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THE ETHOS OF DONALD TRUMP: TRUMP'S LACK OF PRESIDENTIAL
DECORUM FROM 2016 FORWARD AND ITS IMPACT ON AMERICAN POLITICS

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2022

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DECORUM FROM 2016 FORWARD AND ITS IMPACT ON AMERICAN POLITICS

NORA M. KRALL

ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

In American politics, the concept of presidential decorum is upheld through the complexity of political and presidential rhetoric. When Donald Trump became president, he sought to break what standard decorum was in order to justify his desires as president. This breaking of decorum is complex in nature and is paired with mediatization, demagoguery, populism and collectivism, all of which are rhetorical strategies that challenge the norms within American democracy and in turn, have created a shift in what is considered presidential. Donald Trump seeks to utilize his personal ethos alongside these rhetorical methods to infiltrate multiple subsets of society, thus creating a dangerous silent majority that thrives off of these rhetorical tools as proof of Trump's validity. Trump's populist actions give way to an immense amount of political otherization, polarization, and ultimately create a lasting impact on democracy for the future.

Keywords: Decorum, populism, Donald Trump, demagogue, mediatization

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I'd like to thank my committee Dr. Christopher Minnix, Dr. Jaclyn Wells, and Dr. Cynthia Ryan. Your support for me during my years at UAB has been incredible and shaped me into the academic I am today. I would not have been able to have completed this project without your kindness and appreciation for my contributions. I'd also like to thank Dr. Rebecca Bach for your ability to push my boundaries in a way I never knew possible. Without your commentary, empathy, and critiques, I would not seek to reach the heights of my capabilities and for that I cannot thank you enough. I'd like to thank Dr. Bruce McComiskey as well for his teachings and his initial push for me to obtain a master's degree. If it were not for our many talks during office hours and your incredible teaching, I would not be writing these acknowledgments. I'd also like to thank Dr. Robert Koch, one of the most inspiring professors I've ever met, for pushing me to transfer to UAB in the first place. You knew my potential before I ever did, and I would not have made it to this point without your tough love. I'd like to thank my parents for their support throughout my UAB journey from my undergraduate degree to my master's degree and for always having faith in their daughter, the English major. I cannot thank my boyfriend Stephen enough for easing my anxiety and reading every paragraph, sentence, and theoretical concept I threw his way regardless of having the complete opposite field of study as me. Your love and support pushed me to make it through the end of this thesis and I am so lucky. To my brother Landon who could discuss political theory with me all day long, I thank you for the lighthearted jokes and the many late-night dinners. Finally, I want to thank the grassroots movements of this country who make discussing topics such as this in an unbiased way possible. And

to every person affected tragically by this dangerous rhetoric, we see you, we hear you, and this project is for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 HOW TO CREATE A POLICTIAN OUT OF DONALD TRUMP: TRUMP’S RHETORIC AND ITS APPLICATION.....	11
Mediatization of the Presidency as a Theoretical Concept: How the Presidency is Consumed Through Media.....	16
The Functionality of Charisma in the White House.....	21
What is a Demagogue? Demagoguery and its Functionality in Trump’s Presidency...25	
Conclusion.....	29
2 MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: DONALD TRUMP’S CAMPAIGN TRAIL.....	32
Donald Trump ‘rallying’ the Troops.....	36
The First GOP Primary Debate: Donald Trump Steals the Show.....	39
Trump Versus Clinton: A Clear Rhetorical Divide	43
3 DONALD TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY JANUARY 20 TH , 2016 – JANUARY 20 TH , 2021.....	52
Inauguration and American Carnage: The Beginning of Trump Era Politics.....	53
The COVID-19 Pandemic and Civil Unrest: Real American Carnage.....	58

The 2020 Presidential Debates: Trump’s Rhetoric and Its Chaos Exposed.....	64
Insurrection at the Capital: Trump’s Final Tirade.....	69
4 CONCLUSION: DONALD TRUMP’S LEGACY AND THE NEW REPUBLICAN AGENDA.....	75
REFERENCES.....	80

Introduction

Despite a multitude of popular and scholarly lenses on Donald Trump's presidency, most scholars agree that Donald Trump has fundamentally changed American politics as we know it. From his surprising election in 2016, to his continual decline and ultimate defeat in 2020, Donald Trump has created a complex, polarizing presidential rhetoric that seeks to confirm the personal biases of Trump and his constituents, and demonize his critics who disagree with him. Donald Trump and his constituents' work to create a rhetoric that is not only multifaceted in content and appearance, but infiltrates the public news media sphere on multiple levels, creating a presidency that breaks what is considered traditional presidential decorum and creates a rhetorical shift that seems consumable and thus, closer to the "average American" than ever before. Yet, as Trump's presidency moved forward, Trump's polarized politics continued to confuse liberal audiences therefore calling into question the innate trust of Trump's erraticism. This modern rhetorical strategy functions as a means to break down traditional presidential decorum and finds its power within multiple spheres of news media and contemporary communication technology despite appearing to lack both logic and structure. This power

is derived from the large audience that contemporary communication technology¹ can reach yet, this rhetorical power functions beyond the audience. Trump's rhetoric and lack of decorum is firmly rooted in the traditional rhetorical strategies of timing, emotion, and credibility in tandem with modern communication so as to simplify, justify, and perpetuate the passivity of Trump's political knowledge, thus legitimizing his rather basic understanding of formal politics in an informal sphere intended for simple communication to the masses. Contemporary communication technology platforms have worked to place Trump's rhetoric in spheres where a president has not typically appeared, allowing other members of the Republican party to utilize this same communication strategy and lack of decorum to mimic Trump's political growth. As the leader of the Republican Party and more broadly, the country, Donald Trump sets the rhetorical tone which those can follow. Therefore, because Trump has set his unique ethos as the example, political leaders can either choose to quietly recognize it and vote accordingly, or infiltrate it in their personal campaigns and thus, their decisions regarding contemporary communication and their own rhetoric. Trump utilizes simple, immediate communication to push his populist rhetoric forward while simultaneously taking advantage of the limitations of said communication in order to disregard the complexity of the political issues at hand. This then shifts Republican constituents' understanding of political platforms, agendas, and the political decorum of the right. This multilevel,

¹ Smartphones, social media, video advertisements, etc., an informal rhetorical setting

multifaceted infiltration of populism through contemporary communication technology challenges the complexity of politics, but also warrants the formation of multiple identities because of the type of mass participation that Donald Trump normalizes through his rhetoric.

In this project, I will focus on how Donald Trump's rhetoric functions to redefine presidential decorum and the ways in which the use of contemporary communication technology functions alongside this shift in decorum to enable different forms of populism. The lens of my analysis focuses on Donald Trump's rhetoric as a collective identity. Collectivism², in this scenario, works to show the ways in which Donald Trump utilizes a collective identity as a means of personal identity for his followers, further perpetuating what America *could* be if one is a member of Trump's collective group. In turn, Trump's collective political identity within his followers works to make other political ideas outside of this group perspective, illegitimate. Alongside collectivism comes populism³ which is a rhetorical strategy that seeks to represent the "common man" and works to generalize political issues so as to create mass appeal. Populism perpetuates the concept of personal identity that collectivism introduces, in that the collective group can be combined with the concept of the common man and thus generalizations about popular issues can appear more legitimate. These two strategies work with one another to

² The practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it ("collectivism," Miriam-Webster).

³ The policies or principles of any of various political parties which seek to represent the interests of ordinary people ("populism," OED).

create a powerful presidential rhetoric utilized by Donald Trump that actively works to confirm the opinion of the group as truth. The two political parties in America thrive under the concept of a collective good as well as a moral high ground. Furthermore, the contemporary communications fully utilized in modern politics create a wider divide between what is considered technical communication and casual communication.

There is also the concept of the presidency as something that is now consumable. This idea of consumability comes from the established lens of collectivism, but even more so, the gradual mediatization of individual politicians which then automatically triggers the mediatization of an individuals' political stance and thus, works to mediatize politics as a whole. Mediatization⁴ under this particular political lens is described by Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winifried Schulz in their article, "Mediatization' of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?" as such: "mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media" (Mazzoleni and Schulz 250). or an alternative definition by Jesper Strömbäck and Peter Van Aelst in their article "Why Political Parties Adapt to the Media: Exploring the Fourth Dimension of Mediatization" reads: "the mediatization of politics has been described as a long-term process through which the media have become increasingly independent from politics and through which politicians and political

⁴ a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics or, "the action or process whereby the mass media comes to control or affect something" ("mediatization," OED).

institutions have become increasingly dependent on the media” (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 342). When viewing mediatization as a dependent strategy, paired with long-term process and effects that Strömbäck and Van Aelst mention, it becomes clear that mediatization is a strategy in which Donald Trump is able to benefit from greatly through his own political dependence and ultimately, a strategy that is crucial to his rhetorical success amongst his collective constituents. Trump’s usage of mediatization shows that there is a clear process surrounding his choices of communication⁵ with his audience and, even more so, a dependence on immediate audience engagement which furthers the consumability of Trump’s populist rhetoric.

Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winifried Schulz further discuss mediatization and its effects on democracy and confirm the notion that expansion of mass media communication in relation to political rhetoric is a threat to the ways in which politics are consumed and understood. Mazzoleni and Schulz discuss media as “the fourth branch of government,” (248) meaning that the media is just as influential in decision making as political leaders are. Mass media as the “fourth branch” (248) works to further perpetuate the notion of collectivism and its connection to personal identity, in tandem with consumption and digestible content that consumability creates. Meaning, as mass media communication further mediatizes political figures and skews political literacy, the average American will fall victim to the influence of this “branch.” The concept of the “fourth

⁵ Ex. Twitter or Facebook

branch” (248) is imperative in understanding the way Trump’s rhetoric is multifaceted and widely distributed. The influence of the consumption of mass media communication creates an extremely simple segue from implicit “understanding” of a political issue by consumers to implied action of consumers. The influential ability to impact the comprehension of complicated political issues creates a multilevel introduction to politics that appears to be digestible. Furthermore, Mazzoleni and Schulz go on to discuss mass media as avenues for accessibility to political content where they say, “The mass media are not mere passive channels for political communicators and political content. Rather, the media are organizations with their own aims and rules that do not necessarily coincide with, and indeed often clash with, those of political communicators” (249). However, mass media as a whole has long perpetuated the ‘good side’ of politics, therefore working alongside political communicators rather than outwardly disagreeing with them. Where there is truth in the fundamentals that Mazzoleni and Schulz are discussing, these fundamentals do not apply to the types of mass communication that is seen in the current political sphere being discussed.

Mazzoleni and Schulz show us that mediatization strategies utilized by politicians like Donald Trump provide immense opportunity for audience participation in presidential rhetoric but in ways that make passive, casual participation the standard of that audience. This type of passive action then works against critical thinking and discussion, thus perpetuating the polarized media space as the only space in which political conversations should be had. The mediatization strategy here normalizes passive

participation which in turn, further normalizes Trump's lack of decorum. Donald Trump's rhetoric is not meant to be consumed under a detailed lens by the masses because that lens negates the consumability that warrants success in both appeal, and consistent mass consumption. In fact, what makes Trump's rhetoric and communication of his rhetoric so unique is the mediums in which he chooses to discuss them (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, etc.). Mazzoleni and Schulz go on to say that, "One of the most significant results is that politicians who wish to address the public must negotiate with the media's preferred timing, formats, language, and even the content of the politician's communication" (249). Yet, Donald Trump has done the exact opposite of this, and moves through spaces of communication in a way that places his personal form of communication before the chosen media's preferences.

There is then the concept of mediatization broken down into separate dimensions that contribute to a process-oriented concept⁶. Within a process-oriented concept comes the importance of focusing on the procedures of a given process itself which, in this case, would be the infiltration of media into Donald Trump's communication so as to legitimize his position in politics. With this process-oriented thinking comes four dimensions of mediatization that Strömbäck and Van Aelst establish: the mediation of politics, the independence of news sources, news media logic versus political logic, and finally, political actors perception of news media. However, the first and the fourth dimensions are

⁶ That emphasizes or focuses on processes, systems, or procedures rather than results or underlying causes ("process-oriented," OED).

the most relevant to the collective consumption of Donald Trump's rhetoric and its multifaceted infiltration that I am exploring. Strömbäck and Peter Van Aelst discuss politics as something that has first become mediated. They write, "The first dimension relates to the extent to which politics has become *mediated*, in the sense that the news media have become the most important source of information about politics and society and the primary channel of communication between political actors and citizens" (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 343). This statement furthers the idea that mass news media is something that politics has become dependent on, rather than something that has been properly utilized by politics/politicians. With mass news media as a mediated tool, it becomes clear that the collective community surrounding the rhetoric of Donald Trump is extremely dependent on this first dimension.

Yet, in exploring this dimension, there must be discussion of where truth and fallacy come into play and how they are commodified. If Donald Trump is referred to as a political actor, then there is a clear actor/audience dichotomy where Trump is given the power to communicate in whatever way he wants because of the primary nature of mediated politics. Therefore, when given this permission, there is a conscious clear divide that Donald Trump must play into in order to be successful and he does so rather seamlessly. Next, similar to Mazzoleni and Schulz's "fourth branch of government," Strömbäck and Van Aelst discuss "the fourth dimension" of mediatization. They state, "The fourth dimension of mediatization thus refers to the extent to which political actors adjust their perceptions and behavior to the news media logic rather than political logic.

This might affect not only their communication efforts, but also the actual political output and the way political actors are organized” (344). This is where Donald Trump is extremely successful in his multilevel infiltration of his rhetorics. Following Strömbäck and Van Aelst, we are able to observe Donald Trump’s media rhetoric as a shift in what is considered presidential rhetoric. Donald Trump’s use of the media eliminates a level of permanency that is present in typical presidential settings such as speeches and debates. Instead, Trump’s rhetoric is seen in media spaces that allow not only forgettability, but also audience commentary which then moves Trump’s rhetoric into multiple spheres of knowledge in a way that serves his ends. His extreme extension of his rhetoric through multiple mass media scopes, lenses, and logics, create a safety net for fallacious politics while simultaneously playing into the legitimacy of news media and how news media is associated within society.

With this, there is then what Strömbäck and Van Aelst call news media logic. News media logic is, “the institutional, technological, and sociological characteristics of news media, including their format characteristics, production and dissemination routines, norms and needs, standards of newsworthiness, and to the formal and informal rules that govern news media” (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 342-343). Donald Trump has impacted news media logic directly in that he has blurred the lines between news media and news *as* media. With his innovation in the collective aspect of his rhetoric, Trump directly creates what appear to be communities of “new knowledge” that can also appear to be logical according to Strömbäck and Van Aelst’s definition. Yet, what Trump is actively working

towards is a mass disregard for the initial intent of news and mass media and instead an approach that feeds into a new standard of news media logic that fits his rhetoric and more importantly, validates his arguments both in structure and legitimacy. Because Trump ignores news media logic, there is a complicated relationship between news media logic and Trump's political logic. Yet, ultimately, the two work together and formulate news to be a catalyst for consumption, rather than a medium at which the public can utilize to feel informed.

We must rethink how communication technologies are shifting and changing themselves and thus, the ways in which greater society experiences and takes part in democratic politics. Alan Finlayson brilliantly discusses these exact points in "Rethinking Political Communication" where he writes, "Such rethinking is necessary because technologies of political communication do not simply reflect or transmit political ideas and opinions. They give shape to thinking and are the means by which we 'educate, agitate⁷, and organize'" (Finlayson 77). The ways in which Finlayson discusses the "shape" that political ideas can take is extremely important. In order for his rhetoric to remain easily consumable and thus, relevant, Donald Trump must seek out visceral reactions versus thought out arguments. Trump actively works to blur the lines between these three key components and where he is moving his supporters in the direction he wants, he is also actively educating, agitating, and organizing those who do not support him. This strategy,

⁷ Urge constituents to action, "to keep a political or other issue constantly under discussion, so as to arouse public concern and bring about action" ("agitate" OED).

whether intentional of Trump or not, creates extreme polarization which in turn, only works to strengthen Trump's side of politics. These tools are also consistently used within news media⁸ thus making Trump's success in their use less surprising. However, these new tools are hard to regulate on news media and social media platforms. Do we stifle who can access these things? Do we grant permission to certain groups of people and not others? Finlayson continues this thought by saying, "The way these problems and remedies are often framed tends to construe them either as intrusions into an otherwise fair and free public sphere or as undermining the ongoing effort to build one. That is to say, critique is guided by an idealized version of the public sphere that was the product of a particular form of democratic organization reliant on print and some kinds of broadcast media" (Finlayson 81). Through this discussion, it is clear that the public sphere has shifted past simpler, more regulated media, and into a realm where individual members of society participate in their own personal media sphere. This complicates political ideologies and can easily help Donald Trump's collectivism appear to be more like a political community than it actually is. Yet amid this extreme complication, there is also a determination that can be made. Where Finlayson notes that there is complexity in open public spheres of communication, one thing to consider is determining what media is strictly for entertainment consumption and what media is meant for political commentary or considered to be political media. Throughout this thesis, I will attempt to show the ways in

⁸ Mass communication to the public via televised news sources, social media, etc.

which Donald Trump's use of media strategies has created not only a shift in decorum, but consequences for democracy. The president is supposed to serve as a representative and advocate for all the nation's people, regardless of political party. The people are now lost in the divisiveness created by Trump's rhetoric and furthermore, are left to navigate political commentary constantly, determining what is real and what is fake through our own lenses and tools and therefore, our own biases. Donald Trump has acted to perpetuate the idea of "common political knowledge" which in actuality, cannot exist without proper rhetorical discussion and communication from people like the President of the United States.

CHAPTER1
HOW TO CREATE A POLITICIAN OUT OF DONALD TRUMP: TRUMP'S
RHETORIC AND ITS APPLICATION

On June 16th, 2015, Donald Trump officially announced his campaign for the presidency. It quickly became clear that Trump seemed to have a lack of political direction and an even more obvious lack of political experience given his erratic and rather messy speech where he claimed “sadly, the American dream is dead” but, if he were to be elected that he would “bring it back bigger and better and stronger, than ever before” (Diamond, CNN Politics). The concept of “making America great again” comes with its own set of complex issues that lie in the simplicity of the phrase. Suggesting that America is not great anymore, alongside the elusive idea that America can be great “again” creates an outwardly simple rhetorical situation that is actually rooted in rhetorical complexity. Furthermore, the perpetuation of hyper-nationalistic rhetoric such as this, pushes “Make America Great Again” as the campaign slogan that would infiltrate the masses. The phrase “Make America Great Again” suggests that America has fallen into the hands of those who lack an “American Identity,” or do not seek to be pro-America outright. Therefore, with this rhetoric, Trump is working to reclaim the American identity and create it to be an

isolationist national identity, one that creates a clear moral high ground for his constituents, and one that isolates his followers from what the traditional rhetoric of the Republican Party has created in the past. The slogan is often stylized and referenced to as “MAGA” and the phrase smartly creates a working combination of a sign and a symbol to represent Donald Trump and his campaign, but also a sign and symbol that oversimplifies a rather complicated political position that is the presidency. This then can be linked back to Trump’s use of social media and the way in which digestible, informal content is a driving factor in the Trump campaign. The phrase, “Make America Great Again” can easily be utilized by other polarizing groups to validate their ethos through a credible source which in this case is a presidential candidate like Donald Trump. The ambiguity that this phrase provides, alongside the ambiguity that social media provides, creates a rhetorical environment that endangers those who do not identify with this phrase for example, a person of color, a person who is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, a person who is not a Christian, etc. This shows that within the phrase’s simplicity, there is immense complexity in the ways in which it can be interpreted. It is safe to say that when a candidate becomes president, they want to contribute to America’s greatness themselves and imprint aspects of their personal ethos in tandem with their political ideology. Yet, in a situation such as this, Trump’s political ideology can be interpreted on a multitude of levels by an immense amount of people and thus, it becomes difficult to pinpoint where Trump’s personal ethos and political goals align. This concept of “Making America Great Again” directly correlates to the shift in politics that Donald Trump perpetuated. This

simple slogan streamlined and sped up the ways in which the presidency can be seen via mediatization, consumption through media, demagoguery, and charismatic leadership.

Mediatization theory,⁹ as defined by Niels Ole Finnemann in his article

Mediatization Theory and Digital Media can be understood as:

“The process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Formats consist, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus and emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication. Format becomes a framework or a perspective that is used to present as well as interpret phenomena.” (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 10)

Here, Finnemann references David Altheide and Robert Snow’s book *Media Logic*, which

focuses on the sociological effect mass media creates within contemporary

communication. Altheide and Snow’s definition, while simplistic, is still applicable to

Trump’s rhetorical situation. Mediatization theory in the case of Donald Trump works to

help us understand the reciprocity of media and American political culture, in particular,

the impact of social media. We are then able to see that Trump’s rhetoric perpetuates

aspects of belonging and agency alongside a lack of decorum. These shifts can create a

lasting political culture that has the potential to impact democracy for years. This

relationship is entirely codependent and works to create an adaptation of ideology and

perception from the political actor, but also the audience. Mediatization thrives off of

audience participation and through gaining a participatory audience, the political actor is

enabled to make immense political gains. MAGA, in this case, highlights the unique

⁹ “The action or process whereby the mass media comes to control or affect something” (“Mediatization” OED).

rhetorical function that political slogans can have and the ways in which that impacts political identity. Through Donald Trump's utilization of social media which creates a collective identity and thus, a shared political agency, MAGA functions to work against what is considered traditional and instead works against democratic politics and rhetoric as we know them. Through its social infiltration, mediatization enables consumability of media on multiple platforms at multiple social levels, which grants access to political information quickly and in mass quantities to multiple audiences.

Another result of Donald Trump's populist social media rhetoric is political charisma. Here, charisma can be viewed as an extension of Donald Trump's rhetorical populism in that his shift away from decorum aligns with the outsider identity that Trump hones in on. Trump's rhetorical style and breaking of decorum within the presidency help to create an identity as a charismatic leader. First, political charisma is defined by Max Weber in Noor Ghazal Aswad's work, *Exploring Charismatic Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetoric of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election* as: "The ambiguous quality in an individual by which s/he "is set apart from ordinary people and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (333). Weber also referred to charisma as "an extraordinary quality of a person" (295)" Aswad adds to the definition by stating, "Others have defined it as the characteristic of having "profound and extraordinary effects on followers" (House and Baetz 1979, 399)" (Aswad 59). It is clear that Donald Trump seeks to become this type of leader with MAGA at the forefront of his rhetorical argument for

his presidential campaign. Here again, it is clear that Trump's mediatization strategies, populist style politics, and breaking of decorum follow a complex rhetorical strategy. Furthermore, in order to add complexity to charisma, Trump also works to use charismatic leadership and political polarization¹⁰ together so as to add complexity to his breaking of political decorum. Polarization here is far more than a political concept, but rather a rhetorical one that is synchronous with Trump's populist style rhetoric. Thus, polarization paired with charisma creates a need to normalize breaking the conventions of democratic politics as we know them as a means to create an enemy out of those who keep with traditional political decorum. This move towards the extremes that polarization creates only heightens the need for charismatic leadership and furthermore, perpetuates charismatic leaders like Donald Trump despite his actual political experience. With MAGA at the forefront of polarization, there then stems the argument of which political party is pro-America and which political party is anti-America and thus pushes the two parties further away from agreement.

Scholars such as Patrica Roberts-Miller and Jennifer Mercieca feature demagoguery at the forefront of Donald Trump's success as a politician. What I will input here, however, is the way in which traditional presidential decorum is framed as elitist

¹⁰The accentuation of a difference between two things or groups; division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of beliefs or opinions; an instance of this ("polarization," OED). ; ideological extremes

grants Trump's rhetoric access to impact the future of democratic politics Demagoguery¹¹ and the rhetoric of a demagogue seeks to work against those who may not understand the breadth of something such as democratic systems to their full extent. For example, Trump's utilization of social media and the desire to "Make America Great Again" appears relatively straightforward to the average voter. Yet, it is impossible to encompass the complexity of "making America great" under the MAGA slogan itself and thus, there is a knowledge gap that is taken advantage of with demagogic strategies. The democratic system itself is not built simply, therefore, its infiltration by an "outsider" can appear dangerous and almost comedic, especially for a candidate like Donald Trump. However, Trump's ability to utilize broad desires and biases of the masses to his advantage creates a mass appeal that is necessary to his success as a politician and eventually, the success of the Republican Party. With the culmination of these theories and rhetorical strategies, I will be exploring the ways in which mediatization, charisma, polarization, and demagoguery move through multiple dimensions of media and modes of communication to create informality in the formal space that is the presidency. The exploration of mediatization, charisma, polarization, and demagoguery will ultimately set up the discussion for formal versus informal rhetoric and the way that these theories interact in formal and informal settings. I will then carry the concept of formality alongside these theories into the discussion of

¹¹ "a person, especially a political leader, who wins support by exciting the emotions of ordinary people rather than by having good or morally right ideas" ("demagogue," Cambridge Dictionary).

Donald Trump's campaign, presidency, and his legacy post-defeat in 2020 and the establishment of collectivism and decorum throughout Trump's presidential career.

Mediatization of the Presidency as a Theoretical Concept: How the Presidency is Consumed through Media

The traditional rhetorical strategies of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos, all function within and between signs and symbols. There are several examples of this relationship, but the most important in this context can be seen through the animal symbols chosen to represent America's two political parties. The Republican Party is represented by an elephant while the Democratic Party is represented by a donkey. Each of these symbols were curated for a specific need or desire of the individual political parties. These symbols have incited change, impacted votes, and created unspoken suggestions within and outside their respective parties. This small aspect of representation alludes to the idea that the only two major parties in the United States can be summarized by two animals that seemingly have nothing to do with politics. It is instances like these, and the addition to modern technology and technological rhetoric, that show exactly how media and mediatization works to create even more symbols and signs, thus allowing the presidency to be consumed, but also dividing politics more and more into inaccurate representations of where the initial intent of a given party began.

As mentioned, signs and symbols make up a large part of society with political symbols being just the tip of the iceberg. These signs and symbols stem back to analytical thought processes, more specifically, encoding. Encoding works to convert sensory inputs into the form of a memory. For example, Donald Trump does extremely well through his

populist mediatization strategy and the “sloganizing” of MAGA. The phrase itself holds multiple interpretations depending on one’s political party, alongside the abbreviation which could potentially connote an entirely different meaning separate from the phrase written in whole. Political candidates, no matter how major or minor, are all working to be the most *memorable*. Winfried Schulz discusses the roles of relay function, semiotic function, and economic function in relation to this level of encoding which becomes increasingly important as we identify Trump’s rhetoric as populist and charismatic. Schulz discusses that there is a basic assumption surrounding mass media and the levels of communication that it requires. In relation to that, Schulz writes, “(1) The relay function, grounded in the media’s technological capacities, serving to bridge spatial and temporal distances; (2) the semiotic function, making messages suitable for human information processing through encoding and formatting; and (3) the economic function, highlighting the standardization of media products as an outcome of mass production processes” (Schulz 87). All three of these functions create what appears to be a safe way to guarantee political knowledge in that they seemingly empower the user to have a baseline of knowledge and understanding of complicated political concepts, format those ideas in a simple and digestible way, and place these ideas everywhere so that they appear as if they are common knowledge. Applying this to the last six years of the presidency exposes the way in which the media works to move in and between the source and the average American. However, in order for these baseline concepts to be fully successful, they must participate in subtle ways within our sphere of knowledge.

When it comes to the general public, Schulz uniquely discusses relay function as a means to “bridge a gap” between spaces and individuals who consume media. Schulz’s work highlights the notion that politicians must create a liminal, rhetorical space to fit themselves into in order to be consumable and memorable. However, it also clarifies Donald Trump’s need to break presidential decorum in order to fit into the rhetorical space that is democratic politics. Bridging that semiotic/rhetorical gap has a huge impact in the way that individuals feel like they themselves are contributing to and participating in politics. With that comes this connection between a political party and an individual and even moreso, an individual politician and an individual consumer of politics. This then combined with semiotics alludes back to the concept of symbols and signs that make information easier to process. Semiotics work to create a signal that a general consumer of media is choosing the ‘right’ side of politics given what they are seeing. For example, if given signs are pointing to a particular hot button issue, the likelihood that a consumer will feel well versed on the subject is a lot higher. Furthermore, a candidate that might have similar signs and symbols would be someone that a given consumer would gravitate towards the most because they feel as if this candidate ‘understands’ them and vice versa. Finally, there is the notion of economic function which may be less obvious to an average media consumer, but is arguably the most important aspect of mediatization. Mass media production, as established, has to appear to be relatable and give consumers a feeling of safety, trust, and success. With this, successful forms of media have immense economic value. There may be persuasion to donate to a campaign or buy a bumper sticker, both of

which are events that would only occur through a successful form of advertising communication. With media as a bridge and semiotic and economic functions as the bearings, this then leads to the concepts of extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation which furthers the breadth that relay function, semiotic function, and economic function already have.

Mediatization needs more than just three basic functions to infiltrate a social system such as politics so successfully. While relay, semiotic, and economic function are core aspects of mediatization there are several more pillars that uphold political media as a bridge. These smaller functions are found in the form of extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation, all of which are more specific supplements to the relay function as a whole. Extension, at its core, is a direct reflection of relay function in that extension “extend[s] the natural limits of human communication capacities” (Schulz 88). This is in reference to cell phones, portable news, social media, community based news media such as Reddit, etc. Human communication can extend as far as any particular user wants it to go and as media works as a bridge, any user can easily create a communication environment that is only communicating about issues they care about with people they want to see and interact with. Schulz continues by saying “Human communication is limited in terms of space, time, and expressiveness; the media serves to bridge spatial and temporal differences” (Schulz 88). Donald Trump seeks to use extension through his use of populist mediatization strategies so as to never *fully* create a meaningful connection with those who choose to consume his content. Extension warrants ambiguity,

something that we have established as necessary for Trump's rhetoric. Where technology and communication has revolutionized the way that humans choose to communicate in multiple areas that are productive for society, it also creates a gray area that makes for these encoding issues as Schulz makes clear. This idea of extension pairs beautifully with the concept of substitution. Substitution identifies media as a "stand in" for social events (Schulz 88). With the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacting social structures as society understood them to be, substitution does have its benefits especially given an election cycle. At times, Trump utilized substitution as a means to thrive politically, with Twitter being a main form of communication between Trump and the general public. Yet, Trump's infamous rallies posed a major risk during the COVID-19 pandemic which then took away Trump's rhetorical tool of charisma, a strategy that is even more powerful in-person. However, Schulz also points out that with substitution media is "replacing a powerful function of in-person communication and participation" (88). The notion of participation here hits an especially important point. Mediatization implies that there is participation from consumers, yet works against participating in the actual community being referenced thus, driving consumers of political media further and further from a level of informed decision making based on physicality, something that is vital to Donald Trump's social media strategy as well as his populism and identity as a demagogue. This also leads to the aspect of physical location as well. In a rural area, the likelihood of in-person participation is low anyway. Therefore, creating a space that is not fully based on

being physically present allows for the inclusion of these groups of people but not necessarily in the most empathetic way.

Finally, there is the concept of amalgamation which works to combine the above semiotic functions and create what Schulz refers to as: “dissolution and boundaries between mediated and non-mediated activities” (Schulz 89). This is imperative in the success of mediatization. Amalgamation works to blur lines between the complicated structure that is human communication but furthermore, it works to move between political lines so as to enable consumers of media to again, feel informed but also to question information less because information can appear to be common knowledge a lot faster than it used to. Underneath all of these smaller strategies comes accommodation. Accommodation factors into the idea that communication media *is* in fact, social change. This then fully contextualizes the way these smaller strategies must function under accommodation. Accommodation as a whole works to create solutions to large groups of people and by acknowledging this with communication media, that social change becomes screamingly obvious. With all of the above at play, informed political decision making, particularly about a party's candidate, becomes extremely different no matter what side of the political spectrum one identifies more with. This then leads to dependency of mass communication through media.

Donald Trump as a Charismatic Leader: The Functionality of Charisma in the White House

While other presidents and politicians alike have been considered charismatic, Donald Trump's populist charismatic strategy is unique in that it was created upon attacks on traditionalist political speech and style that we have typically seen in American presidents. Yet, Trump was able to do so because of the political polarization that preceded him from Barack Obama's time in the White House. In order to understand where charisma and polarization come into play for Donald Trump as president, it is imperative to trace back to the Obama administration. The Obama era of politics led to the ultimate questioning about the Democratic Party, beginning in 2008 with the McCain/Palin campaign which suggested Obama to be a radical politician based on his open liberalism. Gary C. Jacobson discusses this idea in his article "Polarization, Gridlock, and Presidential Campaign Politics in 2016" where he writes, "To a great many ordinary Republicans, Obama is not merely a conventionally objectionable Democrat but a person whose name, race, upbringing, associations, alleged objectives, and presumed values put him outside the boundaries of what is acceptable in an American leader" (Jacobson 229). Jacobson's point is a great example of the underlying expectations of the American president: White, affluent, conservative (even if liberal), and has an agenda that is neither radical, nor confrontational in regards to American traditionalism. The Obama era was a chance to advance politically in America, yet in 2008, the political climate was more apt to reject this important advancement than embrace it. Objectionability followed President Obama from the campaign trail in 2008, and into the Oval Office through 2016, creating tension within his presidency and policies from their conception, until Obama left the White

House. This objectionability morphed into polarization very quickly with party-line voting becoming almost the norm from 2012 forward. In fact, Jacobson speaks to this further where he says, “In the 1970s, an average of 22 percent of self-identified partisans defected to the other party’s candidates; since 2008, fewer than 10 percent have done so. In 2012, 91 percent of partisans voted for their party’s presidential nominee; in 2014, 93 percent voted for their party’s House and Senate candidates” (Jacobson 230). This shows polarization not just within the presidency, but within the entire legislative system itself. While this was certainly not Obama’s intent, it is vital to note that polarization began here as it puts Donald Trump in an extremely volatile, yet increasingly important political situation. It is also notable that Donald Trump was extremely public in his disdain for Obama’s presidency. This instant objectability that Obama faced is something that could have easily impacted Trump, yet in a completely different way. Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that in order to be successful, Donald Trump had to present himself in a way that was the antithesis of objectionable even if his election were controversial. Therefore, it was imperative that Donald Trump fed off of this polarization rather than attempt to fix, thus leading to the ultimate need for rhetorical charisma.

When Trump announced his candidacy on June 16th 2015, his discussion surrounding bringing back the American Dream, and “Making America Great Again” is a direct perpetuation of this need for polarized politics. Furthermore, his announcement led to the additional need for extremely charismatic rhetoric in future speeches, campaign strategies, and merchandise. This paired with polarization, created the perfect formula for

rhetorical success. As discussed, party polarization in 2016 is a determining factor in the weight of the election as a whole. It is no secret that both the Republican and Democratic parties were looking for a leader that would empower voters post-Obama. Where the Democrats risked nominating a female candidate Hillary Clinton, the Republicans risked nominating a candidate completely separated from politics for the entirety of his career. However, where pundits and reporters found comfort in the Democratic Party's nomination of Hillary Clinton was her undeniable political experience. For Trump, this was his largest and most prominent disadvantage. With Donald Trump's obvious political inexperience comes an even more obvious lack of knowledge in serious political issues such as the national budget, international affairs/trade, and political professionalism as a whole. Donald Trump is known for his brash, bully-esque nature which often reads as comedic and even unapologetic in his beliefs and thus, reflects the Republican party or rather, what the Republican party could be post-Obama which can either become widely accepted, or heavily rejected. However, where Donald Trump was able to thrive in his advances was his ability to draw a crowd on multiple platforms, a key component of charismatic leadership. Even more so, with this multi-level infiltration, Trump was able to make the distance between him and his audience appear minimal, another vital aspect necessary for charismatic rhetoric to be successful.

In Noor Ghazal Aswad's study, "Exploring Charismatic Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetoric of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," Aswad addresses the importance of charisma and rhetoric in

relation to the election of Donald Trump. Aswad speaks directly to the concept of distance and rhetoric where she writes, “Rhetoric is especially important because of the concept of distance present during modern-day elections: most followers do not have the opportunity to interact with candidates and directly observe them carrying out their daily work” (Aswad 58). It is important to note as Aswad mentions, that the daily work of the president or any political figure for that matter, is extremely foreign to the average American which makes mass appeal a necessity in election success. More importantly, as a millionaire, Donald Trump must work towards gaining the trust of the “common man.” Aswad continues by saying, “Interestingly, the more distant leaders are from their followers, the more likely that followers will depend on perceived or ascribed attributes when evaluating them. These ascribed attributes are typically extracted from a candidate’s rhetoric in a variety of fora, such as public speeches, debates, and social media offerings. In particular, one of the considerations voters look for in a candidate’s rhetoric is evidence of charisma or charismatic leadership” (Aswad 58). Aswad makes it clear that political candidates must take advantage of this distance in order to work towards mass appeal in one of the most high stakes scenarios possible. This is exactly the intent of Donald Trump throughout his campaign and presidential term. Charisma is necessary in all levels of public appeal and speeches and advertisements are only a sliver of this yet, these small glimpses are vastly important for a candidate like Trump in that they provide a feeling of connection between Trump and his widely diverse and potentially skeptical audience. This then leads to the notion of communal and agentic constructs within charismatic

leadership. Communal constructs help form the “relationship” aspect of Trump and his followers where agentic constructs work to perpetuate the need to “suffer” before achieving greatness. These constructs become a huge part of the way that Donald Trump perpetuates his charismatic rhetoric through and more importantly, continually gains a following.

The utilization of charisma will function alongside the established communal and agentic strategies in my analysis of Trump’s campaign. Furthermore, charismatic rhetoric will be a guiding theory in the translation of Trump’s rhetoric from his campaign, to his election and the impact of his election on future politicians. Alongside this, communal and agentic constructs will help further the discussion surrounding the success of charisma paired with polarization. Where polarization itself is not exclusively a rhetorical theory, I will be exploring how polarization alongside charisma enables the perpetuation of divisive politics and creates a political environment where Donald Trump can be extremely successful. Next, it becomes increasingly important to contextualize demagoguery, its function in politics alongside polarization and charisma, and its relation to Trump’s multi-level infiltration of these three theories throughout his political campaign and eventual election. With the established theories of mediatization, polarization, and charisma, it then becomes increasingly important to contextualize demagoguery, its function in politics alongside mediatization, polarization and charisma, and its relation to political literacy. Here, I will explore how political literacy and Trump’s lack of decorum must utilize

demagogic strategies to build trust within his audience, a trust that is unique to Donald Trump's particular type of populism we have seen.

What is a Demagogue? Demagoguery and its Functionality in Trump's Presidency

Demagoguery can be used to instill fear, otherization, and perpetuate a demagogue's specific gaze. This works directly in conjunction with the agentic (authority) and communal (symbolic reality) constructs that Donald Trump began with. Most importantly, demagoguery frames information and ideas as/to "in-groups" and "out-groups." In Patricia Roberts-Miller's book *Demagoguery and Democracy* Roberts-Miller says, "When we operate that way, we aren't just treating members of in-groups and out-groups differently. For instance, we have a tendency to attribute good motives to members of the in-group, and bad motives to the members of the out-group, *for exactly the same behavior*" (Roberts-Miller 37). In order to fully unpack and understand the breadth of Trump's rhetorical power alongside political polarization and charisma, we will view him as a demagogue under Roberts-Miller's lens. First, we will break down demagoguery and the way it appears in the binary of American politics, then, discuss how the in-group and out-group are affected when limited to this binary. Finally, these concepts will be discussed in conjunction with naïve realism and the limitations of naïve realism as grounds for political thinking. Without these pedagogical strategies at play alongside his demagoguery, Donald Trump's pipeline to success would not have happened as rapidly, nor would it have gained as much success alongside massive growth.

First, demagoguery functions alongside the desires and biases of a particular audience rather than in tandem with traditional rhetorical argument strategies. So, in the case of Donald Trump, his demagoguery works to renounce the traditional ideologies of American politics and seeks to validate his small scope of knowledge about the political situation in America during his election cycle and eventually, his presidency. Patricia Roberts-Miller's definition of demagoguery also helps establish what a demagogic text, media outlet, or culture might be in relation to this intentional demagogic play into biases that Donald Trump is a direct benefactor of. Roberts-Miller continues by saying, "Demagoguery is a discourse that promises stability, certainty, and escape from the responsibilities of rhetoric by framing public policy in terms of the degree to which and the means by which the out-group should be scapegoated for the current problems of the in-group" (Roberts-Miller 33). This definition then establishes the "in-group versus out-group" mentality. When applying these standards to Donald Trump's rhetoric, his demagogic identity becomes increasingly obvious. At the forefront of Trump's demagoguery, there is the notion of in-group favoritism which perpetuates the oversimplification of what makes up the aforementioned in-group and out-group. A simple example of this is uniting his supporters under a phrase such as "Make America Great Again." This phrase alone is a simplification of the power that the president holds and this phrase itself holds a notion of nationalistic hope alongside a clear "right side" or "in-group." This then becomes an argument of morality in tandem with politics in which political evidence fades into the background and fallacious arguments become more

applicable in rhetorical situations of varying types. In regard to news media, demagogic text and information actively works to place blame on the “other side” which in this case, is the Democratic Party. In the media that follows Trump’s demagogic rhetoric, highly complex political issues such as immigration, the Great Recession, etc. become the fault of the Democrats, while Trump’s plans are glorified and compared under the guise of demagoguery. To someone with political literacy, these complex issues are not black and white. Yet, with the strategies of demagoguery already at play through this in-group versus out-group mentality, these issues have a rather simple appearance and the confirmation of a “right” side becomes extremely easy to obtain and therefore appears flawless. For Trump supporters in particular, Roberts-Miller describes this as: “social group membership suffices as proof.” This “social proof” creates a connection between Trump, the demagogue, and the audience whose biases he is tapping into. While ideological grouping is not new or uncommon, this approach through an in-group and an out-group paired with social proof as Roberts-Miller describes, only heightens the confirmation of an audience/individual participant’s personal beliefs while simultaneously moving the participant further and further away from the perspective of the opposing side of the political spectrum and thus further under the illusion that demagogic control creates. This strategy thrives on the division of constituents and utilizes mediatization and polarization alongside this aspect of “social proof.” In order for there to be an in-group and an out-group affected by mediatization and polarization, Trump, with his own rhetoric, must create a boundary that confirms the political binary while making it appear functional and

realistic under his particular demagogic lens. Furthermore, Donald Trump's charismatic strategies and tropes of his personality work to confirm this line of demarcation that demagoguery creates. All of these strategies combined and utilized by Trump, create a complicated rhetorical black hole that falsely claims unity, community, and a moral high ground which only drives supporters further from the actuality of American political issues.

Furthermore, it is imperative to understand the way in which demagoguery must function within a binary in order to warrant the success that is seen by Donald Trump. Already, United States politics are divided by the two-party system; Republican and Democrat or conservative and liberal. However, even between the two main ideologies, politics still functions on a nonbinary spectrum that politicians have to acknowledge in order to be successful with a multitude of voter populations including young voters, women, people of color, etc. Yet, in order for demagogues such as Donald Trump to warrant success, they must function within the binary so as to create polarization, thus playing into in-group favoritism directly. Another way to describe this concept of in-group favoritism is the psychological concept of naïve realism. Naïve realism suggests that, "to determine if a claim is true, I simply need to look around my world and see if my perceptions confirm that it is true" (Roberts-Miller 39-40). This concept directly confirms the necessity of the political binary in the case of Donald Trump because binaries directly reinforce naïve realism (Roberts-Miller 41) and creates no viable middle ground, regardless of the actuality of the American political spectrum. With this in mind, I will be using

demagoguery as a theory that confirms Trump's multimodality directly. While Trump's identity as a demagogue is clear, the ways in which his demagoguery infiltrates multiple levels of communication is extremely complex and adds a unique rhetorical twist to his rise to power as president. Demagoguery utilized in this way warrants the appearance of a functional political being who is "breaking boundaries" when in actuality, Trump is invalidating and preaching disregard for tradition and presidential decorum.

Conclusion

It is imperative to understand that Donald Trump's rhetoric functions on multiple platforms, the first of course being traditional, formal presidential rhetorical platforms. First, a presidential candidate must officially announce their running. Then, during the months leading up to the actual campaign trail, there are several boxes to be checked all of which are centered around presentation. This can mean presentation of the candidate themselves, presentation of their political stance and arguments, and presentation to the political party they are choosing to represent. There is an inherent expectation that these steps are followed actively, gracefully, and with utmost respect to the American political system, as well as running mates and the current peers in a candidate's given party. These formal expectations of what is considered "presidential" rely on decorum. Decorum, as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is known as, "That which is proper, suitable, seemly, befitting, becoming; fitness, propriety, congruity" or, "That which is proper to the character, position, rank, or dignity of a real person" ("decorum," noun). Interestingly, these definitions both have their own suggestions. The first, suggests a decorum in

accordance with one's character in that there is a centralized idea surrounding appearing "becoming" as a president. However, the second definition works to identify rank and character as something that is congruent. When it comes to the presidency, looking to this definition is extremely beneficial in order to understand the social implications with presidential decorum alongside the premature notions of good character and morality the general public associates with American politicians. Formal rhetorical communities such as the White House appear extremely black and white in their rhetorical niche. That is, those within the White House have met or work to consistently meet a formal expectation that has earned them the title they hold in America's formal government. However, alongside this comes a repetitive almost unspoken ethos that applies to presidential candidates. This presidential ethos deeply tied with decorum is what Donald Trump sought to break so that informality and ultimately, lack of experience appeared normal underneath the formal setting that is the White House.

Next, there is the informal presidential rhetorical setting. Because of modern technology, this rhetorical setting has expanded far beyond informal campaign rallies and into social media platforms where content can be viewed, criticized, and in its own way, contributed to and perpetuated. It is because of this that Trump's success in his campaign appears differently than the public has ever seen. A prime example of this utilization of informal rhetorical settings lies in Donald Trump's use of Twitter and social media as a whole. In the modern age of technology, it is not uncommon for politicians to utilize social media as a means to communicate with a given community of people who again,

may not seek out/have opportunity for a public interaction with their candidate of choice. However, the way in which Donald Trump utilizes Twitter has redefined that interaction as something that can be acceptable in its informality. In their article, “Donald Trump, Legitimation and a New Political Rhetoric” Andrew Ross and Damian Rivers address the way that this informality manifests itself further within Donald Trump’s use of Twitter, but also how this informality seeps into other aspects of Trump’s political rhetoric. Ross and Rivers write:

One of the most noticeable features of Trump’s political language – across contexts, but particularly on Twitter – is his degree of informality. For instance, Enli (2017) observed that Trump’s social media use during the 2016 election campaign divorced itself from traditional professionalized approaches whereby tweets are delivered by media teams and tested on focus groups, and showcased a more amateurish, de-professionalised approach. In relation to this, Kreis (2017, p. 610) has stated that an affordance of Twitter and social media platforms in general is that ‘the use of more personal and informal language also contributed to appearing closer to the people,’ and the combination of directness and simplicity have formulated a rhetorical strategy not uncommon in right-wing populist discourse. (Ross and Rivers 3)

With Twitter as a prime example of an informal setting, there is a clear advantage Trump found in his lack of decorum and rhetorical tradition. The “amateurish” speech that Ross and Rivers mention warrants a connection to the American people that is rarely tapped into which ultimately, is an environment that Donald Trump can thrive in as a political amateur himself. Politicians, when put in the public eye, must tread carefully in order to keep all voting pools interested in their campaign and ultimately, their political rhetoric relevant. However, with this informal setting at the head of Trump’s strategy, it is almost as if he has created a new expectation for connection to constituents, one where there is

less formal effort and therefore, more intentional informal aptitude that ultimately works to delegitimize formality that is present in other Republican candidates and later, longstanding politicians. It is because of these formal and informal settings that creates a unique twist on presidential decorum and what the standard is for a presidential candidate.

CHAPTER 2
MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN: DONALD TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN
TRAIL

When Donald Trump announced his campaign for president, he used the media as a tool to propel his campaign into the spotlight. As established, mediatization thrives off the implicit idea that participation from consumers and communities provides proof of that particular audience's trust. In this case, Donald Trump is utilizing that trust from his audience through mediatization to also establish validity in his campaign. However, because media/mediatized politics create an invisible wall between consumers of media and politicians such as Donald Trump, those who identify as part of Trump's rhetorical community are in fact, extremely far removed from Trump's intentions and lack of informed decision making. Thus, Trump is able to project this lack of knowledge onto his supporters creating a support system that thrives off of the notion that community and social in-grouping can and will, "Make America Great Again." Here, I will examine how Trump's populist mediatization and strategies were smartly developed throughout his

campaign and propelled into the 2016 election and eventually, the presidency. Trump's populist twist on decorum alongside his mediatization strategies are able to occur through the presence of celebrity politics. First, political actors/acting can be defined as, "individuals who have obtained at least some measure of political power and/or authority in a particular society who engage in activities that can have a significant influence on decisions, policies, media coverage, and outcomes associated with a given conflict" (Wolfsfeld). This definition stresses the importance of a given political actor's influence on decision making which is rather obvious, yet, this definition smartly pairs this influence with media coverage thus, showing the impact an individual political actor such as Donald Trump can have on the way a political issue is digested by the public and consumed by supporters and non-supporters alike. This shows that political acting works in tandem with mediatization and this type of political acting is key in Donald Trump's success. Alongside this idea of political acting comes John Street's concept of the celebrity politician in his article, "What is Donald Trump? Forms of 'Celebrity' in Celebrity Politics." Here, Street makes it clear that the concept of a celebrity politician is multifaceted and rather complex. At the baseline, a celebrity politician is defined by Street as: "celebrity *politician* (CP1), the aspiring political actor who adopted celebrity techniques, and the *celebrity* politician (CP2), the celebrity who engaged with politics but did not aspire to political office or responsibility" (Street 5). However, Street acknowledges that this definition oversimplifies the rhetorical interaction between politician, celebrity, celebrity politician, and mediatized politics. This definition assumes that the political

power that political actors seek to attain is not utilized when the notion of “celebrity” is added to the mix. However, in the case of Donald Trump, I have found that with the concept of decorum at the forefront of what we are exploring, these definitions become blended when it comes to Trump’s politics. Trump falls into the CP1 definition in that he is an aspiring political actor utilizing his celebrity techniques he has already gained to move into the rhetorical community of American politics. This is extremely important when it comes to Donald Trump selling his legitimacy, as with Trump, there is a stressor on his celebrity tactics and their correlation to that of an established political figure. Where the CP2 definition becomes relevant for Trump is the notion of Trump being “a celebrity engaged with politics” in that Trump has made his political opinions clear and spoken publicly as a *celebrity* about his take on American politics prior to his campaign for United States President. However, within his celebrity identity, there is no responsibility by Trump to incite political change. Through understanding this, we are able to then understand Donald Trump’s campaign as a way to take his lack of knowledge and turn it into a rhetorical identity that Trump is simply an “outsider,” breaking political norms and taking matters into his own hands. This rhetorical solution paired with the concept of mediatization is imperative when it comes to understanding Donald Trump’s unique approach to launching a presidential campaign.

As established, Donald Trump’s official campaign announcement took place on June 16th, 2015. Even in this initial announcement, we are able to see Donald Trump’s celebrity politics take on a populist framework.. This first campaign rally took place in

Trump Tower in New York City. This is an interesting move as Trump Tower is a physical embodiment of what Donald Trump is capable of as a identified business mogul. This physical embodiment, paired with the campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” creates a rhetoric that feels similar to that of “picking yourself up by the bootstraps.” Donald Trump claims in his announcement that this country needs to fight for the American Dream while, subsequently, the crowd is standing in what is a manifestation of Donald Trump’s version of the American Dream. This initial campaign rally set the pace for what was to come in the 2016 election season. Not only is Donald Trump working to create a “better America” but he appears as though he has tangible results as to what “better” looks like, thus tapping into a social audience that relies heavily on traditional aspects of the American Dream. It is important to note here that Donald Trump’s unique celebrity politician status is fully on display from the start of his path to the presidency. There is a physical representation of what Trump is capable of, and there is also a rhetorical community pairing this physical representation with spoken rhetorical strategies which ultimately, appear as if Trump is advocating for the needs of a community that could not relate to his celebrity status less. What we see here is Trump’s ability to tap into his audience’s aspirational desires through his populist strategy that creates a type of audience/speaker relationship that is unique to Donald Trump’s twist on democratic politics.

After the campaign announcement came the traditional sequence of events that follow a presidential candidate on the campaign trail. Donald Trump entered a campaign

pool that was extremely crowded on the Republican side of the ballot. Many lifelong Republicans such as Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, Chris Christie, and Marco Rubio all were a part of the run-off for the Republican nomination for president. These politicians were lifelong and compared to Trump, had an immense amount of political knowledge. Jeb Bush, for example, comes from a family of presidents with both his father and his brother preceding him. Jeb Bush himself also held public office as governor of Florida. There are then senators like Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, both having held years of experience in Washington already. With this level of competition, Donald Trump clearly lacked institutional knowledge and thus, had to stand out in order to swing audiences that lifelong politicians have experience tapping into already. Interestingly, the media began to give Donald Trump attention from his campaign announcement forward, focusing mainly on his lack of knowledge and political experience. This negative media lens followed Trump from June 16, 2015 all the way until the final debate between Trump and Democratic Nominee Hillary Clinton. What's fascinating about this negative media coverage is the way that it ultimately worked in Trump's favor both as a celebrity politician, a mediatized figure, and eventually, a demagogue. Keeping Donald Trump relevant in the news cycle was one of the best things for Donald Trump's campaign as Trump relied heavily on media endorsement. Through Trump's celebrity experience, he can take the voices of the media and discuss them under his own guise while simultaneously stating an opinion that appears factual and, most importantly, he has already been given the agency to do so as a celebrity figure.

Donald Trump 'Rallying' the Troops

This then leads to Trump's infamous rallies during his presidential campaign. Donald Trump knew that in order to gain traction as a politician, playing into the celebrity status he had obtained was key in discussing what exactly he planned to do as president and why the American people should trust him. Here again, we see the ways in which Donald Trump works to break decorum through the informal settings he created within his rallies as compared to former president, Barack Obama. Traditionally, campaign rallies are utilized heavily in the Primary Election season so that a candidate can "tour" the country and establish to potential voters what a candidate's rhetoric is, where they stand on issues that may affect a particular state differently, and how they can help insight the best future for the state they are visiting, as well as the country. Barack Obama again, is a key example as to what the precedent for campaign rallies with traditional presidential rhetoric look like. On May 5th 2008, Barack Obama held a rally in Indianapolis, Indiana the evening before Indiana's primaries. Obama starts off his rally by thanking those around him including staff as well as Indiana officials. He then jumps right into his personal pathos as to why he chose to run for president in 2008 at his age and what he sees as urgent issues for the country. Obama quotes Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he states, "I understand what Dr. King meant when he said: 'there are times when we're called to act because we feel the fierce urgency of now'" (C-SPAN). This connection to American History and in particular, Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. is critical to Obama also establishing a successful ethos alongside his personal pathos. With Obama, there are

clear talking points, subject matter that must get covered, and overall a clear message that starts with the voter which for Obama is “Yes we can!” (C-SPAN). Obama also works to create clarity for his audience from his experiences in politics already by weaving together his aspirations, personal knowledge, and the ways in which those who preceded him have inspired him to insight change. This in comparison to the way Donald Trump hosts rallies exposes Trump’s lack of presidential rhetoric and more importantly, opens up an opportunity to scrutinize Trump under multiple lenses: as a potential voter, a sitting political figure in the Republican Party, news media, etc. Rallies are intended to do the exact opposite of this, especially for voters so why risk it? Given his celebrity politician status, Trump is not risking much, if anything at all. Instead, he is simply utilizing his personal strengths as a celebrity politician and surrounding himself with campaign rhetoric and presidential rhetoric in its simplest form.

Trump’s campaign rallies seemed to feel somewhat over the top and as if political issues were not getting discussed but rather, political figures and American politics were being scrutinized by Trump. Trump places his political authority solely on the singularity of himself as a candidate and his personal goals and does not seek to establish any forms of logos the way that Obama does. Instead, his singularity pushes against the norms of what a presidency should be and ultimately, claims those norms to be not enough and therefore, Trump himself is the solution to break them. The way in which Trump works to target others places his singularity above political decorum. The over the top nature plays directly into Trump’s lack of presidential ethos and his more personal pathos. Where Obama is

able to fully separate his presidential identity from his personal identity, Donald Trump seems to utilize his personal identity *as* his presidential identity, creating a political identity that feels unabashed and comfortable to those who view politics as an outside issue rather than an extension of themselves. This becomes clear when watching Donald Trump speak to constituents. Donald Trump held a rally on March 5, 2016 in Orlando, Florida after his running announcement and into the thick of the Primary Election season. Trump's supporters appear like any other candidate's supporters, excited and ready to hear from Trump himself. However, Donald Trump's projection that he wants to Make America Great Again is everywhere. People are wearing merchandise such as hats, t-shirts, etc. at this rally as well as holding signs that state, "The Silent Majority Stands With Trump" which is a rather haunting political ethos stemming from Richard Nixon, an extremely polarizing president. While rallies are supposed to insight motivation and allow presidential candidates to speak to constituents that they would not normally get to see, this type of rhetoric surrounding "the silent majority" creates the notion of a political *movement*, rather than a presidential campaign rally. Trump utilizes this alongside his celebrity status, playing into his crowd despite tradition and even stating himself: "It's a movement folks it's a movement. It's not about me, it's about you" (C-SPAN). Trump then carries on discussing other candidates in his brash manner that granted him his celebrity status in the first place. He mentions Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and even Jeb Bush, discussing the ways that they are unfit or have "fallen off." Trump then attacks Hillary Clinton claiming, "I'm gonna beat her" which is bold of him to say during the time

of this rally as rallies do not guarantee presidential victory. However, Donald Trump is acting as if he already won.

With all this at play, it is clear that the lack of direction Donald Trump has created a populist discourse. Populism works to create a stark divide between a given populist candidate and the system said candidate is trying to infiltrate. There is work to demonize certain points of view, discuss alternative “agendas” of those already in power, and most importantly the idea of betrayal is rampant in all populist attacks. In their paper “The Populist Style in American Politics: Presidential Campaign Discourse, 1952–1996,” Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron establish important populist theory within campaign rhetoric. They write: “Within this tradition, populism is predicated on a moral opposition between the people, who are viewed as the only legitimate source of political power, and the elites, whose interests are perceived as inherently contrary to those of the populace. The specific elites targeted by populist claims can vary, from elected politicians and business leaders to intellectuals, but they are invariably portrayed as having betrayed the public trust” (Bonikowski and Gidron 1596). Bonikowski and Gidron’s framing of morality within populism is a driving force in the way that Trump uses populist rhetoric. Issues of morality and making the “right choice” within what Trump himself calls a “political movement” are extremely prominent in Trump’s campaign rhetoric from his announcement forward and especially prominent in his notion to “Make America Great Again.” This phrase alone suggests that there is a lack of morality in this country, one that can only be reclaimed by Donald Trump. With this idea of populism as defined by

Bonikowski and Gidron it makes sense why Trump's rallies lack direction. It's that populism thrives off of the inherent demonization of the established system that someone like Donald Trump knows nothing about. With populist discourse, Donald Trump does not have to discuss political issues in the way that a politician like Obama would because his motives, personal rhetoric, and lack of experience do not warrant an explanation but instead, "proof" that he knows what he is talking about through his discussion of what does *not* work.

The First GOP Primary Debate: Donald Trump Steals the Show

The first GOP Primary Debate took place on August 6th, 2015 in Cleveland, Ohio. Against Trump, there were nine other candidates up for the Republican nomination which meant that it was imperative Donald Trump stood out in order to successfully advance as a legitimate candidate. At this point, Trump has what appears to be strong support in the polls and is in the top ten candidates for Republican nominee. Yet, this support will be put to the test in real time against lifelong politicians on this debate stage. The preliminary debate question posed by Brett Baier was, "Is there anyone on stage, and can I see hands, who is unwilling to pledge your support to the eventual nominee of the Republican Party and pledge not to run an independent campaign against that person" (The Washington Post). Donald Trump was the only candidate who raised his hand, to which he said:

"I cannot say. I have to respect the person that, if it's not me, the person that wins, if I do win, and I'm leading by quite a bit, that's what I want to do. I can totally make that pledge. If I'm the nominee, I will pledge I will not run as an

independent. But– and I am discussing it with everybody, but I’m you know, talking about a lot of leverage. We want to win, and we will win. But I want to win as the Republican nominee.” (The Washington Post)

This is a rather risky move for Trump as an inexperienced potential politician and political actor in that this risks his legitimacy as a “real” candidate for president. However, to Trump’s given audience, he seems to be speaking directly to them with the phrase, “we want to win, and we will win” which sounds almost like a call to action to his supporters. Interestingly, the audience in Cleveland has a mixed response. Where there is clear booing, there is also clear uproar in support as well which is a direct manifestation of the type of politics Trump seeks to create for his campaign. Trump’s refusal to rule out running as a third party is a compelling moment in this first debate. Here, Trump is ignoring party loyalty and shifting the view onto his own ethos as an outsider politician and alongside that, a for the people politician as well. Where this moment in the debate can be viewed as unapologetic, this moment is also extremely alarming. Trump refusing to support any Republican nominee other than himself shows that he will stop at nothing to win the nomination and eventually, the presidency. Yet, the subversion that he was able to showcase through his populist, charismatic rhetoric made Trump appear as though he was advocating for the people rather than advocating for himself. Trump is utilizing his charisma in tandem with the media in that the attention he is receiving on stage, which is inherently negative, is being manipulated by Trump to normalize the way he is discussing these critical issues in this debate. This first question is just one example of the way Trump takes a controversial opinion and surrounds it with a rhetoric that ultimately, circles back

to the concept that Trump and only Trump can “Make America Great Again” by ignoring what has been considered proper politics and implementing his own take on debate tactics thus making him even more attractive to his supporters.

Another key moment where we can see Trump’s populist rhetoric taking hold can be found in his need to challenge those who put into question his lack of understanding political discourse. When this occurs, Trump retaliates with a reframing of what he has said/done as almost a discredit to the democratic systems in place, blaming media and political structures as to why his points are framed “differently” than how he said them. This shifting of blame speaks directly to the audience that is the most dangerous, and also the most vital to his success, the silent majority. In this instance, Chris Wallace poses a discussion about immigration between Donald Trump and Jeb Bush. Chris Wallace states:

“Mr. Trump, it has not escaped anybody’s notice that you say that the Mexican government is sending criminals– rapists, drug dealers, across the border. Governor Bush called those remarks, quote, “extraordinarily ugly.” I’d like you– you’re right next to him– tell us– talk to him directly and say how you respond to that and– and you have repeatedly said that you have evidence you have refused or declined to share. Why not use this first Republican presidential debate to share your proof with the American people?” (The Washington Post)

Here, it is extremely important to note the way that Wallace asks Trump for proof.

Wallace frames the need for a proper response and proof almost as an act of respect to the American people. Chris Wallace is essentially calling out Trump on his very public statements stating that if one can make those claims publicly, one can show proof just as publicly. Trump’s response is as follows:

“So, if it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t even be talking about illegal immigration, Chris. You wouldn’t even be talking about it. This was not a subject that was on

anybody's mind until I brought it up at my announcement. And I said, Mexico is sending. Except the reporters, because they are a very dishonest lot, generally speaking, in the world of politics, they didn't cover my statement the way I said it. The fact is, since then, many killings, murders, crimes, drugs pouring across the border, are money going out and the drugs coming in. And I said we need to build a wall and it has to be built quickly." (The Washington Post)

From Chris Wallace's question comes an interesting defense from Trump. The callback to his announcement speaks to where Trump believes the truth falls: if he has discussed a given issue, there is fact to it. And, because he has discussed a given issue under his particular lens, there is no need to provide proof because Trump himself is the only one who should be trusted. This demonization of the media is a strategy that is vital to Trump's success in this primary debate. The denial of how and when he made specific statements leads to the questioning of media personnel such as Chris Wallace even though there is clear evidence of Trump's exact statements in the news cycles. Yet, this denial gives Trump permission to create a narrative that reflects his personal rhetorics and perpetuates that of a populist candidate. The attention he gets in this moment can be viewed as both unapologetic and brave, but also extremely avoidant and distant from political consequences. For any other candidate on stage, this moment could make or break where they stand in regard to becoming the Republican nominee, so why does it work for Trump? Because this has been his strategy from the start. Trump has no political background and therefore there is less political pressure on him to show up and show presidential decorum. It is as though constituents can "forgive" Trump for what appears to be a lack of knowledge and instead, praise him on being defensive and self-righteous, thus granting permission for potential voters to view this type of behavior as presidential.

This primary debate set the tone for future debates and all of these combined propelled Trump into the right position to become the Republican nominee for president.

Trump Versus Clinton: A Clear Rhetorical Divide

As the primary debates went on and Trump was elected the Republican nominee, next came the official presidential debates between Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. Hillary Clinton's political career is extremely well known, even if her political moves may not be well liked. Overall, moderators and reporters favored Clinton when it came to debates, solely based on her political experience alone. Clinton exemplified presidential decorum, proper charisma, and respect for the democratic process that is the election cycle. Because of Clinton's rather seamless path to nomination, this meant that Trump had to "show up and show out" in these debates as he had done in the primaries, but it also put Trump in an interesting political position. With the established lack of faith from the media, Trump's ability to demonize media sources and other politicians continued to grant him permission to act however he needed to in a debate in order to elicit strong feelings within his followers. However, would this behavior allow Trump to gain voters that may be on the fence about his experience as a politician? This becomes apparent in the first presidential debate of the 2016 election where Hillary Clinton's political rhetorical knowledge becomes a clear advantage she holds over Donald Trump.

The first presidential debate took place on September 26, 2016 in New York at Hofstra University. The host, Lester Holt, poses the first question: "Why are you a better

choice than your opponent to create the kinds of jobs that will put more money into the pockets of American workers?” (CBS News). Clinton began the debate and in her immediate response stated, “The central question in this election is what kind of country we want to be and what kind of future we want to build together” (CBS News). This is a fascinating opening statement simply because of the ethos she is using to establish herself as an experienced politician, but also the pathos necessary to create a notion of unification under her specific presidential regime. Her version of togetherness seems incredibly opposite Trump’s notion of “us and we” in that Clinton constantly refers back to the country as a unified nation where Trump’s concept seems to imply divisive rhetoric that perpetuates social in-grouping and out-grouping. Clinton continues with, “We have to build an economy for everyone, not just those at the top” and “I want us to invest in you” (CBS News). This further continues that partnership of ethos and pathos, showing that Hillary Clinton is aware of Trump’s us versus them tactics. Utilizing the ambiguous “you” creates a connection between Clinton and her constituents that feels less like a battle for freedom between right and left as Trump perpetuates, and more like a compromise and a reason to work together. Also, using the word “invest” in reference to the American people works to show Clinton as a candidate who understands the “business” of the presidency, unlike Trump who views the country “as a business” itself. That shift in business rhetoric was a brilliant move in this opening statement. It then becomes clear that Hillary Clinton is working to invalidate Donald Trump’s need for divisive populism through her clear knowledge of the political climate in 2016 and her personal political rhetoric which drives

home the concept of working to build a better nation together, rather than scrutinize what has or has not been done. In fact, Clinton's campaign slogan was "Stronger Together" utilizing unity as a driving force for change. Interestingly, Clinton ends her response with hopes to "earn your vote in November." There is clear respect for voters of all backgrounds here. Again, Clinton is working to keep unity at the core of her ethos with the knowledge that polarization works for Donald Trump. Seeking the exact opposite of Trump in this moment allows Clinton to stand in her own light, respect the American people, and makes it clear that she wants to work for the people as a whole, not for specific groups of people as Donald Trump has suggested.

On the opposite side of the stage, Donald Trump is asked the same question as Clinton. However, his response is a lot less streamlined and even more so less politically charged. Trump's standout statements amidst what is a seemingly chaotic response is that America is "Losing *our* good jobs" and that jobs are "stolen by other countries" (NBC News). He then continues to name drop companies such as Ford and the jobs they provide in tandem with states that feature large manufacturing institutions such as Ohio and Michigan. Finally, Trump circles back to what he will do to create jobs and states that he will lower taxes and that his tax plan is the "best plan since Ronald Reagan" (NBC News). With both candidates, it is extremely clear who has more political experience and who does not. This is where political acting is at its peak in the 2016 election cycle. Where it has been established that Trump is a celebrity politician, Hillary Clinton is a true political actor. She has been granted political power within multiple levels of the United States Government

and with this power comes great rhetorical authority that is not to be taken lightly. During this opening question, Clinton is aware that as a political actor she possesses influence that is extremely important. There is far more clarity in what Clinton is expressing in her answer to the question because she understands in full the brevity of being a Democratic nominee, but even more so, potentially becoming president of the United States. Where there may be some tactics that mimic a level of pandering, her political rhetoric is clear and her attempt to cross party lines can be appreciated. Trump feels erratic in his statements and there are hardly any true specifics until the end of his answer where he discusses his tax plan. In fact, his answer is so unclear that Lester Holt asks Donald Trump the follow up question: “How specifically are you going to tell American manufacturers you have to come back [to America]?” This then elicits what appears to be frustration in Trump and he answers as if no one is or has been listening. He throws his economic knowledge into the mix, discussing statistics of the value of the dollar, economic statistics, and references his business experience. Where Hillary Clinton can outmatch him in politics, Trump smartly takes advantage of his strengths in money knowledge. However, it seems as though in this first debate, money is all Donald Trump can reference. Yet, as a celebrity politician, Trump is simply playing into this strength in order to appear legitimate. Because of his celebrity identity in business and Clinton’s identity as a lifelong politician, he can move in on territory that is not familiar to her in order to further project his popular us versus them mentality and feed on the responses that type of rhetoric elicits. In other question and answer sessions, Trump aggressively interrupts Hillary, has a combative tone, and poses an

argumentative persona. Where there is a lack of specifics, there is a gain in charisma thus perpetuating further his campaign's overall mediatization in that the attention Trump gained created new pathways to understanding Trump as a legitimate candidate for his followers and potential voters alike.

This persona followed Donald Trump and allowed him to gain media attention and political traction, yet, there was still a clear disadvantage between Trump and Hillary Clinton. In the third and final presidential debate, it was made clear through major newscasters that Donald Trump *must* invoke more political strategy in tandem with his aggressive, argumentative persona that got him this far or it could cost him the election. Commentators prior to the debate posed the question: "Which Donald Trump will show up tonight?" stressing the importance of his success against Clinton as his opponent. Furthermore they stated he must, "describe himself persuasively as an agent for change" in order to be successful, something that Hillary Clinton made clear from the start of her campaign. On the other side, remarks made about Clinton included "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and commentators pointed to Clinton's successful rise in the polls alluding to a clear advantage over Trump, one that for Trump, may be hard to come up from. The moderator for the third and final debate is Chris Wallace for Fox News and the debate takes place at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. Because this is the final debate, every choice is intentional between candidates from the questions posed, to the outfit choice of each candidate. This is the final look at who America wants to elect as president and each party must show their best in order to earn votes this late in the election cycle. As the

candidates walk onto the final debate stage, Hillary Clinton wears an all white pantsuit. The color white can be associated with freedom, purity, and for women in particular, a more angelic notion. As for Trump, he is wearing a traditional suit and tie but the tie is red, the color most used to represent the Republican Party. Trump also is wearing an American flag pin on his lapel where Hillary Clinton is not. All of these visual cues are important in establishing relational rhetoric between the candidates and their constituents but also work towards establishing both candidates as participating political actors. Where Hillary Clinton is a clear political actor, Trump is still working to earn that title outside of his celebrity politician status. Trump must gain the appropriate amount of trust from the American people in order to receive the title of political actor and commentators, news media, and constituents alike are looking to grant Trump that title. Where the first debate establishes the groundwork of the individual candidates' rhetoric, the final debate works towards the candidates' personhood in conjunction with their rhetoric thus establishing their actor persona more so than before. Therefore, acknowledging the dress of a candidate can almost be seen as their final "costume" before the closing act of a play as political actors or potential political actors. Trump and Clinton need their audience to see them as familiar and almost like a friend to them at this point, making voting for them a choice they can be confident in.

Amidst political actor status also comes Trump's awareness of his charisma which thus far has been extremely successful, but also his awareness of mediatization and his increasingly negative reputation within the media. Donald Trump, aware of his

disadvantages, takes an interesting position in this final debate as he appears less argumentative and more apt to political conversation with Hillary. Which is a first for Trump on the debate stage. Chris Wallace poses the first question: “Where do you want to see the court take the country? And what’s your view on how the Constitution should be interpreted? [is it a living document?]” (CBS News). Clinton began her statement by posing a counter question, “What kind of country are we going to be?” This is the same counter question that was posed to Lester Holt in the first political debate between Clinton and Trump. Calling back in this way creates familiarity, something that is vital to the Clinton campaign given her status as a “likable” candidate. Her audience needs to hear her make these connections so that they can feel confident in Clinton’s follow through. Clinton then goes on to discuss that the Supreme Court is a court that represents “all of us” and that they should not reverse Roe v. Wade or the Marriage Equality Act on top of saying no to large corporations for the benefit of the country. This answer shows Clinton’s previous experience in Washington while also using “for the people” style rhetoric that was prevalent throughout her campaign, the first debate, as well as the Democratic agenda as a whole. Her pathos in the notion that the courts are for “all of us” creates this “True American” persona that Trump plays into well which Clinton must reclaim. Clinton is aware that she must feed into this “New American Dream” that Donald Trump has perpetuated throughout his campaign, but in a way that follows her political career well so as to gain the traction Trump has with utilizing this rhetoric. Trump then rebuttals with, “it is imperative that we have the right justices” which as a standalone statement, does not

hold up much of an argument. However, Trump then goes on to discuss Justice Ginsburg and her remarks towards Donald Trump at the time. Justice Ginsburg called Trump's campaign "[I think he has gotten] so much free publicity" however her most iconic statement, "I can't imagine what this place would be -- I can't imagine what the country would be -- with Donald Trump as our president," (CNN Politics) was published in the New York Times and was striking to readers and Trump himself, as justices usually are not openly political in this way. When discussing these statements, Trump goes on to say that Justice Ginsburg made "very very inappropriate statements towards me and the many many millions of people I represent" (CBS News). This is a smart move on Trump's part. While his initial statement discussing the "right justices" is vague and does not take a particular side of an argument, taking what Ginsburg said and flipping it as an insult to his constituents is a brilliant political move that in turn, places blame away from his actions and negative media and onto the opposing party and their leaders. In turn, this makes Trump appear as though he is involved in multiple spheres of the political spectrum and acting in them as a representative to a people, but furthermore takes advantage of Trump's "otherness" in his political acting. The pathos that is being used here, as opposed to Hillary Clinton, works to move Trump into a political role that appears to be legitimate and thus, trustworthy. By calling on his constituents, Trump puts his purpose back onto the people and their voices, rather than his own less experienced voice. In other words, Donald Trump is showing his supporters that he is "for the people" in his political acting and is working to gain his title as a political actor.

Overall, the campaign process from the primaries to the final debate works to perpetuate presidential rhetoric. For Donald Trump, this meant selling his legitimacy. Through the discussion of his campaign all the way through the final presidential debate, it becomes clear that Donald Trump was not flawless in executing proper presidential rhetoric. However, when it comes to establishing himself as a legitimate politician, his combination of populism, mediatization rhetoric, and celebrity politician status granted Trump permission to become a political actor. It is important to understand Trump's campaign in this way so that when unpacking Donald Trump as president, we can watch the ways in which these rhetorical strategies shift into dangerous territory. Granting Trump permission to become a working political actor shifts the expectation for GOP politicians as a whole and gives permission to politicians and constituents alike to utilize the same strategies that Donald Trump did to gain an immense amount of divisive power that is extremely difficult to work against.

CHAPTER 3
DONALD TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY JANUARY 20th, 2016-JANUARY 20th
2021

Donald Trump was elected to be president of the United States on November 8th, 2016. This election would seek to change the presidency and American politics as we know them. As established, Donald Trump has utilized complex rhetorical tools throughout his campaign to disguise his disregard for presidential decorum and thus, the complexity of the presidency as a whole. Furthermore, Donald Trump warrants a level of success within this rhetorical strategy that is shocking. Where it may be easy to assume that a given supporter could see through this lack of decorum as a ruse to who Donald Trump really is, that is clearly not the case, especially during Donald Trump’s presidency. Through this ruse, Donald Trump brought about an immensely successful speaker and audience connection with this lack of presidential decorum that in some ways, felt familiar to those more disconnected from politics. Along with that, those who had been voting with traditional candidates could seek solace in the notion that Trump was different from the “average candidate” and he easily appeared as a fresh, new take on what the Republican

Party could be. It seemed as if a shift in decorum and ultimately what presidential ethos looks like, was something that was necessary post-Obama and up against Hillary Clinton. Alongside Trump's presidency following a lack of tradition, there are also an immense amount of controversial events that occurred within the presidency, thus leading the nation to the state it is currently in. America lives in the wake of what Donald Trump created, starting with the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement happening simultaneously, one of the most decorumless presidential debates/re-election campaigns this country has ever witnessed, and to top it all off, insurrection that occurred on the nation's capital January 6th, 2021. These events build up a historical exposé against Donald Trump and even more so, put his lack of presidential understanding and ethos to light. It is through the signposting of these events that I will be exploring Donald Trump's presidency. Furthermore, these events will also help in describing Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies amid both tragic and chaotic times of his presidency, exposing his foundational rhetorical issues through a populist, demagogic lens.

Inauguration and American Carnage: The Beginning of Trump Era Politics

First, in order to understand the stage that Donald Trump set for himself as the 45th President of the United States, there must be discussion surrounding his inauguration speech and the precedent that speech set up for his followers and Trump's connection to them as a demagog. Even more so, this speech worked to reinforce what was immensely successful for Trump during his campaign which is the blending of formal and informal settings and rhetoric. The inauguration took place on January 20th, 2016, where

Trump would give his first official speech as the president of the United States. Obviously, inaugural speeches hold a lot of weight given the election process and the expectations from constituents surrounding the incoming president. For a first speech, especially for a candidate like Donald Trump, it was increasingly important that he had to be impeccable in delivery, clarity, and overall formality. Along with this is the unspoken notion that Trump had to maintain his unique connection to his audience through usage of his demagogic strategy, Trump also had to blend formal and informal rhetoric as the *president* for the first time. This collision of the formal and informal work to test Trump in his points of weakness and ultimately, these tipping points are visible within Trump's presidency very early, particularly in his inaugural speech. Known as "American Carnage," Donald Trump spoke to his supporters about reclaiming what is theirs and the resources that have been lost which are now considered "American Carnage."

Donald Trump's entire campaign ran on the concept of how the people can work to "Make America Great Again" with Trump as president. Now, with his inauguration, Trump must motivate his audience to follow through in a setting that he is not necessarily used to. The debates that the country holds for president are formal debates, yes, but compared to a presidential speech, the way in which Trump is able to talk to a given audience changes consistently in a debate and does not warrant as much decorum as a full on presidential speech. What allowed Trump to shine on the debate stage was his bullying/gossip tactics towards other candidates which created distraction, alongside his ability to consistently speak to an audience and utilize his personal ethos as a means for

success instead of traditional presidential ethos. It was almost as if he was calling out lifelong politicians on their “yes man” attitude and calling his audience into his different political ideology outside of tradition. Alongside this, in other speech giving environments such as rallies hosted by Trump, there was never a need for formality because Trump himself set the precedent for what was to come thus strengthening an intense aspect of trust between him and his audience. However, in a presidential speech, Trump is not shielded by his fellow politicians nor is he shielded by his own set of standards. Instead, for the first time, Donald Trump is fully exposed to presidential tradition and decorum for the first time in his inauguration speech.

This colliding of worlds has to help bridge the gap between Donald Trump as a candidate and Donald Trump, president of the United States. Trump uniquely continues to carry his “Make America Great Again” rhetoric within his speech from start to finish yet infiltrates it in increments throughout his speech until the very end. Interestingly, when Trump’s rhetoric is met with this formal space requiring the decorum that Donald Trump clearly struggles with, his speech seems very read and choppy with less reliance on charisma driving home his points. Trump starts with the opening formalities that most inaugural speeches contain. That being, thanking the former president and first lady for a smooth transition of power, and acknowledging the setting around him. However, in his pauses and moves to drive home his rhetorical impact, it feels almost forced and awkward unless he turns his rhetoric back to the American people. Then, and only then, does the crowd interact without a drawn out pause or cheer without question. In fact, even when Trump

introduces American Carnage for what it is, the crowd does not appear enthused until Trump pushes forward the notion of putting America back in the hands of the people.

Trump says:

“Today’s ceremony, however, has very special meaning. Because today, we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another. But we are transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the people. For too long, a small group in our nation’s capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left. And the factories closed. The establishment protected itself but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs. And while they celebrated in our nation’s capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land. That all changes starting right here and right now. Because this moment is your moment. It belongs to you.” (Donald Trump, NPR)

This part of the speech, right before the explicit notion of American carnage reinforces the idea that Donald Trump as a president warrants a different perspective, a perspective that is saying we govern our nation “too much” when on the flip side of that, Donald Trump does not really know what governing the United States looks like. This “nation’s people” approach warrants extremely anti-establishment populist rhetoric, something that Michael Serazio discusses in his study “Encoding the Paranoid Style in American Politics: “Anti-Establishment” Discourse and Power in Contemporary Spin” where he says, “Historically, this populism found its base of support among blue-collar workers, but today it is less an explicit economic class project as much as a “political project of building and maintaining power”—a savvy decoupling that, I argue here, an elite has managed to exploit within G.O.P. politics (Serazio 183). It becomes clear that Donald Trump is reliant on his audience to build this “political project” as Serazio suggests, while Trump himself upholds

the seat to protect this dangerous ideology. This type of rhetoric which strays from traditional decorum leaves too much to the audience to interpret which in the case of Donald Trump, is exactly what he wants. The more commotion he is able to stir up during this timeframe, the more support he will yield within his populism. This speaker to audience interaction further perpetuates Trump's outsider perspective alongside his audience's understanding of him exclusively as an outsider, thus upholding and legitimizing Trump's social-in group that is vital to his voter base. Next comes Trump's initial breakdown of American carnage where he states:

“Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities, rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation, an education system flush with cash but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge. And the crime, and the gangs, and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.” (Donald Trump, NPR)

Here, the notion of carnage is something that is vital to this part of Trump's inaugural speech. Not only does Trump make it appear as though American carnage is an extremely important foundational crack this country faces, but even more so something that this country has supposedly never experienced until this moment with Donald Trump as president. It is also important to note the dark undertones that this speech brings about between Trump and his audience. This discussion of carnage suggests that America has seen immense hardship and even death pre-Trump. The notion that carnage suggests is that of violence and hardship, almost post-battle. Donald Trump is working to apply this low point to project what the “American Future” can look like with his vision. We, as a country, are cleaning up the carnage and reclaiming what, as Trump says, “belongs to the

people.” This rhetorical move also suggests that America is a struggling country, when in reality, this “carnage” we are experiencing is not a nationwide effect. It is moments like these where Trump infiltrates his “Make America Great Again” ideology, framing the country he has inherited as the antithesis of what America should be under his political ethos. About one third of the way through his speech, Trump even says, “I will fight for you with every breath in my body, and I will never let you down” (Donald Trump, NPR). This promise made by Trump feels lofty, but in reality, this connection parallels the concept of carnage very well. Donald Trump is essentially expressing that he will save America from what he believes to be America’s darkest hour. Trump creates moments like this throughout his speech, describing hardship and suggesting himself to be the solution. This further perpetuates anti-establishment populism within this extremely formal setting thus eliminating the outward need for charisma as Trump has done in the past, and instead, internalizing that charismatic leadership. Trump is now shifting into a rhetoric similar to that of: “I am here now, and I will save *you*” since the trust between him and his audience has warranted proof. This keeps his demagoguery intact, and further eliminates the need for his audience to question his legitimacy within this formal setting of inauguration. This level of trust between voters and Trump becomes vital in the coming years of Donald Trump’s presidency. Trump himself proclaims in a final call to action: “At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other. When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice” (Donald Trump,

NPR). This overly patriotic claim, focuses highly on in-grouping Trump and his followers. His unifying word choices of “us,” “our,” and “we” create what appears to be a very black and white interpretation of the presidency to his audience and thus, an empowerment movement that can potentially act as a shield for Donald Trump and his presidential actions.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Civil Unrest: Real American Carnage

As Trump’s presidency went on, questions surrounding his legitimacy came to the surface. Donald Trump’s presidency created a lack of bipartisanship and worked to polarize not only Trump’s chosen audience from the “norm” of politics, but was successful in polarizing the House of Representatives as well as the Senate. With Trump receiving an immense amount of success through his anti-establishment outsider rhetoric, lifelong politicians and first time politicians who identified themselves as Republicans began to follow suit, showcasing Donald Trump’s rhetoric and infiltrating it into multiple levels of American democracy. In fact, Donald Trump normalized his “America First” agenda with decisions such as the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, The Paris Climate Accord, and an increase in the United States’ presence in Afghanistan. Each of these events happened within the first 100 days, if not the first year of Donald Trump’s presidency. It is the “America First” agenda that creates an extremely dangerous and fragile rhetorical wall around Donald Trump’s presidency, yes, but also the GOP moral compass as a whole.

Fast forward to September 2019, where Donald Trump is facing an impeachment trial called by Nancy Pelosi regarding collusion with the Ukrainian government against Russia. This should be regarded as a huge breach in trust between Trump and the United States. However, Trump's lack of decorum enabled extreme delegitimization of due processes such as impeachment. Donald Trump has never sought out to be what is considered a traditional president and his lack of decorum, which is problematic, is a huge benefit to him in that the denial a lack of decorum brings creates a new narrative, a Trump narrative, that appears as functional truth to those who support Trump. Donald Trump worked to redefine what a presidential standard is for himself so that when his legitimacy came into question, the denial of truth became much easier for Trump and thus, followers could feel even more enabled by his support and his ruse of "care" for them. While Donald Trump was officially impeached on December 18th, 2019, there seemed to be far less commotion through the voices of the American people. Trump's casual take on the presidency created vast desensitization to one of the utmost punishments a president can face and this stems directly from a lack of decorum. This intentional desensitization also functioned as a distraction from Trump's impeachment. In the next two months, Trump would be faced with a tumultuous national emergency that ultimately placed his personal wrongdoings as president on the backburner and Trump himself made sure of this. Donald Trump framed the COVID-19 pandemic as a national distraction, instead of calling it what it was: a national emergency.

The COVID-19 outbreak was deemed a pandemic on March 11, 2020 and Donald Trump had to act fast to protect American citizens and potentially preserve the reputation of his already tumultuous presidency. This was a rhetorical turning point that Trump could have utilized to his advantage to bring those who had lost faith in him back to his attention and those who were anti-Trump view him as a president that when called to a national emergency, can take appropriate action and uphold democratic standards. Yet, when faced with adversity, Trump sought out rhetoric that continued to polarize the country rather than unite America under a rhetorical model that creates bipartisanship. In the study “American Attitudes Toward COVID-19: More Trumpism Than Partisanship” done by Neeraj Kaushal, Yao Lu, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Jennifer So, they work to discuss the general public’s centralized ideas surrounding COVID-19 as Trump has created it to be, and the rhetorical impact Trump had on Americans’ perception of the pandemic. When COVID-19 initially struck, the United States’ reaction was not as active as other countries. As Kaushal et al. describe:

“The United States suffered worse than most other countries from COVID-19 in terms of reported cases and mortality. Critics argue that this was at least partly due to President Donald Trump’s leadership, calling COVID-19 “no worse than seasonal flu,” and “a political conspiracy to destroy the Trump presidency,” and his public mocking of individuals who wore masks, which weakened public compliance of measures that would have restricted COVID-19’s spread.” (Kaushal et al. 67)

For Trump to frame a pandemic as a political conspiracy is not only bold, but ultimately, a lie. It is clear that with the lack of decorum, there will eventually be a lack of presidential reality. There is no precedent that Donald Trump has followed as president to “check

him” instead, there is only the pedagogical strategies Donald Trump could cling to under the formality of the president for so long. A pandemic is an event where a president must be diligent and make proper responses quickly so as to protect American livelihood and instead of doing the proper work, Trump instead made the rhetorical choice to implement the ways in which COVID-19 was affecting *his* community and *his* beliefs and those who support *him*. What Donald Trump then perpetuated, was a waterfall of similar behavior from congressmen and women alike thus trickling down lax approaches to COVID-19 to multiple states all because of Trump’s personal bias against addressing a pandemic.

Kaushal et al. continue this thought when they address the important aspect of partisan influence that politicians like Trump work to create. They write:

“Efforts by presidents to change public opinion have historically had limited persuasive effects (e.g., Edwards, 2003) or depended on the support and trust presidents have had at particular times (see Page & Shapiro, 1984, 1992). On the other hand, while leaders may not affect the public as a whole there are theoretical reasons and increasing evidence that partisan or ideological leaders can influence partisan subgroups. This is consistent with Zaller’s (1992) two-message theoretical model, which postulates that when partisan leaders or other partisan sources diverge on an issue, their supporters would receive and accept their persuasive messages and follow suit.” (Kaushal et al. 68)

With this, it is clear that Donald Trump was aware of the way that he could manipulate his following under the guise of his social in-group that he single handedly worked to create. And, because his fellow Republican Party members were following suit, there was an immense amount of validation for his behavior and thus, the disbelief in the pandemic which ultimately, is not a political issue. COVID-19 became a contingency for Donald Trump and with his disregard for legitimate medical advice given by the World Health

Organization (WHO), and chief medical leader Dr. Anthony Fauci, Trump acted to withdraw from WHO on July 7th 2020.

Alongside the COVID-19 pandemic also came civil unrest after the tragic murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25th, 2020. This event occurred in the height of the pandemic and at the height of Trump's rhetorical downfall. Within the Trump presidency, and even the pandemic, racial tensions had been built and perpetuated by Donald Trump, with Trump himself calling COVID-19 the "China Virus," "Wuhan Virus," or worst of all, "The Kung Flu." But racism did not just start here for Trump. Within his following, there are several neo-Nazi groups that prescribe to Trump's rhetoric and even worse, uphold it in the most dangerous ways through their own rallies and intimidation strategies learned from Trump. After the death of George Floyd came protests all over the country and all over the world, with several American protests turning to riots alongside violent police responses. Over 200 American cities activated curfews in response to protests, and more than 2,000 cities and towns across America sought out some form of protest honoring and mourning Floyd. Amidst this, Donald Trump addressed the nation on June 1st, 2020 about the death of George Floyd and the protesting that followed suit. Trump claims that justice for George Floyd is important to him and that he will work to seek that out. However he then goes on to say, "But we cannot allow the righteous prize and peaceful protesters to be drowned out by an angry mob. The biggest victims of the rioting are peace loving citizens in our poorest communities, and as their President, I will fight to keep them safe. I will fight to protect you. I am your President of law and order

and an ally of all peaceful protestors” (Trump 2020). Here, there is a clear subtext that Trump does not approve of protesting to the brevity it is occurring in this country. The “law and order” rhetoric that Trump perpetuates here is almost a coded message to those who are staunchly anti-protest or even on the more extreme end, blatantly racist. Placing law and order alongside the allyship of peaceful protestors makes for a complicated rhetorical face off. Where Trump is attempting to make a statement that could appear empathetic towards the national situation and the protestors defending themselves against violent police action, he is still enforcing the idea of law and order politics which in the past were ultimately founded on the war on drugs and the normalization of racial profiling. This is also Trump mimicking the words of presidents such as Nixon, Reagan, and Bush so as to legitimize his disregard for the protestors and their freedom of speech. Again, because there is a lack of decorum, Trump must cling to rhetorical traditions of the past so as to protect his presidential image that at this point, is anything but presidential. After claiming his identity as an ally to peaceful protestors, Trump then states: “But in recent days, our nation has been gripped by professional anarchists, violent mobs, or, arsonists, looters, criminals, rider rioters, Antifa and others” (Trump 2020). This then, is Trump reclaiming his viewpoints on these protests through otherization. Where he just identified himself as an ally, he is now identifying protestors as violent themselves, not citizens responding to an act of violence and being met in turn, with more violence. Trump has no basis to prove that these protestors fall under the category of professional anarchists or Antifa, an extreme, left-leaning political group who Trump leans on when

making connections to civil unrest and violence. Trump then goes on to state that protesting with violence as the result is an “act of domestic terror” when, in reality, one could argue that domestic terrorism occurred at the hands of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who killed George Floyd. Trump then implements his call to action stating: “That is why I am taking immediate presidential action to stop the violence and restore security and safety in America. I am immobilizing all federal resources, civilian and military, to stop the rioting and looting, to end the destruction and arson, and to protect the rights of law-abiding Americans, including your second amendment rights.” (Trump 2020).

Interestingly, Trump calls his response to the protests a “presidential response” and yet his solutions calling for immobilization of armed police and the National Guard are incredibly violent and work against the notion of American Carnage Trump claimed he would actively avoid. Also, the implementation of the second amendment feels rather out of place. However, it is this type of reference that enables conservatives like Kyle Rittenhouse to move into a protest alongside militarized police. This is not the response of a president but rather, the reaction of anti-establishment populism and its methodology.

On the same day after this address, Donald Trump sought to take a photo of himself holding a Bible at St. John’s Church. In order to achieve this, Donald Trump used riot and militarized police to detonate tear gas and stun grenades to clear out a nearby protest. This is a physical representation of the hypocrisy that is rampant in Trump’s rhetoric. Donald Trump left a trail of carnage for a photo-op. A photo that encapsulates the moral compass of demagoguery when implemented in democracy. This fabrication

does not hide the reality that Trump is facing at this time. George Floyd is a victim of American Carnage in Trump's America. Protesters who faced violence are also victims of this carnage. And those who have been affected by COVID-19 alongside this civil unrest are also victims. With Trump's call to action and perpetuation of violence, he is actively ignoring the trail of carnage he is leaving behind with his rhetorical ideology creating the battleground.

The 2020 Presidential Debates: Trump's Rhetoric and its Chaos Exposed

Alongside the tragic events of 2020 also came the start of the 2020 campaign for president. Clearly, Donald Trump faced an incredible amount of scrutiny throughout his presidency and was faced with national challenges to which he had no experience with on a political scale. By the time of the first debate between President Trump and Joe Biden, Trump had a lot to be insecure about. In fact, many of these insecurities stemmed from his choices on how to handle, or rather avoid, conflicts that were affecting both the nation and the world. On the other hand, former Vice President Joe Biden spoke out about these issues throughout his campaign and into his nomination, upholding a version of decorum in a way that the nation had not seen in four years. On September 29, 2020 in Cleveland, Ohio the first presidential debate between Joe Biden And President Trump occurred with Chris Wallace as the moderator. This debate was crucial for both Biden and Trump in that Biden had to prove himself against Trump, a known bully on the debate stand and Trump had to prove his debate skills to be relevant as president. Again, he worked hard as a

presidential *candidate* to stay relevant on the debate stage but he has yet to prove himself as the acting president.

The first question, centering around stacking the courts, is answered appropriately by both Trump and Biden with room for each candidate to speak their piece and move forward. Then, when Wallace signals for open discussion, that is where things go south. Trump immediately goes on the attack, immediately finding a hot button issue Biden mentions in passing in his previous response and running with it. Trump makes a move to discuss healthcare at the hands of Biden by stating, “The bigger problem that you have is that you’re going to extinguish 180 million people with their private health care that they’re very happy with” (Trump, 2020) to which sparked an intense riff between the two candidates as Trump then called Joe Biden’s comprehensive healthcare plan “Socialist medicine.” Already, it seems as though Donald Trump is floundering and losing his political edge that he so clearly had the last time he stood on this debate stage. The back and forth that is occurring makes for a tough analysis of political points by viewers because next to none of the answers to Wallace’s questions are complete, but furthermore, this chaos makes it extremely difficult to even understand what is going on at all. With this open discussion, Donald Trump will not even let Biden finish a thought even with Wallace attempting to pose another question. Thus leading Biden to turn to Trump and say: “Will you just shut up man?” (Biden, 2020). This is a shocking moment on the debate stage. It is because of Donald Trump’s lack of decorum that caused Joe Biden to break his political decorum that he has upheld his entire career. With Trump’s blatant disrespect

towards Biden, disregard to debate rules, and bullying toward Joe Biden, it seems as if Trump does take these events seriously. In fact, it almost seems as if Trump thinks there is no threat to him as president. Where Joe Biden works to have a true debate that American voters deserve, Trump works to silence Biden and invoke his demagogic, celebrity politician persona.

Next, Wallace then shifts the subject matter to COVID-19, noting to both parties that this is a serious topic so each candidate should “try to be serious about it.” Wallace asks why the American people should trust a given candidate over the other. Biden smartly states the current death rate from COVID-19 first, implementing presidential pathos that audiences can recognize. Biden’s opening statement goes as follows:

“200,000 dead. As you said, over seven million infected in the United States. We, in fact, have 4% of the world’s population, 20% of the deaths. 40,000 people a day are contracting COVID. In addition to that, about between 750 and 1000 people a day are dying. When he was presented with that number, he said, “It is what it is.” Well, it is what it is because you are who you are. That’s why it is. The President has no plan. He hasn’t laid out anything. He knew all the way back in February how serious this crisis was. He knew it was a deadly disease. What did he do? He’s on tape as acknowledging he knew it. He said he didn’t tell us or give people a warning of it because he didn’t want to panic the American people. You don’t panic. He panicked. In addition to that, what did he do?” (Biden, 2020)

This is showing Biden’s understanding of a national emergency and what it means to respond appropriately. Biden is also transparent as to how the president is privy to information about national emergencies in the White House where he states “ He knew all the way back in February how serious this crisis was. He knew it was a deadly disease,” which is confirming Biden’s ethos and credibility as former Vice President of the United States. Here, Biden makes a strong case, one that Americans affected by this tragedy can

hear, understand, and draw logical conclusions to. This is clearly a threat to Trump's rhetoric and lack of presidential knowledge that has shown itself more and more in 2020. Trump, shortly after this, begins small interjections within Biden's allotted two minutes. Trump eventually takes over and goes immediately into his us versus them comfort zone, claiming that Biden could never understand or endure the national emergency that is COVID-19. Trump claims, "If we would've listened to you, the country would have been left wide open, millions of people would have died, not 200,000. And one person is too much. It's China's fault. It should have never happened. They stopped it from going in, but it was China's fault" (Trump, 2020). This is not only shifting blame onto Biden, but completely taking Trump out of the picture by putting the entire pandemic on China's shoulders. Trump then closes out with, "But I'll tell you, Joe, you could never have done the job that we did. You don't have it in your blood. You could've never done that, Joe" (Trump, 2020). This attack again perpetuates Trump's us versus them rhetoric, tapping into the understanding that his audience will hear this and recognize Trump as legitimate, but for Trump, this move appears to be more of about Trump preserving his own reputation to himself. It feels almost as if he is confirming that he took action when the rest of the world is looking at America's lack of COVID-19 regulations and restrictions. He is taking the bare minimum that he enacted and turning it on its head, making out his actions as an act of saviorism and painting Biden and thus, the Democratic Party as a group that would not *want* to do what he did. As the discussion continues, the topic of COVID-19 is still on the table, with Trump insisting his solutions were the only ones that

were right. Biden eventually rebuttals with, “Guess what? A lot of people died and a lot more are going to die unless he gets a lot smarter, a lot quicker-” to which he was quickly interrupted by Trump. Donald Trump then threw presidential decorum out the window where he said to Biden, “Did you use the word smart? So you said you went to Delaware State, but you forgot the name of your college. You didn’t go to Delaware State. You graduated either the lowest or almost the lowest in your class. Don’t ever use the word smart with me. Don’t ever use that word” (Trump, 2020). Instead of a rhetorical attack, Trump makes the decision to attack Biden with his character, all because Joe Biden publicly questioned Trump’s intelligence. Here, this attack feels nasty of Trump and almost puts Trump back in his businessman persona rather than a president. It is this debate that works to showcase Trump’s identity as a celebrity politician and the persona he has paired with a failing political ethos that on this debate stage is ultimately, transparent.

This debate is full of chaotic moments and issues that are addressed within that chaos. Including the issues of race where Donald Trump was called to address neo-Nazi groups and he told the Proud Boys to “Stand back and stand by.” However, one of the most important is that of voter fraud via mail in voting where Trump makes this statement about mail in ballots:

“As far as the ballots are concerned, it’s a disaster. A solicited ballot, okay, solicited, is okay. You’re soliciting. You’re asking. They send it back. You send it back. I did that. If you have an unsolicited—they’re sending millions of ballots all over the country. There’s fraud. They found ’em in creeks. They found some, with the name Trump, just happened to have the name Trump, just the other day in a wastepaper basket. They’re being sent all over the place. They sent two in a Democrat area. They sent out a thousand ballots. Everybody got two ballots. This

is going to be a fraud like you've never seen. The other thing, it's nice. On November 3rd, you're watching, and you see who won the election. And I think we're going to do well because people are really happy with the job we've done." (Trump, 2020).

These claims are lofty, and warrant no actual proof. In this moment, Trump utilized ambiguity and informal, non-specific language, locations, and pronouns to describe the "disaster" of mail in ballots. With this ambiguity and aimlessness present in Trump's response, he is once again showing a lack in decorum and a push towards collective thought in order to warrant proof. The main running point that Donald Trump had is that voting with a mail-in ballot is fraudulent. This is where Trump is driving home the notion to distrust the traditional process that America has used since its conception because those processes and those upholding those processes, are "lying" to the social in-group that Donald Trump has created. This statement also feels as if Donald Trump is making a business deal more than he is actively trying to win more votes. This delegitimization of voting will eventually work to place the integrity of the entire election process into question which is exactly what Trump wants. Trump frames our democracy as something that is working against him, almost as if he as the president is marginalized which in turn, would suggest marginalization of those who follow him and identify themselves within his rhetoric. This rhetorical suggestion by Trump seeks to create a community that works to uphold what appears as a "moral" standard rooted in false patriotism and is built on a fragile foundation. However, this moral rhetorical argument is powerful and post-election will seek to make American history.

Insurrection at the Capital: Trump's Final Tirade

Donald Trump lost to Joe Biden officially in the 2020 presidential election and with this came uproar from Donald Trump calling the election fraudulent and claiming that the election was stolen from him. Joe Biden officially won the presidency November 7, 2020. On January 6th, 2021, there would be a joint confirmation hearing at the capitol confirming Joe Biden as the 47th President of the United States. On this day, Donald Trump hosted a rally around 12pm near the White House. It is also important to note that Trump had actively sought to pressure Vice President Mike Pence into perpetuating the notion of a stolen election and even further, stopping the Senate from confirming Joe Biden as president. Protesters and Trump supporters alike had already gathered at the capitol and were being fired up by Donald Trump at what would be his final rally. In his speech, Trump is clearly angry and working to invalidate the decorum that is now moving him out of office. He is still constantly uniting people under his rhetoric, with phrases like “despite everything we’ve been through,” and “looking out at over 250,000 patriots today, I have never been more confident in our nation’s future,” both still selling the ruse that is the social group united under Trump. The social in-group that Trump created has now become an armed and dangerous, racist group of voters. Amongst these “political activists” are the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, both starkly passionate about upholding their personal freedoms via the constitution. Donald Trump speaks to his crowd when he states, “Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that’s what this is all about. And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with: We will stop the steal. Today I will lay out just some of the evidence proving that we won this election

and we won it by a landslide. This was not a close election” (Trump, 2020). Trump speaks to his followers in a way that makes them feel incredibly heard, acknowledging their rhetoric that is a reflection of his own and praising them for their due diligence. This type of enabling rhetoric works to confirm lies, and in this case, the lie that Donald Trump won the election against Joe Biden.

As Trump continues, it becomes clear that he is transferring his rhetorical power onto his violent audience who is looking to seek his validation and uphold the moral high ground that Trump created. He then states, “Many of you have traveled from all across the nation to be here, and I want to thank you for the extraordinary love. That’s what it is. There’s never been a movement like this, ever, ever. For the extraordinary love for this amazing country, and this amazing movement, thank you” (Trump, 2020). This reference to a movement is a signature Donald Trump move, carrying his rhetoric from the campaign all the way down to a moment of moral compass. Playing with the idea that, if you are really part of this “movement,” you will show your patriotism through the support of Trump and in this moment, they will support the concept of the notion that the Democrats “stole” the election. Interestingly, most of this speech feels similar to the way in which Donald Trump tended to ramble in his campaign rallies. He tends to go off on tangents, moving from one subject to another sporadically and then circling back to his personal ethos, his founding rhetoric that made it into the White House and clearly, was unsuccessful. This is interesting in that it appears as though Trump is showing a backslide in the way he works to appeal to his audience. He is relying on his old rhetoric that gave

him the success large enough to become president. Trump himself is fully aware of that niche audience and even more so, he is aware of the ways in which he can mobilize them through this rhetoric.

In his final remarks of the 70 minute speech, Trump stated: “We fight, and we fight like hell, and if we don’t fight we won’t have a country anymore” (Trump, 20210). This is almost a call to battle for his constituents and he purposefully framed it that way. While Trump uses a call to action traditionally in most every speech he gives, this one was legitimate in Trump’s call for action. This is where populism can turn quickly into facism and here, Donald Trump walks that line very carefully, touching on multiple aspects of its danger. Trump then says, as if the mobilization rhetoric were not clear enough, “So let’s walk down Pennsylvania Avenue” a statement that functions as a “go ahead” for the audience he is looking at. It was this moment that sparked the horrifying attack on the United States Capitol. As Trump ends this speech and does not return to the capitol himself, the confirmation hearing has already begun and rioters sought to move in on the United States Capitol. The events that occurred on the steps of the nation were violent, unconstitutional, and a threat to our democracy that Donald Trump claims he loves fervently.

CONCLUSION
DONALD TRUMP'S LEGACY POST-INSURRECTION AND THE NEW
REPUBLICAN PARTY'S AGENDA

Post-Trump, the country has been left with an immense amount of work to do both politically, and socially. Joe Biden inherited an version of America that is almost unrecognizable from when he began his career. We have faced a global pandemic that is still not over, we have faced tragedies based on gun violence, we have faced tragedies based on race, and our economy is suffering tremendously. There is crisis after crisis, shortage after shortage, a war waging on in Ukraine. All of this is post-Trump America. All of this is carnage.

Politicians now running in primary elections seek to use strategies that Trump implemented. In the state of Alabama, Tommy Tuberville beat out Doug Jones for his senate seat, with Tuberville running strictly on an “outsider” campaign as a former football coach from Auburn University. Katie Britt, the most recent winner for Senate in Alabama beating out “MAGA” Mo Brooks, ran on an Alabama First campaign, similar to that of Donald Trump’s America first campaign. Donald Trump created a rhetoric that

will be utilized and followed by the Republican Party for generations of politicians. Some senators in conservative states even identify themselves as a pro-Trump politician, suggesting the support of his rhetoric is at the head of their political ethos as well. With this, it is clear that Donald Trump has created a new ethos for conservative politicians, one that guarantees power and support regardless of experience. The normalization of this type of rhetoric is dangerous in numbers, and the multilevel infiltration that Trump began, is an active part of the legacy that Trump left behind. However, within this new ethos comes a discussion surrounding morality and where these up and coming politicians differ from Trump is the utilization of their Christian background as their explanation for how they identify their own morality. Traditionally, conservatism was formed under the basic ideas of Christianity. However, because Donald Trump reshaped what it means to be traditional in America, the Republican Party has utilized those Christian values as an excuse for behaviors that uphold patriarchy, racial tensions, and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. There is now an immense amount of projection from the Bible onto fundamental rights of United States citizens in 2022. Alongside this, Donald Trump actively worked to stack the Supreme Court in his presidency appointing three conservative judges thus swinging the bench to work to overturn landmark decisions such as Roe v. Wade. We are now living in a world where the overturning of Roe v. Wade is our reality.

However, there are consequences to Trump's actions. Currently, the Senate is going through a series of hearings addressing the insurrection for what it is: an attack on United States democracy and a disregard for morality and the legacy that has been left

behind. The work that must be done to create bipartisanship starts with these hearings and coming together as a nation to understand the insurrection for what it is will help break future barriers. Donald Trump has worked to preserve partisan politics and the insurrection was the peak of that preservation. However, there is much hope in the trials that Donald Trump's cabinet must face and even more hope in the communication that the Senate hearings create with the public. It is a sense of duty, as Liz Cheney put it, to culminate a conversation about the *actual* events at hand and the ways in which we must address these events to preserve duty and decorum together. It is clear that Donald Trump lacks a sense of decorum, but a sense of duty is something that Trump did have, just in the wrong way. Donald Trump redefined the sense of duty for the Republican Party and Liz Cheney, and hopefully other Republicans, are working to reclaim that for themselves and the longevity of the party.

With this exploration of Donald Trump's rhetoric and ethos under my chosen lens, there is an immense amount of clarity in how his version of democracy functioned: it was based on simple rhetorical tactics that when used together, create a complex web of falsehoods and fallacies. Each rhetorical strategy utilized by Trump functions in its own unique way and when stacked on top of one another, in the setting that Trump created for himself. The holes in Trump's legitimacy should have created an extremely obvious disregard for Trump as the president. Yet, the image that Donald Trump created for himself, was a completely different picture come January 20th, 2021. Donald Trump entered the White House as a celebrity politician, working to project his outsider

perspective onto the nation and he left shrapnel in the Oval Office, with the blood of thousands on his hands, further perpetuating the violent American Carnage he spoke on so fervently at the start of his presidency.

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