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What's in a Name?

Terrorism is perhaps the most emotive, pejorative term in the English language. The nation's leadership has used it to justify policies and actions that the American public would abhor in virtually any other context. US presidents have authorized the use of sabotage, skyjacking, military coups, mass deportations, and assassination when responding to terrorism. They have used secret courts to prosecute suspected terrorists based on hearsay testimony and guilt by association. They have reserved the right to imprison American citizens and deport aliens who financially support terrorist groups, even in cases when those implicated have been unaware of the illegal activities. They have held Americans accused of terrorist activity in solitary confinement for more than two years without the benefit of a trial. They have granted military tribunals jurisdiction over terrorism cases involving immigrants, abandoned the evidentiary standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, and exempted tribunal decisions from appellate review. Indefinite confinement of alleged terrorists and public contemplation of government-endorsed torture demonstrate the extremes US leadership will consider in the fight against terrorism.

The public will never know the full extent of terrorism's influence on American culture. Classified presidential papers, the reluctance of government officials to discuss matters of national security openly, and the secrecy of related judicial proceedings ensure that much of the nation's battle against terrorism will remain beyond the scrutiny of the average citizen. Nevertheless, what can be known about actions undertaken in the name of terrorism can be revealing. One former senior administration official admitted he ignored a direct order from his commander in chief because of his confidence in his own plan for responding to terrorism (Turner 67). Another advocated a military attack on a foreign country allegedly involved in terrorism, believing the action would have a positive influence on the outcome of an upcoming presidential election.[1] Still others have leaked false information to members of the media, including the rumor that a foreign leader believed to be involved in terrorism was a cross-dresser![2]

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The events of September 11 have fundamentally transformed long-standing debates about what constitutes a governmental overreaction to the threat of international terrorism. On an empirical level, it is still true that more Americans have died from crossing the street than from being victims of terrorist attacks, that only six Americans have died as a result of chemical or biological terrorism since 1900, and that no American has ever died from an act of nuclear terrorism (Simon 107–08; Lluma 15). Still, memories of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks have removed many doubts about the destructive potential of America's worst nightmare. Anthrax scares and abandoned al Qaeda laboratories have compounded American's feelings of fear and insecurity, rendering worst-case scenarios about weapons of mass destruction realistic probabilities in the public's imagination. Relatively few Americans would now agree with one scholar's earlier conclusion that the government's response to terrorism is nothing more than a "an old and well-tried trick to divert attention from economic and social problems to focus attention on an ill-defined and frightening enemy" (Wardlaw 78).[3] Security from terrorism has become a primary concern, whether in conversations of the mainstream public or in the deliberations of the political elite.

Those who focus on the comparatively small number of civilian casualties to argue that the government's response to terrorism is disproportionate misunderstand the role that terrorism plays within American society. The leadership does not calculate the magnitude of its response exclusively on the nation's actual or projected loss of life at the hands of terrorists. The threat from terrorism appeals at a much more fundamental level. Terrorism functions as a signifier of American identity, defining what the nation stands for and against. The term divides those who are civilized from those who are uncivilized, those who defend economic freedom from those who would attack America's way of life, and those who support democracy from those who would disrupt it. Supporting the fight against terrorism enacts political allegiance; resisting it opens one to charges of disloyalty.

Reconsider the nation's response in the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11. Calling for national unity in a televised speech the day after the attacks, George W. Bush proclaimed: "Freedom and democracy are under attack" (*FDCH Transcripts* 9/12/01). The nation rallied to support the president. The members of a previously divided, partisan Congress united, singing "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol Building and passing a forty-billion dollar supplemental appropriations bill to aid in the relief and response effort. Members of the public gave more than a billion dollars to the families of those killed in the tragic event. National polling revealed an unprecedented ninety percent approval rating for Bush's handling of the crisis (qtd. in "Bush Best Pop in Poll" 21). American flag sales soared.

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The patriotic surge, made all the more palpable in the face of a dangerous, external threat to the nation, reflected the public's heightened sense of identification. Had the country been less unified, members of the public and the media might reasonably have expected Bush to announce that he knew who the perpetrators were before insisting that he knew why they acted. Interviews conducted by the 9/11 Commission now reveal that while Bush suspected al Qaeda as the perpetrators of the attack, he also considered Iraq and Iran as potentially culpable parties (National Commission, *Final Report* 334).[4] Instead of waiting until he knew who was responsible, Bush publicly grouped all terrorists, including the perpetrators of 9/11, into a homogenous collective characterized by opposition to fundamental American values. Bush proclaimed that terrorists "have a common ideology . . . they hate freedom and they hate freedom-loving people" (*FDCH Transcripts* 9/19/01). His approach defined the clash as one between those who supported America's foundational principles and those who opposed them. Bush reaffirmed America's sense of self by defining the nation's mission as the defender of freedom around the globe.

The notion that depictions of the nation's threats are integral to conceptions of American identity is not new. Noted language theorist Kenneth Burke reminds us that within any social interaction, "identification is compensatory with division" (*On Symbols and Society* 182). In the context of international relations, David Campbell argues that representations of danger are integral to the ever-evolving boundaries of a state's identity (3). Political scientist Murray Edelman explains why leaders define their enemies not according to the harm that they do, but by the identifying function they serve within the political process. He reasons,

> In constructing such enemies and the narrative plots that define their place in history, people are manifestly defining themselves and their place in history as well; the self-definition lends passion to the whole transaction. To support a war against a foreign aggressor who threatens national sovereignty and moral decencies is to construct oneself as a member of a nation of innocent heroes. To define the people one hurts as evil is to define oneself as virtuous. The narrative establishes the identities of enemy and victim-savior by defining the latter as emerging from an innocent past and as destined to bring about a brighter future world cleansed of the contamination the enemy embodies. (76)

Such insights help explain the public's reaction to Bush's early remarks about the terrorists of September 11. Bush's claims about the terrorists' motivations helped elevate a newly elected president into the natural leader

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for those who identified with the cause of supporting freedom and democracy around the globe.

Presidential Discourse and Terrorism

This book explores the ways in which terrorism functions as a term of identity formulation within American society. It examines the public communication strategies of the executive branch of the US government since the end of World War II. The choice to focus on the words of the presidents and their executive branch surrogates is deliberate. The citizenry turns to the president during times of national crisis. The public seeks understanding regarding who is responsible for the attacks, why the nation has been attacked, and what will be the most effective response. In the short run, the public looks to the president for reassurance that the nation will again be safe. Over the longer term, presidential discourse focuses attention on specific aspects of terrorism that warrant ongoing governmental concern.

The chief executive's role as a key spokesperson on the international stage magnifies the influence of presidential discourse about terrorism. Both in public forums and in private correspondence with foreign leaders, the president and his executive branch appointees select the aspects of the terrorism problem and the range of appropriate response options that will receive a heightened focus. Such choices have international ramifications. American presidential discourse has, at times, set the international standard for responding to terrorism. Consider the prime minister of Israel's public justification for air attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in December 2001. Echoing the Bush administration's post–9/11 rhetoric, Ariel Sharon proclaimed, "Just as the United States is conducting its war against international terror, using all its might against terror, so will we, too" ("Excerpts from Talk by Sharon" A8). Sharon followed Bush's lead both in his choice of a military response and in his strategy for justifying the decision to the public.

To a large degree, the executive branch's public terrorism strategy is influential due to the institutional powers of the presidency. The constitutional powers of the commander in chief, clarified and interpreted in the War Powers Act, give presidents the right to engage military forces to defend the nation against external attack (Keynes 1). Accordingly, the offices primarily responsible for responding to terrorism all fall within the purview of the chief executive. Examples include the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Office of Homeland Security, the National Security Council, the State Department's Office of Counter-terrorism, the Office of Public Diplomacy, and the Office of Diplomatic Security.

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Besides these and other standing agencies, presidents have historically constructed small, ad hoc groups of trusted advisors to develop and implement their responses to specific terrorist events (e.g., Jimmy Carter's Special Coordinating Committee during the Iranian hostage crisis and George Bush's Persian Gulf Working Group in response to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait). Taken together, groups constructed within the executive branch are the principle source of policy initiatives and implementation in the terrorism arena (Greenstein 3–4).

Not only do the executive agencies have institutional decision-making authority over terrorism, they routinely have informational control over intelligence related to the nature of the threat and the effectiveness of the nation's response. While the State Department does release an annual list of abbreviated descriptions of international terrorist acts, the bulk of information about the attacks, the alleged perpetrators, and the government's response remains outside the public arena for extended periods. Even information related to terrorist events that occurred more than two decades ago remains classified.

The power of the executive branch to control the bulk of the nation's terrorism information is unlikely to change. Historically, presidents have argued to the public and to the courts alike that failure to grant them exclusive access to certain information compromises the intelligence-gathering capabilities of the government. Bill Clinton publicly refused to reveal the evidence justifying his bombing of the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant in August 1998 in the interest of protecting US intelligence methods; George W. Bush offered a similar rationale for not initially releasing the evidence regarding bin Laden's involvement in the attacks of September 11, 2001. Bush further expanded presidential prerogatives over classified materials by signing Section 3(d)2 of Executive Order 13233 on November 1, 2001 ("Executive Order"). The order permitted a sitting president to withhold national security information, even in cases where former presidents have authorized access to their own records. Senator Orrin Hatch's indiscreet mention of U.S. intercepts of Osama bin Laden's satellite phone conversations in the early days after September 11 may serve as a prototypical cautionary tale for future presidents willing to expand public information about terrorism, given bin Laden's immediate and highly publicized shift to other modes of communication.[4] The executive branch will unlikely relinquish its hold on terrorism data, given the potential costs of having it more widely disseminated.

With access to information about terrorism strictly limited, the executive branch becomes the primary source of information for the media's coverage of terrorist events. Members of the American media have tended to reiterate administration's statements about terrorism, rather than present a balanced presentation of competing perspectives. In a study of follow-up terrorism

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stories in the *New York Times* written in the early 1990s, for example, Steven Livingston concludes that government officials encouraged a selective interpretation of terrorism that replicated and reinforced the State Department's official reports on terrorism. Competing viewpoints received far less press attention. Livingston notes "officials and offices of ideological and/or foreign policy adversaries of the United States" accounted for only five percent of the references in the stories on terrorism (75). Embedded reporters in the recent US war with Iraq have further reinforced the media's reiteration of the administration's message. Positioned within military units outside of Iraqi strongholds and subjected to American commanders' prerogatives for selective news blackouts, field reporters presented news accounts generally consistent with the administration's public framework during the major combat operations in Iraq.

The events of September 11 altered the relationship between the media and official administration sources to some degree. Brigitte Nacos reveals that US television networks mentioned bin Laden more frequently than they did President Bush after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks (41). Nevertheless, she concludes that the executive branch still remained a powerful influence in media coverage. She points to Condoleezza Rice's successful plea to the networks to limit coverage of bin Laden's threats against the American people to avoid the incitement of more violence (48–49). She also cites the media's likening of George W. Bush's address to the joint session Congress to that of Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and that of Winston Churchill during World War II (50). Assessing media coverage related to both bin Laden and the anthrax attacks, Nacos concludes, "In the face of an ongoing terrorism crisis at home and a counterterrorism campaign abroad, the mainstream watchdog press refrained from barking in the direction of public officials" (51).

Jarol B. Manheim studied why the media relies so heavily on official sources. He concludes that a lack of direct access to foreign events, limits on the media's inclination to devote resources to foreign news reporting, and the new era of instantaneous communications has made "the manipulation of the news and public images of actors and events in foreign affairs actually more likely to have an effect than it [would] in the domestic sphere (127). With the media contributing to the issue agenda for the public at large, journalists' continued reliance on governmental sources magnifies the importance of the executive branch's public terrorism strategy.

Compounding the influence of executive branch statements is the heavy reliance on such sources by academic researchers. Joseba Zuliaka and William A. Douglass dramatically critique the entire field of terrorism research when they observe, "One characteristic of the work of terrorism experts is the very prohibition upon personal discourse with their subjects.

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Authors writing about terrorism must abide by this taboo. It is telling that one can claim expertise regarding 'terrorists' without ever having seen or talked to one" (179). Academics, shunning interviews with the terrorist themselves, routinely turn to sources within the executive branch and administration databases as the foundation for their eventual findings. Prominent scholars engaged in terrorism research have extensive connections with the federal government and its attendant funding apparatuses (Collins 155–74). Taken as a whole, the presidents' institutional authority over terrorism, access to classified information, and agenda-setting function for much of academe and the media ensure that the discourse of the executive branch is the single most vital source for understanding how terrorism functions within American culture.

Terrorism and Ideology

Contemporary presidents evoke terrorism as a key component in their ideological formulations of the American culture, but the precise nature of that role remains a subject of open debate. Some argue that terrorism is an ideology in and of itself, masquerading as objective reality while "actually expressing the narrow interests of a dominant group" (Collins 157). Others deny that terrorism qualifies, because the term "does not itself explain and evaluate conditions or provide people with an orientation" (Ball and Dagger 8). Evaluating the merit of these competing perspectives depends on one's definition of ideology, itself a contested concept (Cormack 9–10; Williams 55–71; and McLellan 1–9).

I myself would argue that terrorism functions as a symbolic marker of the culture that does not represent an ideology, in and of itself, because it fails to evoke a coherent, positive orientation for members of the collective. However, the term does perform ideological work within the culture. By functioning as a recognized point of contrast, terrorism encompasses behaviors considered unacceptable for those belonging to American society. The term's adaptability of meaning and usage renders it a powerful tool for those wishing to advance various ideological perspectives.

John Lucaites and Celeste Condit, both scholars in the field of communication, theorize the evolutionary process of language development associated with ideological orientations. For them, terms serving as cultural markers must function as three distinct types of discourse units: namely, labels, narratives, and ideographs (7–8). Given the centrality of these three units to the transformation of terrorism's cultural meaning, the remainder of this section will elaborate the role each plays within a general communication

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context and within the specific application to modern presidential discourse about terrorism.

Labeling

Labels are linguistic terms used to describe agents, agencies, acts, scenes, or purposes within the public vocabulary (Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* xv). The process of labeling is not neutral. Each use of a term is a choice (whether conscious or unconscious) that emphasizes certain aspects of what is being described, while de-emphasizing others. "Wars of aggression" rather than "wars of liberation," "collateral damage" rather than "civilian casualties," and "prisoners of war" rather than "battlefield detainees" (to name but a few) simultaneously highlight and obscure aspects of the referenced material circumstances. By happenstance or by design, labeling necessarily entails perspective taking.

This book examines the evolving perspectives of the terrorism label within the public discourse of the executive branch since the end of World War II. The study encompasses all material circumstances where the executive branch made more than one hundred public references to an event or series of events as terrorism. The decision to focus on clustered references rather than on more unique, isolated examples of the use of the terrorism label stems from Burke's insight that mundane repetition of key terms invites an audience to associate with a particular ideological orientation (*On Symbols and Society* 229).

A review of executive branch rhetoric since World War II reveals dramatic distinctions between clustered and isolated usages of the terrorism label. On a few occasions, the nation's leadership has used the word "terrorism" to describe agents as diverse as American college students, US World War I veterans, a US senator, and members of the antiabortion movement. Such cases, however, have been anomalies in the totality of presidential discourse. The clustered references emergent from the speeches of the executive branch have highlighted extremist groups that influence foreign states (Carter), state sponsors of terrorism (Reagan and George W. Bush), terrorist states (both Bush administrations), nonstate terrorist actors (Clinton and George W. Bush), and terrorist-sponsored states (George W. Bush).

When applying the terrorism label to actions, a full range of activities has qualified for inclusion in the term's meaning. The presidents have made occasional mention of antiwar protests, computer hacking, domestic violence, protests against US governmental policies, and political disagreements between presidential candidates at election time as terrorism. In their clustered references, however, the nation's leadership has tended to focus on more extreme forms of violence. Examples have included acts of assassina-

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tion, kidnapping, torture, hostage taking, bombing, foreign military aggression, and the use (or potential use) of weapons of mass destruction.

In public discussions of terrorist scenes, the presidents have historically narrowed the range of possible locations worldwide. They make infrequent mention of acts perpetrated within the borders of Europe, Africa, Central and South America, or Australia. In their clustered references, the Middle East has emerged as the dominant backdrop for terrorism since World War II. Spectacular terrorist assaults in North America have also received focused presidential attention (e.g., the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the 1996 Olympic bombing, the first World Trade Center bombing, and the events of 9/11).

When members of the executive branch have used terrorism to depict purpose in their public statements, they have generally erased the terrorists' stated rationales (whether secular or religious) for their own behavior. Only rarely do the presidents discuss jihad, revolution, retaliation, or other terrorist causes. More regularly, the presidents have insisted that such enemies act out of goals of regional/world domination or out of an ingrained hatred for democratic ideals.

At times, the clustered events chosen for inclusion in this book may be frustrating for the reader. Sensible observers could easily categorize the events that contemporary presidents have labeled terrorism to be acts of war, instances of nonterrorist political violence, or something else altogether. Nevertheless, the choice to allow the presidents' words to define what constitutes terrorism is essential to understanding the ideological ramifications of the cultural marker. As this book will illustrate, knowing the terrorist threat as defined by the nation's leaders helps illuminate the cultural boundaries of American society.

Narratives

Serving as a label alone is insufficient to elevate terrorism into a language marker of American culture. The term must also function within recurrent societal narratives that provide meaning to the lives of the community's members. Narratives are public stories that provide coherence and consistency to the scenes, characters, and themes that guide the moral conduct of a society (Fisher 64–65). They structure the relationships between and among various labels (Lucaites and Condit 8). Their meanings come, in part, from the interrelationships that a given story has within the context of other narrative accounts (Katriel and Shenhar 376). Narratives can provide justifications to perpetuate the status quo or be compelling reasons for social change.

Narratives are critical to the formulation and reformulation of the multiple levels of identity. Jürgen Habermas theorizes a complex interaction

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between narratives and an individual's identity. He argues that individuals "can develop personal identities only if they recognize that the sequence of their own actions form narratively presentable life histories; they can develop social identities only if they recognize that they maintain their membership in social groups by way of participating in interactions, and thus that they are caught up in the narratively presentable history of collectivities. Collectivities maintain their identities only to the extent that the ideas members have of their lifeworld overlap sufficiently and condense into unproblematic background convictions" (136). At the personal, social and cultural level, narratives function to integrate discrete aspects of an individual's existence into a coherent sense of identity.

Narratives also function to warrant and guide the behavior of individuals hoping to qualify as members of the collective. Maurice Charland offers three ways that narratives help constitute collective publics (133–50). First, narratives render collective subjects by demonstrating how, through the story's characters, members of the polity are supposed to believe and behave to demonstrate community allegiance. Narratives define the attitudes and actions characteristic both of the members and of the outcasts of the collective.

Second, narratives transform individuals into transhistorical subjects. Narratives identify what interpretations of historical events are relevant for understanding the current opportunities and challenges of the community. Not only do narratives select and emphasize certain salient events of the past; they also reframe interpretations of past events in a manner consistent with the moral force of the story.

Finally, narratives create an illusion of freedom for individuals functioning within the collective. Individuals believe that they are selecting the stories that they will accept, the beliefs that they will cherish, and the behaviors that they will practice as members of the culture. Once identification with the narratives ensues, however, free choice becomes an illusion. The narrative plotline defines what concerns are important and what public beliefs and acts are appropriate. The scene of the narrative identifies the relevant elements of the situation that should influence thought and action of the culture. Taken together, Charland's three insights into the functioning of narratives reveal how the stories embodied within societal discourse help form the boundaries of the culture.

Narratives are not static; they change over time. The process of narrative evolution is complex and multifaceted. The public tends to cling to accepted narrative accounts when other stories confront them directly (M. H. Ross). Nonetheless, accepted societal narratives do change. Sometimes narratives combine, as in the case of two or more stories being compatible and complementary with each other (Mink 142). At other times, the acceptance of one

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narrative involves the rejection of the other (Bennett and Edelman 158). Narratives must evolve or risk losing their definitional currency for the members of the collective.

The use of narratives has been a recurrent quality of modern presidential discourse about terrorism. The nation's leadership has presented terrorism to the public as a moral drama, pitting good against evil in an ongoing battle for the survival of civilization itself. George W. Bush's recent announcement of America's new war on terrorism has enhanced the likelihood that narratives will play a central role within future presidential discourse on terrorism. Narratives function at the level of a generic expectation for presidential war discourse. They emerge as an anticipated element of war discourse because they dramatically exhort a generally reluctant American public to favor the use of military force (Campbell and Jamieson 107–11). With the United States now involved in a long-term war against terrorists, narratives will likely play a central role in the future terrorism discourse of the presidency.

Presidents since the end of World War II have used the terrorism label within a diverse set of societal narratives already familiar to American audiences from other contexts. Notably, the presidents have borrowed narratives from literature, religion, military affairs, and American history to develop their public communication strategies about terrorism. These seemingly diverse narratives have relied on similar themes and characterizations that have contributed a consistency and cogency to US discourse about terrorism throughout the contemporary period.

Modern US terrorist narratives have displayed one key difference traceable to the unique approaches of the two political parties. The point of clash mirrors a long-standing debate in scholarly terrorism circles: whether crime or war constitutes the most appropriate metaphor to apply to the unconventional violence of terrorism. Democratic administrations have focused on narratives that feature crime as the predominant theme since the end of the Vietnam War; Republican administrations have relied on stories that borrow heavily from US war narratives. Despite the dominance of one metaphor within each of the two parties' narratives, both groups have resisted an exclusive focus on either crime or war. Neither party has been willing to cede to their opponents complete linguistic control over the two dominant terrorism metaphors. Nonetheless, the decision to focus on crime or war as the featured element of the narrative does have ideological implications for American society, as the next section will preview.

Ideographs

Terrorism, like all labels recurrent in society's dominant narratives, must function as an ideograph to constitute a defining cultural term. Ideographs

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are collective terms of political allegiance that embody a society's ideals. Michael McGee, the originator of the concept, defines an ideograph as a "one-term sum of an orientation, the species of 'God' or 'Ultimate' term that will be used to symbolize the line of argument the meanest sort of individual *would* pursue if that individual had the dialectical skills of philosophers, as a defense of a personal stake in and commitment to the society" (7). Ideographs "typically serve as the primary purpose term" (Lucaites and Condit 8) for the central narratives of a culture. They define the foundational values that serve as the basis of a culture's identity. Equality, justice, and liberty are examples operating within the American culture.[5]

Ideographs are not limited to ideal cultural values; they also include terms that define the society through negation. To know what a culture is requires an understanding of what it is not. Negative ideographs contribute to our collective identity by branding behavior that is unacceptable (McGee 15). American society defines itself as much by its opposition to tyranny and slavery as it does by a commitment to liberty and equality. Nevertheless, the few studies that do mention negative ideographs limit their discussion to the antithetical relationship such terms have with a culture's foundational values. Most prevalent is the observation that terrorism frequently functions in opposition to freedom and democracy (Parry-Giles 191; and Railsback 412).

A brief synopsis of the four defining characteristics of ideographs reveals that terrorism currently functions to define American culture through negation. The first definitional element of an ideograph is that it must be "an ordinary language term found in political discourse" (McGee 15). If a particular term gains usage only in conversations of the political elite, it lacks the persuasive impact needed for the broader audience that identifies itself with the culture. To perform ideological work for the culture, the term must "come to be part of the real lives of the people whose motives they articulate" (7). It must be readily available for use by members of the collective.

Certainly, terrorism has qualified as a common term of political discourse. It has been the subject of thousands of presidential addresses and scholarly books. It has been the topic of blockbuster movies (e.g., *Die Hard*, *Air Force One*, and *The Negotiator*) and, since September 11, the repeated subject of both print and television advertisements. Political cartoonists have capitalized on the term's currency with the public, as have those who are in the business of selling patriotic memorabilia. Terrorism's recent impact on the stock market, unemployment, and airport security increase the likelihood that rank-and-file citizens will be using the term in their political discourse into the foreseeable future.

The second characteristic of the ideograph is that the term must be "a high order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (McGee 15). To function as a

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marker for the culture, a label must be capable of an expansive range of possible applications. If a term's meaning is constrained to a particular set of circumstances, it lacks the transcendent character necessary to encompass and appeal to a broad cultural audience that includes diverse subgroups. Cultural markers must be flexible, permitting shifts over time in the perspectives of those who define themselves to be members of the in-group. Elasticity of the term's meaning allows for renewed and reaffirmed interpretations for a group's identity.

By virtually all accounts, terrorism has been such a flexible term. It has defied concrete definition. Rarely has a book on the subject failed to bemoan the plethora of definitions used by government officials, scholars, and the media. A sampling of scholarly opinion about terrorism exposes the futility of striving for a consensus definition of the term:

- "Encapsulating terrorism in all its varieties could require upwards of fifty distinct attributes, potentially yielding an unworkable million different combinations." (Weimann and Winn 25)
- "Terrorism can mean just what those who use the term (not the terrorists) want it to mean." (Jenkins 1–2)
- Terrorism "resembles pornography, difficult to describe and define, but easy to recognize when one sees it." (Laqueur, "Reflections on Terrorism" 381)
- Terrorism is "a catch-all pejorative, applied mainly to matters involving force or political authority in some way but sometimes applied even more broadly to just about any disliked action associated with someone else's policy agenda." (Pillar 12)
- In the context of terrorism, there are "especially strong reasons for avoiding the excessive preoccupations with definitions." (Roberts 9)

The flexible application of the terrorism label has been precisely what has allowed it to remain a resonant indicator of identity for an ever-evolving American society. Its elasticity of meaning has permitted the term to adapt to changes in the international context. Early on, terrorism referred to violence committed by the state (i.e., during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution). Modern-day interpretations of the term have not abandoned its historical meaning, as presidential references to state-sponsored terrorism attest. At the same time, however, the nation's leadership has applied the term to the very antithesis of its earlier meaning. Now terrorism involves not only politically motivated violence by the state, but also that carried out by individuals or groups against the state. Any act of violence carried out for any reason by any group or individual can conceivably qualify as an act of terrorism.

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As with other ideographs, the lack of clear goals related to terrorism has not prevented the term from prompting the collective commitment of the American public. The US citizenry has proven time and again its willingness to unite behind military actions targeting terrorist activity. US retaliatory bombings in Libya, Afghanistan, the Sudan, and Iraq have garnered the overwhelming support of the public.[6] Even the failed rescue mission in Tehran in 1980 attracted public support, because it demonstrated the Carter administration's willingness to do something to end the hostages' confinement.[7] The widespread presence of yellow (or now red, white, and blue) ribbons, candles, American flags, and chants of "USA" at sporting events have been signs of the unity of the US commitment in the fight against terrorism.

The third characteristic of the ideograph is that it "warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable" (McGee 15). The public accepts extreme measures due to a belief that a threat exists to the continued existence of the culture. Ideographs evoke an "end justifies the means" approach, initially compromising the very foundational values that America is ultimately fighting to protect.

Even a cursory review of presidential actions in response to terrorism reveals that the term has justified response measures that the American public would not ordinarily accept from its leadership. The opening of this book details several of the actions that presidents have employed in order to defend the nation against terrorism. Others include asset forfeiture, governmental monitoring of library records and computer usage, temporary suspension of the freedom to associate, revocation of a suspect's ability to speak to an attorney in private, and the calculated risk of losing critical foreign alliances. Increasingly, civil liberties have lost their sacred status within American society as the public has felt increasingly at risk from terrorism.

The final characteristic of the ideograph is that the term's meaning is culture-bound. Members within the society are socialized or conditioned to the vocabulary of ideographs "as a prerequisite for 'belonging' to the society" (McGee 15). A willingness to accept a given interpretation of the term becomes a virtual litmus test for membership within the collective.

Perhaps no phrase better illustrates the cultural nature of the terrorism definition more than the oft-repeated statement that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." In the 1970s the Ayatollah Khomeini was a powerful religious leader to one culture, while qualifying to another as a despicable zealot who enabled kidnappers of diplomatic personnel. In the 1980s the Contras were alternatively depicted as a critical insurgency group bent on bringing freedom to an oppressed nation or as a lawless group of terrorists who raped, kidnapped, and tortured the civilian population of

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Nicaragua. By the 1990s Osama bin Laden was either the mastermind of a brutal international terrorist network or a leader of a righteous jihad, depending on one's cultural perspective.

In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, public rejection of the maxim that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" has become increasingly commonplace. A number of government officials have denounced the view that the definition of terrorism depends on one's cultural orientation. Given the rise in patriotism associated with the tragedies at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, such opinions should not be surprising. The inclination to see one's own cultural perspective as the only interpretation reflects how embedded the term has become within America's definition of itself. Attacked and vulnerable, the nation has less tolerance for dissension and competing views. Just as antiwar sentiments prompted accusations of anti-Americanism during the Vietnam War, acknowledgment of cultural differences about terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 has constituted an act of collective betrayal for some.

Having met the four definitional requirements, terrorism constitutes an ideograph for American culture. It is a cultural-bound, abstract term of ordinary political discourse that warrants the use of power in ways the public has normally considered unacceptable. Like all conceptions of collective identity, ideographs do change. Over time, the meaning of any specific ideograph both expands and contracts in response to changing circumstances. To understand the progressions of terrorism as a contemporary ideograph, this book will explore the shifts of the term's meaning since the end of World War II. The meaning of ideographs also changes due to interactions with other slogans characteristic of collective life (McGee 10-14). As this book will demonstrate, terrorism's recurrent pairing with terms such as "piracy," "barbarism," "tyranny," "slavery," "Nazism," and "Communism" has all contributed to the term's meaning.

Administrative choices related to terrorism have ideological implications for American culture. The flexible application of the terrorist label gives the nation's leadership substantial freedom in defining the acts, agents, agencies, purposes, and scenes that will fall outside the boundaries of the culture. The terrorist label encompasses a plethora of potential outcasts, making it a powerful linguistic option for those who would employ it.

For administrations that focus on crime as the featured element of their terrorism narratives, the ideological force of the term is comparatively small. The primary reason is that conventional responses to crime concentrate on the individual. Is the person guilty or innocent? Has the individual received proper due process? If punishment is warranted, is it consistent with the mitigating circumstances of the individual's life history? The crime metaphor's focus on the individual undercuts the totalizing impulse of ideology. Were an

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administration to assign guilt to an entire group or class of individuals, they would expose themselves to charges of racial profiling or judicial unfairness.

The war narrative, by contrast, invites the public to embrace an ideological perspective related to the conflict. The culture is under attack, not from an individual as the crime narrative would portend, but from a menacing group that threatens the continued existence of America's cherished values. The evocation of ideological discourse, which in turn prompts the nation's rank-and-file to accept new powers and prerogatives for their leadership, leads to a spiral of events that gives impulse to cultural warfare.

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