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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL AND MEDIA DISCOURSE ON IMMIGRATION DURING THE TRUMP ERA

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL AND MEDIA DISCOURSE ON

IMMIGRATION DURING THE TRUMP ERA

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines political and media discourse on Immigration through four studies: Trump's immigration reform speech, newspaper coverage of DACA, a Saturday Night Live episode, and social media via #ColoradoBorderWall memes. Various critical cultural theoretical frameworks are used within critical discourse and textual analysis is to examine media and political rhetoric about immigrants and immigration policy during a period of drastic institutional political change evidenced by Trump's administration. As a collective, these narratives examine how Trump's rhetoric and populist style of communication demonstrate a return to restrictive immigration rhetoric not witnessed in a presidential administration since the 1920s. This research demonstrates how political rhetoric and media discourse are part of discursive formations the produce and reinforce nativist, xenophobic, and racist ideologies about undocumented immigrants, immigrants, citizenship, and national belonging.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to the lived experiences of undocumented migrants seeking

better lives as they escape conditions of poverty and violence, as well as immigrants

legally living in the U.S. experiencing racism and xenophobia. It is my hope that through

critical analyses, political, media, and corporate business initiatives and policies that a

positive difference can be made.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USM   The University of Southern Mississippi

WCU   William Carey University

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

The Trump Era marks a significant rhetorical shift in political discourse on immigration, specifically regarding illegal immigration and gaining control of the U.S. - Mexican border. While recent past presidencies regarded immigration as having some positive economic and cultural benefits, Donald Trump's administration consistently framed immigrants as threats to economic and national security. Trump is the first American presidential candidate to successfully run on an anti-immigration platform and make it into the White House. As Pierce and Seele (2017) explain, "No administration in modern history has placed such a high priority on immigration policy or had an almost exclusive focus on restricting flows, legal and unauthorized alike, and further maximizing enforcement" (p. 8).

Trump's administration enacted an unprecedented 472 executive actions toward U.S. immigration policy throughout his four years in office (Bolter, Israel, & Pierce, 2022). These actions have proven catastrophic for legal and illegal immigrants, refugees, and citizens with family members attempting to immigrate to the U.S. Trump's regime has increased and expanded surveillance and law enforcement, reduced the number of admitted refuges to its lowest level since enactment of the statute in 1980, and reduced legal immigration by 63% (Boler, Israel, & Pierce, 2022; Baxter & Nowraste, 2021). Unfortunately, the harmful effects of these policies will be hauntingly present for years to come. (Bolter, Israel, & Pierce, 2022).

Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric reflects right-wing nationalist and populist discourse that has been sweeping across the U.S. and Europe as their global influence and economic standings have become more precarious. While Trump, and his administration,

appear as a harbinger for increasingly nativist and xenophobic political policies and discourse, it is necessary to understand that "Trump's core ideology differs little from that of the mainstream Republican Party, and his only innovation is in his mode of delivery" (Terrill, 2017, p. 498). Trump's mode of delivery sidesteps mainstream media, where he can speak unconstrained by norms of political correctness directly to his followers via Twitter.

The Trump administration's anti-immigration discourse reflects broader aspects of institutional change, manifested in questions about political identity and belonging. Stuckey (2017) explains that discourses characterized by anger, fear, and hope are signals of this institutional political change, amidst societal ails of rising economic insecurities, alienization, and highly polarized communication/miscommunication. Boorstein and Arnsdorf (2022) explain: "We're in an era where the MAGA movement's boundaries of who is considered a real, good, authentic American are mutating and the future is very unpredictable (para, 15). Examining anti-immigration discourse, especially during times of political change, are necessary for understanding who is included and excluded in the national imaginary and how this relates to policy.

Discourse, as Foucault explains, is the production of knowledge through language. He argues that meaning is constructed through discourse; therefore, discourse constructs the topic, providing the "appropriate" rules for speaking about the topic as well establishing restrictions. Discourse applies not only to materials written within a socio-historical period, but also to behaviors, events, and practices. Foucault argues that discursive formations occur when "the same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time, will appear across a range of texts as

forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society" (Hall, 2003, p. 44). Texts and practices about the same subject reinforce one another, establishing a pattern or supporting a strategy, belong to a discursive formation.

Immigration threat narratives written and orally communicated by politicians, as well as media spectacles are discursive narratives woven into practices within the Trump administration's political apparatus. As Chavez (2008) explains, "Through its coverage of events, the media produce knowledge about, and help construct, those considered legitimate members of society as well as…define what it means to be a citizen" (p. 63). Conversely, media spectacles involving immigrants are used to define those considered less legitimate through concepts such as "illegal aliens," "undocumented," "foreigner," and "immigrant." Discourses that objectify immigrants as "illegal" dehumanizes them; making it easier for governments to use them as scapegoats for economic and national threats as well as pass harsh policies and laws that govern their behaviors.

Bolter, Israel, and Pierce (2022) emphasize the consequences of the Trump administration's nativist rhetoric by noting a change in mission statement for U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). They explain, USCIS is the agency within DHS (Department of Homeland Security) tasked with immigration benefits adjudication, but under the Trump administration, USCIS played an increasingly large role in enforcement. This shift was perhaps most clearly reflected in changes to the agency's mission statement, from a focus on "customers" and "America's promise as a nation of immigrants" to "protecting Americans" and "securing the homeland." (110) Analyzing both political and mass media rhetoric and representations of immigrants, both authorized and unauthorized, is important for understanding the constitutions of

citizenship and belonging in the national imagination during political climates of right-wing populism and nationalist ideologies.

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically analyze discursive formations constructed in political narratives and the media about immigration during the era of the Trump administration. While Trump's administration proposed and enacted restrictive immigration policies imbued with racist and xenophobic undertones, it is necessary to understand that American Immigration is fundamentally built upon and (re)constituted by these ideologies. As Foucault argues, "It is discourse, not the subjects who speak it, which produce knowledge. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of episteme…of a particular period and culture" (p. 55). While Trump and his administration's discourse and policies are critiqued throughout these analyses, it is important to remember Foucault's proposition that "the subject is produced within discourse…[and]…cannot be outside it" (p. 55). Therefore, it is acknowledged that Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric and discourse serve as signals for discursive formations on race and belonging within the national imaginary during an era characterized by remarkable institutional political change.

This dissertation examines four separate Trump narratives regarding immigration. In the first study, I will use discourse analysis to examine how Trump's speech on immigration reform relies on rightwing nationalist and populist rhetoric and political styles based on well-established immigrant threat narratives [rhetorical situation]. The second analysis uses critical discourse analysis to examine how a newspaper, *The Washington Post*, constructed representations of Dreamers, in response to Trump's threat to rescind DACA. Dreamers, undocumented immigrants brought into

the country illegally as children under the age of sixteen, continue to live in "legal limbo" without a clear path to citizenship following Trump's administration. Because discourse extends beyond serious political and news narratives, the final two studies incorporate entertainment media such as television and social media. The third analysis uses Hall's decoding framework and Hariman's model for parody to examine how *Saturday Night Live* uses satire and parody to challenge rightwing nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric about immigrants. The final study examines social media centered on memes using the hashtag, #coloradoborderwall, to illustrate how memes contribute to political discourse and use humor to expose and challenge dominant hegemonic ideologies related to race and immigration policy.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trump's campaign and presidential rhetoric exhibits the "most visible iterations" of xenophobic discourse regarding immigration in past presidencies (Cisneros, 2017, p. 515). During Trump's 2015 presidential campaign he referred to Mexican migrants as "rapists" (Varela, 2018, para 2) and immigrants as "killers" over 500 times at speeches and rallies, as well as generating over 2000 political advertisements equating migrants with "invaders" (Kang & Yang, 2022, p. 143). Trump's comments stand is in stark opposition to previous administrations, such Obama's, that exercised caution and political correctness. McHendry (2018) argues that Trump's ascendancy into political power effectively shattered the "Obama-era fantasies of a post-racial America," and that his presidency exposes "the hate-tinged rhetoric we have cured within the foundation of the American Project" (p. 2-3). McHendry (2018) further explains that it is not difficult to recognize how Trump's presidential election and the "forceful reemergence of white supremacy" simultaneously arose. Trump's rhetoric not only indulges this racist ideology, but his "entertaining" political style provides an effective vehicle for its transmission.

Hall, Goldstein, and Ingraham (2016) argue that Trump's unconventional political style resembles a "Rabelaisian character that deploys bawdy humor to entertain his audience…Like Rabelais, Trump understands that crude humor has the power to bring down the princely class—aka, the political establishment—as well as anyone who opposes him" (p. 82). Trump establishes himself in opposition to the political elite that are responsible for enforcing political correctness and failing America. Connolly (2017) argues that Trump's unconventional style is not intended to primarily convey policy

agendas. "It draws energy and direction from anxieties and resentments about race, border issues, immigration, real working class insecurities, trade policies, pluralizing drives, the new place of the United States in the global economy, and uncertainty about the shaky place of a neoliberal culture on this planet" (p. 28).

Most notably, Trump's nativist rhetoric and political style reinforce one another in his campaign promise to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border as a national security measure. Hall, Goldstein, and Ingraham (2016) argue that Trump uses a series of gestures that align with his nativist border wall rhetoric to accentuate his message and further engage his audience. They explain that "the 'huuuge' wall that Trump performs in several campaign speeches—wide outstretched arms to illustrate width, tall upright arms to illustrate height, a sharp L-shaped drawing pattern to illustrate strength—positions Mexicans as a wandering people who need to be stopped" (p. 90). While physical barriers were erected in previous administrations, Kang and Yang (2022) argue, "Trump's anti-immigration solid rhetoric has strengthened the connection between racism, xenophobia, and wall construction" (p. 141). Valera (2018) notes that Trump's border wall is less about national security, and more about sending a symbolic message that Latinx are not welcomed in the United States.

The Trump administration's restrictive policies, conflate and racialize illegal immigration as a "Mexican" problem, even though many undocumented immigrants become "illegal" by overstaying their travel visas and not necessarily from crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Dick (2011) suggests that the U.S. historically and presently is engaged in a "national politics of belonging." "Such debates have always differentiated among immigrant groups; some are constructed as desirable…and others as undesirable,

as a threat to U.S. sovereignty and national identity" (p. 36). The Trump administration's emphasis on the U.S.-Mexico border and use of the Spanish word bad "hombre" in political speech strongly indicates that Latinx, citizen or non-citizen are undesirable and a problem for national sovereignty. Romero (2008) argues, "concern over immigration to the US is inseparable from stereotyping Mexicans as 'illegal aliens' and socially constructing Mexicans as criminal, foreign, and the other" (p. 28). Dick (2011) further argues that racial conflations of Mexicans as being "illegal" provides an interpretive lens for viewing all individuals from Latin America as "illegal."

Racializing Latin Americans as "illegal" renders them vulnerable to racial profiling practices that construct them as "others," while also normalizing whiteness as "American-ness." Price (2010) explains that "to be racialized is to have one's physical, economic, social, and political mobility curtailed and policed…to be denied entry into the mainstream of power and privilege. As with geopolitical borders, race has checkpoints, guards, and requisite tokens for passage" (p. 166). Due to the racialization of Latin Americans as "illegal" immigrants, people of Latin American descent carry around a "figurative" border regardless of their legal status and whether they live near the US-Mexico border (Romero, 2008, p. 28).

This "figurative" border often results in assimilating or disciplining immigrants into the dominant white status-quo. Romero (2006) argues that for Latinas/os speaking Spanish, being associated with a work crew, living near the border or in a neighborhood with other Latin American immigrants is enough "reasonable suspicion" for authorities to initiate a discretionary citizenship inspection (p. 29). In an interview Romero (2006) conducted with a mother of two small children after a citizenship inspection stop, she

explains how humiliated the mother felt and her desire to protect her children from being

degraded through such a spectacle. Romero explains,

> F. is determined to eliminate any signs of their 'Mexican-ness.' Quite probably,
> she will dissuade her children from playing outside in the sun and tanning darkly,
> from learning to speak Spanish to communicate with their grandparents and other
> family elders…Is it any wonder, then, that F. will probably place assimilation at
> the top of her list of mothering responsibilities? (p. 33)

Romero (2008) argues that debates surrounding immigration are inseparable from racial,

economic, and political privilege that benefit whites through promoting assimilation and

a continuation of the status quo.

Neoliberal policies emphasize meritocracy and post-racial language that

naturalize racist policies as a matter of "law and order." Di Tomasso (2012) argues that

neoliberalism is involved in the racialization process by emphasizing meritocratic ideals

such as linking success and wealth to hard work and failure and poverty to personal

shortcomings. Di Tomasso further explains that neoliberalism "both contributes to the

production of racialized bodies and modifies the ways in which race functions" (p. 335).

Neoliberal policies often have greater impacts on racialized communities, but any trace of

racial identity or racist ideology in these policies is shrouded within these meritocratic

principles. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) explain that "long histories of racism and

injustice are effectively eradicated within neoliberal discourse because human agency is

understood as a series of individualized choices" (p. 255). For example, immigrants who

"choose" to come into the U.S. illegally are "breaking the law" and therefore are

considered criminals worthy of any repercussions they receive for doing so.

Neoliberal frameworks also circumvent an examination of U.S. economic policies that push people from Latin American countries toward the U.S. for better lives. De Genova (2002) argues that migrations do not just randomly occur, but that they are produced. "And migrations do not involve just any possible combination of countries; they are patterned" (p. 424). Neoliberalism masks the racialized nature of these policies, as well as the role of U.S. economics in creating the necessary conditions for migration.

Media Frameworks: Agenda-Setting, Frame Analysis, & Metaphor

Media and political discourses construct immigrants both as individual subjects (micro-level) and as a socio-political problem (macro-level), which influences the types of representations presented within journalist narratives and within policy debates (Quinsaat, 2014). Ngai (2004) argues, because "the line between alien and citizen is soft," media discourses on policy debates, legislation, and immigration law constitutively construct public perceptions and opinions on American immigration. Quinsaat (2014) explains that immigrants are ambiguously situated "inside and outside the purview of the state," which results in conflicting news narratives about immigrants and immigration policy, thus, revealing the "relationship between discourse and power and the role of mass media in the discursive production of dominance" (p. 575).

Immigration reform remains a dominant issue in U.S. politics, especially during the Trump era and now, post-Trump era, as these periods constitute "critical discourse moments" in which the nation continues to struggle over identity and belonging (Chilton, 1987). Mass media set parameters for these discussions through journalistic practices of agenda-setting, establishing news frames, and using rhetorical metaphors that "affect our imagination of possible futures" (Ellis & Wright, 1998, p. 688). The culmination of these

practices results in media packages that guide and limit immigration debate. Chavez (2008) argues, "Media help construct the imagined community through representations of both inclusion and exclusion. Both the Latino Threat Narrative and struggles over the meaning of citizenship pervade media-infused spectacles where immigration or immigrants are the topic" (p. 5). Examining topics of immigration in previous media studies using agenda-setting, frame analysis, and metaphor are useful for understanding dominant representations, as well as the re(production) of hegemonic ideologies embedded within the discourse.

The agenda-setting framework seeks to examine issues given precedence by the media. Branton & Dunaway (2009b) describe agenda-setting theory as "the process by which the news media, by giving more salience to certain events and issues over others, influences the public's perception about which issues are most important" (p. 290). McCombs (2003) argues that the mass media has immense power in shaping the national agenda as well as influencing public opinion on important issues (p. 1). Audience members gain facts about issues from the media as well as learn about their importance based on the emphasis placed upon them in news coverage.

Regarding agenda-setting on immigrant populations, Greer & Jewkes (2005) further explain that "which group is portrayed as the most deviant or troublesome at any particular time depends largely on media priorities, cultural trends, and political currents" (p. 21). Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano's (2010) research demonstrates the media's power to focus public attention on the extensive national immigration reform proposed in 2006 and its correlation to national public opinion. Sharp increases in national media coverage of immigration during this time provided an opportunity for the researchers to

examine public opinion through the national Gallup Poll question, "What is the most important problem facing this country today? (MIP)" (p. 360). They found "consistent with agenda-setting theory, amplified media coverage of immigration leads to a heightened perception among the public that immigration is an MIP" (p. 375). The volume of exposure audiences receive about immigration and its' associated attributes are influential in creating concrete images within the minds of viewers. McComb (2003) defines attributes as characteristics or qualities that describe an issue, object, or public figure (p. 5). Erjavec (2003) provides research on agenda-setting and illegal immigration in Slovenia, where criminality is the agenda-setting attribute.

Media constructed illegal immigration in Slovenia into a national problem by regularly (at least three times a week) publishing short news items on the number of illegal immigrants apprehended on pages devoted to criminal reports and at the end of televised news programs (p. 88). Erjavec (2003) argues that Slavic journalists "mirrored reality" in their adherence to discourse established through political agendas. She further explains that the relationship between the media and police reinforced and perpetuated the criminal attribute of illegal immigration to the extent that the police become the "primary definer." This relationship between media and law enforcement cements an image into audiences' minds of illegal immigrants as perceived as criminals invading Slovenia in droves.

Agenda-setting theory also considers the importance of media organizational variables such as location and economic factors. Location is an important feature of agenda-setting because the audience is more likely to focus and/or care about issues that are closer in proximity to themselves. Branton & Dunaway (2009b) found that Border

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States are exposed to a significantly higher volume of immigrant and immigration related news coverage. Many of these stories have been constructed from "crime scripts" of a "sensational nature" (p. 291). Branton & Dunaway (2009b) argue that reliance on crime scripts is economically motivated because they are easily adaptable to newspaper coverage. They also argue that Border States consistently rank immigration as the most important issue facing the country and "vote nativist on ballot initiatives;" demonstrating to media corporations that negative and sensationalized stories will appeal to audiences (Branton & Dunaway, 2009a, p. 260). Additionally, Branton & Dunaway (2008) found that economic incentives were also responsible in positive and negative media bias surrounding immigration in Spanish and English-speaking newspapers. "Although English- and Spanish-language media organizations are both motivated by profit, they have very different target audiences, which…[they]…argue results in differences in news content on immigration" (p. 1019). English-speaking newspapers carried more articles with negative immigration stories, whereas Spanish-speaking newspapers depicted immigration stories more favorably.

The media play a powerful role in shaping public discourse surrounding immigration. McComb (2003) explains that "What we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. More specifically, the result of this mediated view…is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public" (p. 2). If the media portrays immigrants as pollutants, invaders, and infectious diseases, then it is likely public opinion will reflect this concern in polls and possibly even voting initiatives.

Frame analysis in immigration research examines how news media present socially constructed frames to guide audiences toward intended "learning outcomes" (McQuail, 2015, p. 511). Bryant & Miron (2014) define frames as "cognitive structures that guide both the perception and representation of reality" (p. 693). News media's organizational structure influences the level of complexity that stories receive, which requires news workers to "present easy-to-understand, interpretive package[s]" to the audience (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011, p. 293). Frames consist of "tacit theories" that reflect journalists' and editors' selections regarding how to define an issue, primary cause of an issue, and possible solutions (Gitlin, 2003, p. 6). Understanding how news media constructs frames is important because they guide audiences' interpretations and perceptions of social structures, how they make sense of reality, as well as having the potential to change attitudes and beliefs. Ortega and Feagin (2016) argue that media stories use persuasive rhetorical strategies and repetitious phrases when constructing arguments to easily guide news consumers to uncontested conclusions. They explain further that "media frames accentuate pieces of information, through omission and inclusion, thereby making them more salient and meaningful to audiences" (p. 20).

Framing of undocumented immigrants has typically been presented in negative or restrictive frames that emphasize threat narratives to U.S. citizens. Ortega and Feagin (2016) explain that "negative framing of people of color remains central to this country's systemic racism, including white people's desire to preserve the racial status quo" (p. 23). Stewart, Pitts, and Osborne (2011) found: Dominant themes in the press suggest immigrants take jobs away from "real" Americans, undermine U.S. politics, commit

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crimes, abuse alcohol, spread disease, dry up social and economic resources and impose

their own (i.e. not American) cultural practices. (p. 9)

News stories of immigrants and immigration that do not involve crime or illegal

border crossings are largely absent from media coverage. The National Association of

Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) found that out of 1,201 stories, crime and immigration

accounted for 36% of media coverage and that out of 115 "Latino-based" stories 27%

involved illegal border crossings (Branton & Dunaway, 2009b, p. 291). Subveri & Sinta's

(2015) research on Latinos in network news found that even though Latinos are the

largest minority population in the United States, they are only represented in one percent

of media coverage (p. 19). They further explain that "the primary topics of that meager

coverage remain focused on Latinos as people with problems or causing problems" (p.

20). The striking absence of media coverage for minority and immigrant populations,

makes the meager negative stories a dominant narrative for establishing and reinforcing

unfavorable opinions and attitudes about immigration.

Dekker and Scholten (2017) found four master frames in previous articles written

about news coverage of immigrants and policy agendas: human-interest, threat,

economic, and managerial. The human-interest frame is favorable toward immigration

and often depicts immigrants or refugees as victims in need of compassion and help. It

reminds American citizens of their immigrant pasts, central to beliefs about the national

imaginary. Quinsaat (2014) argues, "The press retells this narrative to reaffirm the

formation of the nation" (p. 581). Kinefuchi and Cruz (2015) found in their examination

of sixty news articles from major networks such as ABC, CBS, and NBC that only

sixteen portrayed Mexican immigrants in a sympathetic or human-interest frame. They

defined sympathetic articles as covering topics such as "family separation, fear of deportation, accidents, and obstacles to citizenship and depicted Mexican immigrants mostly as victims and families" (p. 346). While human-interest frames can be useful for shifting attitudes on policy, they can also have unintended consequences, such as creating a division between "good" immigrants and "bad" immigrants.

Threat frames are far more common in news coverage on immigrants and immigration policies. Threat frames establish immigrants as dangerous and frequently occur in contexts regarding national security, border control, and crime. Immigrants are frequently depicted as villains violating national sovereignty by "illegally" crossing the US-Mexican border. Flores (2003) explains that prior to Great Depression, rhetorical narratives constructed undocumented immigrants as docile "peon" laborers, unmotivated to engage in social and political aspects outside of work and family. However, after the economic insecurity created by the Great Depression, Mexican laborers were rhetorically constructed into criminals by "illegally" crossing the US-Mexican border.

Threat frames use exaggeration and superlatives to generate fear of immigrants in media stories involving drugs, human trafficking, and terrorism (Quinsaat, 2014). These narratives encourage audiences to perceive immigrants as suspicious and potentially dangerous. Quinsaat (2014) argues, "the portrayal of immigrants as dangerous is a common trope in the immigration discourse rooted in the imagining of the nation, especially as it is conceived as a bounded space" (p. 586). Associations of illegality and criminality arose in response to immigration policies in the 1920s that sought to establish a physical, rather than cultural and racial, barrier between the U.S. and Mexico, as well as policies for deportations. Flores (2003) explains, "The emphasis on criminality and

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criminalization of entry combined to provide a rhetorical space in which the Mexican

body became a criminal body" when crossing into U.S. sovereign territory (p. 376). The

US-Mexico border remains center-stage for media frames of invasion, corruptions,

surveillance, and protection from those perceived outside the national imaginary.

Economic frames are presented in terms of immigrants and immigration policies

benefiting the economy or draining the economy. Common news coverage regarding how

immigrants benefit the economy is by providing cheap labor and working in jobs other

Americans do not want. They are depicted as draining the economy when they take jobs

away from other Americans and become dependent on federal resources such as welfare.

Quinsaat (2014) explains that media narratives frequently include "quotes of employers'

opinions about the economic interest of keeping undocumented immigrants" (p. 587).

During times of economic insecurity, media discourse on immigration and border

crossing raise fears and anxieties over access to resources.

Managerialist frames are defined by Dekker and Scholten (2017) as maintaining a

pragmatic and depoliticized view on immigration policies. It considers certain rules and

regulations related to immigration as necessary and justified. The central argument is that

to be able to accommodate immigrants, the government needs to be selective in who may

enter and in the services that are provided (p. 210). This frame views laws and policies as

rules that should not be bent or broken because they are part of our legal-rational

bureaucracy regardless of their moral implications. Immigration news coverage in a

managerial frame resembles what Glasser and Ettema (1989) refer to as "an impartial and

disinterested response to the day's events, issues, and personalities rather than as a value-

laden determination" (p. 5). Tuchman (1978) suggests that even in crime coverage when

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events are defined by the police and not the victim or perpetrator, "what is reported as fact is a product of bureaucratic interaction embedded in instrumental rationality, and it both predigests and hides lived social experiences" (p. 58). Managerial frames depoliticize immigration issues and use neoliberal discourses, such as "law and order" to mask racist and nativist ideologies.

Metaphors, in rhetorical analysis, are conceptual systems that "play a central role in defining our everyday realities" (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003, p. 4). Metaphors extend beyond language and into thoughts, actions, attitudes, and beliefs. Cisneros (2008) explains that "metaphors create conventional understanding by connecting phenomena with familiar cultural assumptions and experiences" (p. 570). Santa Ana (1997) argues that metaphors operate on a deep conceptual level and are ingrained within our cultural knowledge to the extent that they appear to be natural (p. 319). Rhetorical analyses of metaphor in immigration research often seek to examine what metaphors are framing illegal immigration discourse and then to deconstruct those metaphors to reveal dominant ideologies or assumptions about undocumented immigrants and the role of U.S. immigration policies.

Dehumanizing metaphors of undocumented immigrants are powerful conceptual systems that have the potential to shape public opinion on immigration policies. Quinsaat (2014) explains, "The press employs words such as *illegal aliens, fugitives, hordes,* and *lawbreakers* to identify them as perpetrators; *flood, flow*, and *invasion* to describe their movement; and *harm* and *threat* to illustrate their presence in the United States" (p. 585). Cisneros (2008) identifies another metaphor, *pollution*, in his examination of Fox News and CNN's coverage of a toxic chemical crisis called Love Canal. He explains,

Fox News and CNN often portrayed undocumented immigrants through similar

visual techniques, creating an impression that immigrants were collecting like

piles of potentially dangerous waste or were approaching the viewer as mobile

pollutants. (p. 579)

Cisneros (2008) found that when wide camera shots were used, they were arranged so

that immigrants "trailed off" on one or both sides of the image to appear as if they were

an infinite stream with no "definitive end in sight" (p. 582).

These metaphors reflect a threatening narrative about immigration and

immigrants in media coverage by depicting them as dangerous pollutants oozing

endlessly closer toward the "contamination" of pristine "all American" communities.

Christoph (2012) argues that even when non-criminalized reports are covered on

immigrants, they hardly ever have any "influence" over the coverage (p. 98). Without

influence over media coverage, immigrants largely remain silent in the face of threat

narratives constructed by politicians and the media.

These metaphors are also present in news coverage of asylum seekers and

refugees. El Refaie (2001) analyzed Austrian newspaper coverage and found that asylum

seekers are often represented using animal metaphors. El Refaie argues that "in this case,

it becomes quite 'natural' to talk of them as being hunted and caught in nets" (p. 358).

Applying animal metaphors to undocumented immigrants, rationalizes and naturalizes the

use of harsh "law and order" strategies for identifying, capturing, and removing them

from the United States. Santa Ana's (2002) research best illustrates how metaphors, such

as water, contain racial signifiers that racialize all illegal immigrants as being Hispanic.

Specifically, he found coverage that portrayed illegal immigrants as "a sea of brown

faces" and that America is "awash under a brown tide" (p. 7). These depictions strip away agency, perpetuate dehumanizing stereotypes, and have the capacity to rationalize surveillance and state violence against undocumented immigrants and refugees.

Methodology & Theoretical Framework

Critical cultural approaches used within this dissertation are Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a focus on ideological criticism and political style/rhetoric, Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theoretical framework, and Raimi McKerrow's critical rhetoric framework. To provide a foundation for these frameworks, I will discuss common features of these approaches as an overarching critical cultural framework. Critical cultural analyses of media and political communication involve analyzing struggles over discourse within social inequality, power relations, and cultural difference institutionally, politically, and in other areas of society. Critical cultural approaches, historically, are tied to Marxism, but more contemporary roots are associated with the Frankfurt School in Germany and Annales school in France. Ono (2009) suggests that critical cultural researchers and theorists are concerned with investigating "discourses of power and knowledge, relationships between global and local communities; cultural dominance and resistance, theory and its relationship to criticism; communication and its corresponding intersection with culture, performance, economics, social organizations, ethnography, and media" (p. 75). These approaches ultimately seek to accurately reveal the nature of society (Ritzer, 1999).

Critical cultural theories adhere to a constructivist ontological stance. A constructivist ontological stance allows for multiple realities and rejects "the existence of any possible correct reality" (Dieronitou, 2014, p. 7). Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue

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that every day or common-sense knowledge, whether scientifically validated or not, comprises the "fabric of meaning" that allows society to function and exist (p. 15). Our experience of reality is constructed, according to Berger & Luckmann, through a dialectical process comprised of three moments: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. These moments are not temporally ordered but occur simultaneously. "To be in society is to participate in its dialectic" (p. 129).

Externalization refers to the experience of social reality as subjectively meaningful, logical, or inevitable. Social reality appears to operate behind the scenes and is taken for granted in the significant and idiosyncratic experiences of everyday lives. Berger & Luckmann argue that not only does social reality encompass subjective experience, but it also exists as a "world that originates in [peoples'] thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these" (p. 20). Objectivation occurs when externalized human products lose their association with human activity. Reification, an "extreme step" within objectivation, occurs when people forget their position of agency and instead view the world as pre-arranged and beyond their ability to control (p. 89). Berger and Luckmann argue that a reified world is a dehumanized world because it implies that "we are capable of forgetting our own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between us, the producer, and our products is lost to consciousness" (p. 89). Internalization occurs when reified objects have become internalized, thereby making humans a product of the society that created them.

Critical cultural approaches situate knowledge within a symbolic process, rather than viewing it as an objective or naturalized product, which opens discourse up to multiple meanings. These approaches avoid the pitfall of solipsism by explaining how

rhetorical processes shape society and our identities. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that while everyone has subjective experiences, people understand "the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of [one's] apprehension of them and impose themselves on the latter" (p. 21). In this way, a shared reality appears to be objectified, normal, and self-evident. Brummet (1967) suggests, "Reality is meaning yet meaning is something created and discovered in communication" (p. 30).

Critical cultural approaches "emphasize careful and creative theorization, interpretation, and evaluation of the communication phenomena," though they do not follow a universal or systematic theory and/or methodology (Ono, 2009, p. 74). Weiss and Wodak (2003) argue that this "plurality of theory and methodology can be highlighted as a specific strength" of critical cultural analyses (p. 6). Instead of relying on or employing grand theories for guidance, critical cultural approaches apply conceptual tools relevant for analyzing discourses within socio-historical contexts. Weiss and Wodak (2003) argue that theoretical tools must be clarified with critical cultural projects as well as assumptions "regarding text, discourse, language, action, social structure, institution, and society" (p. 8). They must also be capable of connecting discourse to social institutions, structures, or actions. Critical cultural approaches are often interdisciplinary to mediate the connection between the sociological and linguistic.

Determining the meaning embedded within a text, is the primary purpose of a textual analysis. Critical cultural research incorporates a form of textual analysis within their methodology. According to Baker (2011), "The most common methods are discourse, narrative, rhetorical, semiotic, auteur, and generic" (p. 306). Data exists within

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the selected texts. In a textual analysis, the text is more than the words appearing in a newspaper article, for example. It is "the evidence that's left behind" of sense-making practices within a particular culture at a specific time in history (McKee, 2003, p. 15). Texts are created by people and meant to be communicated and understood by others. Because texts are culturally bound by time, space, norms, and values, they are open to multiple meanings within a single person. Fursich (2009) argues that "media texts present a distinctive discursive moment between encoding and decoding that justifies special scholarly engagement" (p. 238).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Weiss and Wodak (2003) identify three cornerstones of CDA: discourse, ideology, and power (p. 11). Foucault defines discourse as knowledge production through language. CDA is especially interested in the relationship between language and power within discourse. CDA is concerned with how ideology both establishes and maintains unequal power relations. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue "Discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned—it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain the status quo, and…contributes to transforming it" (p. 258). CDA recognizes that language alone is not powerful, but gains power through dissemination, especially through powerful individuals or institutions.

Foucault argues that discourse is more than a statement, single text, or source, but the tangible existence of ideas constructing a topic. Discourse frames rules and practices surrounding a particular topic that define the parameters acceptable for discussion and

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knowledge production. Discursive processes of defining and excluding constitute what

social phenomena and actions are considered permissible or deviant. Brown (1990)

explains that a comprehensible reality rests on legitimated discourses and habituated

behaviors at the expense of alternate realities disregarded as peripheral or "backstage"

knowledge. The process of defining discourse "protects established interpretations by

means of social sanctions," while the process of excluding "marginalize[s] or silence[s]

dissident voices" (p. 192). The habituation of legitimatized discourses presents itself as

naturalized, self-evident, or objectified to members of society. In terms of discourse,

persuasive strategies of domination appear natural, thereby concealing or obscuring their

creative origins. Reified discourses promote conformity to dominant ideologies and

imbue intersubjective groups with an understanding of the social order, which functions

as a "realized morality" (Brown, 1990, p. 193). Because of this, Weiss and Wodak (2003)

argue that in CDA, "Close attention is paid not only to the notion of struggles for power

and control, but also to the intertextuality and recontextualization of competing

discourses in various public spaces and genres" (p. 15). CDA is interested in the ways

that language and discourse are used as "expressions and manipulations" of power by

analyzing relevant texts, as well as the person or entity responsible for discourse and the

social occasion for its exercise or challenge (p. 15).

    CDA projects employ strategies of ideological criticism to demystify reified

power inequalities within discourse. Ideological criticism is a type of analysis that seeks

to uncover the powerful economic systems, politics, and social institutions/structures that

influence media and popular culture. Ideologies are not merely hidden within texts or

other systems of representation; they constitute the system itself. They contain common

sense principles that provide meaning for those participating in a social structure. Commonsense principles avoid scrutiny because it appears to represent the natural order of things or 'just the way things are.' Geertz (1983) explains that common sense is comprised of four "quasi-qualities" that produce this "totalizing" cultural system: naturalness, practicalness, thinness, and accessibleness (p. 85). When ideology is interpreted as common sense, it appears so natural and inherent that aspects of reality are likely to be taken for granted without question. Practicalness, as a quality of common sense, reflects the notion of "being sensible" (p. 87). Thinness refers to the literal or simple quality of common sense. Geertz (1983) further illustrates this point by saying, "The world is what the wide-awake, uncomplicated person takes it to be. Sobriety, not subtlety, realism, not imagination, are the keys to wisdom; the really important facts of life lie scattered openly along its surface, not cunningly secreted in its depths" (p. 89). Accessibleness, according to Geertz (1983), is the final quality of common sense that is reachable for the masses and not relegated to the terrain of experts or intellectuals.

Political rhetoric, media such as news and entertainment, rely on principles of common sense to narrate cultural stories about societal values, norms, and mores. Stories reflect a collective "common sense" knowledge of reality as well as legitimating and reinforcing messages. John Fiske (2004) explains that news and media programming, are "replete with potential meanings, and… it attempts to control and focus this meaningfulness into a more singular preferred meaning that performs the work of the dominant ideology" (p. 1274). Ideologies are imbued with a quality of inevitability and naturalness that tends to minimize discussions and criticism or the social/political hierarchy. Campbell, Jensen, Gomery, Fabos, and Frechette (2014) explain, "Status quo

values and conventional wisdom…or political arrangements…become taken for granted, viewed as natural and commonsensical ways to organize and see the world" (p. 82).

When discourse becomes reified and unequal social relations appear outside of socio-historical contexts, it acquires the disguise of an ahistorical truth. Makus (1990) explains, "Losing their propositional status, premises are transformed into narrative statements that are resistant to alternate interpretations of events" (p. 499). In this sense, they become dominant or hegemonic ideologies. Storey (2015) explains, "Hegemony is never simply power imposed from above: it is always the result of 'negotiations' between dominant and subordinate groups, a process marked by both resistance and incorporation" (p. 84). Ideologies, functioning as systems and structures, interpellates subjects and constitutes them as their authors. "Ideologies consequently create the lived realities of their subjects" (Makus, 1990, p. 500). Charland (1987) explains that the "peuple quebecois" are an example of constitutive rhetoric. Their lives were "called into being" through socio-historically situated discourse; exemplifying how discursive practices constrain the boundaries of their membership socially, politically, and economically.

Ideological Criticism

CDA analyses use ideological criticism to demystify embedded ideologies for emancipatory purposes. McKerrow (1989) explains, "The critique of domination has an emancipatory purpose—a telos toward which it aims in the process of demystifying the conditions of domination" (p. 91). She explains that critical approaches to rhetoric and discourse aim to understand the ways that knowledge and power are integrated to view possibilities for change (p. 91). While hegemonic discourses express power through

functions that benefit dominant interests, Foucault (1980) explains that the discursive

process is continuous and unstable. Foucault (1980) argues, "Discourse can be both an

instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of

resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces

power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it

possible to thwart" (p. 100-101). An essential starting point for ideological criticism is

identifying hegemonic ideologies and then exposing them through alternate and opposing

discourse.

Barthes' *Mythologies* framework is useful for uncovering hegemonic ideologies

or myths by examining the relationship between signs and meanings. Barthes employs

the concept of myth to make explicit the ideologies that are naturalized in society by

examining the multiple meanings of words through denotation and connotation.

Denotation refers to the primary signification and connotation is the secondary. Barthes

argues that myths exist at the level of connotation. The polysemic nature of signs is

apparent at the connotation level and can be challenged or interpreted in other ways than

their denotation. At the level of connotation, the message carries not only the intended

meaning of the signified, but also draws from and adds to a cultural repertoire

surrounding the signified.

Barthes argues that myths are dominant ideologies hidden in plain sight that

embody the "goes-without-saying" characteristic of inevitability or naturalness (Barthes,

1972, p. 10). Barthes explains, "what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is

that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is

only an equivalence, he sees a kind of causal process: the signifier and the signified have,

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in his eyes, a natural relationship" (p. 130). Barthes argues that myth is a semiological system that has become distorted as a factual one. Barthes objective in mythologies is to uncover the "ideological abuse" that exists hidden with plain sight (p. 10).

Stuart Hall expanded upon Barthes' work with his Encoding and Decoding framework. Hall developed a framework that explains the encoding and decoding process within three possible readings or levels of analysis: denotative or hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. In the denotative or hegemonic reading, the receiver decodes the message as the sender intends for it to be decoded. When interpreted this way, it appears as natural or inevitable. In the level of negotiation, the receiver interprets the message from the dominant reading, but also creates their own exceptions to the rules. The final reading occurs at the oppositional level. In this case, the receiver "detotalizes" the dominant reading and it is "retotalized" in an alternate framework (Hall, p. 60). Makus (1990) further emphasizes, it is "here on the level of signs, rhetorical battles are lost and won" (p. 504).

Each of the following chapters engages in critical cultural approaches to examine immigration discourse in political and media discourse. The first chapter uses CDA to examine Trump's immigration reform speech, the second chapter uses Barthes' mythologies to examine newspaper articles about DACA participants, the third chapter examines an episode from Saturday Night Live, using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, and the final chapter examines #ColoradoBorderWall meme's using McKerrow's critical rhetorical framework.

CHAPTER III - PRESIDENTIAL POWER, POLITICAL STYLE, AND

IMMIGRATION RHETORIC: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S

IMMIGRATION PLAN FOR THE 21 CENTURY

Throughout Donald Trump's election campaign and reign as President of the

United States, political scholars have witnessed how his political style disrupts "politics

as usual" and speculate that his political behavior reflects larger patterns of change within

a highly mediatized political landscape. Stuckey (2017) argues that Trump's political

style throughout the election process can be interpreted as "a moment in which already

weak political norms shattered, existing institutions faltered, and routinized patterns of

political behavior became apparently outmoded" (p. 668). During Trump's election

campaign and presidency, his unconventional political style has generated widespread

media attention and publicity. His crude humor, political incorrectness, and mocking

depictions of political and media adversaries are best understood as being "part of a

comedic political style that accrues entertainment value as it opposes the usual habitus

associated with US presidential candidates" (Hall, Goldstein, & Ingraham, 2016, p. 74).

More insidiously, Trump's comedic and entertaining behaviors are symptomatic features

of a right-wing populist political style.

Trump's right-wing populist political style is most evident in his speeches and

tweets on immigration and illegal immigration. Block and Negrine (2017) explain that

populist communication reflects a particular style "because it is primarily an act of

speech, as populist actors use words, signs, and images—forms of communication—to

connect with *the people*…and demonize the Other" (p. 179). In recent decades, right-

wing populist movements have been gaining political momentum in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Wodak (2015) explains that the tendency to create "ever new borders (and even walls), of linking the nation state and citizenship (naturalization) with nativist (frequently gendered and fundamentalist religious) *body politics*, lie at the core of right-wing populist ideologies" (p. 2). Proposals for restrictive immigration policies on a national and global level reflects the intersection of right-wing populism and nativist ideologies. With a rise in right-wing populist movements in North America and Europe, it is important to analyze populism as a political style and nativist rhetoric within political speeches and policies to understand their growing popularity.

The purpose of this Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to examine President Trump's speech on immigration reform delivered May 2019 in the White House Rose Gardens. Fairclough (2010) suggests that the strength of CDA lies within its examination of the "linkages between discourse, ideology and power" (p. 93). Performing a CDA of Trump's immigration reform speech is beneficial for examining not only the rhetorical content, but also Trump's political style and performative gestures. Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram (2016) argue that political style has become valued over content within the context of late capitalism (p. 72). They suggest that Trump embodies the political style of a comedic entertainer, which allows him to attract media attention and protects him from media backlash encountered by traditional politicians. Within this CDA, attention will be given to Trump's words, gestures, repeated phrases, and engagement with the audience during his immigration reform speech. Agger (1991) argues "every text is a contested terrain in the sense that what it appears to "say" on the surface cannot be understood without reference to the concealments and contextualizations of meaning going on

simultaneously to mark the text's significance" (p. 112). Contextualizing Trump's

immigration reform speech necessitates a brief discussion of presidential power and

media representation's influence on public opinion and attitudes toward immigrants and

immigration; as well as how Trump's political style reflects and reinforces populist

ideologies.

Review of the Literature

Trump's use of presidential power and populist political style are rhetorical

strategies for garnering public and political support for restrictive immigration reform

and border control. Arthur and Woods (2013) define presidential power as the

presidential use of rhetoric to persuade constituents of their "requests with the hope that it

will translate into policies" (p. 468). Presidential power also extends to establishing a

public agenda, influencing public opinion, persuading Congress, and controlling media

coverage of key issues through control of bureaucratic media processes and carefully

crafted press releases. Arthur and Woods' (2013) research on presidential power and

immigration reform suggest that presidents "maintain a 'rhetorical congruency' with

public opinion, which enables them to strategically connect to the public" (p. 486).

Specifically, Arthur and Woods (2013) found that presidential rhetoric on immigration

became more negative following the terrorist attacks of September-11 and during the

2008 economic decline.

Presidential and political representations of immigrants and immigration are

important to how audiences construct their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes surrounding

these issues in a socio-political context. Although the strength of media's influence on

audiences' opinions, values, and attitudes varies throughout research on immigration and

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many other areas, it is valuable to analyze because it may be the only source of information large sections of the population receive about immigration. Newton (2006) explains that media may play a secondary or weaker role in influencing audience perceptions when people have firsthand experience or knowledge about an issue. However, Newton (2006) argues that when "people know and care little about the issue, and [when] it is remote from their everyday experience of life and their values, then the impact of the media may be greater" (p. 218). Aside from Border States, many citizens in the United States rely on political and media interpretations of immigrants and immigration as a primary source to formulate their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs.

Contemporary media and political representations of immigrants and immigration reflect rising populist discourses in the United States and Europe. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) argue that populism is a "highly contestable" concept within the political science lexicon due to its plurality of definitions (p. 382). Lee (2006) explains that populism has chameleonic qualities that alter the focus and content of discourse, making it difficult to identify populist rhetoric. However, Lee suggests, "The rhetorical form of populist argument consists of four interrelated and mutually reinforcing themes. Rhetorically functioning as connected spheres within a Venn diagram, the four themes are a vocabulary at once of stark pessimism and collective hope" (p. 358). The four themes Lee (2006) identifies are that 'the people' are conceptualized as stable and definable, the enemy is defined and labeled, that a "system" exists wherein political and economic order and power is "distributed, governed and managed," and that "apocalyptic confrontation" is necessary to generate "revolutionary change" (p. 358-362). These interrelated populist

tropes inform contemporary political discourse and media coverage of immigration over the past few decades and persist within Trump's immigration rhetoric and policy reforms.

Populists use rhetoric and style to interpellate or conjure a conception of "the people" through enacting performances that produce "the people" they claim to represent (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Moffit & Tormey (2014) argue, "The evocation of 'the people' is the central element that differentiates populism from other political styles. 'The people' is both the central audience of populists, as well as the subject that populists attempt to 'render present' through their performance" (p. 391). DeCleen, Moffitt, Panayotu, & Stavrakakis (2020) argue when discussing claims made on behalf of "the people" that it is important to differentiate nationalism from populism because there has been "conceptual slippage" between them (150). They argue that nationalism has a horizontal orientation that differentiates between inside and outside group membership, depicts citizens as the nation or belonging to the nation, whereas populism has a vertical orientation, organized based on hierarchy (p. 150). Populists claim to speak for "the people", "the ordinary people", "the little man", "the common man", "the man in the Street" as a down-group or underdog. And they reject "the elite", "the establishment", "the political caste", "the ruling class" as an up-group for not representing "the people" and for endangering its interests" (DeCleen, Moffitt, Panayotu, & Stavrakakis, 2020, p. 152).

In Lee's (2006) second trope of populism, he argues, "The enemy not only provides a sharp boundary rhetorically insulating "the people's" identity, but the enemy also is a rhetorical purifier, a scapegoat for societal ills" (p. 359). Lee (2006) suggests that a dialectical relationship exists between the rhetorical construction of 'the people'

and their enemy through boundary legitimation and objectivation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This aspect of right-wing populism is evident in the way politicians and the news media "define" immigrants as villains by using metaphors that incite fear among American citizens or "the people." Cisneros (2008) argues that metaphors "create conventional understandings by connecting phenomena with familiar cultural assumptions and experiences" (p. 570). Cisneros analyzed reports on immigration from Fox News and CNN during 2005, amid proposed radical changes to national immigration policy. He provides examples of the common metaphors of immigrants from these reports: "floods," "tides," "infestations," "burdens," "invaders," "criminals," and "pollution." These metaphors use populist rhetoric by defining the enemy as a threat to the American people, characterized as "heroic defenders" of our national democratic values (Lee, 2006, p. 358). Populist depictions of "the people" in rhetorical discourse include the following characteristics: "ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans" (Lee, 2006, p. 358). Defining the American people with these attributes brings into existence a collective audience who feel entitled to this land and distressed by those who wish to invade or burden it.

Immigrants encompass what Greer & Jewkes (2005) define as "extreme others" because they are portrayed in politics and the media "in terms of their *absolute* otherness, their utter detachment from the social, moral, and cultural universe of ordinary, decent people—their pure and unadulterated evil" (p. 21). Wodak (2015) argues that continuous campaigns that employ Manichean divisions between us and them or good and evil are popular rhetorical techniques used by right-wing populists (p. 67). Manichean divisions within immigration rhetoric obscure hegemonic whiteness by equating it with citizenship

and creating a spectacle around the U.S.-Mexico Border that constitutes "criminals" out of illegal border crossers. Rowe (2004) argues,

> It is through this process of (de)legitimating certain bodies through the trope of citizenship that differentiated mobilities, forms of institutional access, and capacities to participate in political processes take shape. Whiteness, citizenship, and freedom function within these texts as a chain of equivalences. (124)

Rowe (2004) explains that whiteness equates with citizenship and citizenship with freedom. By constituting illegal border crossers as criminals or "extreme others," these policies place figurative borders around non-whites that restrict their mobilization through INS stops and increased surveillance.

Populist media coverage of political speeches parallels these sharp boundaries and definition of immigrants as "extreme others." Politicians in the mid-2000s defined immigrants as "extreme others" through immigration and law enforcement strategies aimed at securing the U.S.-Mexico Border. Restrictive immigration policies largely re-emerged in the U.S. following the terrorist attacks on September-11 and the subsequent concerns about national security. Branton & Dunaway (2009) quote a brief section of Governor Bill Richardson's speech in 2005 as he declares a state of emergency for four New Mexico counties along the U.S.-Mexican border: "[The region] has been devastated by the ravages of terror and human smuggling, drug smuggling, kidnapping, murder, the destruction of property, and the death of livestock" (p. 289). This description provides "exceptional" examples of unusual crimes that "seize the public imagination, either paralyzing communities with fear, or eliciting levels of collective outcry that result in public protest and, in the extreme, vigilante action" (Greer & Jewkes, 2005, p. 21). The

Governor of New Mexico's speech seized the public's imagination to the extent that it prompted Arizona's Governor to declare a state of emergency on the following Monday and California a year later (Branton & Dunaway, 2009, p. 289). Vibrant images of the consequences of immigration portrayed by the media also mobilized ordinary citizens along the border to patrol with guns and binoculars, as a vigilante group called The Minutemen (Cisneros, 2008).

The third populist trope Lee (2006) identifies is that "the system" is no longer serving "the people" because it has fallen into decay or corruption. Lee (2006) argues, "The conflict between the 'people' and the enemy initiates the populist crisis; the corrupted system accelerates it. Good is losing the battle to evil. Worse still, the structures designed to uphold justice have become too remote, corrupt, or beholden to 'special interests' to yield redress" (p. 361). Immigration reform and policies designed to increase border security often emphasize a crisis or threat within "the system" that needs mended. Rightwing populists often employ stylistic tactics to separate them from 'the system' or traditional politicians. One of these stylistic tactics is anti-intellectualism, in which presidents favor appearing like "the people" they represent and distance themselves from "experts" (Shogan, 2017). Shogan (2017) describes anti-intellectualism as a "defiant leadership approach" because it minimizes the role of experts. "Implicitly, anti-intellectualism conveys the message that the president is in charge and answers to no one" (Shogan, 2017, p. 296). Presidents, such as Trump, may embrace anti-intellectualism to circumvent "the system" and its "experts" by making unilateral decisions about policies on their own terms.

The fourth and final trope of right-wing populism Lee (2006) presents is an "apocalyptic confrontation" that leads to "revolutionary change" (p. 362). This rhetorical tactic emphasizes that the system has failed to the point that immediate action is necessary. Jamieson and Taussig (2017) argue that Trump exemplifies this populist trope by "apocalyptically contrasting the country's supposed demise with the deliverance that only he can provide" (p. 623). They further suggest that Trump's slogans such as "Make America Great Again" and putting "America First", as well as advocating for a Border Wall are examples of Trump's use of rhetoric for delivering "his supporters from a rigged system and myriad threats" (p. 624). Lee's (2006) four tropes of populism are useful for understanding how populist discourse can embody a political style.

Hariman (1995) defines a political style as encompassing identity, rhetoric, and use of media. Hariman (1995) argues that political style accounts for "the role of sensibility, taste, manners, charisma, charm, or similarly compositional or performative qualities in a particular political culture. In brief, political style is *a coherent repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions for political effect*" (p. 3-4). Moffitt and Tormey (2014) explain that populism as a political style emphasizes the performative and relational elements over simply the communicative aspects. Block and Negrine (2017) argue that populism as a communicative style is not a "top down approach" because it involves more complex identity affiliations and emotional interplay between populist actors and their publics" (p. 182). Moffitt and Tormey (2014) suggest that this performative interplay surrounding identity and rhetorical conventions, as well as media use exemplify political style. They specifically argue that populist political style

involves an appeal to 'the people', a crisis/breakdown/threat narrative, and a general "disregard" for "appropriate" behavior and speech within the political realm (p. 392).

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Immigration Reform

This Critical Discourse Analysis uses both Lee's four tropes of right-wing populist discourse (constituting a virtuous people, enemy, corrupt system, and revolutionary change) and Moffitt and Tormey's model of populist political style (performance of appealing to the people, crisis narrative, and divergence from appropriate political behavior) to conduct a case study on President Trump's Immigration Reform Speech. Trump delivered his immigration reform outline in May of 2019 in the Rose Gardens. Trump's speech was approximately twenty-five minutes long and a transcription of the speech was obtainable via White House briefings at whitehouse.gov.

Critical Discourse Analysis is the preferred method of analysis because the focus is not only upon the semantic relationships between signifiers and signified, but also involves performative elements depicted in the populistic political style presented by Moffitt and Tormey (2014). A qualitative grounded theoretical approach to coding was used to analyze Trump's speech line-by-line beginning with open coding. Axial coding revealed categories that aligned closely with the conceptual categories presented by Lee (2006) and Moffitt and Tormey (2014). An additional finding reveals that Trump's right-wing populist political style also involves rhetoric that exemplifies neoliberal or meritocratic/racialized rhetorical strategies. Selections of Trump's immigration reform speech are presented as examples of his political style.

Appealing to the People

Constituting 'the people'

As Moffitt and Tormey (2014) explain, "'The people' is both the central audience of populists, as well as the subject that populists attempt to 'render present' through their performance" (p. 391). President Trump evokes both nationalist and populist political styles to constitute "the people." For example, Trump's rhetoric reflects the horizontal axis of in-group/out-group to define and situate the audience metaphorically as "the nation." Trump (2019) states, "*Our proposal* builds upon *our nation's* rich history of immigration, while strengthening the bonds of citizenship that *bind us together* as a *national family*" (para, 2). Trump uses a populist political style in this passage to place himself at the same level as the audience so that they are more likely to identify with him and support his plan for immigration reform. He refers to his reform plan as "our proposal," suggesting that it is in the best interest and belongs to "the people." While this technique reflects a populist political style, the rhetorical strategies near the end of the passage are nationalist. Trump conflates these approaches strategically to align them together. His emphasis on "bonds of citizenship," "binding us together," and "national family" reflect how citizenship constitutes "the people" and therefore "the nation."

Trump's conflation of populist political style with nationalist rhetoric is also evident in the following passage:

> Out of many people, from many places, we have *forged one people* and *one nation under God*, and we're very proud of it. (Applause.) We share the *same home*, we share the *same destiny*, and we *pledge allegiance to the same, great American flag*. (Applause.) (2019, para, 3).

Trump's language and performance during this passage are rhetorically scripted to garner emotional support and call into existence a unified body of citizens rallying behind the most iconic American symbol, the flag. While many of Trump's rhetorical strategies for constituting 'the people' involved both populist and nationalist discourse, one passage focused solely on his populist style. Trump states, "One of the reasons we will win is because of our strong, fair, and pro-America immigration *policy*. It's time to restore our national unity and *reaffirm our national purpose*. It is time to rebuild our country for all Americans" (para, 55). In this passage, Trump alludes to a "system" or "institution" that has not had the best interests of Americans in mind. Again, he aligns himself with the people by advancing the proposition that "we will win."

Collective Narrative for Unseating the Enemy

Once a well-defined enemy is created, "the people" must generate a collective narrative for ensuring its defeat. Lee (2006) argues, "the "people's" collective fantasy is a narrative of unseating an enemy that has an unyielding commitment to hoarding power and to the destruction of "traditional" values" (p. 359). In Trump's immigration reform speech, he defines illegal immigrants as drug smugglers, "frivolous" asylum seekers, and "burdens" to our nation's economic resources. Trump (2019) elicits an emotional response from his audience as he expresses how "gravely underfunded and woefully inadequate" the infrastructure of the border is and how it allows "drugs [to] pour across." Trump changes his tone from concerned and disheartened to assertive as he forcefully states, "We're going to stop it" (para, 11). Trump also defines the enemy as "frivolous" asylum seekers who provide false or exaggerated claims for remaining in the U.S. This rhetoric has the effect of minimizing the experiences of those seeking asylum.

Trump defines low-skill immigrants and illegal immigrants as "burdens" on the

U.S. economy. Trump (2019) states, "Newcomers compete for jobs against the most

vulnerable Americans and put pressure on our social safety net and generous welfare

programs" (para, 31). Trump's rhetorical strategy in this passage enhances 'the people's'

fears and anxieties about resources being overwhelmed by outsiders and/or non-citizens.

In a vulnerable U.S. economy, Trump taps further into these anxieties and fears by

stating, "Foreign workers are coming in and they're taking the jobs that would normally

go to American workers" (para, 40). Because his proposed plan for decreasing illegal

immigration is to allocate more funds toward the Border wall and enhance law

enforcement at the Border, it is evident that Trump's enemy is constructed south of the

US-Mexico border. DeChaine (2009) explains,

> In its materialization as a border rhetoric, alienization operates through victimage.
>
> Blamed for the ills of a society that proclaims root values of tolerance and
>
> pluralism but longs for wholeness, the undocumented migrant fulfills the role of a
>
> "perfect enemy", a vessel for that which the American reviles, disavows, and
>
> fears. (p. 50)

In this sense, Trump is using the border as both a material and metaphorical barrier

separating citizens from non-citizens or separating "the people" (good) from their

enemies (evil).

The primary focus of Trump's narrative for "unseating the enemy" rests on

creating or enhancing "the people's" anxieties regarding the "pourous" US-Mexico

Border. Trump (2019) begins his immigration reform plan by proclaiming that it "stops

illegal immigration and fully secures the border" (para, 8). Immediately locating the

Border as his political locale, Trump uses a neoliberal rhetorical strategy to divide

citizens from non-citizens, as well as racializing illegal immigrants as Mexicans. Trump's

rhetoric criminalizes non-citizens who cross into the United States without proper

documentation and generates suspicion towards those of Latin American heritage (citizen

or non-citizen, legal or illegal immigrant).

Trump speaks with authority and conviction as he states that his proposed

immigration reform will be the most "complete and effective border security package

ever assembled by our country — or any other country, for that matter. It's so important"

(2019, para, 9). Trump's addition of the importance of this plan, is an attempt to reinforce

the necessity and immediacy for allocating resources and funds toward constructing the

Border Wall to secure "the people" from their "enemy." Trump's rhetorical strategy for

engendering fear and urgency around the Border Wall parallels traditional right-wing

populist agendas. Wodak (2015) argues,

> All right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some kind of…minority as a
>
> *scapegoat* for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the
>
> respective group as dangerous and a threat 'to us', to 'our nation; this
>
> phenomenon manifests itself as a '*politics of fear'*. (2)

Right-wing populist leaders, such as Trump, construct fear to garner support for their

policies through appeals for safety and national security (Wodak, 2015, p. 5). The

necessity of a Border Wall and increased national security is the narrative Trump relays

to "the people" for "unseating the enemy."

Corrupt Political System

Right-wing populists use anti-intellectual strategies to align themselves with "the people" and appear common or down-to-earth. Canovan (1999) argues that populist movements are in support of the people, not the system or the established elites. "Populism challenges not only established power-holders but also elite values. Populist animus is directed not just at the political and economic establishments but also at opinion-formers in the academy and the media" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). Trump exemplifies this right-wing populist sentiment when he explains that politicians did not design this immigration reform plan: "This plan was not developed, I'm sorry to say, by politicians" (2019, para, 10). He further states, "We have a lot of politicians" (para, 10), which accentuates his view of politicians as part of the failed "system" or "political establishment" that runs in opposition to the needs of "the people."

Moffit and Tormey (2014) argue that the system or establishment "are usually evoked in populist discourse as the source of crisis, breakdown, corruption or dysfunctionality, as opposed to 'the people' who in turn have been 'let down,' 'ripped off,' 'fleeced,' rendered powerless or badly governed" (p. 391). Trump's rhetoric exemplifies this aspect of populist discourse when he blames the Democrats for the current failed state of immigration reform: "Today, we are presenting a clear contrast: Democrats are proposing open borders, lower wages, and, frankly, lawless chaos" (para, 5). Trump's rhetorical strategy equates Democratic policies and leadership with anarchy and his strategy as the common-sense approach toward immigration reform.

Trump's "common-sense" solutions for immigration reform resemble neoliberal rhetoric that celebrates meritocracy and obscures racism. Trump (2019) states,

Under the senseless rules of the current system, we're not able to give preference

to a doctor, a researcher, a student who graduated number one in his class from

the finest colleges in the world — anybody. We're not able to take care of

it. We're not able to make those incredible breakthroughs. If somebody graduates

top of their class from the best college, sorry, go back to your country. We want

to keep them here. (para, 28)

Trump argues that because of the currently flawed immigration system, the United States

forfeits the inclusion of talented immigrants and instead must accept poor unskilled

immigrants. Trump further laments, "As a result of our broken rules, the annual green

card flow is mostly low-wage and low-skilled" (para, 31). Trump argues that our

immigration system should enlist those "who will expand opportunity for striving, low-

income Americans, not to compete with those low-income Americans" (para, 41). This

statement generated a substantial applause from his audience. Trump's statements reflect

neoliberal rhetoric through perpetuating "the falsehood that wealth and power

deservingly go to those who merit them through hard work" and "render invisible issues

of power, privilege, oppression, and processes of racialization" (Di Tomasso, 2012, p.

335). Trump's rhetoric never mentions race specifically, but his emphasis on the US-

Mexico Border serves as a code for the low-skilled and low-wage workers he claims are

competing with vulnerable U.S. citizens.

Trump's right-wing populist political style and rhetorical strategies culminate in

his plea to allure Democrats into agreement with his proposed immigration reform.

Trump (2019) states,

Many of the Democrats have claimed to be for these concepts at different times in

their careers and, in many cases, in very recent history. And I hope that they will

end up joining me and all of the people gathered together today in putting politics

aside, putting security and wages first, and pursuing these historic reforms. It's

time. (para, 51)

Trump's overall populist style relies on Manichean claims and is based on a discourse of

dualities. Jamieson and Taussig (2017) explain, "Trump's dualistic world is populated by

winners and losers, those who are strong and those who are weak, those who agree with

him and those who are corrupt, dishonest, unintelligent, or incompetent" (p. 625). In this

passage, Trump associates the Democrats with "cogs in a broken system" and as "corrupt

politicians" who lost their integrity along the way. Trump (2019) further appeals to his

audience by stating that even if the Democrats do not "put their politics" aside that this

reform will go through when Republicans "take back the house, keep the senate, and, of

course, hold the presidency" (para, 52). Trump receives a big round of applause as he

profusely thanks his audience and nods his head in agreement.

Apocalyptic Confrontation and Revolutionary Political Change

Lee's (2006) fourth trope of populist rhetoric features an "apocalyptic

confrontation" as a "vehicle to revolutionary change" (p. 362). Lee states, "If the system

rhetorically accelerates the populist crisis, apocalyptic confrontation is its boiling point, a

zero-sum portrayal of a mythic battle" (p. 362). Trump impresses the necessity of getting

his immigration reform plan passed several times throughout his speech. He often uses

phrases that emphasize the importance of quickly implementing his policy after

emotional appeals to his audience's humanity or fear. In one passage, Trump (2019) says

that under our current law women, children, and drugs are smuggled across the border.

He goes off script and says, "People have no idea how bad it is unless you are there,

unless you are a member of law enforcement. They see it every day and they can't

believe what they see" (para, 16). When delivering this passage, Trump appears solemn

and appeals to his audience empathy for the experiences of women and children

smuggled across the border into the U.S. After a brief pause, Trump continues his speech

stating that "Our plan will change the law to stop the flood of child smuggling and to

humanely reunite unaccompanied children with their families back home — and rapidly.

As soon as possible" (para, 17). In this passage, Trump makes an emotional appeal to

humanize his immigration reform policy and motivate Democrats to act swiftly rather

than waiting for the next election where Republicans have an opportunity to take back the

Senate.

Trump also impresses the immediacy of this immigration reform on appeals

meant to generate fear or anxiety among his constituents. In one passage, Trump equates

illegal immigrants and asylum seekers with gang members and criminal cartels. This

tactic evokes fear and anxiety amongst 'the people' over those who appear "foreign."

Trump (2019) explains,

> Our plan closes loopholes in federal law to make clear that gang members and
>
> criminals are inadmissible. These are some of the worst people anywhere in the
>
> world — MS-13 and others. Inadmissible. Not coming in. We're taking them out
>
> all the time by the thousands, a year, but they come in. They are no longer
>
> admissible. And for criminals already here, we will ensure their swift deportation.
>
> (para, 21)

This passage generates a strong round of applause from his audience. Trump continues by explaining that his immigration reform policy "will keep our communities safe. Americans can have complete and total confidence that under this plan, the borders will finally be fully and totally secured" (para, 22). Trump relies on this populist threat narrative to heighten the audience's anxieties and then steps in as a "savior" to restore their sense of safety and confidence with his plan for immigration reform.

Trump's attempt to generate fear and anxiety is also evident in his argument about how "frivolous" asylum claims affects the social welfare system in the U.S. Trump (2019) states,

> Asylum abuse also strains our public school systems, our hospitals, and local shelters, using funds that we should, and that have to go to elderly veterans, at-risk youth, Americans in poverty, and those in genuine need of protection. We're using the funds that should be going to them. And that shouldn't happen. And it's not going to happen in a very short period of time. Have to get this approved.
> (para, 19)

Trump's tone and performance toward the end of this passage mimicked that of a "strict father," which Wodak (2015) identifies as a tactic of right-wing populism. Wodak (2015) explains that right-wing populist leaders, such as Trump, "necessarily require a hierarchically organized party and authoritarian structures in order to install law and order" (p. 67). In this passage, Trump explains how asylum abuse puts vulnerable Americans in jeopardy and how passing his immigration reform policy will rectify such abuses or restore order.

Trump presents his immigration reform plan as the much-needed "revolutionary change" for solving the illegal immigration crisis in the United States. Trump strategically emphasizes the urgency for immigration reform to evoke the perception of crisis. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) explain, "The effect of the evocation of emergency in this fashion is to simplify radically the terms and terrain of political debate, which is reflected in the tendency toward simple and direct language" (p. 391-392). Throughout Trump's immigration reform speech, he uses simplistic language to garner his audience's support. Trump (2019) states, "Our proposal is pro-American, pro-immigrant, and pro-worker. It's just common sense. It will help all of our people, including millions of devoted immigrants, to achieve the American Dream" (para, 6). Trump's sentence structure is short and his description simplistic. Trump appeals to the "common sense" of his audience by using the language and terminology of "the people."

Trump's solution for easing anxieties and fears about illegal immigration is simply to build a wall and increase border patrol. Trump's solution fails to account for the neoliberal policies and trade agreements that generate patterned migrations toward the United States. Varsanyi (2008) explains,

> Neoliberalizing economic policies such as the North American Free Trade
> Agreement (NAFTA) that have challenged rural livelihoods in Mexico and
> elsewhere, combined with a consistently high demand for inexpensive, flexible
> labor…act as powerful push and pull factors promoting cross-border labor
> migration. (p. 878)

Trump's policy places the blame and criminalization of undocumented immigrants on those who cross the border illegally, without accounting for the United States' economic

responsibility for fueling the flow of poor laborers over the border. Trump's simplistic focus on the wall and disregard for U.S. policies that promote migration across the border reflect populist rhetorical strategies. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) argue, "Populists favor short-term and swift action rather than the 'slow politics' of negotiation and deliberation. Politics thus become highly instrumentalized and utilitarian" (p. 392). Trump's immigration reform aims for swift action and discourages deliberation regarding shifts in migration patterns that increase or decrease numbers of undocumented individuals attempting to cross the border.

Conclusion

Trump's populist political style interpellates his audience by appealing to their hopes, dreams, fears and anxieties about illegal immigration in the United States. Trump embodies the four populist Tropes identified by Lee (2006): an appeal to 'the people', a collective narrative or unseating the enemy, a corrupt 'system', and an 'apocalyptic confrontation' and 'revolutionary change.' Trump embodies these tropes through a right-wing populist political style that extends beyond his rhetoric and into his performance.

While Trump's immigration reform speech was not as comedic or theatrical as his political campaign speeches, his political style remained within the genre of right-wing populism. In his immigration reform speech, Trump constituted 'the people' as (white) citizens as opposed to criminals, "frivolous" asylum seekers, and welfare burdens coming over the US-Mexico border (non-white, non-citizen). Trump constructed a narrative for unseating the enemy through building a border a wall and increasing security near the border. Trump blamed Democrats for the failed state of the immigration system and stressed an urgency for its immediate reform. Finally, Trump appealed to "he people's"

fears and anxieties surrounding illegal immigration to present himself and his reform as the solution for restoring confidence and security for "the people." The findings of this research are important for understanding how presidential style interpellates audiences and generates public opinion in support of presidential policies.

CHAPTER IV AN AMERICAN DREAM MYTHOLOGY: A CRITICAL

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE WASHINGTON POST'S DACA COVERAGE

Throughout our nation's history, migration to the United States has generated

among the populace both fear and suspicion of "foreigners," but also an admiration for

those determined to rebuild their lives in a new country. These diametrically opposite

conceptions of immigrants are tied to our socio-historical positions to capitalist market

demands on human labor, the ability of immigrants to assimilate into mainstream culture,

and an overall adherence to the American Dream. The American Dream ideology mirrors

Protestant ethos, such as hard work and determination, which Weber (1958) suggests are

responsible for accelerating and stabilizing early capitalism. Weber (1958) argues that a

disciplined labor force and the regular investment of capital were necessary for rational

capitalism to emerge and flourish (p. 3). Our nation's ideological adherence to the

American Dream actively constructs our perceptions of immigrants as being either

industrious assets or as economic burdens or criminals. Immigration reform remains a

controversial issue within a climate of right-wing populism and nativism within

industrialized nations such as the United States and Europe (Wodak, 2015).

The dichotomous view of immigrants as economic assets or liabilities exists

within our national mindscape through dialectical manifestations of both our subjective

and collective experiences, which remain in a perpetual state of internalization,

legitimation, and objectivation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). News media reflect and re-

present these dialectical manifestations by constructing master narratives or stories that

favor elite political and economic interests surrounding immigration reform. Erjavec

(2003) argues, "The news is written to assume that the dominant point of view is natural,

commonsense, to be taken for granted and not meant to be doubted. In this, we can see

the hegemonic effect of journalistic discourse" (p. 93). Media representations of

immigrants, as well as the news coverage of immigration debates actively construct the

nation's public imagination about the future of immigration reform and the sovereignty of

the nation (Vukov, 2003, p. 337).

The media is influential in shaping public opinion on political issues, such as

immigration through focusing on whose story is being told, "whose voices are silenced

and whose are heard, and the contingent crafting and recrafting of the plotline and casting

and recasting of the actors" (Price, 2010, p. 158). Previous studies on immigration in the

media have found that immigrants are largely depicted through threat narratives told by

either politicians or journalists, rarely allowing immigrants' voices to be heard. Stewarts,

Pitts, and Osborne's (2011) analysis of immigrant representations in the media revealed

the following themes: "immigrants take jobs away from "real" Americans, undermine

U.S. politics, commit crimes, abuse alcohol, spread disease, dry up social and economic

resources, and impose their own (i.e., not American) cultural practices" (p. 9). The power

of the media to shape immigration reform is immense and the consequences for illegal

immigrants, as well as citizens who are "racialized" as "illegal" are dire, ranging from

deportation to surveillance via racial profiling practices.

The Trump administration took an especially nativist position on immigration as

it pursued an overhaul of policies that significantly reduced the number of refugees,

accelerated the deportation of undocumented immigrants, terminated temporary

residency for millions of people, and eliminate programs such as the Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Sacchetti & Miroff, 2017). The DACA program differs

from restrictive initiatives, previously analyzed within immigration research, such as "the

1986 IRCA, the 1996 IIRAIRA and California's Proposition 187…[which]…were

intended to contain, regulate, and punish immigrants, especially those who are nonwhite"

(Lawston & Murillo, 2010, p. 40). Specifically, these policies generally sought to deny or

severely restrict access to health care, education, and/or welfare benefits, as well as limit

the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States.

In 2012, President Obama used his executive power to override congress and

implement the DACA program, which aims to protect children brought into the U.S.

illegally from the threat of deportation. According to the National Immigration Law

Center (NILC) (2017), undocumented immigrants arriving in the U.S. before the age of

sixteen and under the age of thirty-one as of June 15, 2012 are eligible for the program.

The NILC (2017) estimates that 800,000 undocumented immigrants participate in the

DACA program, which grants them a renewable two-year reprieve from deportation

pending no criminal history and enrollment in or graduation from high school, or

participation in the Armed Forces of the United States. To remain in good standing,

DACA participants must maintain a clean criminal record, as well as submit and pay a

program renewal fee of $495.00 every two years.

The purpose of this Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to examine newspaper

coverage from *The Washington Post,* surrounding the Trump administration's decision to

rescind DACA as well as resultant political and legal battles over the program's future.

Fairclough (2010) suggests that the strength of CDA lies within its examination of the

"linkages between discourse, ideology and power" (p. 93). CDA reveals "opaque

relationships" or hegemonic ideology that has been reified to appear natural or outside of

human production (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairclough, 2010). Using CDA to examine DACA newspaper coverage provides an opportunity to systematically explore the dialectical relationship between newspapers as discursive practices or texts and broader societal and historical structures surrounding immigration.

The Trump administration's decision to rescind DACA is historically and culturally situated within an era of late capitalism, increasing globalization, as well as neoliberal reforms and restructuring (Bauder, 2008). Newspaper coverage of illegal immigration in the United States and throughout Europe often employs "nationalistic, xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric" that generates fear toward outsiders and constructs an imaginary binary of "us" the "citizens" versus "them" the "aliens" (Wodak, 2015, p. x). Newspaper texts, as discursive practices, are not only shaped by historical and cultural contexts, but also are constitutive in legitimating, objectifying, and even reifying nationalistic or xenophobic ideologies to appear rational, logical, self-evident or natural (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

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Mythologies

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Barthes' *Mythologies,* provides a useful framework within CDA for uncovering hegemonic ideologies or myth ideologies within news stories. Throughout history myths have been created to explain the practical and pragmatic functions that sustain human life and make sense of societal institutions that operate beyond an individual's control (Priest, 1970). Campbell (2003) argues that while ancient cultures "told grand stories of good and evil through larger-than-life characters, [that] contemporary myths…can also work to sustain dominant political ideology, and the 'common sense' that lurks beneath the surface" (p. 49). The function of myth in society is to uphold social values that legitimate

and maintain social order or perpetuate the status quo. Chandler (2017) argues that myths so powerfully perpetuate dominant ideologies because they appear self-evident or natural without a need to be "deciphered, interpreted or demystified" (p. 174).

Barthes (1972) employs a semiological model to uncover layers of meaning between signs, which involves a schema comprised of a signifier with its signified at the primary level of signification (denotation) and the secondary level of signification (connotation) (Storey, 2015). Barthes argues that the denoted image is an analytic device that "naturalizes the connoted image and is thus inseparable from its ideological implications" (Ariello, 2006, p. 100; Barthes, 1972). This process reflects Barthes' third level of focusing, when the mythical schema relates to a society's history and moves beyond semiotics into the realm of ideology. Barthes (1972) explains that here we reach "the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature…What causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as motive, but as reason" (p. 128). In this way, the purpose of myth becomes political, and for Barthes, the target is bourgeois norms (Storey, 2015). Lule (2002) argues that for Barthes, "myth is political speech that attempts to make a particular ideology seem beyond question. Myth, he noted, is difficult to isolate in the news, because myth functions best when its role goes without saying" (p. 278). Barthes (1972) argues that because myth does not attempt to conceal or deny anything, it "is experienced as innocent speech" (p. 130).

News functions as a modern myth in our society because its primary purpose is perpetuating the status quo and legitimating dominant ideology and social order. Hartley (1982) suggests that "news is a mythmaker," which underscores the dialectical

relationship between news as myth and journalists as myth-makers who package and supply them to media consumers (p. 30). Aiello (2006) argues that "those who have access to the means of signification—i.e. media institutions—are also able to privilege and thus also impose a *preferred meaning* on images" (p. 91). Lule (2002) explains that myths in the news reinforce cultural values and beliefs. "News portrays the need for stability and dangers of instability. News celebrates authorities and degrades those who challenge authority. News drives people to sacrifice, punish, forgive, avenge, protest and surrender" (p. 287). Because myth is naturalized in hegemonic or preferred meanings, journalists and other myth-makers and tellers may themselves be unaware of these ideologies within their society's cultural repertoire and legitimize them unknowingly.

Text Selection and Procedures

Newspaper articles from *The Washington* post are selected for this CDA because of its wide circulation and proximity to the nation's capital. Potter (2014) argues that regarding political issues that *The Washington Post* is "the chief source of public discourse" (p. 233). Because *The Washington Post* reaches national audiences, as well as local districts known for their nativism, Potter (2014) argues that it may provide more "nuanced" news coverage on political topics, such as immigration, than other national newspapers (233). Newspaper articles were collected from September 5, 2017, when the Trump Administration officially rescinded DACA through June 30, 2019 when the Supreme Court announced its decision to rule on DACA later that year. Currently, the future of the DACA program remains in "legal limbo" and continues to be a controversial issue within political debates surrounding immigration reform and national security. Newspaper articles were selected using the EBSCOhost newspaper database. *The*

Washington Post was selected as the source, while key terms such as "DACA," "illegal

immigration," and "undocumented immigrant" were used in the search engine to yield all

possible results. Only articles relevant to the DACA political or legal debates are

included within the analysis, which resulted in a total of fifty-two newspaper articles.

CDA is an appropriate method for analyzing news coverage surrounding the

DACA program because it encourages the researcher to go "beyond the manifest content

of media…[and]…focus on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the

text" (Fursich, 2009, p. 240). Uncovering mythical ideologies within newspaper articles

on DACA involves a methodological strategy for deconstructing the text. Agger (1991)

argues "every text is a contested terrain in the sense that what it appears to "say" on the

surface cannot be understood without reference to the concealments and

contextualizations of meaning going on simultaneously to mark the text's significance"

(p. 112). Deconstruction involves questioning these "concealed" or "opaque"

assumptions and ideologies, as well as inconsistencies within a text or group of texts.

While CDA does not have a standardized methodology, Fairclough (2010)

suggests that a traditional analysis is formulated within in four stages: focusing on the

semiotic element of a social wrong, identifying obstacles preventing the social wrong

from being addressed, considering if the social wrong provides a function for society, and

identifying strategies for overcoming these obstacles (p. 226). Hall (1975) argues that

analyzing a text should begin methodologically with a "preliminary soak, a submission

by the analyst to the mass of his material" (p. 15). During the preliminary soak, Barthes'

approach to deconstructing or uncovering latent ideologies or myths within the DACA

newspaper articles remains central to the analysis. Newspaper articles from *The*

Washington Post were prudently reviewed and read multiple times to garner a deep understanding of the texts. Critical excerpts from the articles were isolated and analyzed within their dialectical relationships with social, cultural, political, historical, and economical structures for latent ideologies and the implications of these ideologies. In addition to focusing on the texts themselves, the dialectical relationship between the newspaper articles, journalistic processes, and the audience remained central to this CDA.

After the preliminary soak or in-depth readings of the text, the ensuing evidence must be examined. Hall (1975) argues that evidence points "in detail, to the text on which an interpretation of latent meaning is based…[and indicates]…more briefly the fuller supporting or contextual evidence" (p. 15). In addition to revealing latent meaning, Fursich (2009) argues that examining evidence allows the researcher to detect "implicit patterns, assumptions, and omissions of a text" (p. 241). In this stage of the analysis, *The Washington Post* articles on DACA were analyzed for patterns. Extracted experts were compared with other articles to identify common narratives or themes within the texts. Once patterns were identified, the hegemonic ideologies or mythologies became more evident. In addition to observing patterns, paying attention to what is absent from a text provided insight into where the "politics of signification" lie within the discourse (Hall, 1980, p. 138).

Analysis

The articles compiled from *The Washington Post* overwhelmingly presented DACA participants within human-interest or sympathetic news frames, which is uncharacteristic of illegal immigration coverage. DACA participants were attributed with characteristics associated with the American Dream and mainstream white middle class

values. Journalists' association of DACA participants with characteristics of the American Dream both reinforces dominant white middle class values and disciplines immigrants into being industrious assets to the U.S. economy. DACA participants were depicted as "deserving immigrants," while "illegal border crossers" were characterized as "undeserving immigrants." The racialization of the immigration debate coupled with a focus on neoliberal or "law and order" discourses were typical strategies used to justify the decision to rescind the DACA program as well as justify restrictive immigration initiatives.

The American Dream

Lawston and Murillo (2010) argue that sympathetic news stories tend to focus on responses to anti-immigration arguments. "They appeal to an American sense of fairness and charity, putting a human face on immigration and evoking sympathy for undocumented immigrants" (p. 40). The types of appeals that render sympathetic news frames reflect ideological apparatuses that legitimate and reinforce American identity through belief and adherence to the American Dream. Situating the American Dream within its historical context is necessary to Barthes' frameworks because the connection of mythical schema to a particular history moves the analysis from one of semiotics to one of ideology (Barthes, 1972, p. 127).

The American Dream is an ideology coined by, James Truslow Adams, during the Great Depression. Wysong, Perrucci, & Wright (2014) explain that early conceptions of the American Dream rested "on the belief that humble class origins are not destiny. It includes the widely shared view that American society offers equal and nearly unlimited opportunities for those who embrace a strong work ethic, regardless of class origin" (p.

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4). American prosperity following World War II, altered the dream to include aspects of materialistic consumption and leisure such as, home ownership, education, successful careers, comfortable retirements, and upward mobility for future generations (p. 4-5). Nonmaterial aspects of the dream, such as happiness, freedom, and democracy reflect a post-WWII logic of American exceptionalism. Lawston and Murillo (2010) argue "according to this notion, the United States occupies a special and preeminent role in the world because of its 'free and democratic government' and 'free market economy'" (p. 48).

Fisher (1973) argues that rather than viewing the American Dream as a monistic myth, that it is comprised of two separate myths—materialistic myth and moralistic myth. Fisher argues that the materialistic myth is rooted within the Protestant or puritan work ethic. Weber (1958) argues that the early Protestants, specifically Calvinists, developed a system of signs used to determine whether a person would be saved. People were encouraged to work hard and diligently, wait for signs of their salvation to appear, and they extolled economic success as the greatest sign of divinity. The values Fisher (1973) uses to define the materialistic myth exemplify these early Calvinist signs: "effort, persistence, 'playing the game,' self-reliance, achievement, and success" (p. 161). This Protestant ethos drove industrial capitalism to heights never seen before in human history, while also legitimating inequality as a divine stratification beyond human control (Ritzer, 2000, p. 145). Weber (1958) explains,

> Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the
> world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power
> over the lives of men as at no previous period in history…victorious capitalism,

since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer…and the idea

of duty to one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious

beliefs (p. 181-182).

Weber argues that the Protestant chose to participate within this ethos system; whereas

now these beliefs have been rationalized into the bureaucratic nature of capitalism itself;

thereby forcing participation or ensuring economic demise. Materialistic characteristics

of the American Dream confront us now as capitalist imperatives rather than religious

prescriptions.

The moralistic myth is characterized, by Fisher (1973) as representing the values

stated in the Declaration of Independence: "all men are created equal,' men 'are endowed

by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,' 'among these are life, liberty and the

pursuit of Happiness'" (p. 161). Other moralistic qualities include tolerance, charity,

human dignity, compassion and basic human worth (p. 161). Placing greater value on

either the materialistic myth or the moralistic myth is an inaccurate interpretation of the

myths because they both encompass American values, which are deeply rooted in

Protestantism. Wilder (1970) explains, "We can hardly fail to recognize the fateful

influence of the Christian and biblical mythos upon the Western world, or the fact for

better or worse this history still conditions the contemporary outlook and attitudes" (p.

69). Both myths are so deeply embedded within American culture, that no citizen can

fully escape the entire dream. Fisher (1973) explains, "There is a sense in which the two-

fold nature of the Dream leads to schizophrenia. When one of the myths tends to

dominate, whether in the culture or in the individual, the other myth is always hauntingly

there in the background" (p. 163).

Journalists from *The Washington Post* constructed stories about DACA participants as being "deserving" undocumented immigrants, by imbuing them with valued features of both the materialistic and moralistic myths within the American Dream. They use familiar language that parallels the experiences of DACA participants in pursuit of the American Dream with that of white middle class America. Aligning the experiences of DACA participants with the white middle class, accentuates their shared goals and aspirations for achieving the American Dream.

The "deserving immigrant" as determined by the materialistic myth, is reflected in the ethos of the Protestant work ethic, as well as economic and material acquisitions. Lawston and Murillo (2010) argue that characters who "embody essential characteristics of the model U.S. citizen" are likely to be interpreted by audiences as deserving of the American Dream because they are "extraordinary" (p. 43). Journalists covering the DACA program frequently referenced narratives about extraordinary immigrants pursuing the American Dream despite facing great adversity. The articles from *The Washington Post* most frequently depicted DACA participants in the following ways: educated, employed, accomplished, and innocent or blameless.

Journalists evoke the materialist myth underlying the American Dream when they construct stories around immigrants' persistence and hard work toward pursuing an education or career. Sacchetti (2017) discusses how DACA has "opened unprecedented doors" for children who have come into the United States illegally and how this has "become, for much of the nation, a new embodiment of the American Dream" (para, 4). She illustrates how the DACA program has transformed the lives of participants by providing the following examples.

A former waiter, born in El Salvador, now writes code for a U.S. Navy contractor.

A young man from South Korea is using the money he makes selling pastries to

help pay for community college. And a psychology major from Ecuador, who

feared she'd be stuck babysitting all her life, now plans to earn a doctorate and

move to New York. (Sacchetti, 2017, para 1).

These examples seek to portray DACA participants as hardworking individuals that have

excelled in their careers. Portraying immigrants as industrious accentuates their

relationship to human capital and how the ethos of the Protestant work ethic support and

reinforce conceptions of a well-disciplined workforce under the guise of American

Dream ideology.

Journalists also reference meritocratic qualities inherent within the moralistic

myth underlying the American Dream. The Just World Belief is the impetus behind the

adherence to the moralist myth undergirding the American Dream. Smith (1985) argues,

"The belief in a just world contains the idea that deservedness is a precondition for

certain rewards or other outcomes. In American culture, deservedness is based on

standards pertaining to one's behaviors or attributes" (p. 18). In a *Washington Post* article

written by McDaniels (2018), she describes the circumstances around Daniela Gaona and

her pursuit of a master's degree from John Hopkins University. Gaona's mother Mary

Caeres secured travel visas for her daughter and herself to escape the violence in

Columbia hoping to seek asylum in the U.S. Her mother was detained and deported back

to Columbia, while Gaona remained in the States. After DACA was rescinded, Gaona

tried working multiple jobs to "cobble" together enough money to pay for school.

McDaniels (2018) narrative suggests that because of Gaona's behaviors (i.e. pro-market

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behaviors) and attributes (Protestant ethos) her plight was found to be deserving of financial assistance by the Office of the Dean of Education at John Hopkins University. The letter Gaona received states, "Because of the exceptional circumstances that you and your mother are experiencing, the Dean has agreed to offer you tuition assistance" (McDaniels, 2018, para 23).

In another *Washington Post* article, Newmyer (2017) discusses business leaders' negative reactions toward the Trump administration's decision to rescind DACA. Their reactions reflect the relationship between pro-market behaviors associated with DACA participants and their adherence to the American Dream. Roger Iger CEO of Disney tweeted, "Rescinding DACA is cruel and misguided. Dreamers contribute to our economy and our nation. Congress must act fast to protect them!" (Newmyer, 2017, para 3). Iger's comment reflects a violation of the just world belief through a perceived contradiction between the moralistic ideals of the American Dream and actions taken by the Trump administration. Iger perceives Dreamers as being "deserving" immigrants who possess pro-market behaviors and attributes, entitling them to the same predictable outcomes as white U.S. citizens. Along these same lines, the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook tweeted, "#Dreamers contribute to our companies and our communities just as much as you and I. Apple will fight for them to be treated as equals" (Newmyer, 2017, para 4). In this tweet, Cook racializes DACA participants into the protestant ethos of middle-class white America and advocates equal treatment. Luckerson (2014) notes that Apple's racial diversity is largely white (55%) with only 11% Hispanic and 7% African American employees (para 1). When Tim Cook is speaking about contributing to business and

communities the "same as you and I," his point of reference reflects upper-middle class white American values.

In these narratives, journalists from *The Washington Post*, often framed the DACA participants in language familiar to white middle class America, especially the idea that success is achievable with enough hard work and dedication. The audience of *The Washington Post* is largely white (61%) with an average household income of $124,792 in the metro Washington area (Nielson Scarborough, 2016). White middle-class Americans may find DACA narratives relatable because they are starting to see more obstacles blocking their dreams as well as persistent stagnation in social mobility. Wysong, Perrucci, and Wright (2014) argue that opportunities for the working and middle class to climb the social ladder in pursuit of the American Dream are "being shredded by powerful, economic, political, and social forces that are part of the "iceberg" of the new class system—an iceberg of epic proportions and potency that spans the entire society and threatens to destroy the American Dream" (p. 5). They argue that increasing wealth and income inequality and its relationship with global markets and politics is resulting in a "hardening" of class lines in which social mobility is becoming less of a possibility.

Whether intentionally or not, journalists are reinforcing the attainment of the American Dream to its audience, thereby "conditioning" them into pro-market behaviors. Smith (1985) argues, "To justify and legitimate the American system of social inequality, it is necessary for a substantial proportion of the populace to internalize the belief that merit and fate are closely aligned" (p. 17). The plight of DACA participants additionally calls upon a social memory of America's heritage as being founded as a "nation of

immigrants." It serves as a social reminder and impetus to a struggling white middle class, who remain adherent to the pro-market behaviors exemplified by Protestant ethos, that hard work and perseverance continues to pay off. In this sense, Calvinism's Protestant ethos continue to condition a well-disciplined workforce in an era of late capitalism and globalization.

Comparing DACA coverage to previous immigration research, reveals a stark discrepancy. While DACA participants were imbued with the essence of the Protestant ethic and constructed as "deserving" of the materialistic and moralistic rewards associated with the American Dream, previous research suggests that undocumented or illegal immigrants are overwhelmingly depicted using metaphors associated with criminality and invasion (Cisneros, 2008; Quinsaat, 2014, Chavez, 2008). These dehumanizing metaphors generate threat narratives that strip away human agency for undocumented immigrants.

Althusser's concept of the "problematic" provides a reasoning for this discrepancy. He argues that ideology is a closed system "it can only ever set itself such problems as it can answer; that is, to remain within its boundaries (a mythical realm without contradiction) it must stay silent on questions that threaten to take it beyond these boundaries" (Storey, 2015, p. 76). Althusser argues that it is as important to understand the motivations and assumptions of what is being stated in the text as what is missing from the text. Storey (2015) explains, "One way in which a text's problematic is supposedly revealed is in the way a text may appear to answer questions it has not formally posed" (p. 76). This reflects Barthes' proposition that myth does not hide; but is naturalized and *goes-without-saying* (1972, p. 10). Levi-Strauss believes that meaning is

derived from the "interplay between a process of similarity and difference" (Storey, 2015, p. 120). His view of myth is structured in binary oppositions, such as good/bad, us/them, and black/white. By combining Levi-Strauss's binary opposition argument with Althusser's problematic, it becomes apparent that within the process of constructing "deserving" immigrants that "undeserving" immigrants are simultaneously created and rationalized through this ideological process.

Materialistic and moralistic attributes that define the "deserving" binary of the myth; simultaneously construct characteristics of the "undeserving" binary. Therefore, "deserving immigrants" must remain mutually exclusive and oppositional to "undeserving immigrants." The oppositional characteristics exemplified by "undeserving immigrants" include being uneducated, unemployed or illegally employed, responsible for choosing to be here illegally, unaccomplished or part of the working poor/underclass, and/or criminal. Lawston and Murillo (2010) explain, "Respectable' immigrants need to be juxtaposed against an 'other' to reinforce their Americanness…The act of determining one immigrant as 'deserving' rationalizes the violence used against those who do not fit that category" (p. 44). In the news coverage, it is often mentioned that DACA participants entered the United States as children "through no fault" of their own. This suggests that those who do enter the country illegally are to blame and are responsible or worthy of the punishment they receive. This binary type of law-and-order discourse serves the purpose of legitimating harsh immigration policies and increasing border patrol. It also fails to uncover U.S. policies and political intervention in Central and South America that contribute to migrants crossing the Border and into the United States.

Racialization and Neoliberalism

Several articles from *The Washington Post* discussed how the Trump Administration used DACA participants as a bargaining chip to implement restrictive immigration initiatives. Hohmann (2018) states,

> Trump says he's willing to give a pathway to citizenship for the 1.8 million people who are eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), but only if he gets funding for a border wall, restrictions on family-based legal migration and an end to the diversity lottery program. (para, 3).

In this passage, it is clear to see how Trump's immigration wish list "racializes" Latin Americans as "illegal" and renders them vulnerable to racial profiling practices. These racial profiling practices construct Latin Americans regardless of their citizenship status as "illegal," while also normalizing whiteness as "American-ness." Price (2010) defines racialization as having "one's physical, economic, social, and political mobility curtailed and policed" in addition to being "denied entry into the mainstream of power and privilege" (p. 166). Romero (2008) argues that due to the racialization of Latin Americans as "illegal," they are "marked" and inhabit a "figurative" border that often results in assimilating or disciplining them into the dominant white status-quo.

Standards used by social scientists to measure successful assimilation often reflect the same materialistic and moralistic values within the American Dream. Romero (2008) argues, "The preoccupation with assimilation results in accepting White middle-class standards as the norm and in regarding racialized groups as departing from the norm" (p. 25). Escobar (2008) argues that "American-ness" is associated with being white and that immigrants are disciplined into adopting the values of the American Dream, such a strong

work ethic, because the alternative is to be characterized as Black. She explains that migrants' "vulnerability…encourages them to generate distance between themselves and impoverished US citizens constructed as "lazy" and racialized as Black" (p. 58). Escobar argues that these racialized and oppositional binaries serve "to naturalize violence against both Black and brown bodies through the rhetoric of personal responsibility" (p. 69). For undocumented immigrants crossing the border as adults, this means accepting a criminal identity and possibility of punishment for crossing the border illegally.

Neoliberal discourses eliminate racism and social injustices from policy considerations by emphasizing the ideals of meritocracy and individualism (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 255). By linking success to hard work and failure or poverty to personal shortcomings, racial and social class injustices are subsumed under an ideology of fairness and meritocracy. Neoliberal policies have a larger impact on racialized communities because they often justify inequality through "law and order" discursive strategies. The articles from *The Washington Post* revealed how the Trump administration used "law and order" strategies to justify their decision to rescind the DACA program. In an article written by Hohmann (2017), White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders argues, "This is not an easy one and certainly something where [Trump] wants to be able to make a decision with compassion…But at the same time you can't allow emotion to govern…It's not cold hearted for the president to uphold the law" (para 5). Sanders attempts to humanize the president and reduce blame toward the administration by arguing that laws, not emotions, should govern the nation.

Another article in *The Washington Post* focuses on Attorney General Jeff Sessions arguments for rescinding DACA. Rogers (2017) argues that "Sessions is

committed to enforcing the law above all else. Period. Bringing DACA to an end is not some insider legislative tactic. Rather, it is a return to proper law enforcement" (para 3). This neoliberal discourse denies the racialization and the subsequent policing and surveillance of Latin Americans regardless of their citizenship. Lawston and Murillo (2010) argue that "law and order discourses" mask the contradiction between moralistic values associated with the American Dream, such as "freedom," "democracy," "fairness," and "social mobility" with "institutional racial disenfranchisement in the United States" (p. 51). While DACA participants are absolved from criminal identities because they arrived as children, neoliberal discourses justify criminalizing immigrants who "chose" to come into the U.S. illegally as well as federal or state enforced sanctions for doing so.

Conclusion

A Critical Discourse Analysis using Barthes' Mythology as a strategy for deconstructing newspaper texts on DACA uncovered mythic ideologies related to materialistic and moralistic aspects of the American Dream. Journalists imbued DACA participants with attributes associated with mainstream white middle class values that effectively disciplined them into "whiteness" and therefore "deserving" of a chance to obtain the American Dream. Whether intentional or not, journalists racialized DACA participants into whiteness, as well as perpetuating and reinforcing the ideology of the American Dream. During a period of growing income and wealth inequality, DACA narratives remind the nation of its immigration heritage and seize the social imaginary with hope for a brighter future.

Adherence to the American Dream through Protestant ethos and meritocracy, obscure the dominant or elite's hand in economic policies that increase social inequality.

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Similarly, racialization and neoliberal discourses play a role in legitimating racism through "law and order" immigration policies. The Trump Administration's decision to rescind DACA is justified by politicians and journalists as a matter of upholding the law, which obscures how this disproportionately affects individuals of Latin American descent. Barthes strategy for revealing hidden ideologies is necessary for restructuring how we discuss and debate immigration reform in the United States.

CHAPTER V -- THE ROLE OF PARODY IN DECODING MEDIA TEXTS: A

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE'S 'S CARAVAN COLD OPEN

Just in case any viewers missed news coverage regarding the migrant caravan

heading toward the U.S. on the Fox News cable program, *The Ingraham Angle, Saturday*

Night Live (SNL) provides a great synopsis! The "vicious caravan" headed toward the

U.S. is full of "hella Aladdin's," as well as "everyone you've seen in your nightmares"

such as "Guatemalans, Mexicans, ISIS, the Mendendez Brothers, the 1990 Detroit

Pistons, Thanos, and several Babadooks!" (SNL, 2018; Appendix A) The caravan also

has several women who are nine months pregnant and waiting to drop anchor on U.S.

soil. And this vicious caravan is moving quickly toward the United States, in fact, if they

"walk at the normal pace of three hundred miles a day, they could be here in time to vote

for Election Day!" (SNL, 2018).

SNL, largely known for their comedy sketches and political parodies of politicians

has increased their political satire in recent years to cover more policy-based issues such

as immigration. *SNL*'s shift from personality parody to political satire parallels the

emergence of a rising millennial voting presence and increased diversification in media

consumption. *SNL*'s core audience, as of 2018, was between the ages of 18 and 39

(38.3%) (Semeraro, 2018). While millennials comprise a large portion of *SNL*'s

audience, they are also closely approaching the largest adult voting demographic with 62

million eligible voters (Fry, 2016). Fry (2016) explains, "Millennials, who are projected

to surpass Baby Boomers next year as the United States' largest living adult generation,

are also approaching the Boomers in their share of the American electorate" (para, 1).

Comedy news programs or "fake news," along with partisan cable news programs may

play an increasingly influential role in setting the political agenda for both legal and illegal immigration policies.

The increasing popularity of partisan and "fake news" programs has also arisen alongside technological innovations responsible for diversifying media consumption. Media consumption by young audiences, such as millennials (often regarded as being born between 1981 and 1996) is often selectively filtered into echo chambers through technological algorithms and individual preferences (Dimock, 2019, para 7). Foer (2017) argues, "The algorithm is a novel problem for democracy. Technology companies boast, with little shyness, about how they can nudge users toward more virtuous behavior—how they can induce us to click, to read, to buy, or even to vote" (p. 111). This is especially poignant to research on millennials because according to the Pew Research Center (2016) during the 2016 election, young audiences between the ages of 18 and 29 reported social media sites as being their primary source for election news (35%) followed by news websites/apps (18%), cable TV news (12%), radio (11%), local TV (10%), late night comedy (6%), network nightly news (4%), and various other sources comprising under 5% (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer, & Mitchell, p. 4).

Based on the Pew Research Center's findings, it is evident that millennials prefer what Katz (1992) refers to as "New News," which he considers to be "dazzling, adolescent, irresponsible, fearless, frightening and powerful…part Hollywood film and TV movie, part pop music and pop art, mixed with popular culture and celebrity magazines, tabloid telecasts, cable and home video" (p. 35). Katz argues that traditional journalism or "Old News" has been "bewildered and paralyzed" by these new post-modern mediums for news consumption (p. 36). "Fake news" programs, such as SNL,

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increasingly use celebrities, music, popular culture, and political humor to expose

dominant political ideology. Political humor, such as satire, negotiates dominant

narratives by poking holes in hegemonic ideologies that are perceived to be incongruous

with lived experiences. Rossing (2012) argues that "by holding a fun house mirror to

contemporary culture, humor distorts, exaggerates, and reframes in ways that invite

audiences to see themselves and society from new vantage points" (p. 46). In a rapidly

changing media environment characterized by partisan and "fake news" or

"infotainment," parody has the potential to not only problematize dominant news

narratives, but also influence further critical analysis and oppositional frameworks for

interpreting these discourses.

   The purpose of this chapter is to examine how parodic techniques used in the

Saturday Night Live (SNL) episode, *Caravan Cold Open* (season 44, episode 6, 2018),

complements Stuart Hall's (1980) theoretical framework for decoding media texts

surrounding illegal immigration, asylum seekers, and U.S. immigration policy. First, an

overview of Hall's decoding framework (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) is

established to provide the necessary theoretical foundation for examining the role of

parody in revealing "ideological abuse" found in dominant news narratives (Barthes,

1972, p. 10). Second, because parody requires an initial discourse for its existence, it is

necessary to "situate" the original discourse within Hall's dominant or preferred level of

analysis. This makes the complementary nature of parodic techniques explicit within the

levels of negotiation and opposition. Third, Hariman's (2008) use of the Bakhtinian

model for analyzing parody will be employed to reveal how "parody can take any other

discourse outside of its given context of assertion and assent to show how things could be

otherwise" (p. 260). The *SNL* caravan parody will be analyzed within Hall's (1980)

negotiated level of analysis according to the four operations from the Bakhtinian model:

doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, social leveling, and decentering discourse. Lastly,

a discussion of the limits and potential of political parody in Hall's oppositional reading

will conclude the analysis.

Hall's theoretical framework is comprised of three levels of analysis: dominant

(denotative), negotiated (connotative), and oppositional (connotative). A preferred or

dominant reading closely resembles the intended message of the media text's producer. A

negotiated reading of a media text goes beyond the intended meaning of the producer;

allowing for multiple interpretive readings. Hall (1980) explains that within the

negotiated level of analysis, the dominant ideology is "shot through with

contradictions…[that are]…only on certain occasions brought to full visibility" (p. 137).

Hall (1980) argues that negotiated codes within media texts may become "detotalized"

from the dominant reading and "re-totalized" within an alternate framework (p. 138).

Hall explains that when events decoded in a "negotiated way begin to be given an

oppositional reading…[that]…here the 'politics of signification'- the struggle in

discourse – is joined" (p. 138).

The Ingraham Angle: The Dominant Reading

SNL's parody derives its primary discourse from an episode of *The Ingraham*

Angle, in which host, Laura Ingraham, focuses on the migrant "invasion" heading toward

the U.S. Ingraham interviews several politicians and bureaucrats, including former ICE

acting director, Tom Homan and House majority whip and republican congressman,

Steve Scalise, about their concerns regarding the looming "tide" of "illegal aliens"

making their way through Central America and into Mexico. This episode aired two weeks before the 2018 mid-term elections, in which the Trump administration hoped to capitalize on the illegal immigration platform and sway voters for a republican majority. This episode also addresses Trump's self-proclaimed identity as a "nationalist," in which Ingraham jumps to Trump's defense against the "outraged liberals." She cites Merriam-Webster's definition of nationalism as "loyalty and devotion to a nation. In other words, loyalty and devotion to America. So where is the controversy," she asks (Ingraham, 2018, para, 83). Within the context of *The Ingraham Angle,* these two issues are discussed within different segments separated by commercial advertising.

Nielson data released in April of 2018 indicates that "Ingraham has an average audience of 2.5 million viewers, making her the fourth-highest-rated show in cable news and one of the pillars of Fox News Channel's dominance in prime time" (Joyella, 2018, para 2). Joyella (2018) further explains that out of the twenty top ranked cable news programs, Fox News owned fourteen (para, 6). The popularity of *The Ingraham Angle* reflects a wider systemic return to partisan media in lieu of new media technologies and the expansion of cable networks that cater to niche audiences. While Fox News and *The Ingraham Angle*, in particular, cater to conservative leaning audiences, it is important to note the impact of these dominant narratives on partisan cable news consumers. Wicks, Wicks, and Morimoto (2013) found that individuals who identified as being conservative or liberal were more likely to seek out partisan media and engage in political conversations that support their views. When people become more enmeshed within their political echo chambers, they tend to become more polarized in their political views. Conservatives tended to surround themselves with more traditional media sources like talk radio and Fox News,

whereas liberals were more likely to use Facebook, Twitter, and blogs for their news sources. Levendusky (2013) argues that partisan media has the potential to affect the democratic process by accelerating "the move toward the "uncompromising mind" that seeks out gridlock and partisan advantage rather than compromise and consensus solutions" (p. 621). The effects of dominant narratives through partisan news coverage have the potential to affect the livelihood of undocumented migrants within the U.S., as well as those attempting to seek asylum.

While *The Ingraham Angle* reflects just one cable news program on a conservative leaning network, the dominant narrative regarding illegal immigration pulls from a rich history of national news coverage that positions undocumented migrants within threat frames. McQuail (2015) argues that the news media presents socially constructed frames, such as a threat frame, to guide audiences toward intended "learning" outcomes (p. 511). Ortega and Feagin (2016) argue that news stories tend to use metaphors and language to construct arguments, as well as repetitious phrases that become naturalized for news consumers. Cisneros (2008) argues that metaphors "are some of the principle tools with which dominant ideologies and prejudices are represented and reinforced" (p. 571). Cisneros (2008) provides a list of common metaphors used in existing literature on news coverage of immigrants and immigration: disease, infection, criminal, infestation, invader, burden, and flood (p. 572). He adds pollution as a metaphor to this list within his own analysis of CNN and Fox News coverage of the proposed immigration reforms in 2005. Cisneros (2008) found that immigrants were often portrayed in similar ways to news coverage on toxic pollutants during the Love Canal Crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Like the barrels [of toxic chemicals] in images of Love Canal, the immigrants are

portrayed as unorganized, idle, and aimless—connoting a sense of accumulating

danger. Whether sitting under trees or collecting on street corners, these images

disrupt a sense of order and safety by portraying immigrants as ticking time bombs

of cultural and economic contamination situated throughout our cities. (p. 580)

These metaphors become naturalized by news consumers and "form part of our popular

consciousness" around immigration through frequent repetition by journalists and

politicians (Cisneros, 2008, p. 593).

In *The Ingraham Angle,* Ingraham references many of these metaphors, but her

most used are centered on immigrants as invaders and water (floods). Ingraham uses

additional creativity to elevate the threat of invasion by regularly referring to the migrant

caravan as an "invading horde." Not only does her dominant discourse warn viewers of

an invasion, but by adding "horde" she also adds a savage or animalistic aspect to these

migrants. Migrants are stripped of human rationality in her narrative, which heightens the

fear of their arrival because they are perceived as lawless and ready to devour the

nation's natural resources. For example, Ingraham (2018) argues that "this current horde

coupled with a number of illegals streaming across the border daily, will overwhelm the

infrastructure and cause another crisis that is totally avoidable" (para, 31). She further

explains that "as for the invading horde headed our way, they must be intercepted and

sent back to their countries of origin" (2018, para, 33). She argues that if these migrants

are not stopped, they will "swamp" or "mass rush" the border.

Ingraham also uses water metaphors to describe the migrant caravan. For

example, she asks one of her guests how we can "stem the tide" of migrants headed

toward the US-Mexico border. In the previous examples of invasion, she also uses the word "streaming" to refer to illegal immigrants entering the U.S. in smaller numbers to contrast the "horde" making its way through Central America. She also refers to the caravan as "swelling" in size as it moves through Central America and into Mexico suggesting that more people are joining the caravan. Ingraham's statement is a response to a video clip in which Donald Trump makes a statement about who and what may be found in the caravan, as well as a subsequent response from CNN's Don Lemon. In the video clip, Donald Trump urges the media to "take your camera, go into the middle and search. You are going to find MS-13, you're going to find middle easterners, you're going to find everything" (para, 7). Don Lemon argues that Trump is "ceasing on unsubstantiated right wing media reports that the caravan has been infiltrated by criminals and unknown middle easterners" (para, 8). Ingraham shuts down Lemon's alternate narrative using sarcasm and referencing a government source to add credibility to her threat narrative. Ingraham (2018) states,

> Well, it turns out the president may be privy to more information than the bright lights at CNN headquarters and their reporters are ever privy to. Tonight, the spokesperson for the Department of Homeland security confirmed that the caravan includes "citizens of countries outside of Central America, including countries in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and elsewhere are currently traveling through Mexico toward [the United States]. (para, 13)

Ingraham's metaphors generate a dominant threat narrative around the migrant caravan heading toward the U.S. This threat narrative is used to generate fear of the migrant's

impending "invasion," as well as pressure her audience to vote for conservative republican measures to ensure America's safety.

Ingraham's use of metaphors to construct her narratives function in a similar way as Roland Barthes' (1972) "myths" and Clifford Geertz' (1983) "common sense." Cisneros (2008) explains that metaphors function as "cultural indices" from which we build "common sense" understandings and attitudes (p. 570). Because metaphors are interwoven throughout discourse, they become naturalized components of the overall narrative. With the rise of audiences choosing partisan news, these narratives reinforce one another; creating master narratives. Hall (1980) explains that dominant hegemonic definitions of situations "connect events implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations, to the great syntagmatic views-of-the-world" which gives master narratives the capacity to appear all-encompassing and inevitable or natural (p. 137).

Master narratives, such as Ingraham's discourse on immigration, become reinforced through other programs on Fox News that share similar views, as well as those of the Trump administration. Master narratives within partisan echo chambers are likely to be decoded by audience members in line with the intention of the media producer because they carry a "stamp of legitimacy" within a particular thought community (Hall, 1980, p. 137). Hill (2013) explains that master narratives become a natural part of our interpretive process, escaping conscious detection as they continually work to organize our perception of the world" (p. 327). Hill (2013) further explains that these master narratives influence what an audience comes to define as right or wrong and provides a "template" for how to understand and interpret future narratives (p. 327). In the case of illegal immigration, Ingraham leaves no doubt for her audience that the migrant "horde

invasion" making its way toward the U.S. is bad and must be stopped. Voting for a republican majority is her intended solution to "stemming this tide." Ingram (2018) argues, "But now my friends, it's up to the American people. They will either allow Democrats to continue to ignore the obvious and permit rank lawlessness of the border or you the voters will empower the president with the majority he needs to protect our country" (para, 33).

SNL's Caravan Cold Open: A Negotiated Reading

Political humor, such as parody and satire, operate within Hall's negotiated level of analysis because humor "can be used to expose and express the contradictory aspects of life, and to communicate and share this experience with others" (Kuipers, 2008, p. 377). Within a negotiated level of analysis, the cracks or inconsistencies and contradictions within dominant narratives are made visible. Hill (2013) explains that political parody and satire can function as counter-narratives because they aim to "arouse and awaken the perceptions of "men asleep" by shining the brightest, most piercing light into the gaps present in dominant discourse" (p. 331). Political humor utilizes negotiated codes operating in what Hall (1980) calls a "particular or situated logics" to illuminate the "differential and unequal relation to discourses and logics of power" (p. 137). Within parody, negotiated codes are often "shot through with contradiction" using various techniques that combine imitation and alteration of these codes (Hall, 1980, Hariman, 2008), Hariman (2008) explains that these parodic techniques include: "direct quotation, alternation of words, textual rearrangement, substitution of subjects or characters, shifts in diction, shifts in class, shifts in magnitude, etc." (p. 249). These techniques

problematize dominant codes and have the potential to engage audiences in a "politics of signification" (Hall, 1980, p. 138).

 SNL's political humor has shifted from parodies and satires that are solely based on personality, to also include political issues. Boskin (1990) nearly thirty years ago, argued that American political humor is "more frequently than not a tepid cup of tea" (p. 475). He argued that because political humor was largely centered on personality-based issues, that it left political and corporate interests safely "wrapped in a cocoon" (p. 481). Wild's (2015) analysis of SNL's parodies of the 2000 and 2008 election reflect the changes that have occurred in political humor since Boskin's analysis. Wild (2015) found that Will Ferrell's impersonation of George W. Bush, as well as the parodic storyline, largely focused on personality-based issues. While these issues may have made Bush appear less intelligent, they were rarely taken seriously by mainstream media and had little effect on the 2000 election. However, in 2008, Tina Fey's impersonation and parody of Sarah Palin went beyond personality-based issues and has been considered a possible reason for Palin's demise as a politician. Day and Thompson (2012) argue that Fey's parody was so effective because she "largely used Palin's own words and embellished them to highlight their naivety and nonsense, ultimately creating a vision of the politician as hopelessly vapid and uniformed" (p. 179). They argue that this depiction is much more satirical than the majority of previous *SNL* parodies. This switch in focus from personality-based to issue-based parodies, gives *SNL*'s political humor more theoretical leverage to illuminate dominant hegemonic ideologies surrounding political policies and economic corporate interests.

Hariman (2008) argues that political humor, such as parody, can contribute to the maintenance of a democratic public culture. Hariman (2008) explains that "parody creates and sustains public consciousness first and foremost by exposing the limits of dominant discourse: it counters idealization, mythic enchantment, and other forms of hegemony" (p. 253). He further explains that parody is especially powerful when it moves beyond functioning as a corrective measure and generates thoughts and discussion in the public democratic sphere. Using the Bakhtinian model, he emphasizes four operations that are necessary for parody to contribute to a democratic public culture: doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, social leveling, and decentering discourse.

Doubling

Comic doubling within a parody opens up an original discourse to more than one meaning or interpretation. This is often accomplished through creating ambiguity and placing the parodic discourse alongside the target discourse. Hariman (2008) explains that "parodic imitation works, appropriately, at more than one level. The parody replicates some prior form and thereby makes that form an object of one's attention rather than a transparent vehicle for some other message" (p. 253). In this sense, it identifies a dominant or hegemonic code/message and negotiates it through parody to highlight contradictions in the original message or "transparent vehicle." Comic doubling in parodies is often accomplished through refraction or "making minor alterations to the original text" to be interpreted through a new angle or light (Peifer, 2013, p. 166). Peifer (2013) further explains,

> The exaggerated refractions of parody can often expose the underlying
> absurdities, ridiculousness, or contradictions commonly pervading the political

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realm…the subtle and not so subtle refractions can offer up illuminating

interpretations of the unspoken subtext in political rhetoric. (p. 167)

Refractions have the capability of moving negotiated messages into a "politics of

signification" because rather than just reflecting or imitating, they have the capacity to

create new meanings and interpretations outside of the dominant and negotiated codes.

Peifer (2013) argues that this is why SNL's parody of Sarah Palin was so powerful. "The

comedy sketches were helping to create new and meaningful interpretations of Palin

beyond the parameters of immediate "real life" circumstances" (p. 170-171). Peifer

(2013) does caution that parody cannot accomplish this feat on its own but must do so

through the intertextual nature of dialogical discourse (p. 171).

In the *SNL* episode, *Caravan Cold Open*, Kate McKinnon impersonates Laura

Ingraham, host of *The Ingraham Angle.* The *SNL* set is transformed to visually appear

like the Fox News studio, with the Fox News banner and *The Ingraham Angle* logo on

the screen. Kate McKinnon imitates Ingraham's hairstyle, make-up, and posture as she

sits behind the studio desk wearing a red dress—to emphasize her conservative

republican political leanings. The target discourse and parody both begin with Ingraham

introducing herself and the show. *SNL*'s parody also provides comic doubling through its

imitation of programmatic style: interviews, live footage, and advertisements.

Parody Ingraham interviews fellow Fox News cable show host, Judge Jeanine

Pirro, played by Cecily Strong, as well as former Milwaukee County Sheriff, David

Clarke, played by Keenan Thompson. Ingraham in the initial discourse interviews a

former ICE director as well as a Republican congressman from Louisiana. *SNL*'s choice

to replace these individuals with people who have arguably less knowledge and

experience with immigration policy or knowledge about the migrant caravan is an example of an exaggerated refraction. This exaggerated refraction places the establishment of partisan news, in general, under scrutiny. While parody is limited in what it is actually able to "say," one may extrapolate this strategic move as a critique of partisan news in its attempt to pass as "traditional" news. Partisan news is undermined through this comic double because the parody suggests that a host can have politically subjective and unqualified "experts" on their programs to dispense "the news," which is often assumed to be an objective account. Baym (2005) argues that conventional or "old news" asserts an "epistemological certainty" and pretends to already have the truth packaged neatly for consumption (p. 267). Juxtaposing the assumption of objectivity on Fox News' *The Ingraham Angle,* invokes humor, especially for those outside of the Fox News echo chamber, because it is known to be conservatively biased news. Providing parody interviews with Pirro, a fellow Fox News show host and Sheriff David Clarke, a known Trump cheerleader, provide an exaggerated reading of partisan cable network news.

Carnivalesque Spectatorship

Hariman (2008) argues that parodied objects are cast into carnivalesque spectatorships in which they are "held up to be seen, exposed, and ridiculed…The key operation is to reveal that what seemed to be identical with a particular mode of articulation in fact is otherwise" (p. 255-256). He explains that parody is a particularly effective strategy for externalizing discourse because it uses "shifts, slippage, and silliness" to illustrate the performance inherent within both discourses (p. 256). Hariman (2008) explains that as "parodic techniques coalesce in the construction of carnivalesque

spectatorship, institutional forms are revealed to be masks, [and] power and status are shown to be acts" (p. 256).

    SNL's parody makes a textual shift in the order of the original discourse to expose the relationship between Trump's announcing that he is a nationalist and his use of threat narratives against illegal immigrants. In the original discourse, these two topics are separated by commercial breaks and not intended to be a continuation of the same conversation. In the *SNL* parody, Ingraham says, "Thankfully we have a president who actually protects America. President Trump seen here in an official portrait…sent thousands of troops to the border to stop the caravan" (*SNL*, 2018). The portrait displays an American flag backdrop with blurry faceless Mexicans wearing sombreros scattered around the bottom half of the photo. Donald Trump appears front and center as a Rambo-type of action figure. He is accentuated with exaggerated muscles and shirtless chest wearing a Davy Crocket raccoon skin hat. Parody Ingraham continues,

> Of course the liberal media is trying to label President Trump a racist. But except
> for his words and actions throughout his life, how is he a racist? All of sudden the
> term nationalist is bad. The word white is bad. The phrase white nationalist is bad.
> When I hear white nationalist, I just think of a fun Fourth of July barbeque. The
> kind you don't have to call the cops on." (SNL, 2018).

Immediately after this dialogue she switches to an interview about the caravan with parody Fox News show host, Judge Jeanine Pirro. This shift in discourse, as well as its silliness, make the relationship between Trump's racist political discourse and enacting state violence against undocumented immigrants explicit to the audience. Additionally,

parody Ingraham, upon thanking her sponsors, includes White Castle to further illustrate the point--"A castle for whites, yes please" (*SNL*, 2018).

Social Leveling

Social leveling occurs when "humor starts with word play but quickly degenerates into…altering photos or adding voiceovers to represent events that are patently impossible, interviewing people that are totally nuts, and so forth" (Hariman, 2008, p. 257). *SNL*'s parody provides several examples of social leveling. While Ingraham refers to the migrant caravan as an "invading horde," parody Ingraham refers to the migrants as a "vicious" caravan. Parody Ingraham is alluding to one of Ingraham's earlier statements in which she questioned whether the caravan had weapons based on Trump's claim that they were probably armed. Parody Ingraham states, "Tonight we're live from the Arizona Border where a vicious caravan and dozens maybe millions of illegal immigrants are headed straight for you and your grandchildren. And that is not fear mongering. That is just the truth" (*SNL*, 2018). While Ingraham never said these words, her original discourse did exaggerate a threat narrative about the migrant caravan. *SNL*'s parody unmasks this ideology by providing heightened exaggeration of the original threat narrative to illustrate its ridiculousness.

Another example of social leveling occurs when "parody" Ingraham interviews Fox News show host, Judge Jeanine Pirro. Parody Ingraham asks Pirro what she has heard about the caravan. Pirro responds, "I haven't just heard about it, I've seen it with my own eyes. Take a look at this footage of the caravan from earlier today" (*SNL*, 2018). The footage Pirro shows is Black Friday shoppers storming into a Walmart. The video shows mass chaos as people are rushing and pushing past each other to gather their

coveted items. Upon seeing the footage, parody Ingraham gasps and says, "My God. And that is real footage of the caravan?" (*SNL*, 2018). Parody Pirro responds that "it has to be real. I found it on trutheagle.gun" (*SNL*, 2018). This aspect of the parody juxtaposes actual American citizens behaving with an "invading horde" mentality to consume material goods with *The Ingraham Angle's* actual footage of the caravan migrants pulling apart a fence to push through a blockade in Central America. The Black Friday video is far more chaotic and horde-like than the video of the migrants, which *SNL* purposely uses as a social leveling device to problematize the "objectivity" of the news coverage. Pirro's jab about truth and objectivity found on a website called trutheagle.gun further emphasizes the critique of partisan objectivity in news coverage.

The final example of social leveling demonstrates how *SNL*'s parody unmasks neoliberal discourses surrounding illegal immigration to reveal their racist undertones. Parody Ingraham asks Pirro who is in the caravan, which reflects the previously discussed video clips between Trump, Lemon, and Ingraham. In the original discourse, Ingraham references a homeland security report that indicates people from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia are part of the caravan. The parody illustrates how traditional news coverage of illegal immigration is often racialized as a Mexican or Central American issue, by taking the original discourse and exaggerating it beyond realism. Pirro responds to parody Ingraham, "Everyone you've ever seen in your nightmares, Laura. It's got Guatemalans, Mexicans, ISIS, the Menendez Brothers, the 1990 Detroit Pistons, Thanos, and several Babadooks" (*SNL*, 2018). The parodic response begins in line with traditional discourses on illegal immigration, but then extends beyond into fictional examples to include marvel and horror villains. The cracks

in the dominant discourse become evident through this parodic example as the original threat moves from only the migrants to all people of color, whether real or fictional.

This exchange continues, as President Trump is tied back into the discourse on race and the caravan. Parody Ingraham asks Pirro, "And President Trump said that there are Middle Eastern people as well?" (SNL, 2018). Pirro responds, "No question, Laura. This caravan has hella Aladdin's. They took the very common direct flight from Iran to Guatemala. They claimed their elephants as service animals and then rode them straight into Mexico. It makes too much sense" (*SNL*, 2018). The humorous absurdity of Pirro's statement threatens the legitimacy of President Trump and Homeland Security's claim that the caravan traveling toward the U.S. from Central America includes people from the Middle East and other entire continents. Pirro's claim that Middle Easterners were taking the "very common direct flight" into Guatemala and riding their elephants into Mexico further problematizes the dominant narratives surrounding the migrant caravan because it would be far more realistic to fly into the U.S. and overstay a travel visa. De Genova (2002) explains that overstaying a visa is a "discrete act by which very significant numbers of people become undocumented migrants" (p. 436). However, he argues that this is not especially dramatic, which is why "it is precisely "the Border" that provides the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of 'the illegal alien' that the law produces" (p. 436). SNL's focus on the U.S.-Mexico Border emphasizes the theatrical aspect of this stage, as well as its subsequent racializing effects for migrants.

This section of dialogue ends with parody Ingraham asking what will happen when the caravan arrives. Parody Pirro shows footage from the 2013 movie *World War Z* in which Zombie hordes are moving rapidly and crawling over one another to scale a

giant wall. As the screen pans out, a zombie horde overturns a large public transit bus,

and a glimpse of Brad Pitt's profile is shown. When parody Ingraham asks Pirro if that

was Brad Pitt, she responds by saying that he was dating the caravan and that people had

labeled them "Bradavan." The zombie reference problematizes Ingraham's original

discourse of referring to the migrant caravan as "an invading horde." Consistent with

animal metaphors, hordes can also refer to Zombies in popular culture with similar

effects. Shifting the metaphor from animal to zombie elevates the threat narrative to a

state of pandemic crisis. El Rafaie (2001) argues that when illegal immigrants or

refugees are no longer regarded as human, "it becomes quite 'natural' to talk of them as

being hunted and caught in a net" (p. 363). These metaphors naturalize state sponsored

violence against illegal immigrants through INS patrols tracking, hunting, rounding up,

and detaining migrants attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico Border. Whether depicted as

a horde of animals or zombies, migrants are stripped of their human agency and

rationality through these discourses.

Decentering Discourses

Hariman (2008) argues that "parody nurtures public culture by portraying public

life as a dynamic field of competing voices forever commenting on each other. As with

leveling, this is part of democracy's social imaginary" (p. 257). A common political

argument made by Ingraham, as well as other conservative politicians, is that illegal

immigrants take advantage of social welfare policies that end up costing taxpayers

billions of dollars. *SNL*'s parody encourages an "opening" up of this debate and narrative

through the exaggerated refraction of "dropping anchor" in the U.S. When parody

Ingraham interviews Sheriff David Clark, he tells her that he has "also learned that all the

women in the caravan are more than nine months pregnant. And they are holding the babies in until the exact moment when they cross over the border. And the babies…get this…are pregnant" (SNL, 2018). SNL's parody decenters the dominant narrative and problematizes it through the absurd exaggeration that the pregnant women's babies are also pregnant. Escobar (2008) argues that by suggesting undocumented women "drop anchor" or have "anchor babies" migrant women's reproduction is targeted and criminalized within public welfare discourse. Escobar explains that often in media and political discourses that "migrant women are imagined as crossing the border 'illegally' to secure not only their children's citizenship, but their own eventually, and undeservingly, accessing resources such as healthcare and education" (p. 64). *SNL*'s parody opens up these dominant narratives to multiple interpretations and problematizes hegemonic ideologies underlying immigration policy and its impact on the welfare state.

An Oppositional Reading: The Limits and Potential of Parody

Parody undoubtedly has the potential to illuminate contradictions within dominant narratives. Rossing (2012) explains that humor distorts, exaggerates, and reframes in ways that invite audiences to see themselves and society from new vantage points…[and]… distinctively confronts contradictions and constructs possibilities for meaning and social and political repression" (p. 46). Parody is able to de-totalize dominant ideologies but struggles in its ability to re-totalize them in an alternate framework. Often political parodies are left within the realm of humor and lack the necessary vehicle to join in "the struggle over discourse" in an oppositional framework. Abel and Barthel (2013) explain that "most stories filtered through the comedic domain

remain there, but occasionally they are taken back into mainstream news with more critical frames" (p. 2).

   SNL's parody of Sarah Palin is an example of how a negotiated reading transcends into an oppositional reading. Abel and Barthel (2013) argue that Palin's initial interview with Katie Couric received little attention from the press and that Palin's answers during the interview were largely disregarded. However, after *SNL*'s political parody, the original interview was revisited and critiqued in news ways. Abel and Barthel (2013) explain that "after the SNL skit aired, journalists and news commentators used Tina Fey's impersonation and/or skit to discuss, reinterpret, or further analyze the Couric interview" (p. 9). Abel and Barthel (2013) argue that news organization's adherence to objective reporting often limit their ability to critically evaluate and analyze news stories, which leads them to reference "soft news" such as comedic "fake news." Campbell (2017) further explains that "soft news" programs like *The Daily Show* indicate "the potential of postmodern media to serve the role that journalists once performed" (p. 206).

   SNL's parody, *Caravan Cold Open*, highlights and problematizes many of the dominant media metaphors and narratives surrounding illegal immigration and U.S. immigration policy. It will depend on whether journalists evaluate these "contradictions" and offer new critical approaches to discussing immigration on whether it is effectively '(re)totalized' in 'politics of significance' (Hall, 1980). Baym (2005) argues that "the parody pieces ask us to consider just what a reporter's job should be. As such, they ultimately play a diagnostic function, identifying much that is wrong with news in its current form" (p. 270). While parody may remain confined to Hall's level of negotiation, it provides a valuable resource for critical cultural researchers and mainstream journalists

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to recognize these codes and re-totalize them in alternate frameworks that disrupt harmful hegemonic ideologies.

Journalists who wish to "re-totalize" *SNL*'s parody *Caravan Cold Open,* could do so by examining how news coverage and political debates surrounding immigration are cloaked in neoliberal discourses. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) explain that "neoliberalism effectively masks racism through its value-laden moral project: camouflaging practices anchored in an apparent meritocracy, making possible a utopic vision of society that is non-racialized" (p. 254). By emphasizing meritocracy and individual agency, neoliberal discourses suggest that migrants who "choose" to enter the U.S. illegally also "choose" to break the law; therefore, making them criminals and worthy of harsh treatment such as detention and deportation. Lawston and Murillo (2010) argue that this tautological reasoning "naturalizes" the binary "criminal/noncriminal" and "offers no historical context for migration patterns and trends; it also refuses to recognize the role of racism and white supremacy in the policing, criminalization, and imprisonment of large groups of people" (p. 41). Varsanyi (2008) explains that U.S. neoliberal economic policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) coupled with the desire for cheap labor and goods "act as powerful push and pull factors promoting cross-border labor migration" (p. 878). Neoliberal discourses surrounding immigration has effectively obscured the "interventionist" role of the U.S. in "creating and maintaining political and economic conditions that have driven migration northward" from Mexico and Central America (Lawston & Murrilo, 2010, p. 40).

By centering illegal immigration discourse around the spectacle of the US-Mexico Border, constructions of "illegal aliens" become synonymous with Mexicans and Central

Americans (Romero, 2008). This has the racializing effect of targeting people of Latin American descent as "illegal" using stereotypes centered on both physical characteristics and any failure to fully assimilate into white mainstream culture, such as continuing to speak Spanish. Dick (2011) argues that "racializing practices mark actors as non-normative by dehumanizing them, representing them as undifferentiated, immortal, dangerous—inherently and irredeemably Other…To be sure, racialization often goes hand-in-hand with criminalization" (p. 40). While the law determines criminality, policing and surveillance are critical elements that assist in the construction of illegal immigrant status. Romero (2008) explains, "The practice of racial profiling demonstrates that citizenship status is inscribed on the body" (p. 28). Whether a person of Latin American descent is an immigrant (legal or illegal) or a citizen, they are often unable to leave the border behind them and often feel coerced to assimilate into white mainstream society. The racialization of illegal immigration discourse is important because "policy recommendations generated from the focus on assimilation maintain the status quo, ignore White privilege, and set the agenda to disadvantage racialized groups even further (Romero, 2008, p. 25). Re-totalizing *SNL*'s parody requires journalists to deconstruct and unmask policies appearing to be "race neutral" to reveal underlying racist ideology and how it shapes and restricts our discourse on illegal immigration through the confinement of naturalized metaphors.

Conclusion

Millennial's preference for post-modern mediums of news consumption parallels a return to partisan news and the emergence of news as "infotainment" or comedy-based "fake news." Consuming news through post-modern media often encapsulates viewers

within political echo chambers based on algorithms. The algorithms propagate content similar to what is clicked on or liked most frequently, which is associated with increases in political polarization (Wicks, Wicks, & Morimoto, 2014). However, *SNL*'s young audience's political affiliation spans across the political divide uniting both democrats and republicans through political humor (Statistica, 2017). Through political humor, *SNL*'s parody, *Caravan Cold Open*, "de-totalizes" dominant ideologies prevalent in discourse on illegal immigration. *SNL*'s parody creates an opportunity for its audience to see the contradictions, exaggerations, and inconsistencies within the dominant narrative of *The Ingraham Angle.*

While unmasking ideology through a negotiated reading is a worthwhile endeavor, political humor often fails to become "re-totalized" in an alternate framework. This is especially problematic for discourse surrounding immigration. Common metaphors naturalize and restrict immigration discourse within negative threat frames that serve to police and control their mobility. While political humor identifies and problematizes important elements within the immigration discourse, it is unable to "re-totalize" or shift this discourse within a context of neoliberal U.S. policies that create (often forced) migration, as well as the racist ideologies subsumed under neoliberal ideals of meritocracy and individual agency. Millennials will soon overtake Baby Boomers as the generation with largest voting capacity, this provides journalists with an increased responsibility for paying attention to how comedy-based "fake news" reveals dominant ideologies. Journalists must then engage in a "politics of signification" by establishing an alternate framework that can challenge these dominant ideologies.

CHAPTER VI – #COLORADOBORDERWALL: A CRITICAL RHETORICAL

ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S GEOGRAPHICAL GAFFE

"*You get a wall. You get a wall. And everybody gets a wall.*" Oprah exclaims as

she points toward the audience. The famous "You get a car" gif is one of many images

remixed, appropriated, and adapted to mock a geographical gaffe made by Donald Trump

at the Shale Insight Conference in Pittsburg Pennsylvania in 2019. Trump proudly

announced that the U.S. was building a wall in the non-border state of Colorado, which is

located 450 miles north of Mexico. Trump boasted that the Colorado border wall was a

"beautiful wall, a big one that really works—you can't get over, you can't get under"

(Liptak & Kelly, 2019, para 1). Social media did not miss an opportunity to ridicule

Trump's gaffe with an onslaught of user-generated content that captured the attention of

both politicians and the mainstream media. Colorado Governor, Jared Polis, tweeted

"Well this is awkward. Colorado doesn't border Mexico. Good thing Colorado now

offers free full day kindergarten so our kids can learn basic geography" (Chan, 2019, para

1). Colorado's Representative, Diana DeGette, also jibed at Trump by asking on Twitter,

"Is NEW Mexico going to pay for it?" (Chan, 2019, para 5). Senator Patrick Leahy, from

Vermont, tweeted an intertextual meme displaying a map of the U.S. re-written with a

black marker to exclude New Mexico, thereby making Colorado a border state. Leahy,

entitled the meme, *Sharpie Gate*.

Memes following Trump's geographical gaffe offered structural engineering

advice for constructing Colorado's Border Wall, such as lining used snow skis around the

perimeter, mounting a snow corridor around the state, and for the exercise enthusiasts—

constructing a rock-climbing wall! Another category of memes serves as a social

corrective to mock Trump's gaffe, whether it was truly his geographical ignorance or a "Freudian slip" in place of Arizona or New Mexico. Taken together, these memes use humor to reveal hegemonic ideologies along the intersection of race, class, and citizenship in contemporary political discourse.

The purpose of this critical rhetorical analysis is to examine a set of memes collected from Twitter after Trump's geographical gaffe using the hashtag #ColoradoBorderWall. This project joins in a growing conversation about the relevance and significance of memes in political discourse by examining humor's role in exposing underlying ideological structures legitimated and objectivated as reality. Davis (1993) suggests that humor has the capacity to "assault" reality as it seeks to denaturalize, distort, and debunk. Raimi McKerrow's (1989) critical rhetorical theory provides a complimentary framework for examining the role of political humor in memes as its aim is to "unmask or demystify the discourse of power" (p. 91). This article presents an overview for understanding memes as a rhetorical text and addresses the intertextual and rhetorical functions of memes that intend to evoke humor and ultimately persuade audiences on political issues, specifically, Trump's presidential authority and xenophobic discourse on immigration and border security.

Memes as Rhetorical Texts

Internet memes are pertinent texts for examining political discourse among teens and young adults, because they are among the most popular forms of online communication. According to a social media behavioral survey conducted by YPulse, 75% of social media users between the ages of 13 and 36 share memes, 55% sharing them weekly and 30% daily (2019, para 4 & 5). Tama-Rutigliano (2018) adds that

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millennials reportedly view between 20-30 memes a day and the use of memes in advertising has the capability of yielding an audience reach larger than traditional marketing techniques with significantly higher engagement rates (para 8). While memes may appear as trivial or innocuous jokes spreading and mutating across the internet, they are a "distinctive product of current digital culture" entrenched within the global economy and political systems. Currently estimated at $2.1 billion, the meme industry has established its relevancy as a dominant medium for communication on social media (Amra & Elma, 2022).

Shifman (2013) defines internet memes as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process" (p. 367). Because memes are created with an awareness of one another, they often share common characteristics across the dimensions of content, form, and stance. While memes take various forms, many are humorous and involve image-macros with text captioned or superimposed on the images appropriated from popular culture and news media. Davis, Love, & Killen (2018) argue that memes have become a language of their own using a shared vernacular of symbols, syntax, and grammar among social media users (p. 3902). Brown (2022) suggests that beyond constructing a language, memes have the "capacity to transform cultures and construct identities between people. These shareable visual jokes can also be powerful tools for self-expression, connection, social influence and even political subversion" (para 5). The ability to easily grab attention, engage, and entertain audiences, make memes a formidable apparatus of political persuasion.

Huntington (2016) argues that Internet memes are appealing because of their

intertextuality, "by which they take images from dominant media structures, juxtaposing

and remixing them to create new layers of meaning" (p. 78). Intertextuality, according to

D'Angelo (2009), "describes the relationship between and among texts" (p. 33) based on

Kristeva's formulation that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva

cited in D'Angelo, 2009, p. 37). Memes are dialogically connected to other texts through

strategies of intertextuality such as "citations, quotations, allusions, borrowings,

adaptations, appropriations, parody, pastiche, imitation and the like" (D'Angelo, 2009, p.

33). Examining the rhetoric of intertextuality within memes is useful for identifying their

visual arguments within political discourse. Huntington's (2016) research on "The Pepper

Spray Cop" meme is a quintessential example of how these rhetorical strategies reveal

arguments "regarding essences of human liberty" through intertextuality and synecdoche

during the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) Movement. Huntington argues that memes can be

effective means of activist rhetoric and that "The Pepper Spray Cop" demonstrates how

the myth of the American dream is at odds with the myth of meritocracy and fairness;

thereby expressing the sentiments of the OWS movement.

Memes derive their rhetorical power from source texts and contexts of events they

appropriate and remix; often yielding at least "partial" political narratives and

enthymematic arguments. Visual enthymemes depend on an agreement between the

rhetor and audience. Blair (2004) explains that an Aristotelian enthymeme leaves

premises "unstated," encouraging the audience to "participate" in their own persuasion

"by filling in that unexpressed premise" (p. 41). Smith (2007) adds that visual

enthymemes gain persuasive power from identifying with the "common opinions of their

intended audiences" through incorporating references to context and culture (p. 120).

Context is critical because it involves relevant cultural assumptions and socio-historic information regarding the creator's rhetorical situation (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996).

Bitzer (1968) defines a rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (p. 6). Constructing a rhetorical situation is imperative for visual images to persuade effectively.

An examination of memes necessitates a focus on the rhetorical situation or context. The premises put forth in visual images are dependent upon the interaction of the image with the context, as well as the audiences' interpretation. Memes present a rhetorical situation in which a process of "meaning making" occurs when an anonymous creator sends a message via meme and it is received and remixed, reappropriated or combined to create a new meme. Carlson and Frazer (2017) argue, "that the meme-making process is always a meaning-making process" as they have the potential to "become entangled in the achievement of new political arrangements and the production of new subjects" (p. 4). The rhetorical situation or context is essential for interpreting meaning because it "unites the ideas of common language and argument fields" which is important for images because visual arguments operate through symbolic codes and the audiences' process of decoding them (Weska, 2012, p. 225). To be persuasive, visual enthymemes must incorporate material aesthetics and opinions from a socio-historical and cultural context that resonate with the intended audience (Wekesa, 2012; Kjeldsen, 2018).

Memes, Humor, Politics, and LOLitics

Internet memes constitute a significant segment of political humor on social media. While not all memes are political, there has been a growing prevalence of political memes following the aftermath of Trump's 2016 election, which continues to blur the "boundaries between popular culture and political expression" (Penney, 2020, p. 791). For example, in a Forbes (2017) analysis, the most popular keywords generated from over 10,000 memes revealed that 60% were associated with politics. "MAGA", "Donald Trump", and "Conservative" were in the top five most referenced. Political memes boomed during Donald Trump's campaign, prompting Politico Magazine to refer to the election as "World War Meme" (Schreckinger, 2017).

Internet memes descend from a longstanding tradition of political humor where irony, satire, and parody "sustain democratic public culture" (Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021) by challenging authority through strategies used to mock or de-legitimate authority, exposing hypocrisy and hegemonic ideologies, and establishing identity politics through Manichean divides (i.e., "us vs. them") (Ross & Rivers, 2017). Tay (2014) coined the phrase "LOLitics" to describe this "category of digital texts created by ordinary individuals that, like most political humour, are usually responses to news events or gaffes committed by political figures" (p. 46). Memes, like editorial cartoons, are created by people outside of media production, who "play" with the meaning of news, politics, and popular culture. Sobande (2019) argues that political memes incorporate "digital manipulation, image juxtaposition and ironic humor…[to] constitute a form of 'visual argument' that artfully blends popular culture and politics in entertaining and incisive fashion" (p. 158). Burroughs (2020) suggests that memes' capacity for

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"operat[ing] as stitching devices, which meld platforms, ideology, and geopolitics" make them valuable components within online political discourse (p. 191).

Humor pervades all social contexts, including politics (Lynch, 2002). Mortensen & Neumayer (2021) "conceptualize the politics of memes as playful appropriates of contexts that occur at the intersection of the political and the humourous" (p. 2369). Like enthymemes, humor relies on its audience to interpret the context as funny and playful; thereby framing the discourse from an alternate standpoint outside of serious discourse (Witkin, 1999; Kuipers, 2008). Kuipers (2008) explains, "Humor and joking are important negotiations over the meaning of things: the construction of norms, the debate about what is "going on" in a particular situation" (p. 374). Satire and parody are communicative aspects of political humor strategically employed to generate feelings of inclusion or exclusion depending on the audiences' interpretation of the joke.

Davis, Love, and Killen (2018) identify three main functions of humor in their review of tweets leading up to the Presidential election of Donald Trump: "expressing opposition, establishing political subjectivity, and bolstering civic support" (p. 3906). During the 2016 presidential campaign, nearly two-thirds of all tweets expressed humorous strategies to discredit the opposition. Satire is an especially useful strategy for expressing opposition as it focuses on ridicule and mockery (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993). Parody, like satire, is a strategy used to ridicule and mock, but through imitation and a form of burlesque (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993, p. 102). Kuipers (2008) explains that in political or antagonistic contexts, humor can be weaponized through "hostility, aggression, superiority, and rivalry" (p. 368). Davis, Love, and Killen (2018) found that twitter users questioned and debated fitness for presidency between Trump and Clinton

through humorous tweets informed by the hashtags— "basket of deplorables" and "nasty woman." Trump supporters used "deplorables" to discredit Clinton's connection with mainstream Americans by portraying her as an elitist socialite and "career politician" (p. 3907). Clinton supporters used "Nasty Woman" to ridicule Trump by focusing on his misogyny, immaturity, and lack of experience and preparation for the role of presidency (p. 3908). Struggles over superiority were the primary impetus for these tweets, as each side sought to delegitimate the opposition and establish legitimacy for their preferred candidate (p. 3909).

While the previous tweets divided the audience via political partisanship, Davis, Love, and Killen (2018) found that political humor also helped groups maintain in-group unity. They argue, "Identification includes constructing the self as a political subject by "reclaiming" derogatory labels, connecting one's political preferences with other valued statuses, and establishing oneself as part of a political bloc" (p. 3909). In their research, they found that #nastywoman was reclaimed by Clinton supporters to symbolize strength and feminism, while #deplorables was revised as hardworking and patriotic by Trump supporters. Duerringer (2016) argues that memes may also "function in the service of ideological subjectification. Interpellation, the process by which ideology constructs individuals as concrete political subjects" (p. 9). Not only is humor capable of interpellating political subjects, but also has a cohesive function. Kuipers (2008) explains that humor invites "those present to come closer", which strengthens in-group unity, especially within an already highly polarized political climate.

"Civic support" is the final and smallest categorical function of the tweets Davis, Love, and Killen (2018) analyzed. They found that #depolorables and #nastywoman

"worked to not only discredit oppositional candidates and identify the self as a political subject but also became forces of individual participation and collective action" (p. 3910). Twitter users applied these hashtags to indicate their voting choice for either Clinton or Trump; thereby emphasizing the power of social media to divide, unify, interpellate, and call-to-action or persuade its audience.

As with tweets on social media, a critical rhetorical examination of memes in political discourse is important because an increasing body of scholarship suggests that memetic humor has the potential to influence political discourse and outcomes (Penney, 2017, Ross & Rivers, 2017, Hristova, 2014, Peters & Allan, 2021, McLoughlin & Southern, 2021). The creation and circulation of political memes is no longer considered innocent entertainment, but "increasingly central to how large numbers of predominantly young citizens experience politics" (Dean, 2019, p. 256). McLoughlin and Southern (2021) argue that on a micro-level, memes may contain policy information or stances prompting low-threshold engagement such as meme creation and diffusion as a form of political participation (p. 63). On a macro-level, as Mkhortykh and Gonzalez (2020) argue, political memes serve as rhetorical devices where "activists can bring together citizens and mobilize support for collective protest action by challenging the state's control over the public sphere", as they discovered during the Venezuelan and Ukrainian protests (p. 344).

Memes have emerged as a relevant source of political scholarship within an era of media convergence as the boundaries are continuously blurred between "interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications" (Shifman, 2013, p. 6-7). Social media simplifies creative processes for generating

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widespread political content; thereby making ordinary citizens more engaged and less passive audiences to messages of political elites (Lillekar & Jackson, 2010). Ross and Rivers (2017) argue that memes should be considered "artifacts of participatory digital culture" because they "are an organic means through which citizens can respond in almost real time to contemporary political events with no fear of delay or censorship from mainstream media" (p. 3). Because of their capacity to circumvent traditional media, they can facilitate "active, polyvocal citizenship" (Milner, 2013, p. 2361). Memes seamlessly transmit potentially emotionally charged and persuasive messages to massive audiences; thereby making them increasingly relevant in shaping political discourse (Mkhortykh & Gonzalez, 2020).

#ColoradoBorderWall, A Critical Rhetorical Framework

McKerrow's (1989) conception of critical rhetoric is beneficial for examining memes because it seeks to unmask dominant ideologies embedded within discourse to reveal how conceptions of reality and truth are naturalized as "common knowledge." Barthes (1972) references mythical speech as the act that "transforms history into nature" (p. 128). He suggests that mythical speech, once uttered, "is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as motive, but as reason" (p. 128). Critical rhetorical approaches attempt to situate knowledge within a symbolic process, instead of viewing it as an objective or naturalized product. It is within this symbolic process that rhetoric is "inherently persuasive" (Brown, 1990, p. 189). Situating knowledge within a symbolic process opens the discourse to multiple meanings.

The aim of critical rhetoric is to examine the "integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what

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intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change"

(McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). McKerrow presents four features that define critical rhetoric

and its objectives. First, is that it shares a "critical spirit" with theorists such as

"Horkehimer, Adorno, Habermas, and Foucault" (p. 92). Second, she argues that critical

rhetoric must be concerned with how discourse permeates itself into power/knowledge

dynamics, as well as demystifying these relationships in the process. Third, McKerrow

(1989) views critical rhetoric as not being "detached and impersonal; it has as its object

something which it is 'against" (p. 92). The final feature she presents is that critical

practices must have consequences in terms of possibilities for action or future action (p.

92).

McKerrow describes her framework as a transformative practice rather than a

directive to be carried out or a traditional methodology. McKerrow offers eight principles

for establishing an orientation toward a critical rhetoric. She argues these principles are

not exhaustive, nor is each principle necessary to practice critical rhetoric. An

examination of #ColoradoBorderWall memes specifically engages the principles of

materiality of discourse, influential discourse, absence and presence, and an emphasis on

performative action to "establish a critical rhetoric as theory and praxis" (p. 109).

Applying this framework to #ColoradoBorderWall memes illuminates the integration of

power and knowledge operating within discourse. The power/knowledge integration is an

important feature within the symbiotic relationship among memes, as a medium, and the

message decoded by audiences. As Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously explains, "The

medium is the message' because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and

form of human association and action" (p. 108). #ColoradoBorderWall memes circulate

unregulated outside the confines of traditional mass media, facilitating the necessity to examine symbiotic relationships among the rhetorical situation or context, memetic humor and rhetorical strategies, persuasive content, and emancipated ideologies.

#ColoradoBorderWall, The Rhetorical Situation

Trump's geographical gaffe and subsequent onslaught of memes is situated within the dynamics of major U.S. institutional political change. Stuckey (2017) suggests that Trump's election serves as a harbinger of this political change, as his presidency reflects the lack of political coherency and rhetorical order associated with institutional stability (p. 669). This is not to say, that Trump's election or presidency caused this political change, but that his presidency aligns with already weakened political institutions and norms, while his brazen rhetoric precludes the possibility of an ethical civic culture (Terrill, 2017, p. 500). Stuckey (2017) argues that "Dramatic political change will always take place in a certain kind of affective environment—anger and fear, hope and trepidation, are not unique to the Donald Trump presidency but always color the rhetoric of such movements" (p. 668). Current political change and rhetoric, Stuckey (2017) believes, is centered on questions of "identity, privilege, and belonging" (p. 687). These questions are evident in Trump's rhetoric on building a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico, because as DeChaine (2009) explains, "The specter of the border haunts the language of social relations" (p. 43).

At the Shale Insight Conference in October 2019, Trump reinforced his rhetorical arguments on curtailing illegal border crossings made during his Immigration Reform speech a few months prior. In Trump's Immigration Reform speech, he espouses fears of immigrants as national burdens (welfare and employment), criminals (drug cartels and

human smuggling), and invaders crossing the US-Mexican border illegally. During both speeches, he uses rhetorical markers that Stuckey (2017) identifies with moments of heightened political change: "a dependence on hyperbole; an accompanying tendency toward incivility; a certain vagueness regarding means and ends; and a reliance on hope and nostalgia" (p. 676). Trump's rhetoric is hyperbolic as it attempts to overwhelm audience's emotions and circumvent rationality. His arguments evoke incivility by labeling Mexicans coming into the U.S. as being involved in criminal activity such as drug cartels and human trafficking. Terrill argues, "Where others have cloaked their racism and misogyny in coded language apt to be most clearly decoded by a specific target audience, Trump speaks plainly, unconstrained by the bogeyman of "political correctness" (p. 498). His proposals, to "Make America Great Again" (nostalgia), vaguely emphasize plans to secure the U.S.-Mexico border as they do not identify a clear path for funding, construction, and enforcement.

The rhetoric of the Trump administration along with contemporary media discourse on immigration use the border as a spectacle and attempt to distinguish citizens from illegal aliens based on intersectional statuses related to race, class, and gender (Cisneros, 2011). Cisneros (2011) argues, "Obsession over the literal and symbolic border between American and foreigner…is motivated in part by fear of the dilution and dissolution of US citizenship. As a result, alienization of the non-citizen is fundamental to the rhetorical maintenance of US identity" (p. 26). Border rhetoric, through political and media discourse, constructs our notions of belonging in the national imaginary, as well as how this membership is determined. Chavez (2008) argues that Latinx, particularly those assumed to be from Mexican descent, are defined outside of the

national imaginary and therefore "outside of the practices of citizenship/subject-making and incapable of feelings of belonging" (p. 46). While citizenship contains a legal aspect, it operates subjectively and is applied based on perceived deservedness by the ruling collective; thereby, emphasizing the point that citizenship does not necessarily result in equal membership of "the body politic" (Roman, 2001, p. 81).

Chavez (2008) argues that this subjectivity creates a segmented citizenship that emphasizes the rights and privileges of some citizens over others. "Such differences, once constructed and normalized, rationalize and justify governmental practices and policies that stigmatize and punish certain categories of immigrants and their children" (p. 46). Latinx, regardless of citizenship status, are racialized as foreign and unassimilable into the national imaginary. Surveillance practices, such as racial profiling and border enforcement, reveal how citizenship status is symbolically "inscribed" on bodies outside the national imaginary (Romero, 2008). Ngai (2004) states, "Immigration policy is constitutive of Americans' understanding of national membership and citizenship, drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion that articulate a desired composition—imagined if not necessarily realized—of the nation" (p. 5). Furthermore, she explains that our focus on illegal or undocumented immigrants as being the most undesirable, foregrounds national sovereignty as a primary principle for generating immigration policy (p. 62) This explains why the US-Mexican border has become center stage for productions of "illegality" and continued contestations on national belonging, as well as policies of restriction and deportation (De Genova, 2002).

The #ColoradoBorderWall Memes

Trump's geographical gaffe spawned several memes, however, two dominant

themes emerged: prototypes for Colorado's Border Wall and U.S. map reconfigurations.

This critical rhetorical analysis examines seven memes that exemplify these dominant

themes. Utilizing McKerrow's critical rhetorical framework, this analysis examines

humor and rhetorical strategies used in the #coloradoborderwall memes. The first

category of memes are image-macros of proposed walls deemed suitable to surround the

southern border of Colorado. One meme, displays an image-macro of used skiis standing

side-by-side with tall evergreen trees behind them, symbolizing Colorado's reputation as

a refuge for nature and snow sport enthusiasts. The caption says, "Donald—I've been

working on this design for the Colorado wall, what do you think?" The second meme is

an image-macro of a snow corridor on the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine route in northern

Japan. The walls of this snow corridor can reach up to twenty meters. In the image

macro, the snow walls tower over tourists and their charter bus, while the caption says,

"First group of tourists to get an up-close look at the new #colororadoborderwall." The

final meme is an image-macro of an indoor rock-climbing wall, with the caption,

"Breaking News: Prototype of the #ColoradoBorderWall unveiled."

The second category of memes reconfigures the border between the U.S. and

Mexico. Three memes redraw the border using a black sharpie marker, referencing

Trump's weather-related gaffe with Hurricane Dorian. Explaining, #SharpieGate, is

necessary because the meaning is remixed and appropriated to #ColoradoBorderWall. On

August 29, 2019, the White House displayed an image of Hurricane Dorian's path

provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which did not

include the state of Alabama in its path. However, Trump sent a series of tweets in early September saying, "In addition to Florida—South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, will most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated. Looking like one of the largest hurricanes ever. Already a category 5." (KnowYourMeme, 2019)

Trump received a barrage of tweets ridiculing him for including Alabama. The National Weather Service even tweeted a correction saying that hurricane Dorian would not impact the state of Alabama to alleviate residential fears. Trump unleashed a twitter rant indicating his correctness about the hurricane's trajectory and his victimization by #fakenews. On September 4, the official White House twitter account tweeted the original photo, but with a black circle drawn to extend the original trajectory of the hurricane to include Alabama. Trump was quickly called out for doctoring the weather map with a sharpie by a news station who added that falsifying a weather report is illegal. Shortly after these allegations, new variations of manipulated weather map memes circulated throughout social media ridiculing Trump, resulting in #SharpieGate.

The #ColoradoBorderWall memes allude to #sharpiegate through appropriating images of a U.S. map manipulated by a sharpie to justify Trump's assertion that Colorado is a border state. Two of the memes display the same U.S. map, with a sharpie drawn around the US-Mexico border with exception of New Mexico. On this map, "New" is crossed out leaving only "Mexico" visible. In one meme, Donald Trump holds up this version of the manipulated map on a giant posterboard, labeled U.S. Border Wall. Trump appears to be in mid-sentence, leading the audience to assume he is defending the placement of the Colorado Border Wall, as he did with the trajectory of hurricane Dorian. The second meme simply shows an image of the manipulated map, excluding New

Mexico, with the caption "Out of the news cycle for 24 hours, and wake up to discover Trump is building a wall with Colorado, and his audience applauded. Grandpa would have his keys taken away; he needs nuclear codes taken way." The third edited sharpie map draws the U.S.-Mexico border to exclude not only New Mexico, but also Arizona and half of Texas. The caption says, "The White House just released this map proving Colorado does border Mexico."

The final meme in this category is written primarily in Spanish and contains an English caption at the bottom of the image. In Spanish, at the top of the map it says, "Let's support Donald Trump: Yes, to the Border Wall. Below the map is a caption in Spanish that says, "I will gladly send you the plans and don't worry we Mexicans will pay for the work, when you get off the land to start building." The map is appropriated from a pre-1848 U.S. map prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and 1850 purchase of Western Texas. The map says, "El Muro De Donald Trump" (Donald Trump's Wall) and reflects the US-Mexican "border" prior to Mexico's cessation of land upon losing the Mexican-American war. This map redraws the border to exclude California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. The English caption at the bottom of the meme resembles multiple-choice responses on a geography or history exam. While there is no question posed, the answers are:

A.) A U.S. president revealing ignorance of U.S. geography?
B.) A U.S. president jumbling the 'Latino ones'?
C.) Senility?
D.) A restoration of Mexico's borders pre-Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo?
E.) All of the above?

This meme explicitly exposes hegemonic ideologies underlying Trump's gaffe within the context of U.S. expansion and immigration reform.

A Critical Rhetorical Analysis of the #ColoradoBorderWall Memes

The #ColoradoBorderWall memes require an audience to be knowledgeable about the rhetorical context of Trump's geographical gaffe to generate humor and persuasion effectively. The intended audience for these memes is likely to be critical of Trump and/or his obsession with building a wall at the U.S.-Mexican border, as memetic rhetorical strategies range from playful ridicule to questions of presidential legitimacy. The #ColoradoBorderWall memes establish their persuasive arguments by appropriating images from existing sources outside the rhetorical context and using parody and satire. The appropriated images of potential Colorado border wall prototypes and reconfigurations of the U.S.-Mexico border are remixed and re-purposed within the rhetorical context of the memes to persuade audiences to laugh and possibly participate in creating and spreading their own #ColoradoBorderWall memes.

#ColoradoBorderWall Prototypes and Map Edits

Memes focusing on prototypes for the Colorado border wall rely on cultural stereotypes to generate humor. Colorado, popular for its tourists' attractions, boasts four national parks and diverse landscapes for outdoor enthusiasts. These memes capture the state's reputation for being a snow skiing haven, as well as a tourist destination for sight-seeing and exploring nature. The #ColoradoBorderWall prototype memes all address an aspect of fun and leisure in the composition of the proposed Colorado border wall, which presents a stark contrast when juxtaposed to various constructions of the actual US-Mexican border. These images remain largely absent in discourse. Learish (2022) describes the actual US-Mexican border wall as

a series of piecemeal barriers that vary in size, shape, and age. Sections of the

"wall" include low fences, high barriers, dividers with steel slats and areas with

checkpoints and pedestrian passages. Other parts of the border have no structure

at all, demarcated instead by rivers and mountains (para, 2).

Juxtaposing #ColoradoBorderWall with the U.S.-Mexican border wall exposes

underlying racial and economic ideologies associated with unequal membership within

the national polity.

As a collective, this group of memes illustrates how Trump's gaffe exposes

"unconscious" or hegemonic assumptions about who belongs in the national imaginary.

DeChaine (2009) explains that borders serve as ordering apparatuses that "perform both

division and containment functions, differentiating the self from others, one culture from

another, desirable elements from undesirable ones, and, often enough, "us from "them"

(p. 44). Geographically, and logically, Trump's "border wall" should reside between New

Mexico and Mexico and not between Colorado and New Mexico. However, Trump

mentions he is building a wall around Colorado, a state with a relatively high white

population (67%) and a relatively low percentage of Hispanics (22%) for a southwestern

state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). New Mexico, by contrast, has the highest percentage

of Hispanics (46%) in the nation (World Population Review, 2023). Based on the

rhetorical situation and Trump's record for exhibiting racist and xenophobic immigration

rhetoric (Kang & Yang, 2022), this gaffe reveals his thoughts and beliefs about racial

belonging within the national imaginary.

The #ColoradoBorderWall memes illustrates how race and class intersect when

these memetic prototypes are juxtaposed to the actual US-Mexican border wall. The

former is comprised of leisure, attraction, and adventure, whereas the latter appears ominous and threatening. Additionally, memes referencing the map reconfigurations exemplify a race and class intersection as well. For example, Colorado has the seventh highest median household income ($85,000), whereas New Mexico is among the poorest states, ranking forty-seventh in the nation ($53,463) (WiseVoter, 2023). Building a wall around Colorado, rather than New Mexico, emphasizes societal values and privileges associated with the white middle-class. In this respect, Colorado resembles the nostalgic "MAGA" vision from Trump's national imaginary that needs protection from outsiders threatening to contaminate "the body politic" (Roman, 2001).

The meme appropriating a U.S. map prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848), playfully and explicitly illustrates racial contentions within the national imaginary. Referencing Mexico's cessation of land during the US-Mexican war, reveals historical struggles over race and inclusion into the polity (Ngai, 2004). Ngai (2004) explains that as a social construct, race is always historically specific and contingent on a "confluence of economic, social, cultural, and political factors" (p. 7). While early national quota systems (1920) classified and segregated Europeans by nationality, their whiteness defined them as more desirable than non-whites. While European ethnic classifications were "uncoupled" from their racial identity, this was not the case for Asians and Mexicans (p. 7). Ngai (2004) argues, "The legalization of these ethnic groups' national origin cast them as permanently foreign and unassimilable to the nation…These racial formations produced "alien citizens" …with formal U.S. citizenship but who remained alien in the eyes of the nation" (p. 8).

An allusion to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo within the meme is historically

relevant because the cessation of land following the Mexican-American War complicated

conceptions of citizenship and nationality. Ngai (2004) explains, "Manifest Destiny

touted the Anglo-Saxon, and during the Mexican-American War, expansionists wanted to

take all of Mexico, but abandoned the idea because they did not want to bring a populous

colored race into the nation" (p. 50). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo extended U.S.

citizenship to inhabitants of the conquered territories who did not return to Mexico,

which consequently necessitated them as being racialized as "white" (Ngai, 2004, 50).

This allusion reveals that struggles over national belonging and citizenship, cannot be

disentangled from race. Early immigration quotas were designed around the notion that

the American nation descended from Europe, and therefore should resemble Europe and

maintain a predominantly white populace (Ngai, 2004, p. 27). While cloaked in

neoliberal discourses, these ideologies still operate insidiously within U.S. immigration

policy.

#ColoradoBorderWall Memes, Humor as a Rhetorical Strategy

Satire and parody are especially evident in the series of #ColoradoBorderWall

memes. Martinez & Atouba (2021) define political satire as "a form of political

communication that uses humor, irony, and/or parody to provide substantive criticism of

political actors, political institutions, media, and the various absurdities of our

sociopolitical systems" (p. 461). Parody, while also functioning as a form of mockery and

ridicule, also uses a "burlesque" style of imitation to accomplish its criticisms (Kreuz &

Roberts, 1993, p. 102). In addition to political criticism, parody assists in demystifying

hegemonic ideological assumptions.

Meme-making has the potential to demystify "conditions of domination" through visual rhetoric and humor (McKerrow, 1989). Because memes involve images and texts, their use of humor has potential to expose contradictions within dominant hegemonic discourse through playing with meaning. Bakhtin regards humor's "carnivalesque" space "as a possible alternative to the bourgeois public sphere, allowing for a different mode of 'popular' civic participation" (Kuipers, 2008, p. 377). The memescape provides content creators opportunities to engage with what Foucault calls, "spaces of dissension," within ideological articulations. Duerringer (2016) describes them as "instabilities that, if stressed, can pull down the entire structure," as well as being opportunities to "pry apart taken-for-granted associations and schemes that otherwise operate below the level of the said" (p. 2). Internet memes circumvent the exclusionary character of mass media, allowing more equal footing for political engagement. As Zidani argues, "Memes have been used across the world both to reinforce and disrupt power relations in the political and cultural landscape" (p. 2383).

The #ColoradoBorderWall memes address these "spaces of dissension" through their creative satirical and parodic styles that mock Trump's intelligence and mental fitness, racism, immigration policy, and presidential legitimacy. The map reconfiguration memes were more likely to directly mock Trump's intelligence by questioning his knowledge of U.S. geography. One of the possible answers on the "El Muro De Donald Trump" meme says, "A U.S. president revealing ignorance of U.S. geography?" indicating his lack of elementary-level knowledge. This same meme also gives another option of "Senility?" which questions Trump's mental fitness for leadership and may also allude to agist implications for his leadership. One of the Sharpie edited map memes

explicitly engages with agist assumptions surrounding his mental fitness, "Trump is building a wall with Colorado, and his audience applauded. Grandpa would have his keys taken away; he needs nuclear codes taken away." By comparing Trump to a Grandpa, this meme suggests that Trump is too old for presidency and needs to be relieved of important duties, especially those of nuclear capacity.

All the map reconfiguration memes implicitly address Trump's racism through their reconstruction of the US-Mexican border to exclude states with higher proportions of Hispanic populations. However, the "El Muro De Donald Trump" meme directly addresses race as a possible answer from the multiple-choice listing, "A U.S. president jumbling the 'Latino ones'?" This meme directly addresses Trump's verbal error as his racial bias in constructing his national imaginary. Another multiple-choice option in this meme that alludes to race is, "restoration of Mexico's borders pre-Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo?" This addresses the complicated colonial past between the U.S. and Mexico its relevance to race, xenophobia, national sovereignty, and the US-Mexican border.

As a collective the #ColoradoBorderWall memes serve to de-legitimate Trump's presidency through mocking and ridiculing him personally, as well as his immigration policies focusing on the US-Mexican border wall. In theories of legitimacy, Habermas believed that political actors, such as Trump gain legitimacy through warranted actions in the public sphere (Ritzer, 2000). However, legitimacy is also negotiated and upended in the public sphere. The #ColoradoBorderWall memes' satirical humor serves to de-legitimate Trump's political leadership in the public sphere and create distrust and uncertainty about his policies. Davis, Glantz, and Novak (2016) argue, "In some instances, the Internet can indeed act as the great equalizer" as memes become viral and

influential, they are able to delegitimize and topple powerful corporations and political actors' regimes (p. 80). This gives credence to memes being a form of political engagement capable of harnessing strategies of humor and rhetoric to make persuasive arguments.

Conclusion

A critical rhetorical analysis of the #ColoradoBorderWall memes situates Trump's gaffe within the context of his speech at the Shale Energy Conference, as well as within an atmosphere of political change. Trump's speech constitutes a dominant discourse reflecting embedded ideologies indicative of institutional political change such as nativism and populism. As Stuckey (2017) mentions, during climates of institutional political change, people question belonging, identity, and privilege often through expressions of anger, fear, and hope. Nativist and populist ideologies and rhetoric reflect symbolic struggles over determining boundaries between ingroups and outgroups, as well as spawning a general distrust of political elites. Chavez (2008) explains, "Restrictions on immigration and citizenship have always been about how we imagine who we are as a people and who we wish to include as part of the nation, whether this is explicitly recognized or not" (p. 25). Conceptions of the inclusion within national imaginary are real in their consequences, impacting the lives of undocumented and legal immigrants, as well as Latinx citizens.

Analyzing #ColoradoBorderWall memes, open political and media rhetoric to symbolic interpretation, which has the capacity of moving ideological discourses "toward emancipation" Makus, 1990, p. 496). Trump's geographical gaffe, like a "Freudian slip" or parapraxis, functions as a verbal error that expresses "unconscious wishes, attitudes, or

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impulses" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Trump's gaffe functions as a verbal error exposing aspects of hegemonic ideologies related to race, class, and citizenship within the national sovereignty. Against the backdrop of the US-Mexican border wall, Trump's gaffe is a reminder of the performative nature of the border, "whose primary function is to designate, produce, and/or regulate the space of difference" (p. 44). As a collective, this series of memes uses rhetorical strategies and humor to playfully expose "spaces of dissension" and negotiate ideological contradictions of inclusion and exclusion into the national imaginary (Hall, 1980).

This analysis demonstrates how memes expose and challenge dominant ideologies, as a potent form of visual political rhetoric. Collectively, these memes use elements of visual rhetoric to persuade audiences that Trump lacks the basic education/knowledge and mental fitness to be a U.S. president, while also criticizing his xenophobic and restrictive immigration policies. Circumvention of exclusionary mass media, instantaneous dissemination, and virality, coupled with the ability to legitimate and delegitimate political actors through persuasive humor and rhetorical strategies demonstrate the necessity for examining memetic political discourse. As our society continues to grapple with issues of identity, privilege, and belonging, examining political memes assists in emancipating hegemonic ideologies from their naturalized positions. DeChaine (2009) explains, "Notwithstanding the nativism and xenophobia that have historically shaped and continue to shape popular attitudes toward undocumented migrants in the United States, the problem of immigration, it seems, lies not with the migrant, but with the border" (p. 44). The #ColoradoBorderWall memes provided fertile ground for examining the construction of meaning surrounding Trump's geographical

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gaffe and its relevance to race, class, citizenship, and immigration policy, as it pertains to

the U.S.-Mexico border.

CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION

Political deliberations about undocumented migrants, immigration policy, borders, and boundaries, as well as citizenship occur within mediated public spheres. This research reveals how political and media representations of undocumented immigrants and immigration policy function as discursive formations, resulting in discursive practices that render them as habitually foreign. While immigration remains a divisive political topic in the United States, this research demonstrates the need to expose dehumanizing rhetoric and hegemonic ideologies that emanate discursive power over the constitution of undocumented migrants. Weakened political norms and values in American politics preceding and continuing throughout Trump's presidency reflect increased partisanship in our current polarized political landscape. The rhetorical context of Trump's presidency is poignant to this research because his presidency represents a "stark exception" and divergence from otherwise positive trends in political rhetoric regarding immigration and mixed representations of immigrants within mainstream media (Card, et al., 2022). As a collective, these four studies expose hegemonic ideologies prevalent to immigration, immigration policy, and undocumented migrants within the rhetorical context of Trump's presidency and provide insights on how humor and social media can be used to expose and politically engage audiences.

The timeliness of this research adds to its overall importance. Politically, presidential rhetoric that retells our history as "a nation of immigrants," have been relatively positive following World War II. However, Trump's presidency and administration represent an abrupt change not only to immigration rhetoric, but also to traditional political norms. Card et al. (2022) argues, Trump "by his utterances, was the

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most antiimmigration president to sit in office over the past 140 y[ears]" (p. 3).

Congressional immigration rhetoric had also remained positive since WWII, until

political partisanship began increasing in the 1970s and intensified following President

Clinton's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Contemporary partisan

divides continue to deepen. Support for immigration and immigration policy has

profoundly aligned with the democratic party. Card et al. (2022) explains, "By contrast,

Republican legislators are now approximately as overtly antiimmigration in their

speeches as the average legislator was during the Age of Mass Migration from Europe

and the 1920s quota periods" (p. 2). This research exposes both the overt and covert anti-

immigration ideology and rhetoric produced by Trump himself, as well as through

newspaper articles, television, and social media.

Trump's immigration reform speech, televised at the White House Rose gardens,

illustrates how his restrictive policies and political style reflect and (re)produce nativist

and rightwing populist discourses centered on the US-Mexican border. Trump's

presidential political style involves performances that interpellate his audience through

populist appeals regarding the breakdown in immigration policy and control of the US-

Mexican border. He engages his audience using emotional appeals that operate outside

norms of traditional politics and political correctness.

The presidency wields powerful opportunities for generating discourses about

belonging in the national imaginary. While Trump's core ideologies did not vary

significantly from mainstream republicans (Terrill, 2017), his presidential style operated

outside of political norms. Trump dropped the "visage" of being politically correct,

brazenly mocked and ridiculed political opponents (personally, not their platforms or

positions), and operated on a racist and xenophobic framework that idealizes American nostalgia prior to the civil rights era and "liberal wokeness."

Trump's political style and emboldened rhetoric around race and immigration has left a haunting and divisive legacy, as well as upending political and communicative norms. Lehrer (2022) labels the era Post-Trump, as Trumpism, because his "bombastic style and anti-establishment attitude" remain years after he left office (para, 5). She explains, "Trumpism is embedded in the DNA of the [Republican] party. Most of those who refused to pledge fealty to the former president lost their primaries or retired to avoid defeat. With only a handful of exceptions, the Republicans running for office are strongly in Trump's camp, embracing some version of his denials of his 2020 election loss" (para, 4). Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a 2024 presidential candidate, is a primary example of Trumpism, as he adopts Trump's provocative rhetoric and practices to rile up his supporters. DeSantis has engaged in shocking and despicable acts to garner rightwing support, such as paying to have undocumented migrants sent to Martha's Vineyard, an island with few resources for employment or public assistance.

These undocumented immigrants were Venezuelan asylum seekers, but instead became nameless political pawns in U.S. struggles over immigration reform. Chavez (2008) explains, "Media spectacles transform immigrants' lives into virtual lives, which are typically devoid of the nuances and subtleties of real lived lives. It is in this sense that the media spectacle transforms a 'worldview'—that is, a taken-for-granted understanding of the world—into an objective force, one that is taken as "truth" (p. 6). Undocumented migrants lose their humanness through discourses that racialize them into morally abject

criminals crossing the US-Mexican border for opportunities to escape poverty and violence (DeChaine, 2009).

Trumpism remains a specter on American immigration politics, as evidenced by DeSantis's outrageous actions. DeSantis's actions stem from naturalized rhetorical discourses that essentialize and dehumanize undocumented immigrants as criminals and economic burdens, resulting in uncontested state-controlled violence against them. Rarely do we hear undocumented immigrants' sides of the story, but in the case of Martha's Vineyard, a journalist describes the brokenness these refugees experienced upon discovering the truth. Staff at the Martha's Vineyard community center assisted a refugee named, Pablo, as he called his wife in Venezuela. "My love, we were tricked," he told his wife, weeping uncontrollably" (Sandoval, Jordan, Mazzei, & Goodman, 2022, para, 46). This reveals a rare, humanized experience of these immigration policies.

While this research focused exclusively on how Trump's presential style revealed nativist and rightwing populist rhetoric within his Immigration Reform Speech, future research could examine how this presidential style also extends to populist modes of communication, such a social media. Trump's passion for Twitter was no secret during his presidency, as he dominated the media with "headline grabbing behavior" (Karpf, 2017, p. 3). Twitter, and other forms of social media, are celebrated for their ability to circumvent mainstream media and allow "the people's" voices to be heard. Trump's presidential candidacy and presidency utilized the populist benefits of social media and incorporated populist messaging. Karpf (2017) explains, "Trump rarely was using Twitter in order to *bypass* the mainstream media. Instead, he was using social media in order to set the agenda of the mainstream media" (p. 3). For example, Trump's inappropriate

behavior and acerbic tweets dominated mainstream media so thoroughly, that his opponents received little attention. Understanding this communicative style, may reveal additional hegemonic ideologies as they pertain to race, immigration, and citizenship.

The second study examined newspaper articles in *The Washington Post,* related to Trump's decision to rescind the DACA program using Barthes' mythologies. Trump's decision to end the DACA program demonstrates presidential authority in creating policies that reflect and reinforce nativist and xenophobic immigration discourses. Trump's decision to rescind DACA, was largely criticized by media journalists and corporate leaders, demonstrating that "undocumented immigrants are at once welcome and unwelcome: they are woven into the economic fabric of the nation, but as labor that is cheap and disposable" (Ngai, 2004, p. 2). The economic benefits for business are relatively straightforward, but journalists' support of DACA participants is entrenched within ideologies of meritocracy and a just-world hypothesis inextricably woven into the American Dream. Applying Barthes' framework to analyzing DACA narratives, is beneficial for understanding journalists as myth-makers, as well as exposing the myths within their DACA coverage.

In journalist coverage over DACA, participants were exulted for their industrious work ethics, academic accomplishments, and perseverance to achieve their dreams. They were characterized as blameless and innocent victims of their parents' or guardians' decisions to illegally enter and remain in the United States. Journalists promoted DACA participants as morally good non-citizens, as opposed to immoral immigrants who entered the country illegally. DeChaine (2009) explains, "The transgressive act of unauthorized border crossing thus produces a double exclusion: it renders migrant

persons both legally and morally abject" (p. 44). This moralistic divide supports

governmental regulation and control of its borders through practices of surveillance,

regulated mobility, and threat of deportation. Because DACA participants did not break

the law upon entering illegally, they are poised as victims who deserve the right to

achieve the American Dream.

American Dream rhetoric is problematic because the just-world hypothesis and

ideals of meritocracies are idyllic fiction that mask advantages privileging some people

over others. This is especially evident in identity statuses related to race, class, and

gender, as well as their poignant intersectionalities. American Dream discourses also

measure achievement based on white-middle-class standards, which promotes

assimilationist ideologies. Immigrants are encouraged to be racialized into white-middle-

class practices and values, or risk being racialized into criminal discourses associated

with non-whites. However, cracks in the American Dream mythology are being exposed

as patterns of social inequality send more middle-class-whites into the working-class and

poverty. Journalists' adherence to American Dream rhetoric in immigration studies may

restore faith in the American Dream, temporarily, as depictions of DACA participants

demonstrate extraordinary pro-capitalist behaviors and relative economic success.

Currently, DACA remains in existence. However, as immigration history

suggests, undocumented migrants are always subject to economic and political changes,

leaving them vulnerable to racist, nativist, and xenophobic discourses. Undocumented

migrants, such as DACA participants, remain governed by "rites of institution" that

control their movement through "surveillance, immigration documents, employment

forms, birth certificates, tax forms, drivers' licenses, credit card applications, bank

accounts, medical insurances, and mandatory car insurance" (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012, p. 256). Gonzales and Chavez (2012) argue that these "biopolitics of citizenship" and practices of "governmentality" generate immense stress over possible detention and deportation (p. 256). Future research on DACA, could examine the experiences of these participants in response to media representations and political policies addressing their status. This may be especially useful in shifting the mode of communication to social media as it provides a mediated venue for anonymity.

The third study examined a television episode of *Saturday Night Live* called, "Caravan Cold Open," using Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding framework, along with parodic techniques for analyzing the role of humor in negotiating media texts. This study reveals the power of parody through its ability to expose nativist, nationalist, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric through four operations from the Bakhtinian model, doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, social leveling, and decentering discourse. This study demonstrates how partisan media coverage, especially Fox News, presents exaggerated and "occasionally" fictitious claims about undocumented migrants and immigration policy. *SNL* captures the opportunity to ridicule Laura Ingraham's depiction of migrants from Central America attempting to cross the US-Mexican border as "vicious hordes coming for you and your grandkids." These exaggerations reveal racist and xenophobic ideologies, while also mocking and ridiculing those responsible for the discourse.

Satirical television shows are increasingly important for political communication scholars, as research shows they are informative about current events and policies, as well as sources of news among teens and young adults. Previous research also suggests that satirical news programs lead to further political discussions and engagement, as well

as "mobilizing" emotions associated with "indignation, outrage, and anger" (Martinez & Atouba, 2022, p. 462). While satirical news has some potential benefits, it must be (re)totalized into an alternate frame to join in the "struggle over discourse" (Hall, 1980). This study demonstrates how *SNL* uses satire to negotiate dominant hegemonic ideologies related the movement of undocumented migrants but requires journalists to engage in a "politics of signification" for them to be contextualized as racial, economical, and xenophobic discourses about belonging in the U.S. national imaginary. Future research could examine more satirical news programs or episodes that examine undocumented immigrants and immigration policy to identify discursive patterns and themes. "Emancipating" these ideologies from hegemonic discourse is necessary for changing xenophobic immigration rhetoric and policy.

The final study examines memes posted in response to Trump's claim that he is building a border wall around Colorado using McKerrow's critical rhetorical framework. This study examines memes as visuals arguments that use rhetorical strategies of intertextuality and humor to politically persuade audiences. The study reveals two thematic categories of memes addressing Trump's geographical gaffe—border wall prototypes and U.S. map reconfigurations. Colorado border wall prototypes are based on fun and leisure activities defined by geographical attributes of the state, whereas the actual US-Mexican border wall is imposing and threatens those who dare to cross. De La Garza (2019) explains,

> The U.S.-Mexico border is over 2,000 miles long and every inch poisons the physical and psychic landscapes between Mexico and the United States. Those who inhabit or pass through the borderlands are scarred, mutated…broken down,

wounded and remade into Others through alienating discourses, debilitating and

assaulting the body through structural violence. (94)

As this passage suggests, the real U.S.-Mexican border poses immense physical and

emotional consequences. The border wall prototype memes used satire and parody to

expose racist and xenophobic ideologies, but also to mock and ridicule Trump's

intelligence and delegitimate his presidential authority.

The second category of memes reconfigure the U.S. map to make Colorado a state

that borders Mexico. These approaches rely on rhetorical strategies of appropriation

(#SharpieGate), allusion (Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo), as well as parody and satire to

expose hegemonic ideologies within U.S. conceptions of national belonging related to

race, class, and citizenship. By focusing attention to the U.S.-Mexico border, Trump

racializes "the immigrant problem" as a "Mexican" problem and therefor a problem

"easily" solved by constructing a barrier. De La Garza (2019) explains, "The concept of a

border elicits duality—the splitting of things into two, purging all that does not belong.

Yet, the binary is rarely stable. There are spaces between, edges that do not break cleanly;

phantom traces that remind one of what is lost. The borderlands represent both the pain

and hope of those who do not belong" (p.97). These memes capture Trump's conception

of a white national imaginary that excludes Hispanics, regardless of citizenship. As a

collective, these memes use rhetorical strategies and humor to "emancipate" hegemonic

discourses and encourage continued political participation through subsequent meme

iterations. Future studies on memes could address audience reaction to the memes, as

well as the number of shares and "likes" they receive.

As a collective, this research reveals discursive struggles over national identity and belonging. Chavez (2008) argues that restrictive immigration policies and the placement of structural barriers speaks volumes about who belongs within our national imaginary. This research employs critical cultural analyses to participate in an "emancipatory" discourse that reveals and contextualizes these discourses within a "politics of significance" (Hall, 1980). Racist, nativist, and xenophobic discourse has real consequences for those allocated to positions of abjectivity, and whose body and movements are subject to "biopolitical practices of citizenship and governmentality" (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012, p. 256). Racial profiling, surveillance and the threat of deportation remain constant threats for those living in the United States undocumented.

Limitations

As this research employs critical cultural analyses, it is subject to two common criticisms—confirmation bias and lack of methodological rigor. The first criticism suggests that researchers seek information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs. This type of bias is difficult to control in quantitative, qualitative, and ideological criticisms because those familiar with relevant theories and literature are exposed to the discursive conversations happening in a particular field. Therefore, they are knowledgeable about likely associations between variables and possible correlations or intervening variables. Similarly, critical cultural analyses are familiar with relevant discursive conversations happening within media representations and dominant hegemonic ideologies. While empirical studies control for bias in various ways, critical cultural analyses support their findings and arguments using pre-existing theories and research as validation.

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Additionally, I admit my research bias as a white American female interested in immigration and race within U.S. politics. My positionality outside of being a racial minority and non-immigrant may influence aspects of my analysis. Additionally, my use of critical cultural analysis aligns with my support for exposing hegemonic racial, xenophobic, and nativist ideologies. This analysis would not align with conservative political audiences' interpretations or decoding of this material, which could also be viewed as a limitation. While some critics suggest that thorough research examines the possible decoding for multiple audiences, this research exclusively focuses on exposing dominant ideology. Additionally, the dominant conservative decoding is straightforward and does not need to be re-interpreted. While critical cultural analyses are accused of lacking a methodology, there is a framework in place that involves emersion within the text and systematically identifying patterns and themes.

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