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"Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists":
Propagandizing the War on Terror

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1. Introduction

The images of the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001 are some of the most powerful in propaganda history. Using "passenger airplanes as missiles," al-Qaeda targeted the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and a field in Somerset, Pennsylvania (Oxford). It seemed to the public the United States faced a massive crisis of national security, and, consequently, an impending war. Of course, public chaos was inevitable, and propaganda was necessary to unite us as "Americans" and support the national cause. But how did a presidential administration justify entering a war without any concrete evidence that weapons of mass destruction existed or any precisely articulated objective? What made the public so quick to blame an entire religious group despite knowing few facts? What is terrorism; really, and how did the Bush Administration define it to suit their goals? How did establishing that the government was taking every action to protect Americans from the real issues minimize chaos? Was the public truly convinced? From 2001-2004, the Bush Administration used propaganda–"the mechanism by which governments persuade the public of the evilness of the enemy and the justness of its own cause"—in order to effectively unify the home front by instilling a sense of nationalism, brand the stereotypic Muslim enemy stereotype, and ultimately maintain continued public support for the government's cause (Steuter & Wills 18). The administration employed many of propaganda's essential concepts, including: establishing a good vs. evil/hero vs. enemy dichotomy, one simple repeated message, a restricted amount of information, media censorship, use of multiple media outlets, creating stereotypes, scapegoating, "the end justifies the means" mentality, and striking monuments. The Bush administration needed propaganda's convincing power in order to gain public support for what would become a one of the longest wars in America's history. The campaign was, in many respects, quite effective, as various forms of black (propaganda for which the source is not known), white (propaganda for which the source is clearly known), and gray (propaganda for which the source may or may not be disclosed or legitimate) propaganda to create stereotypes, a new vocabulary of terrorism, and a sense of nationalism and American identity still in place over a decade later. The campaign, like most, did have its weaknesses, including the failure to provide one uniform message throughout the extended time of conflict. This paper will assume limited effects theory to examine the campaign qualitatively in order to scrutinize the complexities of its efficacy. This analysis will be limited to George W. Bush's first term in office from 2001-2004, and it will take into account both the campaign's strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, the goal is to gain greater understanding of this campaign's use of propaganda principles and the extent of this campaign's efficacy.

The basis for launching this campaign and war began after the attacks on September 11, 2001. Less than a month later, on October 7, the United States began bombing Afghanistan, citing the fact that al-Qaeda had been harbored there since the 1990s as their

reason for invasion. This was not the first time that the United States had come into conflict with Al-Qaeda, "an international terrorist organization of Islamists that compromises members from numerous countries and has a worldwide presence" (Oxford). Osama Bin Laden founded al-Qaeda in 1988 in conjunction with veterans of the war against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Its goal is to establish a government based on the rule of the caliphs, or successors of Mohammed. In 1998, Bin Laden declared jihad, or Holy War, against the United States and bombed several US embassies as well as the USS Cole. So, in 2001, tension between the United States and this organization had already emerged. Nearly a year later, and after a massive propaganda push which tied all conflict in the Middle East, whether correlated or not, to the attacks of September 11, Bush declared the next target: Iraq, claiming that it was thought that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Though this claim was later discovered to be unfounded, war nevertheless continued, and the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 (Oxford). By the time Bush won reelection in 2004, it was clear that propaganda was firmly established enough that war could continue at the government's discretion.

2. **Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature**
This argument employs qualitative methodology in its cultural analysis of the campaign's communication. Like the Bush Administration, this argument, while recognizing the power of propaganda to manipulate public opinion, also assumes limited effects on the public when analyzing the success of the propaganda campaign—the public certainly wasn't completely brainwashed when consuming the campaign's media. As Altheide and Grimes point out about limited effects theory, "definitions of situations are informed by pervious experiences and meanings," and the campaign would not have a universal or totalitarian effect (621). It seems that, as a whole, using the interpretive method of scholarly literature, the established research on this campaign agrees with our main assertions concerning the campaign's efficacy on the home front and failure internationally, its use of public relations methods to solve their problem of needing to justify the war to the American people, and its employed propaganda principles.
Several sources agree that the Administration was mostly successful in promoting the war and swaying public opinion on the home front, but it was not as effective at swaying the international community. Rampton and Stauber address the efficacy of the Administration's approach in their assertion that "The paradox of the American war in Iraq, however, is that perception management has been much more successful at 'influencing' the 'emotions, motives, and objective reasoning' of the American people than it has been at reaching 'foreign audiences'" (5). It's clear that international powers were opposed to actions of the Administration, as they moved to imperialistic action regardless of the UN's advice. As Carpenter states in his argument about the increasing disapproval of the international community: "European powers [had] to tolerate an increasing arrogant 'take it or leave it' attitude on the part of the US leaders" (520). This echoes what Ikenberry states in his argument about American imperialism: "[T]he United States ha[d] decided that it [was] big enough, powerful enough, and remote enough to go it alone" (54).

Several sources also align with our statement that the Bush Administration needed

propaganda to justify the war to the American people, and they therefore controlled the flow of information about the war and the reasons for its beginnings through a public relations approach. Baran and Davis state that the propagandist sees it "necessary that half-truths and even outright lies be used to convince people to abandon ideas that are 'wrong' and . . . to discredit their opposition" (43). The Bush Administration clearly set an agenda for public knowledge and used black and gray propaganda in order to accomplish it. The Administration used what McLaren and Martin call "ideological state apparatuses," including major media outlets, in order to manage the flow of information (281). Deepa Kumar argues that the media failed in their responsibility as the watchdogs of American society, pointing out that "Bush advisors Karl Rove and Mark McKinnon met with the heads of Viacom, Disney, MGM, and others after 9/11 to discuss how the media could 'help' the government's efforts" (51). And not only did the government organize the media's flow of information, but used immense pressure for media self-censorship. As Anthony DiMaggio points out, "In some ways, the fear is that [as a journalist], you will be necklaced . . . you will have a flaming tire of lack of patriotism put around your neck" (46).

Using this very clear agenda, as reflected in the literature, the Bush Administration used several very specific propaganda principles in order to carry out their objectives. Among the most important of these, which Douglas Kellner addresses in his analysis of wartime rhetoric, was the building of American nationalism—Bush's "use of 'We,' 'I,' and 'you' serve[d] as rhetorical devices to bind himself with the country" (626). Tools such as this served to make Americans believe that this War was a unifying objective and that "we" were fighting to preserve our American freedom. This nationalism also involved creating a good vs. evil, us vs. them dichotomy that could not be questioned. Building nationalism also involved constructing an enemy without, largely through racism and xenophobia. As Steuter and Wills point out, "Racism feeds war's atrocities, offering us a perverse permission to punish demonized others, not so much for their actions as for their difference . . . War . . . supports racism's most dangerous assumptions about that difference, urging that our best hope for security lies in eradicating it in any of its guises" (190).

3. **Analysis of Campaign's Propaganda Techniques and Principles**
In the wake of the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, one of the largest and most complex propaganda campaigns in modern American history was launched on the evening of September 11, 2001 as President Bush sat down in the Oval Office to offer his remarks for the international news. His rhetoric and framing of the conflict established some of what would become the campaign's major ideological foundations. Though the exact enemy was not confirmed at this time, word choices like "terrorist," "mass murder," "evil," and "the worst of human nature," set the stage for framing what would later become a racially-based "enemy without." On the other side of this enemy/hero dichotomy, words and phrases like "American" (used ten times in four minutes), "strong," "beacon for freedom and opportunity," "peace and security," "war against terrorism," and "defen[se] [of] freedom," in conjunction with the repeated display of images of the attacks on the 24/7 news cycle, prepared the American people to support the government's "just" cause of

defending American ideals.

The early part of this campaign involved a barrage of public speeches and statements in order to give the public the perception of safety and trust in their government. The campaign also continued to work the hero/enemy dichotomy and increased stereotyping of the "enemy without". In a speech aired across news networks on September 16, 2001, President Bush began to use the propaganda slogan "War on Terror," to imply a "crusade," or holy war, against an uncivilized "other" and admitted that it was "going to take a while," but it would be worth it because America would endure against this very obscure enemy that was called the "terrorist" (CNN). As Michael Erard notes, "A phrase like 'war on terror' subtly 'encodes a frame in which an intangible terror can be targeted or conquered'" (Steuter & Wills 8). Since "America" prides itself on a strong army that can conquer any threat, these speeches also reinforced feelings of American nationalism. And, after all, "an appropriate war on an appropriately framed enemy can actually be more comforting than frightening" (Steuter & Wills 8). In addition to subtly calling the enemy "uncivilized," early discourse was also full of racist depictions, as "terrorist [came] to stand for all Arabs . . . broadening our target . . . to encompass all Middle-Easterners" (Steuter & Wills 26). In the public discourse, Muslims were compared to rodents, swamp creatures, and cowards, implying that all possible action should be taken to eradicate them (Steuter & Wills 71).

This racial profiling of a rather obscure enemy helped to pave the way for public approval of all government actions in different parts of the Middle East, whether clearly related to the attacks of September 11 or not, and President Bush set the precedent for preemptive action against terror quite early by stating that the United States would take "all action against terror." On October 7, 2001, the first bombs were dropped in Afghanistan and war had begun (PBS). Propaganda tactics continued, and the campaign began to employ public relations professionals and principles in their framing of the war. Thus began a massive campaign of disinformation–intentionally false information– to "spin" the events of war. Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld remarked, '"we need to do a better job to make sure that people are not confused as to what this is about'" (Steuter & Wills 20). The simple, repeated message of the need to conquer the obscure enemy who was seeking to destroy the world's freedom and peace was communicated and, as Bush later echoed, "[I]n my line of work, you got to keep repeating things over and over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda" (Steuter & Wills 20). The word "truth" here is relative, and as demonstrated countless times throughout the campaign, the "truth" was subjective, whatever the government wanted it to be. This concept of truth leads to other tactics used by the Bush administration as the war continued. A large part of promoting the government's "truth" was silencing any opinions that differed from it. Media censorship, both officially and self-inflicted, played a huge role in shaping public perception of what was actually happening in the Middle East. Video news releases, or prepackaged news segments, were made in conjunction with over 20 different federal agencies and played on local news stations throughout the war to appear as actual news coverage, but were in fact coming directly from the government rather that the media watchdogs (Steuter & Wills 167, DiMaggio 47). Even The New York Times refused to criticize the Bush Administration's actions during the

first part of the war (2001-early 2003) (DiMaggio 45). This was likely in part self-censorship and the fear of being harshly criticized for un-patriotic or un-American activity. Dan Rather told BBC in 2002 that "'The fear of being labeled un-patriotic had caused American journalists to engage in a form of self-censorship'" (Steuter & Wills 176). This fear of being called "un-American" eerily echoes Cold War Era discourse and partly explains why an act as invasive as The Patriot Act, which would in essence allow extreme government surveillance and set a precedent of invasive military action, was so easily passed in October 2001. Even now, this euphemistically named law is framed on its webpage as "Preserving Life and Liberty" (Department of Justice).

As the war continued past the turn of the new year, the campaign defined its next objective: the invasion of Iraq. In order to maintain public support, the Administration continued to use similar propaganda concepts in order to "advertise" and justify continued military action. It's clear that much of this systematic, prepackaged, public relations-like propaganda was gray, and the Administration was certainly not fully open with the public. Basically, the Administration wanted the public to believe that all military action was directly caused by the events of 9/11, and another propaganda push in early 2002 began with CIA direction George Tenet claiming links between Iraq and al-Qaeda (PBS). This linkage effectively made Iraq and Saddam Hussein's suspected weapons of mass destruction seem like the obvious next step in nationalistic American democracy promotion. Vice President Dick Cheney claimed that Iraq would inevitably use the weapons of mass destruction, and that it was "not a matter of if, but when" (PBS). Since the American people already had an established hatred of the enemy (which was obviously continually maintained through the campaign) and a deep-seeded sense of fear that their freedom was at risk, it was almost easier to establish a preemptive strategy of war. This strategy was closely related to the success of what McLaren and Martin call this generation's "big lie"—imperialistic, preemptive military action is acceptable because it is protecting Americans from the evil "others" who were responsible for 9/11 (285).

By August 2002, President Bush adamantly dispelled differing opinions about Iraq's potentially harboring weapons of mass destruction, claiming that Saddam Hussein "desired weapons of mass destruction" (regardless of the lack of evidence for this claim) (PBS). Even further, invasion of Iraq was justified to the American people by the idea that we would be spreading our freedom and democracy throughout the world by overtaking this evil enemy. Anthony DiMaggio points out that major U.S. newspapers like The Washington Post reported favorably on this imperialistic action by stating that the U.S. was attempting to "'launch a bold initiative for democratic reform across the region'" (79). Though the American people may have been effectively persuaded to trust their government, the United Nations was not as convinced to support the United States' imperialistic, preemptive war strategy. While Britain had been urging the United States to put off their invasion of Iraq until concrete evidence of weapons of mass destruction was uncovered, the UN also denied the United States military assistance in the invasion because no evidence had been found. It is clear that the United States acted with blatant disregard to other countries' advice, but the simple repeated message of their propaganda, as Secretary of State Colin Powell stated in a speech on ABC, was that "The United

States reserves its option to do whatever it believes might be appropriate to see if there can be a regime change . . . U.S. policy is that regardless of what the [UN] inspectors do, the people of Iraq and the people of the region would be better off with a different regime in Baghdad" (PBS).

In order to maintain support on the home front regardless of international opinion, the Administration launched another push of nationalistic democracy promotion, largely through media censorship. After the United States' invasion of Iraq in March 2003, "five hundred hand-picked journalists from selected western agencies were embedded into U.S. military operations" in order to paint the picture of justified U.S. military action (Steuter & Wills 165). In addition to government mandated censorship, Steuter and Wills assert that during this time, "mainstream media were swept up in a patriotic fervor that impaired its sense of professionalism" and its ability to be democratic media watchdogs (177). Anthony DiMaggio claims that even The New York Times, which "has long been a major agenda setter . . . positive[ly] fram[ed] the Bush administration's claims" concerning the necessity of invading Iraq (71).

It's clear that the propaganda campaign continued to be successful despite the interminable nature of the War on Terror, as President Bush won reelection in 2004. Steuter and Wills assert that this was proof of successful propaganda, and point out the success of statements like "'It is better to fight the War on Terror on the streets of Baghdad than on the streets of New York or Washington'" (14). To gage the campaign's success quantitatively, a 2005 Pew Research study found that in March 2004, only 13% of Americans believed that the United States was overreacting to terrorism, and 81% still favored the war in Iraq (Pew).

Artifact #1: Bush's national address, September 20, 2001
George Bush's address to the American people on September 20, 2001 was crucial to instilling public confidence in their government shortly after one of the most tragic days in American history. Though this speech was not an "official" declaration of war, it served as an important piece of off-white propaganda (the source of the speech was clearly known, but some of the facts it presents could be argued "gray") and a step to unification and instilling enough nationalism to prepare America for a long but "justified" war initiative. This is the speech through which Bush set an important precedent by stating: "Our war on terror begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated" (Washington Post). He warned Americans to prepare for a war "unlike any we have ever seen," but claimed that it was justifiable because all of these evil people would be eradicated (Washington Post). All elements of this speech were carefully crafted to define "American," set up a good vs. evil dichotomy, instill nationalism, create a simple, repeated message, and reinforce people's trust in their government's intentions. It worked so well, in fact, that after watching it, it would have been difficult to disagree with the need for war and still consider oneself as honestly supporting the American cause. After all, as Bush said, "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" (Washington Post). There was no middle ground and no room to disagree.

Before addressing the text of the speech, it's important to recognize that the visuals of this speech are very important to its success because of the 24-hour news cycle and the prevalence of TV and Internet access in 2001. Though George Bush hasn't historically been recorded as a master-speaker (especially as compared to the best propagandists, like Adolf Hitler), here his personality was ideal for the intended purpose. He appeared somber and stern, with just enough emotion to make him appear as the typical American. It was important to portray him with emotion because he became extremely relatable in his response to such a horrible attack. The speech was also set in front of Congress, and behind him was, of course, an American flag. Since he appeared so relatable and authoritatively positioned, people were able to trust in his words and proceeding actions. The actual text of the speech was crafted extremely carefully, and the word choice alone set up the meaning of "America"–a strong and powerful world force. He began with a barrage of emotional images of Americans "deliver[ing]" their own "state of the union" through candlelight vigils, prayer, and the boasting of the American flag (Washington Post). Not only was this highlighting nationalism, but he also claimed that the entire world had seen America's strength through these actions, so he was beginning to establish that we were a strong nation that would undoubtedly win the war.

Next, he used powerful, assertive language to incite fear and to set up a good/evil dichotomy strong enough to craft an "enemy without". It was important that Americans see this enemy as everything opposite of themselves. While Americans were free, democratic, good, and godly, the enemy was freedom-hating, totalitarian, and godless. Whether these "facts" about terrorists were true and to what extent, he was importantly promoting the campaign's narrowly defined "American ideals" with each statement. He referred to Al-Qaeda specifically as "enemies of freedom" and "the enemy of America," who aimed to "disrupt a way of life [democracy]" (Washington Post). He continued to describe them as following the fascist ideology of the 20th century, and this allusion implied that their way of thinking would be eradicated (because it has been historically) by the American way. According to Bush, they hated Americans because of our good and perfect freedom, and he even mentioned our "freedom to disagree" (Washington Post). Ironically, the fact that this speech itself was meant to silence anyone who disagreed with the government's actions effectively illustrated the way propaganda was working here. This attitude was crucial to Bush's framing the last part of the speech. As mentioned previously, he warned Americans to prepare for a lengthy campaign of multiple attacks. After all, if "[w]e [were] in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility [was] to live by them," we needed to take extreme action. He also told Americans they must never lose the resolve of post-9/11. Later in the campaign, this would be even more crucial, as it would rely on pictures like these in the minds of Americans in order to keep justifying any action. Going along with this need to eradicate this "other" enemy without, he also subtly promoted extended government surveillance policies that would soon be passed into law.

Overall, this speech was incredibly effective, as it prepared Americans for the actions of war that this campaign would promote over the next few years. It was a simple message, and if someone questioned it, they were absolutely considered un-American. He portrayed action against terrorism as a fight for civilization, which almost eerily echoes other American campaigns, especially discourse in the Cold War era.

Artifact #2: The fall of the Saddam Hussein statue
During the 2003 War On Terror, the Bush Administration was fighting one of the biggest battles in the Middle East, which culminated in the elimination of Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square in Baghdad, Iraq. It was a replica of Saddam Hussein himself, the President of Iraq since 1979. From events leading up to the Iraq War and during the Iraq War, The Bush Administration decided to invade Iraq to dispose of Saddam based on the accusation that he possessed weapons of mass destruction and had ties with the terrorist group al-Qaeda. Although Saddam Hussein himself was not captured for another eight months, going in and removing the statue of Saddam became a symbolic representation of American victory and democracy promotion and thus a critical moment in the propaganda campaign.

CNN, CBS, FOX, and many other news stations throughout the United States played the falling of the statue over and over again on their 24 hour news cycle beginning on April 9, 2003. Many Americans watched from their homes as Iraqis took down the statue, not only was this the fall of their dictator but it also symbolized the fall of a life under hard regime for many Iraqis. The U.S Marines then came in with armored vehicles and demolished the remains of the statue. The American Flag replaced where the statue once stood. The response and gratitude of the Iraqis was expected. Many Iraqis cheered on American Marines and degraded the remains of the statue. This created a positive uproar from the Iraqi people and twisted American minds into believing we are invading a country to do what we believe to be morally right. The United States was trying to influence the people of Iraq with the promotion of democracy; even though we didn't really ask the Iraqis what they wanted. With the censorship of American journalist being high during the Iraq war and PR firms influencing public media, " Of course we have no way of knowing whether Rendon or any other PR specialist helped influence the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue or other specific images that the public saw during the war in Iraq"(Rampton and Stauber 5). This day was hugely significant, in fact, "Donald Rumsfeld compared the day to the collapse of the Iron Curtain" (Rampton & Stauber 2). "The images of the Statue being toppled are replayed over and over again on American News. This has more to do with perception management . . . because it provokes Americans' interest" (The Tipping Point 2).

On April 15, six days after the destruction of the Saddam Statue, 20,000 citizens of Iraq rallied to oppose the U.S troops while chanting against the American troops as well (Rampton & Stauber). The American people on the home front were being misled to believe that the US was victorious in promoting a positive democracy, but this was clearly not the whole story. The way the U.S government portrays the images of the war makes Americans see and believe what the government employs although there is more than what meets the eye. Americans were staged to believe that the Iraqis praised the American troops for bringing down the statue of their Dictator, although the footage of what the Americans saw isn't exactly the case. The propaganda set out by the Bush Administration was successful in channeling the minds of the American people to believe what was happening was right and twisting the images to make Americans believe it and replaying the images to reinforce what the government intended to be seen.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Bush Administration launched a major propaganda campaign following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. They needed propaganda and employed it to justify their reasons for going to war and to gain public support for the war. Through a massive disinformation campaign, the Administration used black, white, and gray propaganda and numerous propaganda principles, including setting up a good vs. evil dichotomy, censoring the media, creating stereotypes, generating a sense of nationalism, in order to accomplish their objectives. Overall, the campaign was effective in creating support for the war on the home front—evidence from Bush's reelection in 2004 to the fact that it was difficult to find a coherent timeline of war objectives in research for this analysis proved its efficacy—but the campaign was not as effective at swaying the international community.

In future research, it would be beneficial to extend the span of this study to Bush's second term and possibly into the Obama administration to observe how the propaganda campaign for American involvement in the Middle East has evolved with the conflicts. It would also be intriguing to study the role of citizen journalism in influencing the public's perception during this campaign. Since this was one of the first major propaganda campaigns in an age of text messaging, social media, and other rapidly evolving technology, it's difficult to determine the effects of citizen journalism in functioning as counter-propaganda or becoming a form of counter-hegemonic knowledge.

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