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The "Othering" of America: How the Strategic use of Crisis and Ressentiment Succeeded in the Trump era

Laura J. Franklin

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THE “OTHERING” OF AMERICA: HOW THE STRATEGIC USE OF CRISIS AND
RESSENTIMENT SUCCEEDED IN THE TRUMP ERA

by

Laura J. Franklin

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Media and Communication
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The establishment of a crisis theme through public rhetoric often triggers widespread attention, resulting in public concern and media coverage of an issue that could potentially be overblown or deceptive. In right-wing political discourse, this crisis warning is typically delivered by a White male leader with ready access to the powerful news media. An “us versus them” theme often occurs. Within this mode of a hegemonic exclusion, a culture of immigrants or an American minority are often depicted, perhaps aggressively, as a threat: A threat used to motivate, enrage and create the frustrations inherent in *ressentiment*. This dissertation explores the manner in which damaging crisis talk can thread its way into the media and impact public opinion, legislation and everyday lives. Through an analysis of discourse, official testimony and news coverage, three case studies explore how the strategic use of “othering” occurred towards Muslims and Mexicans in the 21st century. It examines the false depiction of Sharia law and consequent passage of anti-Sharia legislation, the anti-Muslim Congressional hearings sponsored by Rep. Peter King, and the elevated charges of Mexican criminality espoused by former President Donald Trump. A fourth case study illustrates the versatility of this mode of rhetoric through a thematic comparison of two nationalist speeches delivered years apart in vastly different settings by Stephen Bannon and then-president Trump. Findings of the study suggest that many of the themes and tactics used in these case studies remain the same. It notes that the reporting of false or overblown claims by the media led to even further repetition and public exposure. It recognizes that the reiteration of these claims by mainstream media was often the result of efforts to provide a balanced news story. Finally, it raises awareness of the societal impact of this demonization on the

general public and vulnerable minority populations who may be subject to similar treatment and restrictive legislation.

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Dedication

For Freddie. Your gentle spirit and audacious beauty
makes the world better.

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CHAPTER I – Introduction

In August 2014, Stephen K. Bannon, a co-founder of the ultra-conservative Breitbart News, delivered a nationalist-style speech to a group of elite Vatican officials. As broadcast into an ornate palace on the grounds of the Vatican, the media executive appeared on a large screen, speaking via Zoom from his office in Los Angeles, where he served as Executive Chairman. Bannon was the keynote speaker at a yearly conference of elite Roman Catholic leaders, and while the 2014 theme was “Poverty and the Common Good,” his discourse was centered upon the protection of Christianity against evil forces, and the maintenance of “great” wealth. Referring numerous times to a threat posed by Muslim extremists, he warned of an eminent “bloody, bloody battle” looming on the horizon (Feder, 2016). While Bannon’s speech did not receive media attention, three years later a nearly identical approach was utilized by President Donald Trump, within a stronger nationalist frame. Known as the Warsaw Address and published in full by NBC, it was Trump’s sole major European speech as President (“Here’s the full,” 2017). At the time, Bannon was his Chief White House Strategist.

These two speeches offer abundant opportunities for exploration. Both relied heavily on the use of crisis talk, primarily related to the supposedly dangerous and looming forces of Muslim terrorists. Trump’s famously blunt question, asking the audience whether the “West has the will to survive” was characterized by journalist and political commentator Peter Beinart as one of the most shocking sentences to have ever been delivered by a U.S. president on foreign soil. Beinart condemned the terminology saying that it “only makes sense as a statement of racial and religious paranoia” (2017, para. 10). The speech described and reenumerated an outlandish threat that bore little

resemblance to reality, as neither the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS, or any other Muslim terrorist entity were in any position to pose a significant threat, let alone topple a Western country. Nevertheless, the speech received extensive media coverage on a global level. In both speeches, the repeated references to a clash of civilizations were compelling. Referring to Trump's own evaluation of the Warsaw address, Glenn Thrush of *The New York Times* noted that the president felt that he had found an audience for his "hard-edge brand of conservative nationalism" (2017, para. 9).

Approximately 80 years earlier, Adolf Hitler sounded a similar alarm before thousands of German nationals in the Berlin sports dome. That speech, which referenced Hitler's depiction of a looming European economic crisis, resulted in strong media attention in the United States, both regional and local, including *The Pittsburgh Press* (Sims, 1938) and *The Greenville News* (Hitler's Crisis, 1938). Both papers used "Hitler" and "crisis" in their headlines. Again, the critical situation that Hitler depicted had little connection to reality, as Europe was not economically dependent at the time on Germany's financial well-being.

The purpose of this research project is to look at the relationship between the presentation of a crisis theme or depiction of emergency in nationalist rhetoric at the leadership level during the Trump era, and how that theme, often fabricated, can manifest as a powerful trigger, one that serves as a catalyst for media attention, even among mainstream outlets such as *USA Today*. Ultimately, of course, not only does the "crisis talk" of conservative nationalism find its way into the media, it serves a far-greater purpose in procuring public interest and support, perhaps breaking down previously held

beliefs in surprising ways, suggests Mary Stuckey, ways that over time can also seep into the national sense of consciousness (2010).

As Stuart Hall noted in 1975, when a news item takes its place in an existing structure of awareness, its frame will persist in the public memory far longer than a bold headline may suggest. Therefore, from Hall's perspective, this mode of textual analysis—from source to placement to public acceptance, helps us understand the nature of the relationship between media and society. In reviewing the use of this theme, I will also look at the development of political demonization, the iconic “othering” that perpetuates itself in nationalism, fueling hatred of a large, and largely innocent, third party. This mode of discourse is a prevalent aspect of the triadic form of populism proposed by Adam Hodges (2020) a tactic that works to summon the media and muster crowd support. As Hodges explains, the typical left-wing dyadic populism champions the people against an elite or establishment. Right-wing triadic populism champions the people against an elite that is seen as coddling or ignoring the dangers presented by a *third group*, such as immigrants, Mexicans or American Muslims. Ernesto Laclau's thoughts are pertinent, as he noted how populist discourse frequently displaces antagonism by constructing an enemy, thereby also constructing a populace. Laclau argued that “the enemy is externalized or reified into a positive ontological entity (even if this entity is spectral) whose annihilation would restore balance and justice” (2006, p. 555). As we will see in the case studies that follow, the removal or diminishment of certain scapegoated parties, within the triadic model, carries the promise of a restoration of White privilege and societal safety.

The discourse related to this demonization tactic leads directly into a political grievance known as *ressentiment*. This term, first introduced by Nietzsche in 1930, describes the strategic cultivation of a festering, simmering fury that resides in the public consciousness with no solution in sight. A means of gathering an audience and cultivating shared anger and dissatisfaction, *ressentiment* works to engage and unify. In lamenting the loss of American factory jobs to the Chinese, Donald Trump experienced success with this tactic. It served as a sound strategy, stoking up a sense of mutual anger and support for his candidacy through the reversal, as Nietzsche argued, of good and evil (Remley, 2016). A useful example of this reversal can be found in the publicly sanctioned McCarthy hearings related to the Senator's dire warnings about the infiltration of American communists in 1953-1954. At the time, Senator McCarthy served as Chair of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee and was intent on rooting out the presence of "red" supporters in American society. "Watch for reds," McCarthy would proclaim ("Watch, 1953), as jobs were lost and hard-won reputations (and livelihoods) were instantly turned upside down.

Whether it is a call of impending terrorism or a threat to fiscal instability, the textual nodes associated with fear, chaos and failure often emerge from a crowded informational landscape to find new life in headlines and future political discourse. This project will demonstrate how the replication of this crisis characterization unfolds in both traditional and conservative media outlets.

From Opinion to Fact: Misinformation as Strategy

Within the realm of nationalist speech, a trend or theme, such as McCarthy's false threat of communist infiltration, can emerge that will deviate from the truth and endure

independently, often with great success. The elements of circulation and recirculation as argued by Jenny Edbauer are worth noting here, as there are few barriers dividing grounded, truthful narrative from the unknowing dissemination of misinformation (2016). Indeed, misinformation may travel with greater ease as it offers novelty, a sense of newness and a typical characterization of essentiality. Coupled with the third-party endorsement factor, it can be a powerful rhetorical tool, as a simple reiteration in the press will dramatically increase its believability (Cameron, 1994). Michel Foucault likened the spread of information, not necessarily that which is true, to the dominant, powerful and wealthy, noting that reality may even be characterized, or presented through the media in order to favor powerful interests (1978). This is especially apparent in a study such as this, which focuses on the rhetoric of powerful politicians, reiterated and reintroduced by the powerful press.

While “modern nationalism” has roots back to the mid-eighteenth century, this study focuses on authoritarian leaders in the early decades of the 21st century who targeted a vulnerable American minority and sought to stoke fear and suspicion for the purpose of political support. Technology in this instance played a role. It is well known that Adolf Hitler was the first global leader to make full use of loudspeakers, propagandistic film, and air travel (Bergmeier et al., 1997). Similarly, Trump and the French nationalist leader Marine Le Pen forged new pathways in the use of social media, particularly Twitter. Here, often-salacious falsehoods can succeed far beyond the realm of the banal, especially within the political landscape. A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology demonstrated that news of questionable origin on Twitter tends to move at twice the speed of stories that are true (Lohr, 2018). In addition

to considering the circulation of crisis-oriented rhetoric, this research will investigate the manner in which Donald Trump used the Twitter platform as a tool to procure attention, support and control of the media landscape in previously unimaginable ways.

Being considered untruthful does not necessarily diminish the stature of a nationalistic politician. In their investigation of the lying brand of demagogue, Hahl, Minjae & Sivan (2018) argued that it can help maintain authentic appeal, particularly if the lie is common knowledge and if supporters see themselves as outsiders in the political establishment. In discussing the propensity for nationalists to engage in misleading discourse, Patricia Roberts-Miller noted that “the Holocaust was not necessary self-defense, Germany was not a victim entitled to world domination, Japanese internment was not our only protection, and slavery was neither a necessary evil nor a positive good” (2017, p. 27). This tendency, to rouse group fear, anger and support for demonization is at the heart of this study.

The appointment of an enemy third party within the populist arena is a prevailing aspect of “triadic populism” as defined by Hodges in his 2020 book on the rhetorical tactics of Donald Trump. This strategy can create a powerful cohesive experience with an audience as it arouses the “us versus them” mentality that unites followers in a joined desire to vanquish the third party for the sanctity, safety, and well-being of the nation. In reviewing discourse that works to motivate, enrage, and foster *ressentiment*, there is a uniform, predictable aspect that aligns with Ronald Greene’s concept of rhetorical materialism (2009). Certain terms and themes are brandished at will, pulled out and deployed to suit the rhetorical situation. Within this mode of materialism, we have witnessed discourse that is uncannily familiar decade after decade, such as the repeated

efforts to vilify immigrants. In his eloquent examination of the rise of nationalism in India and the U.S., Pakistani scholar Zahid Hussain attributed it to the “virulent” or dangerous strain of discourse that “seeks to assert racist, political and cultural hegemony” into democratic processes that previously functioned on a platform of truth and tolerance (2019, para. 1). When coupled with the aspirations of powerful political leaders, it supports the notion of hegemonic exclusion noted earlier.

The characterization of a threatening crisis can serve as a trigger in developing the useful state of *ressentiment* within an audience and mindset. This is a powerful psychological tactic that has served nationalist politicians particularly well in the procurement of support (Capelos & Demetzis, 2022). It effectively elicits a deeply emotional response to the inability to attain an object or status, such as power or privilege, one that is unattainable and repeatedly denied.

The Compelling Characterization of Crisis

In the news media, the warning of an impending threat or crisis is not just a mainstay, it can be seen as one of the chief responsibilities of journalists, keen to warn the public of danger, and also cultivate future stories. The flow of news, as Stuart Hall argued, is a highly organized and institutionalized social process, one of “cultural production and consumption” (1975, p. 17). This research will also seek to explore the social process of alarmist messages in the hopes of fostering understanding, discernment, and the circulation of more truthful and productive messaging. Chapter I introduces the reader to its purpose and themes that will be analyzed. Chapter II will provide a literature review and describe the project’s methodology of textual analysis with an emphasis on the media that resulted from a false depiction of chaos and crisis. Chapter III will delve

into the use of anti-Muslim “crisis” rhetoric, and the cultivation of *ressentiment*, following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. At the national level, this mode of inflammatory discourse helped to support and sustain two years of Rep. Peter King’s (R, NY) futile anti-Muslim congressional hearings, the first in United States history to target a specific religious faith. At the state level, it will analyze the discourse that preceded the passage of two bills in Tennessee that initially made it illegal to engage in common, daily Islamic traditions such as foot-washing prior to worship. Chapter IV continues this discussion of targeting and “othering” a vulnerable minority with former President Donald Trump’s false categorization of the immigration crisis and the “critical” need to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. In this chapter it becomes apparent how social media was used as a tool to summon support as well as increase media attention. As in Chapter III, I will explore the cultivation of *ressentiment* as it deepened politicized grievances with a near-infinite shelf-life. Chapter V of this study offers a case study of the Bannon Vatican speech and the Trump Warsaw Address in order to examine crisis talk in its surprisingly similar versatility. Finally, Chapter VI will summarize the research findings and describe its significance. It will also address the limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

In discussing political discourse, David Zarefsky argued that a better term is political argumentation, because it typically focuses on the obtainment of power (2008). Herbert Wichelns noted that oratory is associated with statecraft and to pursue a successful democracy requires the study of this mode of communication (Murphy, 1995). While in many historic instances, the furthering of public good served as a sound political theme, modern nationalism is primarily interested in a very limited aspect of positive

service, one that typically occurs at the exclusion of others. The repeated references to the “West” in the Bannon and Trump speeches illustrate that. Beinart argued that the use of the term the “West” by Trump and Bannon acted as a silent nod to racism, in that these countries by tradition were White (2017). When simple terms such as the “West” are used as a racist nationalist trigger, the need for discernment becomes obvious. If we are indeed on the receiving end of flawed, disingenuous discourse, it is imperative that we know.

The sources for this research are numerous and varied, which is wholly intentional, as I look at nationalist crisis talk across various regions and timeframes. The archives and research opportunities at University of Southern Mississippi and Tulane University provided access to scholarly research, news articles, transcripts and a wide range of print media. The Legislation Archives of the Tennessee State House provided video recordings of the arguments that preceded the passing of its two anti-Muslim bills. Similarly, Congressional records complemented research into discourse that precipitated and occurred during King’s Congressional hearings. Local and regional papers, such as the *Tennessee Daily News*, the *New York Daily News* and *Newsday* (King’s hometown paper in New York) were also of interest and available through a subscription service online. Transcripts of speeches provided concrete insight into the tactics of are of interest and available through the wire services, such as the Financial Market Regulatory Wire. Finally, in exploring the cultivation of *ressentiment*. *The American Presidency Project*. provided a complete record of the Twitter remarks made by Donald Trump, from the time he announced his candidacy until he was removed from Twitter. Most of these sources were also instrumental into the exploration of the nodes of acceptance where the crisis

theme was accepted and disseminated by the media in order to develop a clearer understanding of how, why and what factors contributed to the construction of these “terminal phrases,” to quote Burke, as they circulated in a different but perhaps more influential form back to the public (1984).

CHAPTER II – Literature Review and Methodology

The Foundation and Practice of Western Nationalism

This study focuses on the themes, trends and media coverage of rhetoric that reflects the tenets of Western nationalism. In his comparison of nationalist movements, Konstantin Symmons-Symonolewicz argued that there is a strong difference between “Western” and “Non-Western” nationalism. In instances where a nation was oppressed and has obtained its freedom, the non-Western form takes precedence. Symmons-Symonolewicz described how the uniquely Western form of nationalism rose in an effort to build a nation in the political reality and struggles of the present “without too much sentimental regard for the past; devoid of any immediate connection with the present and expected to eventually become sometime a political reality” (1965, p. 224). This aligns with Ernest Gellner who maintained that it is “nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around” (Calhoun, 2017, p. 55).

We often think of nationalism as a celebration of loyalty to a shared culture. Nationalistic celebrations, replete with costumes and regional food delicacies, can create a visual or textual “border” from other nationalities. While today’s nationalist discourse varies considerably from the early patriotic forms that constituted the beginnings of modern nationalism in the 18th century, all share a belief that self-determination is critical. To that end, it is believed that a nation should govern itself independently from outside interference, answering only to its own leaders for answers and political power. This might be considered the self-deterministic model.

Bennett Anderson saw the rise of “modern” nationalism as related to the waning supremacy of both religion and monarchs. He linked this so-called birth of capitalistic

nationalism to an era of “print-capitalism” that helped nations disseminate ideas. This made it far easier for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about and relate to others (Beasley, 2018). It was the early competitive trade between the United States and England that set the stage for modern nationalism according to Timothy Breen (1997). He referenced the burgeoning commerce that existed between the two countries as influencing the manner in which early colonists perceived themselves. It was Benjamin Franklin who announced that Americans must “know, think and care” about any country they trade with, in order to sharpen their own national awareness (Breen, 1997, p. 13).

This early patriotic stance was strengthened by the American Civil War, where a strain of nationalism emerged that upheld the soldier as an icon of martial heroism. Towns and cities across the country erected monuments that celebrated their local war heroes; an era marked by popular books, plays and other cultural artifacts celebrating bravery and character (Pettegrew, 1996). Here, there was a dark side as well: As unity of the country became increasingly important, the nation began to shore up against new waves of immigration. One way to do this, John Pettegrew argued, was to re-establish Anglo Saxon strength and virility, a concept that grew in the 20th century and remains at the heart of 21st century White nationalism (1996). Anatol Lieven argued that the United States’ “anarchy of empire” was managed by controlling immigration flow, identifying enemy groups, and diminishing the influence of those with non-Western identity. He referenced the passage of legislation like the Naturalization Act of 1790 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Black, 2006).

William James turned his considerable powers of observation to the heightened 'military feeling' in modern America. Noting that “pugnacity” and a “love of glory” has

been instilled into the American psyche through centuries of war, James saw a special, deeply rooted affinity for battle through its memory of the Civil War (Pettegrew, 1996). As Harold Brands argued, the form of nationalism that rose to the forefront at the very beginning of the 20th century found an ideal manifestation in United States' Memorial Day celebrations that recognized the dead, the sacrifice, and the tragedy inherent in this ritualistic mode of nationalism (2017).

In his book *Nationalism*, Craig Calhoun holds that nationalism functions as an “evaluation of political and cultural ideologies that claim superiority for a particular nation” (1997, p. 5). In the use of “evaluation,” Calhoun refers to the premise that nationalism is often “given the status of an ethical imperative” in boundaries that “ought” to be respected and people that “ought” to confirm to its moral values (1997, p. 6). This aligns, in an unfortunate sense, with the demonic, aforementioned use of “othering,” or Lieven’s description of limiting resources and power to a non-Western minority. Nationalism can also be viewed as a form of civil religion, one that provides a set of values, symbols and rituals institutionalized as the cohesive force and center of meaning that unites people (Fairbanks, 1981). Here, it is natural to envision the Trump campaign rally, with its massive display of American flags, lined up in alarming similarity to Nazi swastika banners on the parade grounds of Nuremberg, Germany.

The Necessity of Conflict and Victory

One critical factor within the nationalist frame is that of continued promised victory over these minority opponents. In his book *Extreme Politics*, Charles King suggested that the history of nationalism isn’t always written by the victorious, but in most cases, it is written *about* those who won (2010). In a series of lectures on this

subject, Eric Hobsbawm noted that a criterion within nationalist rhetoric was a “proven capacity for conquest” (1990, p. 38.) This is a mainstay as demonstrated repeatedly on the nationalist stage, particularly when a real or perceived threat emerges. In Donald Trump’s early Tweet about the “criminal” Mexicans, he punctuated his thoughts with the word “FIGHT!” (“Tweets,” 2023). Amy Kaplan articulated a perspective of U.S. nationalism that situates this propensity towards conflict and victory as the crucible of America’s imperialist tradition (Black, 2006).

But is nationalism an ideology? A political position? One of the surprising aspects of nationalism today, according to Anderson, is that it is often under-realized and under-noticed (2006). Florian Bieber described it as “being much like air, both ubiquitous and elusive, permeating the global system, despite ongoing calls that it is outmoded” (2018, p. 519). In his book on the imagined communities that constitute various forms of nationalism, Anderson argued that to classify nationalism as simply an ideology is insufficient and makes it easier to view it as a “kinship” or “religion” rather than a movement associated with fascism (2006, p. 5). Alternatively, Symmons-Symonolewicz looked at contemporary Western Nationalism as a social movement, driven by leadership and discourse. The political theorist and philosopher Ernesto Laclau viewed it as a class-free unifying factor. Nationalism is open to everyone, argued Laclau, with “no necessary class belonging” (Lundberg, 2012, p. 227). The avid, blue-collar voters who supported the billionaire, elitist Trump confirms the logic of Laclau’s argument.

The White nationalist frame has unquestionable relevance in this study, as the five individuals responsible for the delivery and perpetuation of this brand of crisis-prone nationalism (Trump, Bannon, King, Ketron and Matheny) were all White male

conservative Republicans. Bieber suggested that while the strength of White nationalism should have been diminishing in countries as diverse as the U.S. and France, that was not the case in the 21st century (2018). In a review of four texts that traced American nationalism through four distinct periods of American history, Jennifer Mercieca (2006) described a consistent trio of themes in the perpetuation of White nationalist supremacy: Trust, loyalty, and the foundations of nation-building/protection (2006). These three themes underline much of the discourse examined in this study.

The Exclusionary Aspect: A ‘Clash’ of Cultures

The nationalism of focus in this project is routinely exclusionary, depicting the threat of outsiders, even if they are citizens, and maintaining the consequent dangers that they pose to “traditional” cultures and values. This exclusionary understanding aligns neatly with the hegemonic discourse that promotes the powerful and supports Hodge’s definition of triadic populism, with its third-party demonization (2016). The political philosopher Hannah Arendt noted that the so-called “modern” type of nationalism in the West is distinguished by a tendency to remove any “tribal” impurities that may impede its stature or clarity (1961). This trend, to restrict access to a certain mode of nationalistic belonging, has become, as I will argue further on, one of the core components of conservative nationalism, an ideology of hegemonic exclusion. This might be seen as one of the threads in essentialist thinking that Calhoun sees as the way race, gender, sexual orientation, and other collective identities are constituted in and by nationalism (1997). Essentialism refers to the reduction of diversity to a single criterion portrayed as defining its "essence" and most crucial character. This position is often coupled with the claim that this essence is prearranged (or preordained) by nature (Calhoun, p. 18). The

“preordained” aspect encompasses the characteristics of White supremacy, as argued by Paul Johnson (2022), who saw this exclusionary form of nationalism as the nexus where racism and White masculinity converge.

American political scientists in the 1970’s viewed the fierce, exclusionary mode of Western nationalism as an atavistic sentiment that would eventually disappear as our society became more variegated and economies more modern (King, 2010). Sadly, political news in 2022 did not support this hope. Two right-wing nationalists progressed remarkably well in the French presidential elections, with the conservative, “pro-Putin” Marine Le Pen securing a record 41% of the vote (Cohen, 2022). Le Pen won many of her voters with a decidedly anti-immigration form of nationalism, stating that: “a stranger who comes to our home will not take advantage of our hospitality and respect the French” (Onishi & Meheut, 2022). Here, we see the validity of Arendt’s argument on protecting the sanctity of a nation from the inflow of “tribal impurities” (1961).

Yet another nationalist front emerged in Canada in 2022, when a far-right truckers' rally secured millions of dollars in international support, primarily from the United States (Scott, 2022). American political figures and content creators "really gave it a boost that made it global," noted the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a think tank that tracks online extremism. Finally, beyond nationalist ideology, the desirable and profitable aspects of winning elections should not be ignored. Hobshawm argued that the roots of modern Western nationalism exist solely as a “second-order political movement” based on a contrived false consciousness that is rooted in political economy, not culture (1990).

In the analysis of a public delivery, rhetorical theorists often point to the influences of an audience, rhetor, exigence or constraints in place at the time of the

delivery. These elements are typically considered influential. Yet in the world of White nationalist discourse, they often carry little relevance to the message. Indeed, we may consider how status, background and culture of an audience can be effectively removed from the discursive equation if the text offers the signals that warrant engagement and support. Both Barbara Biesecker (1989) and Thomas Eagleton (1981) viewed the qualities of deconstruction as instructive, looking beyond the text to the constitutive elements of the situation “out of which and for which it is produced” (Biesecker, p.110). Similarly, Eagleton argued that in an effort to avoid the ruses of power and desire, there is a metaphysical opposition, an inside/outside aspect that distinguishes the political rhetoric. In nationalism, the “inside” consists of the core motivators of the public, or audience, as gained from a purposeful and not a demographic perspective. The outside consists of the “others” who pose a threat in some aspect. In both instances, this tactic works to differentiate the audience and its attributes from the danger and devastation linked to external threats, creating an inside/outside polarity. This creates the basis for what I define as hegemonic exclusion.

Within this mode of hegemonic exclusion, a culture of immigrants or an American minority are depicted, often aggressively, as a threat; a threat used to motivate, enrage and create the frustrations inherent in *ressentiment*. In what he defined as ethno-nationalism, Bart Bonikowski underlined its resurgence, noting that “a confluence of grievances associated with economic, social and cultural change has increased the salience of nationalist beliefs, particularly of the variety that evokes exclusionary understandings of the nation” (2017, p. 203).

Traumatic Nationalism: A Suffering Mode of Citizenship

While many historians saw a change in America's position regarding Muslims, terrorism and treatment as related to the September 11, 2001 (9-11) attacks, there were further repercussions that may have contributed to a surge in nationalism after Trump's election in 2016. Lee Pierce argued that the Ground Zero Mosque Controversy served as a gateway to the traumatic nationalism that ushered in a new era of hate-filled rhetoric. Writing about the issue, where a Muslim temple was to be built near to the World Trade Center grounds (following the 9-11 attacks), Pierce suggested that the construction of a mosque so close to a hallowed site provided a motif of conservative, bipartisan moralism that became increasingly prevalent in traumatic nationalist discourse (2014). This emergence of a rhetoric of traumatic nationalism that connected suffering to citizenship worked to reproduce a national crisis through a motif of consecration.

Interestingly there is yet another trauma that persisted among American nationalists. As witnessed in events such as the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally on August 12, 2017, many supporters of Donald Trump were the unknowing victims of his efforts to put "America First." Jack Jenkins noted that Trump's 2017 budget blueprint was presented as a strategic plan to "make America great again" while extending "drastic, controversial cuts" to domestic programs that worked to assist vulnerable Americans (2018). Kenneth Burke alluded to this as "counteraction" rhetoric, in that the precious resources funneled towards fighting foreign aggression rather than improving domestic conditions worked to engage "precisely these victims of nationalistic aggressiveness" (Jensen, 2018, p. 384).

The Continual Need for a “National Crisis”

This research is concerned with the manner in which crisis nodes are presented through a leader’s words and then disseminated and amplified through the media. In that sense, the notion of crisis becomes a conduit to the goals and aspirations of the leader. The multi-changing threats of warfare, terrorism, immigrant dominance and of course anti-Semitism are a mainstay in Western nationalism. This tension frequently manifests itself in the crisis or precarity-inducing aspect of nationalism, with its many foes and dangers. While arguing for the necessity of his Congressional hearings, Rep. King defied reality by warning, in terrifying terms, of the possibility of chemical warfare as unleashed by his “homegrown” American terrorists, which could kill thousands of innocent Americans (“Understanding,” 2011). Similarly, the mighty exigency proclaimed by Bannon and Trump in their two speeches drew upon the familiar call to protect culture, families, freedom and the “traditional” (White) race from battle. Even though there were no enemies at the border, both men warned of an imminent cataclysmic confrontation with any number of Brown or Black foes. In her description of Trump’s Warsaw Address, Rebecca Townsend explored his crisis-prone rhetoric as flaunting constructs of patriotism and the "mighty exigency" of its protection in a call for “destruction, devastation, distrust and fear.” (2017, p. 97).

The deliberate use of textual nodes related to crisis could be considered a journalistic frame, one that supports Entman’s theories on how messaging is ranked or classified in public consciousness (2004). The frame exists beyond the text; it might depict the theme of an entire story and be categorized as urgent and requiring immediate attention. In her exploration of the use of crisis as a journalistic frame in news media,

Hanna Vincze (2014) discussed the usefulness of the crisis catchphrase as it often intersected with other constructs related to society, such as the need for a border wall or increased militarization against ISIS.

By employing the angst related to a pending crisis, primarily perceived, a nationalist leader can extend or renew a sense of urgent support among their listeners, with the hope of reiteration by the media. This supports Richard Vatz's argument that crisis is often deliberately crafted to serve leadership (2016). Shanta Robinson connected its creation to White male precarity, arguing that "American masculinity and conservative populism converge in refusing to sublimate, crafting crisis to make sense of self" (Johnson, 2022, p. 110).

In discussing the mythic unreality of the crisis-laden situation, Vatz depicted all political crisis (as in the U.S. Cuban missile crisis) as very rarely "found," and more frequently created (2016). This can be seen in Bannon's speech before Vatican leaders, where he repeatedly referred to the "bloody, bloody battle" looming between his White Roman Catholic audience and Black or Brown terrorists (Feder, 2016). Since this threat, as depicted by Bannon, loomed indefinitely, it could also be considered a "precrisis" as defined by Neophytos Loizides in his study on the politics of nationalism. This allows for a better understanding of the mobilization and circulation of ideas and meanings. Loizides (2015) connected the development of a precrisis frame with thematic variables, such as the "threat" of a suspect immigrant population on traditional values. This can be useful in fostering an early consensus which is necessary for a candidate striving towards power. And, as demonstrated on these pages, it may also be untrue. When Trump referred to a "crisis" at the border, convincing millions of U.S. citizens that the situation between

Mexico and the United States was dire, Scott and Marvin Astrada (2019) established that immigration numbers (from Mexico) were at a ten-year low. Nevertheless, the false use of the crisis theme served Trump well, creating a textual node of familiarity and angst that unified and prolonged support.

This concept corresponds neatly with Kaplan's thoughts regarding the continued tension within imperialist traditions (Black, 2006) in that the crisis frame offers an unsettled, unpleasant, often irrevocable situation that presents a stubborn (albeit potentially imaginary) obstacle to peace and prosperity. That situation of insecurity is a core value of capitalism according to the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant. She connected precarity to a hierarchical dependence based in oppression and domination (Edgar & Holladay, 2019). The crisis frame and the precarity it generates is at the heart of this research, in that it functions as a very specific strategy clad in the media-friendly, "urgent and important" category.

In his analysis of the crisis frame in the 2016 United States' GOP presidential primary, Johnson (2022) connected its use to popularity, finding that those who supported Trump were among those who were most likely to believe that the United States was at a crisis point. Arguing that the deliberate use of crisis works to instill a sense of precarity, Johnson noted that "felt powerlessness" functions as a precursor for "felt precarity," and how this "fleeting sense of disempowerment" collapses into a more permanent condition of imagining oneself a victim (2022, 180).

To enter a state of crisis is to experience a sense of vulnerability, a tangible precarity. In their investigation of the politics of precarity, the six-author team of Schaap et al., examined the long-term implications of its continued exploitation within certain

political agencies. Precarity, these authors suggested, refers to “a situation lacking in predictability, security, or material and social welfare” (2022, p. 143). This condition, they argued, is one that is socially produced by neoliberal forms of government, which tend to remove social protections. In a sound argument supporting further research into this area, they maintained that to ignore its perpetuation and the vulnerability that results, is to bypass critical methods in which it is utilized by various modalities of power that work to “mitigate, exploit and manipulate the realities that vulnerability situates in the populace (p. 143). Furthermore, they established that precarity is distributed unevenly, with people of color, women and low-status workers experiencing its most distressing effects. After repeated exposure to the potential existence of crisis or critical situations, what may remain, according to Joronen and Rose, is a whole new precarious class of people, “the precariat,” (Standing, 2011). Additionally, precarisation has been increasing in the U.S. since the 9-11 terrorist attacks (Joronen & Rose, 2021, p. 403).

As the health crisis related to the growth of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) escalated in the early 1980’s, there was extensive political discourse related to the dangers of associating with homosexuals or anyone who could potentially have the disease. Writing for *The New York Times* in 1983, Dudley Clendenin mentioned that the crisis was spreading pain and fear among the ill and healthy alike. Ronald Godlin, Executive Vice President of the Moral Majority, contributed to national uncertainty by stating that “I’m upset that the national government is not spending more money to protect Americans from the Gay Plague” (Clendinen, 1983, p. B7). James Carter, a professor at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine added to the stigma by announcing that, in the opinion of his doctor, AIDS was

contrived by God to punish those who engaged in immoral behavior. The use of the word “contrived” in situating a disease is of note (Clendinen, 1983). The use of a false crisis mode in this instance contributed greatly to precarity relating to AIDS and also the delay of funding for life-saving research. It offers a clear example of how demonization and crisis can work efficiently together to create precarity and fuel controversy.

Within their examination of discursive constitution, James Jasinki and Jennifer Mercieca drew upon three vehicles that, they argued, are central to tracking the direction or exterior movement of rhetoric. This is an effective method of analyzing right-wing crisis talk. These vehicles or dispersants are reception, circulation, and articulation (2010). The aspect of circulation is critical to both the reception (instilling precarity) and articulation (further media coverage leading to even greater precarity). As we will see through this research, these vehicles are critical to the successful perpetuation of divisionary crisis talk, even within the genre of mainstream, non-partisan news.

Precarity Into Ressentiment: A Theoretical Construct Emerges

In fueling the frustrations inherent in continued precarity, the beginnings of a state of mind entitled *ressentiment* emerges. As defined by Nietzsche, *ressentiment* refers to the chronic, frustrated and bitter devaluing of what one desires into a sentiment that is undeserved and undesirable. *Ressentiment* has been described as a “seething cauldron of cognitions, emotions and motivations” (Capelos & Demertzis, 1975, p. 110). This rhetorical strategy looks backward, utilizing past hurts and defeats in an effort to create a festering wound that can never be healed. Kelly describes it as the unique intersection where powerful sentiments are coupled with feelings of powerlessness and ruminations on past injuries (2020). Unlike the more commonplace emotion “resentment,” it is a

strategy in political discourse, used publicly, repeatedly and deliberately. There is rarely any recourse and there is always a certain entity, political party, policy or leader to blame. Trump has used the cultivation of *ressentiment* strategically throughout his rallies; a signature tactic that helped to prolong audience engagement, interest and rage.

The inefficacious and impotent victimhood of *ressentiment* is a natural link to the precarity associated with White supremacy: Its complex affectivity based on frustration, sorrow and seething umbrage finds an outlet in the often-diminishing status of the White citizen, living a precarious life that is far removed from where he or she “ought” to be in the societal hierarchy. This psychological state is a characteristic feature of contemporary grievance politics, one that is remarkably similar to the Fox in Aesop's fable of the sour grapes, the legendary creature that is continually focused on the desirable but unattainable object that remained perpetually out of reach (Capelos & Demertzis, 2022) That quest, never satisfied, never fulfilled, resists solutions and thus retains an aura of victimhood. There is a powerlessness to *ressentiment*, and nationalist rhetoric focuses on the triumph that will eventually be certain, when justice, often far off on the horizon, finally occurs. This is the glory that waits for those who believe. Remley wrote about the relationship between the individuals caught up with *ressentiment* and those they blame as a slave to master relationship, one that is wholly non-reflecting:

Ressentiment aims at other individuals, other groups or other institutions; its very essence requires that one's view be directed outwards instead of back to oneself.

In order to exist, slave morality insists upon a hostile external world, which provides the necessary external stimuli in order to act at all, yet that action is fundamentally reaction. (Remley, 2016, p. 46)

The strategy of cultivating *ressentiment* is a mainstay in the public discourse of far-right nationalism, with a strong, historic link to anti-Semitism (Remley, 2016). When first coined by Nietzsche in the 1930's, it was considered the structural foundation for Sartre's psychological analysis of the silent anti-Semite. In viewing Hitler's earlier speeches, the provocation of *ressentiment* was grounded repeatedly in two topics: The economic constraints of the Versailles treaty that forced proud Germany to endure "injustices" (actually conceived as retribution for its aggression in World War I); and the economic power that was "wrongfully" possessed by Jewish bankers and business leaders. These dual injustices were utilized as a motivating factor to secure the loyalty and engagement of Nazi crowds. Similarly, Marine Le Pen, in her public discourse, referred to the immigrant as not appreciative of the French culture or the "hospitality" that was offered to the population, and again, with no satisfactory solution in sight, the wound and the anger festered (Onishi & Mehéut, 2022).

The many virtues of the past can be referenced in the use of *ressentiment*. In that sense, it engenders an attachment between the subject and their wounds, whether real or perceived. The wound, the denied opportunity to [falsely] embody virtue, becomes the source of a subject's political identity. The simple, inarguable merits of "virtue," a predictable mainstay in the typical keynote or presidential address, fall victim to the rhetorical need to castigate, prevail, enrage and engage. In a 2022 discussion of Stockman's book *American Made*, Hochschild noted that, in addition to Trump's race-based politics of *ressentiment*, he also found success with the supposedly weakened state of the U.S. economy. After the election of President Joseph Biden, Jr., the use of *ressentiment* remained an important tool for Trump in maintaining the anger and

engagement he depended on, whether it was the “stolen” 2020 election or the “weaponization” of the criminal justice system in the August 2022 search of his home that resulted in the recovery of classified documents (Tucker & Balsamo, 2022).

The truly unfortunate aspect of *ressentiment* is that it often does a good country a strong disservice, benefitting few people other than the speaker. In this regard, it can be seen as a tragic use of sublimation. Stuckey noted that truth often has no relevance in political discourse and certainly this argument applies to the perpetuation of *ressentiment* (2015). Similarly, Arendt argued that organized lying by a leader in power, can be an adequate weapon against truth: “For opinion, not truth, belongs among the indispensable prerequisites of power” (1961, p. 233). In sum, when Stucky argued that it is the United States president who wields the most influence through their rhetoric, it was also a warning. The president alone has the clearest, most decisive ability to speak for the nation, to “tell us who we are and who we aspire to be” (2015, p. 38).

The Inner-Workings of Persuasion and Delivery

There is a strategic aspect to nationalism that can differentiate from more democratic discourse, in that it asks us to defend and secure supremacy (i.e. White nationalism); jobs and families, (anti-immigration); and “freedom” an oft-used code word for traditional White society (Kelly, 2020). By clearly stating that any of these are at threat, the speech summons support, precarity, *ressentiment*, and, in the case studies of inquiry here, media attention.

What constitutes the successful delivery of subject matter, especially within the narrow, frequently hateful lens of nationalism? Barbara Warnick argued that rhetoric consists of observing the available means of persuasion and considering how they could

be best applied to the citizenry (Murphy, 2016). Aristotle might famously link the success of delivery to one that effectively captures the critical elements of persuasion. We see this at the heart of the nationalist speech when victory promises safety and secure borders create sanctity for a threatened “traditional” population.

The clear route, in this type of critical analysis, is to view contents through the themes that emerge. What Burke called “terministic screens” (1984) might also be defined as “linguistic frames” by Stuckey, who argued that such mechanisms are pivotal to how a leader might exercise their most important rhetorical prowess (2015, p. xv). Stuckey argued that this is where persuasion lies, as it is the speaker’s ability to move the audience in a desired direction that will directly influence their success on the stage, and perhaps in the media. Burke understood this as being much more than mere persuasion, and in the nationalist rhetoric that successful speakers have espoused, his argument about the building of a community through the establishment of an identification with audiences, is critical.

In his depiction of the gain and usage of power through political argumentation, Zarefsky noted two elements that are consistently prevalent in nationalist speech: A clear absence of time limit within the themes, and recurrent patterns and characteristics (2008). Both of these, interestingly, are also prevalent in the use of *ressentiment*. While the values of freedom, justice and democracy are a mainstay of routine presidential addresses abroad, Townsend viewed these core motivators as rarely embodied by nationalist politicians, who tend to focus, as noted in this study, on issues of division, warfare and protection from the “other.” In the case of former President Trump, the third party or “other” enemy might shift from other candidates, such as Hillary Clinton or Marco

Rubio, to other cultures, such as Hispanics, or economic competitors like China. Truthful views on the status of a country or populace, even in the democratic society, can prove problematic to a speaker who relies on the platform of agreed-upon grievances to win over an audience. It can be risky, argued Arendt, who logically noted that in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, it was more dangerous to discuss the known aspects of the economy or concentration camps while topics such as racism, anti-Semitism and the benefits of communism provided a common ground (1961).

The prescient nature of Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives* offers insight into the use of nationalist rhetoric for what might be perceived as devious reasons. Burke's approach to rhetorical counteraction is distinguished by the study of rhetorical devices. Burke believed that he could help his audience reframe their attitude toward evolving political events through a better understanding of motive and device (Jensen, 2018). This study takes a similar position, seeking to define the connection between nationalist crisis talk and how that discourse is embodied or portrayed by the media, with a special emphasis on the tacit use of *ressentiment*.

Finally, when discussing political communication, which leans towards the use of oratory, it is useful to remember the social conditions that create the expediency of that speaker, leader, notion or ideology. The pervasive and personal aspects of nationalist discourse support the possibility that an audience on the way out of an auditorium may be more deeply entrenched than when it arrived. Here, Maurice Charland's concept of constitutive rhetoric as calling an audience into being is one that is pertinent to this study (1987). The speaker-audience model as developed by Charland presumes that any audience is *already* constituted as a subject and there will be discourse and visual signals

that sustain, possibly deepen those relations (1987). Similarly, Vatz maintained that utterance strongly invites exigence, and situations obtain their character, such as rage, from the rhetoric that surrounds them (2016).

In many instances a change in political conditions can prompt a change in the norms of political discourse. This departure, Stuckey would argue, can work as a harbinger or a beacon of promise to those seeking an audience (2017). Prior to the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany, there was an unmistakable loss of power and privilege due to the economic constraints of the Versailles treaty. This created political opportunity and a change in rhetorical norms. In contemporary France, employment and financial stability were a persistent factor, as a struggling middle class found its parameters increasingly encroached by ambitious immigrants. In the United States, there was the festering anger of a populace that resented a Black president in the White House. Some attribute a change in the appearance of American leadership under Barack Obama as linked to the visible and pronounced reemergence of White supremacy. Pham argued that “perhaps it was because he (Trump) was following the first Black President that his racist views and misogynistic words were deemed laudable” (2018, p. 94). In sum, we witnessed the rise of leaders that responded through rhetoric to the very social conditions that defined their audience, as outlined by Lance Bennett and Barbara Pfetsch (2018), with an eye to what messages would most demonstrably connect, through Burke’s terministic screens, in the interplay between social conditions and nationalist discourse (1984).

Impact and Influence: The Societal Burden of Crisis-Talk

To establish impact, with any delivery of news, is a highly desirable objective. While we can undoubtedly measure and analyze media coverage related to a crisis, the impact of this circulation is important. A crisis theme is powerful and impactful within people's lived reality. There is also the third-party endorsement factor, a proven source of public believability, trust and comprehension (Cameron, 1994). This so-called endorsement factor works to legitimize news simply by its presence. At the height of the McCarthy hearings, polls marking a new, high level r "concern" for communist infiltration offers one example (Lawrence, 1953). Other unfortunate results might include a presidential veto or failure of well-intended legislation. The potential result of hate speech attached to the AIDS crisis was the diminishment of funding that wasIVdesignated at the federal level for AIDS-based research in 1983. In an opinion piece, *The Washington Post* lamented the miniscule amount of funding that the National Institutes of Health had belatedly allocated (The Fear of Aids, 1983). In anticipation of President Reagan's veto of \$12 Million for AIDS research, other funding avenues were being vigorously explored, including transfers from other programs (Nelson, 1983).

The elevation of political actors to the role of unmediated information provider is also of concern. Jason Gainous and Kevin Wagner argued that, in the political communication sphere, the influence of the social media has not been in the shifting of power from the media to the individual, but from the *media to politicians* and political interests (2014). A lack of trust may well accompany the reception of individually scribed posts. This has been a source of scholarly investigation. Seth Lewis argued that a certain

loathing and bias had accompanied the growth of self-authored and highly partisan news, thus eroding trust in media as a whole (2020).

The unique possibility of political communication, and its influence, invites an investigation of where and how it manifests itself. In their investigation of populism, extremism and media, Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgren viewed social media as the terrain where much of the political is played out. Referring to self-authored tweets or posts as personalization, they argued that an individualization of civic cultures has emerged in tandem with the growth of mediated populism through the use of new technologies (2016). Writing for *The New York Times*, Farhad Manjoo categorized the election of Donald J. Trump as “perhaps the starkest illustration yet that across the planet, [that] social networks are helping to fundamentally rewire human society. They have subsumed and gutted mainstream media” (2016, para. 4).

All of this rejects the long-held norms that public institutions promote honesty and objectivity. Whether it is attributed to Hitler, McCarthy, King or Trump, there is an unmistakable, if not sorrowful, aspect of moral unreason that justifies inquiry and a better understanding. Writing on political oratory as it permeates life and decision-making, Hariman referred to public practices and leadership figures “who cultivate a moral sense in the citizenry that would result in decisions being made primarily with regard to the common good” (1995, p. 96). In reviewing the specific crisis rhetoric of nationalist leaders, I will argue that the lack of concern with the common good, as circulated by the more powerful media, has become an inadvertent crisis, in and of itself. In all fairness, this could represent the belief in “binary” opinions, as the press sought to present a balanced approach to its news coverage. Unfortunately, as Stucky argued (2015) the

presentation of misleading rhetoric within mainstream media gave it a legitimacy that never would have existed otherwise.

Areas of Analysis

This study begins with a focus on two early channels of anti-Muslim sentiment that proliferated prior to the Trump era. Both occurred in the United States after the 9-11 terrorist attacks. The first is related to media attention garnered by Rep. Peter King (R, NY) who sponsored five anti-Muslim Congressional hearings during 2011 and 2012 (“Legislating Fear,” 2013). National security advisor/writer Spencer Ackerman noted that “no legislator did more to demonize American Muslims” than King (*WNYC*, 2019). This study will look at King’s public discourse, which resonated with conservative outlets such as *The New York Daily News* and *The Wall Street Journal* while also provoking a strong public and federal government response.

On the state level, anti-Muslim legislation, and the discourse related to it, is worthy of investigation. In 2011, the Tennessee state legislature passed HB 1353 and SB 1028, which made it a felony to practice Sharia Law and initially proclaimed that any religious practices such as feet-washing and prayers were treasonous. The House version of the bill also defined Muslim illegal immigrants as alien enemies subject to immediate deportation. Both bills were drawn from a template developed by David Yerushalmi, a Brooklyn lawyer and self-appointed expert in Islamic law and its relationship with terrorism and national security. This joint investigation, of King’s and the two Tennessee bills, offers an opportunity to look at crisis-related anti-Muslim discourse on a local and national level.

In Chapter IV, I will look at the false immigration crisis as depicted by Donald Trump, primarily before he was elected U.S. President. Trump repeatedly referred to the “crisis” of immigration in relation to his campaign promise to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. While the Pew Research Center reported that, in 2016, the numbers of illegal immigrants entering the United States from Mexico was at a 10-year-low (Passell & Cohn, 2018), Trump was successful in establishing a perceived, urgent need for a wall. Speaking in Grand Rapids, Michigan on October 31, 2016, Trump said:

We received the first ever endorsement from our ICE and Border Patrol officers. These are amazing people. Who frankly have a much easier job if I don't win. Because the people just walk right in. But these are great Americans. They're devastated. They see what's happening. They see who's coming in. And they say, we are going to give Donald Trump the first ever endorsement. They've never endorsed anybody before. They tell us the border crisis is the worst it's ever been. It's a national tragedy and a national emergency. They said that. (“Donald Trump,” 2016)

Within the genre of social media, it will be valuable to look at Trump’s messaging in terms of longevity and sustainability. Gainous and Wagner established that the use of Twitter and other similar, direct-to-public news platforms were more prominently used by Republicans, who viewed the media as biased (2014). Yet, partisan leanings aside, if the initial introduction of a potential crisis appears within a Tweet, does it possess the strength or authenticity to resonate with journalists in traditional media? With this question in mind, I will also examine source, message and media response, looking at the factors that affect placement and further exploration.

Chapter V of this study looks at the context of two strongly related speeches with a nationalist crisis theme. The first was delivered by Stephen K. Bannon in 2014 to Vatican officials in Rome and the second speech served as Trump's sole European Presidential address, delivered in Warsaw, Poland in 2017. This chapter offers an opportunity to fully delve into the language and tactics of the White nationalist speaker portraying crisis, precarity and cultivating *ressentiment*.

Method

In seeking to develop a better understanding of the influence of crisis talk and its propensity to garner media attention, I turn to Bennett and Pfetsch as a guideline for discussion. These two scholars describe political communication as being defined historically by the “interplay of social conditions that define audiences, the communication processes that send messages to them, and the effects of those processes” (2018, p. 243). To that end, my goal is to develop a better understanding of the social and political factors at play in the development of a crisis thread or theme that serves as a rhetorical node around which circulates further crisis discourse in news coverage, and ultimately, legislation that affects everyday lives.

The evolution of crisis talk can be effectively evaluated through the simple, yet profound Rhetorical Structure Theory, developed by William Mann and Sandra Thompson in 1988. This provides an exacting method of exploring the process in which an original message (media, discourse or otherwise) can be seen as the *nuclear* element that impacts or creates a *satellite* component. Both elements, nuclear or satellite, are subject to the influences or constraints mentioned above (technology, ideology of the media, etc). In this study, the primary constraint I will be investigating is the original way

in which the crisis mode was communicated and the dissemination of that crisis theme or node, in media—what was the salient message that lived on and why? Every newspaper, according to Hall (1975) is a structure of meanings in linguistic and visual form, indeed it is a discourse, which allows room for our interpretation.

A final element of interest is the concrete action that occurred due to the combination of nucleus and satellite – a Congressional hearing; a veto of legislation; a poll that indicated changed public sentiment.

This form of analysis works cleanly and organically in partnership with the constant comparative method of textual analysis as established by Barney Glaser (1965) prior to his introduction, with Anselm Strauss, of the grounded theory in 1967, which incorporates much of this methodology. Glaser stressed that the analysis of each category is dependent on the previous stage, and together all stages contribute, albeit independently, to the development of a final theory. As argued by Elfriede Fürsich in 2007, this method of investigation is particularly valuable in media studies, because it addresses the original narrative character of the content and its potential as a node for ideological furtherance.

For this multi-platform media study, I also rely on the foundations of a critical cultural analysis, as defined by Hall in his work with the school of British Cultural Studies. Hall offered a sound resource for methodologically analyzing the progression of information across media formations and platforms (1973). Text is never a fixed artifact, argued Michael Leff, who underlined the significance of Hall's approach-- viewing rhetoric as possessing meaning and significance that changes when interpreted from

different angles (2001). Hall's methodology allows for a greater understanding of the evolution from a nationalist crisis warning to an officially sanctioned news story.

Implications and Validation for This Inquiry

There is a pressing need to gain further understanding of the tactics of nationalism in procuring media attention. While Donald Trump did not win the 2020 presidential election, his "Stop the Steal" campaign carried on, fostering *ressentiment* among supporters despite numerous court decisions supporting the legitimacy of the election. The division between ideological factions moved from angry rhetoric to violence, as evidenced by the January 6, 2021 storming of the United States Capital. As reported in *Politico* in August of 2022: Rhetoric that is both dehumanizing and of a violent nature contributed to a surge in violence that was "everywhere. Go to a gun show. Visit a right-wing church. Check out a Trump rally. No matter the venue, the doomsday prophesying is ubiquitous — and scary" (Heath, 2022, para. 18).

When we consider the deliberate, strategic use of *ressentiment*, this research becomes additionally important. There is nothing random or blithe about this mode of nationalist discourse. While arguing that political argumentation is about gaining and using power, Zarefsky (2008) defined it as typically about collective decision-making for the public good, but in this study, the power-seekers are generally uninterested in societal change; this is about power, which in most cases is about money. Moreover, as noted earlier, there is a tendency, among nationalist speakers, to transform political need into truth.

Political argumentation is neither random nor unpredictable. Across situations and even eras, one can find reoccurrences that work to define the genre and establish its

conventions. A closer look at argumentation, particularly as it espouses crisis, offers an opportunity to transcend the pedestrian details of any particular case. In this sense, we can see some aspects of political argumentation as institutionalized. A careful, unbiased review of its patterns reveals a helpful schema, one that allows for discernment and detachment.

A given rhetoric is not simply contained by the elements that comprise its rhetorical situation. Edbauer cautioned that a rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities existing in the social field (2016). This ecological or affective rhetorical “crisis” model is one that we may read as a process of emergence in a continuous, albeit changing, field. Through this study, I am seeking to uncover the intricacies and constraints of these changing pathways, as they elucidate what we have already experienced and will undoubtedly see again.

CHAPTER III – The “Homegrown” Terrorist Crisis: Nurturing *Ressentiment* Through
Rhetoric and News Coverage

The anti-Sharia bills appear as a solution to a non-existent problem. But that was beside the point for anti-Sharia activists. For them, the very act of pronouncing Islam in an American court is a problem, and even proof of an Islamic threat.

Theirs is a preemptive war (Marzouki, 2017 p. 119)

Damaging Demonization at the State and Federal Level

The ten-year anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks brought its fair share of speeches and somber memorials, but also something infinitely more lasting. In an effort to continue engineering an atmosphere of mistrust and continued *ressentiment*, American conservatives worked individually and collectively to heighten fear and frustration towards the growing American Muslim community, a large populace that had virtually nothing to do with the 9-11 attacks but served a purpose in political rhetoric. This is a concrete example of the chief tactic of triadic populism, as defined by Hodges (2016), whereby a third party is added to the traditional dyadic form, the “people versus the elite.” That third group may consist of any minority: From immigrant, to race, to gender identity.

This chapter looks at this mode of inflammatory political rhetoric and the resulting news coverage associated with false claims of Muslim-based “homegrown” terrorism. It examines two episodes: The passage of anti-Sharia state legislation in Tennessee and a near-simultaneous series of U.S. Congressional hearings. Both sought to publicize a nebulous, if not wholly contrived crisis. These two incidences illuminate the tactics used by lawmakers to increase public support, media coverage and party

loyalty by blithely ignoring the true values of the large American Muslim community. Speaking through the media and in the hearings, American Muslims were vocal in their efforts to further peace, good relations, and involvement in their local American communities. Additionally, they served as the largest single source of initial information (48 of 120 cases) regarding potential terrorist activity (Gowan, 2010). Yet, because of the inflammatory, “newsworthy” nature of the claims and rhetoric used by the lawmakers, local and national media was an unwitting participant in the perpetuation of crisis talk and furthering of futile *ressentiment*.

At the state level, this research examines statehouse testimony and news content associated with the passing of two identical bills (per Tennessee procedure): SB1028 and HB1353, both known as the “Material Support to Designated Entities Act of 2011.” Introduced on February 16, 2011, they were signed into law on June 16, 2011 by Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam and are now commonly known as Tennessee Public Chapter Number 497.

At the federal level, I explore media content and Congressional records related to Rep. Peter King’s (R, NY) launch of five Congressional Hearings, officially known as “self-radicalization within the Muslim community and that Community’s response.” These hearings were established to rout out any potential Muslim terrorist nodes fostering dangerous activities, as well as the supposed failure of the Muslim community to identify or eliminate these nodes in defense of the country. King, a Republican from Long Island, New York, was the recently appointed Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, created by President George W. Bush after the 9-11 attacks.

Political Hyperbole Based on a False Depiction of Sharia Law

Both case studies lean into the ideological meaning of Sharia law and offer little substance in depicting its positive, peace-driven principles. The Islamic scholar Jeffrey Lyons (2012) maintained that the Western study of Islam and Islamic law has been dominated by the disciplines of political science and international relations for decades. A chief focus of Western views is the aspect of Sharia, which may be defined as the totality of God's commands and exhortations, intended to regulate human conduct and guide believers to eternal salvation (Saliba, 2011). According to the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, Sharia law is a mature legal system that has something to teach all of us (Saliba). The five goals of Sharia include the protection of life, sound religious practice, sanity, the family, and personal and communal wealth. The acknowledgement of sound local customs throughout the world is at the heart of these maxims and is often misinterpreted. It is also helpful to underline that women under Sharia law have the full legal capacity to own, manage, and dispose of property; to be involved in trade and commerce; and to negotiate and enter into contracts without any interference by their husbands. This illustrates the compatibility of Sharia law with Western legal concepts. In her comprehensive exploration of American Muslim devotion, Marzouki argued that the anti-Sharia movement was:

The result of failure. It's because its leaders were unable to convince the true leaders of the conservative movement or those of the Republican Party or in federal agencies of the pertinence of their project, that they were forced to turn instead to state-level legislative bodies and gamble on the anti-Washington reflexes of many state and local politicians. (Marzouki, 2017, p. 117)

In terms of the Tennessee legislation and Peter King's hearings, this demonization effort proved quite successful, despite the fact that America's greatest ally in the war on homegrown terrorism was the American Muslim community (Tutt, 2011, Gowan, 2010). At the time of the two events in 2011, America's adult Muslim population was approaching 1.8 million, with 63 percent of adults 18 and older born abroad. Fully one-quarter of all U.S. Muslim adults had arrived in the country since 2000 (Muslim Americans, 2011). Yet a high rate of naturalization distinguished this population – 70% of those who were born outside the U.S. reported that they were naturalized citizens. To serve the religious needs of the growing population, approximately 715 mosques were built in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010, bringing the nation's total to 1,925 (Marzouki, 2017). The building of one new mosque, in Murfreesboro, TN in 2010, became controversial, receiving abundant local and national media attention, including the CNN piece "Unwelcome: The Muslims Next Door" (O'Brien, S. 2011), CBS-News' ("New mosques," 2010) and a lengthy, front-page article in *The Washington Post* entitled "Nowhere near Ground Zero, but no more welcome" (Gowan, 2010). Media related to the Murfreesboro Mosque helped build the momentum needed for the anti-Sharia legislative effort.

Initial Accusations of "Foreign Law" and Imminent Terrorism

Some of the earliest statements attributed to this specific wave of anti-Muslim discourse stem back to a 2010 speech delivered by Newt Gingrich, (R, GA) former Speaker of the House and then-presidential candidate. Delivered at the American Enterprise Institute in July of that year and referenced by *USA Today* several months later

(Leinwand, 2010), the speech was noteworthy for its use of the term “foreign laws.” That specific phrase attained greater meaning through repetition, becoming a signature substitute for “Sharia” even though Sharia law does not conflict with U.S. Federal or state law or seek to replace it. In a solid depiction of a looming crisis, Gingrich issued warnings about “a fundamentalist political, economic, and religious movement that seeks to impose Islamic law or Sharia throughout every society in the world” (Marzouki, 2017, para. 1). These two concepts, that of “foreign law” and the political and economic aspects of Sharia became closely attached, working simultaneously through media signification throughout the controversy.

Two shooting incidents, both well publicized, also contributed to this rise in seething suspicion towards American Muslims. A 2009 episode at a Texas army base resulted in 13 deaths and over 30 injuries. The shooter, Nidal Malk Hasan, acted as his own attorney and admitted that he had gunned down the soldiers at Fort Hood who were being deployed to protect Muslims and Taliban leaders in Afghanistan. The Waco-Texas affiliate for CBS, KWTX noted that Hassan shouted “Allahu Akbar” (“God is great” in Arabic) before opening fire (“10 minutes, 2019). Yet in his coverage for *The New York Times*, Robert McFadden added that Hasan had listed “no religious preference” on his personnel records (2009).

The second incident, which was a mainstay in the discourse by Tennessee officials as well as Rep. King, was committed in Little Rock, Arkansas by Herman Bledsoe, a radicalized Islamic who called himself Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad (Dao, 2010). Bledsoe shot and killed one person and fumbled an attempt to bomb a nearby home. He had attended Tennessee University in Knoxville and was affiliated with

the Muslim student organization there. While local prosecutors considered it a straightforward murder case, Bledsoe mentioned that he was a member of al-Qaida , which served as a powerful signal to the anti-Muslim faction.

Finally, the construction of a mosque and community center near Ground Zero in downtown Manhattan created extensive discussion and controversy. While it was initially planned to include a memorial to the victims of the 9-11 attacks and foster interfaith dialogue, it was quickly renamed the “Ground Zero Mosque” and depicted as an emblem to the evils of Muslim ideology such as jihadist conflict in *The New York Post* (Peyser, 2010). This type of connection—linking the rhetoric of traumatic nationalism to the angst of the populace, “articulates suffering to citizenship” (Pierce, 2014, p. 53). The notion of a social embodiment rooted in media proclamation supports the aspects of representation, as a fixture within space conveys so much more than the fixture itself. In discussing the proposed mosque, which was slated to open on September 11, 2011, *The New York Post* crafted the term “Monster Mosque” quoting oppositional leaders such as Paul Sipos, a local politician, who said “if the Germans opened a Bach choral society across from Auschwitz, even after all these years, that would be an insensitive setting” (Peyser, 2010, para. 7). As of mid-2023, construction on the Islamic cultural space had still not begun. Here it is clear how the use of an iconic phrase, such as “monster mosque” can ride the waves of media coverage and remain easily identifiable, a fresh new signifier of a strong belief or ideology, in this case one that is adamantly anti-Muslim.

Following Gingrich’s speech and prior to the introduction of the Tennessee legislation, an abundance of anti-Muslim rhetoric surfaced, related to the building of the

Murfreesboro Mosque. This created a platform of understanding among Tennesseans who saw this mosque, the fifth one in a peaceful, predominantly Muslim community, as a threat. As reported on CBS (“New mosques,” 2010) and the *Arizona Daily Star*, Bob Shelton, a 76-year-old Murfreesboro resident said, referring to the 10,000 Muslim-American residents in town, “they are not a religion. They are a political, militaristic group.” A large photo in the *Star* article, showed a White man carrying an American flag and pointing angrily at a dark-haired woman with a head scarf, as if to communicate that he is defending his country. Both news pieces mentioned local mosque leader Essam Fathy, who helped plan the new building in Murfreesboro. He referred to his peaceful experiences as a resident for 30 years and exhibited the plea for reason and pragmatism that became so prevalent in this research: “There's nothing different now except it's [the new mosque] going to be a little bigger. The level of anger, the level of hostility is much higher in the last few years,” (“New Mosques,” 2010; “Hostility Grows,” 2010). Jack McElroy, editor of *The Knoxville News Sentinel*, noted that the wave of anti-Islam sentiment in his community “surely is idiotic and evil” (2010, para. 5).

In a lengthy exploration of the resistance to construction of the Murfreesboro Mosque (four successful and well-attended mosques were too crowded), *The Washington Post* quoted Pat Robertson, the late American evangelist as inquiring, on his television show, whether “a Muslim takeover of America was imminent and whether local officials could be bribed to allow that to happen” (Gowan, 2010, pp. 1, 3.) This false depiction of a take-over and illegal enticement received little push back from the media.

In the *Daily Kos*, a predominately liberal internet forum, Republican LouAnn Zelenik, a Tennessee candidate for U.S. Congress, was cited as proclaiming that:

until the American Muslim community finds it in their hearts to separate themselves from their evil, radical counterparts, to condemn those who want to destroy our civilization and will fight against them, we are not obligated to open our society to any of them” (Edwards, 2010, para. 5)

Coverage such as this positioned the state of Tennessee to be open to anti-Muslim legislation.

Dependable Sources for anti-Muslim Sound Bites and Fear Mongering

From the Tennessee Statehouse to the King Congressional hearings, the leaders of the anti-Muslim movement relied on a few consistent and predictable figures for a steady flow of timely appearances and newsworthy sound bites. Frank Gaffney, founder and president of The Center for Security Policy, was one popular choice. Gaffney appeared on conservative talk shows and provided the kind of quotes that reporters used “for balance” in their news articles that may have alluded to the absurdity of the anti-Muslim movement. In Leinwand’s *USA Today* story, she quoted Gaffney as noting that Sharia law was “creeping” into U.S. courts and “jihadists who want worldwide Islamic rule” are intent on weakening democracies like the United States’ (2010, para. 11). Opposition to this ideology was present, but unsuccessful. In the last section of Leinwand’s article, with the subhead “fear mongering,” Randall Coyne, a professor of constitutional law at Oklahoma College of Law put it bluntly: “There’s no risk of Oklahoma falling under the way of Sharia law or any other law other than American law for that matter. It’s fear mongering at its worst” (para. 23).

Herman Bledsoe’s father, Melvin Bledsoe, also served as an active spokesperson for the “homegrown” threat, testifying in King’s congressional hearings and mentioned

frequently in the Tennessee statehouse testimony by those who supported the passage of the TN bill. In one of the more damaging anti-Muslim news articles, *The Daily News-Journal* in Murfreesboro, TN reported that the suspect's father blamed the Nashville Mosque for indoctrinating his son into a terrorist mindset, with a prominent photo of Bledsoe and headline that announced "Suspect's father blames Nashville mosque; testifies to Congress that his son was led to terrorism" (Smietana, 2011, p.1)

As seen with the 2016 victory of former President Donald Trump, demographics and ideology are often so closely linked in the U.S. that one can nearly predict where a vote will fall based on local culture. Tennessee is one of the Bible Belt states known for its numerous evangelical communities. Moreover, it has the largest number of local chapters of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a White supremacist organization with leaders who favor the return of segregation nationwide. Its state capital, Nashville, has over seven hundred churches, several religiously affiliated universities, and a number of publishing houses specializing in producing Bibles (Marzouki, 2017).

The Tennessee Statehouse Hearing: Divisive, Misleading

The creation of HB1353 and SB1028 adhered to the ideology of the Tennessee Eagle Forum, a right-wing citizens group that viewed Tennessee Muslims as domestic versions of the Islamic theocracies in Iran and Saudi Arabia. They also sought to connect Muslim leaders in Tennessee with radical clerks despite a lack of tangible evidence (Tutt, 2011). Sponsored by State Sen. Bill Ketron from Murfreesboro and State Rep. Judd Matheny, from Tullahoma, the bills described Sharia law as "dangerous" to U.S. security, (Griffin, 2011) and initially made it a felony to practice every day Muslim rituals such as foot washing. The original bill encountered vehement pressure from civil rights groups

such as the ACLU (Tutt, 2011) and was amended several times to remove direct references to Islam and Muslims, yet the damaging effects lingered. This bill initially stated, in section 8:

The unchanging and ultimate aim of jihad is the imposition of Sharia on all states and nations, including the United States and this state; further, pursuant to its own dictates, Sharia requires the abrogation, destruction of violation of the United States and Tennessee Constitutions and the imposition of Sharia through violence and criminal activity. (Tennessee Statehouse Archives, 2011)

The pronounced hegemonic influence of the political ruling class was on full display in the Tennessee Statehouse on April 12, 2011 for testimony related to the bills. The four chief proponents, consisting of the two sponsors and two guest “experts” were all White men, confident in their testimony, oblivious to opposition. Senator Bill Ketron opened the hearings with a justification for its importance, stressing that the “focus” of the United States’ terrorist threat had evolved into a domestic issue, particularly relevant to Tennesseans, because of the recent shooting (of one person) by the “radicalized” Bledsoe (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011). With this as a platform, he argued that the new focus of Islamic terrorism would be “homegrown” and that his bill would move the state from a purely reactive position to one of prevention. Interestingly, Ketron noted that the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) supported the bill and indeed CAIR considered it a “win” for the Tennessee Muslim Community. With that he added that “there is no prosperity without security.” In Chapter V of this study, we will see that this same link, between prosperity and security, was used extensively by Donald Trump and Stephen Bannon.

Senator Ketron brought forth two experts to testify on the necessity of the bill: Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Meyers, a self-proclaimed anti-terrorism expert who served 19 months in Afghanistan, and Joseph Schmidt a former employee of the Department of Defense who had quit five years earlier but possessed “extensive experience” in overseeing compliance in security issues and laws. The bill, which mirrored the federal Patriot Act, would bring its enforcement into the realm of the local police and FBI. Several of the lawmakers questioned why Tennessee needed a bill that was nearly identical to federal legislation. The answer was that this would allow Tennessee to “not be bound” by the investigative priorities of the Department of Justice. A long list of potential enemies were proposed during this portion of the testimony: Mexican drug cartels, neo-Nazi’s, White supremacist organizations, and at the very end of the list, al-Qaida and the International Muslim Brotherhood. Senator Tim Barnes said in response: “You’ve cut a wide swath alluding to all of these groups” (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011). The fact that the bills targeted Muslims was not mentioned by the experts providing testimony. Taking the microphone, Meyers stated that this “bill would have authorized [police] to stop those who provided material support to Bledsoe.” Meyers failed to mention the minimal expense of obtaining one gun and creating a failed homemade bomb. Yet Memphis was described as a terrorist training incubator. When Senator Barnes from Memphis asked if they knew of any specific terrorist training camps in his city, there was no response. Senator Ford spoke up in support of her Muslim neighbors and noted that she had “grave concerns” about the imprisonment factor of 15 years “just for practicing their faith” (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011). With that, Schmidt replied, “I don’t know where (this bill) is coming from.”

The next two individuals to testify provided sound justification for the demise of the legislation. In a surprising turn, Dorothy Zwayen, a blonde-haired Muslim from Knoxville, spoke on behalf of her American Muslim community. A devoted community volunteer with other Muslims at the “Love Kitchen,” Zwayen testified that the bill would make it near-impossible for her to practice her faith. When this position was challenged, she noted that the scrutiny under which they all would be living, under fear of imprisonment, would curtail life as they knew it in the Muslim community. Zwayen also referenced David Yerushalmi, the Hasidic architect of the bill as calling for a “national war” against Islam. When informed that the bill does not “focus” only on Muslims, she dismissed it by saying: “growing up and seeing the vivid actions of the KKK, I have never seen them prosecuted” (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011).

Hedy Weinburg, the Executive Director of the ACLU in Tennessee, testified that the bill, in all its different forms, is nothing more than “a way to harass and target and take away the religious freedom rights of the Muslim community.” Interestingly, Weinburg brought up Ketron’s dubious reference to the support of the Southern Poverty Law Center towards this legislation. This approval of the bill, she said, was an impossibility. Weinburg concluded with strong words: “to say that this bill would embrace them and support them is not genuine.” In terms of the bill providing safety and security to the community, Weinburg noted “This is not the bill and the tool to do that,” (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011).

Both bills were amended several times, eventually removing some of the most damaging language. Yet the final bill retained the authorization for the attorney general to designate an organization as “Sharia” and ultimately freeze its assets or issue a fine of

\$50,000 for violation. Most alarmingly, the offense of providing material support would be a Class B felony, punishable by no less than 15 years imprisonment, and if a death occurs, imprisonment for life. A summary of the final bill, as signed by the Governor on June 16, 2011, can be read here:

<https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB1028&GA=107>

In the News, a Plea for Fairness and Reason

In his depiction of newspapers and the dissemination of news items, Stuart Hall argued that the framing of events and structure of awareness that is developed through the media will reflect the core values of the outlet in a way that offers a consistent scheme of interpretation (1973). Within that framework, we will see that the media and community leaders were frequently aligned in their opposition to this anti-Sharia rhetoric, at a time when there seemed to be little justification for its surge. While public sentiment, as seen in interviews and letters to the editor, did reflect the hateful concepts espoused by Gingrich and other conservative leaders, the press was vehement in arguing otherwise. National print media, such as *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* sought to define the bill as one that would breed animosity and curtail the efforts of the American Muslim community to thrive and succeed professionally. For the most part, local Tennessee outlets did the same. Additionally, as demonstrated with supporting data in the King Congressional hearings, the American Muslim community was portrayed as essential to any domestic efforts to combat terrorism, a front-line in this important effort. Therefore, with the two sides – public and media—frequently clashing, this episode in hateful discourse truly did have the aspects of a preemptive war, as Marzouki argued (2017).

A great deal of concern was expressed at this hateful trend spreading across the country. National print media in the United States went to great lengths to explore the foundations of the Tennessee bills, as they also represented a legislative trend with similar bills passing in Oklahoma and Louisiana (Elliot, 2011). A lengthy piece in *The New York Times* (2011) helped explicate the long-range results of the anti-Sharia movement, noting that more than two dozen states were considering measures to restrict judges from consulting Shariah. Written by Andrea Elliot and weighing in at over 2300 words, it outlined the dubious “threat” of Islamic law from the Tennessee statehouse to the halls of Congress. Rigorously researched, with an abundance of opposing views, the front-page exposé focused on the influence of David Yerushalmi, the Hasidic lawyer from Brooklyn who drafted the legislative template used in the Tennessee and Oklahoma bills. “Despite his lack of formal training in Islamic law” Elliot wrote, “Mr. Yerushalmi has come to exercise a striking influence over American public discourse about Sharia (para. 6). As mentioned in the Tennessee Statehouse testimony, Yerushalmi supported the initial conviction of U.S founding fathers that women and Blacks should not be permitted to vote (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011). Elliot also quoted several well-regarded Washington figures, such as R. James Woolsey, former director of the C.I.A., and two Republican presidential candidates at the time, Newt Gingrich, and Michele Bachmann, who signed a pledge to reject Islamic law, likening it to “totalitarian control.”

In March, 2011, David Yerushalmi was interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR). The subject was homegrown Muslim terrorism. Host Michel Martin opened with a quick clip from Rep. King, reiterating the dangers of homegrown terrorism as demonstrating the necessity of his Congressional hearings. Martin noted how a dozen

states were considering measures that would make certain Muslim religious acts a felony. Yerushalmi was introduced as founder and president of SANE, the Society of Americans for National existence and the author of the policy paper that was the catalyst for many of the anti-Sharia bills. When asked why these laws have become so necessary, Yerushalmi responded:

Tennessee has had a problem of homegrown jihadists. Bledsoe, who went out to the recruiting office in Arkansas, was from Tennessee and as it were radicalized there. So that's number one. Number two, the statute identifies a specific threat doctrine in policy and in law. The more specific you can be, as to the harm you're trying to address, the better the law is. And because we have a very specific threat of global jihad domesticized in this country, the statute is refined to just that aspect of the terrorist profile and threat that deals with this particular jihad doctrine. (Martin, 2011)

A second guest, Intisar Rabb, professor of Islamic and American law from Boston College, was interviewed next. Asked about her particular concerns with the legislation. Rabb replied: "I wish we were misreading what that bill actually does. I want to start off with just the language of Sharia, which represents ideals in common with core American values. The bill attempts to define Sharia as something other than that" (Martin, 2011).

Sarcasm towards the unrealistic aspects of the anti-Muslim legislation was also evident. In a *Washington Post* editorial, Eugene Robinson noted that:

Worst is all the ugly noise—it doesn't qualify as debate – about the imagined encroachment of Islamic Sharia law. As a threat to the American way of life, the likelihood of our justice system being taken over by "creeping" Sharia is less than

that of Godzilla emerging from New York Harbor. Yet state legislatures are taking up actual legislation to guard against this imaginary Islamic threat. (2011, p. A15)

In a cynical column “State politicians earn obscure awards,” the leader of the conservative Eagle Forum organization, Bobby Patray, was designated as the “leading conservative Christian crusader” (Humphrey, 2011)

Local coverage regarding the Tennessee legislation was mixed, ranging from blatant opposition to tolerance for the legislation. Three typical local headlines were as follows:

- “Ketron proposes law to forbid Shariah” *The Daily News-Journal* in Murfreesboro, TN, (Smietana, 2011)
- “Anti-Muslim bill a threat to values” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, (“Anti-Muslim,” 2011)
- “Anti-Islam bill unconstitutional” (*The Knoxville News-Sentinel and Daily News-Journal* (“Anti-Islam,” 2011)

Under the headline “Anti-Islam bill unconstitutional,” the *Daily News Journal* published an editorial protesting that employees or any organization that was designed as “adhering” to Sharia would be subject to felony charges that could result in at least 15 years of prison, adding that the disclaimer to the law, stating that it doesn’t apply to peaceful followers of Islam is “laughable” (“Anti-Islam,” 2011, para. 5). Describing the bill as “odious,” the editorial urged its sponsor, State Sen. Ketron, “to withdraw the bill and issue an apology to all state residents, Muslims in particular” (para. 2).

The editor of a prominent Knoxville paper spoke up against the legislation. Writing for the *Knoxville News Sentinel*, Jack McElroy argued that the current wave of shameful targeting is not “unprecedented” and went on to describe the hateful traditions

of anti-Catholicism and anti-semitism in American history. McElroy concluded that “now American Muslims are the targets,” comparing the situation to the negative sentiment towards Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor (2010, para. 5 &16).

Prior to the statehouse testimony, *United Press International* reported that an amendment on the “anti-terrorism” bill was going to remove the pointedly offensive text that branded Shariah as a “legal, political and military system” that promotes “the abrogation, destruction or violation of the United States and Tennessee constitutions through violence and criminal activity.” The article, which was picked up by *The Murfreesboro Post*, quoted co-sponsor Rep. Matheny as saying that the bill was simply “about protecting our citizens from those who would use religious doctrine as a justification to commit criminal activities or terrorist acts” (“Tennessee backs off,” 2011, p. 8).

Local Media: A Sliver of Support

While the Tennessee newspapers did not outwardly applaud the legislation, two letters to the editor were selected to do so. A local pastor, Maury Davis, was granted a prominent position in the Gallatin, TN *News Examiner*. Entitled “Citizens need to be informed of the truth about Sharia law,” his letter falsely stated that the fundamentals of Shariah are connected to the “radical Islamic movement,” a frequent misnomer. Without noting the Islamic community traditions that had perpetuated peacefully for many years in Murfreesboro, Davis wrote:

To honestly say they want a peaceful coexistence with those of us who believe in American traditional values and, God forbid, Jesus [is impossible]. There is a

cultural clash of great proportion on the horizon, and we would do well not to be ignorant and uninformed of the reality of the differences. (2011, para. 5)

Writing to the editor of the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Patray (the aforementioned leader of the conservative Eagle Forum) expressed gratitude:

Once more we want to praise God for the multiple times that he intervened on behalf of this legislation and to express our deep appreciation to Senate Caucus Chairman Bill Ketron and House Speaker Pro Tempore Judd Matheny for their courage and tireless efforts to see this important legislation through to victory.

(Humphrey, 2011)

Perhaps the conservative outlet FOX-TV was expecting a different angle but shortly after the Tennessee bills were introduced, Bob Smietanta, a Tennessee-based reporter for Gannett, appeared on the Greta Van Susteren show. When Van Susteren opened with a description of the looming legislation creating a “battle” over Sharia law, Smietana explained, quite simply, that it was not, in fact, a battle. According to Smietana, Christianity might be considered a set of beliefs and Sharia law should be considered in the same context as kosher laws. He mentioned how local Muslims believe that their law exists alongside constitutional law, but that those in support of the bill saw the situation much differently, proclaiming that Sharia law “means treason and overthrow of the government” (Van Susteren, 2011).

The “Sink-Gate” Debacle. Finally, in yet another public display of ignorance, there was the “sink-gate” controversy in March, 2013. As reported by the *Associated Press* and published on *Gawker*, the two Republican sponsors of the “Material Support Act,” Sen. Ketron and Rep. Metheny, publicly questioned the purpose of a floor-level

sink in the men’s restroom at the Tennessee Statehouse. In what became known as “sink-gate,” Ketron asked the Senate Clerk if there was religious significance to the fixture, concerned that it was created for Muslim religious ablutions. In response to media inquiries, Legislative Administration Director Connie Ridley described the function of the sink as, “in layman’s terms, a mop sink” (Jefferson, 2013). This inquiry demonstrates Ketron’s lack of knowledge regarding Muslim foot-washing, which would only occur outside a mosque. It also indicates, according to Ibrahim Hooper (at CAIR): “the ridiculous depths to which paranoid extremists will sink to manufacture anti-Muslim hysteria based on bizarre and non-existent controversies” (Hooper, 2013).

The Rep. Peter King Travesty: Two Years, Five Hearings, no Findings

We’re talking about al-Qaida, we’re talking about the affiliates of al-Qaida who have been radicalizing. There’s been self-radicalization going on within the Muslim community, within a very small minority. But it’s there, that’s where the threat is coming from at this time. – Congressman Peter King (Griffin, 2011)

Using Congress to Further Political Goals

This research looks at the spectacular influence of political power in framing an issue and repeatedly driving it forward, to the exclusion of any oppositional framing or opinions. This tactic, as outlined by Speakman and Funk (2020) in their study of nationalism and hegemony, is a mainstay in the hegemonic influence on all types of news, from mainstream to partisan. King’s Congressional hearings demonstrate how this powerful influence occurs at the upper levels of political power, as driven by White conservative male leaders. Whereas a negotiated position might consider alternative sides

to an issue, the methods that Congressman King enlisted were decidedly non-negotiable and relied on the press for support, embellishment, and reiteration.

After the Republicans regained control of the House of Representatives in 2011, Rep. King was re-appointed Chairman of the Department of Homeland Security. Shortly afterwards, he initiated a series of Congressional hearings entitled “The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community’s Response.” According to Richard Cohen’s “Fuel for the bigots” in *The Washington Post*, the last part of Kings’ title, “that community’s response” was obvious from the start (2011).

Prior to the first hearing, in early 2011, King held a Homeland Security committee meeting, entitled “Understanding the Homeland Threat.” The purpose of the meeting was to garner support and underline the necessity of the future hearings. In a lengthy opening statement, King quoted, not for the first time, Attorney General Holder’s statement, that he “loses sleep” at night, thinking about the “young men in this country who are being radicalized and willing to take up arms against their own nation” (“Understanding, 2011, para. 15). King concluded with a dire but baseless threat certain to instill panic—the possible use, by these “homegrown” terrorists ,of chemical and biological weaponry within the United States, and the “massive” loss of human life that would result, saying: “A nightmare scenario is to have that attack involve a dirty bomb, which would put that metropolitan area basically off limits, besides the massive loss of human life that would result” (“Understanding, 2011, para. 23). This hyperbole of fear, crisis and demonization set the stage for Kings’ hearings to begin the following month.

The First Hearing: Pugnacity Versus Pleas for Balance

This study focuses primarily on King's first Congressional hearing, held on March 10, 2011. In a lengthy introduction that provided more outlandish threats that have not materialized, King noted that this trend towards homegrown "radicalization" was a new strategy that al-Qaida was using in partnership with the American Muslim community. Stressing that the community has not provided the support that he believed was necessary, King worked to instill a false sense of dread and fear, rife with misstatements. He referenced a 2007 report by the Pew Research Center that was initially published to indicate that Muslim publics around the world were increasingly rejecting suicide bombing (Global Attitudes). While a small percentage of young Arabic men were still not demonstratively opposed, the numbers had dropped significantly. King transposed the meaning of the report, and the locale of the youth (Middle East, Asia, Africa), proclaiming that "15% of our Muslim youth" could favor suicide bombings and that these are the youth that al-Qaida is "attempting to recruit" (Compilation of Hearings, 2011). Secondly, King mis-represented President Barack Obama's position on the hearings by stating that "indeed Congressional investigation of Muslim American radicalization is the logical response to the "repeated and urgent warnings which the Obama administration has been making in recent months" (Compilation of Hearings, 2011). Similar to the officials in Tennessee, King falsely depicted trustworthy sources as supporting or validating his effort.

A number of Congressional Representatives along with a few hand-picked "experts" testified in the first hearing. There was very little cross-over in the discussion. Facts were often replaced by opinions. As noted in *The Washington Post*, if King was

truly intent on presenting important information, he would have called upon the FBI and his colleagues in the Department of Homeland Security to testify (Robinson, 2011). This was not the case. Throughout the testimony, members of Congress typically expressed profound disappointment and lack of support for King's position. King's "experts" who testified in support of the bill, included Bledsoe's father Herman and an Arab representative, Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, author of an anti-Muslim opinion piece in *The New York Post* entitled "Why Muslims must look in the mirror" (2010). *The Washington Post* noted that Jasser has "little following among Muslims but has become a favorite of conservatives for his portrayal of American Muslim leaders as radical Islamists" (Goldstein, 2011, para. 14).

By far, the most prominent opinion expressed by House leaders was that the investigation was too narrow and needlessly focused on one particular ethnic group. Perhaps Rep. Laura Richardson (D, CA) said it best:

The premise of this hearing fails to acknowledge all of the infamous terrorists we have had in our Nation's history that had nothing to do with Islam. From Timothy McVeigh to Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, our history has shown us that terrorism crosses many spectrums and ideologies (Compilation of Hearings, 2011). Similarly, Rep. Yvette D. Clark (D, NY) noted that the concerns of parents, worried that their children are being "radicalized" was not unlike that of parents in her district, except her parents were terrified of the influence of gangs, not al-Qaida (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

In all instances, despite requests for a broader and less vitriolic investigation, the pleas were disregarded. Interestingly, Start Hall's encoding/decoding theories (1973)

address this inability for a receiver to accept a clear and, in this case, pragmatic message: Different audiences generate different meanings. Mr. King's interpretation was to forego fairness, and focus on the debilitating mode of crisis talk that contributes to *ressentiment*.

Even in the face of direct, blunt sarcasm, King did not relent or retract from his intended purpose. Representative Clark expressed her disdain in very clear terms:

Let me say that today's hearing has been a great Congressional theater, certainly the equivalent of reality television. I'm just appalled at the fact that we have not really gotten to a substantive conversation about how we define terrorism and how we define the whole idea of radicalization (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

The late Rep. John Dingell, the longest-serving member of Congress at the time, urged King to not raise questions about the decency of Arabs or Muslims, or any other American "en masse," stating that "there will be plenty of rascals that we can point out and say these are real dangers to the Nation that we love and that we serve" (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

The protestations did not end there. After the transcripts of testimony, the Congressional record displays numerous letters from community leaders and members of Congress. One such document, signed by 57 House Democrats and Republicans, stated that "we believe that the tone and focus of these hearings runs contrary to our Nation's values." After noting that Muslim Americans contribute to the nation's well-being in many capacities, the letter concluded that "the choice between our values of inclusiveness and pluralism and our security is a false one" (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

Stressing The Importance of the Muslim Community

Only one Muslim sat on the panel for these hearings-- Rep. Keith Ellison, the first African American elected to Congress from Minnesota and the first Muslim to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. While continually seeking to build consensus among his colleagues, Ellison noted that the Muslim American community “across the country” works with law enforcement officials and had been directly responsible for vanquishing two recent terror plots. Data backs up Ellison’s statement, as Rep. Laura Richardson testified that, according to the Congressional Research Service, non-jihadist attacks outnumbered jihadist attacks by 30 to 3 since the 9-11 attacks and these data suggested that cooperation from the Islamic community had helped law enforcement disrupt a significant amount of all plots that has taken place since 9-11 (Compilation of Hearings, 2011). Richardson’s statement, which had the factual power to dismantle King’s premise that the Muslim community was failing the American community, was not only disregarded by King, it was also missing in the media related to this research.

King introduced a letter from five members of Congress, who jointly protested that the hearing targeted a largely innocent community and his continued vitriol would have unintended consequences, such as alienation and increased feelings of resentment. They jointly stated, as did several others, that the hearings posed a powerful risk by possibly hindering law enforcement’s efforts to detect, deter, and prevent potential threats. Even Sheriff Leroy Baca, who testified about the efforts to fight extremism after the 2005 transit bombings in London, stressed the need to work with the Muslim community:

implementing community trust policing methods is the best way to succeed and gain the cooperation of any community you serve and work with. The Muslim community is not different than all the other communities we serve daily. Build trust, solicit cooperation, and establish methods of communication with the community and the result will be crime reporting, reporting of suspicious activities, and countering violent extremism at all levels. (Compilation of Hearings, 2011)

Similarly The Asian American Center for Advancing Justice wrote:

Targeting a community based on religion makes our communities and our nation less safe. To effectively maintain public safety, law enforcement requires the trust and cooperation of people in the communities they serve. Yet, any community that feels vulnerable and targeted is much less likely to trust law enforcement and therefore, less likely to report crimes or act as witnesses in investigations and prosecutions. Consequently, fear and suspicion of law enforcement in one community jeopardizes public safety for all. (Compilation of Hearings, 2011)

The Cultivation of Ressentiment Through Crisis Talk

Mr. King was adept at recruiting other individuals to support and bolster his claims of urgency in the investigation of the Muslim-American community. Melvin Bledsoe was powerful in his portrayal of the abandonment of the Muslim community and its continued efforts at radicalization. As noted earlier, his testimony resulted in one of the most powerful media pieces to appear in support of King, with a headline that read “Suspect’s father blames Nashville Mosque” (Smietana, 2011, p.1). Bledsoe sought to raise fear and cultivate resentment through overblown crisis talk testifying that:

We are losing American babies. Our children are in danger. This country must stand up and do something about the problem. Yes, my son's tragic story you are hearing about today. But tomorrow it could be your son, our daughter. It might be an African American child that they went after in Nashville. Tomorrow the victim might have blond hair, blue eyes. One thing for sure, it will happen again.

(Compilation of Hearings, 2011)

Another staunch supporter was Jasser, the Muslim-American who catered to conservative media needs. Jasser testified that the only solution to ending the violence that jihadists seek, was to treat the problem at its roots, the foundations of Islam. Here, he furthered the impression that Sharia laws might, in some incalculable way, be applied to constitutional law. The United States has been so "fixated" on preventing attacks that they have neglected, according to Jasser, to develop the tools to defeat the ideology that drives the attack (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

In the Media: Familiar Lines of Partisan Division

Whereas many of the lawmakers at King's first Congressional hearing provided sound and well-developed arguments towards fairness and support for the Muslim community, their statements (or factual assertions) were rarely mentioned in the media coverage. This section of the research looks at the differences in coverage between the mainstream media (The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN and other similar outlets) and the more conservative outlets such as The New York Post, Fox News and the Wall Street Journal.

In a CNN interview just prior to the hearings, King said: "We're talking about al-Qaida we're talking about the affiliates of al-Qaida who have been radicalizing. There's

been self-radicalization going on within the Muslim community, within a very small minority. But it's there, and that's where the threat is coming from” (Griffin, 2011). Further along in the same segment, CNN national correspondent Candiotti reiterated King’s claims, nearly verbatim. The reporter was attending a protest against the building of the aforementioned Mosque in lower Manhattan. Describing the protestors, she said: “these are people who say that there is, indeed, a real fear. There is a radicalization of Muslims in this country. And their belief is that Muslims are not doing enough within their own community to stop the radicalization within some Muslims in America” (Griffin, 2011).

Two days before King’s first hearing, *The Washington Post* published a full page of editorials, all focusing on the threat to religious freedom in the United States and abroad. Two of these pieces comprised nearly half a page. Kings’ efforts were discussed in disparaging terms as an effort to isolate and criminalize a largely peaceful and successfully integrated minority in the U.S. Richard Cohen (“Fuel for the bigots,”) noted an “awkward fact” that came to light the previous month: A significant decrease in terrorist activity by American Muslims, from 47 incidents in 2009 to less than half (20) in 2010. Additionally, as also reported by *The Washington Post*, the largest source of terrorist-related tips came from the American Muslim community (Gowan, 2010). Referring to a report issued by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security (affiliated with Duke and the University of North Carolina), Goldstein noted that in certain communities, Muslim Americans were so concerned about extremists that they reported people who were actually undercover informants (2011).

The disparity between reality and Kings' efforts was not complicated according to *The Washington Post*, which noted that "if King is looking for threats to our freedoms and values, a mirror would be the place to start" (Robinson, 2011, para. 1). Five days later, in another scalding opinion piece, Robinson referenced the CNN interview with King's claims of the "self-radicalization" in the United States as opposed to the fact that he bears "no animus towards the Muslim population" despite his belief that unfortunately there are just too many mosques in the United States (2011, para. 5). The article noted that King, through his "grandstanding" was "trying to peddle the booeey that moderate Muslims do not speak out against extremism" (para. 9), adding that Islamophobia has become a powerful force in American politics, pitting those who applaud King for associating the phrase "American Muslim community" with the phrase "who our enemy truly is" (para. 13). Security hearings such as this, Robinson wrote, serve only to increase the rumblings of Islamophobia that seem to grow louder and crazier each day.

That same week, Kings' local paper, *Newsday*, printed a letter from Mark Lukins, editor of the Interfaith Alliance of Long Island. In "fueling a bigger divide," Lukins accused King of wrongly claiming that the mosques and American Muslims were not cooperating with law enforcement. That statement, in all its many forms, had been contradicted by the FBI, who believed otherwise (2011).

Law enforcement experts also challenged Mr. King's portrayal of noncooperation. Los Angeles County Sheriff Leroy Baca of Los Angeles County, who testified at the hearings, was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying that he had "cultivated extensive relationships with Muslim leaders through the country" (Goodstein, 2011, para. 15).

On CNN, Ellison, the “lone Muslim in the crowd” at the Congressional hearings (Epstein, para. 3) noted the need to be cautious but said: if we’re going to investigate a religious minority and a particular one, I think it is the wrong course of action to take. The same CNN segment offered interviews with Muslim-Americans about the King hearings. New York resident and activist Imam Faisal complained that the hearings were turning all Muslims and all of Islam into the national enemy (Griffin, 2011).

Hyperbole and Demagoguery from the Right

The conservative daily The Washington Times, reiterated King’s purpose statement in the first paragraph of its report, stating that GOP leaders also believed that “extremist elements of Islam are a real threat that needs to be confronted” (McLaughlin, 2011, para. 1). In a local Newsday article entitled “King Defends Probe, the congressman defended his focus on Sharia law in the American-Muslim community, saying: “When we’re going after the Mafia, we looked at the Italian community; the Westies, the Irish community.” He added: “in New York they go after the Russian mob, they go into the Russian community to Brighton Beach and Coney Island” (Epstein, 2011, para. 3).

During this time period, Business Insider estimated that the conservative radio host, Rush Limbaugh, reached 15-20 million people weekly, across the 600+ radio stations in which he was syndicated (“Rush Limbaugh’s,” 2012). Just prior to the hearings, Limbaugh weighed in, saying:

We’re having these hearings in Washington on domestic terrorism. After decades of terrorist attacks on American citizens here and around the world by militant Muslims, we’re finally having hearings on this, and there’s anger that we’re

having hearings. The anger should be that we haven't done this for decades. And so now Peter King has to have a big time security detail. A question, ladies and gentlemen. If we are afraid—and obviously Peter King is not, but some people are—if we are afraid to have congressional hearings on terrorism, haven't the terrorists in effect won? I mean not altogether, but it looks this way. I mean the left is in a total meltdown and guess who's standing on the sidelines? Obama. Obama is on the sidelines. (2011, para. 3)

In a report on the King hearings, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) noted that Rep. King had long maintained, for over eight years, that 80 to 85% of all mosques in the United States were controlled by Islamic fundamentalists. When Fox News asked, in December, 2010, if he still believed this to be true, King proclaimed that “he will stand-by his 85% number” (Legislating Fear, 2013, para. 1). In an interview with ABC's “*Good Morning America*,” U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder spoke of the ongoing fight to protect American national security and as also reiterated by King, commented that the threat of homegrown terror is the danger keeping him awake at night (Pierre, 2010).

The moderately conservative *Wall Street Journal* chose to publish a Muslim's opinion in support of King's hearings. Qanta A. Ahmed's opinion piece carries a poignant truthfulness that underlines the values of a minority population so sorrowfully “othered” by King and Tennessee lawmakers. Ahmed argued that Muslim leaders in the U.S. should support Kings' efforts to rout out radical Islam in the U.S., because “it is the duty of Muslim-Americans to follow the laws of the United States and to make sure that fellow Muslims do the same” (2011, p. 11).

More baseless and fiery claims were published by *The New York Post* on July 27, 2011. Reporting on Kings' third round of hearings, the conservative daily noted that: "There is a looming danger of American Shabaab fighters returning to the US to strike" ("Terror," para. 3), adding that the U.S. had underestimated the Taliban. Providing a measure of reason, Rep. Bennie Thompson from Mississippi contributed the following: "today marks the third time that this committee has taken up alleged links between terrorism and the American Muslim community. Before these hearings began, I requested that their focus be broadened to include a look at the real and present threat of domestic violent extremism. Those requests were rebuffed" (para. 5).

The Dangers of Divisive "Othering"

While devout, practicing American Muslims had not experienced a conflict in living their lives with Sharia law or reporting fears of terrorist activity, the trumped-up accusations in these two case studies demonstrate the barrier that can exist between reality and highly partisan, political goals. Throughout the media findings and rhetoric associated with the two hearings, there is ample support for the deliberate instillment of resentment, that festering anger so skillfully fostered and maintained through the demonization of an unknowing minority. In the aforementioned Washington Post editorial, Robinson referred to "the ugly noise—it doesn't qualify as debate – about the imagined encroachment of Islamic Sharia law on the hallowed U.S constitution" (2011, p. A15).

This study also notes the "foreign law" threat as proposed by Gingrich, one that perpetuates the citizen-as-victim categorization that King monetized through public rhetoric and domination of the media. Here, through what Gramsci might refer to as

ideological hegemony, there is the dominance of a certain perspective, one that is rooted in an institution of power. In his book on television and its depiction of American Blacks, Herman Gray (1995) argued that minorities, as represented in the media, are often assembled for the purposes of the ruling class and subsequently become a part of the storehouse of American racial memory. Gingrich's and King's proclamations were used extensively by the powerful media, in both critical and anti-Sharia articles: Even traditional media was willing to report, if not repeat, the falsities, if only for "balance." Furthermore, oppositional arguments were often ignored. For example, in the Tennessee hearings, representative Barnes asked Kedron's first "expert" (Lt. Colonel Meyers) if there was any purpose for this legislation beyond the murder that Bledsoe committed. Barnes: "so you don't have anything specific, that says, besides one person's personal account, that says these groups are training terrorists or anything like that?" ("Senate Judiciary," 2011). Similar to the data that Rep. Laura Richardson presented, demonstrating the helpfulness of the American Muslim population, this question was also overlooked by the news media in its coverage.

In addition to a lack of oppositional substance, there was a great deal of reiteration in the press as well, such as the CNN piece where correspondent Candiotti repeated King's false depiction virtually verbatim. In fact, because this research reviewed news media *prior* to the testimony, it was shocking to discover actual data presented in the hearing that showed a significant reduction in Muslim terrorist activity after 9-11 (Goldstein, 2011). News reiteration is a tremendous factor in the fostering of *ressentiment*, and much of it derived from the mainstream media in an effort to present a "balanced" story with coverage from both sides. In the next chapter, we will see how

these media participated, so unknowingly, in Trump's perpetuation of a false immigration crisis.

It is also critical to note the sorrowful risks of propagating this false hatred. As Rep. Ellison eloquently testified in King's first Congressional hearing: "at the height of the (Ground Zero Mosque) controversy, a man asked a cabby whether he was a Muslim. When the cab driver said, "As-salamu alaykum, which means peace be unto you, the individual stabbed him" (Compilation of Hearings, 2011).

CHAPTER IV – The Pursuit of Crisis, Nationalism and *Ressentiment*
in the Trump Tradition

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

-Donald Trump announces his presidential bid, June 16, 2015.

(*Washington Post*, 2015).

Trump the Candidate: Offering Nationalism to Democracy

Veering from one opponent to the next, the subjective, pouncing nature of Donald Trump's public discourse was a distinguishing feature even before he announced his intention to run for president in mid-2015. This chapter sees that technique as representative of a larger, more significant political pattern. Its ceaseless third-party animosity demonstrates the now-familiar methodology of triadic populism, as Hodges (2020) described. Not only does this tactic build loyalty among the "us" portion of the audience, it functions, with tool-like precision, as an effective means of nurturing the seething, solution-free perpetuation of *ressentiment*. Often, Trump's tirades only had a hint of truthfulness, yet a glimmer of reality was there. Marilyn Young, professor of history at New York University, noted that propaganda, devised to sway and maintain a loyal audience, is always founded on a slim portion of truth because "that's the way propaganda works, it has to tell some truth to be believed" (2016, p. 19). Yerushalmi, the

Hasidic lawyer who drafted the anti-Sharia legislation addressed in Chapter III, noted that “all good propaganda is based on half-truths” (Elliot, 2011).

In the previous chapter, the triadic form of populism was centered upon an actual event, a tactile threat to the populace, albeit remote and exaggerated. The “homegrown” terrorist shooting that occurred on a small scale in Memphis still had the characteristics of a larger threat, with its link to Al Qaeda and Muslim roots. The focus of this chapter begins in a vacuum, initiated by a crisis statement with little basis in reality other than a political goal. Here, it is helpful to note Vatz’s argument (2016), that in political circumstances a “crisis” is typically contrived. Therefore, this chapter unfolds as a contrivance of Trumpist hate and fear that finally took root in the unfortunate shooting of an American woman on July 3, 2015, and thus gained the legitimacy needed to expand on a platform that allowed for even harsher words, extensive media coverage and “I told you so” vindication.

In her study of Trump’s use of aggressive language, Massimiliano Demata examined speeches, interviews and public statements (including Tweets), noting their intertextual choices, such as fear of invasion, threat of crime, perpetual unemployment – all placing traditional morés and values at risk. This is a prevailing tactic of the populist strategy (2017). This portion of the research delves into an information environment in relation to the media coverage that accompanied it. In looking at that information environment, we seek to understand the national context in which it occurred, taking a deeper look at the candidate himself and other related events, such as a need to dominate press coverage.

Two weeks after Trump announced his run for the presidency, Kathryn Steinle, described in media reports as a pretty, blonde 32-year-old White woman, was strolling with her father and a friend on Pier 14, a popular San Francisco destination. A handgun, recently found by Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez, went off accidentally and immediately killed her. As reported by *The New York Times*, Mr. Lopez-Sanchez said that he had found a gun wrapped in a T-shirt under a bench and when he picked it up, it fired three times. Lopez-Sanchez told the police that he was guilty but remembered very little because he was under the influence of sleeping pills (Preston, 2015). Steinle died quickly in her father's arms, with two final words-- "help me." Sanchez had been deported five times and his criminal history included seven prior felony convictions, four involving narcotics charges (Ernst, 2015). Thus, the information environment, as depicted by Leticia Bode (2020), was highly conducive to the media coverage that Trump relied on to express vindication about his prior warnings, maintain *ressentiment* and place himself at the media forefront.

Donald Trump's singular, early anti-immigration position on Mexicans, combined with the timing of Steinle's death, provided an ideal platform that this particular candidate was unusually equipped to weaponize. Further on in this research we will see how he dominated headlines, lead-ins and cable-news discussions on a wide array of media outlets for weeks. On two separate occasions, when he was not the focus of a major news story or cable segment (7/12 and 9/3) Trump used a particularly provocative Tweet to return to the forefront.

The data in this chapter aligns neatly with the many ways in which *ressentiment* can become the most useful weapon in the demagogue's arsenal. Trump's Tweets were

so uniformly repetitive and accusatory while his poll numbers rose, that it is both astonishing and revealing. In discussing the analysis of a political campaign, Bode underlined that this direction of study is a tri-part examination of “the relationship between the campaign information environment, [and] what people get from it, to these realities” (2020, p. 11).

False Crisis and Real Precarity, Because of *Those People*

In demagoguery, complex issues are typically reduced to a question of group identity. By selecting Mexico/Mexicans to focus his ire, Trump created the perception of a population at risk, demonstrating two principles of White nationalism that were later substantiated by the Steinle shooting. Edgar and Holladay discussed how a “commitment” to country is a political investment in White masculine precarity- always at risk, frequently threatened.

This condition of insecurity is also a core value of capitalism, as Lauren Berlant notes, with precarity occurring as a result of the hierarchical dependence based on oppression and domination (Edgar & Holladay, 2019). Precarity, according to Johnson (2022), denotes the striation and distribution of trepidation in relations of inequality. Rather than simply an unpleasant state of affairs, Johnson’s version of precarity can be seen as a sophisticated schema that works to distinguish suffering from mere uncertainty, to one that is related to actual power hierarchies. Johnson argued that "felt powerlessness" serves as a precursor for "felt precarity" (2022, p. 180) and how a momentary sense of disempowerment evolves into a more permanent condition of imagining oneself a victim; victimized for no good reason.

The "distribution" of precarity functions as a way of understanding suffering within a history of said power hierarchies -- the fundamental basis of capitalism. Therefore, it becomes even more telling that a 2016 Gallup study referenced by Johnson (2022) verified that the typical Trump supporter was not affected, in any significant way, by the threat of foreign trade or immigration, two rhetorical weapons that Trump regularly deployed. Yet by returning repeatedly to the theme of the outcast White "minority," Trump kept his crowd motivated and angry.

This mode of felt powerlessness and uncertainty is also an element in triggering political change. The political writer and analyst Mary Stuckey noted that distrust, anger and an idealized vision of a "former" past all contributed to the change that the United States experienced with the election and leadership style of Donald Trump (2017). Similarly, Paul Taggart argued that populist leaders usually emerge in moments of crisis caused by either real or imaginary threats to the existence of the "heartland" (2000), adding that a key populist strategy is the identification of certain groups as enemies of the nation. Of course, there is the added factor of old-fashioned White "values," a reference to the days when race relations were "just really not so concerning," and possessed a certain same-race nostalgia (Mejia et al., 2017, p. 110). Perhaps that racist look backwards was at the core of Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again." Trumpism, as John Paul Brammer wrote, is a movement built upon the loss of privilege and perceived social status:

Indeed, Trumpism is a movement built on victimhood. It holds that Americans are unemployed because immigrants stole their jobs. It argues that people of color are diluting the culture of America and that LGBT people having rights is an attack

on the traditional family. Its slogan, Make America Great Again, speaks to that victimhood. We were great once. We aren't anymore, because of *those* people (Brammer, 2017, para. 7)

All of these concepts found a foothold, and great sustainability in Trump's portrayal of the Mexican "enemy" as stealing our jobs, raping our women and defiling our country.

Barring the Newfound Enemy With a "Great" Wall

"We are going to build a great border wall to stop illegal immigration, to stop the gangs and the violence and to stop the drugs from pouring into our communities!" -Donald Trump accepts the Republican nomination for president.

(“Donald Trump,” 2016)

Three weeks after announcing his intention to run for president, Trump invited Robert Costa, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, to accompany him aboard the Trump plane headed for a campaign rally. Costa was curious about Trump's focus on immigration, and why he had made that specific issue the thrust of his campaign. Trump responded quickly that the liberals had, in fact, selected it for him. The controversy that erupted from his anti-immigration stance was notably effective for two reasons: The demonization of a prevalent American minority resulted in opposition from the left and support from the right, therefore creating newsworthy controversy. Secondly, the Steinle shooting "appointed" Trump as the knowing leader, situated at the forefront of the "dangerous immigrant" story, with nearly every major outlet, mainstream and conservative, in the United States.

While there was little truthfulness in his initial accusations, they ultimately proved to be a tremendous and timely asset. Writing for *The Business Times* in Singapore, Leon

Hadar (2015) noted in an August 2015 headline that “making attacks on immigration has turned Trump into a frontrunner.” In an editorial, the *Albuquerque Journal* announced that the Steinle killing presented a “dual hit” for Trump, providing important leverage for his stance regarding immigration reform (Trump, Killing, 2015). In reviewing the overall success of Trump’s rhetorical battle against a perceived enemy, there is no question that Steinle’s death became a form of political currency that moved mainstream Republican sentiment far right, into an area of ideological tenets once espoused only by the deeply conservative Tea Party (Demata, 2017).

The barrier of a wall was also prescient. Here, in one word, Trump delivered the promise of safety and protection through exclusion. This justified the demonization of a minority population by offering a newfound security that supposedly did not exist before. The depiction of a porous border, equated with crime and loss of jobs, provided a causal scheme that served Trump at rallies, in the media and through Twitter. The continual use of this demonization device was multi-faceted and flexible, but once Trump selected a theme, such as the wall, it became an iconic link to his brand. Adam Hodges argued that chief among Trumps go-to rhetorical devices were immigration metaphors that worked to dehumanize immigrants -- likening them to animals that were infesting the country (2022). To defend against possible invasions, he also typically relied on militarized policy responses, such as “FIGHT!” in an early Tweet that demonized Mexicans on June 30, 2015 (“Donald Trump,” 2015). Hodges also argued that Trump equated the enemy with dangerous metaphors, such as the “dangerous waters” theme, with immigrants “pouring” in and a sacrosanct nation that needs to be protected or “sealed” against this flood-like invasion. As he looked down on the Mexico/United States boundary from

30,000 feet above, Costa noted that this was indeed the border that Trump had called so porous, illegal immigrants were able to “flow in like water” (2015, para. 3).

Ushering in The Post-Truth Presidency

The lack of truthfulness in many of Trump’s statements, both as candidate and president, caused much consternation among the public but also media professionals who were initially hesitant to label his falsities as “lies.” It appears as if there was a decided effort to find other terms such as “baseless,” as in “baseless claims.” Nevertheless, the departure from typical presidential norms caught the media off guard, as the rules seemed to change so frequently. This was not a trivial concern: at the end of Trump’s third year as president, Kessler et al. reported (for *The Washington Post*) that Trump’s false or misleading claims numbered 18,000, only to follow-up on January 21, 2021 with a final count of 30,573 lies or misleading claims in his four years in office. This amounted to about 21 erroneous statements a day. What is especially striking, the writers concluded, was how the “tsunami of untruths kept rising the longer he served as president and became increasingly unmoored from the truth” (2021, para. 3). Unfortunately, as this research will demonstrate, many of Trump’s falsehoods were picked up by the media and reiterated endlessly, in print, digital and broadcast coverage.

After the Trump presidency, Margaret Sullivan argued in *The Washington Post* that the media needed to handle such untruths in a better, more direct manner (2022), noting that the press owes its readers a far more thoughtful framing and context, a counterweight of truthfulness to the falsity. Hodges discussed the horrors of reiteration, noting that the more frequently something, anything -- even falsities -- are reported in the media, they grow in strength (2022). *The Economist* put it bluntly in August of 2015,

writing that “Mr. Trump remains in the bad habit of telling lurid stories about immigrant crime, as though they are illustrative of an alarming trend; over the last thirty years America has experienced a boom in Mexican immigration together with a precipitous drop in violent crime” (Ottaviano et al., 2015). Julie Davis, writing for *The New York Times*, noted that “Republicans said the [President] Obama administration should be focused on tackling what they called a border crisis. In this case, the data supports the Democrat position, which happens to be much more realistic” (2015, p. A19). Here the term “much more realistic” is again an example of the soft-pedaling of the media, seeking to avoid describing a statement as simply untrue.

Hodges, in his depiction of the “post-truth” presidency, noted that Trump’s “flagrant disregard for truth” is unprecedented among U.S. presidents (2022). Several media outlets stepped up to correct Trump’s wild and unfounded claims but the affects were not considerable. After Steinle’s death, Trump noted that killings like this happened “thousands and thousands of times” (Gomez, 2015). In discussing this “lapse” of honesty on CNN (2015), Ana Navarro noted that Trump’s comment was “almost certainly “an exaggeration and an overstatement,” yet never fully came out and described the statement as a lie. The mainstream publication *USA Today* reported that the Steinle killing was an isolated incident, and rather than “thousands and thousands” of murders due to undocumented immigrants, the federal murder convictions related to undocumented immigrants amounted to only eight cases in 2013 (Gomez, 2015). Furthermore, while the number of undocumented immigrants in the country tripled from 1990 to 2013, violent crime rates dropped 48%. Gomez concluded in her article that the undocumented crime issue was not just weak, it was unrealistic.

Immigration numbers, as reported by Trump, were also misleading. In reviewing 2016 government data, the venerable Pew Research Center looked specifically at Mexico and reported that the numbers from Mexico continued to decline, almost entirely because of a sharp decrease in the number of Mexicans entering the country without authorization (Passel & Cohn, 2016). Similarly, *The Los Angeles Times*, three weeks before Trump's presidential victory, reported that "net migration from Mexico has remained below zero for several years, according to U.S. and Mexico census data, with more people returning home to Mexico than entering the U.S. illegally each year" (Bennett, 2016, p. A4).

Robert Wright lamented that in the aftermath of Trump's election "we have been frequently told that we're living in a post-truth world; the term even became word of the year in the *Oxford English Dictionary*" (Mejia et al., 2017, p. 109). False news is desirable and spreads fast, according to *The New York Times*. Especially on Twitter, where untruthful claims, wrote Steve Lohr, were 70 percent more likely than truthful claims to be shared. The mere exposure to fake news, according to Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), is not without effect, as about half of the people who are exposed believe fake news to be true.

Trump alluded numerous times to the loss of American factory jobs, due to the trade agreements with Mexico. The typically conservative *Wall Street Journal* chose to differ. In "Donald Trump says the 'outflow of jobs' to Mexico is 'tremendous.' How big is it?" William Mauldin reported that a 2014 study published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics estimated that while imports from Mexico had displaced 203,000 jobs a year, the two-way trade also supported 188,000 jobs due to U.S. exports

headed south. So that's a net loss of 15,000 jobs annually, a tiny fraction of U.S. employment (Mauldin, 2016).

Despite his relentless lying, an unusual 2016 Gallup study demonstrated that Trump was successful in his relentless efforts to gain attention. The study, which sought to discover what was foremost on Americans' minds, indicated that during the three weeks between August 21 and September 10, 2016, the terms "immigration" and "Mexico" as linked to candidate Donald Trump, came up first in nationwide polls (Newport et al., 2016).

Shortly after the shooting, San Francisco authorities released Lopez-Sanchez, rejecting a request to hold him until federal immigration authorities could take him into custody. San Francisco was among hundreds of jurisdictions nationally that can decline to honor federal immigration requests, prompting the term "sanctuary city." Under the leadership of Republican Rep. Duncan Hunter, legislation was developed to cut off reimbursements to sanctuary cities that didn't cooperate, and also shut down two different types of local law enforcement, moving it into federally controlled jurisdiction ("Congress," 2015). The legislation passed in the House but ultimately failed in the Senate. This creation of legislation was also quite beneficial to Trump, especially as the bill was initially coined "The Trump Act."

Steinle's death occurred during a busy Tweet-week for Trump and became a fortunate occurrence for the candidate, who never met the Steinle family but became a national spokesperson for the need to legislate and the threat of foreigners murdering innocent Americans. Because of the lack of substance to Trump's initial claims, the Steinle shooting was referred to as "fodder" for his campaign in *The New York Times*,

due to the polarized debate over immigration (Preston, 2015), with Trump pointing to the killing as “yet another example of why we must secure our border immediately” (Preston, 2015, p. 10).

While Trump made numerous public statements regarding Steinle and Mexico, the following series of Tweets offers a roadmap that illustrates how fortuitous her death was, and why Trump was considered an ideal spokesperson for the media covering the issue.

The Wall Series of Tweets

June 30, 2015 12:57	I love the Mexican people but Mexico is not our friend. They’re killing us at the border and they’re killing us on jobs and trade. FIGHT!	Retweets: 3076 Favorites: 2997
July 3, 2015 22.12	Our Southern border is totally out of control. This is an absolutely disgraceful situation We need border security!	Retweets: 1457 Favorites: 2225
July 3, 2015- 22:39	My heartfelt condolences to the family of Kathryn Steinle. Very, very sad!	Retweets: 568 Favorites: 1140
July 3, 2015 22:44	Where are the other candidates now that this tragic murder has taken place b/c of our unsafe border	Retweets: 1448 Favorites: 1801
July 3, 2015 23:26	@marcorubio what do you say to the family of Kathryn Steinle in CA who was viciously killed b/c we can't secure our border? Stand up for US	Retweets: 1425 Favorites: 1977
July 13, 2015 10:53	...likewise, billions of dollars gets brought into Mexico through the border. We get the killers, drugs & crime, they get the money!	Retweets: 1527 Favorites: 2164

(“Tweets,” 2023)

The Truth About Trump’s Twitter

This research seeks to explore the ways in which the media responded to Trump’s misleading claims regarding Mexico, Mexicans and of course the so-called criminal

“dangers” that led to Steinle’s death. However, it would be remiss to not explore the new protocol and dimensions inherent in social media, which created an altogether different environment. In their 2014 book *“Tweeting to Power,”* Gainous and Wagner took a strategic look at how Twitter functions within the larger social media contingent. While traditional forms of mass communication move outwardly and could be described as one-way, Twitter, with its numerous means of extending and commenting to a potentially enormous audience of unknowns, is notably two-way. Hence, a declaration of crisis can be reiterated, renewed and amplified in previously unimaginable ways. This “different news paradigm,” as the authors described it, sounds like an understatement. There is also a surprising shift of power, as Gainous & Wagner argued. This shift, rather than moving from the media to the individual, as often assumed, works predominantly to power politicians and political interests. Furthermore, this specific chapter demonstrates that this proliferation of power is particularly useful to those who are elevating fear, precarity and demonization of a third party -- all illustrative of triadic populism.

The formerly firm borders between the media and the public are dissolving, according to Barber, who developed the Equalization Theory to illustrate how the internet helps to diminish the borders between the public and politicians, creating vastly more ideas and candidates. This has shown to be a positive democratizing entity, particularly in the Middle East. However, it also opens a pathway to granting opportunities for nefarious reasons as well. The same year as Barber’s thoughts were published, (2001) Antonio Giustozzi argued that this perceived equality through use of the web makes it difficult to control damaging and undesirable stories using the more traditional heavy-handed approaches to opposition media (Gainous & Wagner, 2014).

In an effort to understand how Trump's use of Twitter functioned on a mechanical basis, Edbauer's position on the ecological or affective model is useful. She looked at a single Tweet in two lights: A process of distributed emergence, which is evident from the individual wall Tweets listed above, and the ongoing circulation process that is inherent, especially with the relentless drumbeat of Trump's various grievances. How that process occurs outside of the exigence, the rhetor, the audience and even the constraints of the initial medium are all of interest in this inquiry. We noted how Trump's earliest Tweet on Mexico, initially created in a vacuum, (June 30, 2015) grew in strength as his depiction of the threat was realized. The candidate clearly initiated interest in the false "enemy," which proved successful and was repeated throughout his campaign and presidency. When media interest began to wane during the campaign, Trump returned to his provocative formula. This was evident after a substantial story in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (Spagat & Har, 2015) and also a September FOX-TV interview. In both instances, when Trump was not mentioned, the candidate struck back in his inimitable way, creating toxic Tweets that would quickly return him to the public eye. Four unique Tweets addressed Trump's rage at the negligence of Bill O'Reilly to mention him on the September 2, 2015 episode of the O'Reilly Factor (2015), including the following: "Every Poll has me winning BIG. If you listen to dopey Karl Rove, a Trump hater, on @oreilly factor, you would think I'm doing poorly. @ Fox News." (Tweets, 2023).

Scholars have expressed interest in the formulaic consistency and success of Trump's Tweets. Michael Humphrey, a journalism professor at Colorado State University, studied Trump's Tweets from June 16, 2015, the day he announced his candidacy, through 2021, when Twitter permanently suspended the former president's

account. Reviewing over 20,000 Tweets, Murphy noted that the main distinction was the storytelling methods utilized by the candidate and president, one that depicts the threat of fear and invasion. Murphy argued that there were five main themes that appeared regularly in Trump's Tweets, some which would occur all in one day:

- 1). The true version of the United States is beset with invaders.
- 2). Real Americans can see this.
- 3). I (Trump) am uniquely qualified to stop this invasion.
- 4). The establishment and its agents are hindering me.
- 5). The U.S. is in mortal danger because of this.

Murphy believed that an overall story structure to Trump's Tweets might be summarized this way: "The establishment is stopping me from protecting you against invaders." In Trump's world, the establishment could be "anyone—Democrats, other Republican presidential candidates, and notably the media. His characterization of "invaders" veered from China to the Coronavirus, to Mexicans, to Black Lives Matter (2021, paras. 12–14).

In "How to Tweet like Donald Trump," Hodges offered a quick tutorial on the structural elements that Trump used so effectively. He described the following four steps (2022, p.7):

- 1). Take a derogatory noun
- 2). Add a gratuitous modifier
- 3). Sprinkle with vacuous intensifiers
- 4). Repeat.

The following Tweet, from July 4, 2015, underlines the reality of Hodges' formula:

“What about the undocumented immigrant with a record who killed the beautiful young women (in front of her father) in San Fran. Get smart!” (“Tweets,” 2023)

Relentless Reiteration, From Mainstream to Conservative Media

While his official prepared remarks did not include the infamous line about Mexican rapists and criminals, the impromptu addition to Trump’s candidacy announcement lived on so strongly that Trump rarely had to repeat it. The media handled that for him, competently and repeatedly. Indeed, in his *Washington Post* interview with Costa noted earlier, the candidate was able to downplay his remarks, claiming that he never said the Mexicans were bad people (2015).

Trump’s criminal/rapist line became a short, convenient go-to quote in mainstream and conservative outlets. Whether it was a salacious interest to go for the most provocative verbiage possible, or simply a desire to report on his overt racism, nearly every major news outlet, from NPR to Fox to *The New York Times* reiterated that exact line in the many stories that resulted from the sanctuary city legislation and other related events. Interestingly, there is an aspect of mythology to the entire venture here; Trump’s ugly statement, linked to the consequent and urgent need for a “wall,” evolved into a divisive symbol of good versus evil, akin to Roland Barthes (1972). As such, a single word conveyed meaning quite effectively, summoning a connection to that perpetual fight between the pure and the foul as in the great legendary themes of mythology. This signification worked so effectively that the word “wall” came to represent criminality, infestation, illegals – even the false claims of job loss.

Capturing the Media: A Fortuitous Event, Much Vindication

Controversy, teamed with repetition about the “criminal/rapist” remarks proved helpful to candidate Trump, who relished an appearance in front of the camera and was gifted with a golf course interview after ESPN, protesting the Mexican slander, moved its celebrity benefit to a property not owned by Trump (Cooper, 2015). This offered another opportunity to express his defiance and fury, gaining the lead on NBC’s *Today Show*: “Not a big deal, that’s what Trump said, as he spoke out again” (Lauer & Alexander, 2015). The venerable *Palm Beach Post* reported that Telemetro would not be broadcasting the Miss Universe contest, because they were offended by Trump’s description of “Mexican migrants as rapists and as people who bring drugs and crime to the United States” (“Victim’s parents,” 2015, p. A002). On NBC *Nightly News* (Hill & Fryer, 2015), Trump was mentioned in the first lead sentence, attached to the term “blistering backlash,” about his recent comments, which actually occurred three weeks prior. Numerous print outlets, such as the *Associated Press* (Werner, 2015); *Chicago Tribune* (Werner & Caldwell (2015); *San Francisco Examiner* (“Congress debates, 2015); *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Kelly, J., 2015); and the Hamilton, Ohio *Journal News* (Sanctuary, 2015) all reiterated the entire “criminals and rapists” line, which obviously kept the presidential candidate in the public eye and helped to prolong *ressentiment*.

In terms of media domination, there is no question that Trump succeeded mightily, able to establish his position on a “looming” crisis that was miraculously confirmed by the Steinle death, allowing for vengeance and victory in every possible medium. The three major networks, ABC, NBC and CBS (2015) all acknowledged Trump’s opinion on the “porous” Mexico border, now falsely confirmed by the shooting.

On numerous cable news shows, (NPR, CNN and FOX News) Trump's name and aspirations were trumpeted repeatedly, as a lead-in and again further into the shows. In a July 2015 NPR episode of "*All Things Considered*," focusing on the immigrant controversy and proposed legislation, Trump was never interviewed but his name was featured in the lead (Chang, 2015). Most fortuitous was the title initially attached to the GOP sanctuary city legislation-- both NPR (Chang) and *The Hill* referred to it as the "Donald Trump Act" (Lillis, 2015). All told, Trump received almost \$2 billion in free media attention from the beginning of his campaign in June, 2015 through February, 2016. This accounted for 25 percent of all election coverage on the evening newscast—more than all the Democratic campaigns combined (Confessore & Yourish, 2016). Additionally, Trump spent less on television advertising than any other major candidate.

A mild thread of near-harmless negativity arose, perhaps contributing to the controversy. The candidate was depicted, numerous times, of being *opportunistic*, of capitalizing on the situation. Writing for the (Passaic, N.J.) *Herald News*, Chris Stile noted that Steinle's brother accused Trump of "seizing" an opportunity for political gain by using her death as a platform, while never reaching out to anyone in the family (2015, p A8). On CBS *This Morning*, (2015) San Francisco Sheriff, Ross Mirkarimi, bluntly said: "Donald Trump is an opportunist and I think he's trying to capitalize on the misfortune of others." An interview with Brad Steinle, who accused Trump of "sensationalizing" his sister's death, was featured on *CNN Wire* (Schleifer, 2015). For her FOX-TV show *On the Record* (2015), Greta Van Susteren noted Trump's penchant for controversy in an interview with Kevin Cirilli, reporter for *The Hill*. Trump had provided

Lindsey Graham's cell phone number on the air, sparking a new wave of talk show controversy. The discussion went like this:

CIRILLI: But there is no question that Donald Trump is leading in the polls. And there is really no question that he feeds off of these types of political feuds.

VAN SUSTEREN: OK. But *The Des Moines Register* editorial today in Iowa says, it was headlined, [that] Trump should pull the plug on his bloviating side show. So now you've got the lead newspaper there coming at him.

CIRILLI: You know, but he feeds off of that. When is Donald Trump not in a feud with the political media? And I think that you hit the nail right on the head. I think that this, he speaks to a frustration with Washington. He speaks to a frustration with people who just feel that everything is too scripted. And I think that he is very much on par to be on stage at the August 6th debate.

Another Plus: the “Angry Billionaire” Descriptive

The media was not accustomed to working with a presidential candidate who had no political background. Therefore, the word “billionaire” became attached to the Trump name. This term may have helped define him as successful, savvy and bright. On the CBS Pittsburgh affiliate, KDKA, Donald Trump Junior defined his father as a “blue collar billionaire,” an effective way to connect with the angry White conservatives who attended his rallies and applauded his populist agenda (“Donald Trump Junior,” 2015). *Breitbart News* quoted “the billionaire Presidential aspirant” as saying “this senseless and totally preventable act of violence committed by an illegal immigrant is yet another example of why we must secure our border immediately” (Wilde, 2015, para 2). *The Daily News* noted that the “billionaire” candidate cost himself business deals through his

demonization of Latinos, before reiterating the rapist/drug dealer line (Katz, 2015, p. 3). A July 6, 2015 segment on *Good Morning America* was entitled “Rivals blast Trump on immigration billionaire stands by his comments” (Stephanopoulos & Robach, 2015).

Trump was fiercely adept at shutting down any opposition to his false claims. This penchant for mindless aggression was perhaps seen as an asset because it demonstrated the militarist strength Trump punched into his populist Tweets. The following conversation was actually aired twice in a single segment on the “O’Reilly Factor” (O’Reilly, 2015):

TRUMP: Well, immigration is a very big topic. Take a look at all the crime that's being committed. Go take a look --

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Research says crime does not match what you are saying. The Pew Research, which is independent --

TRUMP: Don't be naive. You are a very naive person.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Pew research says that there are for -- immigrants on the whole create --

TRUMP: Come on, try getting it out. Try getting it out.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I will get it out.

Similarly, the ejection from a Trump press conference of Louis Ramos, who covered the Trump campaign for the Latino station Univision, demonstrated Trump’s aggressive instincts. In addition to including a video clip of the expulsion, Megyn Kelly opened her show, *The Kelly File*, with the following: “breaking tonight, a remarkable moment on the campaign trail with Republican frontrunner Donald Trump setting off new controversy as the chief news anchor of the nation's largest Spanish language TV

network is thrown out of Trump's news conference” (Kelly, M., 2015). After Ramos was tossed out, Trump realized that the visuals were not working in his favor. Ramos was invited back in.

Trump’s fondness of controversy and aggressive treatment of the press may have worked to silence any rebuttals or claims of misleading information in public. This “fighter” instinct was described in the same Megyn Kelly show, when she interviewed Howie Kurtz, Host of FOX’s “*Media Buzz*”:

Well, Donald Trump loves to pick fights with prominent journalists and keep those fights going especially if they are back from vacation. And for him, Jorge Ramos is the perfect foil. A guy who has called Trump the loudest voice of intolerance and hatred in the country who wasn't called on, who wasn't so much asking a question as lecturing Trump. You cannot deport 11 million illegal immigrants. And when Trump had him escorted out, it's like reality television. It was almost like he was having him deported. (Kelly, M., 2015)

Early Conservative Media: Trump a “Menace”

Interestingly, this study found that the conservative print media was initially opposed to candidate Trump and worked hard to communicate that to their readers. Two pieces in the esteemed *Wall Street Journal* urged pragmatism and restraint in dealing with the candidate (Reinhard, 2016 & Ip, 2015). In his piece, Greg Ip argued that Trump’s position on immigration was surprisingly weak, exhibiting the characteristics of nationalism:

The current backlash against immigration has less to do with jobs and wages and more to do with concerns about national identity and control of borders. This is an

important distinction. Immigration is different from other facets of globalization.

Foreign-born people affect the makeup of society in a way that a foreign-made car or a foreign-owned factory doesn't. (Ip, 2016, para 1)

The far-right *National Review* was scathing in its criticism of candidate Trump, while *The Epoch Times*, also deeply conservative, reported on this noteworthy stance, saying that “even on immigration, Trump often makes no sense and can’t be relied upon,” (Stieber, 2015, para. 3) and that candidate Trump is a “menace to conservatism” (para. 5). *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, chose to woefully acknowledge his lack of social or political diplomacy:

I don't like Donald Trump. I wish he'd said what he said in a more accurate, less provocative way. But it isn't he who deserves condemnation. It's the politicians whose policies have made them accessories before the fact in the murder of Kate Steinle, and so many others. (Kelly, J., 2015, p. D3)

At times the conservative backlash was considerable, if not historic. In a veritable “who’s who” of conservative media personalities, the *National Review* published, in one issue, 23 essays written by prominent media and governmental conservatives. From the nationally syndicated radio host Glenn Beck to William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*, the single issue provided an enormous, multi-faceted warning about the “greatest charlatan of them all” (NR Symposium, 2016, para 19). In the same issue, Ben Domenech, publisher of *The Federalist*, stated that “conservatives should reject Trump’s hollow, Euro-style identity politics” (2016, para. 28). The novelist Mark Helprin also wrote: “He doesn’t know the Constitution, history, law, political philosophy, nuclear strategy, diplomacy, defense, economics beyond real estate, or even, despite his low-

level-mafioso comportment, how ordinary people live” (para. 43). Two writers began with the same statement: “Donald Trump is no conservative” (Levin, para. 48), with David McIntosh adding, “He’s a populist whose theme is: Our government is broken, and I’ll fix it,” (para. 65). Referring to the “wall” crisis, the conservative talk radio host Michael Medved wrote:

Building a *yuuuuuge* wall along the southern border hardly qualifies as a “cautiously moderate” approach, nor would uprooting 11 million current residents (and, presumably, millions more of their American-citizen children and spouses) in the greatest forced migration in human history. (2016, para. 77)

In the same *National Review* article, Fox News contributor and *USA Today* columnist Cal Thomas wrote that “anger is not policy” and “The wall keeps getting higher as the story gets older. He never says how he will force Mexico to pay” (2015, para 125).

Shortly before Trump accepted the Republican nomination for U.S. president in June, 2016, Reinhard interviewed the candidate for *The Wall Street Journal*. While she duly reported Trump’s claims of staggering amounts of crime to illegal immigration, she ultimately concluded that the data was absent, or “scarce” (2016, para. 26). This type of characterization, one that leaves a blatant falsehood up to interpretation, is an unfortunate trait of much of the mainstream coverage at the time. Furthermore, while many Trump opponents hoped that the outrageous frequency of his misstatements or lies would eventually, hopefully, become his downfall, it appeared to have had little impact on his popularity. As mentioned previously, Hahl et al. demonstrated that a politician’s willingness to be regarded as a pariah by the establishment and flout the norms of

honesty only increases perceived authenticity among their supporters (2018). Trump was widely regarded as authentic, despite this tendency to repeatedly lie or mislead.

While it might even be seen as ludicrous, due to the vile repetition of Trump's statements, Katie Reilly's article for *Time* magazine entitled "here are all the times Donald Trump insulted Mexico" revealed the profound intention within the Trump campaign to create significant division between the pro-and anti-immigration camps. Beginning with a Tweet from June 5, 2013, and continuing to May 5, 2016, Reilly listed over 23 uniquely hateful statements and Tweets attributing violence and loss of jobs and life to the "open" Mexican border and the people that poured across (Reilly, 2016).

Occasionally, the mainstream press would voice opposition, but in 2015 it was rarely on the front page. In a potentially prominent news piece featuring Trump in the headline ("Obama rejects Trump's depiction of U.S. in crisis") the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Obama told reporters "this idea that America is somehow on the verge of collapse, this vision of violence and chaos everywhere, doesn't really jibe with the experience of most people" (Superville & Klapper, 2015, p. 24). Unfortunately, Obama's words may have lacked much impact because the article was published deep into the paper on page 24.

The "Balanced" News Syndrome

At times it is difficult to understand why the mainstream media chose to reiterate so much of Trump's harmful, hateful rhetoric. Mary Stuckey attributed that to an honest effort by the traditional media to display objectivity. She referenced the norm of presenting "both sides" of any controversy (White, 2021, p. 126), providing readers with a "fair" or "balanced" story. In Stuckey's argument, this had a binary effect that proved,

in the early days of Trump’s brand of political rhetoric, to be misleading. Stuckey argued that “this tendency means that the reporting on every issue is reduced to a binary with two equally reasonable opposing sides, a tendency that legitimated even the more outlandish of Trump’s claims” (2021, p. 126).

Hodges argued strongly that warnings of falsity should come prior to the actual untruthful report or quote, because the end result can far outweigh the initial barb: “False claims are repeated and strengthened both through direct reported speech—actual quotes that simply reanimate the false claims—and also indirect reported speech as the reporters paraphrase the speakers’ original claim” (2022, p. 82).

Throughout the summer of 2015, Trump managed to fuel the fires of controversy, vengeance and vindication resulting from Steinle’s death. News coverage swung from one controversy to the next: The golf course relocation on ESPN; the Telemundo decision to not broadcast Miss Universe; the expulsion of the Latino Univision reporter, and of course the Republican development of sanctuary city legislation.

The Creation and Maintenance of *Ressentiment*

The potential consequences of Trump’s false accusations are abysmal. An entire subset of Americans faced newfound, unwarranted anger and prejudice. We cannot know how many children were bullied at school or how many adults lost their jobs because of their Mexican heritage. In March 2023, *The Washington Post* reported that hate crimes in the U.S. had risen to the highest level ever, with targeted attacks against all major categories, including racial minorities. “What this establishes, along with our research, is that we have hit an inflection point now, in this decade, in regard to hate crimes that we haven’t seen since modern collection began” said Brian Levin, the director of the Center

for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University at San Bernardino (Nakamura, 2023).

The impact of this disruption of traditional presidential values, such as honesty and compassion, cannot be overstated. Shortly after Trump lost the 2020 Presidential election, the long-term effects began to appear in journals and scholarly publications. In writing about Trump's often debilitating accusations of fake news, Cynthia Baum-Baicker used a variety of sources, such as the American Psychological Association, Gallup and *Pew Research Journals* to develop a better understanding of the toxic stress reactions that resulted. She documented the physical, behavioral, emotional and interpersonal effects of the unrelenting stress that manifested through his communications leadership (2020). Her data strongly supports the validity of a "Trump stress effect" as viewed through the lens of terror management theory.

With a willing audience ready to absorb and reiterate fake news, the damage becomes even greater. Hodges noted that "in many ways, a narrative based on misleading claims and fabricated evidence provides a more poignant and convincing depiction of reality than one based on banal facts—at least for those who share that worldview" (2022, p. 28). By lifting the communications "decency" barriers that had existed for decades, Trump provided a newly permissible environment for those with an alternative, perhaps dangerous worldview. The Center for Countering Digital Hate noted that racists, misogynists, and homophobes found a tremendous outlet on Twitter (Frenkel & Conger, 2022), with the Anti-Defamation League also reporting an alarming surge in problematic content (Goldberg, 2022). Public demonstrations verify this unfortunate trend, such as

the January 2021 attack on the nation's capital and the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA. Both were shockingly replete with Confederate and Nazi flags.

French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen also succeeded with her far-right demonization tactics. In an opinion piece published by *The New York Times*, the nationalist politician began with the Camus statement that to "misname things is to add to the world's unhappiness" launching into her defense of strongly worded, deprecating remarks aimed directly at France's surging Muslim population. In her essay, entitled "to call this threat by its name" she stressed that:

Let us call things by their rightful names, since the French government seems reluctant to do so. France, land of human rights and freedoms, was attacked on its own soil by a totalitarian ideology: Islamic fundamentalism. It is only by refusing to be in denial, by looking the enemy in the eye, that one can avoid conflating issues. Muslims themselves need to hear this message. They need the distinction between Islamist terrorism and their faith to be made clearly. (2015, para. 3)

Le Pen's pronounced nationalist position proved effective. She motivated her French audience to get to the polls, obtaining a record-breaking vote, one that came historically and dangerously close to erasing the incumbent's (Macron's) victory (Cohen, 2022).

Beyond the historic dimensions of nationalist discourse as espoused by Anderson (2016), what fueled the strong re-emergence of White nationalism under Trump? Some attribute a change in the appearance of leadership under Barack Obama, America's first Black president, as linked to the strong, unspoken presence of American White supremacy. Pham argued that "perhaps it was because he (Trump) was following the first

Black President that his racist views and misogynistic words were deemed laudable” (Pham, 2018, p. 94).

The nature of the presidential position is one that inspires loyalty and belief. Yet it is also one of power, where an opinion (or falsehood) may be believed. According to Arendt, “opinion, and not truth, belongs among the indispensable prerequisites of all power” (1961, p. 233). The result, she argued, is that a whole group of people, and even whole nations, may take their bearings from a web of deceptions to which their leaders wished to subject their opponents. Clearly Donald Trump cultivated a like-minded population to broadcast his lies, live in the wallows of his manufactured *ressentiment*, and put him into the oval office in January 2017.

CHAPTER V – Borrowing From Bannon: The Wily Tactics of
Nationalism and *Ressentiment*

And we're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict, of which if the people in this room, the people in the church, do not bind together and really form what I feel is an aspect of the church militant, to really be able to not just stand with our beliefs, but to fight for our beliefs against this new barbarity that's starting, that will completely eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years. -Steve Bannon, Vatican

Keynote Address, June 26, 2014. (Appendix A, para. 6)

Two Speeches Illustrate the Tenets of Crisis and Demonization

In June of 2014, the far-right media executive Stephen K. Bannon delivered a short keynote address at the annual meeting of the Signitatus Humanae Institute or Human Dignity Institute (HDI). The 12-minute speech, delivered via the Skype platform from Bannon's office in Los Angeles to a marble-clad, 15th century palace on Vatican grounds, would have remained nondescript except that its White nationalist themes and pronounced use of *ressentiment* were repurposed and presented in vastly different circumstances by former President Donald Trump three years later, on July 6, 2017. Delivered in Poland and known as the Warsaw Address, it became Trump's sole, formal European address as a United States president. Bannon's remarks are available in Appendix A and an excerpt of Trump's Warsaw Address appears in Appendix B. The full Trump speech can be accessed through a link listed in the references ("Here's the full," 2017). While Trump's speech initially appears to have very little in common with Bannon's, in terms of the audience, setting and rhetor, this chapter will demonstrate that

this certain mode of discourse, one that demonstrates “this thing that we understand,” can float between culture, nation, leadership level and even socio-economic circumstances.

While Bannon’s and Trump’s audiences were quite different, there was one common element. Similar to the Vatican officials listening to Bannon, the primary population in Warsaw, having lost its sizeable Jewish population in World War II, was primarily Roman Catholic. Yet, the officials, media and governmental officials present at the Warsaw Address shared little in common with the Bishops and Cardinals who constituted Bannon’s audience. As the journalist and anti-Nazi activist Dorothy Thompson said during World War II, “Nazism has nothing to do with race or nationality. It appeals to a certain type of mind” (Cohen, D., 2022, p. 9). Edbauer, in her 2016 depiction of unframing the models of public distribution, noted that when it comes to texts through time, and these two texts were situated three years apart, an audience is not fixed or static-- it remains fluid.

The Bannon Vatican Keynote and Trump’s Warsaw Address mutually demonstrated the use of precarity, *ressentiment* and hegemonic exclusion. All three elements were distinct in their applicability and stood the test of time. Each speaker achieved their goal of convincing an audience that an undeserved, imminent clash of civilizations and threat to their White privilege and national identity required immediate attention. Even though it didn’t.

Unpacking the Bannon Vatican Keynote Address

A deeply conservative viewpoint was at the heart of Bannon’s address and undoubtedly his relationship with the HDI. Born in 1953, Bannon attended an exclusive Catholic high school in Virginia and described himself as a traditionalist Catholic even

though he had been divorced three times (Jenkins, 2017). This religious foundation, as demonstrated in the text of his speech, lies at the heart of his relationship with the HDI. He served as a patron and board member and, as of May 2023 his photo remained prominently displayed on the home page of their website.

The HDI was founded in 2008 by conservative philanthropists Nira Devi and Benjamin Harnwell, in response to a decision by the Italian government to sever ties with a commissioner, Rocco Buttiglione, who believed that homosexuality is a sin and the principal role of women was to have children. The stated mission of the HDI is to “protect and promote human dignity based on the anthropological truth that man is born in the image and likeness of God.” Ten Roman Catholic Cardinals served as exclusive members of its Board of Advisors.

This chapter suggests that there were three prominent thematic elements in Bannon’s Vatican Keynote and that all can be seen in Trump’s Warsaw Address. They might even be described as signal phrases, to reference Burke (1984). The themes include: An imminent “clash” of civilizations; a resounding justification for divine-granted prosperity; and, finally, the victimage ritual, which in this instance identified White Christians as threatened by numerous non-Christian opposing forces. The victimization ritual functioned as the critical platform for instilling precarity and *ressentiment*. I will argue that it also represented a silent nod to White supremacy, as all the opposing forces depicted by Bannon and Trump were people of color.

One can sense a strong purpose in the opening words of Bannon’s speech with terms that signal intention and direction. After briefly referring to wealth and wealth creation, he immediately referenced the significance of the speech date: The assassination

in Sarajevo of Archduke Fran Ferdinand exactly 100 years prior, giving rise to “the bloodiest century” in history. Next, he outlined the dire societal dangers that followed the two World Wars, placing the capitalism that generated “tremendous wealth” for his audience at great risk (Appendix A, para. 5). These threats, in Bannon’s remarks, ran the gamut from forms of “unenlightened” capitalism currently working to undermine their righteous efforts, to perceived foes such as ISIS, Boko Haram and other groups metastasizing in sub-Saharan Africa. Bannon referred to the divine providence that served as a creator of jobs, wealth and the God-given obligation that he and his fellow Catholics have in protecting it. In increasingly provocative terms, he returned to the opposition threatening the underpinnings of capitalism, which had thrust his audience, and indeed all who support their tenets, into the “beginning stages of a global war” (Appendix A, para. 19).

While the theme of the HDI conference was “Poverty and the Common Good,” Bannon did not even briefly allude to the issue of poverty or anything related to the “common” good, as in good for the “masses.” He did suggest that as Roman Catholics of privilege and wealth, the members of HDI hold a responsibility to protecting that wealth for future generations and higher purposes, such as guarding the sanctity of their religion from dark forces. This is noteworthy, in that it created an umbrella of elitism at risk. Raymie McKerrow argued that the use of rhetoric is to maintain the privilege of the elite and the actual critique of rhetoric is a critique of domination (2016). This research supports both of these arguments. As witnessed here, elitism is a treasured possession about to be lost and any critique of *that* belief is questioning its sanctity.

A Society, a Culture in Peril: The Clash of Civilizations

To examine Bannon's speech is to see the development and description of a definite problem, a dangerous situation that required immediate attention: An imminent clash of civilizations. In discussing ISIS, Banon maintains that they are determined to:

turn the United States into a "river of blood" if it comes in and tries to defend the city of Baghdad. And trust me, that is going to come to Europe. That is going to come to Central Europe, it's going to come to Western Europe, it's going to come to the United Kingdom. And so I think we are in a crisis of the underpinnings of capitalism, and on top of that we're now, I believe, at the beginning stages of a global war against Islamic fascism. (Appendix A, para. 18)

Beyond the threat of ISIS, Bannon offered up a mind-boggling list of other possible opponents, from Boko Haram to American libertarians, followers of Karl Marx, and followers of Ayn Rand. This supports Entman's theory on framing (2004) providing a conceptual basis into how frames define problems and assist in making moral judgements as they "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem, moral evaluation or definition" (p. 52). Bannon remained very firmly within his crisis/clash of civilizations frame, characterizing a deviant uprising of moral laxity that threatened to defeat the virtues of the Roman Catholic church in a "bloody, bloody battle" that "will completely eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years" (Appendix A, para. 6).

Two years after the speech, Bannon became the chief executive officer of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. After Trump won his bid for the White House,

Bannon briefly served as Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor to the new president. In reviewing the rise of Bannon in Trump's White House, Elliot and Miller stated in *Time* magazine: "It was the announcement of Stephen K. Bannon, a former naval officer turned Goldman Sachs executive turned publisher of far-right vitriol, as chief strategist that signaled an astonishing departure from presidential norms" (2016, para. 3.)

Eight months into his role as a Senior Advisor, Bannon left the White House and Washington, contributing severe anti-Trump comments ("treasonous, anti-patriotic") to Michael Wolff's 2018 book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*. He was arrested in 2020 and charged with conspiracy to commit mail fraud and money laundering in connection to the "Build the Wall" campaign. Bannon and three other men allegedly siphoned hundreds of thousands of dollars from the online fundraiser that promised to use "every cent" towards building the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico (Neumeister, 2022). After receiving a pardon from Trump, he continued to unleash conservative public opinions with great veracity, while pressing forward with plans for his right-wing "Gladiator School" in Italy, a private academy that would help further the careers of young promising conservatives. It is here that Bannon, as reported in *The New Yorker*, aimed to "generate the next Tom Cottons, Mike Pompeos, Nikki Hales: that next generation that follows Trump" (Munster, 2021, para. 2). The school was twice approved and twice derailed, primarily due to its treasured, historic location in an 800-year-old monastery.

On to Warsaw: Trump's 2017 European Address

One empirical result of Bannon's 2014 Vatican Keynote was the delivery, three years later, of Trump's sole major Presidential address on European soil. The ultra-

conservative ideology as expressed by Bannon was repurposed and presented in an obviously different setting to far greater acclaim. In his seminal analysis of rhetorical criticism, Wilchins argued that rhetoric should be concerned not with permanence or beauty but rather the empirical measurements of effect (1925), also noting that “history and criticism are not identical, but they are overlapping circles” (Zarefsky, 1998, p. 21). In many regards, the overlapping circles of Bannon and Trump undoubtedly began when Bannon became chief strategist of Trump’s Presidential campaign, yet they were publicly manifested in the Warsaw Address, as reported by Jack Jenkins on the day of the speech. Writing for *ThinkProgress*, he noted that “Bannon is back, and so is Bannonism,” arguing:

At least that’s the none-too-subtle message of President Donald Trump’s speech in Warsaw, Poland on Thursday, where the business mogul outlined a dark, dualistic vision of “the West” that almost perfectly matched that of his infamous senior adviser Steve Bannon. (2017, para. 2)

The setting and context of Trump’s Warsaw address in Krasínki Square was one of the more successful elements of the delivery, artfully selected by his ambitious new administration. At the time, the conservative Law and Justice party had just prevailed over liberal factions, taking complete control of the Polish Parliament for the first time in Polish history (Markowski, 2016). Trump’s speech was staged directly in front of the Polish Uprising Memorial, a visual prompt of the roots of nationalism in Poland and also, according to Townsend, the spirit of the clash that Trump sought to depict, between the forces of good and evil (2018). Directly behind the President was Poland’s Justice Building, with its symbolic scales of justice and a large iconic memorial of the uprising.

Media reports, according to Townsend, captured the cluster of Poland's insurgent fighters in the memorial statue, armed and looking as if they were running towards some action, lending the speech a visual aspect of the "clash of civilizations" that Trump delivered verbally (2018, p. 91).

Exploring the Common Elements of White Nationalist Speech

The three core themes of Bannon's professed nationalism, as identified earlier, created the foundation of Trump's rambling remarks. The imminent clash of civilizations was portrayed as a looming crisis, a battle between domestic forces and the enemies of honor and freedom. These dangerous foes were portrayed as "hostile regimes," from Syria and Iran to "the 50 Muslim nations" that Trump referenced. Similarly, the divine providence that Bannon advocated to his Vatican audience was another cornerstone of Trump's remarks, with his frequent references to God and the connection between righteous values, wealth and the economy. Here, Trump did veer into the area of populism, as he was known to do, stating:

This great community of nations has something else in common: In every one of them, it is the people, not the powerful, who have always formed the foundation of freedom and the cornerstone of our defense. The people have been that foundation here in Poland — as they were right here in Warsaw — and they were the foundation from the very, very beginning in America. Our citizens did not win freedom together, did not survive horrors together, did not face down evil together, only to lose our freedom to a lack of pride and confidence in our values. We did not and we will not. We will never back down. (Appendix B, paras. 24 & 25)

Trump focused on the forces that threatened the vitality and wealth of Poland's people, and also incorrectly referenced (twice) a response to a 1979 Mass led by (the Polish) Pope John Paul II, stating that "one million Poles sang three simple words: We want God." (Appendix B, para. 20). Actually, this was a simple line within the homily spoken only by the Pope. Finally, there was a startling emphasis on the precarity of the situation that Poland faced now, one that posed "great risk" (para. 21). In an outright, classic portrayal of White supremacist nationalism, Trump stated the need for all Western nations (i.e. all traditionally White countries) to battle the forces that "threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are" (para. 22). Mid-speech, Trump qualified the White roots of nationalism as "what we've inherited from our ancestors has never existed to this extent before. And if we fail to preserve it, it will never, ever exist again. So we cannot fail" (para. 23). Further on, he proclaimed: "Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory" (para. 26).

In their delivery, both Bannon and Trump veered from one hostile threat to another, with few logical connectors between the two. Stuckey discussed the use of these scattered, illogical phrases as a specific political tactic (2017). In examining a 2008 speech by the Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who utilized a similar style, she noted that voter preferences are grounded less in substantial, well-formed policy agendas than the policies that they symbolized. Johnson described Trump's often-illogical vacillations between strength and victimhood as a necessary tactic in maintaining audience interest (2022). Stuckey also described Trump's highly charged "affective

environment" as political rhetoric "unmoored from its institutional routines," and often possessing no connection to reality (Kelly, C., 2020, p. 4).

One can also note, within both deliveries, the concept of an evolving ideology, to reference Michael McGhee, that begins in the collective mind (as opposed to the individual). McGhee noted that the very concept of "ideology" has atrophied- evolving into whatever suits the present purpose (1980). Kenneth Burke presciently offered the concept of a structure of motive, as one that may limit an individual's freedom to further political consciousness (McGhee, 1980). This can be seen in the nationalist discourse that castigates the free press and journalist freedoms.

This research seeks to contribute to an understanding of how White nationalist rhetoric succeeds mightily through very specific tactics, some that are silent and some pronounced. All intersect in the White nationalistic speech as demonstrated by the Bannon Vatican Keynote and Trump Warsaw Address. Among these tactics, three strategies were consistently deployed in an effort to build, maintain and strengthen the White nationalist audience: 1) The unspoken tacit reference to White supremacy, through textual winks and primordial allusions that are never explicitly mentioned; 2) A strategic deployment of the crisis viewpoint or precarity; and 3). The tactical use of *ressentiment*, also known as grievance politics, which enhances and prolongs the frustrations of White nationalist supremacy as continually rooted in crisis (Capelos & Demertzis, 2021).

Codewords as a Catalyst to Audience Engagement

In both speeches the frequent use of certain linguistic codewords work to summon the favor and support of a White nationalist audience. Kelly argued that this unspoken, silent nod to White supremacy carries the three themes of freedom, prosperity and wealth

(Kelly, C., 2020). All were used by Bannon in a speech dominated by the concept of protecting “tremendous wealth” (Appendix A, para. 5). Trump alluded to prosperity but focused heavily on the use of “freedom,” mentioning the specific word 15 times.

Sanchez theorized the use of rhetorical versatility as a language tool for White supremacists through textual “winks” -- a manner in which rhetors camouflage and signal their ideological viewpoints. This theme or textual wink, whether that of divine-granted prosperity and wealth, or the threat of Islam and/or immigrants, can be likened to Burke’s iconic “signal phrases” that refer, silently in this case, to the canons of White supremacy (1984). Such a signal phrase, that indicates far more than it externally mentions, was evident when Trump called upon his Polish audience to recognize the frailty of their traditional culture and civilization, saying “you see what’s happening here, you know what to say and what to do” (Appendix B, para. 21).

Townsend maintained that the distinction between West and East was often utilized as a symbol in public memory. Deep into Trump’s speech, yet another “dog whistle” was sounded, a call to the pressing need to protect the “true” Polish sanctity: “And so I am here today not just to visit an old ally, but to hold it up as an example for others who seek freedom and who wish to summon the courage and the will to defend our civilization” (Appendix B, para. 14). By using “our,” Trump clearly defines what is “not,” and in this case, what is “not” meant any culture other than the traditional Western Polish national, which he compared, earlier in his speech, to the renowned (White) founders of the United States.

A Strategic nod to Racist Ideology

Throughout the “us versus them” themes of both speeches, there exists a complete exclusion of signifiers related to consensus, sharing, and efforts to raise and assist the disadvantaged. The “traditional” heritage in Poland and Vatican leadership was bereft of people of color. This research suggests that power-oriented White supremacy also works through a virtual concealment of signifiers related to racism. Cloud maintained that silence can be seen as an integral component of meaning-making, and that “strategic silence” will encourage attribution of meanings. Foucault argued that there are not one but many silences and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse (1978, p. 34). In Lundberg’s exploration of meaning, he mentioned the unconscious, in that certain meanings are implied in other significations, especially the frequent use of concealment in nationalist speech (2012).

The hegemonic exclusion that exists in nationalism is an underhanded nod to racism, which is not very complicated in terms of purpose. It simply establishes a virtual wall between opportunity and whatever desirable concept is best suited to the moment, perhaps wealth and wealth creation (Bannon) or protecting the “soul” of Western Europe (Trump). This aspect draws upon Bennett’s one-step flow of communication to illustrate its borderless strategy of constituting a symbolic mindset- one that includes and excludes without remorse. Cloud viewed racism as a “discursive phenomenon that persuasively justifies differential access to economic, political and social power in society” (2016, p. 322). In his 2014 book on *Dog Whistle Politics*, López utilized the term *strategic racism* as an adaptive ideology that privileges economics over visible malice- a mainstay in the Bannon script. In this way, racism can include “purposeful efforts to use racial animus as

leverage to gain material wealth, political power, or heightened social standing” (2014, p. 46). Here his framework denotes a strategic advantage or a characteristic to be leveraged, silently.

Utilizing the theme of freedom, prosperity and wealth is a convenient way of discussing the “not,” as in those who should not have access. While nothing is specifically mentioned in Bannon’s remarks about *preventing* wealth distribution or *perpetuating* barriers to economic advancement, the “not” remains in the foreground.

Looking at the issue from two perspectives, that of hegemony and framing, introduces a different angle, one that applies to media coverage as well. Speakman and Funk address the issue of White supremacy through the lens of both concepts, seeing hegemonic framing as a means to understand socially shared concepts such as White supremacist rhetoric. They asked whether this has restructured the world of conservative media (2020). The concept of the constitutive invitation complements this perspective: A rhetor (or news outlet) expresses a particular position, such as the sanctity of the Polish culture or the God-given authority bestowed upon bishops, and then uses it to summon engagement. Ceccarelli argued that this dominant discursive form tells us much about the rhetor and their audience (Jasinki & Mercieca, 2010).

The nationalist “fortress” motif was also a significant factor in Trump’s speech and of course was at the heart of his familiar pledge to create a wall between the United States and Mexico (Brands, 2017). Brand’s depiction of this “fortress mentality” defined much of Trump’s campaign rhetoric. In his exploration of the roots and manifestation of nationalist discourse, Anderson described how the artifacts of historical clashes would of course support this fortress-prone characterization (2006). Hall et al. stated that “the

triumph of Donald Trump empowered a candidate who espoused a stark, pugilistic nationalism” (2016, p. 73). The mighty exigency proclaimed by Bannon and Trump also drew upon the familiar call, as championed by similar leaders, to protect culture, families, freedom and race. Even though there were no enemies at the border, not even a realistic threat of enemies assembling at the border, both men warned of a possible cataclysmic confrontation with the any number of potential foes.

In noting the fluidity and timelessness of this nationalist approach, one that succeeded in remarkably different settings, it is useful to consider McKerrow’s position on the public as having no clear class content (2016). This aligns with the wholehearted support the billionaire Trump had among his blue-collar supporters. Laclau argued that when it comes to certain ideological elements such as nationalism, “we have no necessary class belonging” (Lundberg, 2012, p. 227). As Vatz argued, utterance strongly invites exigence, and situations obtain their character from the rhetoric that surrounds them (2016). Charland’s speaker-audience model presumed that an audience is *already* constituted as a subject and therefore, the speaker utilizes discourse that will sustain if not strengthen those relations (McKerrow, 1987). To follow this line of thinking, we might conclude that an audience on the way out of a speech will be more deeply entrenched in its ideology than prior to walking in.

The Crisis Component: Arguing for Increased Precarity

The two publics in these speeches helped to solve a problem that occurs frequently to the nationalist leader: How to arouse and enrage an audience when reality poses no substantive issues of immediate threat. This is where crisis aligns with power in providing a sound rhetorical solution. There is a repetitious use of warrior terms in both

speeches with much talk of war, battle and blood. All of this prompts a defensive response that demands the promise of power which both speakers exude. This is the power of the best, the wealthiest, the most chaste; the innocent nationalist defending their homeland.

Defining a so-called reality or situation in power terms both repeatedly and deliberately is what ultimately creates the exclusionary brand of hegemony. Trump and Bannon repeatedly stressed the need to rise up and prepare for battle. This hawk-like discourse during peaceful times served both speakers well. Bannon completely avoided the official theme of the HDI conference of eliminating poverty and sharing the teachings of Jesus Christ, which would have been a logical element to include in a keynote address to pious Roman Catholic leaders. Similarly, Trump chose the path of crisis or conflict over traditional, unifying messages typically embodied by U.S. presidents in a major European address. The crisis that is fabricated or created is not novel or new, indeed it is a mainstay of White nationalist discourse. As noted in Chapter IV in his depiction of crisis, specifically the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vatz argued that political crises are rarely “found,” they are, for the most part, created (2016).

Townsend sorrowfully compared Trump’s Warsaw Address to prior U.S. presidential European deliveries and their typically inclusive references to shared global values, such as the pursuit of health and prosperity for all. Trump failed to use motivators such as peace, shared prosperity, and the importance of these principles to the betterment of mankind. Rather, his core nationalist themes, also at the roots of Bannon’s speech, worked effectively to establish the mighty exigency of nationalist protection, in his call for “devastation, destruction, distrust and fear” of the enemy (Townsend, 2018, p. 97).

Unsurprisingly, Trump’s speech served as a catalyst to violence one week later, as pro-authoritarian demonstrators led tremendous, country-wide protests advancing and securing court reform. Here it is clear how the urgent need to suppress opposition, as powerfully initiated by Stephen Bannon, evolved into a successful early chapter in the divisive history of President Donald Trump.

The concept of precarity contributes to a larger understanding of this “clash of civilizations” theme, as it encompasses other dire rhetorical warnings that work to the same end, alarming, and motivating recipients to stand watch, whether they are Americans, Poles or Roman Catholic leaders. In a news analysis of the speech, David Smith noted in *The Guardian* that “Trump’s Warsaw speech pits western world against barbarians at the gate (2017) and that the former president used the word “civilization” 10 times, expanding his vision “to a clash of civilizations” (Smith, 2017, para. 1).

While precariousness is a state that is existentially shared, Johnson argued that precarity “is a category of order, which designates the effects of different political, social and legal compensations of general precariousness” (2022, p. 179). This research has demonstrated, if nothing else, that a false depiction of crisis is a consistent tactic used by conservatives who point to unseen foes that supposedly threaten security, families, national culture, jobs—and, in Bannon’s speech, the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church. Precarity is the great unequalizer as well: White and prosperous cultures are “reminded” of the risk that minorities pose and therefore minorities become the enemy. In both speeches, the idea of security and safety is linked to fighting off Muslims or other Brown-and-Black-skinned threats.

It follows that this mode of precarity is a powerful component in discourse related to White supremacy as the White male is so frequently depicted as under siege, even though both Bannon and Trump managed to skirt those realities throughout their political lives. Robinson argued that racism, or White supremacy, is where American masculinity and conservative populism converge, “in crafting crisis to make sense of self” (Johnson, 2022, p. 110).

Where *Ressentiment* Rewards the Rhetor

One rhetorical challenge that Trump consistently faced was the need to keep his audience engaged, enraged and motivated to support his political goals. A useful tactic was *ressentiment*, the aforementioned rhetorical device that is particularly effective with a nationalist audience. Also employed by Bannon, *ressentiment* looks backward, utilizing nostalgia to awaken past hurts and defeats while perpetuating a festering wound that can never be healed. It is a wholly different type of “resentment” in that it is wielded publicly, frequently and deliberately, like a tool. *Ressentiment* refers to the chronic, frustrated, and bitter devaluing of what one desires, turning it into something deserved but denied, such as White male privilege (Capelos & Demertzis, 2022). It also works to maintain rage and anger, securing audience engagement over extended periods of time (Kelly, C., 2021). With its subjective sense of “willful amnesia” it typically functions as the grievance in grievance politics.

When Trump mentioned the humiliating defeats and sorrows that the Polish people had experienced in the past, he was instilling the frustrations of *ressentiment*. After listing a number of potential foes, from government bureaucracy (i.e. socialism) to Syria and Iran, the former president utilized the backward strategy of opening wounds,

reminding the Poles how their previous losses have undermined the purity of their culture. "If left unchecked," he proclaimed, "these forces will undermine our courage, sap our spirit, and weaken our will to defend ourselves and our societies" (Appendix B, para. 22).

Bannon was equally comfortable in this mode, reminding his audience of the horrors of the past century, battles that left them "children of barbarity." And now that they have finally emerged from the years of terror, Bannon argued that a new line of the aforementioned risks have emerged to take it all away again: Deviants that could prompt a tremendous loss of power, money and authority in Rome, all of them Godless atheists:

Whether it was French resistance fighters, whether it was the Polish resistance fighters, or it's the young men from Kansas City or the Midwest who stormed the beaches of Normandy, commandos in England that fought with the Royal Air Force, that fought this great war, really the Judeo-Christian West versus atheists. (Appendix A, para. 4)

Ressentiment is a "self-poisoning" of the mind, where the subject is consumed by emotions such as hatred and spite. Trump turned this animus into a resource that was virtually inexhaustible. In this way, as Kelly argued, Trump and Bannon were both able to pivot between one emotionally clad term and the next, maintaining a certain state of perpetual anger that they alone were equipped to deal with (Kelly, C., 2020).

The precarity of impending crisis and the frustrations of a waning White supremacy are important avenues in the cultivation of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* captures the socially expressed state of mind, the ethical stance and collective identity that links White victimization with virtue (Hochschild, 2022). This inefficacious and

impotent victimhood is a natural link to other victimized aspects of White supremacy: Its complex affectivity based on frustration, sorrow and buried, seething anger finds an outlet in the diminishing status of the White male, one based solely on Whiteness and maleness.

The idealized virtues of the past can be referenced in the use of *ressentiment*. In that sense, it engenders an attachment between the subject and their wounds, whether real or perceived. Nietzsche argued that in the emotional-moral framework of *ressentiment*, the virtues of good and evil are typically reversed. (Remley, 2016). The simple, inarguable virtues of “virtue,” a fairly predictable mainstay in the typical keynote or presidential address, falls victim to the rhetorical need to prevail, enrage and engage.

The Missing Nation in Nationalism

The strong national identity that is typically linked to nationalism is not necessarily the result of cultural relations, economic status or familial ties. Calhoun explored whether nationalism is inherited or invented, using the term “primordiality” to reference the strong identity that nationalists frequently espoused (1997). Of interest in this research is how this type of thread, an essential form of identity, was constituted, via nationalist leaders like Donald Trump or Adolf Hitler. Calhoun’s thoughts on this were quite prescient, as he argued convincingly that “nationalist visions of internally uniform and sharply bounded cultural and political identities often have to be produced or maintained by *struggle* against a richer, more diverse and more promising cross-cutting play of differences and similarities” (1997, p. 19). The “richer, more diverse” aspect here was evident in the singular vision of Black and White Americans working together to elect former President Barack Obama.

It goes without saying that the election of a Black president was ground-breaking; a dramatic departure from the past. Stuckey looked at issues of change and emergence as particularly instructive, where questions of national identity become the primary terrain of disputation, which have the potential to forge new partisan alignments, administrative arrangements, and the political vocabularies through which we shape and understand them (2017). Calhoun viewed nationalism as a form of evaluation, one that works to serve and protect the “status” of a so-called ethical imperative, replete with its boundaries that “ought” to be respected by a populace that also “ought” to conform to its specific moral values (1997). This logically aligns with the frequent nationalist calls to limit immigration and protect the sanctity of a culture and its people.

In a review of texts that traced American nationalism through four distinct periods of American history, Mercieca (2006) described a consistent trio of rhetorical themes in the perpetuation of White nationalist supremacy: Trust, upon which the nation was founded; the critical demonstration of loyalty, which relies on trust to exist; and finally, the ideological aspects of nation-building, which we see in the delivery to conservative poles as well as Vatican leaders. Nationalism, with its often-illogical loyalty and vehemence, might be viewed, according to Fairbanks (1981) as a form of civil religion, in that it provides a set of values, symbols and rituals institutionalized as the cohesive force and center of meaning that unites many people. As noted earlier, the three prominent themes espoused by Bannon were steeped in trust, loyalty, and the foundations of nation-building/protection. All were reiterated by Trump with a more rigorous sense of urgency and finger-pointing at potential enemies, those who pose a threat to the superiority of a

primordial culture. As Gellner stated in 1983, it is nationalism that engenders nations and not the other way around” (Calhoun, 2017, p. 55).

Hegemony and Hierarchy in Sync

The concept of rhetorical deployment is useful in the interpretation of both speeches. Power and hierarchy can be seen as legitimate tools, brought to the podium and implemented by both speakers, akin to the constitutive aspects noted earlier. Speakers who seek to persuade others often do so through this mode of authority. We see this in the ultra-casual yet provocative words of Bannon, the alt-right conservative media executive speaking from his desk in Los Angeles. Similarly, there was Donald Trump, newly elected to lead the world’s most powerful democracy, a level of authority that could not be invalidated by any of his inappropriate remarks or deeds, simply because his adherents preferred to focus on the expressed ideology and not his often-contradictory actions or discourse. Hariman discussed the image of hierarchy as representing a “transcendent system for concentrating, distributing, and regulating authority which cannot be invalidated by actual practice” (1995, p. 29). Here, authority and power are so intertwined within nationalist discourse that one cannot be differentiated from the other. In her examination of the rhetorical presidency, Mary Stuckey noted the power inherent in the U.S. presidential role:

Presidents potentially possess an enormously important power over our national definitions. They help constitute us as a nation through the symbolic performance of their office, [and] their rhetoric has instrumental effects on policy. Given this, it is clear that paying attention to the questions brought up by focusing on class, race, gender, and the circulation of messages have the potential to develop the

areas of presidential rhetoric and the rhetorical presidency in ways that have been previously underdeveloped. (Stuckey, 2010, p. 41)

Of course it was the Marxist intellectual Ernesto Gramsci who defined, in 1936, the characteristics of hegemony in discussion here, rooted in the notion of a class system that perpetuates power through a third lens that works to exercise an “economic, political and social power as it occurs in an industrial society” (Cloud, 2016, p. 322). This makes the status quo, as portrayed by leaders in power, appear to typically fall within the realm of the reasonable and necessary.

In an exploration of nationalism and hegemony, Speakman and Funk addressed the hegemonic pursuit of the conservative media system, with its relentless caution against infiltrators and loss of status. They cited the tactics of Rush Limbaugh, the right-wing radio pundit, who warned of disenfranchisement at the hands of the undeserving in many of the same ways as Donald Trump (2011). Bannon’s proclamations align here as well, with a declaration that his Vatican audience of Roman Catholic Bishops have been charged with protecting their God-given wealth and privilege from falling to the deviant Muslim forces as if they were on the precipice of the Crusades. With its substantive pull and the exclusion it represents, this strain of hegemony might be seen as more of a genre than a simple ideology.

Audience Motivation Overrides Shortfalls

A motivation to support Trump helped millions of Americans overlook some major ideological shortfalls and discrepancies. It also working to constitute the “hegemonic bloc” that Gramsci argued was necessary to the acquisition and maintenance of power (Colpani, 2021). Truthfulness was clearly an optional factor in both speeches.

McKerrow claimed that whether a discourse is true or false is secondary to showing how it is “movilized” (meaning motivated to mobilize) to legitimate the interests of the hegemonic group (2016). Rhetorical critic Wayne Booth believed that certain concepts, such as hegemony and ideology, can undermine the rational course, due to this type of motivation (Aune, 2016). It also supports the audience subjectivity that lends itself to a perpetuation of hegemony, perhaps the “mutual permeability” that Hall et al. (2016) attributed to theatrical performers facing an avid, welcoming audience. Laclau’s definition of hegemony also explains this notion of audience subjectivity. He defined hegemony as “the very process of constructing politically the masses’ subjectivity and not the practice of a pre-constituted subject” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 4). Furthermore, returning to the inherent power that Trump and Bannon both possessed at the time of their appearances, Laclau argued that this node or element in communication is where power is explicitly exercised (McKerrow).

The recipient of conservative, distrustful rhetoric is often motivated by the pleasure of hearing its hatefulness articulated publicly in a group setting, perhaps with the belief that his/her support is influential to its perpetuation. This was demonstrated in the false anti-Muslim rhetoric in Chapter III and Trump’s overblown Mexican “criminal/rapist” accusations at the heart of Chapter IV. Information of this nature appears to exist outside the routine two-way flow of ideas, where the audience plays a role in the perpetuation of an argument. Bannon and Trump’s stark proclamations clearly deviated from the truth yet were roundly accepted. In that sense there is a static nature to nationalism discourse. Yet again, the one-step flow of communication as defined by Bennett and Manheim in 2006 supports this. The concepts as transmitted are received

intact. This requires a certain knowledge of the audience and while Bennett and Manheim veered into the technological aspects of social media and other very targeted communications, I see this flow as a strong component in the success of White nationalistic rhetoric. The content of messaging, such as conservative, alt-right signal phrases, are specifically developed and targeted towards the welcoming recipient. The phrase or concept of mutual permeability as presented by Hall et al. (2016) helps explain audience response in both instances. There is a single, unified direction in which it proceeds, void of discussion and critical response.

This research also underlines the strong connection between this unified mode of communication and hegemony itself as argued by Entman, who maintained that officials in power sustain control of what is distributed to the public, with an understanding among themselves about what promotes a “harmony that impedes the flow of independent information and consistently (although not inevitably) produces progovernment propaganda and public consent or acquiescence” (2004, p. 4). In reviewing hegemony by exclusion, power and authority can be seen as residing in the perpetuation of the “not,” as in not White, not Christian, not native, not worthy.

After Trump lost the 2020 election and claimed it was a hoax, the “Stop the Steal” campaign may have ultimately worked in his favor. It presented a strong node of backward-looking *ressentiment* that could be brought out and flaunted for the sole sake of angst, even if the accusation was repeatedly proven false in U.S. courts. Here, Stuckey would agree: In her portrayal of nationalistic speech, she argued that truth often has no relevance to resonance (2017).

While the core themes of Bannon's Keynote and Trump's Warsaw Address are remarkably similar, this research also demonstrates that both men utilized rhetorical tactics far beyond the traditional modes of analysis such as audience and setting. The amiable porousness of the Vatican and Polish audiences demonstrated acquiescence with any terms presented, most significantly the threat of a bloody battle and common foes such as ISIS. Yet it also embraced terms such as "freedom" or "values," which typically function as racist codewords that allow "racism without racists" (Pham, 2018, p. 94).

Bannon and Trump managed to skirt the norms of diplomacy and virtue in their European speeches yet found success with their White nationalist audiences. How that success evolved, and where the core elements are, is key to understanding future endeavors— and leaders— seeking to rid their nations of democratic freedoms and multi-cultural opportunities.

CHAPTER VI – Conclusion

This research demonstrates both the versatility and the commonality of discourse related to nationalism. All five case studies clarify and demonstrate the use of these tactics and their effect on public lives: The Tennessee anti-Sharia legislation; King’s Congressional hearings; Trump’s anti-Mexican hyperbole; the Bannon Vatican Keynote; and Trump’s Warsaw Address. All rely on the use of crisis. In these instances, it is a false crisis, one that summons an audience through demonization and *ressentiment* that works to engage and enrage. In Chapters III and IV, a strong media response was an important factor, contributing to the demonization of Mexicans and American Muslims. In Chapter V, the mechanics of two speeches demonstrate the wisdom of many of the political theorists we turned to in this study, from Laclau to Hodges. Particularly relevant is Lieven’s argument that the United States’ “anarchy of empire” was managed by controlling immigration flow, identifying enemy groups, and diminishing the influence of those with non-Western identity (Black, 2006). This view, teamed with the strong use of crisis and demonization, holds merit.

As noted in Chapters III, IV and V, the deliberate use of a crisis theme was not simply prevalent, it formed a rhetorical platform that helped each of its purveyors accomplish their political goals. The contrived anti-Muslim “homegrown” terrorist crisis as presented by Rep. Peter King was an enduring political strategy based on a liminal thread of information. The Tennessee lawmakers who demonstrated near disinterest in the reality of Sharia law, duplicated federal legislation through unrealistic threats of “foreign laws” and false warnings of impending terrorist activity. In the case of Donald Trump, the Mexican immigration crisis, along with an overblown depiction of imminent

warfare in Warsaw, created the false impression of a battle that must be waged between White nationals and infiltrating people of color.

There is a symbolism here that cannot be avoided. Opposing forces tend to be White on one side and Brown or Black on the other. The persistent clash of good and evil in Barthes' mythology writings are relevant (1972) and warrant further inquiry. The truth is derided; peace is irrelevant. Positive values and intentions, those of struggling new citizens and established American minorities are also considered unimportant. Johnson wrote about the symbolic universe as a critical element in certain categories of speech (2022) and certainly in these instances, with an "us or them" mentality, we have solid black or white with very little room for grey. How this false depiction of a crisis, enough to warrant five Congressional hearings or the passage of anti-Sharia legislation, was weaponized by the conservative politicians is not just of note, it is of concern. The implications have impacted everyday lives and communities with no other gain than votes. And without that nefarious use of the crisis theme, these politicians would have had little to brandish or summon the media, their supporters and, in later years, the vast wide world of social media.

Shortly after winning the 2016 Presidential election, rather than seeking to unite and inspire the nation, Trump used Steinle's death to summon his audience once again:

The Kate Steinle killer came back and back over the weakly protected Obama border, always committing crimes and being violent, and yet this info was not used in court. His exoneration is a complete travesty of justice. BUILD THE WALL!" ("Tweets," 2023)

Also of interest is the reference to a clash of civilizations in the anti-Sharia effort and the two European speeches. As noted in Chapter III, a letter to the editor from Pastor Maury Davis was published in the Gallatin, TN *News Examiner*. Entitled “Citizens need to be informed of the truth about Sharia law,” he wrote: “There is a cultural clash of great proportion on the horizon, and we would do well not to be ignorant and uninformed of the reality of the differences” (2011, para. 5). This threat, as also repeated by national leaders, filtered down to the public until it became a reality.

This project has explored how rhetorics of demonization and crisis have threaded through the political and media landscape in recent years. Concurrently we have seen largely innocent groups of Americans subjected to unwarranted prejudice. We have seen the cultivation of *ressentiment* contribute to the public support that helped elect a president who lied over 30,000 times during four years in office (Kessler et al., 2021). Mainstream media was subjected to criticism and doubt, with the proclamations of “fake news” and the reality that a so-called “balanced” and objective story may actually *further* the disreputable goals of a candidate espousing falsehoods. As noted in Chapter I, there exists, within this mode of rhetoric, similarities to the discourse of Hitler prior to World War II. Unfortunately, some of the victims, such as those who practice Judaism, are the same, and, as Jack McElroy predicted in his *Knoxville News-Sentinel* editorial (2011) the American Muslim became the convenient target, similar to the Jews. With the advent of social media and a far broader choice of media to amplify the fears, the end product is even more concerning.

In this chapter, I will summarize the research attained in this study and demonstrate the following: How conservative and well-intentioned mainstream media

served as a conduit to this specific form of crisis-talk; how the use of the crisis theme led to the furtherance of *ressentiment* and delusion among conservative audiences; and finally, how the unfortunate trends that began in the second decade of the 21st century have evolved into a fury of hate crimes, incivility and discrimination, thus supporting continued studies of this nature. Furthermore, without regard for the victimization of others, the depiction of crisis and conflict continues. The perpetuation of the triadic form of “othering” as defined by Hodges, has grown in the 2020’s to include transgender citizens and the banning of important books. The end result of this ludicrous warfare could be cataclysmic to the planet, as Bremmer (2023) argued, because nations are focusing on trivial matters as opposed to the climate change and devastation that is creating scarcity and hunger, the *real* crisis -- worldwide.

The Crisis Component

Interestingly, the actual word “crisis” traveled beyond rhetoric to appear frequently in the media – headlines, broadcast lead-ins and news reports repeated the term to express urgency and importance. Writing for *The European Journal of Communication*, Hanna Vincze noted that “the crisis” is a journalistic frame in news media, one that possesses both generic and issue-specific features (2014). The crisis frame is shown to have intersected with other discursive issues like violent crime or cultural “infestation” to denote severe, alarming circumstances. The complexity of the situation was rarely discussed. When Hitler used the term to depict Germany’s economic situation in 1938, the Greenville (S.C.) News printed a three-word headline: “Hitler ‘Crisis’ Speech” (p. 4). Amy Kaplan noted that this tension is a crucible of American Imperialist traditions, manifesting itself in the use of both crisis and precarity (Black,

2006). This leads directly into Johnson's (2022) views on the precarity that results from the continual threat of an unresolvable crisis; that fleeting sense of disempowerment that collapses into a permanent condition of imagining oneself as a victim. This is the quiet start of the state of *ressentiment*. Looking directly at the production of precarity and crisis, Schapp et al. argued that it is to "ignore its perpetuation and vulnerability that results, is to bypass the critical methods in which it is utilized by various modalities of power to mitigate, exploit and manipulate the realities that vulnerability situates in the populace" (2022, p. 143).

More Like an "us": The Othering of Innocents

In her coverage of Trump's first State of the Union Address, Elizabeth Bruenig noted how the former President created a firm distinction between immigrants and Americans, despite the fact that the categories overlap hugely, noting "it's a classic nationalist feint, creating thick borders between us and them so that we will feel more like an us" (2017, para. 3). Similarly, we see the dialectical tactics of Trump and Hitler, as expressed in the logic of separation between a "pure" country, and a place of multi-racial, multi-cultural infestation. Thus, the unfortunate reality of Hodge's triadic populism comes to light, with its continual "othering" of an unfortunate third party, the device that cannot be alleviated, because there is always another group waiting in the wings, poised to become the next unwitting enemy. The 2023 passage of anti-transgender legislation in Tennessee demonstrates the quick pivot of "othering" for political purposes. This collective resentment of *any* third party activates latent attitudes, argued Bonikowski, offering untold opportunities for the "future successes of populist, nationalist and authoritarian politics" (2017, p. 181). It is clear, through Bonikowski's

frame of media and political discourse, that through this “othering,” the media joins in the fray and furthers the discussion while increasing the size and dynamics of the audience.

Even when blatantly false, the language and accusations can sound convincing. In skewing the results of a Pew Center poll, Rep. Peter King said that “there are realities we can’t ignore. For instance, the Pew poll, which said that 15 percent of Muslim American men between the age of 18 and 29 could support suicide bombings. This is a segment of the [American] community al-Qaeda is attempting to recruit” (Compilation of Hearings, 2011). As noted in Chapter III, this is untrue. The poll was conducted in the Middle East and was greeted as positive news because it demonstrated a *decline* in support for suicide bombings among young men (“Global Attitudes,” 2007).

Media Response to Claims of Crisis: Quick, Politically Expedient

The issue then becomes one of message deployment, and how specific terms and verbiage, often selected randomly by the politician, are weaponized and amplified by the press. The research acquired in this area of the study was surprising. While Trump was wildly fortunate in his endeavors to capture media attention with the Steinle killing, the press, often like the theater, desires drama and certainly the depiction of a rogue immigrant shooter or a “Monster Mosque” in Manhattan was useful. Mainstream media, perhaps once again ascribing to the need for a balanced story, or the binary journalism principle of providing an alternate side (Stuckey, 2021, p. 126), legitimized the untruth, presenting it in the same light as factual truth. Stuckey argued that: “because Trump presented the media with continuing spectacle, they repeated and amplified his messages. These tendencies helped to normalize Trump” (2016, p. 126).

Continuing the near-senseless reiteration, the prominent, national *Washington Post* printed King's wildly inaccurate claim that 80 to 85 percent of the mosques in the United States were run by Islamic Fundamentalists (Robinson, 2011, p. A15.) *The New York Times* quoted "Mr. Trump" in 2015 as saying that the Steinle killing, as committed by an immigrant, serves as proof of his assertion that these "scores of immigrants coming from Mexico are criminals, drug dealers, rapists" (Medina & Preston, 2015, para. 18). Without any reference to its untruthfulness, this infamous line, typically reported verbatim, provided the precise tone and content that Trump desired in his campaign to maintain support, fear and *ressentiment*. It worked handsomely, as demonstrated in Chapter IV, with extensive coverage of Trump's hateful immigration position featured on the three traditional networks as well as NPR, CNN and FOX-TV. As reported by *The New York Times*, it was also economically advantageous: Trump received almost \$2 billion in free media attention, just from the beginning of his campaign in June 2015 until February 2016 (Confessore & Yourish, 2016). Using a historically low amount of money on television advertising, the candidate was "far better than any other candidate at earning media" (para. 3).

One can see, through this crisis-laden demonization, a strong similarity to previous declarations, such as *The New York Times* reporting, in 1952, that Senator Joseph R. McCarthy warned that the "fight" against communism was going to get "rougher and rougher and rougher" (McCarthy Pledges, 1951, para. 1). The lack of objective oversight is deeply concerning. At the aforementioned protest for the construction of the "Monster Mosque" in downtown Manhattan, CNN national correspondent Susan Candiotti described the issue by quoting Rep. Peter King's words,

nearly in their entirety “There is a radicalization of Muslims in this country. And their belief is that Muslims are not doing enough within their own community to stop the radicalization within some Muslims in America” (Griffin, 2011). For King, this was the totality of his storyline, and the CNN coverage legitimized it and extended it to a new national audience.

We cannot ignore the unfortunate reality that fake news will spread faster through the medium of social media. As Lohr noted in *The New York Times*, false claims were 70 percent more likely than the truth to be shared on Twitter. The top 1 percent of false stories were routinely shared by 1,000 to 10,000 people, whereas true stories were rarely retweeted by more than 1,000 people (2018, para. 5). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that false claims which elicit stronger reactions, from surprise to disgust, are a more powerful medium for spreading, sharing and amplification (Lohr, 2018). As Gainous and Wagner maintained: On the Twitter platform, all crisis-related claims are user-driven. Often created for nefarious purposes, they transform from an expansive, lofty position, often founded on air, to then become news; similar to the gossipy chain that takes root in the neighborhood mentality and slowly, inexorably becomes a form of truth (2014).

Lying also works well psychologically, maintaining an intact model of a certain worldview that counterevidence and facts become wholly undesirable as they lead to cognitive dissonance (Hodges, 2022). We are more likely, argued Hodges, to accept facts that accord with what we believe and discount those that do not (2022, p. 28). This helps to explain the unwillingness of Trump supporters to support another presidential candidate, despite numerous investigations, lawsuits and criminal charges.

Hegemony and White Supremacy, a Powerful Pair

The expedient efficiency of media attention in these White nationalist endeavors demonstrates the power that emanates at the intersection of media and political power. Gilborn argued that the interests and perceptions of White subjects are continually placed center stage and considered normal (2006), which is certainly at the heart of Candiotti repeating King's false anti-Muslim argument nearly verbatim. Speaking at the Harvard University Shorenstein Center, Adam Serwer, senior editor at *The Atlantic*, discussed the hesitation if not inability of the White press to bluntly describe the lies and racism that nationalist candidates like Trump espoused, primarily because they are hesitant to describe a major character flaw that is shared by their friends and family: "I think that's partially why you see a big distinction in the way Trump is written about from journalists of color than you often do with White journalists... there's an awareness of explicit subtext with journalists of color. We're cognizant of the fact that Trump is talking about us and people like us in a way that I think is easier for white journalists to dismiss (*The Atlantic's Adam Serwer*," 2018, para 3).

The hegemonic exclusion that routinely fails to note the untruthfulness of a biased claim of criminality derives from the same media that ignored Rep. Laura Richardson's testimony before Congress, proving that the American Muslim community had contributed to a marked decrease in terrorist activities. All of this demonstrates to the symbolic intersection of media power and communication at its most skewed. If rhetoric is all about the obtainment of power, (McKerrow, 2016; Zarefsky, 2008) then it follows that one of the more definitive privileges of public discourse, via a largely White-owned

press or network, is the ability to discuss the current state of nationalist crisis and hate-fueled talk in the words and terms of the powerful and privileged.

Beyond the discourse of the politician, an unbalanced portrayal of news has undoubtedly furthered that familiar irresolvable frustration, also known as *ressentiment*. This had been simmering in a largely White, conservative populace deeply threatened by a change in authority, the rise of power and privilege among minorities; perhaps the appearance of a Black president in the White House. Indeed, Pham argued that if not for Barack Obama, Trump would have never been elected (2017).

Certain spokespeople were appointed without question by the media to support the false claims of these officials, such as Herman Bledsoe and Joseph Schmidt, the “expert” who testified to the pressing need for anti-Sharia legislation in Tennessee and then meekly said “I don’t know what this legislation is all about” when pressed to defend it (“Senate Judiciary,” 2011). As purveyors of the media, it is unfortunate but true that our society needs to look for the perpetuation of demonization through the “fair and balanced” news that repeats claims of criminals and rapists.

Implications and Justification for Future Study

Peter King’s hearings resulted in two years of anti-Muslim rhetoric and biased news coverage. Trump’s incivility provided permission to do the same among many who were once held to greater standards of decency. Following the Trump election, hate crimes in the United States began to rise. Educators were deeply and justifiably concerned about how children would respond to Trump’s racist, sexist and xenophobic remarks. The Southern Poverty Law Center, (SPLC) which monitors hate activity, surveyed 5,000 teachers nationwide. Not only did the educators report a stark increase in

anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim discourse and harassment, over 1,000 responses cited Trump specifically, prompting the SPLC to call it “the Trump Effect” (“The Trump Effect,” 2016) In one elementary school a Mexican American student found a noose in the bathroom, and middle school Mexican American students in the cafeteria were subjected to classmates chanting, “Build a wall! Build a Wall!” (Rios, 2016, para. 2).

Politicians such as Stephen Bannon were keen to rouse the rage and frustration that invariably leads to more anger, more *ressentiment* and polarity in a political system with far greater priorities than false issues related to misconstrued data. “I think anger is a good thing,” Bannon told a group of conservatives in 2013. “This country is in a crisis. And if you’re fighting to save this country, if you’re fighting to take this country back, it’s not going to be sunshine and patriots. It’s going to be people who want to fight” (Friedersdorf, 2016, para. 6). Ian Bremmer saw this as a deeply unfortunate game-changer, noting that the proclivity to occupy citizens with trivial “crises” are leading the world down a path where major issues, such as climate change, are set by the wayside (2023).

American citizens should be forewarned, argued Fintan O’Toole, in describing the failure of Trump’s attempted coup on January 26, 2021 (after losing the U.S. presidential election to President Joseph Biden). The coup failed, according to O’Toole, because Trump ultimately could not project the necessary “heroic drama” by selflessly upholding the election results and then simultaneously “proving” that the system failed. His sullen self-pity was seen as a detriment. Far more importantly, O’Toole argued, were the ideas put forth prior to the rally, which could have resulted in effectively overturning the election, and secondly, could be of great interest to a future conspirator. This is the

danger of electing a dishonest and disingenuous leader, one who was described by *The New York Review* as playing “shamelessly to racist, misogynist, and xenophobic fears,” a speaker who “gave his dispossessed supporters a chance to vent their rage against the architects of empire and the meritocratic elite who dismissed them as ‘deplorables’ clinging to religion and guns” (Lears, 2023, p. 10).

Given newfound permission to experience and express racist anger, advocates of this nationalist “othering” experienced the unresolvable, never-ending possibilities of *ressentiment*. This form of political angst, which all four of the conservative lawmakers mastered, provided an added tool in the ability to summon support and media attention. Anyone watching national news in 2016 became familiar with the sight and sound of Trump’s crowds chanting “lock her up” as Trump worked the crowd, falsely characterizing his Democrat opponent as a criminal.

The increased radicalization of the Republican party, as perhaps initiated by Newt Gingrich with his threat of “foreign laws,” began to usher in a new wave of fiery nationalism, with many of the hateful, “othering” techniques used by Hitler. In April, 2022, the anti-defamation league released a report demonstrating that there were more anti-Semitic incidents in American in 2021 than any year since the organization began keeping track. The assaults and in-person harassment episodes had climbed beyond any numbers ever recorded. Goldberg, the author of an editorial lamenting this sad report, noted that the “radicalization of the Republican party has helped White nationalism flourish” (2022, p. A20). With Trump no longer serving as President, the league was saddened to learn that the Republican Party had grown even more hospitable to zealots. Larger, bias-motivated hate crimes were up nearly 25 percent in 2020, climbing still

further, to the highest level since data began to be recorded in 30 years (Goldberg, 2022). As the flood gates to hate opened, *The New York Times* reported that slurs against gay men on Twitter climbed to nearly 4,000 a day in 2022, while antisemitic posts soared more than 61 percent (Frenkel & Conger, 2022, paras. 3 & 4).

In early 2023, Tennessee once again took the lead in the passage of legislation deemed to extend the “othering” or demonization of an American minority. A series of laws, focused on the LBGTQ (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer) population, were passed, including a controversial ban on “adult performances that are harmful to minors” featuring male or female impersonators, i.e., drag performances (Kruesi & McMillan, 2023, para. 9). This was one result of misinformation related to gender-transition care at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. The American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Tennessee and Lambda Legal said in a joint statement that: “they’ve chosen fearmongering, misrepresentations, intimidation and extremist politics over the rights of families and the lives of transgender youth” (Brown, 2023, para. 7). As mentioned previously, the triadic form of populism will always find an enemy.

Calling for a New Protocol in Reporting “Untruths”

As political candidates began to stretch if not ignore the truth with unforeseen frequency, senior journalists warn that a new protocol in press coverage has become essential. In a poignant appeal to journalists everywhere, Margaret Sullivan noted, in *The Washington Post*, that “too many times, we acted as his [Trump’s] stenographers or megaphones. Too, too often, we failed to refer to his many falsehoods as lies” (2022, para. 5). Sullivan wrote about the gradual realization that came over journalists covering Trump as they began to see that the instincts and conventions of traditional journalism

were not functioning ideally at that moment in U.S. history (2022). In decrying the repetition of falsehoods as they appeared in the press, Hodges noted “false claims are repeated and strengthened both through direct reported speech—actual quotes that reanimate the fake claims – and also indirect reported speech as the reporters paraphrase the speaker’s original claim” (2016, p. 82). The warnings of falsity, Hodges argued, should come prior to the speech, come first not afterwards, or not at all.

The political theorist Stuart Hall wrote an introduction to the book *Paper Voices* (Smith, 1975) that keenly illustrates what this study has intended to accomplish, nearly 50 years after its publication. Hall looked purely at the contents and forms of the press, or as he put it, the “privileged modes of communication” in order to precisely analyze media production in its own right. He did not attempt to label, rank or judge the particular media, but to simply establish and support “a reading of the material in terms of its social and historical meaning” (p. 17). In that sense, this study has looked carefully at the presentation of the crisis frame as a node, perhaps a “determinate moment” (1973, p. 29); one that carries the full societal expression of where we existed as a society when the false alarm sounded.

We also cannot overlook the dire warnings of symbolic or actual warfare in the drum beat of nationalist ideology, through the false depiction of crisis and the ugly “othering” of innocent Americans. Burke warned of a “disease of cooperation” that summons an audience to enter nationalistic warfare in the name of peace (Jensen, 2018, p. 386). This is patently obvious in the depiction of the clash of civilizations, as argued by Tennessee lawmakers and Trump, King and Bannon. By developing an interpretive ability to identify the rhetorical devices that are used to propel this “us versus them”

mentality, Burke argued that audiences can and should build strategies for recognizing and counteracting the threats that exist in innocuous acts. This study sought to underline the unfortunate effects of this “us versus them” theme in public discourse and the pressing need for our media coverage to gauge the impact of routine reiteration.

Hopefully, as Sullivan so eloquently noted in her plea for a more rigorous representation of truth and untruth in the media, the untruths of nationalism can remain rooted in the past. Yet, despite warnings through the years, such as those that resulted from the McCarthy hearings, this has not been the case. Far larger than the false crisis, the hateful lies and the demonization of others that extends from this rhetoric, there is the dark threat of a purer form of nationalism with its pronounced restrictions of freedom: Press, elections, books, speech, healthcare, the very pillars of democracy. This threat, as demonstrated so effectively by conservative lawmakers, has continued into the third decade of the 21st century. *The Washington Post* put it bluntly in a headline: “Trump’s solution to America’s crisis: Nationalism” (Bruenig, 2022)

(Feder, 2016).

Steve Bannon: Thank you very much Benjamin, and I appreciate you guys including us in this. We're speaking from Los Angeles today, right across the street from our headquarters in Los Angeles. Um. I want to talk about wealth creation and what wealth creation really can achieve and maybe take it in a slightly different direction, because I believe the world, and particularly the Judeo-Christian West, is in a crisis. And it's really the organizing principle of how we built Breitbart News to really be a platform to bring news and information to people throughout the world. Principally in the West, but we're expanding internationally to let people understand the depths of this crisis, and it is a crisis both of capitalism but really of the underpinnings of the Judeo-Christian West in our beliefs.

It's ironic, I think, that we're talking today at exactly, tomorrow, 100 years ago, at the exact moment we're talking, the assassination took place in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that led to the end of the Victorian era and the beginning of the bloodiest century in mankind's history. Just to put it in perspective, with the assassination that took place 100 years ago tomorrow in Sarajevo, the world was at total peace. There was trade, there was globalization, there was technological transfer, the High Church of England and the Catholic Church and the Christian faith was predominant throughout Europe of practicing Christians. Seven weeks later, I think there were 5 million men in uniform and within 30 days there were over a million casualties.

That war triggered a century of barbaric — unparalleled in mankind's history — virtually 180 to 200 million people were killed in the 20th century, and I believe that, you know, hundreds of years from now when they look back, we're children of that: We're children of that barbarity. This will be looked at almost as a new Dark Age.

But the thing that got us out of it, the organizing principle that met this, was not just the heroism of our people — whether it was French resistance fighters, whether it was the Polish resistance fighters, or it's the young men from Kansas City or the Midwest who stormed the beaches of Normandy, commandos in England that fought with the Royal Air Force, that fought this great war, really the Judeo-Christian West versus atheists, right? The underlying principle is an enlightened form of capitalism, that capitalism really gave us the wherewithal. It kind of organized and built the materials needed to support, whether it's the Soviet Union, England, the United States, and eventually to take back continental Europe and to beat back a barbaric empire in the Far East.

That capitalism really generated tremendous wealth. And that wealth was really distributed among a middle class, a rising middle class, people who come from really working-class environments and created what we really call a Pax Americana. It was many, many years and decades of peace. And I believe we've come partly offtrack in the

years since the fall of the Soviet Union and we're starting now in the 21st century, which I believe, strongly, is a crisis both of our church, a crisis of our faith, a crisis of the West, a crisis of capitalism.

And we're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict, of which if the people in this room, the people in the church, do not bind together and really form what I feel is an aspect of the church militant, to really be able to not just stand with our beliefs, but to fight for our beliefs against this new barbarity that's starting, that will completely eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years.

Now, what I mean by that specifically: I think that you're seeing three kinds of converging tendencies: One is a form of capitalism that is taken away from the underlying spiritual and moral foundations of Christianity and, really, Judeo-Christian belief.

I see that every day. I'm a very practical, pragmatic capitalist. I was trained at Goldman Sachs, I went to Harvard Business School, I was as hard-nosed a capitalist as you get. I specialized in media, in investing in media companies, and it's a very, very tough environment. And you've had a fairly good track record. So I don't want this to kinda sound namby-pamby, "Let's all hold hands and sing 'Kumbaya' around capitalism." But there's a strand of capitalism today — two strands of it, that are very disturbing. One is state-sponsored capitalism. And that's the capitalism you see in China and Russia. I believe it's what Holy Father [Pope Francis] has seen for most of his life in places like Argentina, where you have this kind of crony capitalism of people that are involved with these military powers-that-be in the government, and it forms a brutal form of capitalism that is really about creating wealth and creating value for a very small subset of people. And it doesn't spread the tremendous value creation throughout broader distribution patterns that were seen really in the 20th century.

The second form of capitalism that I feel is almost as disturbing, is what I call the Ayn Rand or the Objectivist School of libertarian capitalism. And, look, I'm a big believer in a lot of libertarianism. I have many many friends that's a very big part of the conservative movement — whether it's the UKIP movement in England, it's many of the underpinnings of the populist movement in Europe, and particularly in the United States. However, that form of capitalism is quite different when you really look at it to what I call the "enlightened capitalism" of the Judeo-Christian West. It is a capitalism that really looked to make people commodities, and to objectify people, and to use them almost — as many of the precepts of Marx — and that is a form of capitalism, particularly to a younger generation [that] they're really finding quite attractive. And if they don't see another alternative, it's going to be an alternative that they gravitate to under this kind of rubric of "personal freedom."

The other tendency is an immense secularization of the West. And I know we've talked about secularization for a long time, but if you look at younger people, especially

millennials under 30, the overwhelming drive of popular culture is to absolutely secularize this rising iteration.

Now that call converges with something we have to face, and it's a very unpleasant topic, but we are in an outright war against jihadist Islamic fascism. And this war is, I think, metastasizing far quicker than governments can handle it.

If you look at what's happening in ISIS, which is the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, that is now currently forming the caliphate that is having a military drive on Baghdad, if you look at the sophistication of which they've taken the tools of capitalism. If you look at what they've done with Twitter and Facebook and modern ways to fundraise, and to use crowdsourcing to fund, besides all the access to weapons, over the last couple days they have had a radical program of taking kids and trying to turn them into bombers. They have driven 50,000 Christians out of a town near the Kurdish border. We have video that we're putting up later today on Breitbart where they've took 50 hostages and thrown them off a cliff in Iraq.

That war is expanding and it's metastasizing to sub-Saharan Africa. We have Boko Haram and other groups that will eventually partner with ISIS in this global war, and it is, unfortunately, something that we're going to have to face, and we're going to have to face very quickly.

So I think the discussion of, should we put a cap on wealth creation and distribution? It's something that should be at the heart of every Christian that is a capitalist — “What is the purpose of whatever I'm doing with this wealth? What is the purpose of what I'm doing with the ability that God has given us, that divine providence has given us to actually be a creator of jobs and a creator of wealth?”

I think it really behooves all of us to really take a hard look and make sure that we are reinvesting that back into positive things. But also to make sure that we understand that we're at the very beginning stages of a global conflict, and if we do not bind together as partners with others in other countries that this conflict is only going to metastasize. They have a Twitter account up today, ISIS does, about turning the United States into a “river of blood” if it comes in and tries to defend the city of Baghdad. And trust me, that is going to come to Europe. That is going to come to Central Europe, it's going to come to Western Europe, it's going to come to the United Kingdom. And so I think we are in a crisis of the underpinnings of capitalism, and on top of that we're now, I believe, at the beginning stages of a global war against Islamic fascism.

Benjamin Harnwell, Human Dignity Institute: Thank you, Steve. That was a fascinating, fascinating overview. I am particularly struck by your argument, then, that in fact, capitalism would spread around the world based on the Judeo-Christian foundation is, in fact, something that can create peace through peoples rather than antagonism, which is often a point not sufficiently appreciated. (Feder, 2016).

APPENDIX B – Excerpt of Donald Trump’s Warsaw Address, July 6, 2017

(“Here’s the full,” 2017).

On behalf of all Americans, let me also thank the entire Polish people for the generosity you have shown in welcoming our soldiers to your country. These soldiers are not only brave defenders of freedom, but also symbols of America’s commitment to your security and your place in a strong and democratic Europe.

We are proudly joined on stage by American, Polish, British, and Romanian soldiers. Thank you. Thank you. Great job.

President Duda and I have just come from an incredibly successful meeting with the leaders participating in the Three Seas Initiative. To the citizens of this great region, America is eager to expand our partnership with you. We welcome stronger ties of trade and commerce as you grow your economies. And we are committed to securing your access to alternate sources of energy, so Poland and its neighbors are never again held hostage to a single supplier of energy.

Mr. President, I congratulate you, along with the President of Croatia, on your leadership of this historic Three Seas Initiative. Thank you.

This is my first visit to Central Europe as President, and I am thrilled that it could be right here at this magnificent, beautiful piece of land. It is beautiful. Poland is the geographic heart of Europe, but more importantly, in the Polish people, we see the soul of Europe. Your nation is great because your spirit is great and your spirit is strong. For two centuries, Poland suffered constant and brutal attacks. But while Poland could be invaded and occupied, and its borders even erased from the map, it could never be erased from history or from your hearts. In those dark days, you have lost your land but you never lost your pride.

So it is with true admiration that I can say today, that from the farms and villages of your countryside to the cathedrals and squares of your great cities, Poland lives, Poland prospers, and Poland prevails.

Despite every effort to transform you, oppress you, or destroy you, you endured and overcame. You are the proud nation of Copernicus — think of that — Chopin, Saint John Paul II. Poland is a land of great heroes. And you are a people who know the true value of what you defend.

The triumph of the Polish spirit over centuries of hardship gives us all hope for a future in which good conquers evil, and peace achieves victory over war. For Americans, Poland has been a symbol of hope since the beginning of our nation. Polish heroes and American patriots fought side by side in our War of Independence and

in many wars that followed. Our soldiers still serve together today in Afghanistan and Iraq, combating the enemies of all civilization.

For America's part, we have never given up on freedom and independence as the right and destiny of the Polish people, and we never, ever will.

Our two countries share a special bond forged by unique histories and national characters. It's a fellowship that exists only among people who have fought and bled and died for freedom.

The signs of this friendship stand in our nation's capital. Just steps from the White House, we've raised statues of men with names like Pułaski and Kościuszko. The same is true in Warsaw, where street signs carry the name of George Washington, and a monument stands to one of the world's greatest heroes, Ronald Reagan.

And so I am here today not just to visit an old ally, but to hold it up as an example for others who seek freedom and who wish to summon the courage and the will to defend our civilization. The story of Poland is the story of a people who have never lost hope, who have never been broken, and who have never, ever forgotten who they are.

This is a nation more than one thousand years old. Your borders were erased for more than a century and only restored just one century ago.

In 1920, in the Miracle of Vistula, Poland stopped the Soviet army bent on European conquest. Then, 19 years later in 1939, you were invaded yet again, this time by Nazi Germany from the west and the Soviet Union from the east. That's trouble. That's tough. Under a double occupation the Polish people endured evils beyond description: the Katyn forest massacre, the occupations, the Holocaust, the Warsaw Ghetto and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the destruction of this beautiful capital city, and the deaths of nearly one in five Polish people. A vibrant Jewish population — the largest in Europe — was reduced to almost nothing after the Nazis systematically murdered millions of Poland's Jewish citizens, along with countless others, during that brutal occupation.

In the summer of 1944, the Nazi and Soviet armies were preparing for a terrible and bloody battle right here in Warsaw. Amid that hell on earth, the citizens of Poland rose up to defend their homeland. I am deeply honored to be joined on stage today by veterans and heroes of the Warsaw Uprising.

What great spirit. We salute your noble sacrifice and we pledge to always remember your fight for Poland and for freedom. Thank you. Thank you.

And when the day came on June 2nd, 1979, and one million Poles gathered around Victory Square for their very first mass with their Polish Pope, that day, every communist in Warsaw must have known that their oppressive system would soon come crashing down. They must have known it at the exact moment during Pope John Paul II's sermon when a million Polish men, women, and children suddenly raised their voices in a single prayer. A million Polish people did not ask for wealth. They did not ask for privilege. Instead, one million Poles sang three simple words: "We Want God." (20)

This continent no longer confronts the specter of communism. But today we're in the West, and we have to say there are dire threats to our security and to our way of life. You see what's happening out there. They are threats. We will confront them. We will win. But they are threats. (21)

Americans, Poles, and the nations of Europe value individual freedom and sovereignty. We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are. If left unchecked, these forces will undermine our courage, sap our spirit, and weaken our will to defend ourselves and our societies. (22)

What we have, what we inherited from our — and you know this better than anybody, and you see it today with this incredible group of people — what we've inherited from our ancestors has never existed to this extent before. And if we fail to preserve it, it will never, ever exist again. So we cannot fail. (23)

This great community of nations has something else in common: In every one of them, it is the people, not the powerful, who have always formed the foundation of freedom and the cornerstone of our defense. The people have been that foundation here in Poland — as they were right here in Warsaw — and they were the foundation from the very, very beginning in America. (24)

Our citizens did not win freedom together, did not survive horrors together, did not face down evil together, only to lose our freedom to a lack of pride and confidence in our values. We did not and we will not. We will never back down. (25)

Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield -- it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls. Today, the ties that unite our civilization are no less vital, and demand no less defense, than that bare shred of land on which the hope of Poland once totally rested. Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory. (26)

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