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Clara McGrail, B.A.

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THE RELIGIOUS LEFT: PROGRESSIVE PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC POST-NEW DEAL

Clara McGrail, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Lori Merish, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses how, since Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency, progressive presidents’ rhetoric has justified the expansion of the welfare state in a utopic effort to achieve “heaven on earth.” Focusing on imagery of the family and the soldier, this thesis explores how Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Barack Obama attempted to create and concretize their policies as extensions of American identity. The three presidents that this thesis discusses are all progressive in that they believe in a continual evolution towards a perfection of American society, a perfection which the government is best equipped to facilitate. Overall, this thesis seeks to explain how Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama all employ “religious” rhetoric because their policies proposed are dependent on the intervention of a benevolent power when government alone is inadequate to help American society realize perfection.
The research and writing of this thesis are dedicated to the men and women whose bodies and lives are moved by presidential words.
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter I: Franklin Roosevelt and Positive Liberty ................................................................. 9

Chapter II: Lyndon Johnson and Social Citizenship ............................................................ 27

Chapter III: Barack Obama and the Application of Rawlsian Ethics .................................... 44

Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................. 61

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................ 66
INTRODUCTION

American presidents rarely speak without purpose. From their most formal speeches to their seemingly offhand comments, American presidents can shape policy, sway public opinion, and garner personal support with their words. Increasingly, both sides of the Left-Right American political spectrum—what this paper refers to as progressive and conservative, respectively—view themselves as rational and logical rhetoricians and actors while castigating their opponents as, at best, out of touch with reality and at worst, willfully ignorant of reality. While both sides of the political debate are guilty of this error in self-reflection and judgment of their opponents, the scope of this project is unfortunately not wide enough to cover both conservatives and progressives. Moreover, as conservatism has grown to identify itself more and be identified—whether fairly or not—as the “religious” Right, examining the Left as an equally religious group of actors is a more intriguing project.

The historical Progressive Era in America reached its climax during Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, and although Franklin Roosevelt was Wilson’s successor and often tried to emulate his mentor, he identifies more closely with a new form of American liberalism which “[favours] social reform and a degree of state intervention in matters of economics and social justice” (Oxford English Dictionary). Using the term “liberal” or “liberalism” to describe the presidential rhetoric this paper examines, however, is problematic because it ignores other historical and cultural definitions of “liberalism,” which are firmly at odds with the American notion of modern liberalism. Moreover, the three presidents that this project describes—Franklin

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\textsuperscript{a} “Supporting or advocating individual rights, civil liberties, and political and social reform tending towards individual freedom or democracy with little state intervention” (OED).
Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Barack Obama—are all progressive in that they believe in a continual evolution towards a perfection of American society, a perfection which the government is best equipped to facilitate. Furthermore, while Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama do not belong to the Progressive Era, their rhetoric does carry through certain hallmarks of the Progressive rhetoric that preceded them. Thus, I use progressive in this thesis to not only stand in for modern American liberalism but also to expand its definition to accommodate the nuances found in each president’s rhetoric.

As other scholars have noted, religion has long been a central tenet of Progressivism. For example, Eldon J. Eisenach traces the importance of religion for the Progressive Era in *The Lost Promise of Progressivism*. Using the twentieth-century sociologist Albion Small’s “The Bonds of Nationality,” Eisenach explains that in Progressivism there was a distinction between “church,” which was comprised of dogma and rules, and “religion” which was comprised of an interconnectivity of American citizens who held deep personal and spiritual beliefs (58).

Additionally, while Progressivism relied heavily on the social scientists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, its underpinnings were still religious and it was far from purely objective. The late 19\textsuperscript{th} century found a strong emphasis on Christian perfection closely associated with American Methodism. Furthermore, the desire to decrease poverty and improve the lives of the indigent bears similarities to the Social Gospel movement during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Both movements, according to Gaines Foster in *Moral Reconstruction* lead to calls for federal legislation that would “ensure moral citizens and a moral environment” (81). Although Foster rejects narrow definitions of the Christian reform movement, he does trace how it strongly overlapped with the Progressive Era. It is inaccurate, however, to claim that the Social Gospel movement formed
Progressivism. Rather, as Paul Phillips explains in *Kingdom On Earth*, “Progressivism…was an important conduit for Social Christian ideas. As such it attracted many moderate Social Gospelers to its ranks. In turn they often gained limited access to the corridors of political power” (221).

Moreover, nationality—or the identity of Americans as Americans—itself became a type of religion wherein moral obligations were generated and followed by “bonds of sufficient strength to encourage sacrifice for social justice and the common good” (Phillips 62). Therefore, in this thesis I do not claim that the presidents under examination deploy rhetoric that specifically invokes God or belongs to any particular religious tradition. Rather, this project posits two separate but related concepts of religion in progressive rhetoric. First, I use “religious” in the sense that Eisenach uses it to discuss a sense of unity and community among individuals which support a fraternal obligation between American citizens. Additionally, the three presidents this thesis discusses all use “religious” rhetoric in the sense that their policies proposed are dependent on the intervention of a benevolent power when government alone is inadequate to help American society realize perfection. Here is where progressive and conservative rhetoric differ. For although both the left and the right utilize religious rhetoric to present a view of the future and strengthen a sense of American identity, their view of a dependence on a divine benevolence is radically different. Whereas conservative rhetoricians tend to maintain a religious and constitutional tradition in order to limit the encroachment of government on individual liberty, progressive rhetoricians present a view of American society as perfectible through the use of large-scale public projects. This utopic view of perfectibility is dependent on the logic of postmillennialism. This postmillennialism, as John Walvoord explains
in *The Millennial Kingdom*, differs from a Biblical type of postmillennialism in that its logic does not depend on scripture but on an evolutionary view of humans and a “confidence in man to achieve progress through natural means” (Walvoord 23). As this thesis argues, however, this logic must inherently presuppose a divine benevolence because government alone is insufficient for the perfectibility of American society.

This project is indebted to a number of scholars who have both elucidated and complicated readings of presidential rhetoric. Furthermore, these scholars and their works provide a robust account of presidential rhetoric with sympathies ranging across the Left-Right political spectrum. A discussion of the use of morality in political rhetoric would be incomplete without a consideration of George Lakoff’s *Moral Politics*, which argues that both conservatism and progressivism political positions are based on differing moral logic (195). Furthermore, he writes that American conservatism and progressivism view the government in terms of parenthood, but with differing conclusions. Conservatives, he argues believe in a “strict-father model,” whereas progressives view government in terms of a “nurturant parent model” (35). Both highlight the importance of the image of the American family for political rhetoric. They also explain how a logic of morality based on the family structure can differ so drastically between the two poles of the political spectrum. Overall, however, Lakoff ignores the rational logic that drives policy decisions for the executive and the appeals to logic that presidents frequently employ.

The examination of the Johnson, Roosevelt, and Obama administrations that Charles Kesler provides in his book *I Am the Change* is particularly helpful to my project because it traces the political lineage between the three presidents and uses their rhetoric to support or
refute his conclusions. Beginning with Roosevelt, Kesler demonstrates how Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama used the progressivism of their predecessors in manners unique to each president. Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama, he writes, “reshaped Americans’ expectations of government and life” through “an aggressive doctrine unashamedly pursuing the transformation of the country” (xiv-xv). Kesler’s work is somewhat problematic because his opinions certainly color his scholarship, but his readings of the various presidential speeches come closest to providing a close reading, focusing on and analyzing word choice rather than discussing the broader themes contained in each speech. While helpful, Kesler’s project is diminished by the fact that his ultimate conclusion—that progressivism has reached its apex in the United States and is now decreasing—has been proven wrong, or at least been proven overstated, by the 2012 presidential elections and by the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold health care reform.

The rationale behind constraining this project to three presidents can be found in James Cesar, Glen Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph Bessette’s “The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency,” in which they argue that the deliberate use of rhetoric to both shape popular opinion and gain support for policy proposals is a relatively modern phenomenon, made commonplace by President Wilson. Elvin Lim, too, supports this conclusion in his “Five Trends in Presidential Rhetoric.” Furthermore, Cesar et. al note the shift in rhetoric from the rational to the emotional. As they write, “metaphorical terms like ‘voice of a nation,’ ‘moral leader’ and ‘trumpet’ all suggest is a form of presidential speech that soars above the realm of calm and deliberate discussion of reasons of state or appeals to enlightened self-interest. Rather, the picture of leadership that emerges under the influence of this doctrine is one that constantly exhorts in the name of a common purpose and a spirit of idealism” (163). In the rhetoric of Roosevelt, Johnson,
and Obama which this paper examines, idealism and a sense of common purpose abound. Yet while Cesar et. al’s explanation of the Rhetorical Presidency is useful for this project, it overlooks how progressive presidents often times do use appeals to reason and resist purely emotional and moral language in an attempt to present their proposals as the only reasonable course of action amid a sea of chaos.

Colleen Shogan’s *The Moral Rhetoric of American Presidents* supports the view of moral and idealistic rhetoric as a strategy that presidents can employ to gain more political control, but she widens “political control” to include a president’s constitutional authority in addition to his approval rating and policy support. The expansion of political control to include constitutional authority is important when discussing how progressive presidents continually try to trace an evolution of the American government and its constitution from the country’s founding through to the present day. As Ronald Pestritto and William Atto explain in *American Progressivism: A Reader*, the view of government as a continually evolving entity began with Wilson’s view of the Constitution as a “Living Document,” and this concept of government justifies the expansion of government from the parameters of its founding in order to meet the social ills that plague the present (6). Thus, constitutional authority is of utmost importance for progressive presidents because it is necessary to gain support for their interpretations of the Constitution.

Lastly, it is impossible to discuss presidential rhetoric without acknowledging the sizeable contribution that Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have made with their *Deeds Done in Words*. This work provides the most comprehensive account of the types of rhetoric each president must deliver, seeking to “identify the rhetorical functions of each type of presidential discourse and to determine the strategic moves needed for its achievements” (13).
Although this thesis focuses on a variety of speeches from each of the three presidents, the decision to focus most heavily on State of the Union Addresses was strongly guided by the discussion and analysis that Campbell and Jamieson provide for this particular genre. Because Campbell and Jamieson identify this genre as a distinct reminder “that presidents have a unique function in our system of government,” I use these addresses most frequently because of their singularity to the American presidency and their commonality between different presidents (53).

The State of the Union Address, as Campbell and Jamieson explain, is uniquely presidential and it tends to incorporate three broad categories of discourse: “1) public meditations on values, 2) assessments of information and issues, and 3) policy recommendations” (54). Campbell and Jamieson do, however, note that the policy proposals may range in their specificity given the nature of presidents to use the State of the Union Address “to reshape reality and to imprint that conception on the nation” (52). Furthermore, reflection on the past—specifically America’s founding—is a means for presidents to gain support for future legislative initiatives because “meditation and reconsideration reassure the audience that the legislative recommendations to follow are the product of careful consideration, not partisan passion or momentary whim” (57). Although State of the Union Addresses can function to strengthen American identity and unity, this, as Campbell and Jamieson argue, is more the purview of the Inaugural Address. They explain that the inaugural has five functions: to unify the audience as witnesses to a transition of power, to reiterate shared values, to enunciate the political principals to which the new administration will adhere, and to urge restraint in action by “focusing on the present while incorporating past and future” (15). Therefore, Inaugural Addresses are less forward-looking than State of the Union Addresses although both rhetorical
forms serve to create a sense of unity and national identity.

While these scholars all provide useful analysis of progressive rhetoric, and political rhetoric in general, my project will seek to address a gap in the existing scholarship which is to provide a close reading of presidential speeches. By doing so, this work will engage in a discussion of how the language, while not overtly moralistic, does demonstrate the religious tendencies of progressive presidents. By providing a close reading of Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama’s rhetoric, this project endeavors to demonstrate that while each president may use certain appeals to reason, his language and logic are ultimately moral, rather than rational and scientific. Beginning with President Franklin Roosevelt, this thesis will trace how the paradigmatic shift towards positive liberties under Roosevelt’s presidency relied on a logic of morality due to the view of rights as provided by government. Although a conception of positive liberty is present in Johnson’s speeches, his introduction of the Great Society and the War on Poverty rely more strongly on his view of social citizenship. Social Citizenship is corollary to a conception of positive liberty and is therefore present in Roosevelt’s rhetoric, although not explicitly. Using T.H. Marshall’s description of social citizenship in “Citizenship and Social Class,” as “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society,” I argue that Johnson’s two largest policy proposals endeavored to expand the notion of the Aristotelian good life and the concept of citizenship to encompass economic security (149). Lastly, while President Obama’s political ideals display an influence of Roosevelt’s concept of positive liberty and Johnson’s concept of social citizenship, his views are most strongly informed by Rawlsian ethics and a commitment to justice as fairness.
Therefore, this paper will trace not only the differences and similarities between these three presidents but also the evolution of progressive thought over the past century. Further to how each president reintroduces themes of positive liberties and social citizenship, this thesis will also examine how each of the three presidents deploys war rhetoric and rhetoric of the American family. In addition to using war rhetoric to stir national sentiment—a common rhetorical move in both conservative and progressive rhetoric—the three presidents this project examines utilize war rhetoric in a manner that concretizes their policy proposals. Furthermore, the use of familial imagery in each president’s speeches goes beyond the domesticity that presidents from both the American Left and Right frequently invoke. Instead, the American family is introduced as a means to simultaneously view the past as well as look towards the future.

**CHAPTER I: FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT AND POSITIVE LIBERTY**

“*Government includes the art of formulating a policy, and using the political technique to attain so much of that policy as will receive general support; persuading, leading, sacrificing, teaching always, because the greatest duty of a statesman is to educate.*” -Franklin Roosevelt, Commonwealth Club Address

The 1932 American presidential election was a watershed moment for both American progressivism and American history, and Franklin Roosevelt’s “Commonwealth Club Address” helped to mark the monumental nature of that year’s campaign. In his speech, Roosevelt calls education the “greatest duty of a statesman,” positing persuasion, leadership and sacrifice as facets of the education that a statesman ought to deliver. Rhetoric is, because of its biased nature, rarely educational—or at least not educational in the preferred objective sense. Yet despite its biases, rhetoric is always preferable to the other forms of persuasion—violence and coercion. Thus, while presidential rhetoric is, by nature, always biased, it serves the necessary function of
persuading the public to adopt certain proposed policies. While education is perhaps the greatest, noblest duty of a statesman, by design persuasion is the most important duty of a statesman—if he wants to retain power.

Roosevelt was conscious of persuasion’s necessity for preserving power, rising to the presidency in the midst of the Great Depression and the first rumblings of World War II. In *Rhetoric as Currency: Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Great Depression*, Davis Houck explains how instilling faith in the American people, through the use of compelling rhetoric, was the course that both Hoover and Roosevelt pursued as they tried to demonstrate their ability to right America’s economy in their pursuits of the presidency. Having faith that a particular economic policy would meet its objectives, as Houck writes, was more important for a successful policy than the details of the policy itself:

> [A]s both Hoover and Roosevelt clearly recognized and practiced, presidential economic rhetoric could function as *the* policy. It could move millions of people to positive (or negative) economic action, quite divorced from the coercive designs of legislation. Moreover, both men understood that the concept of ‘economic reality’ was a very malleable construct, shaped, in part, by the public’s confidence and belief rather than an externally real, objective reality. (195)

Gaining an audience’s trust and confidence is of importance to all rhetoricians but it is especially so for presidents. Moving beyond gaining support for a president’s proposed policies, Houck here touches on how rhetoric can come to stand in for a policy itself. Moving rhetoric can help the executive circumvent the legislature by motivating people to act in his desired manner, thus doing away with a need for legislation. This section will discuss how, after righting the United
States after the Great Depression, Roosevelt would have to continue this motivation in order to garner support for and maintain the momentum of the domestic war effort. In order to motivate and mold people’s behavior how he wanted, Roosevelt would have to re-conceptualize liberty as positive, rather than negative, in order to have more control over people’s actions. Furthermore, Roosevelt deployed the language of warfare in many of his speeches, and this section will take up a discussion of the importance of war rhetoric for both sustaining the faith of the American people and for making Roosevelt’s policies seem more concrete and realized. By performing a close reading on three of Roosevelt’s speeches, this section will examine how Roosevelt first shifted from a negative liberties model to a positive liberties model and then utilized faith in order to accomplish his economic objectives.

One of Roosevelt’s most iconic speeches, his State of the Union address from 1941 ("Four Freedoms Speech"), appropriately begins this section because this speech shifted the paradigm of negative liberties and came to solidify American progressivism’s focus on positive liberties. Therefore, this section will begin by analyzing Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms Speech” not only because it comes first chronologically but also because it is a turning point for both progressivism as well as American history as a whole. The speech itself is rhetorically impressive, and its ultimate goal is to garner support for Roosevelt’s economic initiatives of raising taxes in order to finance foreign aid to the Allied nations, an expense that the United States could ill afford as it tried to right itself after the Great Depression. In the “Four Freedoms Speech,” Roosevelt attempts to bolster support by using the swelling patriotism associated with the war effort, a rhetorical move he continues in his following speeches. Finally, he ends with his enunciation of four freedoms, ensuring the speech’s importance in history. Yet rather than
reciting a speech solely about the domestic impact of America’s economics, Roosevelt’s speech emphasizes global processes and changes that ought to occur throughout the world. His four freedoms reimagine the Bill of Rights as a guarantee of positive liberties for all people worldwide.

Throughout his speech, Roosevelt continually makes appeals to reason and logic, attempting to ground his speech in reality and to mark his examples and policy goals as self-evident necessities. After beginning with a seemingly traditional historic overview, Roosevelt brings his audience to the present—a time when the Axis powers were gaining strength and America’s ability to pursue a foreign policy of isolationism was becoming difficult. As he says, “Every realist knows that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly assailed in every part of the world—assailed either by arms, or by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord in nations that are still at peace.” Roosevelt’s appeals to reason begin here with “Every realist,” and the fact that he begins with a relatively uncontroversial statement—that the Axis nations threaten democracy—only further grounds his appeals to reason as such. Furthermore, Roosevelt does not give a specific enemy of the democratic way of life. Instead, the nations—which he later refers to merely as “dictator nations”—are marked by their wishes to “destroy unity and promote discord in nations that are still at peace.” Like the “every realist” statement, this too is a device meant to unify his audience in agreement with his words. Thus, in a single paragraph Roosevelt has set himself up as a leader whose proposals are natural and logical, and he has molded his audience into a patriotic one that
will band together in order to fight a common, external enemy. Roosevelt then logically continues, “No realistic American can expect from a dictator’s peace international generosity, or return of true independence, or world disarmament, or freedom of expression, or freedom of religion, or even good business.” This statement is, as history has proven, very reasonable and accurate: while dictatorships can produce domestic stability for a certain amount of time, they tend to foster instability in foreign policy. Yet this statement gives Roosevelt credibility as rational, and when he begins to offer other, more controversial claims, his audience will accept them as self-evident and logical.

The appeal to reason is still a tactic presidents employ, usually referring to their policy proposals as “common sense,” the implication of which is that any reasonable person will agree with the president’s policy proposal and, by extension, anyone who disagrees with the policy proposal is unreasonable. Even the current president, Barack Obama, frequently refers to his legislation proposals—from gun control laws to minimum wage increases—as common sense legislation. In these situations, the rhetorician allows for no dissent, shutting down dialogue and conversation and painting those who disagree as unreasonable extremists. It does not take Roosevelt long to reach this formulation. As he states:

A free nation has the right to expect full cooperation from all groups. A free nation has the right to look to leaders of business, of labor, and of agriculture to take the lead in stimulating effort, not among other groups but within their own

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b Roosevelt also points out the “poisonous propaganda” of the enemy, which is ironic considering that Roosevelt is giving a political speech which is, by nature, itself a form of propaganda.

c While scholars disagree about the amount of information the American government had about Nazi atrocities prior to WWII, Roosevelt makes reference in this speech to both concentration camps and “quick-lime in the ditch” demonstrating that the Nazis’ actions were publicized, if not well-known, and further marking Roosevelt’s statement as reasonable.
groups. The best way of dealing with the few slackers or trouble makers in our midst is, first, to shame them by patriotic example, and, if that fails, to use the sovereignty of government to save government.

Once again, Roosevelt turns to patriotism to stir his audience to act against a common enemy, only this time the enemy is a group of Americans who may disagree with the president’s proposals. The first sentence in this paragraph is contradictory in terms of a negative conception of liberty: in a free nation, citizens have no obligation to the state and, consequently, free nations cannot have any expectations about the actions of their citizens. Note the change in tone, however: any person who disagrees with the policy proposal of increasing foreign aid through increased taxation is a “slacker” and “trouble-maker.” Yet with most policy proposals in the United States, people raise objections. Moreover, people may not have disagreed that helping the allied nations was the proper course of action, but may have instead questioned Roosevelt’s specific policy proposal of increasing foreign aid, instead favoring direct military intervention or raising immigration quotas for refugees. Yet Roosevelt refuses to entertain dissent and discussion, calling on his audience to shame those who disagree and alluding to his intent to use government power to coerce people to comply. Lastly, Roosevelt alludes to using government power in order to “save government.” In this instance government, and the American national identity, is in peril. It is under attack from an inside group. The logic of this line of thinking is that if one agrees that America ought to maintain its national identity—its government being an inextricable part of its identity—then Roosevelt is within his right to use government action and coercion in order to rescue the government.

As previously mentioned, in the conclusion of his speech Roosevelt discusses the four
freedoms that all people—not just Americans—ought to enjoy. The first two freedoms, the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion, are in keeping with the negative conceptualization of liberty found in the Constitution. Yet his second two freedoms are in opposition to the freedoms that the constitution proposes. As he states, “The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.” He then continues explaining that the fourth freedom “is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.”

In his annunciation of both of these freedoms, Roosevelt is both bold and very vague regarding the scope of the freedoms as well as how all people across the world will be able to attain these freedoms. In the first of the two, freedom from want, Roosevelt equates this freedom with health, saying “economic understandings” will secure a “healthy peacetime life for [every nation’s] inhabitants.” This statement is bold in that its aim is to guarantee economic security for all people throughout the world, not just citizens of the United States. Bringing health to all of the world’s inhabitants is a laudable goal, but Roosevelt does not specify what economic understandings will bring this about. In fact, the phrase “economic understandings” is itself vague, possibly referring to both an economic system as well as a country’s specific economic policies. Moreover, the guarantee of a “healthy peacetime life” is also vague. “Healthy” is an objective term when taken out of the context of the body and used to describe an economic situation. Yet without determining what a “healthy” life is or who will guarantee it, Roosevelt
continues to his fourth freedom, the freedom from fear. As Roosevelt proclaims, this freedom from fear constitutes “a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor.” In short, Roosevelt is calling for world peace. Once again, Roosevelt’s proposition is a laudable one but one without a guarantor. What differentiates Roosevelt’s fourth freedom from the third is his focus on nations as actors without a concern for their citizens. His third freedom makes specific reference to nations’ citizens while his fourth discusses violence on the transnational level, ignoring other forms of violence beyond international conflict.

The third and fourth freedoms in Roosevelt’s speech rely on a conception of liberty radically different from the foundation of his first two freedoms. Necessary to understanding the divide between the first two and second two freedoms is the division between negative liberty and positive liberty, a distinction that Isaiah Berlin discusses in his essay “Two Concepts of Liberty.” As he writes:

The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty...I shall call the ‘negative’ sense, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?’ The second, which I shall call the ‘positive’ sense, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?’ The two questions are clearly different, even though the answers to them may overlap. (167)

In brief, in a view of liberty as negative, there is a sense of non-interference whereas in a view of
liberty as positive, there is a sense of interference from outside of the self. This distinction is incredibly clear in the “Four Freedoms Speech.” The first two freedoms—freedom of speech and freedom of religion—both rely on outsiders not interfering with one’s preferences and desires while the second two freedoms—freedom from want and freedom from fear—imply an outside interference or, more positively, an outside influence, necessary to providing one with economic and physical security.

Furthermore, Roosevelt’s use of rhetoric to motivate people to act towards certain economic goals while avoiding legislation that would coerce them to do so is also dependent on a positive concept of liberty. Autonomy depends on negative liberty and this, in turn, means that no one can interfere with another’s autonomy, even if it is for his own good. Berlin delivers a scathing critique of those who interfere with the lives of others, even for the benefit of others. Basing his argument on Kantian ethics he writes, “[T]o manipulate men, to propel them towards goals which you—the social reformer—see, but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to treat them as objects without wills of their own... to use them as means for my, not their own, independently conceived ends, even if it is for their own benefit, is, in effect, to treat them as subhuman” (177). According to Berlin, then, any government action that attempts to interfere with a person’s life—even if it is to that person’s benefit—is unethical.

Of course, this critique does not apply to Roosevelt’s rhetoric itself. Rhetoric may try to persuade or motivate people to act a certain way or to hold certain beliefs, but it is not coercive;

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*d Berlin does note, however, that while negative liberty does allow autonomy, this autonomy does have bounds: “Jefferson, Burke, Paine, Mill compiled different catalogues of individual liberties, but the argument for keeping authority at bay is always substantially the same. We must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom if we are not to ‘degrade or deny our nature’. We cannot remain absolutely free, and we must give up some of our liberty to preserve the rest” (5).*
people still have autonomy to decide whether they will be swayed by the argument that the rhetorician is making. Yet returning to Roosevelt’s speech, one finds that he is calling for people to interfere with each other’s lives and he is implying the use of government force to also interfere if the people fail. When he says, “A free nation has the right to expect full cooperation from all groups,” the term “free nation” is only contradictory in terms of a negative concept of liberty. In light of a positive concept of liberty, however, this term is appropriate. In a (positively) free society, the nation can expect people to act in certain ways because it intervenes into people’s behavior to model it. Yet justifying this intervention is difficult especially, as noted earlier, any intervention can be viewed as unethical in terms of using a person as an ends and not as a means in herself. Therefore, a power higher than humans, or a single human, is necessary in order to justify intervention. As Berlin writes, “In the name of what can I ever be justified in forcing men to do what they have not willed or consented to? Only in the name of some value higher than themselves” (178). Thus obligation to the nation—providing what a free nation can expect—is the justification for intervention in Roosevelt’s speech. Moreover, intervention into the individuals’ rights in terms of freedom from want and freedom from fear is necessary in order to protect humankind as a whole—a power that is implicitly higher than the individual.

By April 1942, when Roosevelt delivered his twenty first Fireside Chat, World War II was well underway, and FDR had to heighten support for the war both abroad and at home. The Fireside Chat was a hallmark of all four Roosevelt administrations, and it suggests a sense of intimacy due to its name. The “fireside” is the heart of the home and the site of domesticity and safety. Chat, similarly, is informal conversation, thus rendering Roosevelt’s speeches seemingly approachable and personable. Yet this image is far from the reality of the Fireside Chats
themselves. The Fireside Chats were a tool that Roosevelt employed to gain support for his policies, and he frequently criticized his audience for their lack of faith and sacrifice (Lim 439). Rather than being invited for a friendly conversation around the kitchen fire, Americans were given a dreaded invitation into the father’s study for a stern dressing down.

Fireside Chat 21 is in keeping with Roosevelt’s usual style, calling on the American people to sacrifice more of their money and efforts in order to help sustain the war abroad. Once again, Roosevelt uses patriotism to rouse his audience, but he also introduces a new rhetorical move: he positions service and sacrifice for the nation as privileges. After explaining that not everyone can have the privilege to be engaged in combat overseas or even working in a factory to support the war effort he says,

But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States—every man, woman, and child—is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, (and) in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war.

Roosevelt, to great effect, uses the imagery of warfare in order to bring his audience into agreement with his view of sacrifice as a privilege. Those at home need not be embarrassed that they cannot fully engage in the war effort through battle because there is a battle left accessible to everyone: the battle for America itself. Additionally, the mundane details of daily lives and daily tasks can have the same importance as the sacrifice that soldiers must endure. The sacrifice
to which Roosevelt is referring, however, is not bodily, it is a financial sacrifice meant to keep the country’s economic system “fortified” and “secure;” both terms relating to protecting and maintaining military strongholds such as bases and trenches. Thus, the sacrifices that Americans can make are not merely in support of the war but are a war unto themselves; Americans left in the United States are fighting a war just as much as the men fighting abroad.

The sacrifice to which Roosevelt was alluding, however, had less to do with Americans’ actions and more with their acceptance of his 7-point economic plan. Due to wartime shortages, the cost of living was rising along with inflation, and Roosevelt proposed a plan to keep wages and the prices of goods artificially low. Once again, he relies on an appeal to common sense in order to guide his audience to accept his conclusion. As he states, “You do not have to be a professor of mathematics or economics to see that if people with plenty of cash start bidding against each other for scarce goods, the price of those goods (them) goes up.” And, of course, Roosevelt is correct. Here Roosevelt is using the basic law of supply and demand—that when supply goes down, demand rises—in order to uncover the self-evident nature of his proposals. In Roosevelt’s terms, one need not be an economist to understand the law of supply and demand just as one need not be an economist to accept Roosevelt’s 7-point plan. What is curious, however, is that Roosevelt is using a self-evident law that he will himself contradict. His 7-point plan is meant to artificially lower prices and wages while raising taxes in order to stimulate the economy. As noted from Houck, Roosevelt realized that he could use rhetoric in place of policy or, rather, that his rhetoric could become the policy. Therefore, Roosevelt did not feel the need to explain how it was possible for his economic plan, one based on artificially manipulating prices, to counteract the natural law of supply and demand in order to stimulate the economy. Instead,
Roosevelt needed the faith of the American people in order to make his rhetoric a reality. The sacrifice that Roosevelt calls for is the material self-sacrifice of altruism, it is a call to asceticism necessary for America to survive both a foreign war as well as a domestic, economic war. Roosevelt calls upon Americans to sacrifice both leisurely goods and necessities in order to support the war effort and he calls for Americans to give up their wages and ignore the law of supply in demand in order to right the economy.

Roosevelt realized, however, that the faith that his rhetoric inspired would not be enough to create long-lasting support for his 7-point plan. It is no coincidence that Roosevelt chose to introduce his 7-point plan during a speech highlighting America’s recent victories and defeats during World War II nor is it a coincidence that he chose to equate the economic sacrifices of Americans at home with the bodily sacrifices of the soldiers at war. While Roosevelt deploys warfare language in his “Four Freedoms Speech,” it is much more apparent in his Fireside Chat 21. As will be explored in discussions of President Johnson and Obama, struggle, strife, sacrifice, and warfare are all topos that progressive presidents use in order to gain support for their policies. One reason why Roosevelt decided to use war rhetoric during his Fireside Chat 21 may have been due to his desire to receive both higher approval ratings from the American people as well as more support for his 7-point plan. Here, it is important to note the medium of the Fireside Chat itself as a direct public appeal. Given the success of direct public appeals for gaining support for his policies, Roosevelt doubled the number of these Fireside Chats that he delivered in 1942 (Baum and Kernell 212). As Baum and Kernell discuss, despite the common remembrances of Roosevelt’s presidency as one of the most successful in American history, Roosevelt experienced the same fluctuations in his popularity common to the office of the
president, with support for his proposals and for him as a leader typically lining up according to party identification as well as socioeconomic status (199). While support was mixed for Roosevelt’s economic initiatives, he saw widespread popularity in the lead up to World War II and in his decision to aid the British (Baum and Kernell 224). While support did wax and wane according to America’s victories and losses in WWII, war appeared to be one area where Americans had faith in their leader regardless of party identification and socioeconomic status. It would make sense, then, that Roosevelt would not only use the language of warfare in his economic initiatives but make his 7-point plan a necessary component for winning the war. In warfare, Roosevelt found himself successful as a leader with the American people and he found widespread support for his foreign policies. It made sense, then, for him to use the language of warfare in order to bolster support for his economic initiatives.

Yet increasing the popularity of both himself personally and of his policies is not enough to explain why Roosevelt would have chosen to compare the economic sacrifice Americans experienced during WWII to the bodily sacrifices that American soldiers were making. While Roosevelt tried to make his policies seem like necessary plans that followed from a self-evident reality, to a wearied electorate they amounted to little more than the “full dinner pails and full garages” that Hoover had promised. Without a plan for growth and prosperity that did not rely on manipulating wages and prices against their real value, Roosevelt had to court the faith of the American people. During World War I, economist John Maynard Keynes recognized that central planning had allowed countries like the United States to realize a high level of economic output, and he wanted to translate this wartime centralization into a plan for peacetime. Yet Roosevelt was reluctant to accept Keynes’ conjectures and introduce central planning into the American
economy. As Richard Adelstein writes in “The Nation as an Economic Unit: Keynes, Roosevelt, and the Managerial Ideal,” “Roosevelt was no tyrant. He intuitively grasped the fundamental problem of central planning in a free society—how to imbue the people with a spirit of common purpose sufficiently powerful to win their submission to the ends of the planners and their consent to the intrusive control of day-to-day economic affairs that planning must entail” (162). Until 1938, Roosevelt continued to resist the idea of central planning and increasing federal spending as a way to right the economy after the Great Depression. He finally relented and took more control of the economy as World War II began (Adelstein 184). For Keynes, the First World War had demonstrated what economic output was possible when economic planning was undertaken and beginning in 1932 he had urged Roosevelt to view the Great Depression as a time of war. Warfare still provides an opportunity for Americans to give up more of their negative freedom in return for security—be it economic security or security in their person. Therefore, utilizing the language of warfare, Roosevelt was able to make a more compelling case for his 7-point plan which emphasizes central planning. Sacrifice, then, means not only Americans sacrificing higher wages in order to stabilize the economy but sacrificing their negative liberties—and turning towards positive liberties—in order to be, according to Roosevelt, economically secure.

By the end of his presidency, Roosevelt knew how to draw his audience in and persuade them to agree with his policy proposals. Yet his fourth and final inaugural address, given in

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*Adelstein continues: “To solve it, he built a formidable planning machine, put the force of law behind it, and then tried to preserve the fragile unity he had created by standing above the policy battle, by withholding his personal support and prestige from any overall strategy or agenda of specific choices and offering instead his own personality as the unifying focus of the planning effort.”

*Most recently we have seen Americans giving up their liberty in terms of their right to privacy during the Bush and Obama administrations under the pretense of national security.*
1945, abandons the previous speeches’ appeals to reason, giving a more spiritual view. In keeping with his appeal to common sense and the common American, Roosevelt decides to quote from his schoolmaster, Dr. Peabody, rather than selecting a more prominent American figure. Quoting his teacher, Roosevelt states, “Things in life will not always run smoothly. Sometimes we will be rising toward the heights—then all will seem to reverse itself and start downward. The great fact to remember is that the trend of civilization itself is forever upward; that a line drawn through the middle of the peaks and the valleys of the centuries always has an upward trend.”

Here, Roosevelt is displaying a common thread that runs through progressive thought. History is always moving upwards towards greater progress and, despite the occasional setback, will never stop accelerating towards the greatest height of human destiny (Pestritto and Atto 10). By extension progressives, who saw themselves as holding the proper worldview, would always have morality on their side, even if it took ages for their views to come to fruition. The sentiment is heartening but also provides a safeguard for any failures that Roosevelt’s policies may have faced. Even if Roosevelt’s policies faltered or even failed, they would eventually prove the correct course of action, leading the United States and the world to the pinnacle of achievement.

In addition to looking forward towards the heights that the United States will achieve, Roosevelt’s final inaugural speech also invokes the Constitution and America’s founding: “Our Constitution of 1787 was not a perfect instrument; it is not perfect yet. But it provided a firm base upon which all manner of men, of all races and colors and creeds, could build our solid

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\(g\) Martin Luther King Jr. captured the sentiment of this line nearly two decades later with arguably greater eloquence in his Sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood preaching, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”
structure of democracy.” The purpose of referencing the Constitution is twofold. First, Roosevelt admits that the Constitution is imperfect but not devoid of hope. If Roosevelt and the progressives succeeding him could alter the Constitution properly it would be able to govern people’s actions in the present rather than remaining an instrument of the past. Second, the Constitution, despite its flaws, is still the basis for American democracy. By acknowledging that the Constitution provides a “firm base” for the “solid structure of democracy” Roosevelt quiets any fears that his changes will substantially alter the very nature of the United States’ democratic republic (Pestritto and Atto 6; Kesler 112-113).

In closing his inaugural address, Roosevelt diverges from both the “Four Freedoms Speech” and his Fireside Chat 21 by specifically invoking God as the providence for America’s prosperity and singularity. As he states, “The Almighty God has blessed our land in many ways. He has given our people stout hearts and strong arms with which to strike mighty blows for freedom and truth. He has given to our country a faith which has become the hope of all peoples in an anguished world.” Despite his usual reliance on reason and rationality, Roosevelt chooses instead to focus on how God has blessed Americans with “stout hearts and strong arms,” painting Americans as strong and loving people but not necessarily mentioning their intellectual or logical capabilities. Furthermore, the strong arms with which God has endowed the American people ought to “strike mighty blows for freedom and truth.” Rather than winning the moral case for freedom and truth through self-evident postures of logic, Americans ought to use their physical prowess in order to maintain their position as a beacon of “the hope of all peoples in an anguished world” and further spread the ideals of freedom and truth through might. Yet in consideration of the fact that many of his other speeches and policies also relied on faith,
Roosevelt’s direct appeal to faith and divine benevolence in his final inaugural speech is unsurprising. His final two freedoms in his “Four Freedoms Speech” relied on faith in the existence of a guarantor who could protect people from both want and fear, despite the fact that Roosevelt never named one in particular. Furthermore, accepting Roosevelt’s 7-point plan from his Fireside Chat 21 also required faith in that one had to believe Roosevelt’s plan, which worked counterintuitively to the law of supply and demand, would be successful. Ultimately then, while Roosevelt’s appeal to faith seems uncharacteristic in this speech, it is a common current running throughout his speeches as a means to bolster the spirit of Americans as well as support for his economic policies.

Despite Franklin Roosevelt’s policies and speeches during the first eight years of his presidency that demonstrated his commitment to a larger federal government, his “Four Freedoms Speech” in 1941 enunciated a full paradigm shift away from negative liberty and towards positive liberty. By appealing to reason, Roosevelt was not only able to gain support for his economic initiatives but also seamlessly introduce a new interpretation of liberty that expanded beyond the American people and outward towards the world as a whole. The support that Roosevelt’s economic policies received was clear given the fact that a year later, during his Fireside Chat 21, he felt emboldened to offer a 7-point economic plan that greatly relied on Keynesian economics. In his final inaugural address, Roosevelt expressly appeals to Americans’ faith, to their hearts and hands, rather than to their intellect, seemingly abandoning his past tactic. Yet the faith of the American people was necessary for Roosevelt’s economic policies to work which is why it is unsurprising that in his final inaugural address he decided to explicitly invoke God. Furthermore, Roosevelt’s speech served to comfort Americans that they were on the right
side of history and would eventually prevail throughout the course of time. Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency marked a turning point for American progressivism, and his rise to the presidency during the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II marks him as one of the most important presidents in American history. Perhaps because of his importance in American history, scholars tend to understate the shift from negative to positive liberty that occurred during his presidency, whether for better or worse, which fundamentally altered the concept of rights. Most impressive is that Roosevelt was able to radically alter the American conception of liberty with his words alone. With his words he was able to sway a nation to support an expansion of the Federal Government and perhaps, as Roosevelt would have hoped, educate the nation about how an expansion of government would better serve their freedom. Yet Roosevelt’s rhetorical and political influences stretched further than his own present, as his ideas and rhetorical tactics continued and continue to mark the speeches of the presidents who followed him.

**CHAPTER II: LYNDON JOHNSON AND SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP**

“These are the most hopeful times in all the years since Christ was born in Bethlehem.... Today—as never before—man has in his possession the capacities to end war and preserve peace, to eradicate poverty and share abundance, to overcome the diseases that have afflicted the human race and permit all mankind to enjoy their promise in life on this earth.” - Lyndon Johnson, Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, 1964

Like Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson’s ascent to the presidency came after considerable turbulence in the United States. Rising to power after President Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson also had to contend with a significant amount of social change due to the shifting demographics brought on by the Baby Boomer generation as well as the Civil Rights Movement (Patterson 7). Additionally, Johnson hoped to emulate Roosevelt’s New Deal (Savage 248-249). Embarking on the largest expansion of the welfare state in American history since Roosevelt’s
tenure, Johnson laid the framework for his idea of the Great Society, the central focus of his
domestic policy, which intended to transform America’s economic strength and production into
spiritual and cultural strength. Furthermore, while Roosevelt’s plans for the New Deal rested on
the importance of positive liberties and began to introduce the concept of social citizenship into
mainstream political thought, Johnson’s Great Society relied most heavily on social
citizenship—the idea that citizenship requires economic security, guaranteed by the state—in
order to come to fruition. Like Roosevelt, Johnson also deployed the language of warfare when
implementing his economic policies—policies that he hoped would differentiate him from his
predecessor, John Kennedy. Unlike WWII which helped define Roosevelt’s presidency, the
Vietnam War was ultimately unpopular and partially damaged the Johnson administration due to
the United States’ escalation of the Vietnam War during the 1960’s. This section will take up a
discussion of two of Johnson’s speeches which introduced his main policies that expanded the
welfare state. In doing so, it will also provide a discussion of the importance of social citizenship
for progressive presidents. Social citizenship was by no means a new concept during Johnson’s
presidency, yet his policy proposals for the Great Society and the War on Poverty both rely on a
redefinition of citizenship to include social citizenship and a guarantee for economic security.

Johnson’s remarks at the 1964 Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony were not unwarranted.
After more than a year in the office of the president, Johnson was both looking for a fresh start
given the tumult of the previous year and was optimistic about his own presidency after having
recently introduced his proposal for expanding the welfare state through his plans for the Great
Society. Unlike Roosevelt, Johnson decided to articulate his plans for the expansion of the
welfare state\textsuperscript{h} not during a major presidential address, like the State of the Union as Roosevelt had done, but during a commencement ceremony whose audience was largely comprised of young adults. The decision was no coincidence. For Johnson’s Great Society to have long-lasting impact and for it to succeed for generations after his presidency, Johnson would have to solicit support from the Baby Boomer generation, the earliest members of which coincided with the age group Johnson was addressing. Johnson opens his speech with an interesting and clever formation that helps make his audience feel invested in his speech and his policy proposal. As he speaks, “I have come today from the turmoil of your Capital to the tranquility of your campus to speak about the future of your country. The purpose of protecting the life of our Nation and preserving the liberty of our citizens is to pursue the happiness of our people. Our success in that pursuit is the test of our success as a Nation.” Both community and responsibility ring throughout this introduction. In the first sentence, Johnson uses the second-person possessive pronoun “your” repeatedly: your Capital, your campus, your country. This repetition reminds the audience of their personal connection to the capital and the country, that, as America’s citizens, they belong to a specific community and that the American government belongs to them.\textsuperscript{i} Yet both community and ownership come with responsibility, as Johnson will make clear in the remainder of his speech. In the next sentence, Johnson moves to using the first-person plural possessive pronoun “our”: our Nation, our citizens, our people. Here, Johnson widens the circle of the community as well as the circle of ownership to include himself and all Americans not

\textsuperscript{h} I use the term “welfare state” neutrally and by the definition of the welfare state as “A country in which the welfare of members of the community is underwritten by means of State-run social services” (OED).

\textsuperscript{i} The epistrophe in this sentence is also reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: “…that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
present at the occasion. Without resorting to clichéd rhetoric, Johnson is able to erase the distinction between regular citizen and government insider, capital and country as a whole, and asks his audience to come together with other Americans as well as with the government to pursue the best future possible for the United States.

Furthermore, Johnson’s deliberate use of country and nation in this introduction also helps to introduce patriotism into his proposal for the Great Society. While frequently used interchangeably, there is an important distinction between country and nation. “Country” refers to “a tract of land of undefined extent; a region, district,” whereas “nation” refers to “a large aggregate of communities and individuals united by factors such as common descent, language, culture, history, or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people” (OED). In short, Johnson uses “country” in the first sentence to denote a place where the students live, whereas he uses “nation” in the second sentence to underscore an entire set of values associated with the United States. Johnson, like Roosevelt, uses patriotic language like “nation” to gain his audience’s support but in a much more subtle manner, and as he continues Johnson never identifies his audience as “Americans,” choosing instead to reference America’s founding. As he speaks, “For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people. The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization.” While not outwardly patriotic, this passage hearkens back to America’s founding, cataloguing the strife that the American people faced and overcame. More importantly, however, is how Johnson emphasizes the importance of communal struggle and effort in the founding of the
United States. Despite resisting the cliché hallmarks of patriotism, Johnson still manages to invoke patriotism with his repeated use of “we”; he begins with how “we” labored to settle and subdue a continent, and includes not only himself in this group and the students he is addressing, but every generation of Americans preceding them since the country’s founding. The repetition of we in these lines embeds not only a deep sense of community but one of continuity from the nation’s founding through to the present day. Therefore, without having to explicitly ask the question, Johnson asks his audience whether they will continue the work of the preceding generations to make America great. The answer, for anyone with even the slightest sense of patriotic pride, is in the affirmative. Also of importance is how Johnson traces the history of America. He begins by describing how Americans settled and subdued a continent, referencing both country and nation formation. Both the people and land that Americans tamed helped to form both territorial and cultural cohesion, allowing for Johnson’s next phase of history: the Industrial Revolution. Through “unbounded invention and untiring industry,” Americans provided for their material wealth. Notice too the language of struggle in these two phases of history. Through labor, unbounded invention, and untiring industry, Americans were able to create the society Johnson’s audience experienced in 1964. Thus it is no surprise that the final phase of Johnson’s history, the construction of a spiritual wealth that will “advance the quality of [the] American civilization,” will also be challenging. Creating the Great Society will be an arduous challenge.

Reverting back to the second-person possessive pronoun, Johnson introduces the concept of the Great Society to the audience saying, “Your imagination, your initiative, and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs,
or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth. For in your
time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society,
but upward to the Great Society.” It is difficult to deny that this explanation of the Great Society
is not rousing and inspiring, but while this introduction of the Great Society swells with idealism,
it is ultimately not based on the concerns of the present reality but instead based on the ideal of
Americans actively willing their future reality; the imagination, initiative and indignation of
Johnson’s audience will construct the Great Society. All three of these are important when
launching a large-scale policy effort but the three are insufficient to bring about actual social
change without a set of ideas, values, goals, and virtuous, intelligent leaders. Moreover, the
language that Johnson uses, that Americans can “build” a society according to certain values and
visions, demonstrates that Johnson views society as capable of being artificially and self-
consciously created by a nation’s people. The Great Society, for Johnson then, is not an organic
and spontaneous entity, but one that must be painstakingly cultivated by motivated and caring
Americans. Like the Americans who tamed an uncivilized, uncultivated continent, Johnson’s
audience will have to tame and harness America’s “unbridled growth” in order to construct the
Great Society. It is no wonder then that Johnson returns to the second-person possessive to
describe the audience’s time. He switches between the possessive pronoun your (time) and the
plural personal pronoun we (have the opportunity) to stress that the present as well as the future
belong to the younger generation he is addressing, instilling a sense of ownership and urgency on
the younger generations in order to mobilize them towards action. Lastly, two seemingly
common metaphors in the last sentence of this section are important to point out: “...toward the
rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.” These metaphors,
toward and upward, are “orientational metaphors,” according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*, making them the most metaphors that best explain the most fundamental concepts because they are based on the orientation of the human body and do not require any further metaphors for accessibility (56). Lyndon Johnson is here trying to demonstrate what he thinks is a fundamental truth about the United States: that it is destined for an apex of civilization in the Great Society. From toiling to subdue a continent, to laboring during the Industrial Revolution, Americans must now move upwards towards a new spiritual and social high; they cannot move laterally “towards” more material prosperity.

For Johnson, the Great Society was not only the name of a program or a new policy proposal, it was an ideal for which the American people should strive. As he describes it, “[The Great Society] is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.” Johnson places emphasis on the Great Society as a means to fulfill Americans’ spiritual desires rather than their material ones. While these goals, and their quality, remains indefinite, their importance for Johnson’s audience is clear: these goals will provide Americans with a sense of fulfillment that the post-war largesse could not supply. While pretty and inspirational, Johnson’s idyllic, almost bucolic, view of the Great Society is quite vague, and two things are important to note in this passage. First, Johnson intends not only for Americans to continually strive for an ideal but for the United States to ultimately embody the Great Society, to be the Great Society. Unlike
Aristotle’s “good life” which Johnson references, the Great Society would be a physical, actual location embodied by the United States. He continually uses the phrase “It is a place” to describe the Great Society, referencing the Great Society’s actual, concrete nature and, at the same time, using the present tense “is,” supporting the idea that the Great Society already exists or at least has the potential to exist. Second, Johnson’s desire to transform America into the Great Society made it difficult for his policy proposal to survive in the long term. As the historian Robert Daniels writes in *The Fourth Revolution* “All revolutions overreach in their trajectories. One way or another they are compelled to fall back to a level more compatible with society’s habits and traditions, whatever advanced rhetoric may persist … So it was with the Fourth Revolution, as currents of radicalism within it alienated some of its supporters while carrying its demands beyond the limits of the tolerable for most of society” (68). Daniels’ conclusion is interesting because it implies that both the ultimate end of the Great Society as well as its compatibility with American values was overreaching. Johnson’s Great Society had difficulty fulfilling its objectives because, first, it did not strive towards concrete goals but instead strove to bring about the best American society possible. Additionally, as Daniels makes clear, Americans could not fully accept the Great Society’s aims, perhaps because while they may have allowed for spontaneous, organic societies, they were ultimately controlled by a framework of federal programs and offices.

The turning point in Johnson’s speech, which comes right before he begins to describe the three different areas in which Americans can strive for the great society, issues a challenge to

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1 As he speaks, “Aristotle said: ‘Men come together in cities in order to live, but they remain together in order to live the good life.’ It is harder and harder to live the good life in American cities today.”

2 Daniels describes the Fourth Revolution as “the social protests that burst forth in many forms in the mid-twentieth century, all over the modern and modernizing world” of which the Great Society was one example (x).
his audience, advising them that Americans will have to continually fight in order to obtain and maintain the Great Society. As he speaks, “[The Great Society] is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.” Johnson’s use of the word “destiny” ought to be of comfort to his audience. The Great Society is something that will necessarily occur in the United States, whether in a decade or in a century, whether Johnson’s audience has enough imagination, initiative, and indignation, or not. The trajectory, then, of moving upwards towards the Great Society rather than toward the wealthy or powerful society is a natural, inevitable progression.

The first area where Americans can fight for the Great Society is in cities, according to Johnson, because the American population would become increasingly urban over the next half century, necessitating upgrades to America’s infrastructure in order to accommodate this demographic change. Yet Johnson describes what he sees as the largest problem of the expansion of cities, “Worst of all expansion is eroding the precious and time honored values of community with neighbors and communion with nature. The loss of these values breeds loneliness and boredom and indifference.” For Johnson, the problem is a general malaise that will descend on Americans as they move into cities and are alienated from nature. However ill-defined Johnson leaves loneliness, boredom, and indifference, it is clear here that his focus is on how the Great Society will fulfill Americans’ spiritual desires. Whereas Americans from the past had to first focus on the security of their bodies and families, and tame a continent, and then had to focus on their material security through laboring in the industrial revolution, now Americans can turn their focus towards providing for their spiritual security. Furthermore, this section introduces some doubt into whether the Great Society is as inevitable as Johnson has lead his audience to believe.
An erosion of values like “community with neighbors and communion with nature”—values that Johnson upholds as of utmost importance to Americans because of their traditional importance—would prove detrimental to the realization of the Great Society. To prevent this erosion, Americans, to use an appropriate metaphor, must turn the tide on the expansion of cities both culturally and geographically, and transform cities into places where, as Johnson puts it, “people will not only come to live but to live the good life.”

Johnson continues this spiritual view of maintaining communion with one another and with the country as he describes the next area where Americans can concentrate their efforts for the Great Society, the countryside. Johnson argues that the beauty of the countryside is rapidly diminishing, the results of which will become detrimental to both Americans’ physical and spiritual health. As he speaks, “For once the battle is lost, once our natural splendor is destroyed, it can never be recaptured. And once man can no longer walk with beauty or wonder at nature his spirit will wither and his sustenance be wasted.” In addition to the imagery of the human soul withering and dying as nature diminishes, this is also the first time in the speech that Johnson explicitly refers to the challenge that Americans will face, should they choose to advance his policies of the Great Society, as a “battle.” The word choice is interesting given the fact that Johnson does not define what force is opposing Americans’ efforts to keep their countryside beautiful and thriving. Without a clearly-defined opposing force one can only assume that the enemy of the American people is the American people themselves; the opposing force is Roosevelt’s “trouble makers” who dare to oppose the president’s policy proposals whether because of a different vision or because of a different preferred method. Yet Johnson is not as explicit as Roosevelt, and while this may indicate that he is open towards dissent, it actually
helps to strengthen his audience’s support for his proposal. By not acknowledging that there are “trouble makers,” that there are people who could disagree with the president’s policy proposal, Johnson makes it seem like the Great Society, like many of the policy proposals labeled “common sense,” is an objective that all Americans will naturally support because it is inherently reasonable.

The third central focus of the Great Society, the third place where Americans must concentrate their efforts according to Johnson, is in the classroom. It is in this area of his speech that Johnson’s remarks center heavily on the progressive idea of an evolving, federal government that is simultaneously rooted in the vision of the founding while accommodating modern-day concerns (Pestritto and Atto 6). As he states, “The solution to these problems does not rest on a massive program in Washington, nor can it rely solely on the strained resources of local authority. They require us to create new concepts of cooperation, a creative federalism, between the National Capital and the leaders of local communities.” The term creative Federalism is a curious one, demonstrating that Johnson must pay homage, or at least lip service, to the ideals of the founding, while giving himself ample room to reinterpret the Constitution to fit his policy agenda. Like Roosevelt before him, Johnson references the Constitution in order to present his plan as wholly American as well as to accentuate the continuity of history—Johnson’s Great Society will continue the work that the founding fathers began when they tamed and settled a continent in the name of a new nation.

To close his speech, Johnson enters into a litany of questions reminiscent of the manner in which a general would rouse his troops. As he speaks,

So, will you join in the battle to give every citizen the full equality which God
enjoins and the law requires, whatever his belief, or race, or the color of his skin?
Will you join in the battle to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty? Will you join in the battle to make it possible for all nations to live in enduring peace—as neighbors and not as mortal enemies? Will you join in the battle to build the Great Society, to prove that our material progress is only the foundation on which we will build a richer life of mind and spirit?

The anaphora of this section, the continued utterance of “Will you join in the battle,” reminds Johnson’s audience that obtaining the Great Society will require a struggle and a fight. Moreover, the choice to use the term “battle” rather than “struggle” or “fight” suggests that there is a clear objective to be won. Yet, once again, it also introduces the concept of a battle that is one-sided, a battle during which Americans will not have a clear enemy with whom they can fight. While it may seem incongruous for Johnson to choose to use the term battle for an initiative that he hopes will bring about greater spiritual fulfillment as well as a greater sense of community, it is not inconsistent at the level of metaphor. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write,

Perhaps the most important thing to stress about grounding is the distinction between an experience and the way we conceptualize it. We are not claiming that physical experience is in any way more basic than other kinds of experience, whether emotional, mental, cultural, or whatever. All of these experiences may be just as basic as physical experiences. Rather, what we are claiming about grounding is that we typically conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical—that is, we conceptualize the less clearly delineated in terms of the more
clearly delineated. (59)

As previously discussed, although Johnson’s proposal for the Great Society and his ultimate goal of making the best American society possible are inspiring, the Great Society itself is somewhat poorly defined. By using the language of warfare, however, Johnson is able to concretize his proposal. Despite modern attempts to remove the soldier from harm’s way as much as possible through technological advancement, war was and still remains one of the most highly embodied experiences. In addition to its physical rigors, warfare forces the soldier to face his or her physical destruction on a regular basis, calling attention to the body’s actual physicality as a concrete, definite object. It is entirely appropriate, then, for Johnson to use the language of warfare to introduce his concept of the Great Society. Without a tangible or even well-defined concept, Johnson had to turn to one of the most highly embodied metaphors, warfare, in order to concretize the Great Society for his audience.

Johnson’s use of war rhetoric to introduce the Great Society is unsurprising given the fact that the Great Society is a policy extension of his aptly-named War on Poverty, an initiative he introduced during his 1964 State of the Union Address. Eager to both continue the work of Kennedy and cement his own place in American history, Johnson decided to focus his domestic policy efforts towards eradicating poverty in the United States. In his opening lines, Johnson defines this initiative as an all-out war, perhaps optimistic about America’s ability to mobilize for a “war” given its ability to do so twice in the two and a half decades prior to Johnson’s presidency. As he states, “This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort.” Rather than calling this a fight or a challenge to end poverty, Johnson decides to use the term
“war” for its ability to call Americans to action in a clear, concrete manner. Yet this vision of a battle against American poverty is inconsistent with how Johnson begins his speech, “Let this session of Congress be known as the session ... which declared all-out war on human poverty” (emphasis added). Johnson’s switch in his speech from human poverty to American poverty, his decision to shorten the battlefield from the world to the United States, merits examination. While Johnson does address global poverty later in his speech, and does give some suggestions on how to combat it, he protects himself from the criticism that the United States ought to solve the problems in its own backyard before it becomes the caregiver of the world. Yet Robert Daniels provides another reason for Johnson’s focus change from the world and all humans to the United States. As he writes in The Fourth Revolution, “Johnson’s vision entailed a sweeping agenda of governmental action, under a timetable compressed by his fear that political support for his program would not endure” (56). While Daniels argues that this lead Johnson to enact hasty legislation, it also opens the possibility that Johnson knew that he had to mobilize Americans quickly in order to make any strides in the War on Poverty. Therefore, Johnson had to tighten the scope of his policies in the hopes that Americans would see concrete results in the War on Poverty and feel compelled to continue supporting Johnson and his anti-poverty initiative.

The war rhetoric in Johnson’s speech does not fade as he begins to develop his policy proposals for how Americans are to assault poverty within their own country. As he speaks, “Our chief weapons in a more pinpointed attack will be better schools, and better health, and better homes, and better training, and better job opportunities to help more Americans, especially young Americans, escape from squalor and misery and unemployment rolls where other citizens help to carry them.” The language of a “pinpointed attack” masks the truth that Johnson himself
knew at this time, that the War on Poverty would culminate in the largest expansion of the welfare state since the New Deal. As if anticipating how Americans would grow weary of Johnson’s leadership and his war in Vietnam, Johnson presents the War on Poverty as a precise, elegant one. Juxtaposing the precise, pinpointed attack is what this war is supposed to accomplish: “better” schools, health, homes, training, and job opportunities. Like the vague benchmarks that Johnson offers in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan,” Johnson’s calls for Americans to make the United States better does not define a clear set of goals nor do they give a clear sense of victory for the War on Poverty.

The use of a “pinpointed attack” is also interesting because it conjures up the image of a surgeon, carefully and precisely cutting away and destroying the parts of a system that do not work. Using the language of the “pinpointed attack” Johnson gracefully transitions into comparing poverty to a disease saying, “Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it. No single piece of legislation, however, is going to suffice.” Presenting poverty as a disease to be eradicated also clarifies the unnamed opposition that Johnson presents when he introduces the Great Society. To a certain extent, the opposition to America's prosperity and spiritual health is poverty made possible by flaws in the social system. Johnson’s reluctance to name a concrete opposing force in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan” has to do with a new view of poverty as a structural problem rather than an individual one. As Charles Murray writes in Losing Ground:

What emerged in the mid-1960s was an almost unbroken intellectual consensus that the individualist explanation of poverty was altogether outmoded and reactionary. Poverty was not a consequence of indolence or vice. It was not the
just deserts of people who didn’t try hard enough. It was produced by conditions that had nothing to do with individual virtue or effort. Poverty was not the fault of the individual but of the system. (29)

While Johnson may not explicitly name the opposition in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan” to disincentivize dissent, he also does not name the opposition because it is, in Johnson’s view, the social system of the United States itself. Yet declaring war on the United States’ social system would have been rather nonsensical given the various positive attributes the social system had. Rather, Johnson pinpointed a specific negative consequence of American society: Poverty.

In this State of the Union address as in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan,” Johnson continues to balance the idea of the founding with contemporary needs. As he speaks,

This budget, and this year’s legislative program, are designed to help each and every American citizen fulfill his basic hopes—his hopes for a fair chance to make good; his hopes for fair play from the law; his hopes for a full-time job on full-time pay; his hopes for a decent home for his family in a decent community; his hopes for a good school for his children with good teachers; and his hopes for security when faced with sickness or unemployment or old age.

The first two hopes that Johnson begins with, the hope for a fair chance to make good and the hope for “fair play from the law” are both long-standing views of negative liberties. Yet the hopes that follow are, very much like Roosevelt’s four freedoms, based on a positive view of

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1 Johnson’s “War on Poverty” is distinct from President Nixon’s “War on Drugs” in a number of ways. First, the War on Drugs actually utilizes militaristic functions in order to combat the illegal drug trade. Furthermore, the War on Drugs targets a specific set of items, behaviors, and the people associated with illegal drugs. Lastly, the War on Drugs is largely proscriptive whereas the War on Poverty is largely prescriptive.
liberty. Johnson explicitly refers to these hopes as those of an American *citizen*, and the hopes that he lists here go beyond a positive view of liberty to incorporate a view of social citizenship which, as T.H. Marshall describes it in “Citizenship and Social Class,” “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (149). Economic welfare is an important component of this portion of Johnson’s speech as he views the hope for full-time work and (economic) security for unemployment and sickness as fundamental hopes that all American citizens share. Putting aside the fact that a “full-time” job seems arbitrarily determined both by American tradition and by Johnson himself, the different requirements for social citizenship in Johnson’s speech seem to follow the same pattern as Roosevelt’s four freedoms: they are subjective. Take for example the hope “for a decent home for his family in a decent community.” Here, Johnson does not describe what constitutes decent, just as he does not describe what constitutes a decent home or community, a good school or teacher. Thus, while Johnson’s policy proposals at the end of his speech are more exact, they can only demonstrate that Johnson wishes to improve the lives of Americans but they cannot explain how or how much he will improve their lives. Furthermore, community and citizenship are both of importance in this section, as they are both central themes in Johnson’s “Remarks at the University of Michigan.” This is in keeping with the view of social citizenship and rights that Marshall explains: “Citizenship requires direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to a civilisation which is a common possession” (151). Therefore, the ownership and community

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In this same speech Johnson states, “I believe the enactment of a 35-hour week would sharply increase costs, would invite inflation, would impair our ability to compete, and merely share instead of creating employment. But I am equally opposed to the 45- or 50-hour week in those industries where consistently excessive use of overtime causes increased unemployment.”
that Johnson stresses in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan” speech as well as the community and citizenship that Johnson stresses in this State of the Union address are important components of social citizenship which, while inconsistent with the view of negative liberties enshrined in the constitution, were consistent with Johnson and Roosevelt’s view of positive liberties necessary for the contemporary American society.

The end of Johnson’s speech dovetails beautifully with Roosevelt’s third and fourth freedoms from his “Four Freedom Speech.” Recalling Roosevelt’s freedoms from want and fear, Johnson states, “So I ask you now in the Congress and in the country to join with me in expressing and fulfilling that faith in working for a nation, a nation that is free from want and a world that is free from hate—a world of peace and justice, and freedom and abundance, for our time and for all time to come.” The similarity between these two freedoms and Roosevelt’s is not surprising given Johnson’s deep admiration for Roosevelt. Once again, Johnson relies on the sense of community, that Americans must work together in order to bring about, and the themes of national identity, community, and labor are ones already seen in his “Remarks at the University of Michigan.” Furthermore, freedom and abundance go hand in hand at the end of this speech, highlighting Johnson’s focus on social citizenship and on the idea that one cannot partake in the benefits of citizenship—like freedom and democracy—without economic security.

CHAPTER III: BARACK OBAMA AND THE APPLICATION OF RAWLSIAN ETHICS

“After all, that’s the spirit that has always moved this nation forward. It’s the spirit of citizenship – the recognition that through hard work and responsibility, we can pursue our individual dreams, but still come together as one American family to make sure the next generation can pursue its dreams as well.” —Barack Obama, State of the Union Address 2014

When President Obama assumed the presidency, America was, and is still, involved in its
longest war—The War in Afghanistan—and the United States was attempting to right itself from what would retroactively be termed the “Great Recession.” Obama’s 2008 campaign for the presidency was a clear victory in terms of both marketing and messaging. His “Hope and Change” campaign, while wildly successful, also demonstrates Obama’s reliance on metaphor, spirituality, and emotion for persuasive rhetoric. Hope and change have posed certain problems for Obama’s administrations, specifically given the fact that these terms promise nearly utopian fulfillment, in other words, calling for “hope and change” requires the rhetorician to balance different, and often competing, notions of what to hope for and how much and what to change. In order to speak of hope and change, Obama has had to try to tap into a commonality of the American people, broadening the stylistically progressive rhetorical move of recalling America’s past and founding (Rockman 1077). Balancing individual notions of hope and change with the collective fervor that propelled Obama to power has proven difficult. Yet while Obama’s situation has been unique, his rhetoric is similar to that of both Roosevelt and Johnson because of its focus on social citizenship and positive liberties.

President Obama first introduced his desire to overhaul the American health care system during an address to the American Medical Association on June 15, 2009, but he made a formal request to Congress three months later, spurring the legislature to eventually pass what would become the landmark bill of Obama’s tenure, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) commonly referred to as “Obamacare.” The difference between the two speeches is somewhat drastic. While addressing the American Medical Association, Obama lays out a number of specific proposals including electronic record-keeping, reducing obesity, and
preventative health care. On the other hand, Obama’s speech before Congress gives few policy suggestions; instead, the speech works to move Congress towards action on health care reform. Like Johnson’s introduction of the Great Society, Obama’s speech to move Congress towards action on health care reform blurs the distinction between lawmaker and American citizen. As he speaks, “More and more Americans worry that if you move, lose your job, or change your job, you’ll lose your health insurance too. More and more Americans pay their premiums only to discover that their insurance company has dropped their coverage when they get sick or won’t pay the full cost of care. It happens every day” (emphasis added). Obama’s remarks to Congress were hardly improvised, and his decision to change between the third-person plural they and the second-person singular you was both careful and conscious. As will be seen later, Obama frequently relies on imagery of the American people as a solid mass that can move together to realize its goals, he even goes as far as referring to America as “one family” in his 2014 State of the Union Address. In part, Obama’s 2008 campaign slogan “Yes We Can!” gained popularity because it did not distinguish between individuals in the collective, all could help make forward progress towards some goal.

The lack of a distinction between Congress and the American people is also important because it demonstrates, rhetorically, more support for Obama’s proposal to reform health care. By blurring the distinction between the third and second-person, between them and you, Obama is able to show that the frustrations and problems of the current health care system are a common problem that all Americans face. While it is the responsibility of Congress to create the laws that

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n Additionally, it is during this speech that Obama made the now famous and often repeated comment, “We will keep this promise to the American people: If you like your doctor, you will be able to keep your doctor, period. If you like your health care plan, you’ll be able to keep your health care plan, period.” While Obama delivered this comment as a matter-of-fact guarantee, it ultimately became a falsehood.
will reform health care, it is a problem in which all have stock. It is no surprise, then, that Obama continues his speech with a series of appeals to reason:

   Now, these are the facts. Nobody disputes them. We know we must reform this system … But what we've also seen in these last months is the same partisan spectacle that only hardens the disdain many Americans have towards their own government. Instead of honest debate, we've seen scare tactics. Some have dug into unyielding ideological camps that offer no hope of compromise. Too many have used this as an opportunity to score short-term political points, even if it robs the country of our opportunity to solve a long-term challenge. And out of this blizzard of charges and countercharges, confusion has reigned.

Here, Obama begins with a succession of three short and effective appeals to reason. First, there are the facts, the measurable, quantifiable, and observable facts that the American health care system is deeply flawed. Next, because it is a fact that the health care system is flawed and not a subjective opinion, it is impossible for anyone to disagree that the American health care system is problematic. Lastly, Obama is proposing a health care reform based on his knowledge, which is rational and logical, and is not colored by his opinions nor by his emotions. After making it clear that his proposals for health care reform are reasonable and necessary, Obama moves to discuss those who would disagree or block his proposals for reform. Like Roosevelt’s “troublemakers” these politicians, Obama assumes, will disagree with a proposal that, up until

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° However reasonable this proposal is, there is, however, a jump in logic between agreeing that there are flaws in a system to calling for the system’s reform. Winston Churchill’s quote “... democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” acknowledges that flaws in a system do not and should not necessarily lead to the system’s reform.
this time in the speech, seemed like a natural and logical conclusion.

The first charge against these dissenters is that they refuse to engage in “honest debate” instead choosing to use “scare tactics” to realize their own political and policy goals. Debate, as a form of rhetoric, does not merit categorizations as to whether it is honest or dishonest. As previously discussed, rhetoric is amoral because it is merely a tool of persuasion. As debate is meant to persuade people, it cannot be either honest or dishonest. Furthermore, the “scare tactics” to which Obama alludes are certainly exaggerated rhetoric, but they are still forms of persuasion, like Obama’s speech itself. Here, Obama himself artfully engages in the same form of debate and scare tactics that his opponents use. By first demonstrating that his proposals are reasonable and logical, he implies that anyone who disagrees with health care reform is unreasonable and illogical. Because they are irrational, Obama’s opponents must rely on debate that does not merely present the facts but instead exaggerates opinions. Yet this formulation of his opponents is hardly a form of “honest debate” because it refuses debate between the opposing sides by painting one as illogical and incapable of debate. The second charge is that these dissenters are short-sighted in terms of America’s future—they care only for their own reelection without considering the long-term needs of the American people. Instead, Obama states that they rob Americans of an opportunity for betterment, implying that this opportunity exists a priori as the property and entitlement of the American people. This view of a priori opportunity for betterment demonstrates not only a perspective of continual American progression but one of divine benevolence. Finally, the last charge is that the dissent in Congress has created confusion. Overlooking the fact that the American political system is designed to move slowly and to create confusion in order to slow the legislative process, Obama views the confusion created by his
opponents negatively. Rather than the logical and reasonable atmosphere that Obama has brought to political discourse, his opponents prefer to create chaos and confusion, both of which will make America’s progress near impossible.

Thus, without having to address any of the concerns that his opposition might have, Obama has skillfully terminated debate and dissent. The next portion of his speech underscores this dismissal of his political opponents: “Well, the time for bickering is over. The time for games has passed. Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care. Now is the time to deliver on health care.” The first two sentences of this section demonstrate pettiness on the part of Obama’s opponents. Rather than debate, they engage in bickering. Furthermore, Obama views these fights as “games.” Like the short-sightedness he charged his opponents with earlier, here Obama is reaffirming the view that his opponents are concerned with unimportant, trifling, and unreal problems. Theirs is not a focus on reality but instead one consumed by gaining political clout. Unlike his opponents, however, Obama portrays himself as entirely focused on the present concerns of reality. His repetition of “now” in the next four sentences demonstrates that the problem of health care is not only a current concern but a real and pressing one. Furthermore, his third sentence, “Now is the season for action,” is interesting because it both diverges from and reaffirms his messaging. Until this point in the speech, Obama has focused on reason, rationality, and contemplation. The call to action, however, is in keeping with Obama’s most successful messaging, his 2008 campaign. The slogans of “Hope and Change” and “Yes we can!” with their implications of action without a defined, particular goal, were successful in
gaining support for Obama’s election and therefore a focus on action could be successful in gaining support for Obama’s legislative proposals.

While Obama’s speeches tend to use portraits of everyday Americans as symbols of American exceptionalism, he chose to finish this particular address by building off of a quote from Senator Edward “Ted” Kennedy, who had died recently before Obama delivered this address (Hoffman and Howard 1317). “[Kennedy] repeated the truth that health care is decisive for our future prosperity, but he also reminded me that ‘it concerns more than material things.’ ‘What we face,’ he wrote, ‘is above all a moral issue; at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country.’” Of course, these words are Ted Kennedy’s, not Obama’s; however, Obama made the decision to use these words in order to reaffirm the particularities of his proposal for health care reform. The view of policy as a moral, not a rational issue, has always been dominant in progressive political rhetoric, and as this quote demonstrates there is also a heavy focus on social justice which, in the progressive view, is only possible through government intervention. Obama continues, “I've thought about that phrase quite a bit in recent days—the character of our country. One of the unique and wonderful things about America has always been our self-reliance, our rugged individualism, our fierce defense of freedom, and our healthy skepticism of government. And figuring out the appropriate size and role of government has always been a source of rigorous and, yes, sometimes angry, debate. That's our history.” Like both Roosevelt and Johnson, Obama here decides to trace American history opting to discuss America’s “self-reliance” and “rugged individualism.” This imagery is, of course, an idealization of America’s founding and Western expansion. Yet this imagery is powerful because it taps into a common, American identity, and it
performs the delicate balancing act of acknowledging America’s common, shared identity while respecting the needs and concerns of particular individuals. Moreover, this section seems to walk back his previous comments about opposition and ideology. He agrees that a healthy skepticism of government does and should exist; however, the skepticism from his opponents does not merit this identification. Also, there is a time and a place for rigorous and angry debate, not dishonest debate.

Finally, after tracing this view of American history, of a country born of rugged individuals who, as in Johnson’s history, tamed a continent, Obama moves towards discussing the shaping of the future. The conclusion of his speech moves drastically away from the beginning, measured logic, and instead moves towards sweeping, inspirational emotionality. As he speaks, “We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we can act even when it's hard. I still believe. I still believe that we can act when it’s hard. I still believe we can replace acrimony with civility and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can do great things and that here and now we will meet history's test, because that's who we are. That is our calling. That is our character.” Obama continually repeats the phrase “I still believe,” demonstrating his own optimism and trying to inspire the same in his audience. “I still believe,” implies that despite certain hardships, one is able to continue forward. Furthermore, there is a view that the American people and, more importantly, the government, ought to take an active role in shaping the future of the country. Obama formulates this as a collaboration between the American people and the government. There is no longer any distinction between they and you as there was earlier in his speech; instead, there is only we. Additionally, Obama places emphasis on action by repeating the sentence “I still believe we can act even when it’s hard” twice.
Obama’s rhetoric frequently includes both explicit and implicit focuses on action because of its success with garnering rapid support. Lastly, action and forward progress are both inescapable because, as Obama states “That is our calling.” Thus, there is a higher aspiration for Americans to realize because, like their opportunity for betterment, it exists a priori.

Like President Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, Obama’s proposals to reform health care in the United States are based on a view of liberty as positive. Whether or not the proper role of government is to provide more options for health care is not in the purview of this project. What this project looks to address is not whether this view is correct, but to demonstrate that this view of health care as a right stems from a view of positive liberty that is incompatible with negative liberty. The expansion of public options for health care coincides with an expansion of the welfare state, and correlates with Roosevelt’s “freedom from want” which, recall, “[would] secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants.” If the ability to enjoy health is not available to a citizen of his own accord, then, in the progressive view of positive liberty, the government ought to furnish it. Obama’s decision to frame the health care debate as both a social justice issue and an issue reflective of America’s character is important for gaining popular support for his health care reform proposals. Yet America’s character as built on rugged individualism is disparate from the view of the government’s duty to provide social justice through positive liberties, specifically through the guarantee of health care (Berlin 194). As Isaiah Berlin argues, “It is a commonplace that neither political equality nor efficient organisation nor social justice is compatible with more than a modicum of individual liberty, and certainly not with unrestricted laissez-faire; that justice and generosity, public and private loyalties, the demands of genius and the claims of society can conflict violently with each other”
Reconciling America’s character of individualism with social justice requires both an appeal to morality and faith. First, it requires an appeal to morality because the ability of the government to fulfill each individual’s personal preferences and desires, specifically in terms of health care coverage, is impossible. Yet framing the provision of health care as the duty of government, as the morally just conclusion, is possible and can prove itself rhetorically popular (Lakoff 43). Second, it requires the faith that the government, as it protected Americans from both fear and want in Roosevelt's “Four Freedoms Speech”, can also provide for Americans’ health care needs. Therefore, while Obama frequently presents his proposal for health care reform as logical and practical, his true argument in favor of health care reform—and in increasing the welfare state through the PPACA—lies in his use of Kennedy’s words, that health care provision is a moral issue. Lastly, the language of faith is most apparent in Obama’s closing of his speech wherein he invokes social justice through health care reform as “America’s calling,” and repetitively uses the phrase “I believe.” Both America’s calling and the strong emphasis on belief rather than knowledge, point towards a focus on destiny and divinity that are faith-based rather than reality-based. Overall, the expansion of government’s roles and obligations, which invoke a view of liberty as positive, necessitate both an appeal to morality and faith in order to be persuasive.

In his State of the Union Address (SOTU) in 2014, President Obama reiterated many of the themes found in his Address to Congress in 2009; however, a focus on positive liberties is not the most prominent theme in his SOTU. Rather, he focuses on opportunity, and while this seems like a departure from his previous rhetoric focusing on wealth inequality prior to 2014, it
is in keeping with the evolution of progressive thought which currently relies most heavily on Rawlsian ethics and moral value of “justice as fairness.” Justice as fairness, as John Rawls conceptualizes in his *Theory of Justice* calls for equality in terms of “the assignment of basic rights and duties” and maintains that “inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society” (13). Rawls calls for a system of ethics that is not entirely egalitarian, but for one that is equitable in that it provides social arrangements that favor the least socially advantaged. While one could argue that this view of ethics does not perfectly account for President Obama’s actions, it is clear that Rawlsian ethics factor heavily in his rhetoric.

It seems, perhaps, out of his usual style for Obama to use the language of personal responsibility. After discussing the current state of affairs in America and addressing a government shutdown which had recently taken place before his address, he moves to discuss the goals and policy proposals he has set for the country. In his SOTU address he states the following:

> In the coming months, let’s see where else we can make progress together. Let’s make this a year of action. That’s what most Americans want – for all of us in this chamber to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. And what I believe unites the people of this nation, regardless of race or region or party, young or old, rich or poor, is the simple, profound belief in opportunity for all – the notion that if you work hard and take responsibility, you can get ahead.

“Action,” in this SOTU, is an important theme that Obama continually uses to try to define the remainder of his second term as active and dynamic, not passive or paralyzed. As mentioned
earlier, the SOTU is a balancing act between addressing Congress and addressing the American people watching and listening from home; the president uses this speech not only to lay out his policy proposals to the legislature, but to gain popular support from the American people. The first two sentences blur the distinction between Congress and the American people. Obama uses the phrases “Let’s see” and “Let’s make” to draw his audience together as a whole. Action will not be relegated to Congress alone but will expand to both the American people as well as the executive branch. It is no surprise then that Obama calls specifically for a year of action. Obama continues to blur the lines between legislature and laymen, as he did in his 2009 address to Congress, by interchangeably using the third-person plural and the second-person singular. He begins by identifying what Americans want, “for all of us in this chamber to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations.” Here, although Obama includes himself with the other members of government, he is speaking from the position as the representative of the American people. Yet he does not say that Americans want help for their needs or desires, instead, he calls for Congress to focus on the people’s “hopes” and “aspirations.” Both of these terms are forward-looking; they are not concerned with present, particular necessities and problems focusing instead on a future position which requires movement to occupy.

In the next few lines, Obama’s focus on individualism and personal responsibility are not exactly surprising. Recall that he used the imagery of rugged individualism in his 2009 address to Congress. What is interesting, however, is his shift from previous speeches of focusing on inequality to his new focus on expanding opportunity. The imagery of hard work and personal responsibility as the drivers for success is a powerfully American ideal but it is also an imagery that relies on a great deal of action. The individual in this formation does not passively wait for
opportunity to present itself but strikes out on her own to create her own success. The purpose of focusing on opportunity in this speech is twofold. First, it makes Obama’s rhetoric more appealing to a wider audience because it relies on American individualism for its imagery and does not bring up income disparities which tend to elicit more criticism. Second, it connects to the wider theme of action which runs throughout this speech.

Obama continues, “[W]hat I offer tonight is a set of concrete, practical proposals to speed up growth, strengthen the middle class, and build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class. Some require Congressional action, and I’m eager to work with all of you. But America does not stand still – and neither will I. So wherever and whenever I can take steps without legislation to expand opportunity for more American families, that’s what I’m going to do.” The commonality between presidents in describing their policy proposals as “practical” has already been noted, but what is intriguing here in the first sentence are the three metaphors that Obama uses to further describe his “concrete, practical proposals.” First, he wants to “speed up growth [of the middle class].” This metaphor implies that while there is perhaps opportunity in the middle class, it is not expanding at a rate that Obama finds adequate. Instead, it has stagnated or plateaued, and Obama must urge Congress to build new ladders of opportunity. The emphasis is on new because Obama does not deny that there are already ladders of opportunity towards upward social mobility that exist for the middle class; he instead calls for further work to be done. Additionally, he wants to strengthen the middle class, implying that an erosion has occurred which has caused fewer people to be categorized as middle class\(^p\). The next three

\(^p\) The appeal to the middle class is unsurprising and requires little analysis. Most Americans identify as middle class, and have done so for the past decade. Therefore, political rhetoric tends to focus on the middle class in order to appeal to the widest range of Americans (Dugan; *Gallup Politics*).
sentences focus heavily on the importance of action for creating legislation, and opportunity. Here Obama aligns himself more with the American people than a Congress that he has already painted as paralyzed, doing so with a simple and elegant phrase, “But America does not stand still – and neither will I.” This phrase is effective because it works to preemptively quiet criticisms of executive overreach by positioning Obama as the representative of the people who fully identifies with the qualities of Americans. Being fixed, passive, and paralyzed is un-American whereas movement and forward motion are American. Thus, as the American leader, Obama cannot help but to move forward, even without a paralyzed Congress. Here too, there is also a shift in Obama’s speech from focusing on increasing opportunity for American individuals but for American families, a shift which carries through to the next portion of his speech.

The image of the family is an important metaphor for political rhetoric because it serves to bring the nation together as a singular unit, and it helps to orient constituents relationally to the government in terms that are familiar and nearly universal (Adams 56). Using the image of the family to form national identity is not, however, only common in American progress rhetoric but is also prominent in American conservative rhetoric (Lakoff 35). After using the mother-child relationship as a means to urge more Americans to sign up for health insurance on the exchange created by the PPACA, Obama continues his use of the image of the family as a metaphor for the nation as a whole. As he speaks, “After all, that’s the spirit that has always moved this nation forward. It’s the spirit of citizenship – the recognition that through hard work and responsibility, we can pursue our individual dreams, but still come together as one American family to make sure the next generation can pursue its dreams as well.” In this portion of his speech, Obama is attempting to reconcile the desires of the individual which are at times at odds with the
communal desires of the American people as a whole. First, he continues with the language of movement, underscoring his earlier imagery of America, and himself, as dynamic and active rather than passive. Yet here, America and Obama do not move forward of their own accord but due to a “spirit” that propels America forward. This spirit is one of community and citizenship, a sense of belonging to a group rather than feeling at best independent and at worst alienated as an individual. The concept of America as family is also generational as well, specifically referencing the future. Obama’s policies, especially the PPACA—a discussion of which leads into this portion of his SOTU—are not regressive nor do they maintain the status quo. Instead, they are forward-looking, allowing Americans to pursue their aspirational desires, their individual dreams. Also, because Obama imagines America as a family in this passage, and a generational one, he implies a past from which the present country can trace its lineage. Therefore, without having to specifically invoke America’s founding and rely on a common theme in progressive rhetoric, Obama is able to imply a continuity through which his view of America extends.

While the language of warfare is common in both Roosevelt and Johnson’s speeches when they discuss their domestic policy proposals, Obama rarely invokes the battlefield for his policies at home. Instead, Obama frequently links his policy proposals to the actions of “ordinary” Americans who enact the ideals Obama hopes his policies will reveal (Hoffman and Howard 1329). In this SOTU, however, Obama’s choice for an “ordinary” American is a soldier. Closing his speech, Obama chooses to honor Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg, an

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9 Hoffman and Howard argue that Obama frequently uses “ordinary” Americans as symbols of American exceptionalism in his public addresses. While this is a common rhetorical device for both presidents from both the Right and Left, Obama has made more use of it.
Army Ranger who, on his tenth deployment, was horrifically maimed after attacked by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. His left side still partially paralyzed, his face deformed from skin grafts and shrapnel, Cory and his injuries bear testament to the embodied nature of warfare. And, as we learn from Obama’s description, Cory briefly lost his ability to speak after the roadside attack.

The video of this portion of Obama’s speech is difficult to watch. Seated between the First Lady and his father, Cory has difficulty standing to his feet when acknowledged in the chamber. After the president tells Cory’s story, he transforms Remsburg into a symbol of America:

My fellow Americans, men and women like Cory remind us that America has never come easy. Our freedom, our democracy, has never been easy. Sometimes we stumble; we make mistakes; we get frustrated or discouraged. But for more than two hundred years, we have put those things aside and placed our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress – to create and build and expand the possibilities of individual achievement; to free other nations from tyranny and fear; to promote justice, and fairness, and equality under the law, so that the words set to paper by our founders are made real for every citizen.

In this passage, Obama is giving a clear, public reflection on common values and, interestingly for a SOTU, inflecting it strongly with strengthening national identity. In the first sentence, Obama states that America “has never come easy.” The fact that America must continually “come” implies that it also must continually leave, demonstrating a view of America as an entity that arrives to its full realization of its ideals, but must be made again anew by each generation;
America ebbs and flows. Like the American family, which is reborn in generation after generation, America itself is constantly coming into being and arriving at its full realization in every era. In the next sentence, Obama combines freedom with democracy. The sentence reads, “Our freedom, our democracy, has never been easy,” whereas if freedom and democracy were autonomous concepts the sentence would read “Our freedom, our democracy, have never been easy.” Here, Obama is subtly inflecting his speech with positive liberty, rather than negative, because freedom here comes not from the division of individuals but from their collective gathering as the demos. Thus, freedom stems from the interdependence of the collective and not from the independence of the individual. After presenting America as a generationally created entity, Obama traces a common course throughout American society which has been apparent since its founding, the ability for the American people to put their frustrations aside and “[place] our collective shoulder to the wheel of progress.” Individual achievement in this passage is not without its merits; however, Obama’s rhetoric reflects the view of the achievements of the collective to outmatch those of the individual. Individuals come together to form one mass which has a singular shoulder. Moreover, they push a “wheel of progress,” a tool which symbolizes both forward motion and the rotational nature of America’s becoming.

Opportunity is a common theme running throughout this SOTU address—Obama mentions it more than a dozen times—which may seem strange given the fact that “equality of opportunity” is a commonplace for conservative and classical liberal rhetoric. Opportunity, however, in this address, does not refer to an equality of opportunity in terms of “equality as careers open to talents” but in terms of “equality as equality of fair opportunity” as John Rawls expands upon in his *A Theory of Justice*. With regard to equalizing opportunity, Rawls writes,
“Those who have been favored by nature…may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out. The naturally advantaged are not to gain merely because they are more gifted, but only to cover the costs of training and education and for using their endowments in ways that help the less fortunate as well” (87). This view of opportunity is in keeping with positive liberty and with Obama’s rhetoric in his SOTU address. In a “System of Natural Liberty,” the government would not interfere with anyone’s ability to seek out different opportunities (negative liberty) whereas in Rawls’ conception of “Liberal Equality,” the government would facilitate new inroads, new ladders, which would help those with less natural abilities and resources access an equal amount of opportunity. In order to bring about liberal equality, however, Rawls does suggest a wilful ignorance of reality—the “veil of ignorance,” which allows a society to choose its rules without being prejudiced to the differences among them (11, 17). The veil of ignorance is neither practical nor realistic, but moral, spiritual, and faith-based. Therefore, Obama must use Cory Remsburg, the soldier, not only as the symbol for what America’s struggles as a collective unit will ultimately end in success, but as a concretization of his policy proposals to expand opportunity, through the Rawlsian definition of “Liberal Equality” to all Americans.

**CONCLUSION**

As the rhetoric of Presidents Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama demonstrate, progressivism has hardly reached its full development and subsequent decline. Instead, each president has been influenced by those preceding him yet he has shaped and expanded his own philosophy which calls for the expansion of the welfare state. President Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms Speech” represents a paradigmatic shift in American political philosophy, firmly initiating the view of
liberty as positive and extending America’s stewardship of freedom beyond its own borders. The implications of the former clearly influenced Johnson’s rhetoric as well as Obama’s rhetoric, seen most recently in President Obama’s State of the Union Address which posited collective action as the wellspring for freedom and democracy. Seizing upon the opportunity America’s patriotism during WWII provided, Roosevelt first linked international warfare to domestic economics, introducing his 7-Point Economic Plan during Fireside Chat 21. The rhetoric of warfare in this address, however, does not merely gain support for Roosevelt’s economic plans, it also concretizes his policies by using the embodied nature of warfare. By drawing a comparison between the bodily sacrifice of the soldier and the economic sacrifice of the civilian, Roosevelt looked to gain support for a plan that, without providing significant details, aimed towards creating one of the largest expansions of government control into the American economy to date.

In his fourth and final Inaugural Address, Roosevelt articulates one of the central views of progressivism, that America’s history is moving ever upwards towards great progress, and it is this view that President Johnson most clearly adopted in his plans for the War on Poverty and the Great Society. With the Great Society, Johnson looked to reach the pinnacle of society that Roosevelt had alluded to in his final inaugural address. Doing so would require a vast social transformation as well as the expansion of the federal government and, most importantly, the significant reduction of poverty. This trajectory is inherent in the logic that Johnson employs in his speech which discusses America’s founding through the Industrial Revolution until the present. In these steps, Johnson is able to present a hierarchy for America’s needs from providing for bodily necessities and economic growth upwards towards the fulfillment of spirituality. Yet
Johnson realized that crystalizing the Great Society, moving from bodily needs to spiritual needs, would have been impossible with any segment of the American population languishing in poverty. Therefore his Great Society necessitated the further development of social citizenship, the first strains of which are evident in Roosevelt’s own policies. The view of citizenship as social citizenship enabled Johnson to justify the expansion of the federal government in order to care for the economic needs of America’s underprivileged. In Johnson’s view, without economic security, the access to political, civil, and social rights which would eventually lead to the fulfillment of spiritual needs was impossible. Furthermore, the stress on community and citizenship is obvious in both Johnson’s “Remarks at the University of Michigan” and his 1964 SOTU. In both of these speeches, Johnson consistently speaks in the third-person plural in order to tie his audience to a sense of duty to country and to one another.

Balancing the strength of individualism for identity-formation in the United States and the call for duty towards a collective is no easy task, yet President Obama undertook it in his “Address to Congress on Healthcare.” Obama’s proposal of the PPACA is perhaps one of the best examples of a policy that combines both a view of positive liberty with social citizenship. Obama frames health care as a right in itself, necessary for the full enjoyment of all other political, social, and civil rights. Yet unlike many other rights, health care is not a natural right, but one that a third party must provide. Thus, social citizenship and positive liberty are fully realized in the PPACA because it calls for the government to provide a right necessary for the enjoyment of full citizenship. President Obama continues the work of Johnson to create a strong sense of community and obligation to country, but he strengthens this duty with his use of familial imagery in his 2014 SOTU. Additionally, he furthers Johnson’s view of the need for
federal programs to be most beneficial to the least privileged Americans with a strong adherence to Rawlsian ethics and the “justice as fairness” and “Liberal Equality” principles. Lastly, in his 2014 SOTU, Obama makes the strongest connection between his policies and warfare by using an actual soldier’s body to enact his view of America as family. Obama uses Cory Remsburg’s spirit—the tenacity he showed when recovering from his horrific maiming on the battlefield—as a symbol for the American spirit that drives innovation and allows the country to realize its goals together as one collective family. Necessary to the fulfillment of these goals, however, is also an equality of opportunity consistent with Rawls’ view of “Liberal Equality.” Thus, Obama’s rhetoric bears influence from Johnson and Roosevelt and, at the same time, demonstrates an evolution in progressive philosophy.

While this project traces the evolution of progressive thought and rhetoric over nearly a century, it invites future scholars to examine both progressive and conservative rhetoric further. As each president is influenced by his predecessors, future research ought to examine how the Progressive Era influenced President Roosevelt as well as examine the diverse forces which joined to form the Progressive Era. Furthermore, this thesis only analyzes Roosevelt, Johnson, and Obama’s rhetorical justifications for domestic policies without examining their rhetoric when formulating foreign policy. Roosevelt’s, Johnson’s, and Obama’s presidencies spanned the lengthiest and costliest wars in American history and their philosophies certainly influenced America’s policies beyond its borders. As noted earlier, Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms Speech” seemed to posit the United States as the guarantor of security and freedom throughout the world and in his 1964 SOTU, Johnson declares war on human poverty, expanding the battlefield overseas. Lastly, while this thesis examined progressive political rhetoric over the past century,
a similar study could be done on conservative presidential rhetoric, examining the logic underlying the resistance towards the expansion of the federal government.
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