CONSTRUCTING A POLITICAL PERSONA OF HONOR: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RHETORIC OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

by

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(Under the Direction of John Murphy)

ABSTRACT

Senator John McCain's rise to national prominence was as rapid as it was unexpected. Despite long odds, McCain claimed victory in seven different primaries, including an initial upset in the New Hampshire primary that put him on the political map. McCain is now perceived as a power-broker on Capitol Hill, often defying the Republican Party with his maverick image and willingness to cross party lines. This dissertation analyzes the ways in which John McCain utilized distinctive rhetorical strategies to become one of the most powerful national political figures in the country. First, McCain employed a narrative of honor to build a persona of a "clean" politician interested in protecting the country's interests over his own. Second, McCain used his campaign autobiography and speeches to meld his personal life story with his political life. Finally, McCain translated his campaign successes into the legislative success of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform legislation. This dissertation illustrates how McCain rhetorically transferred his status as a war hero to that of a political reformer, and thus provides useful insights into how a politician's character is created and deployed in modern politics.

INDEX WORDS: Narrative, Persona, John McCain, Comic Frame, Honor, Character.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

John McCain's rise to national prominence was as rapid as it was unexpected. As the son of an admiral and a former Vietnam POW, McCain possessed the credentials for national leadership. However, in his run for the Presidency, McCain encountered long odds at best. Facing a well-funded and well-supported opponent in George W. Bush, McCain appeared to have little legitimate chance of victory. Additionally, both Republican pundits and the media characterized Bush as the "inevitable" choice, with it seemingly only a matter of time before McCain would be forced to buckle under to the Bush campaign machine.

Despite these odds, however, McCain went on to claim victory in seven different primaries, including an initial upset in the New Hampshire primary that put him on the political map. Although McCain was eventually forced to concede defeat to Bush in the Republican presidential primaries, he followed his run by spearheading the move to get the McCain-Feingold bill passed, arguably the most important reform to the campaign finance system since the post Watergate legislation of the 1970's. McCain is now perceived as a power-broker on Capitol Hill, a figure to be admired, respected, and feared. This dissertation analyzes the ways in which John McCain utilized distinctive rhetorical strategies to overcome political and material obstacles in his effort to become one of the most powerful national political figures in the country.

The distinctiveness of McCain's campaign style was the heavy infusion of the candidate's persona into the race. Riding a bus marked the "Straight Talk Express," McCain promised to tell voters exactly what was going on in Washington, contrasting himself with politicians who would tell them what they wanted to hear. Along these lines, McCain granted

the media free access to his campaign, in striking contrast to Bush, who ran a tight-lipped and heavily controlled campaign. Bush's camp was so strict with media access that one commentator stated, "It's hard to find a reporter who doesn't have a gripe about covering the Bush campaign, whether it's perpetual complaining about a lack of face-time with the governor or getting jammed by Bush flacks for asking tough questions" (York, 1999).

In many ways, contrast was a defining theme for John McCain. McCain was all that other politicians were not. With a willingness to "speak off the cuff," to talk about issues as he saw them, and to give unprecedented access to the media, McCain stood in stark contrast to politicians that were too scripted, too evasive, and too much like ordinary politicians. McCain promised to breathe new life into politics at a time when over half of Americans chose not to vote in major elections. McCain's "authenticity" became the source of not only a fresh campaign style, but fresh media interest as well.

These factors, among others, make McCain worthy of study. Today, John McCain is an influential political figure, despite lacking traditional sources of political power. McCain is isolated from his own party, and is required to build constituencies for legislation largely out of whole cloth. Yet, McCain poses a serious threat to George W. Bush and the Republican political agenda. McCain has forced Bush to sign one of the most significant overhauls of the election system in over three decades, despite Bush's strong opposition to the measure (Alexander, 2003). Lacking a significant power base within his own party, McCain achieves his ends largely through the deployment of a unique rhetorical style. McCain's emphasis on reforming the political system quickly became a popular topic among the press, but as of yet, is not a popular topic with academics.

Research Question

The contention of this dissertation is that the discourse generated by John McCain's autobiography, his campaign speeches, and the discussion surrounding Senate passage of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance legislation offers the opportunity to explore the ways in which a person otherwise bereft of traditional vectors of influence such as fundraising and backing from powerful political leaders, can establish a powerful rhetoric of reform. Furthermore, this combination of rhetorical artifacts allows for a tracing of McCain's public persona throughout various stages of his political career. The study of McCain's rhetoric allows for an illustration of how a public persona can change over time, as well as how persona influences efforts to create public pressure for reform.

McCain's rhetoric thus offers a case study in contemporary political reform, because both the substance of his message and the persona he creates illustrate how reform-oriented candidates can succeed in the modern political climate. John McCain's emphasis on transforming the political system is useful to elucidate the synergistic effect between the rhetoric a political figure uses and the persona that is created. McCain's issue focus influenced media coverage of the *image* of the Arizona Senator, confirming Dan Hahn's hypothesis that issues and images are "*largely a false dichotomy*…the fact remains that images create issues and issues create images; images and issues contain each other" (Hahn, 1987, p. 255). In McCain's case, the image of the reform candidate blended with his issue of political reform, and McCain's emphasis on political reform bolstered McCain's standing as an independent minded politician looking out for the good of the country.

Studying how political images are constructed is especially important in an increasingly technological era. Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles contend that "candidates are forced to

construct an image of presidential leadership in an era of televisual intimacy and intrusion" (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 1996, p. 191). The authors continue, "American politics has traditionally valued presidents who project heroic and mythic personas" (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, p. 191). Given the realities of modern presidential politics, it is either impossible or unwise to try to separate the persona of a candidate from the arguments they espouse. The synergistic effects between image and argument mean that the rhetorical critic must analyze how persona affects the rhetoric of a candidate, and, in turn, how the rhetoric of a candidate influences his/her persona.

As Benoit and Hanczor argue, image is "the perceptions of the source held by the audience, shaped by the words and deeds of the source, as well as by the actions of other relevant actors" (1994, p. 3). The perception of the source held by the audience does not exist independently of rhetoric, either as created by the candidate or others involved in the political milieu. Understanding how McCain's persona influences the choice of rhetorical strategies available to McCain, as well as how such rhetorical choices spill over into perceptions of the candidate, provide the foundations for this rhetorical study of John McCain.

McCain's image as an "above politics" candidate bolsters the arguments he makes about cleaning up the American political system. Ironically, the rhetoric of John McCain, which exists largely to clean up the American political system, also serves as a model for contemporary political debate. McCain's emphasis on the political integrity issue shows that possibilities still exist for effective public deliberation on issues of national concern. The arguments made by McCain and his supporters emphasize a break from modern-day attack politics, in that the reformers focus on coalition building and inclusive approaches to produce broader change. As a

result, the effort to clean up American politics holds the potential to elucidate a mode of argument that may allow room for more optimistic visions of American political communication.

In this dissertation, I explore the political dimensions of communication through the lens of strategies used by McCain to make his case to the American people and the Congress. This dissertation contends that understanding how styles and modes of rhetorical argument affect the larger political milieu is a matter of rhetorical study, and that McCain's emphasis on integrity and political reform serve as a useful case study to illustrate how modes of argument shape candidates' persona and political influence. Far from existing as separate elements of rhetorical criticism, McCain's strategies illustrate the synergistic effects of style and substance in a campaign.

Literature Review

Although a great deal has been written in the popular press about John McCain, little scholarly research has been conducted. Of the research that does exist on McCain, two major themes emerge. The first is work that views McCain's failure to win the 2000 election from an instrumental perspective, i.e. he lost to Bush primarily because of structural features endemic to the campaign. The second theme eulogizes McCain's admirable achievement, portraying him as a gallant candidate who struggled against enormous structural barriers. Both types of articles pay little attention to the specific rhetorical strategies McCain uses to build his reform persona.

Philip Paolino and Daron Shaw's 2001 article "Lifting the Hood on the Straight-Talk Express" illustrates the instrumental perspective on the McCain campaign. The authors contend that the "McCain Phenomenon" has little to do with McCain's "distinctive campaign tactics" and more to do with McCain being in the right place at the right time. In a largely quantitative analysis, the authors conclude that the favorable attention given McCain by the media is not "out

of line compared to other momentum candidates" (Paolino & Shaw, 2001, p. 493). The authors contend that McCain is hardly unique as a political figure, and "as with almost all momentum candidates, McCain's star shone quickly and brightly and then dimmed" (2001, p. 502).

Paolino and Shaw contend that four factors bolstered McCain's rise to power: "(a) latent support for an antiestablishment reform candidate, (b) an exodus of potential competitors at a propitious time, c) extensive and favorable media coverage of McCain...and (d) initial contests [with] open primaries" (Paolino & Shaw, 2001, p. 484). The difficulty with such an analysis is that it is incomplete. The question left open is why McCain was uniquely suited to take advantage of such an opening, and why the press flocked to McCain and gave him such favorable media coverage.

Paolino and Shaw's own analysis opens the door for a rhetorical study of John McCain. They indicate, "[f]ollowing the New Hampshire primary, exit polls showed that McCain had gained support from voters put off by the perceived corruption and partisanship of the political process" (Paolino & Shaw, p. 487). The rhetorical question then becomes: How did McCain position himself to benefit from voters concerned about corruption and partisanship? The answer can be found by conducting an examination of McCain's rhetorical strategies to look for themes and ideas that McCain was able to convey to the American people to gain support from those disaffected with "politics as usual."

In addition, the idea that McCain's star shone brightly, but then faded ignores a long-term perspective, one which links McCain's presidential run with later success on Capitol Hill, most notably, the passage of the McCain-Feingold legislation by the Senate in April of 2001. Having failed every time it was previously brought before the Senate, the rhetorical critic is left to ask

whether or not the momentum created by McCain's run for the presidency bolstered his ability to push for the passage of campaign finance reform.

Other instrumental analyses of John McCain treat the candidate as a subset of the larger 2000 election. In other words, only brief mention is made of McCain in a larger analysis of what went wrong in the Bush/Gore race. Emmett Buell conducted a review essay of several books about the election in an article in the *Journal of Politics* (Buell, 2002). In this essay, the author makes a brief mention of McCain by asking, "Did John McCain or Bill Bradley ever have a realistic chance of winning their nominating races? What about the role of campaign finance?" (Buell, 2002, p. 633). These questions provide only a perfunctory analysis of the role that John McCain played in the 2000 election, and no emphasis is placed on the rhetorical strategies that McCain employed in stump speeches or in his general approach to the media.

Buell argues that the rules governing primaries failed to benefit McCain, noting that, "McCain had no chance of beating Bush unless he got the lion's share of the independent and crossover vote" (Buell, 2002, p. 637). The author examines the rules governing primaries, norms that made it almost impossible for McCain to win the election because of "a front-loaded process that transforms early front-runners into prohibitive favorites" (Buell, p. 639). Brief mention is made of the fact that Bush had a tremendous money advantage early in the race with "twice as many staff as McCain and...open offices in three times as many states" (Buell, p. 640).

Such commentary, while useful in providing structural reasons for McCain's ultimate *failure* does little to explain McCain's *success*. Despite lacking the support of the establishment of the Republican party, despite being well behind in fund-raising, and despite running a campaign primarily on the esoteric issue of campaign finance, John McCain was able to win seven different state primaries against George W. Bush, including the early stunning upset in

New Hampshire which caused McCain to jump in support from 16% to 30%, creating a "legitimate problem for Bush" (Paolino & Shaw, 2001, p. 485).

In addition, such analyses ignore the long-term success that McCain gained after his run for the Presidency. Either one can chalk his legislative victory up to coincidence, or one can argue that there is a clear-cut connection between McCain's campaign for president and the passage of the McCain-Feingold bill. Indeed, given the nature of McCain's campaign and the focus on campaign finance reform, it is possible to see linkages in the rhetoric McCain employed and the spillover in success for the passage of McCain-Feingold.

The second type of existing academic work regarding McCain are a series of articles which briefly look at the McCain campaign from a perspective of gallant admiration for what McCain was able to achieve. John Murphy wrote an article that links McCain to a "heroic tradition" in presidential rhetoric (Murphy, 2000). Murphy contends that McCain has reintroduced qualities of a heroic tradition to public discourse, exemplified by, "the amplification of the nation and its institutions...and...the embodiment of the challenge to command...in the person of the rhetor" (Murphy, p. 468). Murphy argues that, "McCain... articulated a tradition long extant in American politics, a discourse that tends to arise after a period in which the public perceives the nation has not met the call to duty even as it enjoys peace and prosperity" (Murphy, p. 469).

Murphy's analysis provides a useful starting point for studying the rhetoric of McCain. The link to John F. Kennedy and Theodore Roosevelt exemplifies a tradition of a particular kind of rhetoric in American politics, and it will be useful to discover the ways in which specific articulations by McCain fall under this discourse. At the same time, McCain embodies a spirit of a reformer who seeks to change a system of which he is a part. Thus, while McCain may

exemplify a heroic tradition, he also reflects another tradition, that of the reformer seeking to rectify the failings of the democratic ideal. This dissertation will extend the heroic tradition analysis by looking at a more in-depth sampling of specific discourse generated by McCain, and meld such analysis to reformist elements in McCain's rhetoric.

Another article which discusses McCain in the context of campaign communication is Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn Parry-Giles's article "Reassessing the State of Political Communication in the United States" (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2001). The Parry-Giles argue that political communication in America is generally positive and optimistic, and that McCain is "typical rather than unique" in this regard (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, p. 159-160). The Parry-Giles contend that McCain uses his website to tell "voters about views on…different issues…from small business policy to his proposal for campaign finance reform" (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, p. 159). The authors later discuss specific issues contained on McCain's website arguing, "John McCain's 'vision' of reform and renewal involves dramatic proposals for campaign finance reform and compelling narratives about the candidate's captivity in Vietnam" (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, p. 168). McCain is thus situated in a larger context of how candidates engage in policy discussions and provide voters with sufficient information to make comparative policy assessments of candidates for political office.

Although the Parry-Giles' work provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing how McCain fits into the larger political context, the article provides little specific focus on McCain, instead discussing a multitude of candidates and how their campaigns provide a vision of optimism in American political communication. Given the striking success McCain had in not only upending the heavily favored George W. Bush in several primaries, but also the success

McCain had in pushing campaign finance after his 2000 presidential run, more analysis of the specifics of the McCain campaign and subsequent rhetoric is justified.

Furthermore, by placing a higher level of scrutiny on McCain's rhetoric, specific discourse can be looked at which either bolsters the idea of optimism in American politics or undermines such a hypothesis. In other words, which specific messages used by McCain bolster the policy dialogue surrounding campaign 2000, and which messages undermine such a goal? Another article of note is John Parmelee's 2002 article, "Presidential Primary Videocassettes: How Candidates in the 2000 U.S. Presidential Primary Elections Framed Their Early Campaigns" (Parmelee, 2002). This article studies the "meet the candidate videos" used in early campaign strategies of six different candidates, including McCain. Speaking of McCain, the article argues that McCain's eleven minute video portrays him as surviving imprisonment in Vietnam because of "'faith in God,' faith in his fellow prisoners, and 'faith in one's country'" (Parmelee, p. 326). Parmelee argues that McCain's video links his biography to the overall campaign for the presidency by illustrating a man "devoted to his political courage on various issues" (Parmelee, p. 326). The article also notes that McCain specifically targeted his videos, showing none in Iowa, while sending "more than 50,000 videos [to] New Hampshire and South Carolina" and making a "special effort to mail the video to veterans in key states" (Parmelee, p. 328).

Parmelee's analysis provides a useful starting point to analyze one aspect of McCain's campaign for president. The analysis of McCain's video provides greater understanding of some of the central themes that McCain discusses in the campaign, as well as how McCain and his staff rhetorically framed the candidate. At the same time, however, a more extended analysis of McCain's biography and speeches would incorporate an overall look at the run for the

presidency by John McCain. In addition, Parmelee looks at McCain in the context of six other candidates, providing little space in the article for an extended discussion of the unique characteristics of the McCain campaign. Furthermore, Parmelee does not look at McCain's campaign as tied to future legislative influence on Capitol Hill.

Preview of Chapters

The chapters that follow will pursue three different case studies of the rhetoric of John McCain. First, I critically analyze McCain's presidential biography, *Faith of My Fathers*. Second, I analyze three of McCain's speeches in his run for the Republican Presidential primary of 2000. Finally, I analyze the Senate debates surrounding the passage of the McCain-Feingold act in early 2001. The goal will be to critique not only the texts in their own right, but to analyze media coverage discussing the texts to understand core themes of McCain's discourse. The studies will look for themes common to McCain's rhetoric, as well as deviations from such central themes and the impact such deviations had on press coverage, public support, and opposition arguments.

The second chapter will be a critical analysis of McCain's presidential biography released in 1999 as a prelude to McCain's announcement for his run for the Presidency. The strategy of releasing a biography to coincide with a presidential announcement has been described as "more obligatory than instrumental," (Lee, 1995, p. 58) helping "unknown[s] in national politics" by providing the public with a window on the candidate. In McCain's case, his presidential biography gained significant media attention, and served as a useful springboard into the campaign as McCain followed his book tour for *Faith of My Fathers* with his announcement of candidacy.

What is most striking about the book itself is how little it says about McCain the candidate. The book begins with a discussion of the history of McCain's grandfather and father's military service, discusses the trials and tribulations of his capture in Vietnam, and ends with his release from POW camp in Vietnam. Scarcely a word is said about presidential aspirations, a desire to change any specific piece of legislation, or the role of the President of the United States.

At the same time, the book sheds a great deal of light on McCain the man. Steeped in military values, the book emphasizes the ideas of duty, honor, and country. The biography presents someone who is not a career politician, but who has suffered and sacrificed in an effort to make his country better tomorrow than it is today. Additionally, much of the commentary provided by McCain lays the seeds of a vision for McCain the president–someone who places faith in tradition, in country, and in the good fight. In many ways, the distinctions between McCain's biography and other presidential biographies help create a foundation of contrast between McCain and other politicians with whom he would be compared.

The third chapter will analyze three speeches McCain gave while on the campaign trail in 1999 and 2000. The first speech is McCain's announcement address, the second speech is an address McCain gave to the New Hampshire state legislature shortly before his victory in the New Hampshire primary, and the third is a speech given by McCain in Virginia Beach shortly before his loss to George W. Bush in the South Carolina primary. In these speeches, McCain calls for a sense of unity to clean up political corruption for the good of all Americans. In fact, it is when McCain deviates from these central themes in his attacks on the religious right in the third speech that McCain's unification strategy unravels.

The fourth chapter will contain an analysis of the Congressional debates over the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform legislation passed by the Senate in April of 2001. Throughout these debates, McCain and his supporters emphasized characteristics common to a comic style of argument. McCain and those in favor of reform argued that the campaign finance rules were the root cause of corruption, and that everyone in the Congress, both Republican and Democrat, were subject to the corruption created by the overall campaign finance reform system. Second, McCain and his coalition reached out to everyone who was willing to fix the campaign system, even those who supported amendments that McCain and his team found to be troublesome. Finally, the reformers emphasized a notion of transcendence, by illustrating that the whole point of campaign finance reform was to improve a democratic system that had been tarnished by big special interest money. Campaign finance reform was not about attack or blame politics, rather it was about coming together to fix something gone astray.

In many ways, McCain used his campaign in a way that echoes Bruce Gronbeck's observation that, "campaigns yield or 'reflect a social and political consensus that will sustain constructive programs for major public programs'" (Gronbeck 1978, 270). McCain's presidential biography, his campaign speeches, and his stance on the debates over the McCain-Feingold legislation are all part of a larger campaign to clean up American politics. McCain's campaign reflected and influenced a consensus over the nature of American politics and the role of big money in this system. McCain's strategies and arguments in his presidential biography can thus be viewed on a continuum with his speeches on the campaign trail, and his eventual push for campaign finance reform. The style and mode of McCain's arguments in these various stages can thus provide useful rhetorical illustrations of a particular style and mode of argument.

The final chapter will draw conclusions about what the rhetoric of John McCain tells us about the overall state of political communication. The goal will be to use the discourse of McCain to complicate the general notion that American politics is inherently bankrupt or beyond hope. McCain's discourse illustrates a model of political communication that contains the seeds for optimism. The candidate who placed reform of the political system at the centerpiece of his campaign also becomes someone who can be viewed as creating a positive model of political discourse than can restore more optimistic visions of political communication in modern America.

CHAPTER 2: Linked to a Legacy--The Development of Persona in McCain's Campaign Biography

When John McCain's autobiography hit bookstore shelves in September of 1999, the prevailing reaction among media commentators centered on the difference between this book and other campaign biographies. It was the story of John McCain the Naval aviator, POW survivor, and hell-raising rebel more than a political treatise of a politician running for the presidency. The autobiography told the tale of Navy men, born and raised to be sailors and renegades. At the same time, however, the renegades were defenders of the country, proud of their roots, and willing to sacrifice everything for a higher cause. *Faith of My Fathers* was no ordinary campaign autobiography, and Senator John McCain was no ordinary candidate.

Gerard Henderson of the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented that the book "is most unusual for its genre" (Henderson, 1999, p. 19). Woody West of the *Washington Times* added, "[c]ampaign biographies…are as a general thing…exercises in personal and public piety, as guardedly candid as a legal deposition…McCain's 'Faith of My Fathers' has qualities, though, that raise it above the run-of-the-stump book genre (West, 1999, p. A19). Another commentator wrote, "[s]uch works are traditionally the stuff of soapy self-congratulation…and swaths of political philosophy. McCain's biography is a very different animal: it ends…before he decided to go into politics, and…contains barely a word on his political views" (Macintyre, 1999). The author continues, "[i]nstead this is a critical self examination, a detailed description of his time in Vietnam and above all an exploration of the nature of duty and honour [sic]" (Macintyre, 1999).

Pundits were nearly unanimous in their belief that the book was a life story, not a political philosophy. In comparing Steve Forbes' autobiography and *Faith of My Fathers*, Ronald Brownstein argued,

> Steve Forbes brushes over autobiography and stacks up ideas on taxes…and health care like a mason who's paid by the brick. By contrast, in 'Faith of My Fathers,' Sen. John McCain…offers a compelling life story…that is not only free of policy proposals but ends before he even began his political career (Brownstein, 1999, p. A5).

Brownstein continued by noting that McCain's autobiography was "not much agenda so far, but lots of personal credibility. His book…is not only moving but wise" (Brownstein, 1999, p. A5).

At the same time, however, it was impossible to distinguish McCain's autobiography from politics. The book was, after all, an autobiography of a candidate for the presidency of the United States. Although the form of the book was different than others in its genre, the book portrayed McCain as he and his campaign team wanted him to be viewed in his run for the presidency. Brian Crowley wrote, "[t]here seems to be more than coincidence at work in this book's timing, which is bringing the Arizona Republican a lot of attention. Biographies…have long been a part of campaign strategy" (Crowley, 1999). However, he continued by noting the unusual nature of the book,

> [t]hat said, 'Faith of My Fathers' does much more than accomplish its political goal of helping a candidate win attention. McCain's story about his father and grandfather, both Navy admirals, and the strength he took from them as he struggled to stay alive for more than five years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, is compelling (Crowley, 1999).

Indeed, McCain had every intention of incorporating the book into his bid for the presidency. As one journalist wrote about McCain's presidential announcement address, "[i]n an address that invoked the patriotic spirits of his father and grandfather…McCain blended the outlines of a presidential agenda with subtle digs at President Clinton, his Republican presidential rivals and the GOP Congress" ("GOP's McCain jumps in," 1999, p. A1). McCain's campaign team was attempting to exploit what they viewed as a significant distinction between their candidate's life story and the stories of the other contenders. As one columnist wrote, "[h]is campaign team believes that McCain's biography is his greatest asset in a field of candidates with less-compelling life stories" ("GOP's McCain jumps in," 1999, p. A1). Carla Marinucci added, "[i]n a year in which character has taken center stage in politics, McCain's extraordinary life story may draw a distinct contrast to those of the other GOP hopefuls, particularly that of GOP front-runner George W. Bush" (Marinucci, 1999, p. A1). Another commentator said:

> 'Faith of My Fathers' is by definition a political book, of course. It is intended as a resume for his ambition. By invoking his grandfather and father to help explain who he is, Mr. McCain provides affecting profiles of two men who served their nation with distinction (West, 1999, p. A19).

This chapter analyzes McCain's autobiography to explore how the book helps fashion the persona of John McCain the presidential candidate. How does the book create a persona for John McCain in order to position him as a viable contender for the presidency of the United States? The very contrast of the book to other works in the genre provides a useful starting point for analyzing this question.

The Distinct Nature of the Autobiography

Faith of My Fathers mentions none of McCain's political experience, and the book ends after he is released from the "Hanoi Hilton" in 1973. No mention is made of his rise to prominence in Arizona politics, no mention is made of his push for campaign finance reform, no mention is made of any of the political experience that would make McCain fit for office. The book, instead, is a story of how McCain's life follows the trail blazed by his grandfather and father. The book reads more like three biographies in one, starting with the career of his grandfather, Admiral "Slew" McCain, his father, Jack McCain, and only then does it turn to John McCain's life in the Naval Academy and his capture in Vietnam.

McCain's story begins with a description of his grandfather's military career, continues through a discussion of his father's military career, and covers McCain's military career until he is released from the POW camp in Vietnam. Along the way, it tells the story of the McCains' heritage, their allegiances, their respect for honor and duty, and the path of redemption they followed, from shenanigans as roguish young men to achievements as military leaders. The narrative consists of a combination of routine discussions, military battles, and self-reflections. McCain is shown as someone who has endured a long life journey, and as a man who stands at the end of the line of a storied military family.

One of the clearest ways to look at what McCain is trying to do in the book is to use his own words as a guide. He begins the book by quoting Victor Frankel: "[e]verything can be taken from man [sic] but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. vii). The book is going to be about values, particularly the value of perseverance through adversity.

The discussion of McCain's life story and struggle in the POW camps in North Vietnam should be read through this lens.

The book is also a commemoration of McCain's "fathers," both his father and his grandfather. McCain says:

> [m]y grandfather was a naval aviator, my father a submariner. They were my first heroes, and earning their respect has been the most lasting ambition of my life. They have been dead many years now, yet I still aspire to live my life according to the terms of their approval (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. vii-viii).

The book centers on the idea that McCain tries to live up to standards set by both fathers. This central theme recurs again and again, as he judges his actions by how he feels his grandfather and father would feel about what he has done.

However, the book must also be read according to its primary purpose. The book is designed to be a campaign biography, to introduce McCain as a candidate and to bolster his bid for the presidency. Through the unusual method of talking about his family lineage and military background, McCain draws an implicit distinction between himself and other candidates, including George W. Bush. Through the stories of his grandfather and father, a picture of McCain the candidate begins to form.

In many ways, McCain portrays himself as an "anti-candidate." The discussion of his political qualifications for office seems irrelevant; instead, his moral and political qualifications take center stage. McCain avoids discussing political battles won and lost; he talks about military battles instead. The stories of his past do not mention political scandals he has weathered; the stories instead focus on personal trials and tribulations at the Naval Academy and his time in POW camp in Vietnam.

The stories of McCain's fathers portray the life McCain wishes to live. He admires the lives his fathers led, and uses their ethos and credibility to build himself as a candidate for public office. Throughout the book, McCain links his life to their lives by drawing comparisons in experiences, and using their advice to help guide him through various situations. Far from trying to eclipse his fathers' personae with his own, McCain treats his fathers as mentors throughout the narrative—people who are proud that he is carrying on the lineage they have helped create—but also willing to pass judgment if McCain fails to live up to their standard.

In other words, McCain's biography creates a grand narrative of *honor*. McCain lives and dies by a code of conduct that serves as a way of life in the personal and political realms. Joanne Freeman describes this linkage: "[t]his link between honor and politics…gave early national political combat its passion and its sting, for it bound together a politician's personal character with his political principles and actions…it instilled into politics a moral and personal dimension…" (Freeman, 2001, p. 261). For McCain, politics is about honor. The values inscribed as a Naval officer do not exist in isolation; they permeate his being. By incorporating the narratives of his life as a Naval officer, McCain can meld his character to his politics, allowing the reader access to McCain's persona. Throughout the individual stories, the meta-narrative of honor stands out as the primary guiding principle.

Theoretical Linkages Between Narrative and Persona

The uniqueness of McCain's campaign autobiography rests in its heavy reliance on stories, not only of McCain's life, but also of the lives of his grandfather and father. In sharp contrast to campaign biographies that emphasize political accomplishments and agendas in a traditional, "rational" style, McCain's autobiography gains potency because, in Robert Schrag's words, "the stories we tell, in and about our lives, have significant world-organizing power" (Schrag, 1991, p. 313). The ability of humans to understand the world through story-telling is

best explained by Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm. His works have focused the attention of communication scholars on the narrative paradigm, drawing a distinction between the rational form and the narrative form (Fisher, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1989). Fisher argues that, "the narrative paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons" (Fisher, 1984).

Fisher's works ushered in a wealth of communication scholarship on the question of the narrative paradigm (e.g., Farrell, 1985; Lucaites & Condit, 1985; McGee & Nelson, 1985; Weal, 1985; Hollihan, 1988; Rowland, 1989; Schrag, 1991; Kuypers, et al, 2001). Lucaites and Condit contend that, "[t]he impetus for this surge of interest has been, in large measure, the growing belief that narrative represents a universal medium of human consciousness" (Lucaites & Condit, 1985, p. 90). Rowland adds, "story-telling is an essential part of the human condition" (Rowland, 1989, p. 39).

It is in this light that McCain's campaign biography can be read as public moral argument. McCain's stories build a picture of McCain the person, allowing the readers to understand the persona he embodies. McCain's heroism lies not only in what he *has done* for his country, but also in the potential of his future actions. In other words, McCain's life story lays the groundwork for McCain the candidate, and the potential president. McCain never needs to describe his political agenda, because his story is the agenda. If the audience can believe and trust in McCain the war hero, they can believe and trust in McCain the president.

The narrative structure in McCain's autobiography allows the audience to "connect" the character of John McCain with the actions that he may take in the future. In William Lewis' discussion of Ronald Reagan's presidency, Lewis contends that the narrative form allowed Reagan's proponents to "praise him for providing vision, reassurance, and inspiration to the

American public" despite criticisms of Reagan's policy choices on a given issue (Lewis, 1987, p. 281). Lewis' analysis illustrates how, in the Reagan presidency, goals and character supersede an emphasis on policy specifics. Similarly, in McCain's presidential biography, the character of John McCain is created in such a way to allow the audience to infer the types of actions and policies he might take as president.

The narrative form encourages an emphasis on morals and character over detail. In McGee and Nelson's words, tests of narrative stories "apply not to the facts of the case but to their narration. Credibility is the issue, not facticity" (McGee & Nelson, 1985). The traditional standards for judging narratives, the concepts of narrative fidelity and narrative coherence, apply more to the character of individuals than to the details. Lewis says of Reagan that, "factual inaccuracies" in Reagan's narratives were not troublesome because, "[t]he meaning of the general story was more important than the particular figure. If Reagan's estimate erred by 10% or by 100% that would not affect the meaning of his story" (Lewis, 1987, p. 289).

In McCain's narrative, questions about policy proposals and individual details are not as important as the values and goals he conveys to the audience about himself. The story is not a treatise on government or a policy prescription for America. The narrative is a story about McCain, his fathers, and his life. The consistent reference to "faith" throughout the work establishes a moralistic tone, providing an illustration of how the narrative form persuades by building a foundation of character instead of a foundation of policy prescriptions.

In many ways, McCain's story is more difficult to criticize than if McCain attempted to lay out more specific visions for governmental reform. Although critics could get caught up in whether or not McCain's budget numbers are correct or whether or not his assessments of foreign policy threats are accurate, his narrative provides a vision about the type of person

McCain is. The empathy and identification McCain creates allows readers to, in Tonn's words, "deduce the story's moral and draw connections between the tale and other circumstances" (Tonn, 1996, p. 11). This use of the narrative echoes William Lewis' comments about Reagan that "[c]haracter and style combine to reinforce the presumption that will and courage, not intelligence and expertise, are required to solve difficult political problems" (Lewis, 1987, p. 307).

The narrative form thus becomes coupled with the public sphere of argument. McCain's narrative, as Bruce Weal argues, "serve[s] as deliberative rhetoric and thereby play[s] a role in the public sphere of public argument" (Weal, 1985, p. 105). The internal logic and coherence of McCain's story serves as a foundation for the audience to infer the specifics that McCain would seek to uphold as president. In the narrative form, arguments are based more heavily on *ethos* and more heavily on the role of the audience to fill in the missing pieces of argument. Argument in the narrative sphere is almost by definition more truncated, adding to its audience appeal as well as differentiating it from arguments in the rational or technical spheres.

The narrative form also provides a useful means by which to build the persona of the author of a work, in this case, John McCain. The rhetorical concept of persona has received a wealth of theoretical attention in the communication field (e.g. Black, 1970; Ware & Linkugel, 1982; Wander, 1984; Tonn, 1996; Morris, 2002). Ware & Linkugel define persona as, "in the strictest sense…a Latin word referring to the masks worn in Greek and Roman theater" (Ware & Linkugel, 1982, p. 50). They add, "this persona concept—the mask that is there before any person turns to fill it—applies equally well to rhetorical criticism" (Ware & Linkugel, p. 50).

Ware and Linkugel contend that "aspirations and cultural visions" of the audience cause the symbolic creation of certain "archetypal figures" (Ware & Linkugel, 1982, p. 50). Indeed,

many of the rhetorical studies of persona refer to specific archetypal figures that a rhetor is said to embody. For example, Ware and Linkugel study Marcus Garvey as embodying the archetypal figure of Black Moses (1982), and Phyllis Japp studies the "Esther" and "Isaiah" personae that Angeline Grimke embodies (Japp, 1985).

In addition to the study of classic, archetypal figures, persona is also articulated as the means by which a rhetor can fulfill a role representing or symbolizing a particular "historic period, a movement or world-view" (Ware & Linkugel, 1982, 62) in a more generic sense. Dow and Tonn discuss a "persona enacted through maternal thinking" (Dow & Tonn, 1993, p. 297), Tonn studies labor leader Mother Jones via use of "a maternal persona" (Tonn, 1996), John Pauley argues that Louis Farrakhan attempted to "enhance his ethos by reshaping his public persona," (Pauley, 1998, p. 514), and John Hammerback discusses how persona and ideas can be merged in discourse in his study of Jose Antonio's rhetoric (Hammerback, 1994).

In a similar light, McCain's biography serves to enhance his political ethos by shaping his public persona into a redeemed war hero. There is a sense that McCain is trying to fill the mask of the war hero in his rhetorical approach to his autobiography. As performed in McCain's biography, the war hero is grounded in courage, honor, fidelity to God and country, as well as humility with regard to one's accomplishments. The narrative form is particularly useful in this effort to build a political persona. Marcus Wiesner's article on Mario Cuomo's autobiography states that, "[Cuomo's] narrative presentation recapitulates and reinforces his public persona as a rich and complex figure" (Wiesner, 1991, p. 86). Similarly, McCain uses his life story to build his persona. The narratives and stories McCain tells add richness to the man that is McCain, allowing him to align himself with "war heroes" from the past.

Because persona has a direct influence on the audience perception of the words of a rhetor, it is particularly useful for leaders in the political realm to take efforts to bolster their persona. Phyllis Japp, in her discussion of the various personae Angelina Grimke embodied in two different speeches, contends that the differing personae "reveal different strategies for winning equality and enlarging woman's sphere" (Japp, 1985, p. 345). McCain's persona as a war hero embodies a much different strategy than other candidates running for President. Far from making his political agenda the core of the campaign, McCain makes his personal credibility the centerpiece. The stories McCain tells allow him to be viewed as a trustworthy person who has overcome a past of irresponsibility and slovenliness.

This construction of McCain's persona allows the audience to gain a more stable, and hence resilient picture of John McCain. Even if potential voters disagree with one or more aspects of McCain's agenda, the stability created by a powerful persona allows the audience to continue to see McCain in a favorable light. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca argue, "[t]he concept of 'person' introduces an element of stability" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 264). A campaign treatise which lists promises of the candidate can be viewed as transitory, something that may or may not be fulfilled by the candidate, depending on the circumstances and the political expediency of the actions taken. Persona, however, speaks to a person's being, to who they "truly" are. The narrative form in McCain's autobiography fosters an "authentic" quality to his persona. Instead of merely providing a glimmer of what the candidate stands for on a given issue, the audience gains an understanding of McCain the man. The narratives thus serve to provide a more complete picture of what McCain would be like as president, as opposed to a transitory "snapshot" on the issue of the day.

In analyzing how McCain's campaign biography shaped McCain's persona, three themes emerge. First, McCain makes reference to the values one inherits in living the life of a naval officer. According to the book, sailors live their lives according to different standards and codes of conduct than others. Second, McCain talks about the combat experiences of his family in order to discuss the effect of combat on his life. McCain's stories illustrate that those who have not experienced combat cannot fully appreciate how it alters one's perceptions about God, country, and freedom. Finally, McCain uses the book as an apologia against accusations made against himself and his fathers. McCain talks about the failings of the three men, but he does so in such a way that the reader comes to admire the men almost because of their personal failings, rather than in spite of such faults. These themes merge to provide a view of McCain as a proud son of a proud lineage, a man willing to admit his faults, but willing to accept the consequences of such faults in order to focus on the defense of his country and way of life.

Values Affirmed From a Military Legacy

Faith of My Fathers is replete with stories of the McCains' day-to-day life in the Navy. Their careers follow a similar pattern: they nearly wash out of the Naval Academy, but slowly rise to high military positions due to bravery and leadership. They encounter many detractors along the way and many of the complaints are legitimate. The McCains are ill-tempered, hostile, and overbearing, yet these very qualities come to be admired because they make up the character of someone fighting for his country. Honor and duty are not qualities that are left on the battlefield, but consist of the ways in which soldiers and sailors live their lives.

McCain's grandfather and father both expect that the military tradition will run through McCain himself. As he says, "[o]f more lasting duration, and of far greater consequence, was the military tradition [my grandfather] bequeathed to my father and me; the tradition he was born

to, the latest in a long line…who had worn the country's uniform" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 17). McCain contends that the military history of his grandfather and father are directly linked to his decisions to join the military, and intangibly, to McCain himself. In the narrative McCain creates, discussion of the values held by his fathers cannot be divorced from the values held by McCain himself. McCain adds:

> As a boy and young man, I may have pretended not to be affected by the family history, but my studied indifference was a transparent mask…As it was for my forebears, my family's history was my pride. When I heard my father or one of my uncles refer to an honored ancestor or a notable event from our family's past, my boy's imagination would conjure up some future day of glory when I would add my own paragraph to the family's legend (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 20).

His father's history is part of McCain's history, and in the narrative, part of the man who is John McCain.

McCain describes the effect of this lineage in a moving passage:

> The relationship of a sailor and his children is, in large part, a metaphysical one. We see much less of our fathers than do other children…But our fathers, perhaps because of and not in spite of their long absences, can be a huge presence in our lives. You are taught to consider their absence not as a deprivation, but as an honor. By your father's calling, you are born into an exclusive, noble tradition…When your father is away, the tradition remains, and embellishes a paternal image that is powerfully attractive to a small boy, even long after the boy becomes a man (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 51).

McCain portrays this military tradition as extending from one generation to the next, carried down in the way lives are lived and traditions are passed. In his discussion of his father, McCain says that his childhood, "withstood the strain of frequent interruptions, upheavals, travel, and separation that the Navy imposed on the lives of its officers' families. He would never know any other life. From early childhood, he understood he would share his father's vocation" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 52). McCain's father learned the values of his grandfather because they shared in the same tradition—the tradition of a Naval officer. Unlike an accountant or a lawyer, the tradition of a Naval officer carries with it a range of expectations that extend far beyond the vocation itself.

When discussing the values McCain derives from being part of a military family, most of the lessons McCain learned result from observing his father's life. McCain writes, "[m]y father never had to…explain…an officer's life to me…As the son of a professional officer, I had abundant opportunity to observe the long absences, hard work, and frequent upheavals that attended a military career" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 165). McCain draws an important distinction by mentioning the one lesson his father made sure to teach him—personal honor. In his words:

> The sanctity of personal honor was the only lesson my father felt necessary to impart to me…All my life, he had implored me not to lie, cheat, or steal; to be fair with friend and stranger alike; to respect my superiors and my subordinates; to know my duty and devote myself to its accomplishment without hesitation or complaint. All else, he reasoned, would be satisfactorily managed were I to accept, gratefully, the demands of honor. His father had taught him that, and the lesson had served him well (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 167).

Honor becomes the overriding theme of a life in the military, and the overriding theme of the book itself. Small indiscretions, even infractions of rules of discipline and order within military institutions, can be forgiven if one maintains honor. Honor was the one thing that must be taught explicitly; it cannot and should not be inferred merely from surrounding circumstances. As long as one maintains faith to this overriding principle, the rest will fall into line.

Another tradition McCain discusses with a mixture of pride and derision is the life of he and his father at the Naval Academy. The importance of the Academy to the tradition is evident when McCain remarks, "[h]ad my father and grandfather been accountants, it is unlikely I would have sought appointment to the Academy. But it was their example, and my father's expectation, that led me there, not their influence in the Navy" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 125). Although McCain somewhat wistfully discusses his time in the Academy, more often mentioning the things he did to evade the rules and regulations of the institution than his successes, he also makes it clear that the Naval Academy teaches important values. McCain says that, "…the Academy's traditions were…more effective at imparting the cardinal virtues of leaders than the methods devised by any other human institution" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 59). The Naval Academy's traditions became a way of teaching the values that the officers should hold dear. McCain's failure to live up to those traditions reinforces his "long-held paradoxical image of the Academy, a place I belonged at but dreaded" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 117).

In the narrative, McCain draws a strong link between the actions, character, and values of his fathers back to himself. The book makes a clear inference—the values and characteristics McCain is discussing when talking about his fathers should be applied to McCain himself. This creates an unusual juxtaposition in McCain's persona as a candidate. McCain is part of a proud

history, but at the same time rebellious against components of that history which he deems to be unimportant. Yet, in many ways, this juxtaposition works to McCain's advantage as a candidate. He has a proud heritage and believes in honor, country, and duty, while at the same time being willing to disrupt and violate the status quo when it comes into conflict with the overriding notion of honor. This "maverick" image ties in well with McCain's attacks on political corruption and the campaign finance system. Rules and systems that uphold honor are to be revered and valued; those that fail to do so are to be reformed or discarded.

The saddest value for soldiers is that their lives are over when the "last war" for them is over. In discussing his grandfather's death, McCain tells the story as if once World War II was won, there was no point in Slew McCain continuing to live. McCain recounts that after arriving home four days after his tour of duty in World War II, Slew McCain died at his celebration ceremony. "He had fought his war and died" according to McCain (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 6). McCain adds that another admiral close to Slew "believed he had suffered an earlier heart attack at sea and had managed to keep it hidden. According to Carney, the admiral 'knew his number was up, but he wouldn't lie down and die until he got home'" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 6). In discussing the death of his grandfather, McCain makes reference to the last conversation his grandfather had with his father. While McCain's father left the conversation with no feeling that McCain Senior was about to die, his grandfather remarked that, "dying for your principles and country was a privilege" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 7).

Slew McCain was a sailor, born to fight and die on the battlefield. When the last war was over, he had nothing left to live for. The idea that it may have been a physical health failing or just a coincidence is not discussed by McCain in the book. A sailor's life exists to protect others, and when the need to protect them is done, the purpose of a sailor is done as well. This lineage

also extends through McCain's father. When discussing his father's death, McCain writes, "like his father before him, [he] sacrificed his life to hold a command in his country's war" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 288). The lives and deaths of his fathers parallel each other. The men were sailors, nothing more, and nothing less. The life of the sailor is portrayed with glowing admiration by McCain, but the end is almost pre-ordained; sailors fight, and when the fighting is done, sailors die.

McCain's stories of honor provide insight into McCain the candidate. For McCain, the world is organized around the theme of honor, as described through anecdotes, memories, and stories both from and about his fathers. McCain's stories about his fathers provide insight into McCain's history, and the situations allow for readers to infer what stories McCain would prefer in given contexts. McCain's stories of sacrifice in the name of honor underscore the notion that McCain views honor as an overriding principle in all aspects of his life.

McCain's narratives of honor illustrate three rhetorically significant points about the use of the narrative form in political rhetoric. First, McCain's stories of honor and duty allow the book to bolster identification with the audience. Second, McCain's use of well-developed "characters" in the work allow for a deeper level of audience engagement in the story, perhaps helping to elucidate the powerful reaction that commentators gave to the work. Finally, McCain's vignettes about honor and duty lend themselves to moral, as opposed to *policy* judgments, about McCain the candidate. McCain's use of the narrative allows him to tell a more interesting and engaging tale about his life, as well as one that emphasizes his character over his policy prescriptions.

First, McCain's stories of honor and tradition allow the biography to be read as a means of providing identification with the audience. McCain's narrative allows the audience to see the

similarities in values between themselves and McCain. Burke explains in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that "identification" is the joining of two people on the basis of some shared, or apparently shared characteristic ("substance"), or the representation of a more general principle or value (Burke, 1969, p. 20-21). McCain's narrative of his military life of honor allows the audience to become joined in McCain's vision, transcending the traditional "rational" style. The audience becomes caught up in the vivid stories of McCain's time at the Academy, or the tragic death of Slew McCain, allowing the audience to come to appreciate the value system to which McCain subscribes. Bruce Weal notes, "an audience member may identify with a character in the story, and the character may…represent a certain set of values or interests" (Weal, 1985, p. 106). Thus, the audience member comes to view his/her experience as "consubstantial" with the narrative.

Through McCain's discussion of the values he and his fathers possess, McCain allows the audience members to see themselves in the story, confirming Weal's observation that "narratives possess certain qualities which cause them to engage audience attitudes and understanding through identification and expectation to create lines of argument" (Weal, 1985, p. 105). McCain need not make explicit arguments in the "rational world paradigm" that he stands for truth, honor, and dignity. Instead, the audience comes to see the values McCain represents in the stories he tells and the characters represented in the stories. The stories solidify McCain's status as a hero who has derived his values from a sense of duty and honor. Ultimately, the audience can identify better with the story more than with a list of arguments in a traditional Toulmin "claim-warrant-data" fashion. The audience comes to empathize with Slew, Jack, and John as they would members of their own families.

Second, McCain's use of well-developed characters allows him to bolster the identification effect of the narrative. McCain goes to great lengths to speak of the individual details of Slew and Jack McCain's lives, so the audience can better appreciate who they are and what they represent to McCain. Deborah Tannen argues that narrative action in the voices of characters can increase the identification and intellectual engagement stories provide (Tannen, 1999, p. 102-104). The audience becomes wrapped up in the characters, and begins to anticipate how the characters will respond to situations that arise. The narrative form allows for audiences to see characteristics of themselves in the characters, solidifying their identification with such characters.

Finally, McCain's narratives of honor and character lend themselves to moral, as opposed to policy judgments about the story. Much as William Lewis argues with regard to Ronald Reagan's presidency (Lewis, 1987), practicality of specific measures and plans of action take a back seat to the basic morals and values espoused by the story itself. The exact measures that McCain will take as president are subordinate to the goal of conveying McCain's belief structure in the story. The goal of McCain's narrative is not to gain adherence to a specific course of action, but rather to promote identification of the audience with the values that inhere to the story. Weal contends that, "[s]tories display values in the characters they portray, and they argue for values by representing the relationships among characters and their fates" (Weal, 1985, p. 105). The respect, honor, and dignity that other characters in the book confer upon McCain's father and grandfather speak to the positive power of the values the men uphold.

Coupled with stories of his own determination, will, and self-sacrifice, the countless vignettes about honor in McCain's biography enable the audience to generalize beyond their personal circumstances to identify with the McCains and their lives as Navy men. This allows

the values held by McCain to be ones that the audience can view as being consubstantial with their own. Through his discussion of the lifestyle of military soldiers, McCain is able to convey his own values and character, allowing the audience to more closely identify with McCain the man when they evaluate McCain the candidate.

Values Derived From Combat

In addition to the general values derived from being in the military, McCain uses the book to detail how military combat changes and influences one's perspectives on the world. McCain details not only his fathers' military careers, but discusses his own as well, beginning with a discussion of the young naval pilot who was too cocky for his own good, follows with vivid depictions of his torture and confinement, and ends by detailing his eventual release from the Vietnamese POW camps. McCain's message is that combat changes a person, and only those who have lived through and seen war can fully understand how it shapes and influences perceptions on the world.

When discussing his fathers' wars, McCain delves deeply into personal stories about his grandfather and father. With regard to his grandfather, a significant concept is that Slew McCain cared deeply about those under his command, valuing them as individuals, and not just as cogs in the larger military machine. McCain notes, "colleagues of my grandfather [say] that he would cry…when he received casualty reports. 'Whenever a pilot was lost…it was not just a sad thing, but it seemed like a personal loss'" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 15). McCain adds, "my grandfather liked to talk to the pilots just after they returned from a strike…The pilots loved these exchanges, recognizing…a regard for them that was not always apparent in the busy, distracted mien of other senior commanders" (McCain & Salter, p. 15). Slew McCain is portrayed as being morally superior to other admirals in his position, primarily because he acts

differently than most admirals. Caring about the individuality of each soldier under his command brings to light the human side of the admiral, as well as his willingness to listen to and respect those under his command.

The admiral appears to be "just one of the boys." Slew McCain, and by extension John McCain himself, come across as someone who can be trusted with power because he remembers what power is designed to do—serve the average American. These portrayals bolster McCain's ethos with regard to the character issue in his campaign. McCain can be trusted, because he respects the ways in which ordinary individuals are affected by politics.

McCain spends a great deal of time discussing his grandfather's military record. He mentions that his grandfather won the Distinguished Service Medal in the Solomon Islands, with the citation commending "'courageous initiative,' 'judicious foresight,' and 'inspiring devotion to duty'" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 30). However, McCain makes it clear that reports of battles can never do justice to the experience. He writes, "[b]attle action reports, with their dry, matter-of-fact recitation of successive events, portray little of the intense anxiety my grandfather must have felt during those five October days" (McCain & Salter, p. 35-36). McCain says that a commander must make "hundreds of instant decisions," during combat, "evaluating reports from anxious subordinates, and answering their urgent requests for instructions" (McCain & Salter, p. 35-36). McCain's depictions reveal war as a chaotic experience, and one distinct from sanitized visions of combat operations.

McCain also discusses his grandfather in a historical context, arguing that in one battle "historians praised my grandfather," judging him "a much better tactician than his…commander" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 42). The McCain lineage is one of great military leaders, men who commanded troops while retaining their respect. McCain's narrative makes it evident that only

those who have experienced war can understand such situations. Great military leaders are truly heroes, able to deal with intense crisis situations on the spur of the moment.

In the discussions with his father and grandfather about combat situations, McCain contends that the lessons of war go beyond actual operations performed and battles fought. McCain writes, "[t]hey talked about combat as they talked about other experiences in the service. They talked about the lessons of leadership they learned and how they could apply them to current situations" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 163). McCain discusses his intense desire to *want to* go to war, primarily because of the test of character that it entails. McCain says that, "it was war, the great test of character, that made the prospect of joining my father's profession attractive" (McCain & Salter, p. 165). War becomes a trial of honor, and McCain wishes to prove he can pass.

In fact, it was when McCain thought he would be deprived of the ability to go to war that he becomes the most troubled with his potential military career. During a trip to visit his family, he was forced to eject from his airplane. McCain says, "[t]his latest unexpected glimpse of mortality…made me all the more anxious to get to Vietnam before some new unforeseen accident prevented me from ever *taking my turn* in war" (McCain & Salter, p. 172, emphasis added). McCain welcomes the opportunity to join in combat with open arms. McCain is an eager cadet, ready and willing to fight for the honor and glory of his country.

In another story, McCain discusses how military crises can bring out courage and self-sacrifice from those serving in the military. When bombs accidentally exploded on the main deck of an aircraft carrier, McCain comments, "fires were consuming the *Forrestal*. I thought she might sink. But the crew's heroics kept her afloat. Men sacrificed their lives for one another and their ship. Many of them were only eighteen…years old" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 179).

Combat situations teach people the meaning of self-sacrifice, courage, and honor. McCain's descriptions of these military scenarios afford him the opportunity to claim that he understands combat. In his writings about these situations, as well as his treatment as a POW, McCain builds up his credibility as a military man, able to understand how combat changes a person.

A large portion of the book discusses the treatment McCain received while he was a POW in Vietnam. McCain writes of the intense torture inflicted upon him, including being tied up, suffering from dysentery, being whipped with a fan belt, and suffering injuries lasting to the present from the horrendous treatment he received. Nevertheless, McCain feels he received better treatment than other soldiers, primarily because of his father's stature as an admiral and eventual commander in chief of Pacific forces (while McCain was a POW, his father attained this post). McCain writes, "even during those difficult encounters I realized my captors were more careful not to permanently injure or disfigure me than they were with other prisoners…I always sensed that they refrained from doing their worst to me" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 224-225). Far from wishing for his privileged status, McCain exhibits a type of "survivor's syndrome" when he desired to be treated like everyone else, even if that meant he would be subject to indescribable cruelties.

Another recurring theme is that the Vietnamese made numerous offers for him to go home early. However, McCain rejected each offer, arguing that the Code of Conduct for officers demanded that POWs be released in the order they were captured, and recounted a fear that the Vietnamese would try to use his release as a bargaining chip to embarrass his father. McCain felt that the Vietnamese could use his release as a propaganda ploy to prove that they were acting humanely by letting an admiral's son go home from prison early. Further, McCain says that being released early would allow other soldiers to "be taunted with the story of how an admiral's

son had gone home early, a lucky beneficiary of America's class-conscious society" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 235). McCain expresses concern that "my release would add to the suffering of men who were already straining to keep faith with their country" (McCain & Salter, p. 235).

McCain is contrite in his discussion of a confession that he signed while in Vietnam. This is something that embarrasses and shames him, yet he mentions it in a straightforward fashion in the book. McCain alludes to information he gave the North Vietnamese about certain military activities. McCain expresses regret about a possible betrayal of his country and his squadron when he writes,

> I should not have given out information about my ship and my squadron, and I regret very much having done so. The information was of no real use to the Vietnamese, but the Code of Conduct…orders us to refrain from providing any information beyond our name, rank, and serial number (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 198).

McCain feels as if his confessions violated the integrity of the faith of his fathers, and was particularly concerned about his father's reaction to the confession. McCain writes that he "dreaded," his father's discovery that McCain had confessed to being a war criminal while in the POW camp. He adds, however,

> My father was a strong enough man not to judge too harshly the character of a son who had reached his limits and found that they were well short of the standards of idealized heroes who had inspired us as boys. And I am strong enough now to know that my father had sufficient faith in me to assume I had done the best I could (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 286).

Through this story, McCain provides a defense against claims that he "sold out" while a POW in Vietnam. His father becomes a character that can make the argument that McCain might not be able to make directly: that his confession of crimes while in Vietnam was due to excruciating torture and ill-treatment by the North Vietnamese. In addition to being a defense mechanism, however, McCain's discussions of the intense torture he received adds to McCain's persona as a war hero. He survived intense punishment and cruelty, and yet lived to tell about it. In addition, he understands the situations that soldiers might confront in combat.

Through discussion of his torture, McCain reinforces the values that allowed him to resist the enemy. McCain says, "[o]ur senior officers always stressed to us the three essential keys to resistance…faith in God, faith in country, and faith in your fellow prisoners" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 252). McCain adds, "The purpose of our captors' inhumanity to us was nothing less than to force our descent into a world of total faithlessness" (McCain & Salter, p. 252). McCain ties the POW experience directly to values that he feels should guide people, and that being a POW put those values to the ultimate test.

The religious imagery in McCain's discussion of the POW experience is striking. He writes:

> POWs often regard their prison experience as comparable to the trials of Job…Hungry, beaten, hurt, scared, and alone, human beings can begin to feel that they are removed from God's love, a vast distance separating them from their Creator. The anguish can lead to resentment, to the awful despair that God has forsaken you (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 253).

The use of such imagery adds a religious element to McCain's persona, showing him as someone who maintains faith not only in his country, but in God. The faith of McCain and his fathers maintains God at the apex of the hierarchy.

In addition to faith in God, McCain discusses his POW experience in the context of allowing him to understand faith in country. McCain says, "I was no longer the boy to whom liberty meant simply that I could do as I pleased" (McCain & Salter, p. 255). McCain argues that prior to his POW experience, his understanding of faith in his country was quite shallow:

> In prison, I fell in love with my country. I had loved her before then, but like most young people, my affection was little more than a simple appreciation for the comforts and privileges most Americans enjoyed and took for granted. It wasn't until I had lost America for a time that I realized how much I loved her (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 254).

In the POW camps in Vietnam, McCain reaffirms his faith in his country as the means by which he could survive the cruelty and torture to which he was subjected.

The POW experience also changed his attitude toward others. McCain writes:

> When I was a prisoner of war I resented the antiwar activists who had visited Hanoi and…made our life in prison more miserable than it already was. Today I no longer bear any ill will for most of these people. I have made far too many mistakes in my own life to forever disparage people, most of whom were very young at the time, who long ago, and in the name of peace, made a bad mistake (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 280).

Forgiveness for war protesters is a unique perspective for a former Vietnam veteran running for the Republican presidential nomination to take, yet through the experience McCain shows how

combat can elucidate what is truly important about America. McCain's persona is transformed into a kind of elder statesman for the Republican Party—someone who can be trusted to take a mature political perspective. McCain can be seen as someone who understands what is truly important about America, and not become mired in petty squabbles.

In addition, McCain uses his POW experience to reaffirm his perspective on America and Americans. He says:

> Our neighbors in Orange Park…were extraordinarily kind and generous to my family while I was in Vietnam…Now, when I think about Americans…I see the faces of our neighbors in Orange Park, and give thanks that…I was born an American (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 303-304).

This story depicts McCain as a wizened war veteran who has come to appreciate the true spirit of America. America is not an abstract ideal; America is people expressing that ideal in actions they take to help others. McCain's narration of his POW experience portrays an ability to transcend petty issues and focus instead on the true spirit of America. McCain's POW experiences give him a new understanding of what it means to be an American.

The narrative of McCain's POW experience allows him to reaffirm central values he might express as a candidate: faith in God, and faith in his country. In addition, the POW experience allows McCain to transcend his youthful indiscretions, by claiming that the experience matured him, making him "no longer the boy" that he once was. In many ways, McCain tells a redemption story, claiming that his military background gives him depth of character, a depth of faith in values central to Americans. Implicitly, McCain is transformed from a rambunctious child into a mature adult, with an understanding of what God and country truly mean.

In the story, this faith allows him to look beyond narrow self-interests to the greater good of others. Glory is more than the pursuit of material gain; glory comes from understanding what it means to be an American:

> I have learned the truth: there are greater pursuits than self-seeking…Glory belongs to the act of being constant to something greater than yourself, to a cause, to your principles…It was my father's and grandfather's faith. A filthy, crippled, broken man, all I had left of my dignity was the faith of my fathers. It was enough (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 257).

By learning about sacrifice, McCain emerges as someone who suffered immense pain and anguish, only to understand the meaning of faith and self-sacrifice for others. This adds to the "war hero" image, allowing McCain to be perceived as being "above politics" and looking out for the best interests of the country. McCain makes it clear that, "I am a public figure now, and my public profile is inextricably linked to my POW experiences" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 346). McCain the candidate is McCain the POW veteran.

An interesting comment McCain makes with regard to his father is that, "My father was not, however, a political admiral—a term of derision accorded to successful officers whose records lacked combat experiences comparable to those of the war fighters who disapproved of them" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 75). McCain continues, "He was, as his father had been, a man of strong views who spoke his mind bluntly" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 76). Here, McCain seems almost hostile toward the idea of politics. Although this might be an anomaly in terms of McCain's campaign for the presidency, the intense dislike towards the political realm posits McCain as the "anti-candidate." McCain's biography allows him to be seen as a different

kind of politician, one who is willing and able to rise above petty politics to fight for his country's values.

The story of McCain and his father's military combat experiences show McCain as someone who no longer views the world from the perspective of a naïve observer. Combat changes a person, and it teaches them values like self-sacrifice and faith in God and country that only combat operations can. Thus, McCain's combat service bolsters him not only in the direct sense of being more knowledgeable about military affairs per se, but also allows him to be portrayed in a light that makes him better able to understand the core values and ideals of the country. The combat experiences of McCain transform a renegade into a man who understands the true meaning of faith in God and country.

McCain's narratives of combat experiences illustrate two rhetorical concepts regarding the narrative form. First, McCain's stories allow him to fill an archetypal role as a "war hero" in the American public myth. Second, McCain's combat stories "spill-over" into perceptions of McCain as a candidate for president. The net effect is to create a figure of John McCain as both an author of his autobiography and as a candidate who fulfills an archetypal role in American public discourse, that of the redeemed war hero, ready to give service to his country once again.

Defending Against "Indiscretions"

The third theme that emerges from the biography is the great lengths McCain goes to portray himself and his fathers in their fullest light. McCain personalizes the three sailors in ways that on their surface may appear to harm the reputations of the three men. McCain brings to light the drinking, the gambling, and the swearing of the three Naval officers, at times making them seem like a caricature of a drunken sailor. At the same time, however, the stories give all three men a kind of "likeable rogue" personality. The McCains become people that you can trust

when the situation is important, and someone you can laugh, joke, and drink with when the situation is less dire.

In his commentary on his grandfather, McCain says, "[t]he image that remains is that of a rail-thin, gaunt, hawk-faced man whose slight build was disguised by a low-timbered voice and a lively, antic presence" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 11). McCain continues, "[h]e rolled his own cigarettes, which he smoked constantly, and his one-handed technique fascinated me" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 11). Slew McCain is a true sailor, who smokes, drinks, and gambles almost constantly. McCain adds, "[h]is profile in the 1943 *Current Biography* described him as one of the Navy's best plain and fancy cussers" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 11-12). McCain quotes E.B. Potter as saying, "[t]here were few wiser or more competent officers than Slew McCain, but whenever his name came up, somebody had a ridiculous story to tell about him—and many of the stories were true" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 31)

McCain speaks of his grandfather as someone who lives for the moment and enjoys it. McCain quotes the admiral as saying, "[n]ot one penny of my money for doctors. I'm spending it all on riotous living" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 13). This fits with the theme that the McCains will live life to its fullest, only stopping to die once the duty to honor and country are complete. Personal "failings" become traits to be admired: the smoking, swearing, and cussing are part and parcel of being a good sailor, one devoted to honor and country. Thus, McCain turns the personal foibles of his grandfather into a noble characteristic.

McCain presents the story as if he is giving more of a complete picture of his grandfather. As he puts it, "[m]y mother…keeps in her living room a large oil portrait of the admiral, distinguished and starched in his navy whites. In reality, he was a disheveled-looking man with a set of false teeth" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 14). Slew McCain's personal failings did have

their toll, in that they ruined his personal health and left an image far from a typical Navy admiral. At the same time, McCain's version of Slew McCain is a rogue with a heart of gold. Slew McCain may not look the part of the admiral, but when it comes time to make the tough decisions, when it comes time to command a ship at war for his country, it is also time for the leader in the frail body to come forth.

Such indiscretions also apply to McCain's father. McCain defends this idea by arguing, "[i]n the Navy in which my father came of age, men relaxed by drinking. The greater the burdens a man bore, the more he drank to relive himself of them" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 71). However, McCain draws a distinction by saying that one rule submariners consider inviolate is, "[a] submariner never drank aboard ship…no matter how excessive their binge drinking was when ashore, my father and his crew stayed sober at sea" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 73). This illustrates the distinction McCain draws between general "roguish behavior" and the demands of duty. It is considered acceptable to behave wildly outside the confines of the official duties of office. However, when it comes to the job of the Navy itself, officers were expected to follow a strict code of behavior and conduct. McCain details that his fathers were always clear headed and focused on whatever military task was at hand.

McCain also takes the time to defend the military record of his fathers. In a story that details how his grandfather was ultimately relieved of his command due to the failure to avoid a storm, McCain writes, "my grandfather had recommended a heading for the fleet that would have avoided the earlier storm…But Halsey had insisted on another course, a course that tragically failed to take his ships out of harm's way" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 8). Slew McCain's advice to reject the opinions of Admiral Halsey and Clark came too late, causing one hundred and forty-two aircraft to be lost. Admirals McCain and Halsey were ordered before a

military court, with the court deciding that, "the fleet's encounter with the typhoon was directly attributable to Halsey's order to change course and my grandfather's failure to instruct Clark for twenty minutes" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 9). Because "Halsey's relief would be too great a blow to the Navy's and the country's morale," (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 9) Admiral McCain became the fall guy for the ineptitude of a superior officer. The reader is left with the idea that Admiral McCain was willing to "take one for the team" and lose his command quietly rather than raise a stir that might undermine the Navy itself. What seems like a military disaster for his grandfather is depicted as being an admirable quality.

When discussing the impact his relief would have had on his grandfather if he had lived, McCain comments, "my grandfather was a tough, willful, resilient man who, had he lived, would have resolved to serve with distinction in his new post as the surest way to put a great distance between himself and that fateful storm" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 11). Given the link that McCain draws between himself and his fathers, McCain is able to draw upon their values as a way of bolstering his own. By complimenting the strength and resilience of his grandfather, McCain is also able to bolster conceptions of his own strength and resilience.

McCain also tells stories about his father that parallel the military life of McCain himself. For example, McCain's discussions of his father's performance at the Naval Academy closely mirror the trials and tribulations that McCain himself went through. McCain says that, "[m]y father was constantly in trouble at the Academy. His grades were poor, his discipline worse" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 54). McCain continues his discussion of his father's performance at the Naval Academy:

> My father approached catastrophe on three occasions…On all three occasions he was warned that 'the Superintendent notes with concern that you are

> unsatisfactory in your Academic work…and he wishes to point out that unless you devote your entire effort to improve your scholastic work you are in grave danger of being found deficient at the end of the year' (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 55).

McCain says that his father's low grades were not because of a "poor intellect." Rather, it was because of a lack of maturity, "poor discipline…and the insecurity he must have felt as an undersized youth in a rough-and-tumble world that had humbled many older, bigger men" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 55) which caused his father to behave in such an undisciplined manner at the Naval Academy.

McCain continues the discussion of the "roguish elements" that would define his father and himself. McCain says that, "I think for most of us our strong sense of predestination [about career choices] made us prematurely fatalistic. And while that condition gave us a kind of confidence, it was often a reckless confidence" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 52). This "reckless confidence" would lead to "small rebellions" and worse transgressions as the years passed. McCain defends his "youthful transgressions" by arguing that despite being troublemakers, he and his father greatly appreciated their naval life. He says:

> There were times in my youth when I harbored a secret resentment that my life's course seemed so preordained. I often wondered if my father had ever felt the same way. Neither of us ever misbehaved by design…Our antics were much more spontaneous than that…I do know that when both of us reached the end of our naval careers, we could not imagine finding a greater measure of satisfaction than we had found in a life at sea in our country's service (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 53).

When McCain discusses his own career at the Naval Academy, he mentions that, he too, joined in a spirit of rebelliousness while at the Academy. McCain says, "[i]nstead of beginning a crash course in self-improvement so that I could find a respectable place in the ranks, I reverted to form…on a four-year course of insubordination and rebellion" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 120). McCain comments, "[o]ur physical appearance was expected to conform to a code with rules so numerous, esoteric, and pointless that I thought them absurd" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 121). McCain reflects that such behavior was inappropriate by stating, "I was an arrogant, undisciplined, insolent midshipman who felt it necessary to prove my mettle by challenging his [superior officer's] authority. In short, I acted like a jerk, and gave Hart good cause to despise me" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 131). McCain says of the Naval Academy that "I got by, just barely at times, but I got by" (McCain & Salter, 1999, 134). Throughout the chapters on his time in the Academy, McCain mentions numerous stories that leave him poised on the brink of disaster, always on the verge of washing out.

McCain and his father's "youthful indiscretions" were not in spite of their naval careers, but rather in furtherance of them. Part and parcel of being a child of a naval officer is the idea that such children will inevitably "break the rules," in the process learning that the rules have value and merit. In indiscretions, one finds the worth and value of military life. McCain mentions that his behavior at the Academy "was not something that particularly worried my father…he assumed that…I would be absorbed into the traditions of the place whether I wished to or not, and that when the time arrived for me to face a real test of character, I would not disappoint him" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 151).

Despite the numerous indiscretions at the Naval Academy which McCain mentions throughout the book, McCain defends that he always followed what he viewed as the more

important traditions of the institution. McCain claims he "ignored the less important conventions of the Academy," but was "careful not to defame its more compelling traditions," especially the honor code (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 151). McCain claims that it was not his intention to "mock a revered culture that expected better of me" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 151).

A critical feature of the discussion of indiscretions is the corresponding duty to accept the consequences of one's actions. McCain argues, "[s]trict obedience to institutional rules was not among his principles, but manfully accepting the consequences of his actions was" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 58). McCain adds, "[a]n officer accepts the consequences of his actions. He must not hide his mistakes, nor transfer blame to others that is rightfully his" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 66).

Further, McCain draws a distinction between violations of some rules and violations of the Academy's honor code. McCain contends, "[n]either would my father have considered for a moment committing a violation of the Academy's honor code. Honor codes were something he had been raised from birth to respect" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 58). McCain quotes his father's yearbook as saying that "[s]ooner could Gibraltar be loosed from its base than could Mac be loosed from the principles which he has adopted to govern his actions" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 58).

McCain also defends that some vices are acceptable parts of the life of an officer. He says, "[a]n officer's honor could admit some vices…But honor would not permit even…small transgressions of the code of conduct that was expected to be as natural a part of an officer's life as was his physical description" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 66). McCain continues, "[a]n officer must not lie, steal, or cheat—ever. He keeps his word, whatever the cost" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 66). When discussing this idea in relation to his father, McCain recounts a story

where his mother once jokingly accused his father of cheating at cards. McCain says that, "[h]e reacted so strongly to the accusation, with such evident distress over the charge, admonishing her to 'never say such a thing again,' that she never did. Not even in jest" (McCain & Salter, 1999, p. 69-70).

McCain's admissions of the dirty underbelly of the Naval careers of the McCain family seems to be an unusual section of the campaign biography. Discussion of the drinking, cussing, swearing admirals who were reckless in their approach to the Naval Academy would seem to undermine McCain and his fathers' legacy. However, the stories serve to personalize McCain and his fathers. The reader gets to know them better, allowing them to come across as likeable characters with common foibles. McCain and his fathers become humanized in a way that only depicting their glowing military successes would not allow for. The mortification strategy may actually cause the audience to see McCain as someone who understands what is important. When discussing his indiscretions, McCain comes back to the idea that honor, duty, God, and country are the values most worth defending. McCain's indiscretions never breach these values. These depictions show McCain as someone who understands the battles worth fighting, while knowing how to draw distinctions between important political struggles and those of lesser importance. Given that many Americans feel politicians squabble about trivialities, the depiction of someone who can stand above the fray and pick important battles may be a characteristic that ends up benefiting McCain.

Throughout McCain's individual stories, a grander narrative is shaped. McCain tells a redemption story—a wild, irresponsible young man goes through a horrific set of war experiences to emerge as a mature, reflective person fit for the presidency. McCain weaves the individual anecdotes and stories about his fathers and himself into a story of a person who falls

into the pitfalls of wild youth, only to be brought to an understanding of what matters most in life—faith in God, family, and country. McCain's use of smaller stories helps him build his grander narrative, a narrative which makes the reader trust in McCain the man, even if one knows little to nothing about his policies. Kenneth Burke describes the view of the hero, "A hero is first of all a man who does heroic things…But next, a hero can be a man with the potentialities of heroic action" (Burke, 1962, p. 42).

McCain's heroism lies not only in what he *has done* for his country, but the potential of his future actions. In other words, McCain's life story lays the groundwork for McCain the candidate, and the potential president. McCain never needs to describe his political agenda, because his story is the agenda. If the audience can believe and trust in McCain the redeemed war hero, they can believe and trust in McCain the president.

Conclusion

Faith of My Fathers serves as an unusual campaign biography. The book mentions no political stances, nor does it point to a political ideology. In many ways, the book serves as a profoundly anti-political document. The book places a focus on values and not specific policies, the book derides "political" admirals, and the book's story stops in 1973, before McCain's political career begins.

The very anti-political nature of the autobiography, however, points to its greatest strength—it allows McCain to be the candidate of contrast. Instead of coming from a long line of politicians, McCain comes from a long line of military officers who, through the way they lived their lives, taught McCain important life lessons. McCain's autobiography is a story about McCain the man, not McCain the candidate. The biography serves to tell a grand narrative about the life of John McCain while also serving to create a persona for the candidate.

The work also illustrates how narrative functions in conjunction with persona in the political sphere. In an era where politicians are increasingly viewed as "inauthentic" and "wooden," McCain comes across as an authentic candidate interested in bettering America. By placing his primary focus on building his personal credibility for office, it eases the transition for McCain to make his political arguments later in the campaign. By providing a boost to McCain's ethos, the autobiography helps provide a springboard for McCain's later rhetorical successes.

CHAPTER 3: Honor on the Campaign Trail:

A Discursive Analysis of McCain's Presidential Campaign Speeches

After laying the foundations for his presidential campaign with *Faith of My Fathers*, John McCain announced his candidacy on September 27, 1999. McCain's candidacy shocked many political pundits with its early successes. McCain ended up winning seven primaries[1] against the presumed favorite George W. Bush, beginning with an upset in the New Hampshire primary on February 1st, 2000. McCain went on to win the Arizona and Michigan primaries, and managed to win four of the thirteen "Super Tuesday" primaries held on March 7th, 2000. Throughout this campaign, McCain frequently reminded voters of his military history, while emphasizing the need to give democracy back to "the people." Eventually, McCain shifted his focus to an attempt to redefine the Republican Party, arguing that its narrow views were not inclusive enough to create a Republican majority.

McCain grounded his campaign in the idea of honor. McCain emphasized duty to country, integrity in the political process, and the need for leaders of the country to display positive character traits. The campaign soon developed a strong national following, with McCain becoming a media favorite. Nevertheless, McCain did not have enough political support to continue campaigning, and on March 9th, he "suspended" his campaign for the Presidency.

This chapter will analyze three of John McCain's speeches while he was on the Presidential campaign trail in 2000. Despite being massively outspent, and despite running an "insurgency" campaign against George W. Bush and the Republican Party establishment,

[1] McCain ended up winning primaries in New Hampshire, Arizona, Michigan, Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island before bowing out of the Presidential contest on March 9th, 2000.

McCain's campaign energized a large section of the voting populace, while illustrating potential fissures in the Republican coalition. McCain did so by combining a reformist political agenda with the themes of "honor" and strength of character. McCain's campaign was timely, in that character and integrity were gaining significant political import in the 2000 race for the Presidency. As Sheckels and Bell note, "in the aftermath of the Clinton impeachment, voters were especially sensitive to issues of character" (Sheckels & Bell, 2003, p. 69). McCain's campaign was well-suited to take advantage of this increasing focus on character, because he based his candidacy around the ideals of personal virtue and political ethics.

This chapter analyzes McCain's announcement address in Nashua, New Hampshire; a speech before the New Hampshire State Legislature prior to the New Hampshire primary; and a speech McCain gave in Virginia Beach following the South Carolina primary. Analysis of these speeches reveals a consistent narrative theme in the announcement address and the speech to the New Hampshire Legislature, a theme defining honor and integrity as the primary criteria for holding public office. Consistent with his campaign biography, McCain develops a rationale for his candidacy based on the honor and integrity of his life story, and by extension, of his political positions.

However, in the Virginia Beach speech, McCain significantly alters these themes, going on the attack against the Christian conservative base of the Republican Party. McCain indicts leaders of the party as being beholden to a narrow group of religious interests far outside the political mainstream. The speech creates an unusual juxtaposition for McCain, because he engages in the kind of personal assaults that his reformist campaign style generally indicts. I argue that this speech's unusual nature can be explained by viewing McCain's campaign speeches through a prism of honor. McCain's first two speeches serve to bolster his personal

honor and integrity, while the Virginia Beach speech is a response to "honor under siege," reflecting McCain's aggressive attempts to reclaim his personal honor. McCain's retaliation is both understandable through, and consistent with, a political worldview valuing honor and integrity in politics. McCain personalizes the campaign by using attacks designed to restore his personal honor.

In this chapter, I first explore the theme of honor in American political life. Second, I examine the three speeches on the campaign trail, analyzing them for the policy stances that McCain takes in the speeches, as well as the underlying notion of honor running through them. Finally, I reconcile the perceived contradiction in the style and demeanor in the speeches, arguing that, far from being a breach in the stylistic considerations of McCain's campaign communication, the Virginia Beach speech accentuates honor under siege. McCain's response is understandable given the context of the attacks on his personal honor. Although McCain could hardly be expected to challenge Pat Robertson to a duel or to cane Jerry Falwell in response to the attacks on McCain's character, the notion that personal attacks must be vigorously refuted is a long-standing tradition in American politics.

Honor in American Politics

Modern American politics is often referred to as dirty, unfair, corrupt, and nasty, in supposed contrast to a kinder, gentler time which allegedly existed at the time of the country's founding. Recent scholarship, however, has helped put to rest the notion that politics in the "golden era" was as genteel as previously imagined. M.S. Mason writes that the founding fathers often "misbehaved like schoolboys" (Mason, 2002; p. 17). Joanne Freeman writes that early American politics was filled with "[h]issing, coughings, hootings, strong words, clenched fists, and the threat of gunplay" (Freeman, 2001, p. xiv). Far from being a benevolent utopia of

political discourse, smear tactics, foul play, and even duels between political opponents were commonplace in early political life.

At the same time, however, early American politics was guided by fundamental underlying principles. Early American history had "honor" as a guiding principle of political life. S. Scott Rohrer contends that, "this code of honor was a messy business that sometimes meant different things to different people. Men lashed out at their foes in rhetorical broadsides, ridiculed them in pamphlets, and occasionally fought them in duels" (Rohrer, 2002). Rohrer continues, "[a]n implicit honor code guided politicians' actions and shaped their dealings with friends and enemies. What appear to us as irrational attacks were, in fact, often carefully choreographed movements" (Rohrer, 2002). Jim Robinson writes, "[s]howing disrespect and using fighting words…brought immediate challenges" (Robinson, 2003, p. K2). Christopher Caldwell continues, "[w]ithout an understanding…of the honor code under which [the founders] were operating—we tend to view much of the founders' behavior as hotheaded, unreasonable or perverse" (Caldwell, 2002, p.11). Caldwell adds that political challenges were sufficient to provoke duels, such as the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, with dueling just "one extreme" of political battles and challenges (Caldwell, 2002). Thus, while chaotic to an outside observer, the early American political system was infused with certain "rules of engagement."

Although the meaning of honor has clearly changed over time (Rohrer, 2002), McCain's distinctive military background and his references to it lend legitimacy to the idea that honor was a guiding concept in his presidential campaign. McCain largely eschewed traditional party politics for a sense of honor and truth. From his grounding of his campaign in his military background, to his appeals for broad inclusivity in the Republican Party, to his stand against

special interests, McCain's candidacy was a nontraditional one grounded in honor over partisan self-interest.

McCain's challenge to his own party also made his battles more personal. In defying his party, McCain invested himself with a "maverick" persona while simultaneously leaving that persona vulnerable to political attack from traditional centers of political power. Scott Nelson draws the parallel to the election of 1800, contending that the lack of "[s]trong and organized political parties" turned political battles into ones that were "largely personal" (2001, p. 7). Freeman contends that this "link between honor and politics" (2001, p. 261) melds the personal and the political, binding "together a politician's personal character with his political principles and actions" creating a "moral and personal dimension" in politics. James Bowman explicitly links McCain's campaign to the reputations of honor of the founding generation by saying:

> Meanwhile, John McCain, the man who was in some ways the most popular politician of the year, made his…greatest claim on our approval with his military record—his record…not of conquering our nation's enemies but of suffering at their hands. In this it could be said that he was indirectly paying tribute to the legacy of Alexander Hamilton…" (Bowman, 2000, p. 58).

Understanding McCain's speeches through the prism of honor helps to explain McCain's unique view of the political system and the reaction of the public and the press to McCain's candidacy.

While not completely analogous to the era of the founding fathers, several political trends have all led to an atmosphere in which the issues of personal honor and integrity are again becoming important. With the rise of third party challengers like Ross Perot and Ralph Nader, and the increasing attention politicians place on matters of trust and character, the notion of honor in politics can serve as a useful vehicle to view McCain's candidacy. By viewing

McCain's campaign through a theme of honor, McCain's poignant responses to attacks on his personal integrity and character can be more completely understood. Freeman contends, "[f]or men of honor, political losses or public humiliations were no temporary setbacks; they struck at a man's core and threatened to rob him of his self-respect as a man and his identity as a leader" (Freeman, 2001, p. 283). Freeman goes on to argue that honor created "a politics of reputation that blended personal identity, public office, and political experimentation in a volatile mix" (2001, p. 287). In a similar light, McCain's heavy reliance on honor and integrity mixed with his belief that corruption must be weeded out of American politics so that honor and integrity can be restored to American democracy.

At an even more personal level, McCain's stance reflects the notion that honor transcends mere political battles and strikes at his being. Freeman writes that "[h]onor was the core of a man's identity, his sense of self, his manhood. A man without honor was no man at all" (Freeman, 2001, p. xvi). Given the importance of honor in McCain's campaign biography, the notion that McCain views attacks on his personal honor as more than a mere political insult lends credibility to the idea that his strong response to those attacking him in the Virginia Beach speech is guided by his sense of honor. Brent Tarter writes, "episodes involving a wounded sense of honor were commonplace. Understanding men's reactions under those circumstances better explains their political behavior than one-dimensional interpretations based only on policy analysis or regionalism or some other factor" (Tarter, 2001, p. K4).

Far from being an archaic notion that went away with dueling and canings, Harvey Mansfield contends that "recent events in American politics make sense only when seen as motivated by a sense of honor" (Mansfield, 2001, p. 31), citing the battle waged on both sides of the political aisle over the impeachment of President Clinton. Christopher Caldwell contends

that there is no reason "why honor in the early Republic was any different from honor in any other political culture" (Caldwell, 2002, p. 11). Richard Brookhiser contends that modern politics may signal a shift away from the two-party system toward an era where seemingly nonpolitical candidates can be successful:

> If there is a flaw in Freeman's argument, it is the assumption that the politics of honor was replaced by a full-blown and monolithic party system…The withering of party machines, replaced by polling and advertising, and the rise of nonpolitical corsairs such as Ross Perot or Ralph Nader may be a sea change (Brookhiser, 2001, p. R3).

It is in this light that McCain's candidacy makes the most sense. Much as McCain himself can be viewed as a throwback to an earlier time with his continual references to honor and integrity, American politics may be undergoing a renaissance by focusing on the integrity, honor, and character of political officials more than their individual policy stances. If Sheckels and Bell's assessment is correct that, "we can conclude that, at least in 2000, character information was more important than information about the candidates' competence" (Sheckels & Bell, 2003, p. 60), McCain's campaign can be viewed as a return to the past.

Textual Analysis of McCain's Speeches on the Campaign Trail

McCain's speeches on the campaign trail offer several guiding principles for a vision of McCain's run for the presidency. In his announcement address and his speech before the New Hampshire legislature, McCain expounds on a specific political agenda grounded in his military experiences. First, McCain uses his military background to draw parallels between civilian government and the military, arguing that the military way is superior to civilian methods. Second, McCain expresses a sense of obligation and responsibility owed to one's country—

McCain runs with a sense that he owes it to his country to run, while emphasizing the idea that all Americans need to share such a sense of obligation and duty. Finally, McCain emphasizes a populist notion—America has been taken away from ordinary Americans, and if political control of the country was returned to ordinary people, the problems facing the country would be resolved. His primary themes in the speech typify his focus on honor, duty, and country.

McCain's Announcement Address

In many respects, McCain's announcement address is similar to announcement addresses of other candidates. McCain articulates an intention to run, indicates why he is running for office, and initiates the themes of the campaign (see Trent & Friedenberg, 2000, p. 209-210). McCain chooses New Hampshire to deliver the address, most likely because of the early New Hampshire primary. As McCain chose not to contest the Iowa caucuses, instead "husbanding his resources" (Benoit et al, p. 2003), the New Hampshire primary was the first place that McCain could score a victory over George W. Bush. However, several characteristics of the address illustrate the unique nature of the McCain candidacy for president.

First, McCain establishes a sense of obligation to his country. McCain indicates that he runs not out of a sense of personal pride or ambition, but out of a sense of obligation that he owes the country—further establishing that *all Americans* owe a similar obligation. Second, McCain's announcement address heavily emphasizes his military background. In addition to mentioning his family lineage, McCain melds a military ideology with his policy prescriptions for the country. Additionally, McCain emphasizes that government has been taken away from the people. McCain argues that the country has been given away to a set of elite interest groups at odds with the goals and ideals of ordinary Americans. If this group's influence can be minimized, politics can be restored to looking out for the interests of average, everyday

Americans. These themes extend McCain's politics of honor from the personal realm to the political realm, allowing McCain to build upon the foundations established in his campaign biography.

An Obligation Owed to the Country

A primary theme McCain explores in his announcement address is the idea that he runs for president out of an obligation that he owes the country. First, McCain makes clear that he views running for president as a privilege. Second, McCain defines his campaign as a duty which he owes the nation. Finally, McCain extends this sense of duty to the obligations that all Americans owe to their country. Again, McCain's campaign is less about a laundry list of issue specifics, but more of an encompassing sense of the meaning of the presidency itself.

First, McCain is genuinely proud to serve America in his run for the presidency. He says, "It wasn't until I was deprived of her [America's] company that I fell in love with America…I have never lived a day since that I wasn't thankful for the privilege" (McCain, 1999). McCain elevates the nation above his own personal run for the presidency, defining the campaign as military service. McCain argues that he is proud to serve the nation, and the campaign is his way of providing that service to the country. Much as his military service defined the role of the presidency, the theme of honor defines the role of McCain in the campaign for president, his effort to be a servant to the nation itself.

Second, McCain defines his run for the presidency as a duty owed to the nation. McCain makes an explicit effort to deflect attention from the criticism that his campaign is one born of personal ambition. McCain contends, "I do not announce my candidacy to satisfy my personal ambitions. My life has already been blessed more than I deserve" (McCain, 1999). McCain instead defines his candidacy in terms of what he owes the country. He says, "It is because I

owe America more than she has ever owed me that I am a candidate for President of the United States" (McCain, 1999). McCain also says that "America doesn't owe me anything," (McCain, 1999) further enriching the idea that running for president itself is to be valued.

McCain views his candidacy as part of his obligation to the country. This helps shape the role he creates for his campaign. A distinguishing feature of his campaign is that McCain grounds his run for office out of honor and respect for the country. Values and character become a central point of understanding the McCain campaign as well as distinguishing his candidacy from others running for the presidency.

Finally, McCain extends this sense of duty to the obligations that Americans generally owe the country. McCain calls on other Americans to join him in the cause of service to the nation. He contends, "This is a great and worthy cause that beckons us all. It is bigger than any one of us. It is larger than personal ambition. It is more important than self-seeking" (McCain, 1999). McCain asks others to see the nation as he sees it. He continues:

> At a young age I discovered how liberating it is to sacrifice with others for a cause greater than self-interest. I run for President because I want the next generation of Americans to know the sense of pride and purpose of serving a cause greater than themselves (McCain, 1999).

McCain goes beyond defining the campaign about victory for himself or his principles. McCain defines the campaign in terms of what it means to be an American. He provides a meaning of his candidacy that transcends the actual vote for president, and characterizes his run for office as a redefinition of citizenship itself.

McCain expresses the ideal he holds for future leaders of America by saying:

> Our ideals have made much progress in the world. But if they are to advance further we will need the service of all our children, not just the sons and daughters of a privileged elite. We need capable, committed leaders from every part of American society to continue the American experiment and promote the American cause in a still dangerous world (McCain, 1999).

The central features of McCain's vision for others become folded into his vision for the campaign itself. McCain's candidacy is about reinvigorating a sense of pride and respect for the country. McCain interpellates the audience into this vision, allowing the audience to participate "in the discourse that addresses" them (Charland, 1987, p. 138).

McCain defines Americans in a way that requires them to see themselves as a people interested in a sense of duty, honor, and country. In McGee's words, "the people" exist as "a fiction dreamed by an advocate and infused with an artificial, rhetorical reality by the agreement of an audience to participate in a collective fantasy" (McGee, 1975, p. 240). "Americans" in McCain's descriptions, become a group of people interested in self-sacrifice, duty, honor, and respect. McCain's vision calls on the audience to participate in this collective vision of Americans and America that harkens back to a time when Americans were interested in the collective good of the nation, over and above that of individual self-interest.

Emphasis on Military Background

Throughout his announcement address, McCain makes explicit reference to his military background. McCain begins the speech by noting that he "began this day…in the company of United States Naval Academy midshipmen" (McCain, 1999). McCain continues, "I am the son and grandson of Navy admirals, and I was born into America's service." These comments

ground the campaign in a military veneer, extending McCain's emphasis on his military history in his campaign biography. McCain establishes his persona as a career military veteran for the campaign.

In his address, McCain says that his military background is important to his run for the presidency for several reasons. First, McCain argues that military experience is a fundamental prerequisite for a qualified commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Second, McCain uses his military background to establish a set of values and principles that define his role as a potential future president of the United States. Finally, McCain uses his military background as a lens to view the campaign itself via the use of military metaphors and phrases. The announcement address is steeped in the notion that McCain's distinctive feature as a candidate is his life history as a member of the United States Navy.

First, McCain argues that his military experience best qualifies him to be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. McCain contends that being the civilian leader of the military is the most important obligation for the president, "[t]he first responsibility of the next president will be [to] keep our country safe so that we might secure for ourselves and humanity a future worthy of our highest aspirations" (McCain, 1999). McCain also contends that "if America is to lead, then America's leader must be prepared for that challenge" (McCain, 1999). A commander-in-chief must not only be a powerful individual, they must also be *prepared* for the challenge, implying that particular qualifications are necessary for the job.

McCain then explicitly links the role of commander-in-chief to that of experience, noting that, "obligation requires a commander-in-chief who has the experience to understand and lead a

volatile and changing world" (McCain, 1999). Although McCain does not overtly refer to battlefield experience, later comments make it clear that the president must be prepared to deal with battlefield situations. McCain says:

> When a President makes life-and-death decisions he should draw strength and wisdom from broad and deep experience with the reasons for and the risks of committing our children to our defense. For no matter how many others are involved in the decision, the President is a lonely man in a dark room when the casualty reports come in (McCain, 1999).

McCain adds, "[w]hen it comes time to make the decision to send our young men and women into harm's way, that decision should be made by a leader who knows that such decisions have profound consequences" (McCain, 1999). McCain thus defines military experience as an essential ingredient for the presidency. McCain refines the notion of honor in a military light, arguing that a military background best qualifies a candidate to lead the country.

McCain also invokes national security as an important campaign issue. He argues the case for a strong national defense by saying, "[t]here is no safe alternative to American leadership. The history of this violent century has surely taught us that" (McCain, 1999). McCain emphasizes the need for a strong international posture, "[w]e cannot hide behind empty threats, false promises…and photo op diplomacy…And the first priority of world leadership is to protect our own security" (McCain, 1999). He links the current problems in national security with the political climate by arguing that, "[a]s President, I won't ask how much security we can afford. I'll ask how much security do we need, and I will find the resources to pay for it" (McCain, 1999). He continues, "I won't tolerate one dime of our defense budget being wasted to re-elect shortsighted politicians who put their own ambitions before the national interest"

(McCain, 1999). McCain's persona as a war hero allows him to contend that "politics as usual" is a politics that undermines the national security interests of the United States. In some ways, McCain stands both outside and inside the political system, able to critique the short-sightedness of politics as usual while offering hope for political reform through his election to the presidency.

McCain's attacks on the current military situation lay the blame on both political parties. He argues:

> I believe that President Clinton has failed his first responsibility to the nation by weakening our defenses. But he's not the only one to blame. Both parties in Congress have wasted scarce defense dollars on unneeded weapons systems and other pork projects while 12,000 enlisted personnel, proud young men and women, subsist on food stamps (McCain, 1999).

McCain's indictment of the military status quo transcends traditional party politics. This approach positions McCain as an insurgent challenging the current political system. McCain's position also articulates a sense that he understands the true needs of the "proud young men and women" of the armed forces, while most politicians stay focused on glitzy weapons systems and unneeded "pork projects."

In addition to using his military background as a set of qualifications to be commander-in-chief, McCain establishes a set of values and principles derived from the military to define his campaign. The military is not merely part of McCain's life; McCain's life is defined and shaped by his military career. McCain's naval career shapes and influences his candidacy by directly influencing the type of campaign he runs. McCain says, "I run because I believe deeply in the greatness of America's destiny and in the goodness of our cause. We are a lantern of freedom

and opportunity in the world, the bright beacon of hope that our fathers died to bequeath us, and our children will be asked to defend" (McCain, 1999). Running for president is about a greater cause than which party holds the White House for four years. The presidency is about a cause defined by those who died to give the current generation the freedoms they presently enjoy.

McCain grounds his campaign firmly in the traditions of the military. The military serves as a backdrop for the campaign itself, and in some ways, eclipses the everyday politics of the campaign. McCain contends:

> I entered politics with the same expectations I had when I was commissioned an ensign in the Navy. First among them was my belief that serving my country is an honor, indeed, the most honorable life an American can lead. As a candidate, I will campaign with respect for the dignity of the office I seek and the people I seek to serve. On my honor, I swear to you that from my first day in office to the last breath I draw, I will do everything in my power to make you proud of your government. (McCain, 1999).

McCain's defines his political career as an extension of his military career. The military values and lifestyle are still with McCain, and define both his politics as well as his identity.

McCain's position defines life experiences as a critical component of being president. Far from merely being someone who stands for the right things on policy issues, being president is primarily about the choices that define an individual. McCain says, "[t]here comes a time when our nation's leader can no longer rely on…talking points…when the sum total of one's life becomes the foundation…[for] the decisions that determine the future of our democracy" (McCain, 1999). McCain's background directly influences his view of the presidency. Rather than being a job about politicking, logrolling, and cajoling members of Congress into backing

legislation, McCain's vision of the presidency is one defined by the person who holds the office, with values, background, and experience providing the most important qualifications.

Finally, McCain uses his military background as a lens to view the campaign itself. McCain's address is full of battle metaphors and an emphasis on military means to view the campaign. For example, in reference to his stance against political corruption, McCain comments that,

> We can stand together to take up our country's cause. We can fight together to reclaim our government from those who corrupt it; to rescue our political system from those who debase it; to defend the proposition that democracy is…the only moral government (McCain, 1999).

McCain's effort to reform politics is the legislative end of a larger cause, his stance on legislation against corruption becomes a fight to reclaim government. The political system needs to be rescued, and democracy must be defended.

McCain defines American values in a way that requires courage to defend them. He says, "[w]e Americans are a strong confident people…in open competition our ideals, our ingenuity, and our courage ensure our success…We should build no walls… to keep the world at bay. Walls are for cowards, not for us" (McCain, 1999). McCain continues with the theme of courage in an anaphora where he says that "I am not afraid" five consecutive times. He concludes this section by saying, "I am not afraid, because I know that…enough Americans will serve together a glorious cause greater than our narrow self-interests" (McCain, 1999). The political system is a fight that requires a courageous fighter for a leader, one who will stand up for what is right.

McCain's military background anchors his announcement address. He uses it to bolster his qualifications as commander-in-chief, to provide a sense of the values that will define his presidency, and to invent the military metaphors that define the challenges confronting the country at the dawn of the new century. In so doing, McCain begins to flesh out the details of how the story of honor told in his biography influences the campaign. Although McCain's background provides some insight into specific policy proposals that he will pursue, what is illustrated most clearly in his announcement address is how McCain's military background influences the overall approach he takes to the office of the presidency. More important than providing a basis for a stance on a given issue, McCain's veteran status influences his perspective on the values that shape his conceptualization of the office of the president.

Government Has Been Taken Away From "The People"

As he makes clear who "the people" are in his collective vision of America, McCain also articulates who "the people" *are not*. McCain draws a dichotomy between a vision of "normal" hard-working Americans and an elite cabal of special interest groups determined to make America work for their interests. McCain makes this idea explicit, "I run for President because I want to return our government back to whom it belongs–the people" (McCain, 1999).

McCain argues that "the people" he invokes are not to blame for the nation's problems, but that fault lies in a group of "special interests" that have stolen government away from them. He says, "[w]hen our government has been taken from us by the special interests, the big-dollar donors…trust is lost to cynicism" (McCain, 1999). The solution is to "restore the people's sovereignty over government" so that instead of abandoning "the cause our founding fathers called glorious," a "sense of national purpose" can be reinvigorated.

McCain's solution is to "take a stand." He calls for a "New Patriotic Challenge" in which "each of us…join in the fight against the pervasive cynicism that is debilitating our democracy" (McCain, 1999). McCain states that the challenge "is a fight to take our government back from the power-brokers and special interests, and return it to the people, and the noble cause of freedom it was created to serve" (McCain, 1999). This challenge serves to distinguish "the people" from the special interests in Washington, and also serves to glorify the role that average Americans play in government. Government has been poisoned because it has been stolen away by a narrow group of corrupt special interests who operate at every turn to deny "the people's" vision and hope for democracy.

Success in the challenge to take government from the corrupt influence of special interests is the solution to every other problem society faces. McCain says that:

> Restoring honesty to our political system is the gateway through which all other policy reforms must pass. To make our schools better, we must reduce the influence of the teachers unions…To improve our health care system, we must rein in the power of trial lawyers…To relieve the tax burden imposed on working families we must eliminate the special interest loopholes…once we win our government back, there is no limit to what we can accomplish (McCain, 1999).

McCain's invocation of "the people" thus becomes the central ingredient in his campaign's policy reforms. What matters most are not McCain's specific proposals for education, health care, or taxes, but rather McCain's stance against the special interest groups that have stolen democracy away from Americans. Americans have been cheated out of their democracy by the corruption, cynicism, and bad faith of a narrow group of "special interests." If these influences can be removed, democracy becomes real once more.

McCain's announcement address builds on the themes expressed in his campaign biography. His military background makes him uniquely suited for office, his time in the military has instilled in him a specific set of values and mores that will guide him in his term in office, and McCain champions the cause of the people in a battle against a group of "special interests" that undermine the nation. McCain builds on his persona of a military war hero while defining the role of "the people" in such a way that he becomes an avatar on their behalf, fighting for "our government" which has been taken away from "us." Special interest groups serve to take America away from the core values of honor and integrity inherent in the identity of the country. McCain interpellates the audience into his vision of what Americans are—a people interested in fighting for honor, duty, and dignity for everyone. It is only when this people are not allowed to have control over government that problems arise, and restoring control to the people is the solution to every problem America faces. This controversy over who controls America dominates McCain's announcement address.

McCain's Address to the New Hampshire State Legislature

On January 13, 2000, McCain made a campaign address to the New Hampshire state legislature, just weeks before the New Hampshire primary scheduled for February 1st. This speech is indicative of the arguments McCain made on the campaign trail. Three themes are evident in the speech. First, McCain makes strong reference to American traditions and the American way of life. Second, he appeals to the people as being the key to an effective government. Finally, he argues against cynicism that has crept into political affairs due to the influence of special interest groups. In many ways, these themes are logical extensions of both his campaign biography and his announcement address.

Referencing American Traditions

McCain builds this speech around the idea of grounding the future in the traditions of the past. He says that, "I'd like to talk about the future—by first reminding you of the past, and our tradition as free men and women" (McCain, 2000a). He continues, "despite the many differences between yesterday and tomorrow, the America that was built on the faith of our fathers is the same America that you and I hope to pass on to our children" (McCain, 2000a). McCain's America is a country grounded in the past. Optimism in the future stems from faith in the past. If America can be restored to an earlier time, if the excesses that take America away from its core values can be stripped away, then hope for America can be restored.

This appeal to basic principles is illustrated by McCain's statement that, "[t]he beauty of America is found in her decency and simplicity—an honest day's pay for an honest day's work, equal rights and protection under the law" (McCain, 2000a). Simplicity is both the source of America's greatness as well as the foundation for a better tomorrow. When the country is led away from the basic, core values that make it great, the country falls into despair. McCain's campaign serves to reinvigorate the nation's core values like honor and integrity that can once again guide the nation to greatness at the turn of the new millennium.

Appeals to the People

The key to restoring government to its simpler principles is to rely on the people who make up that government. McCain rhetorically creates the people as being distinct from the elitist Washington bureaucracy controlled by special interests. McCain defines the race itself as revolving around this issue when he says, "I chose to enter this race because I want to return our government back to whom it belongs—the people" (McCain, 2000a). McCain continues by

noting that "people who are free to act in their own interests will perceive their interests in an enlightened way, and will…make…a civilization for the ages" (McCain, 2000a).

McCain's vision of how the country operates is to create a dichotomy between "the people" and special interests, partisan politics, and the Washington elite. He says that, "[w]hen our government has been taken from us by special interests and big-dollar donors–as it has been–pride is lost to shame" (McCain, 2000a). He continues by arguing that control by a narrow elite is at odds with the principles of the country, "[w]hen one of the founding tenets of our nation–that the government closest to the people governs best–is flouted by a self-aggrandizing Washington elite…our principles are lost to selfish ambition" (McCain, 2000a).

McCain has ultimate faith in the people, believing that they are the source of all that is good, right, and just in America. Conversely, special interest groups and the "Washington elite" move the country away from the best interests of the nation as a whole towards more narrow, selfish interests. McCain argues that the power of "special interest lobbyists" divert resources to "special interests rather than our national obligations" (McCain, 2000a). McCain's political agenda rests primarily on the grounds of removing special interest power and restoring it to the masses, under the belief that ordinary Americans know best how to run the nation.

Arguing Against Cynicism

A third theme of the speech is the need to address public cynicism about government. McCain contends that "[w]hen our politics are perceived as corrupted by money and lies trust is lost to cynicism" (McCain, 2000a). McCain draws a distinction between the type of politics exhibited in the present system and the types of politics he seeks. He contends, "[w]e can continue to watch as the American people grow ever more alienated from the practice and

institutions of democracy" or we can "restore honesty to our political system…[and] create a gateway that makes all other reforms possible" (McCain, 2000a).

The influence of special interests groups breeds cynicism in government. McCain's political stance is designed to take control away from the narrow elite and move it back to the people, who represent the solution to political problems. He outlines his stance on education, Social Security, and taxation in this speech; the critical element, however, is the claim that American politics has been stolen away from the people. McCain promises to restore democracy back to the average citizenry, primarily by driving out the corrupting influences of special interest politics.

McCain emphasizes the idea that ordinary Americans can be trusted more than elite political groups. McCain's ideological position is that average people in the country can restore truth, honor, and integrity to the political system. It is when politics becomes corrupted by narrow and selfish interests that the foundations of the country are eroded. The solution is to pass reforms empowering the people to take back their government. In this way, McCain melds his personal honor code with a political agenda—an agenda premised on putting people first.

The Virginia Beach Speech

McCain's speech on February 28th, 2000 is a critical turning point in the McCain campaign. In this speech, McCain seemed to stray from many of his campaign themes. Stinging from a series of harsh negative attack ads, McCain used the Virginia Beach speech to lash out against Christian conservative elements in the Republican Party, who were actively behind the campaign to discredit McCain in South Carolina. This apparent change in focus was a deliberate strategy by the McCain team, as Paul Alexander notes, "McCain decided to take the chance he and his handlers felt he needed to take. He would make a speech on Monday, February 28, that

would alter the direction of the presidential campaign as it had been defined…" (Alexander, 2003, p. 289). While this speech represented a major change in campaign strategy, with McCain going on the attack, naming names, and insulting particular religious leaders, the speech was still consistent with the overall theme of honor McCain had developed in the campaign. McCain's response, while virulent in nature, was consistent with the notion of honor under siege, as McCain uses the speech to rebuild his wounded reputation.

The Virginia Beach speech came nine days after McCain's loss in the South Carolina primary to George W. Bush. Although McCain was once a front-runner in the race, Bush's team launched a series of negative attack advertisements against McCain. Bush went on to reverse his early deficit in the polls to win the South Carolina primary by 11 percentage points (Alexander, 2003, p. 278). The campaign for South Carolina was almost universally decried by the media as being a brutal, rough-and-tumble affair. Molly Ivins said of the campaign that it "was a Rove classic. McCain was simultaneously rumored to be gay and a tomcat who cheats on his wife, who in turn was rumored to be a drug addict" (Ivins, 2001, 4). Tim Russert was quoted as saying that the South Carolina primary was "One of the dirtiest I've ever seen" (Ponnuru, 2000). Jonathan Alter, a *Newsweek* writer, "confessed on Don Imus's show that it was 'hard for us to cover' the campaign, so distressing were the attacks on McCain. Imus later remarked that Alter 'sounded like he was going to slit his wrists'" (Ponnuru, 2000).

The attacks against McCain after his early primary successes were also viewed as being part of a conspiracy against McCain by members of the Christian right wing of the Republican Party. Chris Bull reported:

> Just prior to the Michigan primary, [Pat] Robertson recorded a message, later telephoned to voters, accusing McCain of choosing as his campaign chairman a

> "vicious bigot who wrote that conservative Christians in politics are antiabortion zealots, homophobes, and would-be censors." Robertson was referring to former senator Warren Rudman, who characterized some Christian conservatives as such in his autobiography (Bull, 2000).

The McCain camp had strong evidence tying Christian leaders to the widespread rumors and innuendo about McCain, including the rumor that he had fostered an illegitimate black child, a rumor primarily spread by leaflets and flyers placed around churches in South Carolina prior to the primary (Ivins, 2001).

In addition to attacks on his family and personal character, McCain was accused of insincerity on issues he strongly supported. McCain was accused of being disingenuous in his pro life position, and of taking illegal contributions from a company while in charge of the Commerce Committee. The Bush camp used a surrogate speaker to argue that McCain had "abandoned veterans" throughout his time in the Congress (Alexander, 2003). Meanwhile, the Bush camp was running advertisements in New York which "selectively picked from McCain's record to attack him as an opponent of breast-cancer research, an affront made worse by [Bush's] seemingly callous response when he was told that McCain's sister had suffered from the disease" (Carney, 2000, p. 37). The series of anti-McCain ads led to a serious breakdown between the Bush and McCain camps, typified by an exchange between the two candidates during a commercial break of a debate in South Carolina in early February. James Carney of *Time* magazine reported:

> During a commercial break, Bush grasped McCain's hands and made a sugary plea for less acrimony in their campaign. When McCain pointed out that Bush's allies were savaging him in direct-mail and phone campaigns, Bush played the

> innocent. "Don't give me that shit," McCain growled, pulling away. "And take your hands off me." (Carney, 2000, p. 37).

McCain's anger and hostility toward the Bush camp were increasingly evident on the campaign trail. The Virginia Beach speech represented a shift in McCain's tactics in favor of an aggressive defense of his personal honor.

McCain's Virginia Beach address exemplifies a noticeable break in substance from McCain's previous campaign speeches. Although McCain talks about his military background, Social Security, education, and campaign finance, the speech is targeted primarily at a group of religious conservatives that McCain feels undermine the Republican Party. David Nyhan of the Boston Globe writes that, "[b]y flying into Virginia Beach and challenging the big-money TV preachers of the religious right…McCain laid bare the fault line between political conservatives and religious fundamentalists" (Nyhan, 2000). Nyhan continues, "by the time McCain finished strafing the command posts of the religious right Monday, both sides knew this was a battle to the finish" (Nyhan, 2000). William Saletan argued that McCain was leading an "audacious assault on conservative religious activists" in an effort to "reinterpret" the party (Saletan, 2000). Saletan went on to say, "[t]he stakes at Virginia Beach, like those at Normandy, are absolute" (2000).

In the address, McCain focuses primarily on the Republican Party, arguing that the Republican Party needs to be more inclusive in its message. Most noticeable is the change in style—McCain abandons much of his positive campaigning for an aggressive attack on those in the Republican Party he views as being an obstacle to the creation of a new, inclusive Republican majority. This aggressive campaigning style is an unusual juxtaposition for a politician whose primary legislative stance is to clean up politics.

Three themes emerge in the speech. First, McCain narrows his conceptualization of "the people." McCain addresses the speech specifically to members of the Republican Party, and then draws distinctions between Republicans who attack him and those he supports. Second, McCain engages in a strategy of personalization, specifically naming those who oppose his effort to redefine the party. Finally, McCain obscures his overall message of inclusion with a message of division. Although the speech is ostensibly about uniting the Republican Party, McCain draws lines in the sand between those he feels truly believe in the principles he espouses, and those who "pander" to particular influential people and interest groups. McCain's effort to defend his personal honor triggers a change in his political tone, undermining the reformist message of his campaign.

McCain's attention and focus narrow in this address, denying McCain access to his usual *ethos* of being a man interested in the good of the nation as a whole. Even McCain's appeals for inclusion seem to draw a clear limit as to what kind of people McCain wants to include in the Republican Party, undermining his overall approach of returning government to "the people." The ultimate message is a caustic and contradictory one, putting McCain at odds with the optimistic vision of politics presented in previous addresses. In his efforts to defend his personal reputation, McCain falls back on the divide-and-conquer politics he had previously indicted.

Reconceptualizing "the People"

From the beginning of the speech, McCain makes it clear that the audience is the Republican Party itself. McCain says, "I want to start this morning by making a few remarks about our Republican Party" (McCain, 2000b). McCain's remarks are directly targeted towards those voting in the Republican primaries. He describes himself as someone who has "remained true to our conservative principles:"

> It is conservative to pay down the national debt; to save Social Security and Medicare. It is conservative to insist on local control of our children's education. It is conservative to expose the pork barrel spending practices of both political parties. It is conservative to seek to improve the lives of our servicemen and women, and the means with which we ask them to defend us. And it is conservative to demand that America keep its promises to our veterans (McCain, 2000b).

McCain defines himself in a different manner than in previous speeches. Instead of focusing on his military accomplishments and the principles that the military instilled in him, McCain focuses primarily on his political stance—that of a Republican conservative. From this, it is clear that McCain is also defining his audience differently. The audience is a group of Republicans, and McCain attempts to define the Republican Party in a manner consistent with his view of the audience. McCain's vision depicts the audience as conservative, but not beholden to the religious right.

McCain's focus on the Republican Party threatens to eclipse his previous focus on the nation as a whole. McCain tries to skirt this rhetorical difficulty by arguing that, "I always believed that what is good for America is good for the Republican Party" (McCain, 2000b). The problem is that the bulk of the speech is focused on what is good for the Republican Party, without explicitly turning back to what is also good for America. McCain's new focus takes the speech away from improving the country to improving the situation of the Republican Party, narrowing the implied audience. The difficulty for McCain is similar to the difficulty that Lewis identifies Reagan had in dealing with the Iran-Contra scandal (Lewis, 1987). Much as Reagan

faced difficulty when he "strayed from his previous script," the narrowing of McCain's grander vision for America is an unusual rhetorical contrast for John McCain.

This narrower version of audience for the address denies McCain the ability to talk about government being taken away from "the people" as McCain previously defined them. McCain is now drawing lines. By claiming that he is under attack by elements within his own party, McCain identifies some Republicans as being with his cause, and others against it. The previous unity in McCain's message splinters with this rhetorical move. By drawing divisions between friends and foes, the unity that once existed in McCain's vision of "the people" fades away. McCain's divisive message, designed to defend his honor, simultaneously takes away from his political message of unifying all Americans behind a vision of what is good for the entire country.

Personalization of Attacks

A second contrast in this speech is McCain's attack on particular individuals. Whereas McCain's previous approach focused on the political well-being of the nation, McCain now points his attention to particular individuals whom he views as being obstacles to such a vision. McCain says, "I am a pro-life, pro-family, fiscal conservative…And yet, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and a few Washington leaders of the pro-life movement call me an unacceptable presidential candidate" (McCain, 2000b). This personalization strategy is distinct from McCain's prior indictments of "special interest groups" who remain unnamed, largely invisible groups in opposition to "the people." Since McCain has begun to name individuals, it becomes more difficult for those who find themselves in allegiance with said individuals to join McCain's cause.

Through personalization, McCain attempts to push those he names to the fringes of American politics. McCain comments, "[n]either party should be defined by pandering to the outer reaches of American politics and the agents of intolerance whether they be Louis Farrakhan or Al Sharpton…or Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell" (McCain, 2000b). In addition, McCain specifically identifies George Bush as "a Pat Robertson Republican who will lose to Al Gore" (McCain, 2000b).

McCain's personalization of the Republican Party undermines his effort to appeal for inclusion in the party. By launching personal assaults, McCain loses the high ground he maintained by focusing on the positive traits of his personal character and integrity. Further, the question of whether McCain can successfully divorce his attacks against these individuals from their supporters is in doubt. Following the speech, Gary Bauer asked for McCain to "retract his recent statements and apologize to Pat Robertson and the Rev. Jerry Falwell, as well as all men and women of faith" ("Bauer asks McCain," 2000).

Bauer's statement illustrates a fundamental problem with McCain's approach. His attacks on individuals cannot clearly be separated from others that share similar views to those individuals. Thus, McCain's efforts to bring government back to "the people" now constitutes a narrower range of individuals. It is "a people" defined by McCain, who excludes supporters of Falwell and Robertson, with potential repercussions for all people of religious faith. McCain leaves the realm of appealing to the optimism inherent in the principles and values of the country, and resorts to more traditional political techniques of divide and conquer, techniques that McCain indicts in his campaign founded on principles of "Straight Talk" and cleaning up politics. As he tries to single out those who attacked his personal honor, McCain risks straying from his prior vision for the American people.

Appeals for Inclusion

A third theme evident in McCain's Virginia Beach speech is his attempt to appeal for inclusion in the Republican Party. McCain claims, "I am also proud to help build a bigger Republican Party…by attracting new people to our cause with an appeal to the patriotism that unites us and the promise of a government we can be proud of again" (McCain, 2000b). However, McCain undermines his stance for inclusion with the next sentence, "[a]nd for that, I have been accused of consorting with the wrong sort of people" (McCain, 2000b). McCain's call for inclusion is undermined by his own accusatory politics.

McCain contends, "I believe it is the height of foolishness to build a wall around our Party in fear that we are so narrowly defined that new faces and fresh ideas in accord with our basic principles will jeopardize our values" (McCain, 2000b). The difficulty with this approach is that McCain has already drawn a wall around those he feels are undermining the party with their brand of politics. McCain's call for inclusion runs into its limits when McCain himself attempts to exclude conservative Christian leaders.

The ways in which this approach divides McCain from certain members of the Republican Party are clear in McCain's statement that, "[s]ome prefer to build walls and exclude newcomers from our support. Apparently, appeals to patriotism can only be heard by card-carrying Republicans, and only certain Republicans at that" (McCain, 2000b). Although McCain's appeal to inclusion focuses on those outside the current umbrella of the Republican Party, the difficulty lies in the fact that McCain has rhetorically isolated himself from those whom he has defined as the core of the party—the "card-carrying Republicans." Far from isolating George W. Bush to the outer fringes of the party, McCain risks rhetorically trapping himself in that position.

This strategy of isolation also locks McCain into making arguments to defend his political position. Instead of seeking new converts, McCain seems forced to defend his positions so that those already among the Republican faithful do not abandon his cause. This is most evident when McCain says:

> Why should you fear a candidate who believes we should honor our obligations to the old and the young? Why should you fear a candidate who believes we should first cut taxes for those who need it most? Why should you fear a candidate who wants to reform the practices of politics and government…Why should you fear a candidate who would sign without hesitation a partial birth abortion ban or who would work tirelessly with anyone to improve adoption and foster care choices for those who might be considering the taking of unborn life. Why should you fear a candidate who shares your values? (McCain, 2000b).

McCain argues from a defensive crouch, claiming many reasons why he should not be voted *against* in the upcoming primary. What the speech lacks are the reasons to vote *for* McCain. McCain's positive vision of uniting the country is lost in his effort to hang on to those who are already in McCain's camp, undermining his appeal to those who do not currently support McCain. McCain's *defense* of honor vitiates the previous *promotion* of his honor. Instead of allowing him to expand his appeal to new groups through the bolstering of his war hero persona, McCain is now forced to blunt attacks against his integrity.

In the concluding sections of the address, McCain repeatedly calls for the audience to "join us" because, "[w]e are the party of Ronald Reagan not Pat Robertson…We are the party of Abraham Lincoln not Bob Jones" (McCain, 2000b). While providing strong linkages to the past as well as creating ethos disparities between his opponents and his vision for the Republican

Party, McCain is left arguing for divide-and-conquer politics. Those that are attacking him deserve to be attacked in return. This is an unusual juxtaposition for a candidate determined to clean up politics from partisan political attack, and ultimately serves to undermine the position McCain took earlier in the campaign to try and unite all people under the rubric of returning America to core values and principles that define the nation.

Explaining the Virginia Beach Speech through the Prism of Honor

In many ways, the Virginia Beach speech appears to be a clean break from McCain's previous campaign addresses. The speech embraces an aggressive style, naming names and pointing to individuals to blame for the Republican Party's current trials and tribulations. McCain embraces a divide-and-conquer strategy, engaging in assaults against politicians and influential leaders who oppose him. It is easy to write off the Virginia Beach speech as a desperate tactic by a desperate politician who fears the race has turned against him, and thus needs some element of shock to get him back in the contest.

At the same time, however, the Virginia Beach speech is consistent with McCain's narrative theme of honor. In the Virginia Beach speech, McCain responds virulently due to a sense of wounded honor. McCain expresses the notion that he has been treated unfairly, with his record misrepresented in the campaign for the South Carolina primary preceding the speech. McCain's attack politics, while inconsistent with the ideals of clean campaigning he espoused on the campaign trail, make sense when combined with the notion of honor and integrity that McCain elucidates throughout his speeches.

Political analysts loyal to McCain remain split on whether or not the Virginia Beach speech ultimately helped or hurt the campaign. Paul Galanti, a Virginia campaign staffer, was quoted as saying, "it really wasn't appropriate for John to make the speech there…nobody

attacks Pat Robertson. That's like attacking Santa Claus. It cost John votes in Virginia" (Alexander, 2003, p. 291). Meanwhile Gary Hart argued:

> given his refusal to kowtow to the religious right and their dominance in the party—and [given] his native independence—I think he had no choice but to challenge the party…his popularity had to do with his independence and his willingness to say things that nobody else would say (Alexander, 2003, p. 294).

Despite the negative political consequences, the Virginia Beach speech came to be a defining moment for the McCain campaign, testing the viability of McCain's combined message of inclusivity for the Republican Party by a candidate who grounded his campaign in a theme of honor.

Much as previous generations of politicians engaged in aggressive political posturing to defend themselves against attacks on their personal honor, McCain responds to accusations against his personal character in a manner that honor would dictate. McCain strongly refutes the charges, and defends himself in an open forum against the accusers. The personalized attacks against McCain's honor cause McCain to respond in kind. Because so much of McCain's persona is invested in his campaign, political attacks become difficult to distinguish from personal attacks. McCain feels that criticisms of his political positions, especially ones that accuse him of past misstatements, demand a response as personal as the accusations. Because McCain's character is at stake, McCain responds within the realm of character politics. Thus, while the Virginia Beach speech may be at odds with McCain's campaign theme of inclusivity, it is ultimately consistent with the overriding narrative of personal honor.

Conclusion

The analysis of McCain's speeches on the campaign trail highlights and elucidates several rhetorical concepts. First, the inconsistencies in McCain's addresses point to problems when a candidate begins to violate the narrative they have created for themselves. McCain's Virginia Beach speech is at odds with the narrative probability established in his prior addresses. McCain's earlier appeals to a clean style of campaigning which avoids attack politics are directly at odds with the slash-and-burn style elucidated in the Virginia Beach address. This unusual juxtaposition serves to undermine the benefits to McCain's *ethos* created by his campaign biography, his announcement address, and his other speeches on the campaign trail.

Second, McCain's addresses illustrate the pitfalls of a personal approach in political affairs. Far from adding to the substance of the campaign, McCain's attacks on specific individuals detract from his political message. Instead of the audience becoming interpellated via the principles and values McCain upholds, the audience has to ask whether or not they fall into the category that McCain tries to exclude from the address. The focus on the universal values and principles that McCain previously argued all Americans share is lost in this address.

Third, McCain's speeches point to the continuing relevance of McGee's conceptualization of "the people" in rhetorical studies. McCain's continuing references to how "the people" have been excluded from politics and how power needs to be returned to them is undermined in his Virginia Beach speech because of McCain's definitional shift in what constitutes "the people." The Virginia Beach address significantly narrows the range of who "the people" are, first by focusing on the Republican Party, and second by focusing on divisions within the Republican Party. Whereas McCain's previous constitution of "the people" was a broad sense of what it means to be an American, McCain's new conceptualization divides "the

people" up into smaller segments of those who are for and against his vision. This significantly narrows the range of those who can be interpellated into McCain's vision, undermining the ability for McCain to constitute the audience in a manner sufficiently wide enough for him to maintain a strong political base.

Like most political speeches of candidates running for office, McCain's speeches expound on the themes expressed in his campaign biography. Ultimately, however, McCain's focus changes at various points upon the campaign trail, and this analysis illustrates how the alterations McCain made undermined McCain's overall political message. Much as Lewis observes about Reagan's difficulties with Iran-Contra, McCain finds himself in the most trouble when his words are in contrast with what he has previously stipulated.

More importantly, however, McCain's campaign speeches illustrate the rhetorical changes that campaigns undergo when they become heavily invested with a candidate's persona. With character playing an increasingly important role in American politics, the McCain speeches demonstrate how campaigning takes place in a world where the candidate has invested a great deal of personal honor and integrity in the campaign. When issue stances become equated with personal attacks, it is difficult for politicians and the American public to separate the personal from the political. While this may allow for politicians to emerge upon the scene who can take advantage of strength of character to mount successful campaigns, the trend may also work against the ideal of cleaning up politics. Candidates who rely heavily on their persona for their political success must also deal with the fact that their persona becomes vulnerable to attack. And when politics shifts from attacks on issues to attacks on the personal ethics of individuals, politics more closely resembles an era where politicians would respond to challenges to their integrity with responses seemingly disproportionate to the circumstances. While it is unlikely

that we will see a renaissance of public canings and shots fired at twenty paces, it may be the case that politics will more closely resemble an era where political insults were viewed as personal affronts—and responded to in kind.

CHAPTER 4:

The War Hero as Reformer: Linking Legislative Success to McCain's Presidential Campaign

In many ways, John McCain's run for President in 2000 might have spelled the end of his power and influence on Capitol Hill. He chose to run against the favored nominee of the party, chose to challenge the Christian Right, and chose to argue that the Republican Party needed to be changed. McCain risked not merely the "maverick" label, but also that of a traitor. Quite the opposite turned out to be true. McCain used his popularity to spearhead final passage of the largest overhaul to the nation's campaign finance system since the Watergate era, lead the push for a patient's bill of rights, and become a primary spokesperson for American foreign policy in the post September 11th era (Drew, 2002).

In addition, McCain served an important function in the creation of the National Commission on terrorist attacks upon the United States. Together with Joe Lieberman, McCain called for an investigation into intelligence gathering surrounding the attacks on the World Trade Center. McCain's presence served an important balancing role, as an editorial in the *Commercial Appeal* commented, "President Bush will appoint the chairman of the commission, but to help balance that advantage, one of the Republican appointments will be made by Sen. John McCain…a strong supporter of the investigation in his customary role as a GOP maverick" ("Terrorism defense taking shape, 2002, p. B6). In addition, McCain's ability to appoint one of the GOP members of the commission was called the "key" to the compromise, since key Democratic leaders thought that McCain "would appoint someone who would be aggressive in questioning public officials" ("Lame duck," 2002). McCain's honor and integrity continue to

afford him a unique role for both the Bush administration and the Democrats, because McCain is viewed as having the honesty to be put in charge of being a fair arbiter of important matters in the Bush administration.

McCain's "failed" run at the Presidency bolstered him in numerous ways. McCain emerged from the campaign a gallant challenger, fighting for a clear cause and a noble purpose—that of a clean government. As the *Arizona Republic* commented after McCain's run for the presidency:

> John McCain is one of two senators who now have a national constituency…Bush invited McCain for this meeting because he recognizes that McCain has a political base around the country. When you are a senator with a national constituency, you have political clout with the White House ("McCain talks," 2001, p. 6A).

Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times* added, "[McCain's] challenge to George W. Bush…for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000 was the most effective insurgent campaign in a generation. McCain touched a popular chord…he returned to Congress as one of the few legislators ever whose stature was enhanced by a losing presidential run" (Brownstein, 2002, p. R7). Paul West notes, "John McCain is all dressed up with no place to go. His popularity is running as high today as it did two years ago, when his 'Straight Talk Express' bus stopped rolling" (West, 2002, p. C5).

McCain's campaign enhanced his persona and *ethos* not only on Capitol Hill, but also with the American public. McCain's deployment of a reform-based argumentative strategy, combined with his status as a war hero, gave him a stature far above and beyond an average Senator, allowing him to push campaign finance reform through the Senate during the new President's "honeymoon" period. The end of campaign 2000 did not end the trouble that

McCain the rogue Senator would create for the Republican Party leadership, and his push for campaign finance reform served in many ways as an extension of his 2000 bid for the Presidency.

This chapter analyzes the ways in which John McCain's campaign for President in 2000 allowed him greater stature and standing to push for campaign finance reform. First, the chapter will briefly analyze the past failed efforts to pass campaign finance through the Congress. Then, three benefits that McCain derived from his campaign with regard to the push for campaign legislation in Congress will be explored. Initially, McCain's enhanced political persona allowed him to have a stronger ethos in his push for campaign finance reform. Further, McCain's campaign acted as a strategy of "going public," allowing the American public to become involved in, and thus augment, the likelihood of the passage of campaign finance reform. Additionally, McCain was able to extend the theme of inclusivity from the campaign trail to his procedural approaches to get campaign finance reform passed. Finally, McCain employed an argumentative strategy that cast a wide net, allowing for previous opponents of the measure to "come on board" for campaign finance reform. These factors allowed McCain to transfer his status as a war hero to that of a political reformer, creating momentum for campaign finance reform.

The History of Campaign Finance Reform

The current debate about campaign finance reform is rooted in the Watergate scandal. In 1974, in response to the abuses of the 1972 Nixon campaign for President, Congress passed into law the first comprehensive campaign finance reform law, which "placed important new restrictions on the gathering and spending of money in federal elections" (Drew, 1999, p. viii). Despite these reforms, however, growing concern over the role of money in politics remained

among members of Washington's political elite. Largely because of the "soft money" loophole, campaigns were awash in unregulated money donated by the narrowest tier of the American populace. Soft money "has been defined as 'funds that are raised by Presidential campaigns…purportedly for use by state and local party organizations…from sources who would be barred from making such contributions in connection with a federal election'" (see Richards, 2002).

The difficulty with soft money is how much came into campaigns, and the ways in which it was being utilized by candidates to skirt election reform laws. A mere one hundred and three donors gave President Bush $250,000 or more for his campaign, leaving his future policy proposals constantly "shadowed by the suspicion that they are designed to reward big donors" ("The billion dollar problem, 2001, p. B6). Joyce Manyik added, "[u]nlimited and undisclosed money is overwhelming our federal election system" (Manyik, 2001, p. 5A). Others feared that the amount of money in politics gave specialized interest groups too much access, and cited specific legislation and influence gained by big tobacco, the defense industry, the coal industry, the gun lobby, and even arms merchants (Silverstein, 1998).

The growing influence of money on politics was not going unrecognized on Capitol Hill. In particular, John McCain and Russ Feingold had sponsored legislation for six consecutive years in the Senate to curb the excessive amount of money that the soft money loophole allowed into politics. However, in every year before 2001, McCain-Feingold had been defeated on the floor of the Senate, with opponents using procedural rules of debate and filibusters to kill the bill despite the fact that a majority of the Senate had previously supported the legislation (Espo, 2002). A group of primarily Republican Senators led by Mitch McConnell had repeatedly prevented McCain-Feingold from passage.

In 2001, however, the political tide had began to move in McCain's favor. As Bill Turque observed, "…the Clinton-era fundraising scandals and the popularity of Sen. John McCain's insurgent bid for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination…seemed to give the bill its best chance ever for passage" (Turque, 2001). Given that the Senate had been the key to defeating campaign finance reform five times in the past six years, the Senate was to be the critical test case for the passage of campaign finance legislation. McCain had received reassurances from Tom Daschle that "the Democrats would stick with him at least on the early procedural issues" guaranteeing McCain a base of solid support to bring McCain-Feingold to the floor for debate (Drew, 2002, p. 3). Although past efforts to gain support for campaign finance were cut off by a filibuster, McCain's strategy in 2001 was to have an open debate, "which could help him attract additional support by accepting amendments sponsored by senators who were on the fence" (Drew, p. 2).

However, support from the Democrats would not be enough to overcome a filibuster effort mounted by the Republican opposition. McCain would need the support of at least a small number of Republicans in order to prevent the bill from again being subverted by procedural rules. It was here that the defection of Senator Thad Cochran became significant to the reform cause. Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi, joined the McCain-Feingold legislation as a co-sponsor in 2001, thus representing "the 60th vote, the number needed to prevent a filibuster" (Alexander, 2003, p. 335). With Cochran now on the side of campaign finance reform, McCain and Feingold held a press conference on January 4th, 2001, announcing their intent to introduce the McCain-Feingold legislation to the Senate on January 22nd, a mere two days after the inauguration of President George W. Bush (Alexander, 2003).

The stage was thus set for the campaign finance reform debates of 2001. McCain-Feingold, designed to eliminate the soft money loophole entirely, seemed to have a new lease on life despite being defeated for the last six years. McCain had gained new converts to his cause, in the form of new Democrats in the Senate as well as politicians who were increasingly concerned about the role of money in politics. Beyond these instrumental changes, however, McCain also rhetorically benefited from the changes in his own political standing derived from his campaign for President in 2000.

Persona Based Benefits from the Campaign Trail

McCain's stature in 2001 was remarkably different than in prior efforts to pass campaign finance legislation. By making campaign finance his signature issue, the effort to change the political system had become closely tied to the McCain campaign for President. Further, McCain had gained a significant amount of press attention, and given his primary victories over George W. Bush, McCain now had to be taken seriously as someone with powerful political clout. Eliza Carney argued, "Moreover, campaign reform advocates have much to cheer about. McCain's national stature following his presidential bid has built public momentum for…campaign finance reform legislation, which would ban the unregulated 'soft money…'" (Carney, 2001, p. 7)

Whereas before he had been a Senator with a strong military background, McCain was now a celebrity, a man who was taking a stand against corruption in politics even if it meant defying the power brokers in his own party. As one commentator argued, "[w]hether you like him or not, he has gained national stature" (Gregory, 2002, p. I-9). His campaign had taken on a life of its own, with the momentum from his struggle to be the Republican party's nominee spilling over into the debate over campaign finance reform.

The close correlation between McCain's status as a war hero and the way McCain framed the campaign finance debate allowed for a connection to be made between politicians' integrity and the need for campaign finance reform. McCain had made explicit that campaign finance reform was necessary due to the ways in which excess money in politics undermined the honor and integrity of everyone in the political process (McCain & Salter, 2002, p. 337). In addition to providing for a consistent narrative surrounding McCain's push for campaign finance, tying his effort to clean up politics closely to the notion of personal honor allowed McCain to use honor as a shaming technique in the debate over the McCain-Feingold legislation. Politicians who opposed McCain could now be portrayed as either explicitly or implicitly "selling out," sacrificing political honor for personal gain.

Given the unusual nature of the coalition for campaign finance reform, McCain's ability to leverage potential defectors became uniquely important. Many commentators felt that the previous Democratic support for McCain-Feingold was superficial, stemming primarily from the political benefits it provided the party as one interested in true political reform. In particular, the votes of Democrats like Robert Torricelli of New Jersey and John Breaux of Louisiana were suspect, with both members eventually voting for the final legislation after making efforts to scuttle the bill (Baker, 2002). Previously, campaign finance had been a "safe vote" for the Democrats, who realized that the Republican opposition would hamstring the measure via procedural rules, never actually allowing the bill to come into effect. Democrats could thus portray themselves as being interested in "clean" politics without ever having to deal with the substance of McCain-Feingold.

However, as the odds that campaign finance reform would actually pass increased came the likelihood that former Democratic supporters would "jump ship" on the measure. John

Breaux admitted that he had not read the bill until the current legislative session. In Elizabeth Drew's words, "McCain and his staff were of the view that…only a minority of senators in each party who were genuinely for reform. If a bill were to pass the Senate, others would have to be shamed into supporting it" (Drew, 2002, p. 19). The heightened scrutiny of McCain-Feingold accentuated the need for McCain to have the ability to keep potential defectors in check.

Indeed, various Democratic senators were reported as saying that "if there were a secret ballot, the McCain-Feingold bill would receive only about twenty-five to thirty Democratic votes—not enough to pass it" (Drew, 2002, p. 27). However, the fact that McCain had insisted on open procedures for the debate allowed him to bring his persona to bear on potential defectors from the cause.

McCain's linkage of campaign finance to the politics of personal honor thus gave him a shaming device to keep members of Congress on board with campaign finance reform. Richard Lowry of the *National Review* wrote:

> McCain's lodestar as a politician has never been a particular philosophical commitment, but his own patriotic service to country, his honor. Hence, his strong, shamed reaction to getting dragged into the Keating affair and his general distaste for the grubby compromises of partisan politics, both…have helped make him a campaign-finance reformer. In the 2000 primary campaign, the issue of campaign finance became a powerful symbol of his honor (Lowry, 2002).

Because a vote against McCain-Feingold could be construed as an admission that a politician lacked honor and integrity, McCain gained a potent means of influence with members of Congress who had pledged their support for the measure. Drew says, "oratory wasn't his forte. His talents and ability to persuade lay elsewhere: in the way he made the case, in his persona,

his moral authority" (Drew, 2002, p. 15). For John McCain, campaign finance reform was a perfect vehicle to exert his moral authority, as it touched on trust and character in the political realm.

Further evidence of McCain's new stature is illustrated by McCain's ability to influence the vote in the House of Representatives on the companion legislation to McCain-Feingold, the Shays-Meehan bill. Drew notes that, "[t]here was little historical precedent for a member of one chamber to be presumed to have so much influence on the other—an influence that not everyone in that other chamber appreciates" (Drew, 2002, p. 85). However, McCain's increased stature caused Richard Gephardt and Christopher Shays to view McCain as the "trump card" in the House debate over campaign finance legislation. Drew provides a lengthy account of McCain's numerous phone calls to individual members of the House, asking for their support for the Shays-Meehan legislation. The credibility that McCain gained from his run for President on a ticket of political reform allowed him tremendous influence in the House of Representatives, a rare position for a Senator. His new stature allowed him to change his tactics from a general appeal to reform through speeches and debates to a more focused effort on individual members of the House.

McCain's 2000 Campaign as Initiating a "Going Public" Strategy

In addition to providing *ethos* benefits to McCain, McCain's 2000 campaign for the presidency provided the foundations for a "going public" strategy on campaign finance reform. Samuel Kernell defines going public as, "a class of activities that presidents engage in as they promote themselves and their policies before the American public" (Kernell, 1997, p. ix). Kernell contends that the purpose of "going public" is not to influence the public in and of itself,

but to allow a public stage for arguments about legislation which "enhances his chances of success in Washington" (Kernell, 1997, p. ix).

The ultimate goal of going public is not to convince the American voter to support the policy as much as it is to bring public support to bear on politicians in Washington to change their stance on a matter of public policy. Although "going public" is traditionally thought of as a presidential strategy, Kernell also argues that, "many members of Congress today are themselves successfully going public" (Kernell, 1997, p. 29).

McCain's frequent trips on the campaign trail had brought the public's attention to the issue of corruption in American politics, establishing the groundwork for a going public strategy to gain support for campaign finance reform legislation. Vanessa Blum argued, "[p]ublic disgust with flaws in the political finance system fueled Sen. John McCain's unexpected momentum in [the] GOP presidential primaries…" (Blum, 2001, p. 1). Now that public consciousness was more aware of the political corruption created by excess money in politics, McCain and his fellow reformers continued to court public opinion by working with editorial boards and activist groups to strengthen his hand with the public regarding campaign finance reform. In addition, McCain began to appear regularly on Sunday talk shows, give radio interviews, and frequently appeared on programs like Imus in the Morning to promote his agenda (Drew, 2002, p. 44-45).

McCain's focus was to keep public attention focused on members of Congress who might try to undermine the bill. Bill Hall said, "McCain's job…will be to keep the spotlight on House leaders…determined to undermine legislation they may not dare kill outright on the floor. McCain is more aware than anyone…that this is a bill whose time has come with the American public" (Hall, 2001, p. 10A). In addition, on key votes during the campaign finance fight, McCain influenced editorials and lined up supporters from interest groups like the AARP and the

Sierra Club to bolster support amongst their members on portions of the bill. McCain went so far as to use his influence in New Hampshire to bring pressure on would-be Democratic presidential nominees in 2004 (Drew, 2002, p. 52).

Interestingly, the campaign finance reform fight was not the first time that McCain had broadly used the media in an effort to gain political support for his cause. Soon after the Keating Five scandal erupted, McCain initiated a strategy of open discussion with the press. McCain and Salter explained:

> I was in a hell of a mess. And I decided right then that not talking to reporters or sharply denying even the appearance of a problem wasn't going to do me any good…I was confident that the facts were on my side, and only if the facts were disseminated broadly in the media would they spare me from a terrible fate. And they wouldn't be disseminated broadly unless I talked to the press constantly, ad infinitum, until their appetite for information from me was completely satisfied. It is a public relations strategy that I have followed to this day…(McCain & Salter, 2002, p. 192).

McCain's strategy with regards to campaign finance was similar to his strategy in the Keating Five situation. He would make himself available to the press, and conducted multiple interviews and wrote editorials to clarify his position on campaign finance. This coordinated strategy was designed not with the press in mind, but to influence fellow members of Congress to support the McCain-Feingold legislation.

McCain's going public strategy illustrates how highly influential politicians can occasionally access strategies traditionally deemed available primarily to the president of the United States. With McCain's standing raised due to his campaign, McCain became powerful

enough in the eyes of the news media and the public that his stance on policy positions possessed significant influence. The strategy is also particularly well-suited to the campaign finance debate. Kernell contrasts "going public" to the traditional presidential strategy of "bargaining" for influence (Kernell, 1997, 9). Bargaining was the strategy of influence articulated by Richard Neustadt (Neustadt, 1980) where a president gained power and influence primarily by negotiating with members of Congress to support legislation.

However, given that campaign finance reform was a measure designed to clean up Washington from back room deals, the notion that McCain would use a bargaining and log-rolling strategy to achieve campaign finance worked at odds with the purpose of the legislation itself. One political commentator noted:

> McCain also matures as a politician during this period, sensing and then acting on what he must do or say…without ultimately compromising any of his other principles. It is a high wire act of the first order and one senses that McCain came away from the 2000 presidential campaign with a new sense of how to get things done in Washington while maintaining his integrity (Gregory, 2002, p. I-9).

In addition, with the increased public support and media influence McCain derived from his presidential run, the strategy of going public proved to be an attractive means for McCain to build support in Congress for the McCain-Feingold legislation. Furthermore, with fears that many "supporters" of the measure were actually looking for convenient "exit strategies" from McCain-Feingold, the more public McCain could make the fight, the greater the odds of gaining and maintaining support among the members of Congress. Much as campaign finance itself was about bringing to light the back room deals of Washington, McCain's strategy in getting the

measure passed was about exposing members of Congress who might prefer to stay hidden in the shadows.

McCain's Procedural Approaches to Campaign Finance

A third benefit McCain derived from his campaign for president is found in the similarities between McCain's campaign for president and his approach to the passage of campaign finance reform. Throughout his campaign for president, McCain portrayed himself as a politician interested in inclusivity, offering an invitation for people not traditionally affiliated with the Republican party to join his struggle to reform the nation's political system. Similarly, McCain's strategy in the campaign finance struggle emphasized a broad approach, allowing any member of Congress to join him in the fight against excess money in the political system.

Two primary elements of McCain's push for campaign finance reform illustrate the ways in which inclusivity served as a theme for McCain's push for campaign finance reform. First, McCain organized a collective effort to support the bill, as McCain formed a coalition of various Democratic and Republican leaders who would frequently meet to strategize as to how to best proceed in the fight for campaign finance. Second, McCain adopted a strategy whereby he would accept amendments to the legislation in an effort to broaden the appeal of the legislation.

McCain's collective effort to gain support for campaign finance serves as an extension of his campaign theme of promoting a broad-based coalition of support. Elizabeth Drew describes the collective approach McCain used to strategizing about the campaign finance reform legislation:

> Rather than go to the Senate floor with one or two allies and do battle with McConnell and his allies, he [McCain] has formed a coalition of twelve Democrats and Republicans, the "principals," who are strongly behind the bill and

> who will meet each morning or evening in the President's Room, a ceremonial office near the Senate floor, to decide strategy. Unlike past debates on the issue, this was going to be a collective effort (Drew, 2002, p. 30).

McCain was trying to de-personalize the floor debate, and make the fight for campaign finance into a struggle for political reform, not a fight of McCain against the Republican leadership. Drew continues:

> He has asked that the other senators share the burden of carrying the debate on the floor and fighting off hostile amendments…He doesn't want to be out there constantly opposing his fellow Republicans…he also doesn't want to antagonize Republicans who haven't supported reform before but who might come over to his side (Drew, p. 30).

Second, McCain adopted a strategy in the floor debates of being willing to accept amendments to the campaign finance legislation from supporters of the bill. McCain would frequently have a Senator who was interested in adding a friendly amendment to the bill introduce the amendment and add the Senator as a cosponsor to the piece of legislation. McCain adopted this strategy with regard to the millionaire's amendment , allowing DeWine and Domenici to introduce the legislation, as well as the Wellstone amendment regarding nonprofit advocacy groups (Drew, 2002).

McCain's approach to others' amendments also illustrates his willingness to compromise. In dealing with the Bond amendment, McCain says that:

> Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Missouri [Bond]. There is a great deal of redundancy in his amendment. We already bar foreign contributions and increase penalties in some areas. But I think the Senator from Missouri makes very valid

> points. I think his amendment probably addresses some very helpful areas. I am prepared to accept the amendment. I do not know about all Members yet, but we would like to run it by them and see if we can't get some agreement on the amendment. (McCain, 2001, p. S3188).

In dealing with another amendment, McCain expresses his opposition to the amendment, but nevertheless shows a willingness to work on a compromise approach:

> I want to work with the Senator from New Mexico. I think we have to do something about these negative ads. I tell you the best way is to dry up their money, and what you don't dry up fully disclose. I want to work with the Senator from New Mexico. I would like to sit down and see how we could work this out. But in its present form, I am just not sure how this amendment can possibly be workable (McCain, p. S3114).

Senator Feingold also illustrates this approach to amendments when he argues:

"Not only is this amendment well-intentioned, but it is offered by somebody who anyone in the Senate knows is not only one of the most decent but one of the best Members of this body…Reluctantly, I will oppose this amendment" (Feingold, 2001, p. S3114).

This strategy soon became a feature of McCain sponsored bills, as he also used the "friendly amendment" strategy in his push for the patients' bill of rights (Drew, 2002, p. 72). This strategy has continued on in numerous McCain sponsored pieces of legislation as Ronald Brownstein notes:

> Virtually every congressional Democrat even casually considering a run for the White House is now co-sponsoring legislation with McCain. There is McCain-Edwards to reform HMOs,' McCain-Gephardt to cut corporate subsidies. McCain

> teamed with John Kerry in an unsuccessful effort to raise fuel economy standards for cars and trucks. McCain and Joe Lieberman are collaborating…on terrorism, global warming, and gun control (Brownstein, 2002).

The amendment strategy is a means by which McCain enacts his inclusivity theme. The McCain-Feingold bill itself is centered around providing for the maximum inclusivity of multiple voices in politics, and the idea that members of Congress can feel free to add to McCain's legislation fosters this notion of inclusivity with regard to campaign finance reform. Much as McCain's campaign was about reaching out to voters he felt were locked out of the Republican party, McCain's legislative strategy is one that includes the ideas of opponents and grafts them onto the coalition for the bill, allowing a previously unheard voice to gain center stage.

Casting a Wide Net: Argumentative Strategies in the McCain-Feingold Debates

Finally, the argumentative strategies McCain and the reformers employed in the floor debates on McCain-Feingold illustrate the desire of the reformers to maintain an inclusive coalition, allowing for the pro-reform movement to be as broad as possible. A primary strategy of McCain and the reformers is to blame the campaign finance system as a whole as the cause of corruption, and not to try to pin the blame on particular individuals. McCain thus welcomes new supporters instead of trying to demonize potential future allies for his legislation.

The dichotomy between McCain's approach to the legislation and the approach of the Republican opposition is best viewed through Burkean frame analysis. Historically, the use of dramatic frames to discuss argument has been rare. However, some recent theorists have used Burkean frames to analyze argument (e.g., Birdsell, 1993; Fritch & Leeper, 1993; Madsen, 1993; Parson, 1993). Burkean frames are used to understand the social motive of a given argument. Arnie Madsen notes that:

> The critic must consider the dramatistic elements of argumentation to understand fully the claims operating within a particular situation. Inherently rooted in human language and argument are motives. A deeper understanding of motivation is thus essential to more complete analysis of argumentation. As a method of analysis...Burke suggests the comic frame. For Burke, the comic frame becomes a middle ground between societal extremes (Madsen, p. 170).

These motives can be identified through a dramatistic study of rhetorical choices. As Rybacki and Rybacki argue, "The symbols rhetors choose reflect their attitude toward the society in which they live...Burke offers dramatic frames as a means of determining attitudes" (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1995, p. 78).

In contrast to finding *individuals* to place fault and blame upon, the focus of the comic frame is to place the fault and blame on the corrupt nature of a *system* common to the participants in a dispute. The goal of the comic arguer is to identify flaws inherent in the system and to ask for structural change. Instead of demonizing an opposition, the comic arguer makes interlocutors aware of the flaws and weaknesses inherent in continuation of a corrupt and flawed system, thus freeing the group from continued reliance on a type of false consciousness. As Carlson contends:

> The tragic perspective usually projects 'evil' onto a 'scapegoat,' lays the blame at its feet, and 'slays' it. From this perspective, no social change is possible without some form of violence. The comic frame on the other hand, requires a ritual form unique to its purpose...The end of a movement...is to free society by creating a consciousness of the system as a system, revealing its inherent weaknesses, and preparing an aware populace to deal with them (Carlson, 1986, p. 447).

A critical difference, therefore, is how the comic frame construes opposition to an argument as error instead of the fault of an enemy (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1995, p. 78). In contrast to the search for a scapegoat, the comic frame portrays wrong-doing in a guiltless sense, an error that anyone in power may be tempted to make. The goal is not to embarrass or shame the opposition into agreement, but to share a kind of comic consciousness with the participants of the argument. Instead of demonization, the idea is a kind of welcoming to the fold in recognition of previous wrong-doings.

The comic frame thus becomes the argumentative equivalent of having a positive attitude. Instead of focusing on the "evil" of opponents, the opposition is to recognize the failings of the status quo and join in an effort to repair the system (Carlson, 1988, p. 312). The goal is to teach and to educate, not to inflict punishment and demand sacrifice. By identifying the problems inherent to the status quo, the comic arguer can open the door to minor changes that make the system work as it should (Brummett, 1984, p. 219).

In the debate over campaign finance, the Republican opposition to McCain-Feingold constructed a tragic frame for the issue. Meanwhile, McCain and the reformers operated above the fray, pointing to the inadequacies and problems inherent in the overall structure of campaign finance regulations. In this way, they played the role of the comic arguer, allowing for flexibility to accept converts to the cause without treating opponents as enemies. This method was the most effective, because reformers could act above politics, indicting the campaign finance *system,* and not the individual members of Congress that the system governed.

The War Hero as Enemy General: Republican Leaders and the Tragic Frame

The Republican leadership in Congress articulated a tragic perspective toward the McCain-Feingold legislation. With Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky calling the measure

"...a stunningly stupid thing to do," the Republicans in Congress adopted a strong stance against the McCain-Feingold legislation. Opposition was so strong that several "poison pills" were sponsored by the Republicans including the Hagel bill and the "severability" bill, which would have declared McCain-Feingold entirely unconstitutional if even one provision was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Republican opposition leaders, led by McConnell, engaged in three main strategies: individualization of corruption, trivialization of campaign finance reform, and demonization of the reformers.

First, Republican opposition leaders make corruption an individual issue. They say that there is nothing wrong with the system itself, and if there is any problem of corruption, it exists solely in the hearts of corrupt *individuals.* Senator Bennett describes this view of corruption as follows:

> Integrity and corruption does not come as a result of participation in the political process. Integrity and corruption come from the way you were raised, from the way you make your decisions, from the hard commitments you make along the way in life (Bennett, 2001, p. S3092).

Bennett argues that corruption is inherent to those expressing a certain flawed character trait, something that a piece of legislation obviously cannot cure:

> There are corrupt people in entertainment and there are people of integrity in entertainment. There are corrupt people in the media and there are people of integrity in the media. There are corrupt people in politics and there are people of integrity in politics, and they will not change on either side just because we pass a bill (Bennett, p. S3092).

Phil Gramm continues this line of reasoning by arguing that money is not the root cause of corruption; rather, corrupt individuals are the root cause of corruption, "we single out one source of influence, and that source of influence is money. Our problem is not bad money corrupting good men, our problem is bad men corrupting good money" (Gramm, 2001, p. S3120). Gramm furthers this chain of logic by using himself as an example:

> When I listen to my colleagues talk about this corrupting influence, let me say they apparently have lived a different political life than I have lived. I have never in my 22 years in public office and in the 2 years prior to that, when I ran unsuccessfully for the Senate and lost, had anyone come up to me and say: If you will vote the way I want you to vote, I will contribute to your campaign. I am proud that 84,000 people contribute to my campaign, and I believe they contribute to me because they believe in the things I believe in. I am proud to have their support (Gramm, p. S3120).

The Republican leadership situates corruption at the feet of individuals. Money is not corrupting, as long as individuals refuse to be corrupted. This locks the Republican leadership into a tragic frame--allowing no room for those who feel corrupted by the influence of money under their political umbrella. With the focus on individuals, the locus of change becomes the hearts and minds of the members of Congress, not the overall corrupt*ing* nature of the campaign finance system.

Gramm makes it clear that there is no "middle ground" on the issue of corruption--either one is corrupt or not. The idea that money might have influence or give one the appearance of impropriety is not at issue. Gramm continues:

> It amazes me…I hear colleagues talk about corruption, corruption, and corruption. I wonder if people back home know that there has never been a Congress in American history less corrupt than this Congress. I don't agree with many of the people in this body, but I don't believe there is a person in this body who is dishonest (Gramm, 2001, p. S3121).

Gramm leaves little room for the Republican leadership to reach out to individuals who may feel compromised by the present campaign finance system by stating, "...I have never, ever felt compromised because somebody supported me. I have felt honored, I have felt grateful, but I have always believed they supported me because of what I believed" (Gramm, 2001, p. S3121). As he puts it, "So I don't know what is in the hearts of those who feel this corruption. I do not feel it" (Gramm, p. S3121). Senator Bennett adds that there is no way that "speech police" can cure the corruption inherent in the hearts of those who are corrupt:

> One of the things we will not see as a result of the passage of McCain-Feingold is the elimination of corruption in politics. Corruption comes from the heart of the receiver, not the wallet of the giver. If an individual is corrupt, he is going to stay corrupt, whether or not the "speech police" are watching him. He is going to find some way to remain corrupt and to game the system to his advantage. The person of integrity if going to remain a person of integrity, regardless of how many people come waving bills at him to try to get him to change his position solely on the basis of money (Bennett, 2001, p. S3092).

Thus, a primary strategy of the Republican leadership is to place the focus of corruption on individuals and not on the corrupting nature of the system as a whole. The difficulty for opponents of reform is that it creates an "us versus them" mentality. Those that *feel corrupted*

by the nature of the campaign finance reform system must have something wrong with their hearts. They must be corrupt *people.* Instead of providing a way to reach out to those who feel that too much money in the system can provide a corrupt*ing* influence, the Republican leadership draws a bright line on the issue--either that person is corrupt, or there is no corruption in Washington.

A second primary strategy of the Republican leadership is to trivialize the importance of campaign finance, with Mitch McConnell saying "...this issue ranks right up there with static cling as a matter of concern to the American people" (McConnell, 2001, p. S3105). Phil Gramm decried the very idea of the legislation by paying McCain a back handed compliment, "Texas Republican Phil Gramm, a fierce opponent of the bill, offered his old friend McCain this rather damning compliment: 'Seldom has a more noble effort been made on behalf of a poorer cause in the United States Senate'" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 1A). Senator Mitch McConnell even went so far as to say the issue itself was such a non-issue that it was a "stunningly stupid thing to do" (McConnell, p. S3106).

McConnell further reasoned that there has never been a great deal of public support for the issue of campaign finance reform--thus relegating the issue to a trivial concern for the Senate to deal with:

> …reformers frequently assert that there is a great desire throughout the land for their campaign finance scheme. The truth is there is not, nor has there ever been, a groundswell of public demand for even the concept of "reform," let alone an unconstitutional assault by the Federal Government on the constitutional freedom of citizens, groups and parties to participate in America's democracy (McConnell, 2001, p. S3139).

The problem with the Republican opposition's argument is that the strident tone makes it clear that they oppose the entire idea of campaign finance as sponsored by McCain. The strategy of referring to the bill as stupid and unimportant serves to harden views on both sides, especially proponents of the bill. In many ways, this may strengthen McCain's hand, because the Republican leadership increasingly appears to be out of touch with the will of the Senate, and the desire to clean up the system of campaign finance reform.

In addition, this argument contains an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, campaign finance is not a very important issue. On the other hand, it threatens to destroy the United States Constitution. This contradiction creates an unusual juxtaposition for policymakers and the public at large. Campaign finance reform is both irrelevant, in that there is no problem whatsoever with current laws, and at the same time, it is enormously important and threatens the very fabric of American democracy. Such a stance seems to exaggerate both sides of the campaign finance equation, leaving those with a more moderate stance out in the cold.

By demonizing McCain-Feingold, the Republican leadership bolsters the image of proponents of the bill, as well as isolating themselves from potential defections from either moderate Democrats or Republican allies of McCain. The tragic frame draws a line in the sand, a line over which potential moderate defectors would be afraid to cross.

A third strategy of the Republican leadership is to accuse those in favor of campaign finance of acting in bad faith by seeking to secure electoral advantage for themselves. In particular, McConnell makes arguments that McCain-Feingold was being amended to help the Democrats garner support with big labor:

> …unfortunately, the McCain amendment coordination provision lets big labor continue to coordinate its ground game with the Democrats. As you know, I have

> been predicting for 2 weeks that there would be an effort to water down provisions in the bill that were offensive to big labor (McConnell, 2001, p. S3187).

In addition, McConnell believes that proponents of McCain-Feingold are trying to score political points with the full knowledge that the bill would be struck down by the Supreme Court:

> I don't think any of you believes seriously that Jeffords, or Wellstone, or Snowe-Jeffords [amendments are] going to be upheld in court. This is an area of law I know a little bit about. So the chances are pretty good that all of those groups that Senator Breaux was describing are going to be out there on both the right and the left pounding away (McConnell, 2001, p. S3105).

McConnell also argues that, "I am sure there are very few of you who will believe this is going to improve the political system in America" (McConnell, p. S3105).

The Republican leadership's slash and burn technique accuses the supporters of campaign finance of bad faith. The difficulty with this strategy is that it is unlikely to create opposition to McCain-Feingold. Most of the supporters of the legislation are Democrats, so the ability to draw them away by accusing supporters of "playing politics" seems unlikely. In addition, there is no effort to appeal to a higher calling, merely an attack game. Phil Gramm's stance is to accuse the supporters of committing a fraud, "This distinction between soft money and hard money is a fraud. What we are seeing here is an effort to collect political power and to concentrate it" (Gramm, 2001, p. S3121).

Furthermore, McConnell makes explicit comments that draw a line in the sand between supporters of the legislation and opponents of the legislation. McConnell says he likes those on board with the opposition and dislikes the other side:

> I say to my friend from Texas my reward is that I really could not think of a group of enemies I would rather have than the ones I have made in this debate. I can't think of a single set of friends I would rather be associated with than people such as the Senator from Texas, who understand what freedom is all about and understand what this debate is all about (McConnell, 2001, p. S3121).

Given the unusual coalition put together to pass McCain-Feingold (largely Democrats and a handful of Republicans) it is unclear how the demonization strategy could be effective. By levying personal assaults against the opposition, McConnell makes it unlikely that anyone would be likely to "jump ship" and join the opposition to the bill. McConnell employs strategies common to a tragic frame: blaming enemies and identifying everything they support as worthless. This makes the strategy of the reformers a much more appealing one to people on both sides of the aisle.

Reformers and the Comic Frame

In contrast to the Republican leadership's one-sided assault on campaign finance reform are McCain and Feingold. These two reform oriented leaders use an entirely different strategy in their efforts to push campaign finance reform. The primary distinction between the two strategies is a willingness to compromise and reach out even to people who push amendments the reformers oppose. By blaming the system as a whole as the cause of corruption, the reformers hold out the McCain-Feingold legislation as the comic alternative to the status quo and the Republican alternatives. By pointing to the failings in the *system* as the reason for the legislation, the demonization of people which polarized the Republican leadership and prevented coalition building is not evident in the reformers' strategy. McCain plays the role of the comic arguer trying to raise the consciousness of others to the failings in the clownish campaign finance

reform system. McCain thus welcomes new supporters instead of attacking potential future allies for the legislation.

McCain's comic style of argument also illustrates how McCain's rhetorical approach over campaign finance differed from his speeches on the campaign trail, particularly the Virginia Beach speech. McCain and his team understood they needed a carrot as well as a stick. The shaming strategy alone risked being received the same way the Virginia Beach speech was, as a unilateral assault on the party McCain called home. However, by incorporating a rhetorical strategy that offered rewards to members of Congress coming on board, the inclusive approach to the legislation served as the rhetorical "carrot" to the shaming "stick" that McCain retained at his disposal.

Three primary strategies are evident in the reformers' arguments. The first is a redefinition strategy: McCain defined the American political system, and not particular individuals, as the source of political corruption in the country. The second strategy is an identification strategy: reformers identify with the goal of campaign finance, allowing common ground with Senators who propose individual amendments the reformers oppose. Finally, the reformers employ a strategy of transcendence: they focus on restoring integrity and public confidence in the election system, even at the expense of partisan political gain.

First, reformers focus on how the present system of campaign finance is the root cause of corruption in the Senate. In contrast to the Republican argument that corruption exists within an individual person, reformers argue that corruption is created by excess money in politics. This strategy of redefinition allows the reformers to address the contradictory demands of the need for both continuity and change (Zarefsky, et al, 1984, p. 113). Reformers could argue that the ideals

of American democracy can only be met by changing the corrupting nature of excess money in the political system.

Corruption is defined by the reformers not as an action taken but a force acting upon them. This strategy allows reformers to avoid the claim that either they or their opponents are corrupt. Instead, the system is corrupt. The changing nature of corruption from an active to a passive force allows the reformers to claim that all members of Congress are victims of the corruption endemic to politics. The enemy is thus externalized to a system that threatens American democracy.

In a speech regarding the campaign finance debates, Senator John Edwards makes the appeal to restoring the integrity of the system itself, by getting the appearance of impropriety out of politics:

> If our focus is on restoring integrity to the process and the public's perception of ourselves, then getting us out of the process of raising soft money dollars, getting soft money, period, out of the system is a positive thing. And my view is that it helps restore integrity (Edwards, 2001, p. S3099).

Senator Dodd refers to the current rules as a "system out of control:"

> …we ought to pay attention to, what the American people are saying…We think the system is not working very well. We think the system is out of control. We think there is too much money in politics; that our voices do not get heard...(Dodd, 2001, p. S3085).

The reformers make the appeal to rectify problems in the campaign finance system which entraps every member of Congress. Instead of trying to make corruption an individualized issue, reformers appeal to the notion that the present campaign finance system requires members to

take actions that everyone finds distasteful. This allows the reformers to reach out to all members of Congress who feel the system is bankrupt. Additionally, the approach of the reformers is one of identification with those who support the larger goal of fixing the campaign finance reform system. Disagreement is treated as a healthy and inevitable byproduct of the attempt to fix the campaign finance system, and even when reformers disagree with an individual initiative, the group is still open to compromise and change. The reformers identify with a "manifestation beyond" themselves, (Burke, 1984, p. 263) the goal of bettering the campaign finance system.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke uses identification to say that "two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness" (Burke, 1969, p. 21). In the case of campaign finance reform, McCain and Feingold emphasize that all members of Congress are influenced by the same corrupt system, and that all of them have the same goal of trying to ensure an open and fair political process. At the same time, the Senators draw clear distinctions between themselves and their opposition by illustrating the need to eliminate excess money in the American political system. This allows the reformers to emphasize that the goal of all members of Congress is largely the same, while at the same clarifying that the distinction is one of the means to achieve such an end.

This approach is best illustrated by the reformers' stance towards those who defect from their cause. Even when dealing with defections from the cause, McCain and Feingold treat those losses with care. McCain says, “A couple of 'Democrats may be getting a little nervous, or maybe looking for an exit sign...We always knew this was going to be tough” (“Unions Join Fight,” 2001, p. 1A). Feingold adds that, "It's true there might be some knocking of knees as the vote nears" (Malone, 2001, p. 8A). McCain and Feingold make it clear that they understand the

vote would be difficult for many members of Congress. Instead of lashing out or blaming those that defect, McCain merely says that he and Feingold are "guardedly confident" of success (Malone, p. 1A).

McCain's comments make it clear that his position is to stand by the legislation, and to speak on behalf of a change to the overall campaign finance system, instead of launching blistering attacks against those that might choose to leave the cause. Indeed, the "knocking of the knees" comment illustrates that McCain is aware that voting against the system of campaign finance responsible for electing many members of the Congress is difficult for everyone to do. McCain opts for a "we're all in it together" argument, instead of creating camps and casting blame. Given the nature of the hodgepodge coalition of Democrats and Republicans in support of the legislation, it is no surprise that McCain would not want to launch partisan attacks or divide Democrats from Republicans. McCain plays the positive role of someone interested in getting good legislation passed.

By expressing a willingness to compromise for the overall goal of improving the system, the campaign finance reformers place their emphasis on the issue, and not the individuals. In addition, by creating identification with all members who seek reform, even when the actual reform was one they disagree with, the McCain-Feingold coalition emerges as stronger than the Republican approach of exclusion. The eventual passage of McCain-Feingold illustrates the strength of the reformers' approach. The reformers continually identify with those who support reform of the campaign finance system, even when they disagree over an individual amendment or change to the bill. This, combined with McCain's personal credibility, allows the reformers' coalition to focus on the goal of changing campaign finance laws, instead of pursuing an "attack politics" strategy.

Unlike the Republican leadership, McCain rarely blames other individuals or trivializes their position, instead arguing that the system as a whole is corrupt and needs to be repaired. McCain, bolstered by his war hero status and run for the Presidency, crafts a position as a reformer of the status quo who is interested in fixing a corrupt way of doing things, and uninterested in the politics of the every day. By identifying with a goal, others could join the reformers' camp in trying to fix the campaign finance system, and by extension, democracy itself. Instead of opting for a politics of division, the reformers opt for a politics of inclusion, allowing for some disagreements on select issues while fighting for the substantive goal of reforming the campaign finance structure.

The final thread of argument the reformers' demonstrate is that partisan political gain should be pushed to the side while dealing with the issue of campaign finance reform. In response to accusations that change would benefit one side or the other, the common response is that it does not matter who benefits politically from the change. What matters is restoring integrity and faith to the system. The reformers attempt to transcend the issue of partisan politics with the larger issue of restoring the health of American democracy (Burke, 1984, p. 224).

In describing his compromise approach, McCain defends the idea that the legislation favored neither one side nor the other, "What we are trying to do is allow legitimate communication within organizations…I think it is a very legitimate compromise. It favors neither one side nor the other" (McCain, 2001, p. S3184).

Senator Wellstone continues this line of reasoning by arguing that everyone would benefit equally from an approach that took money away from politics and restored politics to everyday people:

> I think it will be a lot better for us, whether we are Democrats or Republicans. It will be a lot better for the people we represent. It will be a lot better for Iowa and Minnesota. It will be a lot better for representative democracy. It will be a lot better for our country (Wellstone, 2001, p. S3078)

Clear in this line of argument is the support by reformers for a compromise approach in an effort to restore the health of representative democracy. Democracy itself becomes the transcendent issue, as reformers work toward the goal of improving the nature of the representative system by attacking the ever-present danger of "corruption."

Senator Dodd argues that McCain-Feingold is a chance for Republicans and Democrats to work together to improve how the country elected officials for public office:

> [f]or those reasons, I hope while this amendment may be rejected, we could find more common ground between Democrats and Republicans on how to restore the public's confidence in the electoral process in this country. That is at the heart of what McCain-Feingold is all about, despite all the debates about various minutiae in the bill or ideas to be added to it. (Dodd, 2001, p. S3085).

Senator Edwards even explicitly denies that the goal of McCain-Feingold is to maintain some kind of "strategic balance," arguing instead that McCain-Feingold is above the partisan political fray:

> The difference I have with my friends from Kentucky and from Louisiana is why we are enacting campaign finance reform. I don't think that the focus of campaign finance reform…is to make sure the strategic balance that now exists is maintained…What we are trying to do is restore public faith in our campaign and election system in this country (Edwards, 2001, p. S3098).

Reformers thus emphasize the duty that members of Congress have in returning democracy back to the American public by pushing soft money out of the campaign finance system. Excess money becomes a threat to the public faith in democracy itself.

Senator Edwards places the emphasis on improving the overall climate in which elections operate, instead of on ways in which individual members of Congress could benefit against potential challengers to their political office.

The reformers' arguments illustrate several efforts inherent in the campaign finance debate to transcend politics and make the issue about the health of American democracy. The reformers place the focus not on individual members of Congress nor scrutiny upon the advertisements in one or two races for Congress. Instead, the debate centers on a system which encompasses and ensnares each member of Congress in a web of corruption. Additionally, the reformers place the American people above the need to benefit either Republicans or Democrats. The transcendence is complete--the issue is simply not about which party does better at the polls--the issue is about restoring faith in the American political system itself.

The reformers' stance is one against the idea of too much money, allowing their motives to be viewed as those who wish to reform the system instead of attacking other individuals in the Senate. The reformers' perspective on their colleagues is that of potential allies in the battle, not enemies to be assaulted. The nature of the arguments made by political reformers emphasize a break from the modern-day image of attack politics, with the focus and emphasis on coalition building for broader change. The reformer strategy thus serves as an argumentative extension of McCain's position on the campaign trail—politics needs to be cleaned up by changing the system that serves to entrap the very people who participate in it. The solution is to argue for inclusivity, both on the campaign trail and in Congress.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how John McCain's campaign for president significantly influenced his standing on Capitol Hill, increasing his ability to push for legislation that had long been stalled in the Congress. The "continuing campaign" McCain engaged in did not end with his defeat in the 2000 primaries. This analysis illustrates how presidential campaigns can have significant spillover effects into the future legislative careers of politicians.

First, this analysis illustrates how presidential campaigns need not exist in isolation of a candidate's political career, or even in regard to legislation supported by former presidential candidates. McCain's use of the persona benefits and campaign strategies derived from his 2000 bid for president illustrate how a presidential bid can result in significant rhetorical advantages for even losing candidates. This study points the way to future studies that look at how "failed" presidential bids can nevertheless increase the rhetorical status and legitimacy of such candidates.

Second, the success of McCain's coalition building strategies speaks to a potentially significant change in how American politics may be defined in the modern era. McCain's candidacy may illustrate that a political vacuum exists in the center of the American political spectrum, a vacuum that can be filled by politicians who do not neatly fit into either a traditional Republican or traditional Democratic mold. Elizabeth Drew comments that, "McCain saw there was a vacuum in American politics, a place for the growing number of people who don't identify with either party" (Drew, 2002, 70). McCain's position as a centrist in American politics speaks to a void that exists between the Republican and Democratic parties, and how a politician with significant cross-over appeal can fill such a void.

Third, this study illustrates why leadership concepts traditionally applied to presidents can be extended to include high-profile members of Congress. Theories like "going public" and "bargaining" are traditionally looked at from the perspective of how presidents get legislation passed. However, the McCain battle for campaign finance reform illustrates that there are moments in time where members of Congress can gain a significant enough role on Capitol Hill to employ such strategies. McCain's war hero status, combined with his message as an inclusive reformer, allowed him to "go public" on campaign finance reform, while managing a broad coalition in both the United States House and Senate.

In addition, the use of the "going public" strategy by McCain's illustrates several significant rhetorical aspects about McCain's effort to get his signature legislation passed. First, McCain's success in going public illustrates that the concept should be explored not only for presidents, but as a strategy available to certain high profile members of Congress at particular moments in time. Second, McCain's strategy of going public may be particularly attractive to politicians who have alienated their traditional party base. Kernell argues that, "[a]s a result of weakening [party] loyalty…Politicians can no longer depend on their party's performance for their personal success and have made a strategic turn to self-reliant individualism" (Kernell, 1997, 56). For maverick politicians like McCain, the strategy of going public may help to compensate for the loss of the more traditional means of power and influence found in party politics and structures. Finally, it may be the case that the "going public" strategy is more effective based on the type of measure. In areas where politicians must sacrifice their own political fortunes for the good of the nation, public scrutiny may be necessary as a powerful check on politicians who would be tempted to lapse into looking at for their own interests. "Going public" may serve to help keep the spotlight on wavering politicians who might be

tempted to find an exit strategy to preserve their own political well-being. In the context of McCain-Feingold, "going public" serves as the rhetorical "stick" to the "carrot" of the comic frame. By keeping the public spotlight on the need for campaign finance, McCain can help keep recalcitrant members of Congress in line, while at the same time offering them incentives in the form of allowing their amendments to be included to the main bill.

CHAPTER 5: Rhetorical Implications of the War Hero's Campaign for the Presidency

This project has examined several rhetorical dimensions of John McCain's 2000 run for the Presidency. By looking at McCain's campaign autobiography, his speeches on the campaign trail, and his push for campaign finance reform, this dissertation illustrates how a speaker study can be integrated into an analysis of multiple levels of the public sphere simultaneously. McCain's rhetorical choices both influence and are influenced by the media, public opinion, congressional debates, book reviews, as well as other politicians. The study of John McCain's run for the presidency thus allows for an analysis of the linkages between various levels of political life in an effort to understand the implications of one man's run for political office.

In addition to helping explain the benefits to McCain's political career, this case study provides three benefits for rhetorical scholars. First, the study of McCain's autobiography illustrates how certain narratives can be productive in the political sphere. Second, this analysis of honor in politics provides an important case study of an effort to build character in an era increasingly dominated by appeals to credibility and authenticity. Third, the reformist rhetoric of John McCain can be used to complicate the general notion that American politics is inherently bankrupt or beyond hope. McCain's discourse illustrates a model of political communication that contains the seeds for optimism.

Narratives in the Political Sphere

First, the study of McCain's autobiography illustrates how certain narratives can be productive in the political sphere. While many scholars have decried the use of narrative forms as detracting from deliberation in the public sphere (e.g. Lewis, 1987; Warnick, 1987; Gring-

Pemble, 2001) the study of McCain's use of the narrative illustrates that the narrative form is not inherently destructive to arguments in the public sphere. Indeed, it may be the case that narratives which bolster the credibility of rhetors prior to the time when explicit deliberative arguments are made may provide a useful tonic to the destructive politics feared by critics of the modern political system.

McCain's narratives allowed him to shape his rhetorical persona into a politician who, in some ways, operated above politics. McCain fashioned himself as a reformer who was interested in bettering the country as a whole. The contrast provided by McCain's presidential run provides a unique nexus from which to study the American political sphere. Although McCain would eventually lose his bid for the Republican nomination against George W. Bush, it is evident from the support McCain received from the American populace and the press that he provided a somewhat successful alternative model to "politics as usual." The clean image presented by his campaign gained widespread respect not only for his bid for the presidency, but for his stature as a political figure.

This persona provided McCain with considerable political currency to push through measures like campaign finance reform, and allowed him to build bridges with politicians from the Democratic Party. The life story of politicians, far from being mere fluff discovered in campaign autobiographies and film clips shown at conventions, provides an anchor of trust, a sense of authenticity in what seems like an increasingly fake and inauthentic time. In terms of making meaningful contributions to the public sphere, McCain utilized his personal narrative to build a persona which allowed him the credibility to advance reformist based agendas. The linkages between narrative and persona allowed McCain to build his image into a platform for

issue-oriented change, confirming Hahn's hypothesis of the linkage between issues and image (Hahn, 1987).

This observation allows rhetorical critics to study how the types of narratives used in the political sphere may be more important than the emphasis on the narrative form itself. McCain's narratives serve as a bridge to traditional public argument, as he gains the credibility and positioning to advance a reform agenda. Thus, instead of trading off with traditional modes of argumentation, McCain's use of the narrative form augmented his political arguments. Further analysis into the types of narratives which serve to invigorate public sphere deliberation can serve as a useful venue for future scholarship.

Honor in Modern Politics

Second, this analysis of honor in politics provides an important case study of an effort to build character in modern times. In a political era where critics decry the increased use of personal attacks and where the veracity of political statements is increasingly challenged, McCain's rhetoric serves to build up respect for honor, dignity, and core American values. The positive reception McCain's book received among the press and the American public may help point to a vision of American politics that blends respect for character with respect for the core values of the American political system.

This study is particularly useful in a post September 11 era. As politicians increasingly use the specter of September 11th to try and claim the moral high ground with the American public in the war on terrorism, the notion of what constitutes honor in America becomes increasingly important. McCain's ability to ground his political campaign in notions of military service and honor was effective even before the attacks on the World Trade Center. The ways in

which politicians use honor to build credibility for political campaigns is of particular relevance in a post 9-11 era.

The analysis of McCain's rhetoric offers a starting point for viewing the politics of honor as a mixed blessing. First, campaigns premised on honor make separating the personal and the political more difficult, leading to a potential for a spiraling escalation of hostility and bitterness to emerge when attack politics begins. Second, campaigns premised on personal honor allow for little "middle ground" to take place between supporters and opponents of a candidate. McCain views opponents of his cause as those who are opposed to his very being, and leaves little room for a constituency which might agree with McCain's policies, but oppose some aspect of his character. Finally, an honor-bound strategy eventually "runs up against a wall" as it becomes impossible for everyone to embrace the vision put forth by the candidate. Thus, those that refuse to be included in the candidate of honor's vision for the country become excluded by definition, leading to residual feelings of hostility over the candidate and the campaign.

Campaigns premised on honor make separating the personal and the political more difficult, leading to a potential for attack politics. Honor establishes authenticity, which allows for the advancement of campaigns and political agendas, but the personalization of politics that it offers can accentuate political battles. The visceral response by McCain to the attacks by the Christian Right is a powerful illustration of how personalizing the political can serve to turn campaigns into mud-slinging contests. The hard feelings created between Bush and McCain which lingered long after the campaign also illustrate the difficulties that exist when a campaign comes to be dominated less by issues and more by personality. Personalizing the political takes politics out of the legislative halls and into a kind of televised dueling arena, where opposing candidates fire away with negative advertisements and messages focused on trashing the

character and integrity of their opponents. Such messages can fuel the very type of cynicism that McCain fought to eliminate from the public sphere.

Additionally, the potential for turning the political into personal battles lurked beneath the surface of the campaign finance debates. As McCain invested his personal *ethos* into the battle, the question of whether or not the measure was good for the country was often eclipsed by the question of whether or not a particular member of Congress was willing to confront John McCain the war hero on the issue. McCain's shaming strategy is a useful illustration of the potential for the politics of honor to become problematic. McCain shone the spotlight on members of Congress in an effort to hold them publicly accountable for particular votes. Although the strategy can be viewed as working for the greater good, in that campaign finance was passed, it also made those who may have wavered on the specifics of the bill unwilling to cast a vote against the measure. McCain's discussion of how there may be some knocking of the knees as the bill approached is a very apt analogy, as the strategy of personalization may allow for many public servants to buckle under to a cult of personality, to the detriment of the overall good of the country.

Second, campaigns premised on personal honor allow for little "middle ground" to take place among supporters and opponents of a candidate. McCain's Virginia Beach speech offers a striking example of the lines in the sand drawn in battles over personal honor. By isolating particular individuals as opponents to be vilified, McCain leaves little room for compromise, dividing the party he attempts to unite. Indeed, McCain's failure to bring the Republican Party together may be in large measure because of his effort to isolate individuals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to the margins of the political system. Honor has the capacity to unify those who support the candidate behind their cause, but ultimately excludes those the candidate

opposes. In creating an honor-bound "hero" in the narrative, the politics of honor also creates villains out of those deemed to be dishonorable according to the standards created. Thus, the politics of honor may serve to divide the public sphere and prevent compromise over contentious issues.

Finally, an honor-bound strategy eventually "runs up against a wall" as it becomes impossible for everyone to embrace the vision put forth by the candidate. It is simply the case that many individuals may choose not to be a part of the vision that is created by the honor-bound candidate. Those that refuse to be included become excluded by definition, thwarting the ultimate success of the strategy. McCain's failure to gain the Republican nomination may illustrate the ultimate difficulty with the candidate of honor's approach because the strategy allows for candidates to have a base of extremely committed supporters, but little room for maneuver left for others to join in the campaign—especially those who fail to fit neatly into the vision of honor. The inflexibility of notions like honor allows great strength when preaching to the converted, but little room to adapt the campaign to new circumstances. Extending this study to include candidates like Howard Dean may lead to a more thorough understanding of how insurgent campaigns focused on the personality of a candidate can gain a rapid groundswell of support only to fade.

McCain's Reformist Rhetoric

Finally, McCain's discourse of political reform illustrates a model of communication that contains the seeds for political optimism. By placing political reform at the centerpiece of his campaign, McCain becomes a candidate who can be viewed as creating a positive model of political discourse that can restore more optimistic visions of political communication in modern America. First, McCain's argumentative strategies illustrate a reformist style of discourse

capable of making productive changes in the American political system. Second, McCain's efforts to restore government to the people illustrate how the media can be drawn into the debate over political reform, providing further support for reformism over the politics of division. Finally, the debate over political reform itself allows for a healthy questioning of American democratic practices at a time when fears of special interest group money threaten American democracy.

McCain's argumentative strategy serves as a model for reformist discourse. McCain's rhetoric on the issue of political reform emphasizes characteristics common to a flexible and open style of argument. McCain and those in favor of reform argued that the political system encouraged corruption, and that everyone in the Congress, both Republican and Democrat, were subject to the corruption. By reaching out to those willing to fix the campaign system, McCain and the reformers emphasized a notion of transcendence, illustrating that the point of political reform was to improve a democratic system tarnished by big special interest money. The goal was not to encourage attack or blame strategies; rather it was about coming together to fix something gone astray.

McCain used his campaign in a way similar to Bruce Gronbeck's observation that, "campaigns yield or 'reflect a social and political consensus that will sustain constructive programs for major public programs'" (Gronbeck 1978, 270). McCain's presidential biography, his campaign speeches, and his stance in the debates over the McCain-Feingold legislation are all part of a larger agenda to clean up American politics. McCain's campaign both reflected and influenced a consensus over the nature of American politics and the role of special interest money. McCain's strategies and arguments in his presidential biography can thus be viewed on a continuum with his speeches on the campaign trail, and his eventual push for campaign

finance reform. The style and mode of McCain's arguments in these various stages can thus provide useful illustrations of reformist rhetoric in modern American politics. The candidate who placed reform of the political system at the centerpiece of his campaign also becomes someone who can be viewed as creating a positive model of political discourse than can restore more optimistic visions of political communication in modern America.

Second, McCain's vision of a productive and healthy political system illustrates how the media can be drawn into the discussion over enhancing American democracy. The media's generally positive portrayal of McCain is in stark contrast to their portrayal of the Republican leadership, who are shown to be selfish and interested in partisan political gain. McCain, on the other hand, is shown as a heroic political figure interested in the issue and not attack politics. This issue-oriented stance simultaneously bolsters McCain's image, as the war hero is transformed into the reformer, interested in reconciliation and the fixing of a system, not the fixing of blame. McCain's heroic image allows him to operate above the fray, away from issue politics, making the formation of a bipartisan coalition in favor of campaign finance reform possible. The intersection of an issue which affects all politicians and all public debates, combined with the unique rhetorical status of John McCain allowed for a coalescence of reformist arguments with pragmatic results.

McCain's reformist style illustrates the benefits of being seen as a compromise figure. Opponents have difficulty attacking someone looking out for the good of American democracy at the potential expense of their overall political career. Also, the media picks up on efforts to be a reconciler interested in the public good. The media depiction of a reformist strategy within a heroic frame is evidence that there is support among the American media for a reform orientation that operates within politics even as it questions politics as usual. These political benefits bolster

efforts to enact legislation, depicting the way reformist arguments can outflank and envelop arguments trying to maintain the political status quo. The advantages of flexibility allow the reformers the rhetorical give and take to successfully pass legislation to improve the system.

Finally, the substantive debate about political reform is important in shaping future discourse governing the nature and function of American democracy. At its most basic level, the effort to clean up politics illustrates the discussion of the influence that excess money creates in American democracy. Additionally, the arguments made by McCain offer a model of public deliberation that minimizes the attributes that lead to pessimistic conclusions regarding the state of political communication in America. The reformers' issue focus and desire to transcend partisan politics point the way toward more optimistic conclusions of political communication, with the use of strategies that serve to undercut the pessimism surrounding political discourse. McCain's victory on campaign finance shows how the strategy of issue focus and coalition building outflanks and overcomes the strategy of division in the opposition. The form and substance of the debate over political reform highlight the potential for optimism in political communication, with the arguments over cleaning up the American political system serving as a means by which to clean up political discourse itself.

Reconciling Honor with Reformism

McCain's rhetorical successes and failures illustrate the complicated role honor can play in modern American politics. On the one hand, honor allows politicians access to vast rhetorical reserves, creating a following and an ability to operate above the political fray. At the same time, however, honor has the potential to create enemies and to personalize the political realm. Honor becomes the ultimate mixed blessing, because it allows a politician the ability to bring

issues to the forefront, yet at the same time can encourage a reliance on personalization, especially when honor comes under siege.

McCain is at his best when honor is a backdrop to his arguments. When McCain focuses on the issues of political reform, honor augments his stance by providing a powerful underpinning for his argument. McCain never needs to mention how honor shapes his agenda; rather, the linkage is inferred based on the arguments themselves. McCain can then focus on the reformist nature of his political agenda, and invite others into the fold in the name of restoring honor and integrity to the political system itself.

However, when honor becomes a personal issue, it can lead to a politics of honor under siege. Responses to personal attacks can become elevated in such a way as to eclipse the political realm. When this occurs, the focus can move away from the issue to the image of the participants involved, hardening views and positions on both sides, and leaving little room for compromise and change. Thus, while honor is often necessary to allow a maverick politician the credibility to bring an issue to the forefront, honor can also allow for politics to lapse into negativity and personal attacks. This study reveals that injecting personal honor into politics creates a complicated set of political interactions.

Rhetorical Significance of the Study of McCain's Rhetoric

John McCain is still one of the most influential politicians in Washington. He forced the President to sign one of the most significant overhauls of the election system in several decades, he is an influential leader in efforts to pass bipartisan legislation, he serves on several powerful Senate committees, and perhaps of the greatest significance to Bush's immediate electoral fortunes, serves as a commission member investigating U.S. intelligence estimates in Iraq, a move that "defused concerns about the panel's independence" ("Make No Haste, 2004, p. B8).

McCain serves an important role as a kind of watchdog on the Bush administration. His ability to parlay his honor and integrity into a nationally prominent role allows him to serve as a neutral figure who can check the Bush administration, despite his role as a member of the Republican party.

Thus, this study of McCain's rhetoric is significant in that it serves to elucidate the rise of a nationally prominent politician to public office. More significantly, however, the study of McCain's rhetoric allows for an in-depth case study of several important rhetorical functions in modern American politics. McCain's rhetoric allows for an understanding of how narratives are woven into the political sphere through various rhetorical artifacts, including autobiographies, media coverage, congressional debates, and the study of speeches on the campaign trail. Additionally, McCain's rhetoric provides useful insights into how character is created in modern politics. In a time when the character of the nation's leading politicians is increasingly called into question in regard to scandals both private and political, these insights are valuable to rhetorical scholars studying how character is formed and operates in modern society. Finally, McCain's rhetoric of reform may provide helpful analogies to understand the role that reformist rhetoric plays in the campaigns of "outsider" and "maverick" candidates for president.

The infusion of honor and integrity in McCain's campaign exemplifies a long-standing tradition in American politics. The similarities of McCain's campaign to the rhetorical style of the founding fathers provides a way to link McCain to the past of American politics. Given McCain's pride in the "faith of his fathers," the link to past traditions is one with which the Senator from Arizona is certainly familiar.

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