the issue in weeks following the Rose Garden address. For example, Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations argued on September 13 that “our best judgment” is that “what happened in Benghazi was . . . a spontaneous reaction to” demonstrations in Cairo, Egypt.⁵⁴ Rice’s judgment was informed by what she described as “the best information and the best assessment” available and it concluded “that in fact this was not a preplanned, premeditated attack.”⁵⁵ The problem with Rice’s testimony in relation to Obama’s speech was that Rice claimed security in Benghazi was “at an unprecedented level.”⁵⁶ Miller and Birnbaum contend that accounts from “the CIA, the FBI” and “U.S. spy agencies” suggested that there had been “no intelligence indicating such an attack was coming.”⁵⁷ If true, this was a revelation that a serious lapse of intelligence had occurred in the face of an act of terrorism. As Kirkpatrick observes, Obama was ultimately “faced with a range of possibilities” and “went with the one that was politically convenient.”⁵⁸ Either the President labeled the attack an act of terror and it was a spontaneous act, or it was a planned attack the U.S. had just experienced a substantial intelligence lapse.

Despite widespread intelligence reporting that the protest over the Youtube film was *hijacked* and not led by a group of extremists, Rice held firmly that the attack on the Benghazi Consulate was “a direct result” of the “heinous and offensive video . . . that the U.S. government had nothing to do with, which we have made clear.”⁵⁹ This presented a Sophie’s choice for the President. Either the Obama Administration had to stick with the

story that the attack was spontaneous in response to a film, despite mounting evidence otherwise, or instead had to defend the position that it was a pre-meditated terrorist attack that U.S. intelligence was unable to detect. Either way, this presented a threat to the government's legitimacy, nation-wide and across the globe.

Taking it to Town Hall

Unfortunately, Obama faced a more immediate source of criticism. It was the peak of the 2012 presidential campaign, with only two and a half weeks remaining before the election. The attack on the consulate was the type of event which Philip Rucker of the *Washington Post* said traditionally creates “moments of joint resolve back home, a time to pause from the daily bickering of partisan politics,” but because of the unique situation, “Mitt Romney broke from that protocol.”⁶⁰ Taking advantage of the volatile political climate, campaign strategists played into the same labeling game, some suggesting that the perpetrators of the attack were “aligned with” or “cells” for al-Qaeda.⁶¹ This reproduced the problem with hasty media speculation; al-Qaeda becomes a label that, according to David Kirkpatrick of the *New York Times*, “can be used as a generic term for a broad spectrum of Islamist militants” and in “heated election year American political debate such distinctions have been lost” since “the administration has framed the attack around the need for American outreach to the Arab world, while Republicans have focused on the perils of American weakness there.”⁶² Romney's criticisms of the Obama Administration were a “calculated gamble” that it would win him the election, but the initial wave of vehement Republican saber-rattling occurred “before the full gravity of the situation was known,” including confirmation that the diplomats were actually killed.⁶³ In a different political climate, Romney's remark that

Obama had failed in being “an effective leader for the U.S. interests in the Middle East” because “the president is apologetic towards America’s enemies” might have been more successful.⁶⁴ This strategy backfired, Rachel Weiner from the *Washington Post* argues, because Romney’s choice to “launch a political attack” during a shocking time “when the United States of America is confronting the tragic death of” fallen envoys was extraordinarily unpopular with the public.⁶⁵

Instead of backpedaling, Romney “stood by his criticism” all week because he fully believed the Obama Administration’s response was a “severe miscalculation.”⁶⁶ Other Republicans stood behind framing Obama as an apologist, while Democrats highlighted the commitment to justice and spreading liberal democracy. The “escalating debate,” as Michael Gordon from *Late Edition* called it, “over the security measures that the Obama administration established” became a battleground between the Left and Right, where Republicans continually pressed that “it is nobody’s responsibility other than the commander in chief” and Democrats like Hillary Clinton made “an effort to inoculate President Obama from criticism.”⁶⁷

Romney had what Andrew Rosenthal from the *New York Times* described as his own Rose Garden moment on October 16, the night of the second presidential debate. The former Massachusetts governor “thought he had a big opening and he moved in for the kill when Mr. Obama . . . called the attack a terrorist act.”⁶⁸ When Romney got his chance and moderator Candy Crowley allowed a question about Benghazi to be asked in a domestic policy debate, it backfired once again. Obama’s Republican opposition tried to stick Obama to the “spontaneous story” and claimed that the President failed to call it a terrorist attack, but as Rosenthal soberly qualifies, “whoever coached Mr. Romney on

that question did the candidate no favors.”⁶⁹ After an embarrassing intervention by Crowley to inform Romney he was blatantly wrong, voters were left in the “uncomfortable position of assuming that Mr. Romney either believes his own propaganda or doesn’t care whether what he says is true.”⁷⁰ This helped Obama easily grab the upper hand because it strengthened his campaign’s narrative that Romney is “willing to twist the truth for political gain.”⁷¹

Of the three presidential debates, the second played the most significant role in shaping each candidate as a leader. In fact, as the *New York Times* argued, the town-hall style debate was “the only prime-time national event at which ordinary citizens are allowed to directly confront the candidates.”⁷² After suffering a crushing defeat in the first debate, Obama’s “special challenge” “was to show some teeth” and take a more confident stance on important voter-identified issues.⁷³ Brian Knowlten of the *New York Times* argued that Romney’s crucial error was framing Benghazi “as a question of leadership, competence and transparency” because it became one of his campaign’s most prominent “fundamental” claims on the Obama Administration.⁷⁴ Ironically, these jabs at Obama raised the Libya issue to “the forefront of the campaign,” making other important foreign policy objectives “like the war in Afghanistan and the building confrontation with Iran . . . secondary topics” in the *New York Times* and elsewhere.⁷⁵ The Benghazi debate was only a “win” for Obama insofar as Romney elevated the stature of the issue to a point where it was pivotal in the election.

Conclusion

Obama’s Rose Garden address and the town hall debate clearly extend the social, cultural, and political situation which emerged from September 11, 2001. While it is

important to document the context of the two rhetorical artifacts, it is insufficient to draw conclusions about the rhetorical strategies and goals present in each. The type of analysis this thesis aims to produce requires an analytical framework based in rhetorical theory to explain such strategies. A contextual analysis is necessary to discover what theories best inform and explain Obama's rhetoric, but it alone is only a starting point.

In the following section, a theoretical lens is developed to interpret the Rose Garden address and town hall debate. This lens is built from synthesizing *epideictic* rhetoric with *public memory*, influenced and assisted by prior studies of September 11, 2001. Developing an analytical framework is crucial to drawing conclusions about a text, since it is otherwise only interpreted by a surface reading of its contents.

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CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUALIZING CONTEMPORARY PRESIDENTIAL EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

Preliminary reading of Obama’s speeches and their respective contexts suggested analyses based in epideictic rhetoric. This chapter develops a theoretical framework to guide those analyses by surveying relevant literature on ceremonial discourse and crafting a succinct but in-depth rhetorical perspective for framing the texts. Given the context of the events, this theoretical framework synthesizes studies of epideictic rhetoric, foreign policy discourse and public memory to draw conclusions about the motives and consequences of Obama’s speeches.

Aristotle’s Three Divisions of Oratory

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three categories of oratory. Each category contains three elements—speaker, subject, and person addressed. Those being addressed are particularly important to orators because they determine a speech’s telos and focal point. As such, the three divisions are identified by a respective “three classes of listeners to speeches” including judges, members of the assembly, or observers.¹ The three divisions of oratory then can be described as (1) forensic or judicial, (2) deliberative or political, and (3) epideictic or ceremonial.

Forensic speaking closely resembles what you might witness in a court of law. A case is presented either attacking or defending someone, and “one or other of these two things must always be done” in a forensic situation.² As such, judicial speeches are concerned with the past since both attacks and their respective defenses reference events which have already occurred. Listeners of forensic discourse make judgment on the

justice or injustice of defendants based on the accusations and evidence of attackers.

Succinctly, forensic oratory is delivered by accusers and defenders, providing accounts of a past event, determined just or unjust by a judge or group of jurors.

Deliberative oratory “urges us either to do or not to do something” and is often delivered to public assemblies.³ Policy speeches in particular exemplify the attributes of the deliberative division. Unlike forensic speaking, political speeches are concerned with the future, presenting arguments for or against some action based on their potential to do good or cause harm. Listeners of political speech cast their support either in favor of or against the speaker’s proposed outcome. In short, deliberative oratory is delivered by individuals addressing a decision-making body, articulating the costs and benefits of some future action or inaction, seeking support or approval by a majority of listeners.

Ceremonial discourse, in Aristotle’s view, is an “oratory of display” which “either praises or censures somebody.”⁴ Epideictic speeches serve a variety of functions since there are numerous ways to praise or blame individuals. As Jon Hesk notes, “in arguing that epideictic oratory is concerned with praise and blame in relation to virtue and vice or what is noble or shameful, Aristotle was clearly imagining the ceremonial contexts of classical Greek civic religious festivals and funerals in which gods, critics, or individuals were praised.”⁵ The praise or blame of subjects aim at proving them “worthy of honour or the reverse,” and speakers approach listeners through this filter.⁶ Because epideictic speakers praise or blame an object “in view of the state of things existing” at the time of a speech’s delivery, they are primarily concerned with the present although they often find it useful “to recall the past and to make guesses at the future.”⁷ Listeners of ceremonial speeches play a role similar to yet distinct from those of forensic or deliberative nature.

On one hand, audiences of epideictic discourses do not cast a vote for a policy nor do they make legal judgment on the innocence or guilt of a party. However, as Aristotle notes, to praise an individual “is in one respect akin to urging a course of action” because it encourages audiences to acknowledge and accept the praise as speakers have forwarded it.⁸

While it is important to understand the distinctions between the three divisions of oratory, the overlap is equally important. Each genre has distinct end in view, but these ends are accomplished through the support of the means of their counterparts. For example, consider that deliberative speakers seek primarily to establish the “expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action” on either the grounds that it will do good or it will do harm.⁹ In order to demonstrate that accepting a course of action will bring good, a proposal must also be interpreted as just and honorable, although these are “subsidiary and relative to” the main contemplation.¹⁰ Forensic speakers in a court of law may also implicate the present and future. Decisions rendered about the past may set a precedent for how laws are interpreted and applied in the future, and the stigma attached to a (not) guilty verdict certainly affects the way individuals are honored or shamed by their surrounding communities. Ceremonial orators may not consider whether their acts “have been expedient or not, but often make it a ground of actual praise” that they have neglected their “own interest to do what was honourable.”¹¹ Epideictic discourse may encourage a later action or reimagine the meaning of justice altogether. Summarily, speeches in any of the three genres must command the absolute or relative greatness or smallness of their praise or blame, their proposals for action, or their accusations or defenses.¹² In short, speakers set goals for themselves depending on their purpose for

audiences; deliberative oratory decides what is expedient; forensic oratory decides what is just; and epideictic oratory praises or blames with eloquently articulated value systems.¹³

Aristotle was clairvoyant when he observed the importance of audience to the genres of oratory. The centrality of audience is crucial to Aristotle's taxonomy. In each genre, the needs of audiences are distinct and therefore a speaker's strategies for satisfying those needs are distinct as well. Forensic speeches act on the need to determine innocence or guilt, deliberative speeches on the need to plan for future actions, but what of epideictic speeches? An audience's needs that conjure up ceremonial speeches are often *definitional* instead of *judgmental*. According to Aristotle, speakers must "take into account the nature of" their "particular audience when making a speech of praise" since if audiences esteem "a given quality," then the subject of praise must be emblematic of that quality for listeners to understand it as speakers intend.¹⁴ In other words, epideictic rhetoric (re)defines the state of existing things for an audience instead of urging them to make judgments on them. Certainly listeners may make judgments on the subject, particularly if their new understanding is persuasive. Audiences may also disagree with a speaker's praise or blame. However, the primary role of listeners in ceremonial oratory is to understand the object as speakers define it, and praise or blame are the vehicles bridging a speaker's definition with an audience's understanding. Summarily, epideictic rhetoric satisfies the needs of both speakers and audiences; it provides orators with a tool to communicate how and why events have occurred while granting audiences a means of understanding them.

For Aristotle, epideictic rhetoric was an essential component of Athenian life. Contemporary rhetoric has produced situations much more complex than those Aristotle encountered in ancient Athens. While Aristotle's ceremonial oratory is foundational to describing the epideictic genre, it lacks the meticulousness needed to describe rhetoric in modern discursive arenas. This is not because Aristotle lacked precision or breadth; it is simply an outdated perspective that fails to account for the variety of ceremonial occasions which have become commonplace in contemporary rhetoric. The audiences are larger, the distribution of information is faster, and channels for consuming texts have evolved. Therefore, critiques of contemporary epideictic rhetoric are guided but not completed by the assumption that all ceremonial artifacts contain some degree of praise and/or blame, but these two terms alone do not explain the nuanced patterns evident in modern public discourse.

Characteristics of Modern Epideictic Texts

Celeste M. Condit updates Aristotle's work on epideictic rhetoric, arguing that contemporary epideictic situations extend far beyond the "ceremonial" occasions he described. Epideictic situations, Condit argues, emerge when some distressing event creates a set of needs for both the community involved and its leadership.¹⁵ That there is a need on behalf of both communities and their leadership is important for understanding the kinds of epideictic situations in which presidents—like Obama—find themselves in. As Chapter 2 outlined, the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi created a climate of uncertainty and apprehension among U.S. citizens. The brewing chaos and fear produced a need for definition and understanding. In situations like Benghazi, leaders must lead and communities need leadership.

Condit articulates that epideictic rhetoric is studied from three general perspectives, message-centered, speaker-centered, and audience-centered. Message-centered perspectives orient themselves around the prevalence of praise or blame of an object, event, or person.¹⁶ Speaker-centered perspectives prioritize a speaker's long-term intentions over the immediate interests of their audiences. In other words, there is a focus on the possibility that leaders use epideictic speeches to "make the populace more amenable to later arguments on more focused topics."¹⁷ Finally, there are two audience perspectives. One pays attention to "the 'judgment' performed by the audience, the other on the 'experience' had by the audience."¹⁸ Synthesizing these general perspectives, Condit offers three functional pairs illustrating how exigencies are dealt with by speakers and their audiences. In each pair, the first term represents the needs arising for leaders, the second the corresponding needs for their communities. These pairs "define/understand," "shape/share a sense of community," and "display/entertain" should not be understood as an attempt to "fence in the territory of epideictic," but instead guide critics in investigating the "characteristics shared by epideictic speeches."¹⁹

Condit's first functional pair, defining/understanding, explains how leaders portray a volatile situation to a community. When a troubling event occurs, epideictic speakers explain the issue through the lens of an audience's key values and beliefs.²⁰ If audiences interpret an event through a backdrop saturated by important familiar terminology, it soothes their confusion over the issue and provides them a sense of comfort. In essence, audiences are "tamed" by speakers' explanations, and the speakers earn "the right to define the meaning of past experience."²¹ Ceremonial speakers then apply the meaning of a past experience to a present one, thereby wielding the power of

emphasizing those values in order to create paths to the future. The strategy of defining events in the present through the lens of the past, if successful, gives audiences “a hint at how they might judge what is to come.”²²

In defining events, epideictic texts often rely on public memory. A funeral oration is designed to comfort friends, family and loved ones by celebrating the life of the deceased. Campaign speeches remind citizens of the past successes and failures of those in power. Commemorations of any kind celebrate the bravery or treachery of spectacular individuals. This is the case, Edward Casey notes, because public memory “points both backward—to the vanished event or person—and forward (by means of the resolute wish to preserve the memory of the event or person, or even to act on it).”²³ Collective remembering operates through the “imagistic, gesticulatory, and linguistic practices” it engages in.²⁴

Presidents are uniquely prone to engage in collective remembering. Denise Bostdorff argues that presidents “often turn to the resources of *memoria* or shared recollections of the past” in order “to explain an event, renew community, and demonstrate leadership.”²⁵ When troubling events occur, “epideictic rhetors may be especially tempted to draw on collective memories as a way of uniting an audience that is highly fragmented both demographically and attitudinally.”²⁶ These are the linguistic practices of eloquent leaders. Ceremonial rhetoric renews the shared identity of communities through what Bostdorff calls “the creative performance of memory.”²⁷

When speakers create a coherent meaning for their audience, they have achieved what Condit calls “definitional authority.”²⁸ Speakers’ stature can offer a metric for the breadth of how far their definition reaches. Presidents in particular speak to a large,

national audience. David Zarefsky articulates that “because of his [sic] prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the president, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events . . . are viewed by the public.”²⁹ Audience members become “publically tamed” by the explanation rhetors offer in the aftermath of a troubling event. A troubling event often presents the opportunity for leaders to both praise and blame. That is, speakers obtain the power to prescribe objects relevant to the situation as good or evil via the audience’s key values and beliefs they have accessed in defining it. Rhetors themselves become the gatekeepers of their audiences’ most sacred values. Summarily, presidents purposefully reach into the past for value systems that form the foundations of moral screens that define present situations, seeking to influence an audience’s understanding of them.

Epidictic speakers define troubling events using language understandable to their audience. Not only must the language used be familiar to their listeners, it must resonate with them as well. There are a variety of ways speakers may choose to characterize an event. Presidents’ rhetorical strategies are influenced by the exigencies which call them forward. As such an event, September 11 has developed significant influence over U.S. citizens in the past decade. Michael J. Hyde characterizes the rhetorical sway of September 11 as a “gut-wrenching spectacle and an awesome symbolic act,” a “vivid epidictic display” embodying American vulnerability through national loss.³⁰ The World Trade Center, the symbol of U.S. economic primacy, crumbled to the ground. An airliner crashing into the Pentagon demonstrated that the most powerful military in the world was unable to detect or prevent an attack at its own headquarters. Even the date of the attack

was eye-opening, it occurred on 9-1-1, the number which signifies “state of emergency” to U.S. citizens.

It seemed natural given the date of the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi that it too would become signified by September 11. A diplomatic structure was assaulted and American lives were taken in the process. Intelligence gathering by a country that takes pride in its counter-terrorism operations failed and the country lost four lives as a result. As Chapter 2 discussed, the date of the attack was largely responsible for the uncertainty looming over the public because of immediate inference that the attack was connected to its legacy in recent U.S. history. These instant connections by the public and the media demonstrate that the resonance and familiarity of September 11 was alive and well eleven years after the initial attacks.

Leaders achieve definitional authority in ceremonial discourse by claiming either moral or political authority. Choosing definitions is, as Zarefksy argues, “to plead a cause” devoid of explicit claims but offered as if they were “natural and uncontroversial.”³¹ This is crucial to overcoming inevitable political opposition. After all, there are always interests at stake in how situations are framed because that determines how they are translated for constituents. As Zarefsky notes, this is how definitions affect audiences; they highlight certain elements of situations for use in arguments while obscuring others, influence whether citizens take notice of situations and how they handle them, and invite moral judgments about the circumstances and individuals involved.³²

The second functional pair, “shaping/sharing a sense of community,” illustrates the formation and sustainability of communities through traditional, long-standing value systems. Condit maintains that epideictic rhetoric is particularly important to the

sustainability of communities because forensic and deliberative speech “pit two sides against each other,” meaning “the focus of the event is inevitably division” instead of “unity and sharing.”³³ Ceremonial discourse does not make arguments through refutation or competition; rather, it creates “opportunities for expressing and reformulating our shared heritage.”³⁴

Communities of any size from small groups, such as a family grieving for a departed loved one, to entire nations, as in the case of the Benghazi attack, need a means for identifying themselves as a people. Epideictic speakers synthesize symbols, values, and myths to construct a “heritage” forming the underlying principles of a community’s identity.³⁵ Communities’ identities can be formed through narrow, contained texts or broad ubiquitous ones. For example, U.S. citizens may identify through well-defined objects, such as the country’s flag or the acronym “USA.” However, the same audience may identify more closely with its principal values, such as freedom and justice. In either case, ceremonial speakers may point to referents of their audiences’ as a means of identifying the recipients of their messages. This mode of identification overlaps with and contributes to “definition/understanding,” Condit says, because “community renews its conception of itself and of what is good by explaining what it has previously held to be good and by working through the relationships of those past values and beliefs to new situations.”³⁶ It is the role of epideictic speakers then to “help discover what the event means to the community, and what the community will come to be in the face of the new event.”³⁷

Condit also notes that there is potentially a dark underbelly to the formulation and sustainability of communities through heritage. A community’s discursive norms

contribute to the formation of its boundaries by highlighting the differences between that community and those existing outside of it. For if there is a community defined by its members, there must also be individuals excluded from it because they do not esteem the characteristics of the heritage which has been tied to what is good; in fact, they may be painted as opposing it. As such, “definitions of community are often advanced by contrast with ‘others’ outside of the community.”³⁸ The result of this phenomenon is that “we constitute ourselves as good (necessarily) by ranging ourselves against ‘the bad.’”³⁹ That is, in the dialectic of “good” and “evil,” speakers portray the community as “good” and “others” outside as evil. In many cases, the labeling of individuals as outsiders to communities is noncontroversial because “there is usually no overt conflict,” and “the promotion of individual values in the abstract” is seemingly benevolent because “we are trained to accept a wide range of values, and to see conflict only in their relationships to each other and to specific decisions.”⁴⁰ This was certainly the case in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and as Chapter 2 illustrated, the same tone emerged in the aftermath of the attack in Benghazi.

Given the complexities of 21st century politics, partisanship has further polarized the divide between the political Left and Right in the United States. This polarization is evident in the congressional gridlock that has increasingly slogged congress over the last decade. However, there are broad value systems that define the heritage of the U.S. as a whole with the power to unify the nation-wide community. For example, the notion that the U.S. is a defender of “freedom” traces back to the nation’s origin, a traverse across the Atlantic Ocean for religious and political freedom from the British monarchy. Likewise, the concept of “justice” is an ideograph of U.S. culture. Still, both of these

terms lack concrete definition. It is the role of leaders then to make meaning out of the values that form the nation-state and its community.

As David Hoogland Noon articulates, “historical analogies offer cognitive frameworks through which we might evaluate new information and experience, but they also trigger emotional, even subconscious associations that are equally capable of inspiring, attracting, and recruiting support for a particular political decision.”⁴¹ In times of conflict, leaders often paint the U.S. as defenders of freedom and the pursuit of justice. George W. Bush frequently alluded to the legacy of World War II in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. For example, in his Address to Joint Session of Congress on September 20, 2001, Bush said that:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars -- but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war -- but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks -- but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day -- and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.⁴²

According to Noon, this connection highlights the general tendency of presidents to invoke “the ‘lessons of history’ to insinuate that the United States has been reliving the tribulations of the ‘good war’” for freedom and justice, and ever since the “‘lessons of September 11’ and the ‘lessons of history’ are seemingly coterminous.”⁴³

September 11 posed a substantial threat to the core of American values. It has become engraved in the U.S. as the go-to metaphor when troubling events occur. Noon argues that Bush “enjoyed countless opportunities to summon the legacy of World War II as the sanctifying touch for his global campaign against terrorism” because September 11, 2001 represented ‘our’ Pearl Harbor.”⁴⁴ Bush’s analogies, Noon argues, “in the

months immediately following the attacks . . . have been extended (and distended) in every imaginable direction;” they “attuned to all the appropriate rhetorical tones,” and saturated “public appearances with reminders of the moment’s historical gravity.”⁴⁵ The institutions of freedom and justice were undoubtedly vulnerable in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Historical analogies play a significant role in all types of oratory, but they serve the needs of presidential epideictic speech profoundly. They are not only “frameworks through which we might evaluate new information and experience, but they also trigger emotional, even subconscious associations that are equally inspiring, attracting, and recruiting support for a particular political decision.”⁴⁶ This explains why presidents satisfy deliberative ends with epideictic means. While “popular nostalgia for World War II serves potentially innumerable functions for ordinary citizens, corporate advertisers, scholars, and political pundits,” the “good war” has since been consistently re-appropriated as September 11 “not simply to justify . . . policy aims, but more importantly as a cultural project as well as an ongoing gesture of self-making;” summoning its memory for ethos-building and “appealing to the anguished national quest for meaning amid catastrophic loss.”⁴⁷ Succinctly, historical analogies are important rhetorical devices for leaders to gain adherence from their audiences, and the memory of September 11 is part of a broader, ongoing cultural project that ensures public support of the state in a war between good and evil.

While there have been several policies implemented in the post-9/11 environment, its memory has independently served as a definition, identity, and moral vision for subsequent events. James Jasinski argues that although “policy proposals are developed

to help curb these problems, we also encounter a substantial amount of epideictic discourse—from speeches by the present . . . that encourages a *reaffirmation* of core values.”⁴⁸ In other words, presidents must constantly reaffirm the “good war” because it promotes the value systems which have the best chance at audience adherence and eventually action. Summarily, Noon concludes, leaders invoke historical analogies of freedom and justice “as a cultural project as well as an ongoing gesture of self-making” to shape the nation-wide community.⁴⁹

It is no coincidence that Bush, Obama, and other political leaders have used September 11 as an access point for defining both the U.S. as a community and the outsiders who oppose it. As discussed in Chapter 2, instances of violence subsequent to September 11, 2001 have been framed as an extension of the original attacks because it is a filter accessible to the community at large, transcending bitter partisan politics with which the country has become all too familiar with. When presidents make epideictic appeals through these frames, it is “noncontroversial” because of the immense difficulty it requires to challenge them. When Presidents define troubling events as nation-wide concerns rooted in strong value-based claims, it becomes easy for opponents to be labeled as threats to the community. As John Murphy argues, this strategy reduces the risk of political obtrusion from opponents because challenging “the president’s epideictic appeals is to question his [sic] right to define the people,” painting the picture that dissenters pose “a threat to the nation” and violate the occasion.⁵⁰ Only ideologically extreme politicians “dare take the momentous step of challenging the moral authority of the president.”⁵¹ Ultimately, Murphy says, opponents of presidents’ epideictic appeals are cast as “un-American” and banished from their respective communities.⁵²

Even when rhetors succeed in shaping communities and sharing their norms, their task is incomplete. Speakers offer definitions of troubling events which they see fit for the communities they address, but they must also demonstrate their leadership skills through mastery of the values and beliefs they wish to instill upon artifacts and audiences. This set of needs describes Condit's third functional pair, display/entertain. In ceremonial discourse, speakers need to demonstrate eloquence, "the combination of truth, beauty, and power in human speech" to which listeners can stretch their "capacities and identities in the human quest for improvement."⁵³ Eloquent language gives audiences a means to recognize and accept leadership in troubling times because it transforms their daily experiences into "grand, noble" ones.⁵⁴ That is, if leaders are perceived by their audiences to know truth, recognize and wield beauty, and manage power then they stand a good chance of "being a desirable leader for the community."⁵⁵

Epidictic rhetoric serves the important function of developing and teaching public morality. Orators frame issues to communities in ways appearing to convey sound judgment and demonstrate discernment on practical matters, inviting them to accept the speakers' interpretation. As Gerard Hauser argues, ceremonial speakers must possess noble qualities and present them eloquently to their audiences.⁵⁶ Ceremonial discourse therefore not only defines events and shapes communities, but it actively teaches communities who they are. Hauser notes that "only skilled arguers" can possess *dynamis*, or the "power of observing the available means of persuasion" for a given occasion.⁵⁷ If orators can *define* troubling events through the lens of *shaped communities*, then they can *display* leadership over issues of public morality since they have shown why something has happened and who we are moving forward. When orators exhibit leadership over

noble qualities, Hauser says, they directly benefit “the community since, ‘if virtue is a faculty of beneficence, the highest kinds of it must be those which are most useful to others,’” and in particular “acts of courage and justice are the most laudatory, since they embody virtues that aid the whole community.”⁵⁸

Even if leaders speak virtuous language to their respective communities, their form requires complementary content. Hauser defines the teaching role of epideictic “by assigning its practitioners the responsibility for telling the story of lived virtue.”⁵⁹ In other words, leaders cannot simply offer praise of the beliefs and values held dearly to their communities, they must embody them and bring them to life. However, this embodiment is not just the story of heroic deeds. Instead, according to Hauser, the embodiment of values is “the expression in words of the eminence of a man’s [sic] good qualities” displaying “his actions as the product of such qualities.”⁶⁰ Therefore, “the subjects of epideictic rhetoric are not themselves the teachers of society,” rather, *leaders* are the teachers because “the moral of their acts emerges not in what” the hero did, “but in the storyteller’s province of how their deeds are narrated.”⁶¹ This is precisely what Aristotle meant when he said “to praise a man [sic] is in one respect akin to urging a course of action.”⁶² That is, bearing witness to narratives of valor and virtue reveals the lives of “exemplary citizens,” implicitly asking society to follow the hero’s footsteps by urging “manifestation of their communal aspirations.”⁶³

The process of teaching communities about the virtuous deeds of others is what Condit labels *entertainment* because it stretches the daily experiences of listeners by encouraging them to emulate the grand, noble narratives displayed by their leaders. Leaders display eloquence and audiences gain leaders. Condit’s use of “entertainment”

certainly explains the attention-grabbing performative nature of epideictic rhetoric, but it seems out of place when accounting for the active learning that takes place in ceremonial speeches. Instead, “manifestation” seems more appropriate since it implies that leaders display leadership through virtuous stories, and listeners are persuaded to emulate the expressed heroic deeds.

Condit’s three functional pairs are useful for understanding the epideictic genre because they explore common characteristics in ceremonial texts. However, it is mistaken to assume that the three pairs are rigid. Instead, it is better to understand them as three mutually reinforcing families of characteristics that often overlap in any given ceremonial oration. That is, leaders define troubling events in ways that are understood by their audiences because they are framed around pre-existing beliefs or values. Leaders’ definitions come from an authoritative position and therefore wield the power to tell communities who they are and what they stand for. When presidents artfully display their leadership over the beliefs and values of their communities, they inspire citizens to emulate the good deeds of others. All three functional pairs interpenetrate one another; they are part of one larger acclamation, the on-going process of ceremonial oratories. Summarily, epideictic texts engage in profoundly constitutive activities; its meaning proves essential in shaping and teaching community norms and producing its leadership; and audiences experience, understand, and celebrate its virtues for political conduct. Ceremonial discourse, Hauser concludes, is a “rhetorical space where community is invented and shared in performances of virtue through stores of significant individuals and momentous events” and are “worth imitating because they teach lessons for making society itself more noble” by defining and articulating public morality.⁶⁴

Crisis Rhetoric in Epideictic Form

Although there are many forms of epideictic discourse, *crisis* rhetoric carries a particular urgency in its very nature. Most crises threaten not only lives and property, but also our very sense of community, the understanding of who we are. Some of the troubling events which presidents address through epideictic rhetoric are genuine crises. Certainly that was the case for the attacks on September 11, 2001. It is no surprise then that the media and Obama explained the Benghazi attacks through the lens of September 11; doing so carried over some of the emotion and memory of those earlier attacks and applies them to a more immediate situation.

Bonnie Dow identifies three defining characteristics of presidential crisis rhetoric. First, presidents tend to assert their “possession of ‘New Facts’ about a situation” in order to define it as a crisis.⁶⁵ Even when the general public is already aware of a troubling event, there are often looming questions and a corresponding set of viral rumors surrounding it. Second, presidents may offer a “melodramatic comparison between the pure motives of the United States and the evil motives of the enemy.”⁶⁶ These comparisons are the type of Manichean notions of good vs. evil, saviors vs. barbarians-discourse that defines who is inside and outside of the (nation-wide) community. Finally, presidents tend to shift troubling issues from “practical, political” contexts to “moral, ethical” ones.⁶⁷ This notion echoes Condit on the formation and sustainability of community and Hauser on teaching public morality. That is, epideictic crisis rhetoric beats the belly-drum of community ethics to reinforce messages that may eventually translate into deliberative calls for action, but are ceremonial in their immediacy. As Mary Stuckey articulates, presidents clarify national crises because they are “the nation’s chief storyteller,” their “interpreter-in-chief” because they “tell us stories about

ourselves” suggesting “what sort of people we are” and “how we are constituted as a community.”⁶⁸

September 11 has drastically changed the way leaders define foreign policy crises. A bipartisan consensus has since emerged that the “9/11 attacks” marked the beginning of “an interventionist ‘war on terror,’” drawing attention to “the significant threats to our national security posed by . . . terrorism.”⁶⁹ U.S. foreign policy has undergone dramatic changes. As Michael Mazarr argues in *Foreign Affairs*, the world has experienced “profound shifts in U.S. foreign and defense policy as a result” of violence committed by non-state actors requiring “multi-dimensional operations composed of such components as political/diplomatic, humanitarian intelligence, economic development, and security.”⁷⁰ The post-Cold War period can easily be described as a lost era in foreign policy because it was a mostly peaceful time for U.S. interests. Clinton’s New World Order was a period of indeterminism because the only metaphor describing conflicts the U.S. was engaged in was a series of “nation-building” operations. Our “enemies” were weak, fragile states. After September 11, our enemies were the terrorizing individuals taking sanctuary in them.

According to Dow, exigency is crucial to crisis rhetoric because crisis speeches are “informed by an understanding of the differing exigencies that give rise to it.”⁷¹ As she further notes, “the most fruitful way for critics to analyze crisis rhetoric is to begin with an understanding of how the rhetoric functions to respond to the exigence created by the situation.”⁷² Crisis discourse often occurs because of one of two pre-dominant exigencies. First, crisis speeches can be justificatory, where orators focus on “explanation and rationalization of military retaliation.”⁷³ Justificatory crisis speeches are therefore

deliberative, since it is “the President’s announcement of American *action* that led to the situations being perceived as crises.”⁷⁴

In other cases, as Dow says, crisis rhetoric is consummatory, or when presidents are “*reacting* to what the news media had already treated as an event with high potential for generating conflict.”⁷⁵ Consummatory rhetoric is pre-dominantly epideictic since it functions to “allow the audience to reach a communal understanding of the events which have occurred” in contrast to justificatory discourse that seeks to legitimize “the expediency of action taken in an effort to gain public support” for a policy or law.⁷⁶ Regardless of whether crisis speeches are consummatory or justificatory, there are generally both deliberative and epideictic characteristics present where one will be more prevalent than another. Exigency is central to analyzing crisis speeches because the dominance of either type “is tied to the function that the discourse fulfills in a situation.”⁷⁷

From the discussion in Chapter 2, the rhetorical environment of the attacks on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi can be easily described as one calling for consummatory rhetoric, “where presidential discourse *initially* constituted the only official reply made by the American government” instead of functioning as the “very beginning of a larger, *overt* military retaliation taken by the government of the U.S.”⁷⁸ The important distinction between consummatory and justificatory crisis rhetoric is how each responds to the exigence calling them forward. Important exigencies for crisis rhetoric are “the events, the needs of the audience, and the purposes of the rhetor.”⁷⁹ These exigencies neatly fit into Condit’s functional pairs: a definition and understanding of the *event*, the

needs of *audiences* addressed, and the presidents' leadership over the event constituting their *purpose* for being an authoritative speaker.

The attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center in 2001 have become, as Gary Woodward argues, a specific form of crisis rhetoric: a set of occasions for “endlessly recycled narratives of American virtue vehemently argued” by presidents.⁸⁰ These arguments are rooted in “nationalistic piety,” functioning “rhetorically as the legitimizing agent” for foreign policy, veiling its political rational beneath the veneer of “moral and historic inevitability.”⁸¹ Much like the failure of Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty, the War on Terror has no definitive end-point. Therefore, “we relish the certainty that our wounded nation will seek its revenge against alien forces around the globe” as long as there are enemies to vanquish.⁸²

Presidential reaffirmation of the values sustaining the moral and historic inevitability of September 11 is significant for the construction of crises. Casey articulates that “a given public memory is constituted from within a particular historical circumstance, usually a crisis of some sort.”⁸³ The initial attacks on the World Trade Center resulted in an “instantaneous installation of a new public memory” that was “regarded *en masse*.”⁸⁴ September 11 is a unique memory in this regard. In the aftermath of the original attack, Bush held a *ninety* percent approval rating, what the *New York Times* described as “the highest rating for a president ever recorded by the Gallup polling group.”⁸⁵ Ever since, the memory of September 11 has been fundamental for how presidents have defined conflicts the U.S. has engaged in.

Eulogizing the Patriots

Chapter 2 noted that the situation Obama faced when he spoke at the Rose Garden was not only a crisis, but it also involved the loss of American lives. The President acknowledged this and it was seemingly appropriate that part of Obama's address was eulogistic. Crisis rhetoric is pre-dominantly epideictic in this case, so the marriage of eulogy and crisis is rather seamless in Obama's speech. Obama's speech was fitting for the occasion because U.S. lives were lost *in* a crisis.

Although crisis rhetoric appears in many forms, eulogies are particularly important for leaders to achieve the functions of epideictic speaking. As Dow notes, "in the case of eulogies, the community has experienced a loss, and its most basic need is to assign meaning to that event and to discover how to proceed following it."⁸⁶ Even when "the majority of the audience is not personally involved" in crisis situations, "they still feel a sense of confusion, a need to understand the meaning of the event for the nation as a whole and to know how the nation will proceed" forward.⁸⁷ Eulogies present orators opportunities to flex their rhetorical muscle by leading the nation forward from tragedy and lighting the path to the future. In short, eulogies perform the consummatory function of epideictic rhetoric because they explain tragic events to the nation-wide community instead of legitimizing the actions of the individuals being celebrated.

Presidents tend to have at least one of three strategies in mind when performing eulogies. First, as Dow argues, leaders will "dissociate the nation from responsibility for the crisis."⁸⁸ This is a necessary component of eulogies because it persuades the community that their anger should "not be directed at the government or themselves."⁸⁹ Leaders can achieve dissociation if they depict the deceased U.S. citizens as helpless victims and their killers as amoral. Second, leaders "place the event within a value-laden

context of similar situations.”⁹⁰ In other words, presidents draw on similar troubling events from the past and use them to guide their explanation of the present situation. This is how leaders make the nation-wide community “feel comforted, restored, and unified after a disruptive experience.”⁹¹ Finally, according to Dow, presidents may “urge perseverance in present policy rather than changes in policy.”⁹² Again, it is certainly possible for deliberative elements to appear in epideictic discourse although leaders may not be seeking action in the immediacy of the speech. Summarily, Dow’s three strategies for performing eulogies strongly reflect Condit’s three functional pairs. That is, leaders offer citizens a particular understanding of an event that dissociates the U.S. from guilty involvement; places the event in a specific value-laden context that aligns with the community’s identity; and urges perseverance in their ideas, demonstrating eloquence through their words of wisdom.

Eulogies are not just understanding, dissociation, and value-laden. They play an active role in teaching good citizenship. This is because eulogies, Kendall Phillips argues, are “not simply to memorialize an individual but to pass on cultural ethics by describing exemplary lives and deaths.”⁹³ When orators speak to audiences about civic virtue, it must be in a language common to listeners but ethically important. Epideictic rhetoric, as Hauser notes, “commemorates noble deeds” and “also can inculcate a common vocabulary of excellence among its witnesses.”⁹⁴ Therefore, eulogies not only frame the way citizens experience an individual’s life, but also how they ought to experience their own in the future.

As Amos Kiewe articulates, “eulogies are temporal discourses meant to construct timeless memories and consequently seek to construct future space for such memories.”⁹⁵

Presidents are particularly “concerned with their heritage” and “are prone to the practice of conditioning memories.”⁹⁶ Valorizing civic heroes is an avenue which presidents reinvent “the American myth” which “is not often about historical truth but about rhetorical truth.”⁹⁷ Eulogy is thus a performance “to create a sense of community” through the ritual of memory work.⁹⁸ In short, eulogies foster “a rhetorical space where community is invented and shared in performances of virtue through stories of significant individuals and momentous events” that are “worth imitating because they teach lessons for making society itself more noble.”⁹⁹ Eulogized Americans become a concrete representation of “renewed hope for a country and a future,” and “their optimism toward making a difference in the world . . . acts as cynicism’s anti-matter.”¹⁰⁰

Eulogies are also substantially influenced by public memory. As noted earlier, funeral orations create timeless memories of the individuals who have passed away. Kiewe articulates that “as epideictic speech, funeral orations are performative, as they rely on noble acts and thoughts and their ritual function is to create ‘a sense of community among its participants,’” and public memory is “a function of the ritual of eulogies.”¹⁰¹ Deceased individuals are not always remembered for their actions. Instead, eulogized persons are often remembered as idealist representations of particular values. In this way, eulogies evoke emotions because they are “an affiliative bond between perfected action and human response” and thus the memories in eulogies “can be harnessed to rhetorically instruct, educate, guide, and motivate” the audience.¹⁰² Succinctly, eulogies perform the ritualistic function of epideictic rhetoric because they guide citizens to act the same way idealistic others have before them. By doing so,

eulogies construct narratives that “can and so invent a persona and a myth and thus can condition future discourses and accounts.”¹⁰³

Personas can be invented in a variety of ways. One important way personas are developed is the process of historical individuals about who little was known transforming into public figures. As Cindy Koenig Richards argues, by associating these individuals “with traditional US symbols and heroes and by displaying” them “as a model of civic values such as courage, duty, and progress,” speakers offer epideictic performances that are “aesthetically appealing and culturally resonant,” evoking the American identity and calling upon a historic past to provide a “model of civic action” through “traditional vocabularies and values.”¹⁰⁴ Eulogists often invent personas and attach them to the individuals they are grieving over. When presidents eulogize individuals they deem heroes, their remembrance focuses less on the particular actions of those individuals and more on the ways they represent ideal citizenship and civic duty.

Campaigning to the Voters

Obama’s Rose Garden Address is easily characterized as an epideictic text. The speech both eulogizes the loss of a U.S. citizen and soothes the confusion over a troubling event for the nation-wide audience. At first glance, the town hall debate between the President and Governor Romney may appear to lack the traditional characteristics of epideictic rhetoric. With regards to its format, the debate was a series of question and answer periods with a moderator to keep time. Although there was an immediate audience in attendance, the target audience was U.S. citizens across the nation watching in real time. Further, the topics discussed were pre-dominantly deliberative issues. Each candidate sought to differentiate himself from the opponent by highlighting

his own distinct political agendas for each of the issues conjured by concerned audience members. Above all else, the candidates prepared to appear on national television to enhance their reputations as leaders who made themselves more politically available to U.S. citizens and politicians on both sides of the aisle.

The ultimate goal for the candidates in the town hall debate was to convince U.S. citizens, voters in particular, that they were best-suited to make expedient decisions for the nation as its leader. In order to do so, each candidate needed to demonstrate their confidence in and knowledge of important and urgent political issues. These political issues composed the molecules of the candidates' larger moral vision for the country, the overall platform they promised to bring with their nomination as President of the United States. Candidates' larger moral vision of the nation reflects what Robert Rowland means by the contemporary "heavily theatrical character of American politics in general and presidential debates in particular."¹⁰⁵

While these attributes of the town hall debate seemingly warrant a deliberative classification, there are important epideictic elements present as well. Recall that in Aristotle's taxonomy the role of the audience in epideictic rhetoric is to make judgment on a speaker's praise or blame of an object. In the case of a debate that has a "winner" and "loser," the speakers praise *themselves* while "blaming" their opponents. Obama and Romney needed to make voters believe they could remedy the nation's current problems while constructing a caricature of their opponent that suggested those complications would continue or grow worse. Certainly this required both speakers to articulate a well-reasoned, well-researched policy platform. However, the presidential nominees would first need to win the election before those deliberative realities were even possibilities.

Most significant to the immediate rhetorical situation for Obama and Romney, then, was their self-promotion as a credible, desirable leader.

The significant relationship between the deliberative and epideictic elements of the town hall debate between Obama and Romney reflect the broader genre of rhetorical situations that Michael C. Leff and Gerald P. Mohrmann isolate as campaign oratory. Leff and Mohrmann contend that campaign orations are best understood as epideictic because in essence they address the honorability of candidates, asking for judgment from the audience on whether they deserve to become the President of the United States. This is the case because the deliberative elements of the occasion, the policies and laws, are used as a *means* to achieve an epideictic ends of self-honor and worthiness of leading the nation.¹⁰⁶ Campaign speeches contain elements of expediency, but *speakers* are not inherently expedient or inexpedient. Although campaign orations do address policy issues, the aim is not to urge the audience to adopt those policies; but rather, to enhance the individual ethos of the candidate. Speakers are not just or unjust, expedient or inexpedient; rather, they are worthy of honor or the reverse..

Paul Rosenthal identifies this phenomenon as the distinction between “non-personal and personal persuasion.”¹⁰⁷ Non-personal persuasion refers to occasions where speakers attempt “to influence audience attitudes about a particular issue, and ethos is important insofar as it lends credence to the substance of the argument.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, the object of non-personal persuasive texts is something external to speakers; the focal point of the text is some platform item and the candidates’ credibility makes that agenda more intelligible and likeable to their audiences.

Personal persuasion, on the other hand, reverses this process. The focal point, Rosenthal argues, is the speaker, where the message becomes a vehicle for enhancing ethos. This means that while “the ostensible purpose of a given speech may be to gain acceptance of a particular policy . . . the actual purpose is to gain votes for the candidate.”¹⁰⁹ In any given policy-oriented speech, speakers need both a strong ethos and a relatable, sensible platform. Sometimes speakers’ ethos enhances the desirability of their policies, and others the desirability of the policies enhances their ethos. Although campaign orations can therefore be classified as either deliberative or epideictic, the town hall debate is uniquely situated to be characterized as personal persuasion and ceremonial since, as Leff and Mohrmann conclude, “the treatment of issues is subsidiary to the purpose of creating a general identification between the speaker and the audience;” the ultimate objective of campaign oratory is not to pass legislation, but is instead “ingratiation.”¹¹⁰

Epideictic campaign speeches must develop their ethos through artistic displays of leadership. Describing presidential leadership generally, Woodward argues that presidents demonstrate their leadership through an “unremitting chain of symbolic acts.”¹¹¹ Through their use of active, controlling verbs, presidents are given purpose by their promises to affirm, determine, direct, or order decisions. This purpose secures presidents’ place as “the master of significant events,” the arbiter of which decisions are relevant and when they are made.¹¹²

Assuming that campaign speeches serve epideictic needs of speakers, the effectiveness of the speeches, according to Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, “cannot be measured by the degree of probability attributed to the accepted argument, but

rather by the obstacles overcome by the action and the sacrifices and choices it leads to and which can be justified by the adherence.”¹¹³ In other words, election speeches cannot be determined by the likelihood that audiences agree with candidates’ platforms. Instead, critics should pay attention to the obstacles speakers must overcome to meet their goals. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that this is the “existence of an interval . . . between the time of adherence and the time of action it was designed to stimulate.”¹¹⁴ This does not occur in a vacuum. It is part of an ongoing process where speakers continually build adherence with their audiences. Presidential campaigns are prime examples where “adherence gained by a speech can always advantageously be reinforced” because slogans and other signifiers build larger, more determined crowds.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the *display* function of ceremonial rhetoric is significant because of its visible, ritualistic performance; “it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the value it lauds.”¹¹⁶ As such, “the speaker’s reputation is not the exclusive end of epideictic discourse,” but instead a *consequence*.¹¹⁷ Presidents promote policies to build their *ethos* and increase the likelihood they win public approval or their candidacy.

When presidents perform political rituals, it effectively blurs the line between theater and politics. That is, “the essence of campaigning and governing” consists of two mutually reinforcing ideas; that campaign orations *construct* a moral vision of the future, and that such visions are *represented* by broad political actions speakers wish to take to get there.¹¹⁸ If presidents’ moral visions are shared by their audiences, they can achieve what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca refer to as “amplification and enhancement.”¹¹⁹ This directly connects Aristotle, Condit, and Hauser’s arguments about epideictic rhetoric. Ceremonial speaking uses value systems to teach public morality, manifesting a

vision of ideal citizenship and encouraging the audience to support leaders who display mastery of eloquent rhetoric and knowledge. In short, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca conclude that leaders “defend the traditional and accepted values” which influence citizens “object of education” to readily convert “into universal values, if not eternal truths, that which has acquired a certain standing through social unanimity.”¹²⁰

Conclusion

Given the complexities of 21st century politics, U.S. presidents are bound to encounter troubling events that require explanation to the public at large. What separates 21st century crises from earlier troubling times is the speed and open-ended access to information that the public at large has. Generally, the immediate response to these confusing situations is not deliberative because policy decisions have not been made by the time information reaches the public. Before deliberative action can take place, presidents must demonstrate control over the situation and explain what has happened to U.S. citizens. Therefore, analyzing the rhetorical strategies presidents use requires a detailed but concise understanding of the epideictic genre. Epideictic rhetoric, first and foremost, praises or blames an object and invites audiences to make judgment on its worthiness of honor or the reverse. This is true of all ceremonial discourse, and yet it is woefully inadequate for the complex objects this thesis analyzes.

Contemporary studies of presidential epideictic rhetoric must pay close attention to the exigencies calling ceremonial speakers forward. In the case of Obama’s Rose Garden Address and the town hall debate, there are three important circumstances. First, the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi spurred a crisis in U.S. public discourse. Crises require strong leadership to define what has happened and promise the

preservation of community heritage through the perseverance of widely-held beliefs that pave the path forward to the future. Second, the death of a U.S. Ambassador opened opportunity for Obama to articulate a moral vision of the nation, urging citizens to strive for the exemplary character of hard-working diplomats that sacrifice their lives for the sanctity of the country. Finally, the town hall debate illustrates how speakers use deliberative means, arguing the expediency or in expediency of various policies, to enhance their own ethos and undermine the ethos of their opponent. Critics wishing to understand the text as more than a list of platform items that may or may not ever amount to legislation must appreciate it for its ceremonial qualities. Although the nationally-televised debate served the needs of audience members, it primarily served the speakers' need of becoming elected as President of the United States. In short, critics should approach presidential epideictic rhetoric by examining the ways it transforms the instability of crises into manageable, well-defined events that inculcate and reaffirm a particular heritage, guided by a fidelity to a moral vision that builds a cadre of exemplary citizens acquiescing to the desires of the President of the United States.

Notes

¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, *Rhetoric*, (Chelmsford: Dover Publications, 2004), [1358a].

² *Rhetoric*, [1358b].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jon Hesik, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. Erik Gunderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 156.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Rhetoric*, [1367b].

⁹ *Rhetoric*, [1358b].

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Rhetoric*, [1359a].

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Rhetoric*, [1358b].

¹⁴ *Rhetoric*, [1367b].

¹⁵ Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar,” *Communication Quarterly*, 33 (1985): 285.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic,” 286.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic,” 288.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 35.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Denise M. Bostdorff, "Epideictic Rhetoric in the Service of War: George W. Bush on Iraq and the 60th Anniversary of the Victory Over Japan," *Communication Monographs*, 78 (2011): 300.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ David Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 3 (2004): 611.

³⁰ Michael J. Hyde, "The Rhetor as Hero and the Pursuit of Truth: The Case of 9/11," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 8.1 (2005): 5.

³¹ Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," 612.

³² Ibid.

³³ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 289.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 291.

- ⁴⁰ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 289.
- ⁴¹ David Hoogland Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, The War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 3 (2004): 340.
- ⁴² George W. Bush, "Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks," 20 September 2001,
<http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm>
- ⁴³ Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy," 339-340.
- ⁴⁴ Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy," 339.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy," 340.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 212.
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- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Murphy, "Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Opposition to War," 67.
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- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 291.
- ⁵⁶ Gerard A. Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 29 (1999): 14.
- ⁵⁷ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 11.
- ⁵⁸ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 14.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 15.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Rhetoric*, [1367b].

⁶³ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 15.

⁶⁴ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 19.

⁶⁵ Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53 (1989): 294.

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⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mary Stuckey, *The President as Interpreter in Chief*, (Chatham: New Jersey, 1991), 1.

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⁷¹ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 295.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 294.

⁷⁴ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 295.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 296.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 294.

⁷⁹ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” 296.

⁸⁰ Gary Woodward, *Center Stage: Media and the Performance of American Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.: 2007), 138.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” 26.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “A Nation Challenged; A Snapshot Gives Bush 90% Approval,” *New York Times*, 23 September 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/24/us/a-nation-challenged-a-snapshot-gives-bush-90-approval.html>

⁸⁶ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” 297.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” 298.

⁹⁰ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” 297.

⁹¹ Dow, “The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric,” 298.

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⁹³ Kendall R. Phillips, *Framing Public Memory*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press: 2007), 9.

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- ⁹⁷ Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy," 251.
- ⁹⁸ Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy," 250.
- ⁹⁹ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 19.
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- ¹¹¹ Woodward, *Center Stage*, 86.
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¹¹⁵ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 50.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Woodward, *Center Stage*, 87.

¹¹⁹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 51.

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CHAPTER 4: EVALUATING THE ROSE GARDEN ADDRESS AND TOWN HALL DEBATE AS PRESIDENTIAL EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

The analytical framework developed in Chapter 3 provides significant insight into Barack Obama's remarks at the Rose Garden and the town hall debate as epideictic events. In both cases, the President refrains from making explicit deliberative proposals in the wake of the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. Instead, Obama's aim was to nurture the public during a spectacular event that was troubling because of its geographical and geopolitical distance from U.S. soil. To define that event in the Rose Garden speech, Obama constructed the Benghazi attack as a crisis and eulogized Christopher Stevens and the others who died. Later, he transformed an otherwise policy-oriented presidential debate into an important epideictic moment. This chapter will analyze the Rose Garden Address's construction of a crisis and eulogy as well as the significant ceremonial elements of the town hall debate to draw conclusions about their implications for studies of presidential epideictic rhetoric.

Obama's Rose Garden Address

In its most basic form, epideictic rhetoric praises or blames an object. Obama's Rose Garden Address simultaneously praises the life of Christopher Stevens and the sacrifices of U.S. civil servants and blames the unknown, evil perpetrators for committing intolerable acts of violence on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. Celeste M. Condit's three epideictic functions, define/understand; shape/share a sense of community; and display/entertain are clearly present in the speech. However, the Rose Garden Address is unique because there are two distinct genres of epideictic rhetoric present.

As Carolyn Miller argues, wholesale studies of epideictic texts are overly general and miss important textual distinctions; instead, critics must identify the “constituent strategies of contemporary genres” and their relationships to one another.¹ This is not to say that examining the eulogy of Christopher Stevens has no overlap with analyzing the text as crisis rhetoric. Rather, it is precisely this overlap that warrants examining the text as both a crisis speech and a eulogy in greater detail. Crisis rhetoric and eulogies have situational, stylistic, and substantive similarities. However, they serve separate, yet mutually-reinforcing functions. Therefore, this analysis organizes itself around the particular types of ceremonial discourse evident in the Rose Garden Address but maintains a fidelity to Condit’s functional pairs.

Communicating the Crisis in Benghazi

Traumatic or confusing events threaten our very sense of community, our understanding of who we are as U.S. citizens and what we represent as a people. Rhetoric that follows crisis situations are pre-dominantly either deliberative or epideictic. The exigencies shaping the rhetorical situation help clarify how discourses should be classified. When the rhetor announces some action previously unknown to the audience, the discourse creates the crisis and is justificatory or deliberative. On the other hand, when the audience is already aware of the event the discourse is a *reaction* and is generally consummatory or epideictic.

In Obama’s case, the Rose Garden Address dealt with three pre-existing exigencies, making it consummatory and thus epideictic. First, the attack in Benghazi happened on September 11. More than a decade after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, September 11 is still, as Obama puts it, “a painful day for our

nation” and a day that the nation mourns “with the families who were lost on that day.”² Even had the attack in Benghazi not occurred, this would have still been a day of general unease among citizens; a day on which people might be nervous to fly, to leave the country or even to drive by an airport, a national monument, or a courthouse.

Because U.S. citizens already interpreted September 11 in such a specific way, the other two emerging exigencies fit seamlessly into the situation. The second exigency was the loss of U.S. citizens’ lives. Although the attack in Benghazi only resulted in the deaths of only four individuals, they all held highly-esteemed positions. Obama needed to offer an interpretation of that loss to the public because, as the President, he held the most apropos position for explaining to the country what had occurred.

Finally, the lack of a coherent explanation by media outlets demanded that a high-ranking official offer clarity to the situation. It was initially unclear whether the attack was spontaneous or premeditated, if any U.S. citizens had been killed or how many, and whether this exposed a serious flaw in the security of the United States. Had the media circulated a consistent story or waited for confirmation of what had happened, the public may not have reacted in a way that required Obama to address the nation a mere twelve hours after the attack. As Chapter 2 pointed out, it took little effort on the part of news outlets to attach the September 11 label to the attack in Benghazi. The date of the attack, the death of U.S. citizens, and the paranoia from uncertainty collectively called on Obama.

Since Obama defined the attack in Benghazi through the lens of September 11, it is worthwhile to analyze the Rose Garden Address as presidential crisis rhetoric and how this genre of epideictic discourse influences the ways audiences are intended to

understand messages. Recall from Chapter 3 that presidential crisis rhetoric emerges when new facts are presented; a melodramatic comparison between pure and evil is established; and troubling issues are shifted from practical to moral contexts. Each of these characteristics is present in the Rose Garden Address. Obama was tasked with presenting new, clarifying evidence; exhibiting fortitude and resolve toward the perceived perpetrators; and framing the event as a moral issue instead of a political one since the rhetorical situation was carefully suspended and wound up in the peak of an extraordinarily heated election season. Bonnie J. Dow argues that when presidents engage in crisis rhetoric, “the net effect of these strategies is to create a communal meaning for the event which is consistent with the community’s existing beliefs and values and which guides the response of its members” and strengthens their confidence that the nation will endure in troubling times.³

Again, by the time Obama delivered the Rose Garden Address several media outlets, including the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* had circulated information and rumors about the attacks; some of which were confirmed by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but the majority was mere speculation. For example, Obama’s announcement that on the previous night four “extraordinary Americans were killed in an attack on our diplomatic post in Benghazi” was the first time it had been revealed that more than two civil servants lives had been taken; and even at the time of the speech the President noted that “we are still notifying the families of the others who were killed.”⁴ This not only confirmed the death of Libyan Ambassador Christopher Stevens and Foreign Service Officer Sean Smith, but also revealed that at least two more lives were lost in the assault.

Revealing that U.S. diplomats had been killed was not the only new information Obama offered citizens. One prominent and immediate critique of the Obama Administration was that it had not effectively anticipated or reacted to the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi.⁵ Obama responded to these criticisms by arguing that because of “this outrageous and shocking attack,” the U.S. was actively “working with the government of Libya to secure our diplomats” and he had directed his “administration to increase our security at diplomatic posts around the world.”⁶ Further, the President argued that this cooperation with Libya was not a new policy, even if news of its existence had been scant prior. This information was a necessary, consummatory reaction to the rumors that the U.S. had been unprepared for the attack, that it would destroy the nation’s hard work of stabilizing a Libya in political turmoil. Contrary to such speculation, Obama noted, “already, many Libyans have joined us . . . and this attack will not break the bonds between the United States and Libya.”⁷ Still, recognizing the tragic deaths of U.S. diplomats and reaffirming the nation’s commitment to building a future Libya is on its own insufficient to consider the text crisis rhetoric. While the President certainly asserted possession of new facts about the situation, it has not been uncommon for the U.S. to cooperate with Middle Eastern or North African countries regarding terrorist activity, nor has the deaths of U.S. citizens throughout the broader War on Terror. The President’s presentation of information does, however, achieve the epideictic function of define/understand because it clarified an unusually troubling situation and fostered a clear understanding that the tragedy was being adequately dealt with.

In order to strengthen his own position and the broader position of the U.S. in the Benghazi crisis, Obama needed to demonstrate that the U.S. had only the purest motives

in Libya and that the perpetrators of the attack were ruthless, stopping at nothing to ensure its failure and destruction. To build the case that the U.S. was innocent, Obama was tasked with representing the diplomats, himself, and the nation at large. In other words, the President needed to shape a nation-wide sense of community in order to share it among all citizens who had heard about the attack in Benghazi. American diplomats, Obama said, “work tirelessly to advance the interests and values of our nation,” often forcing them to “brave great danger.”⁸ Prior to the attack, the President claimed he was engaged in similar work. Obama, earlier in the day, was busy visiting “the graves of troops who made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan at the hallowed grounds of Arlington Cemetery,” where he “had the opportunity to say thank you” for their services before nightfall when he “learned the news of this attack in Benghazi.”⁹ Finally, Obama expressed that “since our founding, the United States has been a nation that respects all faiths,” rejecting “all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others,” urging the world to “stand together to unequivocally reject these brutal acts.”¹⁰ Together, these statements conveyed that the United States in no way instigated the attacks in Benghazi because everything the nation represented could be framed around the pursuit of justice to bring about global freedom.

Conversely, the President needed to portray the perpetrators as evil-doers, separating the U.S. as far from them as possible. Condit argues that communities are sometimes identifiable by who is *outside* of them as well as whom its constitutive members are. In this regard, the President shared the nation’s sense of community by contrasting it from the villains responsible for the death of U.S. civil servants in Benghazi; characterizing the U.S. as “good,” ranging the country against the “bad.”

Obama began this process by arguing that “there is absolutely no justification to this type of senseless violence.”¹¹ Any individuals willing to commit that type of spectacular violence must be outright rejected, and justice must be served. The President promised that “we will not waver in our commitment to see that justice is done for this terrible act,” and after a pause repeated “...make no mistake, justice will be done.”¹² Even more explicitly, Obama, referring to Stevens and the other diplomats, said that “the lives these Americans led stand in stark contrast to those of their attackers.”¹³ In other words, Obama unambiguously delineated the unknown attackers from the slain U.S. diplomats by contrasting the evil-doers with individuals “who represent the very best of the United States of America.”¹⁴ Most importantly, the President affirmed that he would “bring to justice the killers who attacked our people,” cementing their identity as sworn enemies of the institutions foundational to people of the United States.

The final element of crisis discourse is shifting the troubling event from a practical to a moral context. This technique consists of praising communally-accepted ethics that reinforce the community’s purpose. Such a shift is emblematic of Condit’s display/entertain function of epideictic rhetoric because it demonstrates speakers’ leadership over a situation through their artful, persuasive language to enhance their audiences’ experiences. Obama’s rhetoric highlights the intersection between Condit’s functional pairs. Not only does the Rose Garden Address shift a practical issue to a moral context; in doing so, it instructs citizens on what they must become in light of acts of terror. Factually, the Rose Garden Address does not articulate a deliberative course of action in response to the attack, nor does it even hint at one beyond the promise for justice to be served. Instead, there is an immense focus on the moral resolve of the United

States in the face of dangerous rascallions. For example, Obama told citizens that “as Americans, let us never, ever forget that our freedom is only sustained because there are people who are willing to fight for it, to stand up for it, and in some cases, lay down their lives for it.”¹⁵ Urging citizens’ perseverance during the tragic moment, the President contended that “our country is only as strong as the character of our people and the service of those . . . who represent us around the globe.”¹⁶ If the U.S. is to remain the global protector of freedom, citizens must not let acts of terror “ever shake the resolve of this great nation, alter that character, or eclipse the light of the values that we stand for.”¹⁷ Obama argues that because of the hard work and sacrifice of U.S. diplomats, every citizen should take “great pride in the country” and recognize “that our flag represents to people around the globe who also yearn to live in freedom and with dignity” the hope for a better future.¹⁸

Given the complexities of the situation, it is difficult to assess whether the attack in Benghazi produced a *genuine* crisis. That is, the ambiguity of what actually occurred on September 11, 2012 made it problematic even for U.S. intelligence agencies to determine whether the attack highlighted a broader security threat to the nation and its people. However, hashing this question out misses the more important implication of presidential crisis rhetoric in this case study. Instead, it is more significant to ask if the events transpiring at the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi did *not* constitute a legitimate crisis to the nation because the President elevated the attack to a level of parity with the “acts of terror” that threaten to “shake the resolve of this great nation.”¹⁹ Either way, the Benghazi attack was still what Condit calls a “troubling event” and certainly brought back memories of genuine crises like the 2001 attacks on New York and the Pentagon for U.S.

citizens. Because what “was already a painful day for our nation” became worse when “the solemn memory of the 9/11 attacks” and all of its constitutive weight was revived by the Benghazi attack, Obama easily compared it to those on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon eleven years earlier. Summarily, Obama used the constitutive weight of September 11 to frame the attack in Benghazi as a crisis that threatened U.S. citizens’ way of life, the freedoms guaranteed to them, and the pursuit of justice only possible if the nation maintained firm resolve, therefore encouraging its people to remain committed to the moral vision of a “stronger America and a better world for all of our children.”²⁰

When national crises occur, the public becomes angry, afraid, and sometimes confused. The ensuing paranoia requires a leader to emerge to address them. Obama’s Rose Garden Address recognized that the attack in Benghazi exposed the nation’s vulnerability, and from that recognition the President reminded U.S. citizens who they were as a people. They were the people represented by Christopher Stevens and other brave diplomats who devoted their lives to sustaining freedom and justice around the world. As long as “their legacy will live on through . . . the hearts of those who love them,” the U.S. will move forward and become a stronger, more unified people.²¹

Elegiac Eulogy for Stevens

The President’s words were certainly encouraging, but the proclamation that justice would be served could not alone convince citizens that the crisis could be resolved. It is for this reason that Obama’s fusion of two important epideictic genres into one ceremonial occasion occurred seamlessly. Chapter 3 noted that eulogies are themselves a particular form of crisis rhetoric because the most basic need they satisfy is assigning meaning to community loss and proceeding forward from it. Approaching the

eulogy from this basic premise, however, is insufficient to capture the rhetorical strategies at play in the Rose Garden Address.

There are sharp differences between a eulogy delivered by family members of a lost loved one to a small funeral gathering and a televised eulogy for individuals that many listeners may have never heard of prior. One particularly important difference is that achieving audience identification becomes more difficult because speakers must describe the deceased persons in ways that complete strangers can relate. Eulogies delivered by the President to the nation thus possess distinct characteristics. Regarding these characteristics, Amos Kiewe notes that “presidents, in particular, are prone to the practice of conditioning memories” that citizens retain after they witness eulogies of persons that presidents recognize as special individuals.²²

Therefore, it is important to isolate and discuss four functions of presidential eulogy that assist in accomplishing this task. The first three functions, dissociating the nation from responsibility; establishing a value-laden context; and urging perseverance in present policy are borrowed from Dow. Not all eulogies are delivered in the context of a crisis, but given the rhetorical situation, it is important to understand how the President’s eulogy contributed to the impending crisis. Informing good citizenship, the fourth function, is borrowed from Gerard Hauser.²³ Because of Obama’s stature, the eulogy was not meant simply to mourn the loss of Stevens, but also to inspire U.S. citizens to emulate his civic virtues. This is the teaching function of epideictic that Hauser describes. In relation to the rhetorical situation Obama was faced with, it is important to understand how funeral orations exhibit the potential to *transcend* crises. Put another way, presidential deliver eulogies in a variety of contexts; however, in this particular situation

it functions both to remember the loss of loved ones and to explain what the community represents, and its understanding of who it is made up of in the wake of crisis situations.

One of the core controversies surrounding the attack in Benghazi was whether or not the U.S. could have prevented it. It remains unclear whether intelligence agencies believed the attack was spontaneous or premeditated. Although the Rose Garden Address does not address the issue directly, Obama ensured citizens that in the aftermath of the attack “we’re working . . . to secure our diplomats” and to “increase security at diplomatic posts around the world.”²⁴ Further, U.S. civil servants could not have been responsible for the violence in Benghazi because they “stood up for freedom and human dignity,” striving to bring peace to those “who also yearn to live in freedom and with dignity.”²⁵ On the contrary, Stevens and the other diplomats were unconditionally dedicated to assisting Libyans “striving to emerge from the recent experience of war” in a country battered and war-torn by the Qaddafi regime.²⁶ To admit that the U.S. had not been prepared for the attack or that the diplomats engaged in provocative activities would be a concession of complicity. The eulogy needed to reflect that the nation had not simply let the attack slip through the cracks and that the slain diplomats never saw their death coming.

Eulogies offer excellent opportunities for leaders to inject value-laden claims into what might appear as pre-dominantly political issues, providing them an additional means of reacting to crisis situations. When celebrating the lives of fallen citizens, eulogies tend to focus less on the lived experiences of individuals and more on the qualities of those people that resulted in their significant contributions and achievements. This is not to say funeral orations completely ignore or sideline lived experiences; rather, they play a more

supportive role by enhancing the credibility of the claims speakers make about their subject's character. By illuminating and prioritizing the eulogized persons' remarkable qualities, speakers commemorate the values that define individuals' experiences.

Commenting on the "use of epideictic to revise collective memory and to transform the image of a model American," Cindy Koenig Richards contends that commemoration evokes "a powerful communal identification" because it celebrates "an icon" of "traditional values" through "a complex rhetorical performance" that reconstitutes "the membership of a public community."²⁷ The eulogy itself reinforces communal bonds between an otherwise widely diverse series of populations.

President Obama recognized that Stevens "built partnerships with Libyan revolutionaries, and helped them as they planned to build a new Libya;" but this was only possible because of Stevens' "characteristic skill, courage, and resolve" that set him apart from other U.S. civil servants.²⁸ Stevens' death in Benghazi was particularly tragic "because it is a city that he helped to save;" but more importantly, "he worked tirelessly to support this young democracy" because he was an exemplary diplomat.²⁹ Certainly Stevens' lived experiences in Libya reflect his dedication as a U.S. Ambassador, but those experiences may be inaccessible to the community at large. Therefore, Obama carefully attached Stevens' actions to character qualities, courage and resolve, that U.S. citizens should strive to have themselves. In other words, the President focused his efforts on describing the type of values "these extraordinary Americans" possessed that allowed them to put their lives on the line for the cause of the nation.³⁰

Obama's Rose Garden Address does not offer a policy prescription in response to the attack in Benghazi, but the text did urge citizens to persevere and support the nation's

existing goals. In wake of the attack, Obama told the country that “today, the American people stand united,” arguing that such fortitude was necessary to move forward in troubling times. Further, the President did not argue that the U.S. needed to change course. On the contrary, Obama said we must “continue their work” that brought hope and democracy to Libyan revolutionaries for people around the globe.³¹ If those goals were to be achieved, Obama argued, the U.S. and its people must “not waver in our commitment to see that justice done for this terrible act” and others which will inevitably threaten the nation-wide community. Despite the bloodshed and instability in Libya, Obama reminded citizens that “many Libyans have joined us” in alleviating the North African country’s woes and those Libyans would fight back “against the attackers alongside Americans.”³² All in all, Obama did not present a policy to put into place in response to the attack in Benghazi. Doing so may have been a tragic mistake since the attack had occurred only hours prior and a misstep could have resulted in political suicide. Instead, the President reassured citizens that the loss of an important U.S. life was not in vain; Stevens’ contributions made an unstable part of the world a better place and continuing that branch of work would prove crucial to maintaining that stability in the future.

Despite the lack of a policy proposal, there were political implications for Obama’s Rose Garden Address. Kiewe argues that “eulogies have been used throughout history as political tools . . . the *encomium* has political objectives embedded in the intersection between character and ideology.”³³ If the eulogist convinces listeners that they ought to emulate the actions of their lost loved ones or the nation’s most heroic figures, then they have inspired more than just judgment on the honor or dishonor of

those persons; the eulogist has encouraged the community to act a certain way and frame their politics in similar fashion. This valorization, Kiewe contends, is how “the user of epideictic . . . can advance political objectives without necessarily resorting to overt partisan advocacy. Persuasion, in this sense, can succeed when generated by an appealing narrative as distinct of an overt advocacy.”³⁴ Therefore, even when it appears the President is urging citizens to continue their support for the policies present in the status quo, it is erroneous to write off the presence of a political agenda. After all, epideictic rhetoric satisfies both the needs of audiences and the corresponding speakers.

The focus of Obama’s eulogy for Stevens reflected on his qualities as a civil servant of the U.S. and not his lived experiences because those were less relatable to citizens tuned into the Rose Garden Address. These characteristics; skill; courage; and resolve represent qualities of ideal citizens. Speaking on the power of embodying U.S. civic virtues, Richards argues that by associating characters “with traditional US symbols and heroes,” displaying them “as a model of civic values such as courage, duty, and progress,” epideictic rhetoric offers a performance that is “aesthetically appealing and culturally resonant” because it evokes an identity that draws its norms from the nation’s heritage.³⁵ Hauser argues that the noble qualities presented in epideictic address should benefit the community, where acts of courage and the pursuit of justice are the most powerful because they embody virtues that resonate through the entire community.³⁶ Obama praised Stevens in such a way that listeners were being taught the necessary components of good citizenship. Eulogies have immense capacity to illuminate this reflection because they celebrate the lives of extraordinary individuals whom listeners

ought to strive to become. If successful, eulogies can inculcate a language of excellence that listeners seek to assimilate themselves into.

Stevens' eulogy was no exception. Speaking of Stevens' civic engagement, Obama argued that "he was a role model to all who worked with him and to the young diplomats who aspire to walk in his footsteps."³⁷ It was not only young diplomats who looked up to Stevens; Obama was quick to point out that both he and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "relied deeply on his knowledge of the situation on the ground" in Benghazi and trusted his leadership skills as the U.S. Ambassador to Libya.³⁸ Stevens and the other diplomats thus became concrete representations of what citizens ought to be, and the nation-wide community was invited to share in their optimism for a better world.

Eulogies are, without doubt, the way many listeners will remember their deceased loved ones or heroes. The powerful words spoken by Obama celebrating Stevens' and the other diplomats' lives cemented the legacy of courageous civil servants fighting for a freer world. Obama admitted that "the loss of these four Americans is fresh," but ensured listeners that "our memories of them linger on."³⁹ Not only would these memories survive through the President and the loved ones remembering them, Obama also had "no doubt that their legacy will live on through the work that they did far from our shores."⁴⁰ Explicitly, the President engaged in collective remembering for the departed diplomats when he claimed that "we grieve with their families" and we will "carry on their memory," continuing their tireless efforts to advance a more peaceful world for all of its children.⁴¹ Summarily, Obama's eulogy of Stevens and the other diplomats killed in the Benghazi attack dissociated the nation from complicity in the crisis; assigned the values of courage and resolve to the struggle in Libya; and urged citizens to carry on the

memory of the civil servants by striving to emulate their exemplary characteristics as ideal public figures.

A Tumultuous Time at Town Hall

On October 16, 2012, incumbent President Obama and Republican Governor Romney met at Hofstra University in New York for the second presidential debate. This debate was particularly important to Obama because of the widespread perception that Romney “won” the first contest. Even *CNN*, a news outlet generally geared toward liberal viewers, produced a poll after the debate showing that 67% of respondents believed Romney was victorious and only 25% thought Obama performed better.⁴² According to George Lakoff of the *Huffington Post*, “You don’t win a presidential debate by being a policy wonk. Obama violated all the basics of presidential debating.”⁴³ A few of these “basics” are remarkably similar to the characteristics and functions of epideictic rhetoric. What Obama lacked, Lakoff argues, was a clear statement of his moral values that contrasted Romney’s; a projection of empathy and enthusiasm that connected with listeners, and an authentic view of himself that the public could identify with and be proud of.⁴⁴ Instead of doing this, Obama just “talked about policy details.”⁴⁵ As Robert Rowland argues, commenting on the first presidential debate between Obama and Romney, “Carefully explaining positions or providing nuanced explanations not only did not help Obama but it hurt him” because viewers have developed a disdain for even modestly complicated arguments that are “brain bruising television.”⁴⁶

Lakoff’s criticism, at first glance, seems misplaced because the debates *were* about policy issues. For the second debate, the Gallup Organization sifted through a group of undecided voters and invited 82 of them to attend the small, intimate town hall

setting that Obama and Romney competed in. Candy Crowley from *CNN* moderated audience questions and the candidates' responses. Each question was supposed to deal with domestic policy issues, similar to the first debate. This is because the third and final debate was reserved exclusively for international issues. According to *CNN* correspondent Tom Cohen's analysis of the debate, the issues discussed in the town hall event included: taxes; unemployment; jobs; the national debt; energy production and independence; women's rights; health care, and immigration.⁴⁷ One foreign policy issue, however, did manage to slip into the debate; the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Not only did Crowley allow the question, it became one of the most intense, escalatory moments of the night.

That the Benghazi question was strictly a foreign policy matter was not the only thing separating it from the rest of the questions asked throughout the debate. Instead of focusing on what each candidate would do to improve diplomat security or the situation in Libya, both Obama and Romney were fixated on a prior speech, the Rose Garden Address. Even if every other question in the debate fostered discussion of the expediency or in expediency of each nominee's agenda, the Benghazi portion of the event had no evidence of some future expediency or in expediency; no suggested policy, and no desirable outcome for listeners to hang their hats on. This was true of both Obama and Romney's responses to the question. Instead, the tragedy that killed four U.S. diplomats a month earlier was used by both candidates to attack the credibility of one another's leadership on national security and terrorism. In other words, Obama and Romney bashed one another's suitability as the potential commander in chief.

The town hall debate was intended to clarify Obama's and Romney's domestic platforms as presidential candidates. Why then did both contenders abandon their agendas in favor of jabs at one another's credibility on the Benghazi issue? As Chapter 3 argued earlier, each candidate's ultimate goal in the debate was to persuade voters that he was the ideal national leader and possessed the best skills to make expedient decisions for the country. Listeners were tasked with deciding who did the better debating not only because of how well the candidates' agendas lined up with their own, but also because either Obama or Romney exhibited the ethos necessary to occupy the Oval Office. Audience members were voting for which person won the debate, not which policies they supported.

Certainly voters have personal politics and the platforms of the candidates influenced how those citizens initially perceived them. Still, voters are not legislators deciding which agenda items will become law; rather, they are deciding which individual will be elected to enact those policies in the future. Surely Obama and Romney argued about the expediency of their own agendas and the in expediency of their opponent's, but this demonstrated that each candidate wielded political rhetoric as a means to achieving ceremonial ends—enhancing his own ethos as a national leader in the eyes of citizens. As Dow concludes, “all discourses that discuss policy are not necessarily deliberative.”⁴⁸ In short, the town hall debate on Benghazi was a pre-dominantly epideictic event; the candidates used the failures of their opponent's deliberative policies as a means to achieve an epideictic ends of enhancing their ethos, leaving listeners to make judgment on the honorability of the contenders as worthy or unworthy of becoming President of the United States.

When Kerry Ladka asked Obama about “reports that the State Department refused extra security for our embassy in Benghazi, Libya, prior to the attacks that killed four Americans,” the debate shifted dramatically.⁴⁹ What followed was a heated argument between Obama and Romney, immediately personalized by the issues of the President’s responsibility for the attack and his response at the Rose Garden. In this regard, I argue that the Benghazi question ought to be treated as an epideictic moment of the debate, even if deliberative elements are identifiable throughout the dialogue. The shift from the candidates’ number-crunching on tax policy to Romney challenging Obama’s worthiness of the presidency in light of the attack in Benghazi exemplifies the discussion of Paul I. Rosenthal’s personal and non-personal persuasion in Chapter 3. Instead of arguing that Obama’s *policy* lacked clarity or cohesiveness, Romney directly attacked Obama’s *ethos*; using Benghazi as a vehicle for the message that the President was responsible for the eroding primacy and credibility of the United States. This, Michael Leff and Gerald P. Mohrmann conclude, is precisely the type of situation where the audience may be under the impression that the purpose of the debate is to gain adherence to specific policies, but the treatment of those individual agenda items is subsidiary to achieving identification between speakers and listeners.

Since Ladka’s question was for Obama, he had the first opportunity to address the issue. Obama did not begin his answer with an explanation of the security procedures for the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. Instead, Obama said:

Well, let me first of all talk about our diplomats, because they serve all around the world and do an incredible job in a very dangerous situation. And these aren’t just representatives of the United States, they are *my* representatives. I send them there, oftentimes into harm’s way. I know these folks and I know their families. So *nobody* is more concerned about their safety and security than I am [emphasis added].⁵⁰

The president strategically chose to begin the answer this way because it established two important details. First, Obama illustrated once again that U.S. diplomats were extraordinary individuals who risked their lives for the safety and security of the nation and that they braved danger all over the world on a daily basis. Second, and more significantly, Obama let listeners know that he had a personal connection not only to the departed diplomats, but also their families. This signaled that the President cared deeply and compassionately for those who lost loved ones and that he had the upmost concern for resolving the crisis caused by the attack in Benghazi. Obama made sure to mention that a few days after the attack, he “was there greeting the caskets coming into Andrews Air Force Base and grieving with the families.”⁵¹

While Obama had kindhearted words for the slain civil servants and their families, the same could not be said about how the President characterized Romney’s response to the attack. “While we were still dealing with our diplomats being threatened,” Obama noted, “Romney put out a press release trying to make political points, and that’s not how a *commander in chief* operates. You don’t turn national security into a political issue. Certainly not when it’s happening [emphasis added].”⁵² The President made a crystal clear argument that Romney did not deserve to be commander in chief because the Republican nominee was more concerned with his own political gain than the untimely death of outstanding U.S. diplomats. In other words, Obama was attempting to portray to viewers that he held close relationships with important citizens, who held him in high esteem; but, Romney ignored them and therefore had no connection with the individuals who Obama had mourned for at the Rose Garden.

Romney sought to fire Obama's criticism right back at him. On the day following the attack, Romney claimed, Obama flew "to Las Vegas for a political fund-raiser, then the next day to Colorado for another . . . political event. I think these – these actions taken by a president and a leader have symbolic significance and perhaps even material significance."⁵³ The strategy behind Romney's accusation was to highlight that Obama was not being completely truthful about his political motives; that Obama too sought to gain credibility from the attack, and that he continued his election campaign as if nothing had occurred. Although Romney had little to say about Obama's established relationship with the families of the departed diplomats, he did mention that he felt "very deeply sympathetic for the families of those who lost loved ones."⁵⁴ In short, with regards to the diplomats and their families, both candidates expressed sympathy over what had happened; each candidate accused the other of prioritizing politics over the people; but, while Romney only forwarded a criticism blaming Obama, the President praised himself for the time and effort he had put forward getting to know the families and illustrating concern for their wellbeing in addition to pointing out the dishonor of Romney's actions.

Crowley offered Obama an opportunity to deflect the blame for the attack onto Hillary Clinton when she asked, "your secretary of state, as I'm sure you know, has said that she takes full responsibility for the attack on the diplomatic mission in Benghazi. Does the buck stop with your secretary of state as far as what went on here?"⁵⁵ Obama opted not to do so; instead he noted that "Clinton has done an extraordinary job. But she works for me. I'm the president and I'm *always* responsible, and that's why nobody's more interested in finding out exactly what happened than I do [emphasis added]."⁵⁶ This also provided the President with an opportunity to deal a heavy blow to Romney's

credibility on the question of pursuing self-gain over caring about the slain civil servants and their families. Obama added, “and the suggestion that anybody in my team, whether the Secretary of State, our U.N. Ambassador, anybody on my team would play politics or mislead when we’ve lost four of our own, governor, is offensive. That’s not what we do. That’s not what I do as president, that’s not what I do as Commander in Chief.”⁵⁷

After Obama spoke about the civil servants and their families, the President attempted to make a more concerted effort to respond to Ladka’s question:

. . . as soon as we found out that the Benghazi consulate was being overrun, I was on the phone with my national security team and I gave them three instructions. Number one, beef up our security and procedures, not just in Libya, but at every embassy and consulate in the region. Number two, investigate exactly what happened, regardless of where the facts lead us, to make sure folks are held accountable and it doesn’t happen again. And number three, we are going to find out who did this and we’re going to hunt them down, because one of the things that I’ve said throughout my presidency is when folks mess with Americans, we go after them.⁵⁸

Each of Obama’s three instructions illustrates the ways that leaders use questions of expediency to enhance their ethos. First, the President immediately ordered enhanced security at all locations that could have become vulnerable in wake of the attack. While substantively this did not address Ladka’s concern with security measures *before* the attack, it does demonstrate Obama’s expedient reaction and his intelligence as a leader because he called for bolstered security at other potential targets as well. Second, Obama’s demand for an answer about what had occurred regardless of whether the result would hurt his image showed that he was putting citizens’ lives above his political posture. Not only did he call for the truth, the President commanded that the perpetrators be identified and that the military ensured no further attacks would occur.

Finally, Obama reminded viewers that he was serious about eliminating threats to the nation when he announced that if the attackers were identified they would be hunted down. To support this claim, Obama argued that “when it comes to our national security, I mean what I say.”⁵⁹ Obama cited some empirical examples:

. . . not everybody agrees with some of the decisions I’ve made. But . . . I said I’d end the war in Libya – in – in Iraq, and I did. I said that we’d go after al-Qaeda and bin Laden, we have. I said we’d transition out of Afghanistan, and start making sure that Afghans are responsible for their own security, that’s what I’m doing. And when it comes to this issue, when I say that we are going to find out exactly what happened, everybody will be held accountable. And I am ultimately responsible for what’s taking place there because these are my folks, and I’m the one who has to greet those coffins when they come home. You know that I mean what I say.⁶⁰

Again, these are all examples of Obama tying his national security policies to himself; the President refers to himself twelve times in this relatively short passage. This is about Obama, not his policies, and therefore why this is an epideictic moment, not a deliberative one. The President is not using these examples as independent reasons listeners ought to vote for him. Instead, these are proclamations of leadership that provide him with pragmatic evidence that he is well-equipped to handle some of the greatest challenges U.S. presidents have ever faced.

Romney did not address each of Obama’s examples, but he did offer a criticism of the way the President had handled national security issues abroad. This criticism began with the Massachusetts Governor quoting the President, identifying that he “said correctly that the buck does stop at his desk and – and he takes responsibility for – for that – for the failure in providing those security resources” that could have prevented the deaths of U.S. citizens.⁶¹ Not only did Obama fail in Benghazi, Romney argued, but “the president’s policies throughout the Middle East began with an apology tour and . . . this

strategy is unraveling before our very eyes,” evidenced by the ease with which the attack in Benghazi occurred.⁶² Given what had happened in Benghazi, the Republican contender argued:

. . . this calls into question the president’s whole policy in the Middle East. Look what’s happening in Syria, in Egypt, now in Libya. Consider the distance between ourselves and – and Israel, the president said that – that he was going to put daylight between us and Israel. We have Iran four years closer to a nuclear bomb. Syria – Syria’s not just a tragedy of 30,000 civilians being killed by a military, but also a strategic – strategically significant player for America.⁶³

There is a clear critique of the President’s ability to resolve a number of important international issues; but again, Romney’s purpose in identifying the weaknesses of Obama’s foreign policy is to tarnish his credibility as an individual deserving to be elected, not to urge a change of course. Governor Romney never offered an alternative to any of the problems he identified.

Both candidates had plenty of ammunition to fire at their opponent with the goal of reducing his opponent’s ethos as a leader. Neither Obama nor Romney made much attempt to address the particular criticisms being forwarded from either side. However, one major slip on Romney’s behalf unraveled any credibility he may have built with listeners. The Republican nominee argued that the attack itself was only part of the problem emerging from Benghazi:

There were other issues associated with this – with this tragedy. There were many days that passed before we knew whether this was a spontaneous demonstration or actually whether it was a terrorist attack. And there was no demonstration involved. It was a terrorist attack and it took a long time for that to be told to the American people. Whether there was some misleading, or instead whether we just didn’t know what happened, you have to ask yourself why didn’t we know five days later when the ambassador to the United Nations went on TV to say that this was a demonstration. How could we have not known?⁶⁴

Romney was clearly referring to the massive uncertainty seen in the media immediately following the first signs that the attack had occurred. Indeed, as Chapter 2 discussed in detail, there were multiple competing stories of what had transpired on the night of September 11, 2012. However, the governor did not select his words in this hard press very carefully, and it came at a cost.

Obama retorted by reminding Romney and listeners that “the day after the attack, governor, I stood in the Rose Garden and I told the American people in the world that we are going to find out exactly what happened. That this was an act of terror and I also said that we’re going to hunt down those who committed this crime.”⁶⁵ Romney, under the impression he had just gotten the golden opportunity to fact-check Obama and embarrass him on national television, paused and said he thought it was interesting that “the president just said something which – which is that on the day after the attack he went into the Rose Garden and said that this was an act of terror.”⁶⁶ The dialogue that followed did not proceed as Romney anticipated it would:

Obama: That’s what I said.

Romney: You said in the Rose Garden the day after the attack, it was an act of terror. It was not a spontaneous demonstration, is that what you’re saying?

Obama: Please proceed governor.

Romney: I want to make sure we get that for the record because it took the president 14 days before he called the attack in Benghazi an act of terror.

Obama: Get the transcript.

Crowley: It – it – it – he did in fact, sir. So let me – let me call it an act of terror.

Obama: Can you say that a little louder, Candy?⁶⁷

Worded differently, Romney’s initial accusation could have completely devastated Obama’s ethos on the Benghazi question. The initial argument the Republican nominee was attempting to make was that there were severe discrepancies within the Obama Administration about what had transpired. Romney noted that the U.N. Ambassador, five

days after Stevens' death, reported on television that the attack in Benghazi occurred spontaneously because of a demonstration in response to a film critical of Muslims.⁶⁸ Had Romney conceded that Obama called it an act of terror, this would have provided him with more than ample opportunity to criticize the inconsistencies of the Obama Administration on the Benghazi issue.

Unfortunately for Romney, he chose to focus on whether or not Obama called the attack an act of terror. When Crowley cited the transcript, demonstrating that Obama had in fact labeled it an act of terror, Romney's strategy completely backfired. Any ethos Romney had built up at this point was instantly shattered; and conversely, any trouble Obama may have been in had been taken care of thanks in part to Governor Romney. Crowley, attempting to act as a fair moderator, pointed out that while Obama "did call it an act of terror. It did as well take – it did as well take two weeks or so for the whole idea there being a riot out there about his tape to come out. You are correct about that."⁶⁹ Despite this, Romney once again uttered that "this – the administration – the administration indicated this was a reaction to a video and was a spontaneous reaction . . . it took them a long time to say this was a terrorist act by a terrorist group. And to suggest – am I incorrect in that regard, on Sunday the – your secretary . . . ;" but, before he could finish Obama cut him off by simply saying "Candy?"⁷⁰

Realizing he had put himself in an extremely poor position, Romney tried to backpedal by interjecting "Excuse me. The ambassador of the United Nations went on the Sunday television shows and spoke about how..." but he could not finish his statement before a rapid back and forth began between himself and Obama, all the while Crowley

was attempting to move to the next question.⁷¹ Neither candidate successfully uttered another complete sentence before Crowley ended the discussion on Benghazi.

Had Romney buckled down on the discrepancies between Obama and the U.N. Ambassador, the issue could have turned another way. Romney could have exposed a major inconsistency with the potential to harm the President's credibility in front of a nation-wide audience. However, Obama was able to dodge the controversy and this made him look much more credible on the issue than he may have even been prior to the debate. As Chapter 3 discussed, it is impossible to determine the winner or loser of a presidential debate by the probability that the audience adopts their policy platforms. Instead, critics must examine these texts as pieces of a larger, ongoing process that speakers engage in to build achieve the maximum level of audience adherence. Obama invested a substantial amount of time reciting examples of his leadership throughout his presidency; and in conjunction, easily exploited a major mishap on the part of Romney. Romney, given his massive blunder on the issue, could not capture the visible, ritualistic function of ceremonial rhetoric. As such, Obama capitalized on Romney's mistakes guaranteeing that, at least on the Benghazi question, he was the sole possessor of an ethos necessary to lead the nation forward that could be trusted by citizens.

At no point during the Benghazi debate did either candidate hint at how they would handle similar situations in the future. When Romney issued a personal attack on Obama about what he had said in the Rose Garden, the debate slid away from the policy and focused almost exclusively on each candidate's credibility. This portion of the town hall debate illustrates that campaign orations rely on arguments about the expediency or in expediency of policies to enhance their ethos. Had the debaters been tasked with

solving the problem, they would have performed differently; Obama and Romney would have articulated reasons that their credibility as leaders was sufficient evidence to prefer their respective policies. Instead, Obama referred to his previous endeavors to demonstrate that he was the superior candidate for President of the United States and Romney attempted to challenge those depictions.

This chapter examines the town hall debate on Benghazi as an epideictic moment. Such an interpretation is at odds with some conventional wisdom that suggests presidential debates are pre-dominantly deliberative, not epideictic. My analysis is not intended to detract from these texts being examined in such a fashion. However, particularly in the context of the Benghazi question in the debate examined here, the speech responds to the immediate rhetorical problem of a political campaign that determines who becomes the next President of the United States, not what policies should or should not be supported. In other words, there are certainly important reasons for studying policy arguments and how they affect groups such as single-issue voters. But, as Condit notes, “if we were to be so bold as to proclaim presidential debates to be epideictic speeches, we would recognize their importance, not as policy arguments, or even as opportunities for aligning interests, but rather as one of our best chances to judge the eloquence—the broad humane capacities—of a would-be leader.”⁷²

Conclusion

The functions of contemporary presidential epideictic rhetoric are made readily apparent by examining Obama’s persuasive strategies at the Rose Garden and in the town hall debate. Although it is unlikely the President has taken a crash course in ceremonial rhetoric, there is strong evidence that Obama defined the attack in Benghazi in a fashion

that would reach the largest possible audience, composed of U.S. citizens whose moral compass reflected the heritage of the United States. By displaying robust leadership in a troubling time and artfully commemorating the loss of Christopher Stevens, Obama stretched the daily experiences of listeners by encouraging them to acquiesce to the types of behaviors, actions, and beliefs that made Stevens and the other departed diplomats ideal U.S. citizens.

This analysis does not make any claims about the effectiveness of the Rose Garden Address or town hall debate. There is too much potential for alternative causality to make that sort of judgment. Instead, examining these texts highlights an important pattern in presidential ceremonial discourse; leaders will reach into the past and draw from it powerful moments to explain confusing events in the present. These explanations serve not only a clarifying effect for citizens, they also frame issues in particular ways that allow leaders to tell citizens who they are, what they represent, and how that heritage will continue in the face of threats. The capacity for leaders to have such sway over their people is significant not because they can urge better policies; but rather, because they possess the authority to tell an entire population who they are. In short, eloquent ceremonial rhetoric provides authoritative figures with the power of the teacher; an individual who decides what is virtuous and what is evil. Given this incredible responsibility, critics must continue to pay close attention to the ways U.S. presidents characterize the state of society to understand who citizens are, what their purpose is, and why they have come to accept that identity and determination.

Notes

¹ Carolyn Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70 (1984): 164.

² Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/12/remarks-president-deaths-us-embassy-staff-libya>. Paragraphs numbered. Paragraph 8.

³ Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53 (1989): 297.

⁴ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 2.

⁵ David Ignatius, "Casualties in the 'Fog of Revolution,'" *Washington Post*, 2012, Lexis Nexis.

⁶ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 3.

⁷ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 5.

⁸ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 1.

⁹ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 8.

¹⁰ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 10.

¹³ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 11.

¹⁴ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 10.

¹⁵ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 10.

¹⁸ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 11.

¹⁹ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 10.

²⁰ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 12.

²¹ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 7.

²² Amos Kiewe, “Framing Memory through Eulogy: Ronald Reagan’s Long Good-bye,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 249.

²³ Gerard A. Hauser, “Aristotle on Epideictic: The Formation of Public Morality,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 29 (1999): 14.

²⁴ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 3.

²⁵ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 11.

²⁶ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 7.

²⁷ Cindy Koenig Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea: Public Women and the Transformative Potential of Epideictic Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Communication*, 73 (2009): 17.

²⁸ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 2.

³¹ Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 12.

³² Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya,” Paragraph 5.

- ³³ Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy," 250.
- ³⁴ Kiewe, "Framing Memory through Eulogy," 251.
- ³⁵ Richards, "Inventing Sacagawea," 8.
- ³⁶ Hauser, "Aristotle on Epideictic," 14.
- ³⁷ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 6.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 7.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya," Paragraph 12.
- ⁴² Richard Adams, "First US Presidential Debate: Obama and Romney – as it Happened," *The Guardian*, 04 October 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/03/obama-romney-first-debate-live>.
- ⁴³ George Lakoff, "Why Obama Lost the First Debate," *Huffington Post*, 04 October 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-lakoff/obama-first-debate-loss_b_1938734.html
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Robert Rowland, "The First 2012 Presidential Campaign Debate: The Decline of Reason in Presidential Debates," *Communication Studies*, 64 (2013): 542.
- ⁴⁷ Tom Cohen, "It All Shows: Debates do Matter in 2012," *CNN*, 23 October 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/23/politics/debates-matter/index.html>
- ⁴⁸ Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," 308.
- ⁴⁹ "Second Presidential Debate," *National Public Radio*, 16 October 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/10/16/163050988/transcript-obama-romney-2nd-presidential-debate>. Paragraphs Numbered. Paragraph 10.
- ⁵⁰ "Second Presidential Debate," Paragraph 12.

⁵¹ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 31.

⁵² “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 17.

⁵³ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 22-23.

⁵⁴ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 20.

⁵⁵ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 28.

⁵⁶ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 29.

⁵⁷ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 32.

⁵⁸ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 13-16.

⁵⁹ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 17.

⁶⁰ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 17-18.

⁶¹ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 20.

⁶² “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 26.

⁶³ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 24-25.

⁶⁴ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 20-21.

⁶⁵ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 30.

⁶⁶ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 36.

⁶⁷ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 36-44.

⁶⁸ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 20-21.

⁶⁹ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 45.

⁷⁰ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraphs 46-49.

⁷¹ “Second Presidential Debate,” Paragraph 50.

⁷² Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar,” *Communication Quarterly*, 33 (1985): 291.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS ON CONTEMPORARY PRESIDENTIAL EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

The goal of this thesis project was to investigate the rhetorical implications of Barack Obama's Rose Garden Address and his response to the Benghazi question in the town hall debate between the President and Republican Nominee Mitt Romney as epideictic events. This chapter discusses the important conclusions reached from analyzing the two events as epideictic. In addition, this chapter provides insight for future analyses wishing to critique ceremonial rhetoric.

First and foremost, this thesis helps to make sense of two recent rhetorical events. Although the Benghazi attack garnered significant media attention, rhetorical scholars have not sufficiently investigated the controversy. It is easy to describe Obama's Rose Garden speech as epideictic, but this analysis augments that characterization by exploring the presence of two distinct genres, crisis rhetoric and eulogy. The town hall debate is, at first glance, more difficult to distinguish as ceremonial. However, interpreting Obama's response to the Benghazi question as an epideictic moment contributes to a greater understanding of the presidential debate overall. Even if presidential debates can be seen as genuinely deliberative, that does not mean they should be seen *only* as deliberative. Viewing them through an epideictic lens can reveal implications that are not otherwise apparent.

Rhetorical acts can have meaning in many ways, so criticism must take many forms. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues, "the activity of criticism is rendered more complicated by the fact that rhetorical and communicative acts are, themselves,

complex.”¹ “The combative, conflicting, dialectical character of criticism in our discipline,” Campbell notes, “is a function of the qualities and characteristics of rhetorical and communicative acts.”² In other words, there is often a multiplicity of dimensions and meaning present in any text; analyzing all of them requires a variety of analytical approaches to fully grasp or exhaust a given text. Northrup Frye’s work on literary criticism is easily applied to rhetorical criticism. Literary criticism, Frye argues, must be polymorphous because literary events are polysemous in nature.³ Campbell contends that Frye’s understanding of literature is how critics of rhetoric ought to understand rhetorical events. Therefore, Campbell concludes, “Long-standing interest in the study of movements and more recent interest in the study of campaigns and genres reflect a recognition by rhetorical critics and students of persuasion that acts mean as members of groups in addition to the meanings they have as unique acts.”⁴ In short, rhetorical acts can be viewed as discrete efforts to produce specific results, as members of a genre, as historical artifacts, as artistic creations, and so on. To say there is only one way of apprehending a given text is short-sighted and counter-productive.

Surely presidential debates can be viewed as deliberative, but to foreclose the possibility of examining them as epideictic is to eliminate the possibility of discovering rhetorical patterns and strategies that would otherwise be left uncovered. Future research would benefit from analyzing the deliberative elements of the town hall debate. However, this project takes Celeste M. Condit’s advice and investigates the text as epideictic. The Benghazi question was a test of the candidates’ credibility, and thus a test of their suitability to be President of the United States, not their policies. Campbell articulates:

Because of the complexity of rhetorical and communicative acts, theoretical and methodological perspectives must vary in order to account for their many

dimensions. In the case of rhetorical and communication, the existence of a single, dominant “paradigm” is evidence of disciplinary senility. Criticism of such a unitary modality is a sign of returning health, and competition among a variety of perspectives is indicative of maturity and vigor.⁵

In short, critics should investigate texts from every possible angle to inspire an on-going conversation in the field about the state of rhetorical theory and how it assists in revealing significant symbolic patterns.

A second important implication regards the scope of epideictic discourse. This analysis makes evident the interpenetration between epideictic address and the ever-emerging body of research on public memory. Although some form of these connections has been made elsewhere, they do not make explicit connections between public memory and presidential crisis rhetoric, eulogy, and campaign events. Further, the texts examined in this thesis are connected by the public memory of September 11, 2001. Public memory does not necessarily depend on epideictic rhetoric to sustain itself, but all ceremonial discourse in some way draws upon or influences collective remembering.

Each of Condit’s functional pairs relies upon public memory. When leaders define troubling events, they explain them in *pre-existing* terms so that their entire audience has a means of understanding what has occurred. That is not to say that such definitions do not change the meaning of the original event. On the contrary, the collective understanding of events shifts over time and adapts from past to present. The memory of September 11, Edward Casey argues, has become a “*stabilitas loci*, a place for further and future remembering” that is both “actual” and “memorial” because it has adapted and evolved beyond its “given occasion.”⁶ In other words, the collective memory of September 11, 2001, among U.S. citizens has continually provided leaders with opportunities to explain troubling events to the public. Casey concludes that because of

this, September 11 has become a deictic marker by a “consolidated memorial mass” that functions as a “station in the American public’s sense of significant events in the early twenty-first century.”⁷ When the World Trade Center and Pentagon were attacked on September 11, it became what Casey calls “a major node in the horizontal structure” of United States history that continues to extend itself.⁸

Memorialization of September 11 has repeatedly served as a vehicle for leaders to shape and share a sense of community in the United States. Empirically the public memory of September 11 has transcended bitter, partisan politics and brought the public together. Commenting on the power of collective remembering, Barbie Zelizer notes that this is how memory’s defining mark is constituted; it continually evolves across time and space threading linkages between events from the past for “present-day aims.”⁹ It is significant that the assault in Benghazi was on the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Zelizer contends that time is a social construction which constitutes memory through temporal patterning in communities’ historical consciousness.¹⁰ When commemorative dates and events collapse on one another, they form a linear connection even if one had not existed prior. This is likely what Casey means when he refers to September 11 as a new nodal point in U.S. history because it serves both to connect to the past and orient the future.

Collective remembering is an ongoing, never-ending process. Certainly individual memories fade from and enter into existence, but the rhetorical acts communities engage in continues through other shared pasts. Communities, then, may even form or dissolve because of their remembering or forgetting of particular memories. This is because, Zelizer argues, “remembering is no longer seen as a finite activity;” instead “it is seen as

a process that is constantly unfolding, changing, and transforming” and “continually evolving across many points in time and space.”¹¹ Memory’s constitutive defining mark is that “memories confront each other, intermingle, fuse, or erase each other, according to the destiny of the societies whose identity they help define.”¹² In short, the public memory of September 11 has afforded leaders, Obama in particular, opportunities to extend the lineage of the original attacks on New York and the Pentagon; reaffirming the messages which have taught citizens who we are and what we embody in troubling times ever since.

Memories rooted in the September 11, 2001, attacks illustrate both how leaders praise extraordinary individuals who sacrificed their lives and blame ideologies that oppose the identity holding together U.S. citizens. In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the phrase “never forget” circulated throughout public discussion. Obama echoed this sentiment in wake of the Benghazi attack by urging citizens that the nation will not allow these attacks to continue happening. In other words, the ideology behind the extermination of communities and the institutions defining who they are is not limited to the likes of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. One important purpose of public memory in epideictic rhetoric, then, is to promote civically-engaged communities which strive to protect the U.S. from contrasting, authoritarian ideologies. Uncovering such an avenue of exploration for critics suggests that there are additional functions of epideictic rhetoric that go beyond classical oratory. This is not to say classical studies of ceremonial discourse are not useful; rather, contemporary studies borrow tools from classical rhetoric and build on them by using the past to build a present that provides a more insightful future.

Condit's display/entertain function highlights the ways epideictic speakers demonstrate their leadership over the object of praise or blame while also enhancing the experience of listeners. Titling the function for listeners "entertainment" is slightly misleading. Entertainment implies a degree of passivity where spectators in the audience either applaud or belittle, but make no conclusion. The overarching purpose of ceremonial rhetoric is to invite listeners' judgment regarding the worthiness of an object's honor or the reverse. Therefore, the audience is not simply "entertained," but instead *pushed* to manifest such a judgment. As Chapter 3 noted, the pair "display/manifestation" more closely reflects the epideictic function at play. Leaders display mastery over iconic discursive figures and manifest a particular audience judgment by encouraging them to appreciate and emulate those figures when they praise them for their achievements or honors. Condit even explains that displays of eloquence produce "a manifestation" of the qualities speakers praise and leaders who cite them therefore produce "a sign of them."¹³ In short, leaders embody their leadership in displays of eloquence that manifest a vision of who the community is and how they will move forward in troubling times, urging audience members to accept and appreciate that manifestation.

Public memory certainly fits within the display/manifest function. Bradford Vivian argues that given its social, cultural and political significance, the memory of September 11 has "established official precedents concerning how future generations would memorialize and thereby derive models for judgment and action."¹⁴ Further, Vivian notes that epideictic occasions repeating the mnemonic ritual of September 11 "derive order and purpose from seemingly senseless tragedy" for U.S. citizens.¹⁵ This

makes the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon fundamental to affirming the values that form an American identity. It has become, Vivian argues, “the most symbolically representative national forum for the rites of public mourning and civic restoration.”¹⁶ In short, the memory of September 11 has actively shaped U.S. citizens’ orientation towards a variety of troubling events through its symbolic re-presentation of national loss, constantly evolving to meet the immediate contextual needs of listeners.

Even in an increasingly partisan political environment, the public memory of September 11 proves useful in constructing ideal U.S. citizens that the community strives to become, regardless of which side of the aisle they come from. Even in the midst of the contentious presidential election campaign, the Obama Administration “quietly won” congressional approval for what Eric Schmitt of the *New York Times* described as a hefty budget increase in “counterterrorism aid.”¹⁷ This aid package was granted despite the fact that the best evidence at the time of the budget increase approval came from anonymous “officials” who could only offer that the assault suggested “the bad guys [sic] are making plans and organizing” and that requires taking on “new urgency.”¹⁸

Surely, there are multiple explanations for why President Obama was able to obtain a counterterrorism aid package. The Rose Garden Address did not make a call for this package. However, the public memory of September 11 was certainly a strategic aid for the President. Denise Bostdorff argues that:

Presidents can draw upon collective memories, shaped as they are by aesthetic messages, to link the current war with a favored past. The ceremonial setting and the characteristics of epideictic rhetoric can also depict the present armed conflict in ways that make it seem beautiful and that exploit the love inherently with war—the love of comrades that prompts acts of courage, the love of war itself displayed by individuals who repeatedly volunteer for dangerous acts of duty, and the love that so many citizens have for wartime leaders—both to gain solidarity and to quash dissent.¹⁹

Succinctly, epideictic rhetoric offers leaders the potential to permeate partisan divides through eloquent displays of leadership that promote civic duties, particularly in settings involving crisis and conflict.

Investigating the town hall debate as an epideictic event also illuminates an important implication of this thesis. Critics who scan the transcript of the town hall debate in search of its deliberative elements might skip over the Benghazi question in its entirety. One of the most significant moments for both Obama's and Romney's credibility in the televised debates occurred during their responses to this question. This is why Condit says that "If we were to be so bold as to proclaim presidential debates to be epideictic speeches, we would recognize their importance . . . as one of our best chances to judge the eloquence—the broad humane capacities—of a would-be leader."²⁰ I argue that critics must be willing to take an even broader approach to presidential address. Rarely does the President generate completely autonomous decisions for the nation, but the country's leader certainly acts as the face of the nation. Any successful deliberative pitch by the President, then, requires a presumed degree of ethos that resonates through the general public. In order to achieve this character, each policy on the President's agenda must *follow* some ceremonial event that popularizes the idea through reaching into the past to build onto the present. As Condit argues about epideictic rhetoric generally:

. . . a broad and use-oriented focus also indicates the value of a certain kind of theory formation. We cannot adequately define epideictic or other genres or theoretical constructs based solely on explanations of earlier theorists nor based upon what our other theories seem to require. Rather, we need to work diligently to connect theory and empirical study. The *methodological* moral . . . is that we may enrich our understanding of discourse types by examining a broad range of speeches as candidates for a genre and by examining some of these speeches and their historical situations of use in great detail. Only by combining such empirical

investigation with the clues and traditions of earlier theory will we cast a theoretical net adequately wide and complex to capture usefully rich understandings of human speech.²¹

There are many other studies which could use this thesis as a starting point. One important suggestion for future research is that critics perform a more in-depth study comparing George W. Bush's September 20 Joint-Session Address to Congress with Obama's Rose Garden Address. Such an analysis would help draw connections between the two presidencies and which value systems each used to manifest public judgment on the nation-wide community during troubling times.

More importantly, critics should pay attention to the ways which the public memory of September 11 is still re-appropriated by the Benghazi attack. Benghazi has become recognized by political opponents as one of the greatest failures of several members of the Obama Administration. According to Katie LaPotin, "Benghazi will . . . be a key issue in the 2016 presidential race, as presumed Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton's political future hangs on the balance of any potential investigation."²² White House national security adviser Susan Rice still mourns September 11, 2012. The *Washington Times* reported that "Ms. Rice said she has 'experienced directly some of this department's greatest tragedies,'" and in particular she would "continue to mourn the death of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other brave Americans in Benghazi" who "died during an assault by forces linked to Al Qaeda in Libya, during the height of President Obama's reelection campaign."²³ John McCain recently criticized the Obama Administration for its failure to respond to the terrorist threat in Libya:

There should be no doubt about the character of the assault on Benghazi. It was professional, and the January report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence asserts that for months intelligence reports were coming in indicating that security in the area should have been beefed up. The Obama administration

did the opposite. One has to wonder why? Why has not the administration been charged with negligence?²⁴ In short, politicians on both sides of the aisle continue framing the attack in Benghazi in relation to September 11.

House GOP leadership has made clear that the Benghazi question is still relevant in the public memory of U.S. citizens. As the *Washington Times* points out, “House Speaker John A. Boehner announced not long after the attack that he was fed up and was making it a ‘top priority’ to get the truth out to the American people” because of the way the Obama Administration resorted to “deception and stonewalling to blur and block the truth about Benghazi.”²⁵ While Governor Romney did not take the opportunity to press Obama on the discrepancies between the Rose Garden Address and Rice’s testimonies, other politicians are still looking for answers and transparency. Senator Lindsey Graham says that Rice’s story “was politically hatched out of the White House” in order to avoid news of a terrorist attack seven weeks from an election.²⁶

In upcoming elections, the Benghazi debate may become a focal point of Republican strategy. Jim O’Neill has argued that the public will be waiting for this time:

The Obama Administration (with the all too willing collusion of “journalistic” propaganda outlets) has surrounded the Benghazi story with lies, obfuscations, and blatant cover-ups, all designed to muddy the waters and hide the truth—and Congress will not ferret out the truth unless “we the people” hold their feet to the fire, and do it with a will. . . . At some point “we the people” have to stop pointing our fingers at “them,” and put the responsibility for the mess our country is in upon our own shoulders, and be about the serious business of cleaning house. Insisting on hearing the truth about Benghazi would be a good place to start.²⁷

LaPotin notes that “Americans across the political spectrum aren’t entirely convinced that the truth about the Sept. 11, 2012, terrorist attack on the U.S. Embassy in Benghazi, Libya has been fully uncovered, and think Congress should continue investigating the matter to find out whether the White House acted improperly during its handling of the

attack.”²⁸ Citing poll data, LaPotin argues that “two in three Americans – including 50 percent of Democrats – believe that Congress should continue to investigate the White House’s role in managing the attack, which resulted in the deaths of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans” and House Republicans continue to ferociously lead the charge in continuing this investigation.²⁹ Succinctly, the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi will continue remain to politically relevant, the controversy surrounding it continues to retain rhetorical significance.

The attack in Benghazi on September 11, 2012 is still a talking point because it occurred on the anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

As *USA Today* notes, quoting Mike Morell, a recently retired CIA Deputy:

Republicans accuse the Obama administration of trying to mislead the American people in the weeks before the 2012 presidential election so as not to ruin a campaign theme that Obama had al-Qaeda on the run. . . . "The White House needed the talking points to support their narrative that al-Qaeda was on the run," said Rep. Mike Rogers of Michigan, the committee's Republican chairman. "They needed these talking points to say the attack was in response to a video." The committee's top Democrat, Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger of Maryland, said the committee reviewed thousands of documents related to the attack, viewed videos and interviewed tens of witnesses, and proved nothing nefarious about how the talking points were produced. "Today we've found no inappropriate motivations and we have also found no inappropriate actions on the talking points," Ruppersberger said. "We have four dead American. We need to focus at this point on tracking down the people who did this. And I hope we're close to that." The attacks that killed U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens and three other Americans happened on the 11th anniversary of the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington.³⁰

Summarily, rhetorical critics need to pursue an investigation of how the Benghazi controversy influences and shapes the nation-wide community. There has yet to be consensus on what occurred and who is responsible for the deaths of four U.S. diplomats. Albert Einstein once said memory is deceiving since it is colored by the events of today. The public memory of September 11, 2012, colors the events of yesterday, colors the

events of today, and will color the events of tomorrow. This will become most evident during the 2016 presidential election campaign should Secretary of State Hillary Clinton become the Democratic Nominee. Research on presidential epideictic rhetoric in this project provides a springboard for avenues of investigation when this public memory resurges once again.

Notes

¹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Nature of Criticism in Rhetorical and Communicative Studies," *Central States Speech Journal*, 30 (1979): 8.

² Ibid.

³ Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 71-73.

⁴ Campbell, "The Nature of Criticism in Rhetorical and Communicative Studies," 8.

⁵ Campbell, "The Nature of Criticism in Rhetorical and Communicative Studies," 10.

⁶ Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 28.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," 28-29.

⁹ Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1995): 219.

¹⁰ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 222.

¹¹ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 218.

¹² Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 219.

¹³ Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," *Communication Quarterly*, 33 (1985): 291.

¹⁴ Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic: Rhetorical Form and Commemorative Politics on September 11, 2002," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92 (2006): 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Vivian, “Neoliberal Epideictic,” 3.

¹⁷ Eric Schmitt, “U.S. to Help Create Elite Libyan Force to Combat Islamic Extremists,” *New York Times*, 16 October 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/16/world/africa/us-to-help-create-libyan-commando-force.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Denise M. Bostdorff, “Epideictic Rhetoric in the Service of War: George W. Bush on Iraq and the 60th Anniversary of the Victory Over Japan,” *Communication Monographs*, 78 (2011): 301.

²⁰ Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic,” 291.

²¹ Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic,” 296-97.

²² Katie LaPontin, “Americans Still Think There’s More to Learn About Benghazi – and Want Congress to Keep Searching for the Truth,” *Red Alert Politics*, 22 February 2014, <http://redalertpolitics.com/2014/02/22/americans-still-think-theres-more-to-learn-about-benghazi-and-want-congress-to-keep-searching-for-the-truth/>

²³ Dave Boyer, “Susan Rice Tells Diplomats She Still ‘Mourns’ Benghazi Deaths,” *Washington Times*, 11 March 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/mar/11/susan-rice-tells-diplomats-she-still-mourns-bengha/>

²⁴ R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr., “More Yet to be Heard About Benghazi,” *Washington Times*, 26 February 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/feb/26/tyrrell-new-benghazi-witnesses/>

²⁵ Fred J. Eckert, “Keeping Americans in the Dark on Benghazi,” *Washington Times*, 14 March 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/mar/14/eckert-keeping-americans-in-the-dark-on-benghazi/?page=all#pagebreak>

²⁶ Greta Van Susteren, “Sen Graham: ‘They’re Getting Away with’ Benghazi Lie,” *Fox News*, 25 February 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/on-the-record/2014/02/26/sen-graham-theyre-getting-away-benghazi-lie>

²⁷ Jim O'Neill, “The Benghazi Difference,” *Canada Free Press*, 15 March 2014, <http://canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/61760>

²⁸ LaPontin, “Americans Still Think There’s More to Learn About Benghazi – and Want Congress to Keep Searching for the Truth.”

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Oren Dorell, “CIA Deputy Defends Role in Benghazi Talking Points,” *USA Today*, 02 April 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/04/02/cia-deputy-benghazi-talking-points/7206921/>

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Curriculum Vita

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Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
M.A., Communication Studies (Rhetoric) In Progress
Committee: Thomas Burkholder (Chair), Jacob Thompson, David Henry (Dean),
Helen Neill (Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education and Assessment)
Current GPA: 4.0

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
B.A., Communication Studies 2012
GPA: 3.26

Awards and Scholarships

Chancellor's Doctoral Fellowship, University of Kansas	2014
CEDA Pacific Region Critic of the Year	2014
Induction into Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society	2014
Induction into Lambda Pi Eta Communication Studies Honor Society	2012
Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2012-14
Dean's Honor List, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2011-12
Cross-Examination Debate Association All-American Debate Team	2011-12
Outstanding Undergraduate Paper in Urban Affairs	2011
Invent the Future Campaign Keynote Speaker, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2009
Honors Convocation Keynote Speaker, College of Liberal Arts	2009
Debate Team Scholarship, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2007-12
Qualifier to the National Debate Tournament	2008-12
Nevada State Debate Champion	2007
Qualifier to the National Forensic League Championship	2006-7
Clark County Debate Champion	2005-7

Teaching Experience

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Instructor of Record
Communication Studies 101: Introduction to Public Speaking
Summer Session Two 2013, Section 5 (25 students)

As an instructor of record, I had three primary responsibilities. First, I developed all aspects of the curriculum, including PowerPoint presentations, classroom activities, multi-media presentations, and tests. Second, I independently taught 25 students in accordance with department standards. Finally, emphasis was placed on creating a comfortable and supportive classroom environment for several students with high communication apprehension.

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Communication Studies 101: Introduction to Public Speaking

Spring 2014, Section 20 (24 students)

Fall 2013, Section 12 (25 students)

Spring 2013, Section 34 (24 students)

Fall 2012, Section 23 (25 students)

Fall 2012, Section 11 (26 students)

Convention Presentations

“The September 12, 2012 Rose Garden Address: President Barack Obama’s ‘9/11’ Moment,” Under review, National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL, 2014.

“Angels in the debate space: A tournament practice to encourage the growth of regional intercollegiate policy debate,” Under review, National Communication Association Convention, Chicago, IL, 2014.

Debate Work Experience

Assistant Debate Coach, University of Nevada, Las Vegas	2012-2014
Lab Leader, Rebel Debate Institute	2013
University of Nevada Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV	
Instructor, Rebel Debate Institute	2012
University of Nevada Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV	
Assistant Debate Coach, Green Valley High School	2008-2014

Volunteer Experience

Judge/Coach, Las Vegas Debate League	2012-2014
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada	
Judge/Coach, Golden Desert Forensic League	2007-2014
Las Vegas, NV	
Judge/Tournament Assistance	2007-2014
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	

Las Vegas, NV

Tutor/Assistant Chabad of Green Valley
Las Vegas, NV

2005-7