

# THE PEACE RHETORIC OF A WAR PRESIDENT: BARACK OBAMA AND THE JUST WAR LEGACY

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*As a rejoinder to Robert Terrill's recent analysis of Barack Obama's 2009 Nobel lecture, this essay more closely examines that address vis-à-vis the historical foundations of just war philosophy. We argue that Obama's lecture rechannels traditional just war thought by diffusing the potential spatiotemporal reach of American military jurisdiction, praising the supposedly post-political decisions of elite individuals and institutions, and offering ever more inclusive definitions of originary hostile acts that demand the "retribution" of just war. We conclude by addressing the irony that, instead of harnessing that historic occasion for the cause of a renewed global peace, President Obama's lecture actually lays the moral foundation for future conflicts.*

**A**mid two unpopular wars, Barack Obama was elected president on a reformist platform well known for its promises of change and peace. Many people in America and around the world had extraordinary expectations of President Obama, hoping that he would bring to an end the wars and military occupations initiated during the George W. Bush presidency. Yet eight months into Obama's term, when the Nobel committee announced that they were awarding him the 2009 Peace Prize, Obama

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had yet to act on most of his earlier pro-peace rhetoric. In fact, many people were growing impatient with the new president, watching with curious disappointment as he nudged back withdrawal milestones, increased troops and noncombat personnel, and expanded controversial drone strikes into Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. Whereas in 2002 Obama had denounced the looming Iraq War as a “dumb war,”<sup>1</sup> in 2009 he seemed unable or unwilling to decisively withdraw from that conflict. And although candidate Obama had promised that his first presidential maneuver would be to implement an immediate phased withdrawal from Iraq,<sup>2</sup> by fall 2009 he was wavering on this and other progressive foreign policy commitments.

In this public climate of ambivalence and unmet expectations, many analysts viewed Obama’s Prize as an appeal to achieve what the Nobel committee called a “new climate in international politics.”<sup>3</sup> In the words of *New York Times* journalists Steven Erlanger and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, the award “seemed a kind of prayer and encouragement by the Nobel committee for future endeavor and more consensual American leadership.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it appeared as if the Nobel committee was attempting to reconstitute American foreign policy by awarding the young president its coveted Peace Prize. Yet during his address Obama resisted this reconstitution, giving a speech that tested the generic conventions of Peace Prize lectures and asserted his independence from the constraints implied by the award.<sup>5</sup> Instead of reviewing his accomplishments, rearticulating his foreign policy objectives, and outlining a plan for a renewed peace, Obama finessed the occasion by giving an address steeped in traditional tropes of American exceptionalism and just war.<sup>6</sup>

The address’s ambivalent vision dissatisfied many commentators<sup>7</sup>; others, however, found that it provided a compelling image of international peace in this age of interdependence and insecurity.<sup>8</sup> For example, in a deft, impressive work of rhetorical criticism recently published in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Robert Terrill argues that Obama’s controversial lecture may have presented “an altogether fitting vision of peace for the twenty-first century.”<sup>9</sup> Acknowledging Obama’s tremendous debt to the just war tradition, Terrill finds that traditional just war principles such as *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum*—acting justly during war and having just reasons for waging war—give Obama a moral framework for repositioning the United States toward a more benevolent foreign policy. As a rejoinder to Professor Terrill’s article, we would like to offer a different yet somewhat complementary

perspective of Obama's just war rhetoric, one that reevaluates the historical just war tradition that Obama has inherited, and reconsiders the consequences of that inheritance. This historical depth provides a much-needed context for Obama's address, we argue, because it sheds light on some of the more pernicious implications of the rhetoric of "just war."

We begin by providing a brief intellectual history of the paradoxical visions that have structured just war thought. Turning primarily to Plato, Cicero, and Augustine, we illustrate how the just war tradition often has justified the irresponsible extension of exceptional states' military jurisdiction. Because Obama's Nobel Prize address pivots primarily upon *jus ad bellum*, we describe how his lecture functions alongside the "defensive" extension of American military power. We will argue, for example, that Obama's rhetorical realism<sup>10</sup> presents a world in which war originates at the beginning of time and reverberates everywhere, thereby ambiguating the bounds of peace-space and war-space. We further assert that Obama's lecture adopts a transcendent, postpolitical perspective by the use of balanced reasoning and formal equilibrium to establish the ethos of an orator-statesman who sees through mere politics to encounter the world "as it is." Coldly revealing this privileged perspective, Obama inundates his audiences with scenes of terrible violence, misery, and deprivation. By constructing and exploiting his audiences' moral culpability in this human suffering, Obama's address directs that culpability toward an ostensibly unavoidable resolution: the "just" intervention of state violence. For these reasons, we are left to conclude that the peace waged by Obama's address is not "uneasy," as Terrill claims; it is effectively foreclosed.<sup>11</sup>

These aspects of Obama's lecture follow quite smoothly from traditional just war principles: just war theorists have frequently employed rhetoric that diffuses war's spatiotemporal limits, praises the supposedly postpolitical decisions of elite individuals and institutions, and offers ever more inclusive definitions of originary hostile acts that demand the "retribution" of just war.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately we argue that although this prestigious international award provided Obama with a clear exigence to dedicate his administration to a more peaceful role among the nations, he neglected this kairotic opportunity. Instead, President Obama used that historic occasion to rationalize and praise the "just" violence of the exceptional American state. Amid the Obama administration's unsettling record of preemptive aggression—and despite its preference to casuistically stretch these war acts

into “kinetic military action”<sup>13</sup> or “overseas contingency operations”<sup>14</sup>—we hope to generate a renewed assessment of the role played by Obama’s rhetoric in the alarming proliferation of America’s just wars.

### PARADOX AND IMPOSSIBLE PEACE IN THE JUST WAR TRADITION

Obama’s Nobel lecture develops upon two structural paradoxes that, since at least the time of Plato, have rationalized the waging of “just” wars. One of these paradoxes derives from Plato’s and Augustine’s idealist notions of peace and justice, and their related visions of an essentially fallen human nature. In their theories of the just war, peace is located in a “fictional” realm of spatiotemporal ideality—for instance, in a “healthy” or “heavenly” city—that effectively forecloses it as a human possibility.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, in this vision peace must be invoked as a guiding and legitimating ethical principle. Channeling this paradox into the twenty-first century, Obama argues that peace, despite its regrettable impossibility, must be “the North Star that guides us on our journey.”<sup>16</sup> Underlying Obama’s just war rhetoric is also a second paradox, one that arises with Cicero and that has become increasingly prominent in the rhetoric of American foreign policy since September 11, 2001. Justice is identified with the state, which in its divine mission to spread peace must wage war against those who resist its advances. The state, thus conceived as the world’s vehicle of justice, has to maintain moral integrity as it continues its ordained expansion. Those who cannot be assimilated into that growing moral apparatus, and who thus threaten its integrity, deserve the state’s “just” violence. From this point of view, war is a teleological fulfillment of the cause of peace.<sup>17</sup>

Given its defining assumptions, it is unsurprising that the roots of just war theory lie in Platonic philosophy. Alex J. Bellamy argues that, for Plato, “war was an eternal feature of human society and reflected the two sides of man—one better, one worse. The aim of the state was to establish peace by subjugating the worse side of people’s nature and promoting the positive.”<sup>18</sup> Cynically resigned to the violence of human *nature*, Plato sets in motion a tradition of “just” war based on an a priori relegation of peace to the formal realm of spatiotemporal ideality. For example, in the second book of the *Republic* Socrates and Glaucon introduce an ideal city, what they refer to as the “healthy” city, alongside the earthly, “luxurious” city. While the luxurious city is driven by the desires of an innate human “nature”—it is driven to

wage war and expand to satisfy its appetites—the healthy city is a cooperative, independent, peaceful society unfettered by the desires that drive humans to conflict and division.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Henrik Syse points out, Socrates and Glaucon abruptly abandon their discussion of the healthy city and never return to it, opting instead to discuss the appropriate disciplining of the luxurious city.<sup>20</sup> One is left to conclude, with Thomas Rickert<sup>21</sup> and Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>22</sup> that the healthy city is only a noumenal fiction that Plato contrasts with the human-spoiled, luxurious city. As Gadamer argues in his analysis of the *Republic*, the temptations of human desire plant Plato's healthy city firmly in the realm of the "idyllic": any society composed of embodied humans will suffer the distortions of that embodiment, rendering the social body, just like that of its individual inhabitants, racked by appetites for accumulation and expansion.<sup>23</sup> In Plato's words, this endless need to expand is the "origin of war": the sovereign territory of the luxurious city, Socrates concludes, must always seek to grow: "we must further enlarge our city by no small increment, but by a whole army, that will march forth and fight it out with assailants in defense of all our wealth and the luxuries we have just described."<sup>24</sup> Through this dissociation of the earthly "luxurious" city and the noumenal "healthy" city, peace has been irretrievably cordoned beyond the confines of the human grasp.

In the *Republic*, Plato also contemplates a rather perverse division of enemies: those who deserve just treatment, and those who do not. For him, fellow Greeks should not be subjected to brutality or enslavement; "barbarians," however, are spared from such justice.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle continues this line of reasoning in his *Politics*, imploring that the just should not "study war with a view to the enslavement of those who do not deserve to be enslaved . . . [but] should seek to be masters only over those who deserve to be slaves."<sup>26</sup> This troubling aspect of Greek just war philosophy was bequeathed to Cicero, whose thoughts on the just war were important to the emergent ideology of Roman imperialism.<sup>27</sup> While for Cicero peace is not located in an ideal or divine "healthy" city, it is paradoxically aligned with the militaristic telos of Rome and the rather unpeaceful elimination of its adversaries. One thus finds in Cicero's works a concept of the just war that divides enemies based upon their assimilability into the Republic. These enemies, in turn, should be brutalized if they could not be civilized into the moral apparatus of the state. We read in *On Duties*, for example, that "War . . . ought to be undertaken . . . that we may live in peace, without

injustice; and once victory has been secured, those who were not cruel or savage in warfare should be spared. Thus, our forefathers even received Tusculani, the Aequi, the Volsci, the Sabini and the Hernici into citizenship. On the other hand they utterly destroyed Carthage and Numantia.”<sup>28</sup> Although Cicero questions the justness with which Corinth was destroyed, the massacres at Carthage and Numantia, a Celtiberian settlement on the periphery of the Republic, fail to disturb him. In this instance, for Cicero the Romans’ brutality was righteous because of the ethnic, and thus apparently irredeemable, character of the Carthaginian and Numantian outsiders. According to Cicero, as the Republic expanded, its national space had to be purified of these incorrigible elements. Thus, the moral character of this imperial purification rationalized not only an expansion of the state and the assimilation of the conquered, but also the careful elimination of those who might transgress the moral integrity embodied in the advancing Republic. To Cicero, war and brutality are just if the enemy cannot be incorporated into the moral telos of the state. We thus find in Cicero’s just war philosophy that Rome is a state with an exceptional moral destiny—a destiny that justifies the diffusion of its values and its vigorous colonization of unpacified territory.

When Augustine revives the just war tradition in the early fifth century, he synthesizes the paradoxical and exclusionary logics found in Greco-Roman theories of the just war. It is through Augustine—and to a lesser degree through Ambrose—that just war theory is first introduced to the Christian tradition, where it is then used to assess and justify the holy wars that racked the medieval world from Spain to Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> For Augustine, of course, humankind is ambivalently composed of both good and evil, being born of God but having fallen from His grace in the Garden of Eden. Because of this essential fallenness, “perfect peace” cannot exist in the human world.<sup>30</sup> Echoing his predecessor Aristotle,<sup>31</sup> Augustine asserts that even the best of us are condemned to wage war for the sake of peace: “wars, then, are waged with peace as their object, even when they are waged by those who are concerned to exercise their warlike prowess, either in command or in actual fighting. Hence it is an established fact that peace is the desired end of war. . . . In fact, even when men wish a present state of peace to be disturbed they do so not that there should not be peace but that it should be the kind of peace they wish for.”<sup>32</sup> For Augustine, humans have a natural desire for an impossible peace, yet they are corrupted by a compa-

rably innate drive to dominate and to brutalize others in their idealistic quests to remake the world.

To tame this lust for domination and violence, Augustine argues that individuals need the civilizing influence of righteous institutions. Echoing Plato's division of the true and luxurious cities, Augustine in *The City of God* spatially represents the human/divine dissociation, dividing the people of the world into spiritual inhabitants of the City of God or the City of Man. The dissociative spatiotemporal logic of Plato's theory are revived and combined with a mild hint of Cicero's imperialist hubris to identify a potential state—through its special relationship to the church—with the City of God, and its enemies with a corrupt nature that needs that state's civilizing influence. Hence Augustine's City of God remains transcendent, but its influence has been translated, through the promise of the church's divine guidance, into the realm of the human. Thus the church-aligned state, although relatively imperfect in the shadow of the City of God, is posited as the earthly vehicle on which the just must travel to strive toward the "eternal" city in heaven.<sup>33</sup> Through its values and its institutional relationship to the church, the state is able to channel a teleological divinity that, although flawed in its worldly manifestation, is humankind's best instrument for aspiring to the divine realm of peace and justice.

After Augustine the question of just war becomes central to medieval Christian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, as burgeoning European states struggle to reconcile the peaceful tenets of their new religion with its proselytizing imperatives.<sup>34</sup> Realists such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Grotius pick up the just war question between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from whom it is then bequeathed to Enlightenment thinkers who attempt to reconceptualize a secular ethics of just war. In the early American republic, of course, secular Enlightenment just war theory becomes infused with a religious exceptionalism that figures into America's westward expansion ("manifest destiny") and later into our twentieth-century entanglements in European, Asian, and African conflicts.<sup>35</sup> If the history of American war rhetoric is to be trusted, each of these wars can be rationalized under traditional just war principles, being paradoxically fought for the causes of justice and, ultimately, peace. Inheriting an ancient tradition that has been rechanneled by many of his American predecessors—men as diverse as George Washington,<sup>36</sup> Teddy Roosevelt,<sup>37</sup> Woodrow Wilson,<sup>38</sup> George H. W. Bush,<sup>39</sup> and George W. Bush<sup>40</sup>—President Obama confronts

the paradoxical challenge of waging war in the name of peace.<sup>41</sup> Given this long inheritance, Obama's speech reinscribes a discourse that precedes and will certainly follow him. His just war rhetoric, then, is not interesting merely as an isolated moment of presidential address, but also as a reflection and reinscription of a cultural tradition that developed its distinctive features long before Obama took the stage in Oslo.

Like his intellectual forebears in the just war tradition, Obama presents a world that is always-already at war with itself. In this context of total war, an exceptional state must emerge not to keep the peace, but to ensure that violence is channeled toward the immoral. The righteous values that undergird his foreign policy, Obama assures us, justify the aggressive and sometimes regrettable means by which they have to be spread. For Obama, in a world in which warfare is inevitable, peace is an ideal that only exists far off in the stars; so it should only inspire us to the extent that we do not lose sight of the essential brutality of human nature, and thus of the necessity of intervention by those whose values are more closely aligned with a righteous will. As Augustine's concession of an innate human brutality allowed him to praise Christian values and to advocate a closer alignment of the state and Christian institutions, Obama's invocation of the just war permits him to present and constitute a chaotic, brutal world in need of closer alignment with American institutions and values—a world in need of American salvation.

### JUST WAR EVERYWHERE

At the outset of his speech, Obama emplots himself in a tragedy that stretches back to the origins of humankind.<sup>42</sup> "War," he declares, "appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease—the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences."<sup>43</sup> This initial justification sets up Obama's alignment with the just war tradition. Although Obama asserts that current events "require us to think in *new* ways about the notions of just war" (emphasis added),<sup>44</sup> his address actually recycles the same structural paradoxes that have rationalized the waging of "just war" since at least Classical Greece. Rechanneling the arguments of Plato and Augustine, Obama identifies war as evidence of the "imperfection of man": "We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not



eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations—acting individually or in concert—will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. . . . To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.”<sup>45</sup>

Like Augustine, Obama locates humankind in a debased City of Man, in a world inhospitable to peace. To accept war, then, is simply to recognize what Obama portrays as “the hard truth” of our natural imperfections as a species. This opening trajectory reverberates throughout Obama’s speech, leading us to take note, along with Roland Barthes, at the way in which discourses appeal to history to “dress themselves up” in natural reality. As Barthes observes, “In short, . . . I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there.”<sup>46</sup> In our view, Obama’s total war mythology, which with biblical overtones locates war with the first “man,” turns to history to justify the “nature” he has wreaked with the drones, missiles, and tanks of the American military. His reading of history thus reduces the past to an intensifying cycle of violence that has finally met its best match in the “just” benevolence of American military power. In Platonic fashion, Obama waxes dreamily on the healthy city; but in the end, he invokes John F. Kennedy to argue for “a more practical, attainable peace”—a “peace,” of course, secured by the vigilant proliferation of “just” wars.<sup>47</sup>

Obama’s eschatological history unfolds toward the salvation offered by American global hegemony, as mankind’s innate savagery is “haltingly” overcome by the refinement and spread of an ideology of “humanitarian” interventionism that, in Obama’s words, prevents the Axis of Evil—he mentions Iraq, Iran, and North Korea specifically—from “gaming the system.” Recalling the contentious rise of just war philosophy, Obama argues that, “as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers, clerics, and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war.” Yet, he laments, “For most of history, this concept of just war was rarely observed. The capacity of human beings to think up new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible.”<sup>48</sup> A just peace, according to Obama, was for centuries a fantasy in the minds of an intellectual elite. But the wistful imagination of philosophers was always trumped by humankind’s “capacity” to dream up new technologies and excuses for violence. Yet after the

tragedy of World War II, “it became clear to victor and vanquished alike that the world needed institutions to prevent another World War.”<sup>49</sup>

The most remarkable aspect of this rhetoric is its tragedian emplotment of humankind versus itself: not only does it imply an ambivalent, Augustinian division within each human—whose innate brutality must be defused by the right kind of governance—but it also posits a division between humans. According to Obama, because of humankind’s violent “nature” an intellectual vanguard that understands the just economy of peace and war has always been ignored or defeated. That is, until now: in the postwar era, the international community has been brought into line under the moral guidance of an exceptional state. The telos of the just has finally been fulfilled in the ascent of “international” entities like the United Nations and NATO—institutions that are bounded, Obama assures us, by the “universal aspirations of mankind.” Because “wars between nations have increasingly given way to wars within nations,” Obama declares that “we” must dedicate ourselves to a new international responsibility: in “today’s wars,” “a few small men with outsized rage”—men, of course, who cannot be easily tied to a single sovereign territory—can now be expected to indiscriminately murder civilians in unprecedented numbers. Solving terrorism and “wars within nations,” he claims, will require the same vision and persistence as traditional sovereign warfare, but this vision and persistence will have to be waged based upon revised notions of justice, war, and peace: in Obama’s words, we must “think in new ways about the notions of just war and the imperatives of a just peace.” These new ways of thinking about war, Obama declares, will require the wisdom and action of “international” institutions under the guidance of an exceptional state.<sup>50</sup>

Although Obama asserts that “America cannot act alone,” he takes pride in America’s role in the postwar propagation of its signature political and economic models. After invoking the legacy of his predecessor Woodrow Wilson, who is well known for justifying American entry into the First World War because it was “the war to end all wars,”<sup>51</sup> Obama invokes the Marshall Plan and the United Nations as evidence that, in the postwar period, “America led the world in constructing an architecture to keep the peace . . . , and it is a legacy for which my own country is rightfully proud.”<sup>52</sup> Consistent with the ideology of American exceptionalism that appears throughout the address, Obama praises two developments that have been essential in pulling the postwar world into America’s orbit: the

Marshall Plan and the United Nations.<sup>53</sup> The Marshall Plan, of course, was a program designed to infuse capital into war-torn Europe in order, among other goals, to lure nations into the American rather than the Soviet sphere of influence. As Neil Smith has recognized, the Marshall Plan was “aimed unabashedly at the political-economic reconstruction of a capitalist Europe,”<sup>54</sup> leading President Truman to proclaim that the Plan was evidence that traditional American values like freedom were inextricably tied to global trade and unfettered capitalist development: “Peace, freedom and world trade are indivisible.”<sup>55</sup> And the United Nations, of course, has played an even greater role in the export of American geopolitical influence, establishing a worldwide jurisdiction for American military and economic interventions.<sup>56</sup> Obama does not seem very bashful about this: he openly conflates such “internationalism” with American power, citing the Marshall Plan and the United Nations as two things for which his own country—not the international community—should be “rightfully proud.”<sup>57</sup> He implores his global audience to remember “that it was not simply international institutions—not just treaties and declarations—that brought stability to a post-World War II world.” It is the fortitude and foresight of America, he proclaims, that have brought “liberty, self-determination, equality and the rule of law” to a grateful planet.<sup>58</sup>

This exceptionalist rhetoric shows Obama’s allegiances to the Ciceronian tradition of just war. For Obama, of course, America is the new righteous power, and its expansion and influence are predicated on the fulfillment of humankind’s “free” and “prosperous” destiny: “We have [acted internationally] out of enlightened self-interest—because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if other peoples’ children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity. . . . America’s commitment to global security will never waiver.”<sup>59</sup> Embedded within this commitment are two dangerous claims about America’s role among the nations: not only does Obama promise the world that the American military is committed “globally,” he also promises that this global commitment will “never waiver.” In other words, Obama universalizes the potential spatiotemporal reach of American military actions. What is perhaps most innovative in Obama’s war rhetoric, then, is how it makes operable the traditional global aspirations of just war philosophy: Obama renders his enemies and their threats so ambiguous that they, like the innate human evil posited by Plato and Augustine, can be perpetu-

ally fought but never conquered. Therefore “the enemy” exists everywhere and at all times, providing the righteous state with an open warrant to *react* against it. Obama argues that these exceptional commitments are required “in a world in which threats are more diffuse, and missions more complex.”<sup>60</sup> This rhetoric of the “threat” deflects responsibility in such a way that the enemy’s originary act of war is theorized to have already taken place from afar. In the words of Marc Redfield, “It is the other . . . who declares war; the president, in the staged immediacy of his interior consciousness, merely declares war back. . . . War as declaration originates elsewhere: the wielder of sovereign power . . . relegates sovereignty to the other in order to take it back. The true performativity of war as declaration is thus imagined to take place at a distance.”<sup>61</sup> Obama’s war rhetoric therefore functions less as a unilateral declaration of war than a reluctant acknowledgment that he simply must *re-engage* the enemies’ originary hostilities—hostilities, of course, that are being produced by an enemy whose territorial fluidity establishes the whole world as war-space.

### RHETORICAL EQUILIBRIUM AND THE HEAD OF STATE

As we have shown, Obama establishes his ethos partly by aligning himself with and praising America’s “enlightened” global achievements.<sup>62</sup> Recalling Augustine’s identification of an exceptional state with the guidance of God, Obama presents the polis over which he presides as possessing an almost-mystical wisdom about how the peoples of the world should conduct their affairs. Yet the state is not the only exception crafted in Obama’s address: Obama establishes himself as an exceptional commander-in-chief, as a leader who, with unequivocal self-assurance, can surpass mere politics to “face the world as it is.” As we will argue, facing the world with such a postpolitical vision obscures the violence and calculation that are its conditions of possibility. The address’s postpolitical pretensions, therefore, are especially noteworthy because they mystify the geopolitically intricate fabric of American foreign policy, reframing it as if it were simply woven from blind, benevolent justice.

Early in his speech Obama ensures us that, despite calls for a more peaceful foreign policy, he is “a head of state sworn to protect and defend [his] nation.”<sup>63</sup> This metonymic reduction is indicative of the ethos Obama builds throughout his address: he is not only the United States’ administra-

tive head, but he is also the “brains” sitting atop the state’s complex body politic. Thus, although Obama ostensibly *wishes* he could abide by the nonviolent legacies of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, he is obliged to approach the world from his privileged, exceptional perspective. As Terrill has ably demonstrated, one way in which this perspective is generated is through the address’s formal equilibrium. Terrill’s analysis shows how Obama carefully gives an “even division of attention” to war and peace and other dialectically organized themes, developing a formal symmetry that establishes a sense of perspective through balanced, antithetical reasoning.<sup>64</sup> We disagree with Terrill, however, about the moral implications of Obama’s careful performance of perspective-taking, and we would like to demonstrate some of its more negative implications.

For example, Obama begins by acknowledging the tremendous controversy that erupted over his award: “perhaps the most profound issue surrounding my receipt of this prize is the fact that I am the Commander-in-Chief of a nation in the midst of two wars.”<sup>65</sup> The recognition of the “fact” of the controversy creates a rhetorical sense of distance from which Obama establishes the measured and objective ethos of the commander-in-chief. This privilege of perspective and self-reflection is coupled with the responsibility to transcend mere politics in reaching decisions about the use of military force. Although Obama cites a debt to Martin Luther King’s argument that “violence . . . solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones,” he assures us that he is not afforded the luxury of such speculation. The force of King’s example is tempered by his need to “face the world as it is.” This antithetical reasoning provides a rhythm to much of the address: although the war in Afghanistan is “a conflict we did not seek,” he is obliged to recognize that “still, we are at war, and I am responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in distant lands.” While Obama reminds the world that “the United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of arms,” he also acknowledges that “yes, terrible wars have been fought, and atrocities committed.” But despite these atrocities, “there has been no Third World War.”<sup>66</sup> Instead, as the “jubilant crowds dismantling a wall” apparently indicate, the world is now stitched together in the benevolent if untidy web of global capitalism and liberal democracy.<sup>67</sup>

This tight, symmetrical reasoning crafts the illusion that human suffering calls for and is constitutive of a politically transcendent perspective. As Robert Scott insightfully argued in 1967, “accepting the notion that truth exists, may be known, and communicated leads logically to the position that there should be only two modes of discourse: a neutral presenting of data among equals and a persuasive leading of inferiors by the capable.”<sup>68</sup> Because the address’s allegedly “democratic” symmetry draws attention away from the violence in which Obama’s rhetoric is culpable, the “radical flexibility” Terrill identifies—which articulates its moral vision through perspective-taking—serves to forestall rather than encourage critical reflection. Terrill argues that the address’s moral vision constitutes “a thoroughly rhetorical understanding of war and peace; it is governed by the practical judgment that rhetorical training has always been meant to foster, and it is coupled fundamentally to a particular style of speech.”<sup>69</sup> The speech is governed by principles that are informed by traditional rhetorical concerns about the eloquence of symmetry and the privilege of patient, rational deliberation over the haste of autocratic violence. Yet if the address provides a fitting vision of peace, as Terrill claims, it is the peace of militarized American exceptionalism—the peace of a perpetual state of postponed execution.<sup>70</sup>

By giving Obama’s address the veneer of a morally driven, postpolitical vision, antithetical reasoning and formal equilibrium play an essential role in governing the address’s rhetoric. Instead of outlining a humbler, less interventionist vision for American foreign policy under his administration—which, given the occasion, could have been appropriate—the rhetorical equilibrium of the address assures us that multiple perspectives have been considered and that the commander-in-chief will reluctantly shoulder the postpolitical burden of dispensing violence when and where it is absolutely necessary.<sup>71</sup> On the one hand, this sends a message to America’s opponents and lukewarm allies that Obama’s foreign policy would not be constrained by the prize. On the other hand, Obama’s domestic and allied audiences are given the assurance that American forces will administer relief to the world’s suffering bodies, leaving them free to imagine civic duty as deferring judgment and action to those who know—and speak—better.

Hence while John M. Murphy has found that Obama’s rhetoric has at times constituted “advocate and audience as responsible, moral agents in a living narrative,”<sup>72</sup> we find that Obama’s Nobel lecture introduces a more

complex and ambivalent moral vision: a moral vision that is complicated by the dialectically organized tropes of “Home,” an idyllic, depoliticized space, and a war-torn, chaotic “There” of foreign territory. Obama mobilizes this dissociative vision by juxtaposing a mythical, tranquil West with an unjust, volatile There that deserves the justice of Western intervention. Throughout his address Obama inundates his audiences with images of self-evident injustice, invoking genocide in Darfur, “systematic rape in the Congo,” the invasion of Kuwait, “famine and human suffering” in Somalia, and a host of other atrocities. Upon this unsettling foundation of specific horrors, he argues that “the resurgence of ethnic or sectarian conflicts; the growth of secessionist movements, insurgencies, and failed states . . . have increasingly trapped civilians in unending chaos. In today’s wars, many more civilians are killed than soldiers; the seeds of future conflict are sewn, economies are wrecked, civil societies torn asunder, refugees amassed, and children scarred. . . . More and more, we all confront difficult questions about how to prevent the slaughter of civilians by their own government, or to stop a civil war whose violence and suffering can engulf an entire region.”<sup>73</sup> These charges strike a blistering contrast with the everyday predicaments of the “we” that Obama crafts in his address, creating a profound existential distance between the Western portion of his audiences and the scene of moral exigency.

In contrast to the devastated, war-torn societies that Obama describes in his speech, he symmetrically evokes a “we”—an implicitly Western, NATO-based “we”—that is secure because of its “civil and political rights,” “economic security and opportunity,” and freedom from fear and want; a “we” that dwells in an idyllic place characterized by an abundance of food, clean water, and medicine, a place where anyone can get a “decent” education and a “decent” job.<sup>74</sup> These sanitized visions of “home” ignore and erase domestic sociopolitical grievances while generating a sense of privileged, distanced perspective from which a united, allied audience can be constituted.<sup>75</sup>

While producing this sense of Western/American privilege, Obama infuses it with special responsibility: “Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later. That is why all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace . . . . Peace requires responsibility. Peace entails sacrifice. That is why NATO continues to be indispensable. . . . we honor [NATO soldiers] not as makers of war, but as wagers of peace.”<sup>76</sup> Thus faced with the

cruel “real” world that he has dramatized throughout the address, the allied portion of Obama’s audience is faced with a moral dilemma: they must either “act,” or be complicit in an even more horrific intervention later. The irony here, of course, is that while Obama argues that “inaction tears at our conscience,” he offers his audience no practicable *action* whatsoever. So when he implores us to “sacrifice” and “take responsibility,” what exactly does he have in mind? Absent from Obama’s rhetoric is any specific, actionable program for peace or justice in which his audiences can participate.<sup>77</sup> Although Obama succeeds in stoking his audiences’ moral responsibility and outrage, he offers them only one outlet for the expression of that concern: deferring responsibility to the American commander-in-chief, who will assume the postpolitical burden of sending young men and women—whom he hauntingly calls “wagers of peace”—to kill and be killed to restore a just global economy of “peace.”<sup>78</sup>

### CONCLUSION: AN UNLIKELY PEACE

Terrorist attacks have distilled their effects. Grey, hostile areas of insecurity and instability have become more extensive, playing a parasitical role in the global economy. The ultraliberal project for a new world order through the use of information technology has shifted from strategies of soft power to war without mercy as “just war,” in defiance of established international law and the very idea of civilization.

—Armand Mattelart<sup>79</sup>

As one of the most important international bodies praising and protecting the cause of peace, the Nobel institution should ideally transcend the designs of American foreign policy. In the case of Obama’s 2009 Peace Prize lecture, however, the occasion was implicated in the perpetuation and celebration of American military power. In an irony befitting the just war tradition, Obama’s Peace Prize lecture actually seemed to make war more likely.<sup>80</sup> This is one of the alarming symptoms of what Robert L. Ivie identifies as the ambivalent, “flawed logic”<sup>81</sup> of Obama’s Nobel lecture. Given the domestic and international momentum galvanized by his 2008 presidential campaign, Obama could have harnessed that support in pursuit of a more peaceful and just world order—an order he often passionately invoked during earlier parts of his career.<sup>82</sup> Yet President Obama instead



used this opportunity to praise American military history, rationalize its current and forthcoming hostilities, and offer a relieving moral vision in which the United States and its surrogates are bringing free markets and free elections to a world in chains.

Many foreign policy scholars have argued that, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the United States has come to assume Rome's role as the benevolent civilizer of nations.<sup>83</sup> Whereas Cicero's Rome targeted the wide world of barbarians, Obama's enemies are "terrorists" and tyrants, individuals whose vocation is so vague that they find themselves lumped together with "famine," "piracy," and even "human suffering" as warrants for humanitarian intervention.<sup>84</sup> Revising the traditional bounds of peace and conflict, Obama assures us that "peace is not merely the absence of visible conflict. Only a just peace based upon the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can truly be lasting."<sup>85</sup> By invoking such ambiguous parameters for peace, Obama establishes myriad activities as acts of war, as allegedly originary acts that justify the (re)engagement of American military power. This ever-inclusive demarcation of war-space is one of the most perilous implications of Obama's address. Because the definitions of peace and conflict are rendered so unclear—with mundane acts and conditions such as "human suffering" being reinterpreted as direct hostilities that beg for retaliation—the globe is literally filled with spaces that are always-already inviting military intervention. Because for Obama the impossible dream of a redefined peace is "the North Star which must guide us on our journey," anything called "war" in this vague economy of conflict must be met with the "retributive" force of military power. Therefore Obama's mission, like Cicero's, is global *and* moral; but instead of justifying war through appeals to the health and integrity of the Republic, Obama does so by invoking the necessity of a redefined and admittedly unattainable global peace, a condition whose impossibility justifies an obsessive extension of enemy territory.<sup>86</sup>

Delivered in the context of a Nobel Peace award, it is remarkable that Obama's address instantiates even as it defends the territorialization of the world as a war-space under the martial command of the exceptional American state. Therefore, we do not find that the peace Obama wages is "uneasy," as Robert Terrill claims; it is effectively foreclosed. Given the lecture's Platonic dimensions, we see no compelling evidence of "a thoroughly rhetorical understanding of war and peace."<sup>87</sup> As we noted previously,

Terrill supports this claim primarily by pointing to the address's formal equilibrium. Considered from the present historical conjuncture of just war rhetoric and U.S. militarism, we argue that these formal features are better understood as a way in which Obama rhetorically finesses the necessity of perpetual warfare as he glosses over the raw violence that is its condition of possibility. Put differently, Obama's balanced consideration of multiple perspectives implies that the political *decision* to constitute the world as a global theater of war is the natural *response* to a violent and complicated planet. Yet these decisions are ultimately rooted in a dangerous, a priori American exceptionalism that appears to derive much of its impetus from just war ideology.

Lest we be misunderstood, we would like to point out that our disagreement with Terrill's article extends beyond issues of textual interpretation. Terrill's interpretation reveals Obama as a statesman whose "peculiar combination of realism and prudence may indeed present the ameliorative yet proactive stance that seems right for these uncertain times."<sup>88</sup> Our reading, however, presents another vision of this statesman whose prudent realism is thoroughly implicated in American policymaking.<sup>89</sup> We are disturbed by the ways in which the ambivalent vision of Obama's Nobel lecture is being borne out on the world stage: after concluding its humanitarian bombing campaign in Libya, the U.S. military is still actively engaged in combat in Afghanistan<sup>90</sup> and is carrying out controversial drone strikes in Somalia,<sup>91</sup> Uganda,<sup>92</sup> Pakistan,<sup>93</sup> and Yemen,<sup>94</sup> giving an appalling illustration of its spatial ambitions; executive powers have been permanently enhanced by laws like the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, which allows the executive branch to authorize the indefinite detention of suspects, even American citizens<sup>95</sup>; as the 2009 G-20 summits in Chicago and Pittsburgh and the recent Occupy Wall Street protests have brought to our attention, dissent is more policed, infiltrated, and suppressed than ever<sup>96</sup>; and last but not least, Obama has failed to reverse Bush's civil liberties violations, even extending the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 despite campaign assurances to the contrary.<sup>97</sup>

In the face of these very alarming problems, it should be instructive to revisit one more passage from Obama's Nobel lecture: "And even as we confront a vicious adversary that abides by no rules, I believe the United States of America must remain a standard bearer in the conduct of war. That is what makes us different from those whom we fight. That is a source of our

strength. That is why I prohibited torture. That is why I ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed. And that is why I have reaffirmed America's commitment to abide by the Geneva Conventions." One by one, Obama has broken each of these promises, undermining our national morality and "strength" even by the standards forwarded in his own address. Well into Obama's second term, Guantanamo Bay is still open, despite pleas from the United Nations<sup>98</sup>; the evidence is increasingly clear that the United States tortures individuals suspected of "terrorism"<sup>99</sup>; and, despite whatever "commitments" Obama has made, the United States is wholly unaccountable to numerous provisions of the Geneva Conventions, especially those that protect foreign civilians from violence.<sup>100</sup> Under the Bush and Obama administrations, "enhanced interrogation," indefinite detention, preemptive war, and reckless drone attacks have become the standard the United States bears among the nations.

Finally, it is of serious disciplinary consequence that Obama has largely escaped the criticism that was aimed at his predecessor.<sup>101</sup> In an historical moment in which the form and function of presidential address increasingly shapes and is shaped by the deterritorialization of national sovereignty, we are compelled to turn a critical eye toward the reactivation of the nation-state as a ground of moral exception and political decision. What are the aims and means of presidential address in this new context? Why and toward what ends are philosophies of the just war repurposed by national leaders in an increasingly globalized age? What possibilities remain for the very idea of a culture of dissent, to say nothing of insurgency, in the context of a just war being waged everywhere and against potentially anyone? It is to better appreciate these complex questions, and to invite others to consider the stakes and rhetorical terrain of resistance, that we offer our critique of Obama's Nobel address.

## NOTES

1. Barack Obama, "Speech against the Iraq War Resolution," in *Power in Words: The Stories Behind Barack Obama's Speeches, From the State House to the White House*, ed. Mary Frances Berry and Josh Gottheimer (New York: Beacon Press, 2011), 8.
2. "Transcript: The Democratic Debate in Las Vegas," *New York Times*, January 15, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/15/us/politics/15demdebate-transcript.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed July 1, 2012).

3. "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2009," *NobelPrize.org*, October 9, 2009, [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/press.html) (accessed June 30, 2012).
4. Steven Erlanger and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Surprise Nobel for Obama Stirs Praise and Doubts," *New York Times*, October 9, 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/10/world/10nobel.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/10/world/10nobel.html?_r=0) (accessed June 29, 2012).
5. For a description of the Nobel lecture as a rhetorical genre, see Philippe-Joseph Salazar, "Nobel Rhetoric; or, Petrarch's Pendulum," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 42 (2009): 373–400.
6. For more on the constraining "footstones" of American foreign policy rhetoric, see Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 339–61. Also see Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic: Rhetorical Form and Commemorative Politics on September 11, 2002," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 1–26.
7. For example, see Greg Sargent, "Obama Strives to Reconcile Idealism with Realism," *WhoRunsGov.com*, 2009, <http://theplumline.whorunsgov.com/afghanistan/obamas-realistic-idealism-or-idealistic-realism> (accessed October 20, 2011).
8. Although there have been somewhat-diverse treatments of Obama among rhetoric scholars, our disciplinary reception of him has been generally positive. For engagements of Obama's presidential rhetoric, see the Winter 2011 *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* special issue on Obama's rhetoric, edited by David A. Frank. For other representative examples, see James Darsey, "Barack Obama and America's Journey," *Southern Communication Journal* 74 (2009): 88–103; David A. Frank, "The Prophetic Voice and the Face of the Other in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union' Address, March 18, 2008," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12 (2009): 167–94; David A. Frank and Mark Lawrence McPhail, "Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)Possibility of Racial Reconciliation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 571–93; John M. Murphy, "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97 (2011): 387–410; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14 (2011): 125–54; Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93 (2007): 425–48; and Robert E. Terrill, "Unity and Duality in Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 363–86. For a more critical treatment of Obama as a powerful yet flawed "oratorical anomaly," see John M. Murphy, "Book Review: James T. Kloppenberg's *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political*

- Tradition*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97 (2011): 248. Donovan Conley and William O. Saas also seem to have an ambivalent take toward Obama’s rhetoric, yet ultimately, as their title evinces, they argue that he has inherited a legacy of problematic discourses from the Bush Administration: “*Occultatio*: The Bush Administration’s Rhetorical War,” *Western Journal of Communication* 74 (2010): 329–50.
9. Robert E. Terrill, “An Uneasy Peace: Barack Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize Lecture,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14 (2011): 765.
  10. For an assessment of the Nobel lecture’s ambivalent realist vision, see Sargent, “Obama Strives to Reconcile.”
  11. Sargent, “Obama Strives to Reconcile.”
  12. Andrew Gordon Fiala, *The Just War Myth: The Moral Illusions of War* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).
  13. President Obama has hesitated to label as “war” the military operations that have taken place during his administration. Bombing campaigns that have contributed to the death or displacement of thousands of civilians in places like Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Uganda, and Yemen have been labeled “kinetic military actions” by the Obama administration. See, for example, White House, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Dan Restrepo, and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes.” *The White House*, March 23, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/23/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-senior-director-western-hemisp> (accessed March 10, 2012).
  14. See “The Haze Administration: ‘War on Terror’ is Out; ‘Overseas Contingency Operations’ is in,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123879985817588375.html> (accessed December 31, 2012).
  15. See Jan Nederveen Pietersee, “Neoliberal Empire,” *Theory Culture Society* 21 (2004): 119–40.
  16. Barack Obama, “Full Text of Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize Speech: Remarks of the US President in Oslo,” *White House on MSNBC.com*, October 9, 2009, [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34360743/ns/politics-white\\_house/t/full-text-obamas-nobel-peace-prize-speech/#.Tps9n-yP\\_vI](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34360743/ns/politics-white_house/t/full-text-obamas-nobel-peace-prize-speech/#.Tps9n-yP_vI) (accessed October 21, 2011).
  17. See Kenneth Burke’s analysis of the dialectic of war and peace in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 332–36.
  18. Alex J. Bellamy, *Just Wars: From Cicero to Iraq* (New York: Polity Press, 2006), 17.
  19. Plato, *The Republic*, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 371e–375a.

20. Henrik Syse, "The Platonic Roots of Just War Doctrine: A Reading of Plato's Republic," *Diametros* 23 (2010): 104–23.
21. Thomas Rickert, "Toward the Chora: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40 (2007): 258.
22. Gadamer describes the healthy city as "that idyll of a healthy vegetative state . . . in which peace and pacifism are automatically present because each in doing what is right and necessary for all does what is just—this state, tightly organized as it is for the provision of needs, could never exist in human history and is thus no genuine ideal for mankind. For since it is without history, it is without human truth. . . . Man is a profligate being who desires to progress beyond his present circumstances. Thus quite by itself his state transcends itself as his needs increase." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 55.
23. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 55.
24. Plato, *The Republic*, 373e–374a. For Plato, the true city can only be disciplined by the taming of these desires. But because desire immediately corrupts the human, war, as a natural end of that desire, is a simple fact of human existence. Although we might aspire to the heavenly city—to a society free of war—we will always be hindered by the temptations of embodiment with which nature has burdened us. The ideal of peace, then, can be set aside in favor of more practical concerns. Plato's notion of "just war" thus arises as an attempt to domesticate mankind's belligerent nature by prescribing ethical norms for the conduct of inevitable warfare. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato suggests that an institutional shift can more or less defuse our innate brutality: he recommends that soldiers receive a thorough and sensitive liberal education, one that teaches them not to lust for material gain, to attack only those who deserve it, and to redirect their anger toward reason and away from emotion. According to Plato, these steps will ensure that soldiers, and the military bureaucracies that direct their behaviors, will be able to calculate the justness of any hostile act. See Syse, "The Platonic Roots of Just War Doctrine," 121.
25. Plato, *The Republic*, 469b–c.
26. Aristotle, *Politics*, in the *Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. II*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), VII, 1333b, 39–40; 1334a, 2.
27. C. E. W. Steel, *Cicero, Rhetoric, and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also P. A. Brunt, "Laus Imperii," in *Roman Imperialism: Readings and Sources*, ed. Craig Brian Champion (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 163–85.
28. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. and trans. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 35.

29. Norman Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
30. John Mark Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 37.
31. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford University Press), 1177b10–14. Also see Aristotle’s *Politics*, where he declares that “Peace is the end of war” (VII, 1334a, 14).
32. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1972), 866.
33. Rex Martin, “The Two Cities in Augustine’s Political Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972):195–96.
34. See Paul Q. Hirst, *War and Power in the 21st Century: The State, Military Conflict, and the International System* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 7–15. Also see Cian O’Driscoll, *The Renegotiation of the Just War Tradition and the Right to War in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 30–33.
35. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 159–65.
36. George Washington, *Annals of Annapolis*, ed. David Ridgely (Baltimore, MD: Cushing and Brother, 1841), 203.
37. Theodore Roosevelt, “Peace Secured by an Upholder of Just War,” in *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (1916; rpt., New York: Cosimo, 2005), 406. Also see Leroy G. Dorsey, *We Are All Americans, Pure and Simple: Theodore Roosevelt and the Myth of Americanism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 127–30.
38. Richard J. Regan, *Just War: Principles and Causes* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 128–30.
39. James Turner Johnson and George Weigel, *Just War and the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1991).
40. O’Driscoll, *The Renegotiation*.
41. For another, complementary perspective on the rhetorical paradox of violence and nonviolence, see Ellen W. Gorsevski and Michael L. Butterworth, “The Paradox of Violence in Nonviolent Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97 (2011): 50–73.
42. According to Hayden White, “By emplotment, a sequence of events is ‘configured’ (‘grasped together’) in such a way as to represent ‘symbolically’ what would otherwise be unutterable in language, namely, the ineluctably ‘aporetic’ nature of the human experience in time.” In Obama’s speech, the world’s history is emplotted in such a way that certain events are “grasped together”—whereas others are totally ignored—to make a coherent claim on the chaos of reality. See *Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins

- University Press, 1991), 173. For an alternate view of Obama's narratology, see Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Recasting the American Dream."
43. Obama, "Full Text."
  44. Obama, "Full Text."
  45. Obama, "Full Text."
  46. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 11.
  47. The quote to which Obama refers comes from Kennedy's June 10, 1963 commencement address at American University. For a closer look at this speech and its exigence, see Theodore Windt, *Presidents and Protestors: Political Rhetoric in the 1960s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 61–87.
  48. Obama, "Full Text."
  49. Obama, "Full Text."
  50. Obama, "Full Text."
  51. For a compelling analysis of Wilson's internationalist vision, see Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
  52. Obama, "Full Text."
  53. The United Nations was an idea born as a war alliance. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill originally elected to dub as the "United Nations" their international alliance against Germany, Italy, and Japan during the Second World War. The title "United Nations," Churchill reflected, was taken from Lord Byron's "Child Harold's Pilgrimage." The line about the "united nations" is taken from a passage recounting the Battle of Waterloo. See George Gordon Lord Byron, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," in the *Complete Poetical Works*, vol. II, ed. J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 3.35.7.
  54. Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 424.
  55. Truman asserted this in a speech at Baylor University on March 6, 1947. See Smith, *American Empire*, 424.
  56. Mark Manzower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2–27.
  57. Obama, "Full Text."
  58. Obama, "Full Text."
  59. Obama, "Full Text."
  60. Obama, "Full Text."
  61. Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 53.



62. In this sense, as well, Obama's address bears traces of what Vivian calls the "neoliberal epideictic." See Bradford Vivian, "Neoliberal Epideictic."
63. Obama, "Full Text."
64. Terrill, "An Uneasy Peace," 764.
65. Obama, "Full Text."
66. Obama, "Full Text."
67. Global capitalism and liberal democracy are two essential features of what Jan Nederveen Pietersee calls "neoliberal empire," which is sustained and reproduced by discourses of just war. See Jan Nederveen Pietersee, "Neoliberal Empire," *Theory Culture Society* 21 (2004): 119–40.
68. Robert Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Speech Journal* 18 (1967): 10.
69. Terrill, "An Uneasy Peace," 775.
70. In describing geo-politics during the Clinton administration, Brian Massumi similarly argues that "being in this world is reduced to a stay of execution selectively granted by nonparticipants by dint of not judging." See Brian Massumi, "Requiem for our Prospective Dead (Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalist Power)," in *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, ed. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 44.
71. Similarly, in his discussion of "centrist rhetoric" Antonio de Velasco argues that President Clinton rhetorically occupied the political center, claiming that this perspective helped him transcend American partisanship and engage the world as it really is. See Antonio de Velasco, *Centrist Rhetoric: The Production of Political Transcendence in the Clinton Presidency* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010). Furthermore, the presidential performance of rhetorical equilibrium establishes a point of identification upon which the people can project their own *fantasmic* self-image as tough but fair in the dispensation of justice. For more on this dynamic, particular as it relates to public memory and postmodernity, see James P. McDaniel, "Fantasm: The Triumph of Form," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 (2000): 48–67.
72. Murphy, "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," 405. Also see Derek Sweet and Margret McCue-Enser, "Constituting 'the People' as Rhetorical Interruption: Barack Obama and the Unfinished Hopes of an Imperfect People," *Communication Studies* 61 (2010): 602–22.
73. Obama, "Full Text."

74. For more on the role of juxtaposing “commonsensically American values” to negative counterparts, see Joan Caroline Picart, “Documenting, Dissecting, and Decrying Terrorism,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 696.
75. See Barbara A. Biesecker, “Renovating the National Imaginary: A Prolegomenon on Contemporary Paregoric Rhetoric,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 212–47.
76. Obama, “Full Text.”
77. Robert Ivie makes note of this important point in an analysis of the “flawed logic” of Obama’s address: “Obama at West Point: A Study in Ambiguity of Purpose,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14 (2011): 749.
78. Obama, “Full Text.”
79. Armand Mattelart, *The Globalization of Surveillance* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 198.
80. For a discussion of this tension in Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter, see Kenneth S. Zagacki, “Rhetoric, Failure, and the Presidency: The Case of Vietnam,” *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 42–55. For more on the problems in and ambivalences of realist just war rhetoric, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 3–12.
81. Ivie, “Obama at West Point,” 740.
82. Obama, “Speech Against Iraq War Resolution.” Also see Marable Manning, *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 108.
83. See, for example, Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), and Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
84. Jean Bricmont, *Humanitarian Imperialism: Using Human Rights to Sell War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006).
85. Obama, “Full Text.”
86. As Attorney General Eric Holder recently made clear, the territory of war now extends to the homeland and can even now be waged against American citizens. If American citizens—who are typically afforded the special protection of U.S. law—are suspected of terrorism, they can now be targeted for assassination within the borders of the United States. He justified this decision by referring to the state of exception: “We are a nation at war. And, in this war, we face a nimble and determined enemy that cannot be underestimated.” See Eric Holder, “Attorney General Eric Holder Speaks at Northwestern University School of Law,” *The United States Department of Justice*, March 4, 2012, <http://www.justice.gov/iso/opa/ag/speeches/2012/ag-speech-1203051.html> (accessed December 31, 2012).
87. Terrill, “An Uneasy Peace,” 775.

88. Terrill, "An Uneasy Peace," 775.
89. Kenneth S. Zagacki has outlined the potential dangers in war rhetoric that is ambivalently drawn between realism and idealism. See "Eisenhower and the Rhetoric of Postwar Korea," *Southern Communication Journal* 60 (1995): 242–44.
90. The longest-running war in our nation's history, "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan, is a conflict in which America has suffered more than 16,000 casualties. The toll on Afghanistan's civilians is difficult to responsibly estimate, but at least tens of thousands have been injured or killed since the 2001 invasion. See "Operation Enduring Freedom Hits 2,000 U.S. Casualties," *Huffington Post*, June 14, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/14/afghanistan-war-death-toll\\_n\\_1596816.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/14/afghanistan-war-death-toll_n_1596816.html) (accessed December 24, 2012).
91. "U.S. Government Refuses to Lift Lid on Drone Strikes," *Deccan Herald*, June 21, 2012, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/258836/us-government-refuses-lift-lid.html> (accessed December 24, 2012).
92. Craig Whitlock and Greg Jaffe, "General: U.S. Troops' Uganda Mission Likely to Last until Rebel Leader Is Caught," *Washington Post*, November 19, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/general-us-troops-uganda-mission-likely-to-last-until-rebel-leader-is-caught/2011/11/18/gIQAOKeScN\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/general-us-troops-uganda-mission-likely-to-last-until-rebel-leader-is-caught/2011/11/18/gIQAOKeScN_story.html) (accessed December 24, 2012).
93. Owen Bowcott, "Drone Strikes Threaten 50 Years of International Law, Says UN Rapporteur," *The Guardian*, June 21, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/21/drone-strikes-international-law-un?newsfeed=true> (accessed December 24, 2012).
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95. For more information on the dangerous implications of the NDAA, see "NDAA," *AmericanCivilLibertiesUnion.org*, 2011, <http://www.aclu.org/blog/tag/NDAA> (accessed December 24, 2012).
96. Laurie Penny, "Occupy Wall Street: Police Violence Reveals a Corrupt System," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/nov/15/occupy-wall-street-police-violence> (accessed December 24, 2012); Naomi Wolf, "Revealed: How the FBI Coordinated the Crackdown on Occupy," *The Guardian*, December 29, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/29/fbi-coordinated-crackdown-occupy> (accessed December 31, 2012).
97. Lisa Mascaró, "Patriot Act Provisions Extended Just in Time," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/27/nation/la-na-patriot-act-20110527> (accessed December 24, 2012).

98. Tom Miles. "U.S. Flouts Law at Guantanamo, Despite Obama Vow: U.N." *Reuters*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/23/us-un-guantanamo-idUSTRE80M0SU20120123> (accessed December 24, 2012). Also see Jeremy Herb, "Obama Promise to Close Guantanamo Prison Unfulfilled." *The Hill*, January 11, 2012, <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/203727-obama-promise-to-close-prison-at-guantanamo-still-unfulfilled> (accessed December 24, 2012).
99. The Obama administration's torture policy has been skillfully analyzed in a 2010 *New York Times* editorial by Air Force veteran (and former "interrogator") Matthew Alexander. Alexander points out that the Obama administration's alleged banning of torture nevertheless permits many acts of "enhanced interrogation" to continue. He argues that an appendix to the Army Field Manual allows for indefinite solitary confinement, extreme sleep deprivation (up to forty hours' straight interrogation), and other forms of enhanced interrogation. As Alexander points out, such practices do not meet the standards of enemy treatment according to the Geneva conventions; in his words, the Obama administration avoided doing what was legal according to international law, choosing instead to do simply what was "better" than the Bush administration. See Matthew Alexander, "Torture's Loopholes," *NYTimes.com*, January 20, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/21/opinion/21alexander.html> (accessed December 24, 2012).
100. Orla Guerin, "Pakistani Civilian Victims Vent Anger over US Drones." *BBC News*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/15553761> (accessed December 24, 2012).
101. Here is just a sampling of articles that have critically assessed George W. Bush and his rhetoric: James Arnt Aune, "The Argument from Evil in the Rhetoric of Reaction," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 518–22; David Birdsell, "George W. Bush's Signing Statements: The Assault on Deliberation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 335–60; David A. Crockett, "George W. Bush and the Unrhetorical Rhetorical Presidency," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 465–86; Marouf Hasian Jr., "The Return of the Imperial Presidency," in *The Prospect of Presidential Rhetoric*, ed. James Arnt Aune and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 69–97; Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Justifying the War in Iraq: What the Bush Administration's Uses of Evidence Reveal," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 249–73; John M. Murphy, "'Our Mission and Our Moment': George W. Bush and September 11th," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 607–32; and David Hoogland Noon, "Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, the War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 339–64.