

THESIS

THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE MORRILL ACT, GI BILL AND THE POLITICAL
SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT BARAK OBAMA

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ABSTRACT

THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MORRILL ACT, GI BILL AND THE POLITICAL SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT BARAK OBAMA

This thesis examines the dominant discourse that perpetuates ideologies and behavior regarding higher education among Americans. The act of going to college has become a mandatory act in which students pursuing higher education seldom ask *why* they are going to college. I believe legislation such as the Morrill Act of 1862 and the GI Bill of 1944 have guaranteed that the union between the government and higher education will continue to influence political rhetoric and perpetuate the dominant discourse of higher education. This thesis explores the political rhetoric surrounding these acts and two of President Obama's speeches he addressed during his campaign for presidency and during his administration. The purpose of this analysis is to explore the historical contexts of these acts and current political speeches. Based on my analysis and research of these historic texts and speeches, I conclude that the American government's involvement in higher education has fostered a dominant discourse that has created an ideology that a college degree is defined more as a commodity or symbol of human capital, rather than a sign of intellectual accomplishment.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Historical Background of Education in America

I did not have a typical college experience. Upon graduating from high school I did not immediately pursue a college degree simply because I was never encouraged to do so and was not convinced I was “equipped” or intelligent enough to embark on the college path. I did not take the SAT’s in high school nor did I concern myself with the notion that one must go to college directly after high school to be successful. I had planned to live with my older sister in southern California and gain life experience before I made any decisions. My family understood the value of higher education, but these matters were never pressed upon me and seldom brought up in family discussions. Neither one of my parents nor anyone in my extended family went to college when I was growing up, yet most of my family worked hard and ended up living comfortably and settled themselves into the middle class without attaining a college degree. Despite my parents’ lack of higher education they are intelligent, hard working respectable people with high moral values and knowledgeable on many subjects—a college degree was not required for them to establish these traits. My family preached the importance of ethics and values, believing compassion, diligence and a strong work ethic to be the most important traits an individual could possess. I grew up understanding that having those attributes was enough to achieve a happy and successful life—a college degree was viewed as an individual choice, laid out for

those who aspired to be professionals in a specific field and, more importantly, for those who could easily afford higher education.

One year after graduating from high school I moved away from my hometown to live with my sister and took a job as a waitress in southern California. Shortly after I began working at a popular chain restaurant I saw how unhappy and down-trodden many of my 40-something co-workers were. I quickly realized I did not want to be in their positions in my later years, and that the only way to prevent living the same type of life was to pursue a higher education. My grandmother was a waitress for over thirty-five years, and growing up I had an incredible amount of respect for her—I actually wanted to be a waitress like her. I never viewed her as a less intelligent person because she served people, nor did I think she “wasted her life” or potential. She seemed happy as a waitress, led a comfortable life and took pride in her hard work. Yet, as I got older, my growing familiarity with the dominant discourse through media and friends’ discussions about higher education started me thinking about the stigma placed on individuals who did not pursue a college degree. I feared if I did not go to college I would be viewed as an “inferior” or “marginalized” citizen.

While I respected my grandmother and her years of hard work, I wondered if she may have wasted her potential and could have had a better life if only she had gone to college—I began to fear the same for myself. Was she just as disenfranchised as my middle-aged co-workers? Was I simply too young and naïve to know she wasn’t fully satisfied? Perhaps she was content, but listening to

my middle-aged co-workers complain about working for years in a dead-end, thankless job for so long without benefits, coupled with the nagging thought that to move up the so-called “social ladder” one *had* to go to college, prompted me to enroll at the local community college. I accepted the dominant discourse surrounding higher education so easily because in the back of my mind I heard the words of my high school friends and media claiming that you either have the option of going to college or flipping burgers. In my case, this dominant discourse was telling me I had the option of going to college or work as a waitress in a chain restaurant for the rest of my life.

Despite my ambition to succeed in college and my unwavering goal of being the first in my family to graduate from college, I dropped out of school for a couple of years, not because I could not handle it, but because I found myself constantly grappling with the rationality behind the idea that to be a successful and respectable citizen one *must* get a college degree. My initial push into college was because of my experience working with the unhappy 40-something co-workers “forced” into a life of service because they did not go to college. Yet when I began working at a different restaurant, I found myself working with several college graduates who were slinging pasta right along with me. I was shocked when a co-worker told me his “illustrious” college degree in political science from UCLA did not really mean anything, since he was forced to return to waiting tables because he could not find a decent paying job outside the service industry. I worked with people who graduated from prestigious schools who were

doing the same job as me. It was unfathomable to me at the time that a college degree did not always raise one up from the lower rungs of society and place an individual with a good job.

I began to question the relevance and the worth of higher education and likened a college diploma to a meaningless piece of paper whenever I became frustrated with the seemingly futile idea of college. While there were many setbacks and obstacles during my undergraduate studies, I persevered because I discovered that I enjoyed learning and wanted to continue my studies. Additionally, with the encouragement and support I received from my English professors at the community college I attended, I realized I wanted to teach community college in hopes of providing floundering students the confidence and opportunities of higher education I had been given. If the idea of going to college for a better future, good job, and higher social position was not deeply embedded in our cultural discourse, I am not wholly convinced I would have gone on to pursue a college degree—I am however thankful and proud that I did.

My initial interest in this thesis topic stemmed from questioning the notion that a college degree is the defining factor that establishes an individual's worth and positions them as “respectable” or “honorable” members of society. I wondered how students—myself included—could blindly flock to college campuses without questioning why they are there. As I researched and refined my thesis objectives, I became more interested in answering the question of *how* the

dominant discourse surrounding higher education has become so steeped in our culture. I am convinced that the American government's interest in higher education and implementation of legislation such as the Morrill Act and the GI Bill were significant factors that changed the trajectory of higher education, establishing a dominant discourse of higher education that is still very much alive and believed today. It is my assumption that the union of government and higher education has produced unmotivated college students who do not ask themselves an important and critical question when they set out for a college degree: "Why am I going to college?"

Students flock to college campuses each year, become buried in student loans with little hesitation, only to find themselves with a sense of bewilderment as to why they spent four years (or more) of their lives performing their "expected" role of a college student. I am not suggesting that seeking a college degree is a fruitless endeavor. In fact my feelings are quite the opposite. I believe higher education is extremely important for individuals who want to enhance their own knowledge and achieve particular life goals. What I am skeptical about, however, is the ideology of college being a "mandatory act" everyone must perform and how this ideology has become ingrained in our culture. In the following chapters of this thesis I will explore these questions, but prior to analysis I will provide a historical framing of the origins of the dominant discourse surrounding education.

Historical Background of Education in America: Origins of a Democratic Education

To understand the current climate of higher education, it is important to explore how we got here by looking at the evolution of higher education and briefly discussing the major American voices on education: Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, Abraham Lincoln and John Dewey. These great men shared a common view that a democratic education should be provided for all citizens. Although many of these beliefs of universal education were based on egalitarian principles, they were quite exclusionary. I include the historical background to provide readers with an overview of the basic framework of their views on education to set up the following chapters.

Thomas Jefferson and Education: An “Enlightened” Vision

Thomas Jefferson’s vision for education was fostered by a European sensibility toward education and his values aligned with the tenets and philosophies born from the Enlightenment. Jefferson also believed that education should promote “upward mobility” for the masses. In his book, *Jefferson’s Vision for Education*, Cameron Addis discusses Jefferson’s philosophies on education and his dream of building one of the first universities in America separating church and state where religious worship would be viewed as a voluntary act. According to Addis, “...the spirit of Jefferson’s vision was that all children, not just a select few, could be educated” (148). Although Jefferson was not an

advocate for women or blacks to be included in “universal education,” he fostered the idea of all men—not only the aristocracy—should have an equal opportunity to pursue higher education.

In 1779 and 1780 Jefferson introduced the Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge to Congress. On both occasions the bill was met with less than enthusiastic responses from the public and was never passed into law (Addis 14). The bill was quite progressive at the time because it gave poor white students who could not typically pursue higher learning the opportunity to attend college. Jefferson’s bill championed the idea of a “pyramid-shaped system of public education” where the elementary level “was intended to teach the basic literacy necessary for everyday business transactions and familiarize young republican boys and girls with their political right and obligations,” ending with a single university at the top (Addis 12). This bill provided “poor students” with a subsidized tuition to “train future leaders and professionals in law and medicine” (Addis 12).

Jefferson’s bill was met with public opposition for several reasons: voters did not want to pay higher taxes to fund subsidized education, a dispersed population of youth “did not lend itself to localism in politics,” and finally Christians were “offended that Jefferson’s curriculum did not promote their faith” (Addis 14). Jefferson was one of the few leaders during his time who advocated the separation of church and state regarding education. Despite public and political opposition, his views on the matter never wavered, and his determination

and passion ultimately led to the fruition of his vision for higher education and the establishment of University of Virginia (UVA), the first secular university in America.

Although Jefferson influenced education on all levels, his most distinctive mark was on higher education and the legacy of his beloved University of Virginia. The initial building of UVA began in 1817 and was not finished until 1825, one year before Jefferson's death. His vision for the University of Virginia was influenced by European educational theories and philosophies of the Enlightenment, and his plan for the University of Virginia "emphasized scientific revelation over Scriptural adherence" (Addis 55). The legacy of UVA is long running; and according to Addis, Jefferson's university "...became one of the best and most influential colleges in America and served as a blueprint for later state universities" (144). Jefferson was dedicated to the concept of "meritocracy" and believed "deserving leaders would be trained through public education rather than being born into a military nobility" (Addis 26). Jefferson's ideas may have been seen as "radical" during his time, but he envisioned a flourishing, free-thinking democratic America, and his vision continues to be an indelible part of American higher education. Jefferson influenced many great thinkers of education, and if it were not for his steadfast vision and dedicated values, American higher education would certainly not be what it is today.

Horace Mann and Education: An Egalitarian Vision

One of the most influential thinkers on education during the 19th century was Horace Mann. He served as a member of the House Representatives for the state of Massachusetts from 1827 to 1833 and established himself as an education reformer and trailblazer of his time. Mann believed democracy required democratic education and that man should be guided by a sense of justice. *Horace Mann on the Crisis in Education* is a compilation of his work including speeches and reports made in Congress and several baccalaureate addresses throughout his political career taken from the five volume edition of Horace Mann's *Life and Works*. One speech of Mann's in this collection titled "End Poverty through Education" advocates an egalitarian society and chastises the European theory where "men are divided into classes—some toil to earn, others seize and enjoy" (Mann 120). Mann discusses the virtues of the "Massachusetts theory" in which "all are to have an equal chance for earning, and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn" (120). Mann claimed the European system was "baneful" and viewed his own state was drifting toward misguided system where the "two extremes of society [were] lengthening, instead of being abridged" (122). Mann saw education as the "great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social machinery" and subscribed to the notion that "enlarging the cultivated class or caste, [would] open a wider area over which the social feelings will expand" and ultimately "obliterate distinctions in society" (125). The idea of

education being the great “social equalizer” is still very much perpetuated today through political discourse and ideologies.

Although Mann preached the importance of education to be the social equalizer, he also believed the uneducated man to be “ignorant” and could only be transformed and advanced in society by being educated and leaving his former desires and inclinations behind. As a part of his rhetorical repertoire, in the same speech on “Ending Poverty through Education” Mann uses animal analogies to persuade his audience that man must be disciplined, refined and cultivated to abolish class distinctions. Mann ends his speech on poverty suggesting “...an ignorant man is but little more than a swine, whom he so much resembles in his appetites, and surpasses in his powers of mischief” (131). This metaphor connotes to his audience his abhorrence for ignorance and forces those questioning the importance of education as lowly “animals” lacking rational thought or restraint. Mann’s rhetoric implies urgency for his audience to agree with his egalitarian visions for America.

An important element of Mann’s theories of education is the idea of education being the conduit for building moral integrity. Mann suggested in his baccalaureate address to Antioch College in 1857 that “A diploma is a letter of credit, not to the individual, but to the world” (198). He goes on to say a college diploma “is plainly a certificate of educational pre-eminence...that also imports good moral conduct and high moral character” and “ignorance is a feeble accomplice or coadjutor with vice, in tormenting the world” (198). Embedded in

much of Mann's speeches and political discourse is a sense of necessity of change and empowerment only education can bring to poverty-stricken Americans and the most rational way to bring forth a "socially equalized" society.

Mann continues his address stating: "As education...even the *reputation* of an education, is a passport to influential stations in society, not even that reputation should be bestowed on a vicious object" (200). Mann's choice of words: "ignorant" and "vicious" certainly establish a strong ideology among his listeners, and although his original intentions were to create an egalitarian society by offering education to the masses, the widening gap between the classes seems to be one of the legacies left from Mann's rhetoric and values of education.

Abraham Lincoln and Education: A Simple and Humble Vision

In my research I did not find an extensive amount of information on Abraham Lincoln's views on education. Yet it is important to note that he was the president in office who signed the Morrill Act of 1862 which brought about the Land Grant Universities, a law that provided states with large tracks of land to construct state universities and provide the industrial class (farmers and mechanics) opportunities to attain a higher education. During the period in which said bill was signed into law, Lincoln's attention focused on the Civil War and ending slavery. Nonetheless, to neglect Lincoln's views toward education in this thesis due to lack of documented sources would be a severe oversight. I believe Lincoln to be one of the most sincere and powerful rhetoricians of American

history whose benevolent intentions for the American people and whose views on education are extremely relevant for the aims of this thesis.

The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln includes several speeches on education. Lincoln stated in his first political announcement given March 9, 1832 that education "...was the most important subject which we as people can be engaged in." Lincoln also stated "that every man may receive at least a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions..." Lincoln's aim for education was for Americans to be more "well-rounded" or informed citizens—he was not overly concerned with the transformation of "ignorant" men being educated for purposes beyond becoming literate and understanding their own world. Lincoln's first political announcement was given during a time when theories of education were not prominently discussed in public forums and education ideologies were yet to be a part of dominant discourse in American politics.

However, on September 30, 1859, shortly before Lincoln became president in 1861, he addressed the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society three years prior to the signing of the Morrill Act. Lincoln discussed his values concerning the idea of educating the laborers of America. Lincoln stated the following in his address:

The old general rule was that *educated* people did not perform manual labor. They managed to eat their bread, leaving the toil of producing it to the uneducated. This was not an unsupportable evil to the working bees, so long as the class of drones remained very small. But *now*, especially in these free States, nearly all are educated...to leave the labor of the uneducated, in any wise to the support of the whole...henceforth educated people must labor. Otherwise, education itself would become a positive and intolerable evil... (Lincoln 1859).

Lincoln's vision is a true egalitarian society in which all men are laboring for the productive good of the whole. Lincoln did not describe the laborer as "ignorant" nor did he compare the laborer's lower socio-economic status and morality to that of a "swine" as Mann did in his speeches. Lincoln grasped the consequences of the division and class barriers between an educated versus uneducated society; these thoughts were eloquently conveyed in his neutral, un-hyperbolized language when he addressed his audience.

Lincoln's views on education may stem from his own humble beginnings, for he was one of the few American presidents who did not graduate from college. He believed in the eminent powers of education but did not preach education as a means to mere upward-mobility in social and economic spheres. Lincoln believed education should be attained for self-betterment. In the same address he delivered to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, he asserted "[a] capacity, and taste, for reading, gives access to whatever has already been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems...It gives relish, and facility, for successfully pursuing the [yet] unsolved ones" (Lincoln 1861). The desire and ambition to learn and to be knowledgeable on a variety of subjects to become a better individual by one's own devices and interest underlies Lincoln's

views on education. In what sparse information I have found regarding Lincoln's thoughts on education, it is apparent his beliefs and contributions as one of America's greatest Presidents still influence our motives today. Lincoln truly believed in democratic education and that everyone should be given the opportunity to be educated and that all must labor to establish a democracy—even the educated.

John Dewey on Education: A Vision of Social Reform through Democratic Education

Thomas Jefferson's philosophies of education had great influence on John Dewey. Dewey was an American philosopher and advocate for democratic education. Dewey believed the purpose of education was for students to receive proper guidance to reach their potential. Dewey's book *Democracy and Education* published in 1916 includes his philosophies on education which influenced later pedagogical theories still practiced today. The chapter "Education as a Necessity of Life" illuminates Dewey's core philosophy on education: "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life" (3). Dewey stated "[a]s societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need of formal or intentional teaching and learning increases" (11). Dewey was aware that education does not exist in a vacuum and feared that as "formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school" (11). Dewey shared Mann's essential values and beliefs of

providing equal opportunity education for all; however, one major discrepancy sets apart their core beliefs. Dewey believed the aim of education should function to assist men to become, first and foremost, more enlightened individuals rather than conform to pressures within society to gain better social standing by leaving their former “ignorant” selves in the wake. Dewey did not refer to the uneducated man as ignorant, nor did he subscribe to the idea that education should magically lift one out of poverty or despair—but rather guide individuals to better terrains through their own desires and ambitions.

The chapter “Education as Direction” says it most plainly: “. . .the general function of education assumes: namely, that of direction, control, or guidance” (28). To explain this idea more thoroughly, I will use Dewey’s own summary of this concept: “The natural or native impulses of the young do not agree with the life-customs of the group into which they are born. Consequently they have to be directed or guided” (47). According to Dewey, a proper education should build upon already existing skills and the potential of students which will guide and direct them toward a better, more enlightened station in life. Additionally, Dewey suggests these functions should be “intrinsic to the disposition of the person, not external and coercive” in order for successful educational achievement (47). Dewey goes on to discuss the element of “control” to which he states “[t]o achieve this internal control through identity of interest and understanding is the business of education” (47-48). Dewey speaks of plasticity in the sense of individuals having “the ability to learn from experience. . . which is of avail in

coping with the difficulties of a later situation” (53). The true intent of Dewey’s philosophy of democratic education is growth. Without this emphasis in education, students are not able to meet their full potential and are not organically guided and directed, and unfortunately their time being educated may be spent in vain.

Dewey, a social and education reformer, critiqued past philosophies of education such as the Platonic philosophy of Education, the “so-called” individualism of the 18th century Enlightenment, and the institutional idealistic philosophies of the 19th century. Dewey’s main concern with the Platonic view was that the outcome of the model was “comprised in its working out by making a class rather than an individual in the social unit” (115). Dewey also viewed the individualism model as too limited with its concern that “notion of a society as broad as humanity, of whose progress the individual was to be the organ” and that it “reintroduced the idea of subordination of the individual to the institution” (116). These models may have served their purposes for their time, establishing proper and well intended groundwork for the future of education, but Dewey felt a balance was needed for a more democratic model of education. These philosophies may have been fostered with benevolent and egalitarian principles in mind, but according to Dewey these models merely perpetuate class division and relegate education to a select few and stifle genuine learning—all of which undermine the principles of democratic education.

Aim of Thesis and Research Questions

It is a common belief in American culture that if individuals choose to forgo the college experience and go down another path, their chances of being successful members of society are bleak and dismal. We are a culture that clings to the promise of higher education leading to a prosperous future and guaranteed position in the middle class. Yet, with college enrollment exponentially increasing each year this promise of a “good job” upon graduation has become a myth, and college graduates are not always met with “prosperity” but disappointing realities. The aim of this thesis is to illuminate the origins of the dominant discourse and the origins of the promise of education leading to prosperity and how the promise continues to be disseminated in our culture today.

In this thesis I will attempt to answer the following questions: How have the rhetorical structures of historical and contemporary political speeches and the dominant discourse of higher education influenced enrollment in American universities and colleges today? How has government involvement in higher education and implementations of legislative action, such as The Morrill Act and the GI Bill, shaped American perceptions of attaining a higher education as a “mandatory” act? If the American government had never become involved in higher education and did not implement legislative acts such as the Morrill Act and GI Bill, would Americans still believe a college degree to be “golden ticket” to the middle class?

In the following chapters I will use a rhetorical and historical lens to frame the analysis. I will perform rhetorical analyses of texts from the Morrill Act, GI Bill, and President Obama's speeches to illustrate how the dominant discourse of pursuing higher education for success remains consistent in political rhetoric. From the analysis I hope to illuminate for readers how this discourse has become so entrenched in the American cultural landscape and conclude by offering insight toward student perspectives on higher education today.

Chapter Two: Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

“Speeches today either are made for entertainment, or they are political speeches for political ends. And the chief characteristic of the speech for political ends is that it is made for immediate effect, with the smallest regard for what is politically true. Whereas formerly its burden was that the people believed or had experienced, the burden now tends to be what they wish to hear.”

Richard M. Weaver *Ethics of Rhetoric* (1953)

Although the passage above was written in 1953 the message still holds true today. Politicians use rhetorical strategies imbued with ideologies Americans cling to. As a rhetoric and composition scholar with a particular interest in the shaping of ideologies through language I chose to perform a rhetorical analysis of political speeches and texts to investigate the origins of the dominant discourse surrounding higher education. In this chapter I will establish the methodology, theoretical, and rhetorical framing to be used throughout this thesis. Specifically, I am interested in examining the rhetoric regarding the seminal legislative acts and government interest in higher education. I will be analyzing the rhetoric and speeches regarding: The Morrill Act of 1862 which established land- grant universities, the GI Bill and the educational benefits it provided for returning World War II Veterans, and finally President Barak Obama’s recent speeches on higher education. I argue that the rhetoric embedded in the political discourse of these acts led to ideologies still deeply embedded in our culture today.

As I set out to find sources for the Morrill Act and GI Bill I assumed I would find a wealth of information on these acts since they were monumental in shaping the future of higher education. However my initial search for primary sources was met with a few obstacles. Although I found copies of the original government documents of the Morrill Act and GI Bill, the material and rhetoric within the documents revealed little evidence or interesting language to lend support to the aim of this thesis and rhetorical analysis. The legislative documents outlining the tenets of each bill were embedded with legal and political jargon and I felt the material would not fit the scope of this thesis or illuminate any relevant or significant data for the rhetorical analysis. Although my research for relevant primary materials was met with some challenges, the following texts for analysis will help support my argument that political rhetoric about higher education continues to shape American ideologies and behavior.

Texts to be used for the Analysis in the Morrill Act Chapter

The first primary source to be used as a part of the rhetorical analysis will be Jonathan B. Turner's pamphlet titled "Industrial Universities for the People, published in 1853. This text was taken from the book *The Origin of the Land Grant Act of 1862: (the so-called Morrill Act) and some Account of its Author, Jonathan B. Turner*. This work was written and compiled in 1910 by Edmund James and includes several texts supporting the idea that Jonathan B. Turner (a professor of rhetoric at Illinois College) was in fact the true "father" of the land-grant university. The analysis of this text will illuminate the origins of the

dominant discourse of higher education for the masses and establish how these beliefs began to solidify public opinion on the matter of educating the industrial classes.

Another text for later analysis is an extensive transcription of the Congressional debate of the thirty-seventh congress, published in the *Congressional Globe* on June 11, 1862. Although I will not be using large amounts of text for analysis, the excerpts I chose from the debate are similar to the rhetoric found in Turner's pamphlet. In the analysis I will draw parallels between Turner's rhetorical strategies and the political discourse from the congressional debates. The juxtaposition of the analysis of these texts will illustrate the perpetuating dominant discourse and rhetorical strategies used in both the public and political sphere. After the congressional debates, the Land granted to Agricultural Colleges Act was eventually passed by congress and signed into law by Lincoln on July 2, 1862.

Finally, I will examine excerpts of Justin Smith Morrill's speeches taken from Coy Cross' book *Justin Smith Morrill: Father of the Land-Grant Colleges*, a biography of Morrill that includes discussions regarding his visions of higher education and his involvement in the creation of the bill. The main areas of interest behind the passing of the Morrill Act can be gleaned from Cross' chapter, "Morrill's Monument: The Land-Grant College Act." The two speeches within this text that will be used for analysis are from an address Morrill delivered at the

University of Vermont in 1893 and his address to the House of Representatives in 1858 discussing the benefits of the Morrill Act.

Texts to be used for the GI Bill Chapter

I chose FDR's address to the National Education Association in 1938 for the first text for analysis. This speech discusses the importance of education and its direct association in promoting democracy. FDR's language throughout the speech is dry, straight-forward and quite impersonal. Throughout his speeches FDR reiterates the importance of freedom, capital, and maintaining our human capital as a natural resource to continue reigning as the world's strongest nation. He equates education with freedom and democracy. The analysis of this speech will examine FDR's rhetorical strategies and also discuss perpetuating ideologies surrounding higher education echoed throughout political discourse today.

FDR's 25th Fireside Chat delivered from the White House in July 1943 will also be analyzed in chapter four. This speech informs Americans of the status of the WWII and how the army was successful in fighting fascism, the Nazis, and the "Japs" in the Pacific. Roosevelt praises Russia for their strong fighting and fearless leader, Joseph Stalin, and assures the nation they must do their part at home for their troops to be successful. Although it could be fruitful to further analyze the patriotic and inspirational rhetoric FDR employs, the significance of the analysis is FDR's introduction of the GI Bill and discussion of the benefits of the bill. FDR reassures the soldiers fighting overseas that the government and the

American people “would not let them down when the war is won” and that plans to establish a smooth and warm homecoming would be guaranteed this time. The analysis of this speech will focus primarily on the historical context surrounding the GI Bill and the impetus behind the creation of the bill.

The GI Bill booklet, produced in 1985 by the Army Recruiting Command, hails the introduction of the fifth version of the GI Bill, known as the Montgomery GI Bill of Rights created by Mississippi Congressman, Gillespie "Sonny" Montgomery. Because the booklet was produced by the Army Recruiting Command, it is not surprising that much of the content discusses the wonderful benefits of the GI Bill. Statements such as “[m]any would have never realized their educational potential without the GI Bill’s assistance” are interspersed throughout the booklet, among countless quotes from GI Bill recipients of how the GI Bill changed their lives. Several photographs of men and women sitting behind desks at corporations living the “American Dream” are depicted on several pages in the booklet. Much of the analysis of this text will be looking at the idea of middle class prosperity and its association with the advent of the GI Bill.

President Obama’s Speeches

The first speech of Obama’s I chose for analysis is one he delivered in Dayton, Ohio during his campaign on September 9, 2008. This speech outlined his plan for education and discussed how education would “fix” America’s broken economy. One of the main points Obama raised throughout this speech

was “whether we as a nation will remain in the 21st century the kind of global economic leader that we were in the 20th century” (Obama 2008). I chose this speech for analysis because it employs rhetoric of education being the means to solve social and economic problems in America. In the speech Obama explains that “When two-thirds (applause) of all new jobs require a higher education or advanced training, knowledge is the most valuable skill you can sell. It’s not only a pathway to opportunity, but it’s a prerequisite for opportunity” (Obama 2008).

The second speech I chose for analysis is President Obama’s address he gave on August 9, 2010 to the University of Texas in Austin. Throughout the speech Obama emphasizes higher education as being America’s top priority and how an educated populace is the only way to regain leadership in the global economy to keep up with the competition with other countries. Obama reveals his promises and plans for the future discussing his health care plan, clean energy bills and his main goal of producing “8 million more college graduates by 2020...” (Obama 2008). As the speech continues, Obama discusses his plans to make college more affordable and most importantly, more accessible for every American by providing tax credit to middle-class families. Obama reiterates the importance of education and how it is a “prerequisite to prosperity,” and refers to the educational visions held by great presidents like Jefferson and Lincoln and the opportunities for upward mobility provided through the GI Bill. Obama ends the speech with final words of encouragement to the students in his audience: “And we’re going to build an America where each of us, no matter what we look like or

where we come from, can reach for our dreams and make of our lives what we will” (Obama 2010).

Rhetorical and Theoretical Framework

For the rhetorical analysis I will draw from two main rhetoricians—Kenneth Burke and Richard M. Weaver. The theoretical framing of the analyses will draw specifically from Michel Foucault’s theories and Raymond Williams’ Marxist interpretations. An analysis of these texts and speeches using the theoretical frameworks of these thinkers will illuminate how the pursuit of a college degree has virtually become a “mandatory” act most Americans adhere to. A rhetorical analysis of the dominant discourse of the acts and a close analysis of FDR’s and Obama’s speeches will further illuminate how historical acts and language have contributed to the ways in which we view our realities. The analysis of the texts will also demonstrate that political agendas and discourse of the past continue to be pertinent and influential in the construction of our thoughts and behavior.

Establishing Motives: Rhetorical Theories of Kenneth Burke

To understand students’ motivation of attaining a college degree I want to first establish the theories of Kenneth Burke from his book *Permanence and Change*, which will be one the primary texts used in this thesis. Burke discusses the theory of motives stating

...the judgment as to what is proper in conduct is largely bound up with the subject of motives, for if we know *why* people do as they do, we feel that we know *what* to expect of them and of ourselves, and we shape our decisions and judgments and policies to take such expectations into account (18).

Burke's theory of motives correlates with the idea of students attaining a higher education because they have learned to believe it to be beneficial and productive. As Burke mentions, it is the expectations within a given society that serve as motive to set about those goals and tasks. In Burke's "Motives" chapter he illuminates the concept of *Weltanschauung* which literally translated from German means "world-view." *Weltanschauung* can be transposed to any given culture and its beliefs toward things such as ethics and values that shape cultural identity. American students flocking to college after high school with little thought as to why they are going is deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness. This type of universal societal belief is relevant when exploring one the main questions of this thesis: What is the motivation for students to seek higher education?

Burke defines motive as an ever-changing element in cultures, describing how our motives shift according to what objectives and means to be gained by motivations may be. Visions held by thinkers and proponents of higher education of the past (Jefferson, Mann, Dewey) were born from significantly different motives we are still driven by today. Yet the idea of a college degree fostering intelligence and establishing a democratic society is still inspiration and motive enough for most students to pursue higher education, despite the (often times

bleak) possibility that a college degree no longer holds the same value as it may have in the past. Burke goes on to say:

...if the conditions of living have undergone radical changes since the time when scheme of duties and virtues was crystallized, the serviceability of the orientation may be impaired. Our duties may not serve their purposes so well as they once did. Thus we may no longer be sure of our duties with the result that we may cease to be sure of motives (21).

Burke's theories correspond with my own assumptions that student motivation to seek higher education has remained consistent, but over the past several decades, student motivation and purpose have gone through significant changes and cultural shifts. I feel in recent decades, and possibly more so now than ever, students are no longer certain as to why they go to college, and are unclear as to what their duties as students entail. Are students simply going to school because it is a part of our *Weltanschauung*? Are their duties and motives controlled and perpetuated by an entity outside themselves?

Burke's discussion of "Occupational Psychosis" in the chapter titled as such is a term borrowed from John Dewey. Burke defines "occupational psychosis" in relation to "the Marxist doctrine that a society's environment in the historical sense is synonymous with the society's method of production" (38). From my research, I am convinced the concept of making higher education in America available for the masses was born out of political, militaristic and economic interest by the American government. This concept will be examined in greater detail in the chapters analyzing the Morrill Act and GI Bill in particular. Burke suggests "...our psychotic openness to fads, the great cry for innovation

engendered by competitive capitalism, could seem to be in keeping with the marked unstableness of our economic and social expectancies” (39). While American values towards higher education have been relatively static, motives behind the pursuit of higher education have been in flux and continue to be driven by political and institutional economic gains.

Political influence in higher education is certainly not a new phenomenon, but the motives have certainly changed. Jefferson envisioned an educated voting populous and believed in spreading democracy through education for the masses and for every American to have an equal opportunity at modest prosperity. Justin Morrill, father of the Morrill Act of 1862 believed farmers and mechanics had the right to pursue higher education, and the same democratic dream is still present today in many of President Obama’s speeches and political rhetoric surrounding higher education. Obama wants an educated populous by the year 2020 in order for America to keep up with global capitalism and humans—American citizens—are the capital. Government involvement in higher education seems benevolent enough, but with further exploration of past political rhetoric concerning higher education there appears to be higher entity orchestrating student motive and duty.

Burke’s chapter “Permanence and Change” discusses the “dangers” of subscribing to institutional power structures and the implications of adhering to somewhat archaic ideologies that may no longer serve the good or intended purpose for a populous. Burke posits that orientation or, in other words, ideologies

...may survive from conditions for which it was fit into conditions for which it was unfit (*cultural lag*). And its fossilized existence may be prolonged, after it has become dangerous to the social body as a whole, if some group which profits by it controls the educative, legislative, and constabulary resources of the state (*class morality*) (179).

When Burke refers to orientation (ideologies) remaining as a part of our societal conditioning after it becoming “dangerous to the social body” I correspond this reasoning with the aims and trajectories of higher education as it remains today. The advent of for-profit schools is a particular example of how cultural ideologies of attaining a higher education (by any means necessary) have created perhaps not necessarily a “danger” but certainly a detriment to our society. Students are motivated to get a higher education because they feel they have to, even if they are not equipped or prepared to do so. And for many of these students who believe that they must get a college degree to procure a good job and prosperity, the *access and convenience* of the education often trumps the *quality* of education. Students pursuing degrees from for-profit schools believe they will automatically have a successful career upon completion of their degree. Unfortunately, the often saddening reality is that for many students graduating from these schools is that they do not always find jobs due to insufficient training. Many of these students ultimately walk away with enormous debt, unable to pay student loans. The all-too-typical educational outcome of for-profit colleges corresponds with Burke’s reference to orientation or ideologies when they become a “danger to the social body as a whole.”

I argue that government involvement in higher education has changed the trajectory of higher learning creating ideologies replete with false promises. The embedded ideologies reveal the reason why America's youth are going to college simply because they "should." Returning to Burke's "Motives" chapter and his discussion of the pleasure-principle theory and his metaphor illustrating how easily one is trained to behave draws interesting parallels to the modern day student. Burke describes the chickens being conditioned to believe it is time for feeding when they hear a bell, but when the bell was used for punishment the chickens lined up expecting to be fed, without hesitation. Clearly, the "they" he refers to in this next excerpt are chickens, but "student" could easily be inferred here when he states "They were obeying the only realities which their scheme of orientation equipped them to recognize" (23). Most Americans believe pursuing a higher education is a virtuous and noble endeavor, so it is not surprising that students continue to seek a college degree, even if their motive to perform their role or duty is not entirely clear.

Ethics of Rhetoric: Rhetorical Perspectives of Richard M. Weaver

For later analyses in this thesis I will also draw from the rhetorical theories of Richard M. Weaver. Specifically, I will look to Weaver's book *Ethics of Rhetoric* and his discussion of argument of circumstance, the spaciousness of old rhetoric and his theory of ultimate terms. Weaver argues that the argument of circumstance "is the least philosophical of all the sources of argument since, theoretically, it stops at the level of perception of fact" (57). The inferior

rhetorical strategy and the argument of circumstance are employed in many political speeches, and according to Weaver this strategy, “seems to be preferred by those who are easily impressed by existing tangibles” (57).

Politicians deliver speeches with the objective to persuade and successfully reach or move their intended audience to believe or act in a particular way. They often use questionable rhetorical strategies to convey their argument or agenda. Obama’s speeches include these questionable rhetorical strategies, presenting his view of the current state of education as an “argument of circumstance.” Obama’s speeches state numerous inarguable “facts” about education, successfully persuading his audience to fully accept his argument. According to Weaver, the reason the argument from circumstance works well in political forums is that it has the “power to move” (83). The deficiencies underlying such rhetorical tactics stem from the fact that argument of circumstance “is grounded in the nature of the situation rather than the nature of things” (83). Opposition to such arguments is seldom raised since the established “facts” are not easily refutable. Obama’s speeches in particular are based on the argument of circumstance.

Weaver’s chapter, “Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric” examines the different categories of the ultimate terms defining them as: “god terms” “devil terms” and “charismatic terms.” Some examples of Weaver’s “god term” include words such as “progress,” “American,” “science,” “fact” and “history.” Politicians often use these terms and succeed in persuading audiences because

these terms convey dual meanings and listeners associate these terms as “ultimate.” Weaver defines “god term” as an expression “about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers...and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood” (212). The “charismatic terms” Weaver discusses include words like “democracy,” “freedom,” “progress,” and “American.” FDR’s speeches are replete with such terms. Later analysis will illustrate FDR’s use of “charismatic terms.” Weaver fears when ultimate terms transform into a “series of bare abstractions, the understanding of power is supplanted by a worship of power...and can mean only state worship” (230). The analysis of FDR and Obama’s speeches to follow in later chapters will draw specifically from Weaver’s theory of “ultimate terms.”

Power, Knowledge and the Taming of a Society: Theories of Michel Foucault

Much of the theoretical groundwork for this thesis comes from the “Truth and Power” chapter in *The Foucault Reader*, a compilation of Michel Foucault’s essays, excerpts from his various published books, and interviews. Foucault discusses his theory of Power/Knowledge. Foucault’s theories question the role of institutions and the significant power social institutions create and disseminate among societies. I feel the answers to my question of how government involvement in higher education has created somewhat skewed ideologies can be illuminated by much of Foucault’s beliefs and observations of institutional power. The political discourse surrounding higher education coalesces with Foucault’s postulations. Foucault states:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (61).

These lines encapsulate my own theories of why students go to college. I feel the dominant discourse perpetuated by political rhetoric and government interest in higher education, dating back to the Morrill Act and GI Bill, have played key roles in engraining into the American culture the ideology of attaining a higher education as the only way to be a successful, prosperous, and valuable citizen.

To clarify, I am not arguing that attaining a higher education is “repressive” nor am I suggesting the government has hatched an evil plan to force the masses to seek a higher education. What I am concerned about, however, is where the discourse is coming from, why it was implemented and more importantly, how it has become so deeply entrenched in the American psyche.

Foucault's theories raise some fascinating points in regards to this thesis. Government involvement in signing of the Morrill Act and GI Bill has (in theory) helped Americans achieve freedom, prosperity, upward mobility and progress. These contributions are not viewed as repressive acts of power but seen as fostering democracy. It is almost natural for Americans to believe they are empowered by the government and its educational offerings from the Morrill Act and GI Bill. With a society believing and adhering so strongly to the values placed on higher education, why would Americans question the “repressive” nature of pursuing higher education. As mentioned earlier, a noble endeavor that

certainly “produces things” and fosters knowledge and with all hopes creates an educated populous is seldom perceived as a bad thing. Government involvement in higher education may be disguised as a genuine interest for American citizens, but using this theoretical framework for analysis one discovers there are ulterior motives behind higher education legislative acts of the past. These motives may in fact turn out to be “repressive” powers much of the citizenry may be completely unaware of.

Foucault’s “Truth and Power” chapter ends with another fascinating and relevant discussion to support my own assumptions and concerns about government involvement in higher education. According to Foucault ““truth” is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement...” to which the values attached to scientific discourse, and institutions are easily believed as “true” by a society (73). Americans are more inclined to trust hegemonic structures and believe the perpetuated “truth” especially if what they are saying produces beneficial and fruitful outcomes: a college degree is not particularly seen as detrimental to one’s life or character so it is easy to assume seeking higher education is a performed act that should be done for one’s own betterment and social advancement. Foucault continues, suggesting “truth” “...is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, [and] media)” (73). It is interesting to note that government involvement in higher education (the GI Bill)

was in fact prompted by militaristic incentives by providing veterans with greater access to create more soldiers. Additionally, the impetus behind the Morrill Act to enhance agricultural production to establish an economically sound government in regard to trade and commodities also corresponds with Foucault's theories of "truth."

Furthermore, FDR's and Obama's speeches include much discussion of the idea of building human capital to compete in global capitalism. This established "truth" of choosing not to attain a college degree will lead individuals down the path of poverty and failure. The institutions Foucault mentions have instilled values and "truths" among societies and serve these functions to remain powerful in order to discipline the masses to maintain control and order. Interestingly the power and control of these institutions is perpetuated by the masses which the institutions control. It is as though we want to be controlled. Subsequent rhetorical analysis of the Morrill Act and the GI Bill will explore the political discourse and illuminate the impetus behind these government legislations drawing from Foucault's theories.

The excerpts from Foucault's "Docile Bodies" chapter discusses the soldier and discipline: "the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed...mastering it, making it ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit... "got rid of the peasant" and given him "the air of soldier" (179). The idea of the pliability of the soldier parallels to the role of the student, and in the terms of

attaining a higher education; the role of the “soldier” leaving his “peasant” status behind could be supplanted with the role of the “student.” With a broadening skepticism of war and military service taking place in our society, it makes sense for the government to implement legislation to “construct” students into “docile bodies” rather than the malleable soldier of the late 18th century. A student goes to college—essentially to be disciplined—with hopes of achieving a better semiotic position, personal betterment and an entrance to the middle class, just as peasants became soldiers to become the “model citizen.” The “Docile Bodies” chapter concludes with Foucault’s assertion that:

Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was also a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature...but to automatic docility (186).

This docility can also be known as discipline. Sequestering students in institutions of higher education to keep them “off the streets” and out of “trouble” is one the ways for the government to “discipline” the masses. It is no wonder I have heard college being compared to “a prison people pay for” since government institutions of higher education are an ideal holding spot for young people to gather to be further indoctrinated into a particular social episteme.

The “Panopticism” chapter discusses the idea of the pantopticism which is a form of discipline being used “or taken over either by “specialized” institutions (the penitentiaries or “houses of correction...”), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals)...” (206). I will use

Foucault's theories of discipline in chapter four for the analysis of the GI Bill. The GI Bill was created to usher the mass influx of returning veterans into institutions of higher education and trade schools to provide them with work alternatives due to a bleak job market offering little or few jobs for the returning soldier. This, in theory, is a wonderful idea and grand gesture taken by the American government, but from a Foucauldian approach, one might argue it was simply another form of discipline or an act of "social quarantine" (210). To extend this idea of panopticism, Foucault suggests "A multiplicity, whether in a workshop or nation, an army or a school, reaches the threshold of a discipline when the relation of the one to the other becomes favorable" (210). Pursuing higher education has become a "favorable" endeavor, and one would be hard pressed to find someone adamantly against the idea of young people setting out to attain a college degree—for we are disciplined to believe and buy these virtues with little hesitation. Once again, this could be attributed to the semiotic shifts of the modern day student resembling the soldiers of the past—Power/Knowledge at its finest.

Dominant, Residual and Emergent Ideologies: Theories of Raymond Williams

The last theorist I will be examining is Raymond Williams, focusing on his theories discussed in his book, *Marxism and Literature*. While Williams delves into many interesting Marxist theories and viewpoints throughout his book, I will be focusing on the following chapters: "Ideology," "Productive Forces,"

“Hegemony,” “Traditions, Institutions and Formations” and finally the “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent” chapter.

To set up Williams’ theories it is important to first discuss Marxist theories of ideology and the three distinct common concepts in Marxist writing:

- A system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
- A system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
- The general process of the production of meanings and ideas (55).

Ideologies are a part of our social episteme which perpetuates the dominant discourse of our culture, and Williams begins the “Ideology” chapter stating “The concept of ‘ideology’ did not originate in Marxism and is still in no way confined to it (55). Yet, the ideologies perpetuated by legislative acts in higher education are in the tradition of the capitalist structure. It should first be noted how both the Morrill Act and the GI Bill have spawned an aspiration to be a part of the “middle class” in which many ideologies and values are created and widely accepted by a given culture. Also, the concept of “false consciousness” is represented by these middle class values and one being that in order to be a productive and prosperous individual one *must* attain a college degree and become educated. Yet it is unclear as to what defines an “educated” person. We are under false illusions yet we have learned to understand these values as our cultural truth. Is it merely a diploma that promises a permanent position in a given class of society? Lastly, the manner in which “production, meanings and ideas” to which Williams makes reference is greatly influenced by institutions of power. In essence, we are trained,

indoctrinated to uphold certain beliefs despite factual or tangible evidence of the real validity or virtues of the origins or outcomes.

In Williams' "Tradition, Institutions, and Formations" chapter he discusses the socialization of human beings and the influence tradition and institutions have on our active social process. Williams believes "[e]ducation transmits necessary knowledge and skills, but always by a particular selection from the whole available range, and with attitudes, both to learning and social relations..." and goes on to say that "[s]pecific communities and specific places of work, exerting powerful and immediate pressures on the conditions of making a living, teach, confirm, and in most cases finally enforce selected meanings, values, and activities (118).

Similar to Foucault's theory of Power/Knowledge Williams' theories support the idea of higher education being the ideal location for the origin of ideologies' "meanings, values and activities" to be born from. We continually follow the path of pursuing higher education immediately after high school and perform the role of the student because that is what we are "supposed" to do; in essence, we move from one institution to another to become further acculturated in the dominant discourse.

Williams believes residual and emergent elements of a particular culture are "significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characteristics of the 'dominant'" (122). Williams defines residual as a part of a given society

that “has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (122). This theory of the residual will be used in my analysis of Obama’s political speeches. In the speeches of Obama’s I will be analyzing in later chapters, there is much rhetoric heralding the benevolence of government involvement in higher education that reminds his audience about the democratic virtues of an American higher education. The rhetoric of Obama speaks to the ‘residual’ ideologies Williams refers to when he states that “some previous social and cultural institution of formation” (122) continues to influence our behaviors and expected roles as dutiful citizens. Much of the political rhetoric surrounding higher education is steeped in the idea of democracy and it being the golden ticket to the illustrious middle class. While residual values of a culture may dissipate and shift into different forms or signs, the core of the residual remain a part of the dominant.

Williams defines emergent as “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships” that are “continually being created” and that “definitions of the emergent, as of the residual, can only be made only in a relation to a full sense of the dominant. In line with Marxist theory, Williams discusses the function of the emergence of “the formations of a new class, the coming to consciousness of a new class, and within this, in actual process, the often (uneven) emergence of elements of a new cultural formation” (124). This “new class” to which Williams refers can be associated with a term I have coined

as the Middle Class Syndrome (MCS) which I believe is something that can be attributed to the “democratization” of higher education. Recipients of the GI Bill could be the first victims of MCS in that the commonly held belief that a college degree would provide the returning working class soldier with a ticket to the middle class began during this time. The origins of the middle class may have begun with the creation of the land-grant universities, but it is safe to say that the dream to establish oneself in the middle class became prevalent with the GI Bill. The pursuit of joining the middle class has slowly become a part of our dominant discourse, significantly influencing behavior motives and remains a part of the residual, making the concept of a “middle class” difficult to define.

The upcoming chapters will include a close analysis of the political discourse of the Morrill Act, the GI Bill and President Obama’s speeches. The purpose of these analyses is examine the origins of the dominant discourse that has made Americans believe that higher education for the masses will fix all social and economic problems, provide upward mobility for the working class, and provide them with guaranteed prosperity. The following chapters will also illuminate why the government continues to have such a vested interest in higher education.

The next chapter will include a brief historical overview of the Morrill Act and an analysis of the political discourse leading up to the passing of the bill and

political speeches from Justin Smith Morrill. This analysis will trace the origins of the dominant discourse of higher education for the masses that has led to current ideologies today

Chapter Three: Rhetorical Analysis of Political Discourse Surrounding the Morrill Act

“Had there been no land-grant colleges to open such careers to upwardly mobile farm boys, history may have been quite different.”

Christopher Jenks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*

The Morrill Act of 1862 was one of the Government’s most influential legislative acts that did indeed change the trajectory of higher education forever. According to Edmund J. James, author of *The Origin of the Land Grant Act of 1862 (The So-Called Morrill Act) and Some Account of its Author Jonathan B. Turner*, “the Morrill Act signed by Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862 granted each state in the Union 30,000 acres of land-grant colleges for each senator and representative” for the purpose of “promoting ‘liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life’” (8). James’ essay was published in 1910, and served to inform the public that the “true” author of the “So-Called Morrill Act” was not the Vermont representative, Justin Smith Morrill, but in fact Jonathan B. Turner, an early advocate of establishing higher education for the industrial class.

However, the aim of this analysis is not to expose the hidden “truth” of authorship of the act, but rather to perform a rhetorical analysis of the origins of the dominant discourse surrounding the Morrill Act. James states in his thesis how the land-grant colleges and universities serve

...as an indication of how steadily the consciousness of the people has grown to the acceptance of the view that education is not merely a local, nor merely a state, but that it is also a national matter; that its importance is fundamental and that the problems of education in this country will never be settled until the nation recognizes that education is a national function, as much as war, or the protection and furtherance of commerce, or the establishment of justice (13).

This quote illuminates the origins of the dominant discourse of higher education, thus establishing how these values have become an integral part of the political rhetoric regarding education today. Similar rhetoric echoed in many political speeches today has solidified the concept of education being as much of a national concern as “war,” “commerce,” and “justice” as James mentions.

The aim of this chapter is to locate the origins of the political rhetoric and perform a rhetorical analysis using several different theories drawing specifically from the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault, Kenneth Burke, and Raymond Williams, among other scholars. This chapter will include an examination and rhetorical analysis of the political texts and speeches to illustrate the origins of the political rhetoric and dominant discourse regarding higher education through the establishment of land-grant colleges for the industrial class.

The first portion of analysis will examine a pamphlet titled, “Industrial Universities for the People” written by Jonathan B. Turner and published in compliance with the Resolutions of the Chicago and Springfield Conventions for the Industrial League of Illinois in 1853. The analysis of this text will examine the

early origins of the dominant discourse of higher education established several years before the introduction of the first land-grant act to Congress in 1857. Another text used for analysis will be brief excerpts from a Congressional Debate published in the *Congressional Globe* (a transcription of the official proceedings of Congress) on June 11, 1862. These two texts will be used in a comparative analysis that will examine the similarities between the political discourse of the senate debate, and the rhetorical strategies of Jonathan B. Turner's pamphlet. I will draw analysis from Williams' theory of dominant, residual and emergent ideology and his discussion of the Marxist concept of base and superstructure. Finally, I will look to excerpts from Justin Smith Morrill's speeches from Coy F. Cross II's book *Justin Smith Morrill Father of the Land-Grant Colleges*. One speech was delivered to the House of Representatives persuading the House to pass the Bill Granting Lands for Agricultural Colleges in 1858, and the other at the University of Vermont in 1893. The analysis of these speeches will illustrate the origins of the technology of power and institutional discipline.

The Morrill Act did indeed provide the industrial class with an opportunity to pursue higher education and greatly changed the trajectory of higher education forever. However the overarching questions of the following analysis are: What was the impetus behind the creation of the Morrill Act? And, how did the dominant discourse of establishing colleges for the industrial classes change during the course of its conception, its introduction to the public, and finally its acceptance by Congress. The following analysis illustrates the impact of the

Morrill Act and its contribution to establishing the dominant discourse that has led to sociopolitical ideologies of higher education.

Historical Overview of the Morrill Act

Prior to the analysis it is important to set up the historical context and brief summary of the Morrill Act. To provide this framework, I will look to J.B. Edmond's book *The Magnificent Charter: The Origin and Role of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges and Universities*. According to J.B. Edmond, the idea of providing access for higher education was established during the colonial era of the late 1700's. He claims early settlers of America "believed that children of the non-wealthy as well as the wealthy should have the opportunity to acquire a college education and that agriculture and other nationwide industries should be included in college courses and curricula" (5). Jonathan B. Turner and Justin Smith Morrill may have been credited as the inventors of the land-grant university, but the dominant discourse of establishing colleges for the masses began by American pioneers long before Turner and Morrill brought the idea to the public and Congress.

As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of the Morrill Act was to "promote liberal and classical education for the industrial classes." Yet in addition to merely educating farmers and mechanics of the nation, instruction of military science was included in the features of the act. Edmond suggests the inclusion of teaching military tactics at the land-grant universities was because the "nation was

in the midst of the Civil War when the Morrill Act was passed” (18). The author continues, stating “...the founding fathers believed that instruction in military science at the land-grant colleges would assist greatly in the development of a corps of reserve officers adequately educated and trained for leadership in the armed forces of the future” (18). The inclusion of military science in the Morrill Act is significant since the origins not only provided benefits for the industrial classes, but for the government as well, making this provision of establishing a surplus of trained soldiers for future wars one of the determining factors for the passage of the act.

Early advocates of the land-grant colleges included citizens and politicians alike who fought relentlessly for the passage of the act. One advocate was Simon DeWitt, a member of the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and Manufacturers who presented a paper to the New York Legislature in 1819 and was said to have helped “promote public opinion in the movement that resulted in the passage” (Edmond 19). Jonathan B. Turner, a professor of rhetoric and belles lettres at Illinois College was another important figure in contributing to the act’s passage. In 1853, Turner created a pamphlet outlining a plan for the federal government “to make grants of land for the higher educational needs of the common people” (Edmond 20). One of the key figures, Justin Smith Morrill (representative of the state of Vermont and namesake of the act) was obviously another influential leader in the movement. Morrill introduced the original land-grant act to congress in 1857, and while the bill was

overwhelmingly supported and passed by both the Senate and House, President Buchanan vetoed the bill in 1859 (Edmond 21).

The determination to establish the land-grant university to provide opportunities for higher education of the industrial classes remained strong among not only the political advocates of the bill but the public as well. The commitment to the bill's passage finally led to Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Morrill Act upon his election in 1861. Edmond concludes his book stating that the Morrill land-grant colleges and universities "have been highly successful in the solution of problems and in promoting the welfare of the people" (198). Although Edmond's statement may in fact be true, it is important to understand how the political agenda and implementation of the Morrill Act fostered the sociopolitical ideologies regarding higher education still held today. The importance of a democratic nation may have been a part of our culture's dominant discourse, but it was the establishment of the land-grant universities born from the Morrill Act that influenced motive and behavior. The Morrill Act was merely the beginning of the dominant discourse that has left a permanent effect on American sociopolitical ideologies.

Analysis of Jonathan B. Turner's Pamphlet: Viewing the Origins of the Land-Grant Colleges through the Lens of the Dominant, Residual and Emergent

"What we want from school is, to teach men, more dull of apprehension, to derive their mental and moral strength, from their own pursuits, whatever they are, in the same way, and on the same principles to gather from other sources as much more they find time to achieve. We wish to teach them to read books, only

that they may the better read and understand the great volume of nature, ever open before them.”

Jonathan B. Turner, “Industrial Universities for the People” 1853

The following analysis will look at rhetorical strategies employed by advocates of establishing industrial colleges and emerging motives behind the pursuit of higher education for the masses. Jonathan B. Turner’s “Industrial Universities for the People,” a pamphlet published in 1853 by the Industrial League of Illinois nearly ten years prior to the signing of the Morrill Act was distributed to the public to inform them of the need for the creation of Industrial Colleges for mechanics and agriculturalists. Turner’s advocacy for establishing higher educational opportunities for the industrial class did not stem from monetary gain for the individual but for a true education to foster an intelligent citizenry. Turner understood that the industrial class was not welcomed at the elite universities for professionals and was even more cognizant of the fact that most individuals from the industrial class would not even be equipped to engage in such a learning environment. Yet Turner advocated for a new type of education to be provided for farmers and mechanics, and it was this vision that fostered the campaign for the industrial college.

Turner was not credited as the true “father” of the Morrill Act but his advocacy of the establishment of colleges for the industrial class is significant. Turner’s early advocacy for agricultural and mechanic colleges demonstrates his

contribution of perpetuating the discourse of higher education for the industrial class to a wide audience. One of Turner's first statements in the pamphlet claims:

The END of all education should be the development of a TRUE MANHOOD, or the natural, proportionate and healthful faculties of the human being—physical, mental, moral and social; and any system which attempts the exclusive, or even inordinate culture of any one class of these faculties, will fail of its end—it will make mushrooms and monks, rather than manhood and men (50).

This passage elucidates that the motives to establish colleges for the industrial class were initially prompted by a hope for the industrial class to develop existing skills that would direct their future potential. Turner's views on education were not advocating farmers and mechanics to cast their former identities aside, but rather to provide them with an opportunity for the improvement of their existing faculties. When Turner claims that exclusionary education will make the men "mushrooms" or "monks" rather than "men," he is emphasizing the need for another type of university to be created for genuine and impactful education to occur.

Turner discusses the inherent differences and educational needs between the professional and industrial classes and asks: "Is it said that farmers and mechanics do not and will not read? Give them a literature and education then, suited to their actual wants, and see if it does not reform and improve them in this respect, as it has done their brethren in the professional classes" (57). While much of Turner's rhetoric echoes the educational philosophies of Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, he is taking the dominant ideology of education of the time and

developing an emergent discourse by suggesting that the industrial classes deserve the same access to education as their “brethren in the professional classes.”

Turner is successful in shaping the dominant discourse of education into a new form and function by distributing the pamphlet to a culture already familiar with the discourse who have more or less ascribed to education for the masses.

Williams describes “emergent” as something continually created by “new meanings and values and new practices, new relationships” and goes on to claim that definitions of the emergent “can only be made in relation to a full sense of the dominant” (123). In order for the emergent discourse to be successful and believed among Turner’s intended audience, he had to reiterate the importance of a democratic education and does so by presenting his argument based on the already existing ideology among his audience.

Although Justin Smith Morrill was the politician who presented the land-grant college bill to Congress, it was Jonathan B. Turner who helped further establish the dominant discourse of the bill in his pamphlet; thus inadvertently creating an emergent discourse. To further expand on the theory of the emergent in relation to Turner’s rhetorical strategies, Williams explains “[a] new class is always a source of emergent cultural practice, but while it is still, as a class, relatively subordinate, this is always likely to be uneven and is certain to be incomplete” (124). Turner’s advocacy for establishing colleges for the industrial classes sparked both an emergent discourse and the origins of an emerging class. In a parallel fashion to Williams’ dominant and emergent theory, Burke discusses

the concept of “permanence and change” stating, “...what could *discovery* be but *rediscovery*? A man makes a new invention. Yet it is the simply the external embodiment of *prior* mental patterns” (181). The “new education” Turner calls for is easily accepted by the readers of his pamphlet because their “prior” understanding of the importance of democratic education had already been implanted in their consciousness before Turner introduced his proposed “invention” of establishing industrial colleges.

The intent of Turner’s pamphlet does not necessarily imply a need to create a “new class,” but serves rather to draw public attention to a “new education” as a way of improving the lives of the industrial class. He exposes the parallels of the industrial and professional classes to successfully illustrate his main argument by posing a hypothetical situation. Turner sets up a solid argument that persuades his audience to understand the pertinence of establishing a “new college” in the following statements:

- “Suppose you should supply the libraries of the divine and the lawyer with practical treatises on the raising of crops, the resuscitation and improvement of soils, and the management of stock...instead of books treating the particular nature and duties of his own profession, does any man suppose that these professions would exhibit the same love of reading and study, or attain the same mental discipline which they now do? The idea is absurd” (57).
- “Give a divine or a lawyer a book on agriculture, and how soon it is thrown aside! And is it surprising that the farmer and mechanic treats other books on the same principle, and in the same way, for the same reason? (57-58).

- “And are such minds on this great continent to be longer left, by the million, without a single university or school of any sort, adapted to the peculiar want of their craft, while the whole energies of the republic are taxed to the utmost to furnish universities, colleges and schools adapted to the wants of the professional and military classes, who constitute not the one-hundredth part of the population...” (58)

Turner’s use of inductive reasoning by presenting hypothetical examples to influence agreement of his main argument among his audience is quite successful. From an Aristotelian perspective, it is evident that the premise from which Turner presents his argument is based on “enthymemes” derived from “probabilities” which serve as powerful persuasion tool. In Book One of Aristotle’s work *On Rhetoric* he states that “a probability [*eikos*] is what happens for the most part, not in a simple sense, as some define it, but whatever among things that can be other than they are is so related to that in regard to which it is probable as a universal is related to a particular” (43). In other words, Turner introduces his argument by establishing a “universal truth” both industrial and professional classes could only somewhat refute, for the idea of giving a “divine or lawyer” a book on agriculture or “farmers and mechanics” literature not pertaining to their own interests during this time would be unheard of. The presentation of Turner’s main thesis for a college for the industrial class who make up the majority of the population in turn works to convey his message and successfully reach both industrial and professional classes.

Comparative Analysis of Jonathan B. Turner's Pamphlet and Congressional Debate: Defining Ideologies through Political and Activist Rhetoric

In the Congressional Debates published in the *Congressional Globe* on June 11, 1862 (the day after Congress passed the Morrill Act) Senator James Harlan from Iowa employed a similar type of rhetoric used by Turner in his defense of the act. Senator Harlan asserts:

This body is a body of lawyers. There are few gentlemen here who are not professional lawyers. Heretofore appropriations of land have been made for State Universities. The proceeds of the sales of those lands have usually gone to educate the children of professional men. . . Here, for the first time I believe in the history of the Senate, a proposition is made to make an appropriation of lands for the education of the children of the agriculturalists of the nation, and it meets with strenuous opposition from a body of lawyers. If this Senate was composed of agriculturalists chiefly, they would have provided first for an agricultural college, and afterwards probably for a college in which the sons of lawyers, physicians, and other professional men could be educated (2629).

The lengthy passage from Senator Harlan is important to include in this analysis because out of the several pages of the Congressional Debates, this was one of the most persuasive arguments presented throughout the entire debate. Much of the debate from other Senators focused on the issue of monetary funding and spending by the government, yet Harlan's argument actually discussed the real intention of the bill and reminded the Senate who the bill was intended for. After Senator Harlan's comments, a motion to reconsider was agreed and those for the bill went from a divided Senate on the issue to vote of 25 "YEAS" to 15 "NAYS." While Senator Harlan used the rhetorical strategy of probability to persuade his colleagues to pass the Morrill Act, Turner's similar rhetoric worked

to establish the ideology of a universal education for all classes among the public ten years before the passage of the act by Congress. Both Turner and Senator Harlan use hypothetical situations and Aristotle's *eikos* or argument of probability to support their argument. The significance of this comparison is that both public and political forums employ a similar rhetoric that works to motivate each man's intended audience to believe in the cause or exigency of the argument. The merging of similar public and political rhetoric proves even more powerful when establishing a dominant discourse.

Williams' discussion of the Marxist theory of "base and superstructure" corresponds to the convergence of political and public discourse—one only exists with the other. Turner concludes his pamphlet leaving readers with the idea that higher education for the industrial class is already a part of the dominant discourse and will not be stopped, stating

...the idea has got abroad in the world, that some practical liberal system of education for the industrial classes, suited at once to their circumstances and their wants, can be devised, and this idea is not likely soon to be stopped; it seems to work beneath the surface of human thought with the energy of a volcanic fire, and we think it will soon burst forth...and overwhelm and annihilate whatever there may be that is evil in our present educational ideas and processes (61).

This passage relates to Williams' discussion of the "base and superstructure" in the way in which the concept of education for the industrial class was introduced to the public by a college professor of rhetoric, but with legislative action and political maneuvering, education for the masses became a part of sociopolitical ideology. Williams defines "[t]he 'superstructure'" as the whole "ideology" of the

class: its ‘form of consciousness’: its constitutive ways of seeing the world” (76). Without the vision of the establishment of colleges for the industrial classes from the base (the people) an ideology of universal higher education established by the superstructure (the Government) would not exist. Jonathan B. Turner’s advocacy for the creation of industrial colleges may have begun as a gesture of promoting an egalitarian society, yet it was government involvement in higher education and the passage of the Morrill Act that has perpetuated the idea of higher education for the masses.

A Rhetorical Analysis of Excerpts from Justin Smith Morrill’s Speeches on the Land-Grant Colleges

For this portion of the analysis I will be examining select passages of Justin Smith Morrill’s speeches from Coy F. Cross II’s book *Justin Smith Morrill Father of the Land-Grant Colleges*. The original intent of the Morrill Act was to educate the masses. However, to guarantee the passage of the bill, economic and military incentives for the government changed the tenets of the bill. Turner’s vision of simply educating the masses shifted once Morrill brought the idea to Congress. Morrill understood that in order for a successful passage of the bill, the government had to benefit from the act, and with this idea, military and economy led the bill. Rather than the industrial classes being the main recipients of the bill, the government became both donor and beneficiary.

Morrill's address to the House of Representatives on April 20, 1858 discussed the loss of productivity and money for the country prompted colleagues to listen to his proposal for the first introduction of the Morrill Act. To ensure the passage of the act Morrill presented statistics of monetary gains and the way in which the act would benefit the country and diverges from the original intent to actually "educate" the industrial class. Morrill describes the "decreasing yields" in American agriculture that posed a threat of "wide-spread deterioration of the soil" with proportionate loss of capital and wages. Morrill goes on, stating the following:

- "Our country is growing debilitated, and we propagate the consumptive disease with the energy of private enterprise and public patronage." (81)
- "Does not our general system of agriculture foreshadow ultimate decay? If so, is it beyond our constitutional power and duty to provide an incidental remedy?" (81).
- "We have schools teach the art of manslaying and make masters of 'deep-throated engines of war'; and shall we not have schools teach men the way to feed, clothe, and enlighten the great brotherhood of man? (81)

Morrill's rhetorical fight was not in vain, for the House "after some filibustering...passed the bill 105 votes to 100" (82). While Morrill was able to persuade his colleagues to pass the first proposal of the Morrill Act, President Buchanan used executive power and vetoed the bill in 1859. If Morrill had not discussed the economic benefits of the bill for the nation, House members may not have been persuaded to vote on the bill's passage. Burke's discussion of in his

“Occupational Psychosis” chapter correlates with Morrill’s use of clever political rhetoric. Burke states:

The factor of *interest* plays a large part in the business of communication. Even if one speaks very clearly and simply on a subject of great moment for himself, for instance, one is hardly communicating in the desired sense if his auditor does not care in the least what he is saying... We interest a man by dealing with his interests (37).

This theory works on two levels for this analysis: first by Morrill’s success in reaching his audience by honing in on the interest of economic turmoil if the bill is not passed, and secondly, by further establishing the embedded ideology of universal education serving as the powerful solution to solve all problems. Morrill’s choice of words and doomsday rhetoric is quite effective as well—how could House members not be interested in fixing a broken agricultural system that “foreshadows ultimate decay?”

In Morrill’s speech delivered at the University of Vermont in 1893, nearly thirty years after the passage of the Morrill Act, he speaks of the benefits of the act and reminds his audience once again the importance of higher education. Morrill states: “I am a firm believer in universal education. If the training and education of domestic animals wonderfully increases their value and title to esteem, obviously for man, having “dominion over every living creature” it must be of vastly higher importance” (Cross 77). Morrill’s use of metaphor in comparing the training and education of domestic animals to that of higher education for the masses echoes Horace Mann’s description of the ignorance of the working classes and their need for education to become “respectable”

members of society. Both Morrill and Mann express their belief that the only remedy for “domesticating” and disciplining the unruly laboring classes was education. The idea of a domestic animal being trained implies the need for the “untamed” youth or “uncivilized” farmer to become domesticated or refined by entering the institution of higher education. Morrill’s reference to “man’s dominion over all living creatures” implies that education leads to power, and this notion successfully persuades individuals from the working class to fully accept this discourse to inform their decisions and behavior.

This concept of domestication of a class resounds of Foucault’s theory of docile bodies in which he describes a body “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (180). Foucault’s discussion of the technico-political register “constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school, and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body” (180) demonstrates the disbursement of hierarchical power. By establishing institutions of higher education for the masses as sources of power and improvement, the government leads citizens to believe they are in control of their own actions, when in most respects they are being disciplined and continue to be in the submissive position. Including the biblical reference from Genesis and God’s plan for man to hold “dominion over all living creatures” lends to Morrill’s rhetorical repertoire quite effectively. To further analyze Morrill’s statement, one may note that a domesticated animal may be more useful, but simply put, easier to control. To take the analysis further,

suppose one were to alter the phrasing of Morrill's statement by exchanging the term "domesticated animal" with "laboring or working class" and replaced "man" with the government. The following phrase would read as such: "If the training and education of domestic animals (working class) wonderfully increases their value and title to esteem, obviously for man (government), having "dominion over every living creature" it must be of vastly higher importance." While Morrill may not have explicitly stated that the government wanted to have "dominion" over the working classes, there is much to be interpreted from his rhetoric. The phrase "increases their value" in this statement is most interesting, in that in later chapters we will see the same rhetoric of the importance of education increasing human capital being used by other politicians. Morrill ends his speech stating:

Asking personally for nothing...I trust it may be believed that I have aimed to promote 'the greatest good for the greatest number,' and to construe the college act of 1862 in its true sense and meaning, by which only can its greatest usefulness and highest service to our state and whole country be fully developed and preserved (89).

Morrill's use of the Utilitarian mantra of "the greatest good for the greatest number" is powerful rhetoric mirroring the main goal of higher educational opportunities for the masses. Yet Morrill's opposition to "women suffrage and the eight hour work day" certainly does not promote the "the greatest good for the greatest number."

The idea that democratic education will continue to serve the “greatest good for the greatest number,” may have been the genuine goal of the advent of the land-grant college, but who is it serving today? Furthermore, how do these ideologies get so deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness, that we stop asking what our motives are and blindly follow and behave how we have been disciplined to act? In the next portion of this thesis I will perform an analysis of the dominant discourse and political rhetoric surrounding the GI Bill of 1944 and attempt to answer these questions.

Chapter Four: Historical Background of the GI Bill and Rhetorical Analysis of the Political/Historical Context and Discourse of the Bill

The next portion of this thesis will involve a rhetorical analysis of Franklin D. Roosevelt's speeches and contemporary political discourse surrounding the GI Bill which was signed into law by FDR on June 22, 1944. The initial act provided veterans of World War II with several benefits including loans for housing, land and business properties, and most notably, the educational opportunities and monetary support from the government which provided veterans with college tuition and special training fees and living expenses during their studies. The GI Bill contributed to the democratization of higher education and significantly changed the trajectory of higher education, and the legacy of the bill continues today.

Providing a historical context leading up to the GI Bill through a brief recap of the Bonus March will be helpful for readers to familiarize themselves with the analyses presented later in this chapter. To establish this, I will look to Stephen R. Ortiz's book, *Beyond the Bonus March and the GI Bill* and explore the impetus leading up to the signing of the Bill. Many historians like Ortiz are well versed in the origins and political agendas behind the GI Bill, arguing that it was not necessarily established to provide veterans with a smooth readjustment to civilian life, but rather to prevent a revolutionary uproar like the Bonus March of

1932 from recurring upon the return of WWII veterans, and for FDR to capture the soldier vote to win the election of 1944. Drawing from a historical perspective, I would further argue that the political agenda behind the GI Bill illustrates many key points of this thesis that will be presented at greater length in this chapter.

The Bonus March of 1932 and the 1944 Presidential Election: Historical Context and Origins of the GI Bill

“Elite policy makers may have brought the state and higher education into close contact, but it took common citizens in uncommon times to consummate the relationship and to ensure that education would never drift too far from the center of American politics or society again.”

Christopher P. Loss ““The Most Wonderful Thing Has Happened to Me in the Army”: Psychology, Citizenship, and American Education in World War II.” *The Journal of American History*, December 2005.

In 1924 the veterans of World War I were promised an “adjusted compensation for their wartime service in the form of deferred interest-bearing certificates payable in 1945 or, in the event of the veteran’s death, to their beneficiaries” (Ortiz 1) but with the onset of the Great Depression these veterans found themselves in dire need of money. In June 1932, during the “Great Depression’s worst year, tens of thousands of veterans flocked to the nation’s capital to lobby Congress for immediate payment of their “Bonus”” (Ortiz 1-2). Upon the arrival of the some 40,000 veterans (known as the Bonus Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the steps of the nation’s capital, they were met with much disappointment as Congress refused to give the veterans their “Bonus.” The BEF

did not give up easily and set up squatter camps known as the Anacostia Flats near Capitol Hill, remained there with their families, and continued their plea to the nation they served to provide them with their deserved bonus.

Ultimately, the veterans were forced out of their camps after “clashes broke out” that left two veterans dead and several wounded police officials (Ortiz 56). According to Ortiz, the Bonus March left the “veteran supplicants [as] symbols of a collapsing political and economic order incapable of addressing the problems created by the Great Depression” (57). The nation’s incapacity to discipline the soldiers during the Bonus March and their determination to prevent another “revolution” led to the development of the GI Bill. Herbert Hoover’s decision to remove the veterans through violence to regulate and control the veterans illustrates the hypocrisy of the nation’s army fighting their own veterans, and the nation’s need to solidify ultimate control.

There was another form of control at play during the height of the Bonus March; FDR was campaigning for control of the Democratic presidential ticket. At the Democratic National Convention of 1932, FDR expressed his views on the situation, stating that “he saw no reason that the Bonus should be paid in advance, given the economic conditions and the soaring federal deficit” and viewed the recipients of the Bonus as “no more deserving of aid than millions of other suffering Americans” (Ortiz 58). Later, at the American Legion national convention in 1933, shortly after FDR was elected president, he maintained his position that soldiers should not receive special treatment. FDR stated, “[t]he fact

of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his Government a benefit which no other citizen receives” (Ortiz 91). These statements from FDR directly contradict his later views expressed toward education and his subsequent remarks regarding the signing of the GI Bill nearly ten years later.

During FDR’s 1944 campaign for re-election, Republican vice-presidential candidate, Governor John Bricker, reminded voters of FDR’s previous “violent antagonism towards veterans’ legislation” to help clinch the veteran vote (Ortiz 202). Knowing the importance of securing the veteran vote to win the election, FDR initiated, supported and signed the GI Bill on June 22, 1944. FDR’s sudden change of heart and support for the veterans may have been fostered by a true concern for reintegrating returning WWII veterans into society, but the political stakes and the concern of a repetition of the Bonus March were the determining factors behind the signing of the act. While these factors may merely be viewed as “typical,” seemingly innocuous political maneuvers, the GI Bill fostered the dominant discourse of higher education echoed today in political speeches and Army propaganda that continually leads Americans to believe that education will solve all social and economic problems.

Overview of Speeches and Purpose of Analysis

The following portions of this chapter will provide an analysis of three main texts: FDR’s address before the National Education Association in New

York City on June 30, 1938; his 25th Fireside Chat delivered on July 28, 1943; and a GI Bill booklet published by the U.S. Army Recruiting Command in 1985 celebrating the revision of the bill. The analyses of these texts will not only examine the rhetoric FDR employs, but also call attention to two main issues: the origin behind the creation of the GI Bill, and the fostering of the ideology that a college degree is the *only* conduit for upward social mobility. My analysis will be supported once again by the theories of Raymond Williams, Michel Foucault, Kenneth Burke, and the rhetorical critique of Richard Weaver. Other contemporary scholars of history, higher education and human capital theories will also be introduced in this portion.

FDR's 1938 Speech on Education as Capital: Analysis of Perpetuating Political Discourse and Functioning Ideologies

While the rhetorical *style* of politicians is never static, the political *rhetoric* is seemingly constant, perpetuating the same ideologies originating from past centuries. This concept is exemplified in the speech FDR addressed to the National Education Association in June 1938 in the way in which he equates education with human capital and the key to not only personal economic prosperity, but for America's prosperity as well. FDR states that

Man's present day control of the affairs of nature is the direct result of investment in education. And the democratization of education has made it possible for outstanding ability, which would otherwise be completely lost, to make its outstanding contribution to the commonweal. We cannot afford to overlook any source of human raw material (FDR 1938).

This statement resounds of the same origins of political discourse dating back to political figures as Jefferson, Mann and Dewey previously discussed. We are a nation that relies on not only natural resources but human resources or human capital that only education can enhance. The problem with such theories and values is that it creates a further binary between those who hold college degrees and those who do not. FDR's discussion of the "investment in education" and the concept that America "cannot afford to overlook...raw material" resonates with an audience of teachers and administrators living in a capitalist society. FDR's rhetoric in his speech implies that an individual without an education is viewed as an "inferior" or "marginalized" citizen which remains a part of our dominant discourse today as a "fact" that is difficult to refute.

As mentioned in chapter two, I discussed Richard M. Weaver's book *Ethics of Rhetoric* in which he describes his theory of "god terms" and "charismatic terms" and "devil terms" to illustrate the rhetorical effect of FDR's word choices in his speech. The problem Weaver identifies with such rhetoric or ultimate terms is they often "sound like the very gospel of one's society, but in fact they betray us; they get us to do what the adversary of the human being wants us to do." Weaver continues, warning that the "machinery of propagation and inculcation is today so immense that no one avoids entirely the assimilation and use of some terms which have a downward tendency" (232).

The discussion of these terms is significant in this analysis, for it posits a crucial point that while many "sophisticated" thinkers may be immune to such

rhetoric, it is nearly impossible to avoid. Another ultimate term to include in Weaver's list is "capital" or rather "human capital" in its continual association with education found in FDR's 1938 speech. Examples of FDR's use of "god terms" are illustrated below:

- "The only real *capital* of a nation is its natural resources and its human beings. So long as we take care of and make the most of both of them we shall survive as a strong nation and a *progressive* nation..." (my emphasis) (FDR 1938).
- "This *capital* structure—natural resources and human beings—has to be maintained at all times. The plant has to be kept up and new *capital* put in year by year to meet our increasing needs. If we skimp on that *capital*, if we exhaust our natural resources and weaken the capacity of our human beings, then we shall go the way of all weak nations" (my emphasis) (FDR 1938).

It should be noted that these statements were made consecutively. FDR essentially restates the same thing in the second excerpt, but used metaphorical language to clearly convey his message to his audience. Although FDR never explicitly states that human capital will increase through education in these statements, it is certainly implied to his audience made up exclusively of members of the National Education Association. Additionally, FDR's language and the fact that he equates "weakened human capacity" with "weak nations" creates a sense of urgency and establishes the ideology of education serving as the means to uphold a strong nation. FDR's use of the word "weak" parallels with Weaver's discussion of the "devil term" which he believes are rhetorically effective because "they defy any

real analysis” and that “...one cannot explain how they generate their peculiar force of repudiation” (223). When one hears the term “weak” or the possibility of going the way of “weak nations” a sense of ownership of power and the struggle to be the opposite is a powerful act of persuasion which FDR successfully employs throughout his speeches.

As FDR continues, he makes further reference to the human capital and the importance of education and its role in sustaining “democracy” stating:

- “No nation can meet this changing world unless its people, individually and collectively, grow in the ability to understand and handle the new knowledge as applied to increasingly intricate human relationships. That is why the teachers of America are the ultimate guardians of the human capital of America, the assets which must be made to pay social dividends if democracy is to survive” (FDR 1938).
- “We have believed wholeheartedly in investing the money of all the people on the education of the people. That conviction, backed up by taxes and dollars, is no accident, for it is the logical application of our faith in democracy” (FDR 1938).

These statements illustrate the importance of education but only in the sense of its association to maintaining a “democratic society” and a promotion of capitalism.

The terms “democratic society” and “capitalist society” could be read as interchangeable meanings, for this type of rhetoric implies that without the one the other does not thrive. To further examine this concept I will draw from Williams’ discussion of formal institutions and their influence on “social process” or “socialization.” William asserts that “[e]ducation transmits necessary

knowledge and skills, but always by a particular selection from the whole available range, and with intrinsic attitudes, both to learning and social relations, which are in practice virtually inextricable” (117-118). The “knowledge and skills” Williams refers to can be viewed as the inculcation of the ideologies transmitted through teachers, or more specifically, “the ultimate guardians of human capital.” What is education, but the greatest form of socialization? Students begin their education to become good citizens contributing to the good of the nation, and end their education (college) with the promise of prosperity. The concept of a “democratic” education may have initially been created to foster literacy, intelligence and critical thinking among the masses, but it can be assumed the paramount reason for government involvement in education was to establish and maintain a functioning capitalist society.

FDR continues his address and provides a summary of the benefits and policies the Federal Government have been establishing to help poorer communities get the education they need, and heralds the contributions and successes of the Works Progress Administration. FDR shifts from his discussion of capital/human capital and democracy and concludes his speech with several references to the term “freedom.” In the last lines of his speech he hammers the point of education being tantamount to freedom, repeating the word several times. The following lines are found in FDR’s concluding statements:

- “I have spoken of the twin interlocking assets of national and human resources and of the need of developing them hand and hand. But with this

goes the equally important and equally difficult problem of keeping education intellectually free. For freedom to learn is the first necessity of guaranteeing that man himself shall be self-reliant enough to be free” (FDR 1938).

- “If the fires of freedom and civil liberties burn low in other lands, they must be made brighter in our own” (FDR 1938).

In keeping with Weaver’s theories of “ultimate terms” he classes the word “freedom” with the “charismatic” category of terms which he believes are “made use of by modern politicians and statesmen in an effort to get men to assume more responsibility (in the form of military service, increased taxes, abridgement of rights, ect.)” (228). The concept of education helping man become “self-reliant enough to be free” is an interesting phrase, and much of the first excerpt above is full of empty rhetoric. It is not clear what point FDR is making exactly, but his use of the word “freedom” over and over and its association with education creates a message that education equals freedom. FDR reminds the audience of their patriotic duty to perpetuate and sustain their freedom, or in Weaver’s terms “assume more responsibility” to serve institutions to maintain individual freedom. The values appear logical, therefore widely accepted among Americans. The same use of Weaver’s “ultimate terms” and political rhetoric is used today and it is this type of rhetoric that continues to shape ideologies of higher education among Americans.

FDR’s last lines of his speech revert back to the “ultimate term” of democracy and finishes on a patriotic and hopeful note:

There may be times when men and women in turmoil of change lose touch with the civilized gains of centuries of education: but the gains of education are never really lost. Books may be burned and cities sacked, but truth, like yearning for freedom, lives in the hearts of humble men and women. The ultimate victory tomorrow is with democracy, and through democracy with education, for no people in all the world can be kept eternally ignorant or eternally enslaved (FDR 1938).

To test my previous assumption of the idea of democracy and capitalism being interchangeable terms I will change the statement to illustrate my argument.

Critically reading FDR's terms and viewing democracy as capitalism as interchangeable in the following excerpt illustrates the argument of how education has become more of a economical than educational pursuit: "ultimate victory tomorrow is with democracy (capitalism) and through democracy (capitalism) through education." Yet, taking this concept further, FDR's rhetoric implies without a democratic education individuals will remain "ignorant or eternally enslaved." The only alternative to democratic education is certainly not a preferred position and these binaries have been perpetuated for centuries. And although these values have some validity, it is important to note how this type of political rhetoric often functions as a guide for thought and behavior for many Americans who seldom question why they believe these values to be "true." As we grow more dependent on the capitalist system and view it as a part of American "democracy" these ideologies hold deeper meaning for motives and behavior normalized not only by political rhetoric, but institutions of education. This idea refers to FDR's earlier discussion of teachers being the "guardians of human capital."

FDR's rhetorical strategies function to serve as what Burke describes as our "orientation" which influences motives and behavior. Burke claims that "[a]n orientation is largely a self-perpetuating system, in which each part tends to corroborate other parts" (169). Burke also goes on to discuss his theories on the search for motives and suggests:

Historic textures can be said to "cause" our frameworks of interpretation in the sense that they present varying kinds of materials for us to synthesize—but the synthesis is necessarily made with reference to non-historic demands, the genius of the human body as projected into its ideological counterparts (229).

The "frameworks of interpretation" Burke refers to are demonstrated throughout much of FDR's speech to the National Education Association and the dominant discourse is perpetuated by the transmission of ideologies stemming from dominant discourse that influence unconscious motives. Burke's theory supports my assumption that dominant political discourse repeated through the centuries is what has fostered ideologies and behavior through a signified language.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's 25th Fireside Chat: Analysis of the Origins of the GI Bill and the Rhetoric of Discipline and Power

As previously mentioned, FDR's interest and support in creating the GI Bill did not stem from purely benevolent intentions of providing service men and women opportunities for higher education and monetary assistance, but rather from a self-serving government where control and disciplining of the masses was placed as a top priority. FDR states in his Fireside Chat when he first introduced

the GI Bill that service men and women in the armed forces “...must not be demobilized into an environment of inflation and unemployment, to a place on a bread line, or on a corner selling apples” and goes on to discuss how the government this time would “have plans ready—instead of waiting to do a hasty, inefficient, and ill-considered job at the last moment” (FDR 1943). There are two issues functioning here: a direct address sublimating the nation’s fear of a repeat of the Bonus March fiasco, and the guarantee of the veteran vote to help FDR win reelection for presidency. Foucault’s discussion of the discipline and theory of panopticism suggests that institutional power often takes on the form of a disciplinary machine to control the masses. Foucault states that a “multiplicity, whether in a workshop or a nation, an army or a school reaches the threshold of discipline when the relation of the one to other becomes favorable” (210). The benefits of the GI Bill are indeed “favorable” for the government and the returning soldier; thus the concept of discipline is widely accepted by those benefiting from the Bill. However, the true origins of the bill are seldom questioned, and the legacy of education for the masses functions as another form of governmental discipline.

In FDR’s Fireside Chat he outlines the benefits of the bill which included the following:

- “Mustering out pay to every member of the armed forces and merchant marine when he or she is honorably discharged...large enough in each

case to cover a reasonable period of time between his discharge and the finding of a new job.”

- “...employment insurance if the individual registers with the United States Employment Services.”
- “...opportunity for members of the armed services to get further education or trade training at the cost of the government.”

These benefits described did indeed contribute to a smooth transition for returning service men and women, but the education benefits provided by the GI Bill have often been believed by many historians and educators as its greatest legacy.

Christopher P. Loss, author of the article “The Most Wonderful Thing Has Happened to Me in the Army” asserts that “World War II transformed American higher education forever” (864). In this essay, Loss also critiques the government’s involvement in higher education stating that the purposes behind the education benefits of the GI Bill were “manipulative” and that “education was a democratic form of propaganda,” claiming that the Army Information and Education division believed that if it “used pedagogy and propaganda before, during, and after combat, American GI’s would be better off as soldiers and citizens” (876). Loss raises some interesting points in which the whole function of government involvement in higher education is put to question. The fact that FDR equated those in uniform with everyday citizens, then established such an extensive plan for veteran benefits represents that a larger function and purpose determined the creation of the GI Bill.

Raymond Williams discusses the importance of critically examining institutional involvement in a historical context, believing that “in authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance” (121). To examine the context of the creation of the GI Bill is important in order to understand what entity the bill is actually serving. The emphasis Williams places on the importance of historical analysis correlates with one of Loss’s further critique that “[b]y equating educational service and military service, policy makers converted collegiate study into a new weapon of the nation’s defense arsenal” (890). FDR’s decision to create the GI Bill by providing educational benefits did more than simply prevent another Bonus March or ensure the veteran vote for his reelection: it established a guaranteed supply of soldiers to serve the nation. Loss supports this idea when he states that after the introduction of the GI Bill, “higher education had become a stronghold of democracy, an arbiter of citizenship, and a key institution of the Cold War national security state” (890). Loss further exemplifies this notion when he discusses the record numbers of veterans who “stormed the ivory tower” stating that from 1947 to 1948 “veterans totaled nearly 50 percent of college students nationwide” (889). These numbers certainly illustrate the influence of the GI Bill had on higher education and the existing legacy of the bill today.

Foucault’s discussion of the importance of “genealogy” is similar to Williams’ views on historical analysis. Foucault suggests

The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin...he must be able to recognize the events of history (and) must be able to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength...to be in a position to judge philosophical discourse (80).

Understanding the political context and exigencies of the GI Bill lend powerful insight to how such ideologies of higher education were established and how they continue to influence motive and behavior. Foucault further illuminates the aims of genealogy from Nietzsche's perspective and states that it is to be done to "identify the passing events...the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and hold value for us..." (81). Identifying the "false appraisals" of the GI Bill is the aim of this analysis and serves the purpose of this thesis, which is to fully examine the historical context of the GI Bill to view history and perpetuating ideologies with a critical lens.

Changing political views and agendas is commonplace for many politicians, but it is important to understand the *purposes* of changing political agendas. Following the views of Williams and Foucault and their discussion of the importance of thoughtful historical analysis, I will draw focus once again to FDR's previous views on soldier benefits and parallel this one of FDR's statements in Fireside Chat. FDR states directly before he outlines the details of the GI Bill that "...the members of the armed forces have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other sacrifice than the rest of us, and they are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems" (FDR 1943). This is in direct opposition to FDR's previous view toward soldiers from a

quote stated earlier: “[t]he fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his Government a benefit which no other citizen receives” (Ortiz 91). The institutional marriage of the government and higher education was consummated by the GI Bill nearly seventy years ago that is still going strong.

The GI Bill Recruiting Booklet: An Analysis of Middle Class Aspirations and the Legacy of the GI Bill

“The first GI Bill of Rights turned out to be one of the most important bills in the history of the United States. At the time of its signing, there was little realization of the great changes it would have on life in America. The program changed the entire concept of adult education in this nation...”

U.S. Army Recruiting Command Booklet 1985

As noted above, the GI Bill did indeed “change the entire concept of adult education” yet perhaps one of the greatest influences of the GI Bill recognized today was the opportunities it provided “working-class” citizens to move with greater ease into the middle class. The GI Bill Recruiting Booklet produced by the U.S. Army Recruiting Command published in 1985 is charged with countless interviews of veterans singing the praises of the GI Bill and how it gave them access to job opportunities and a position in society they never thought they could aspire to.

In the following analysis, I will discuss the GI Bill’s significant contribution in solidifying the ideology of higher education serving as the only

path to the illustrious middle class. It is an indisputable fact that the GI Bill did in indeed provide upward mobility for “working class” veterans and positive opportunities for many service men and women, yet I am not performing an analysis of the virtues of the bill in this portion of this thesis. I am concerned with the dominant discourse born from the GI Bill and its influence on establishing the notion of equating a college degree with a “guaranteed” entrance into a burgeoning middle class. More specifically, I want to examine how these beliefs have caused so many students to flood colleges and universities simply because they feel as though they “have” to. While I do not necessarily find the creation of middle class America from the GI Bill opportunities disturbing, I do find this notion of pursuing higher education as the *only* way to better one’s position in society problematic.

The intended audience of the brochure is prospective Army recruits so it is logical that rhetoric praising the benefits of the GI Bill is reiterated throughout the text. Yet it is interesting to note that much of the rhetoric entails discussion of how the educational benefits of the bill led to achieving the “American dream.” One statement mentioned in the introduction of the brochure establishes that “More than 18 million Army veterans have attended college using veterans’ benefits” and that “Many would have never realized their educational potential without the GI Bill’s assistance” (3). Again, I am not refuting these points and this is not the purpose of the analysis. I do want to draw attention, however, to the implications of the military’s immense power and authority to play such a large

role in shaping the future through the promise of reinventing oneself for upward mobility and, as Burke would suggest, creating an “orientation.” In his “Search for Motives” chapter Burke claims:

Even if one ascribes the rise of an orientation to its usefulness, one cannot conclude that it necessarily serves the ends of use. It may survive from conditions for which it was fit into conditions for which it was unfit (*cultural lag*). And its fossilized existence may be prolonged, after it has become dangerous to the social body as a whole, if some group which profits by it controls the educative, legislative, and constabulary resources of the state (179).

I believe this particular statement speaks to the “orientation” of the middle class identity perpetuated by the promises and accounts found throughout the GI Bill booklet. The GI Bill benefits of the Army’s assistance in paying for higher education, coupled with dominant political discourse surrounding higher education and democracy established the “orientation” or ideology of higher education serving as the main factor for attaining upward mobility decades ago.

However, this functioning ideology and promise of a better future through the acquisition of a college degree does not serve the same purpose as it historically did in the past. Higher education has changed dramatically since the signing of the GI Bill, yet I argue that in recent years, the youth seeking a “better future” with the hopes of moving to a better semiotic position enlist in the Army with the main intention of getting a college degree, rather than enlisting on behalf of patriotic duty to serve one’s country. While this may be a far reaching assumption, it is interesting to examine the similarities between the American soldier and student, notably that they are both enlist or enroll with hopes of

achieving a better future through education and “serving time” under institutional guidance and supervision. Here are few example veteran testimonies from the booklet:

- “I found the Army to be one of the few places where I could receive equal opportunity as a female...I know that I could have not completed college without the GI Bill. I encourage all young men and women to enter the Army as a means to attaining maturity and education” (17).
- “It (the Army) taught me to appreciate the freedom and opportunities we have as Americans and not to take them for granted” (17).
- “This education has opened doors that otherwise would have remained closed. Furthermore, this education coupled with the exposure received in managing line organizations while on active duty, has given me the tools needed to be successful in any walk of life” (20).
- “Without the GI Bill, I would not have been able to complete my education...There was no way I could have worked and carried the number of courses I did...The GI Bill was a blessing (20).

All of these statements echo the same point—the GI Bill changed their lives and opened doors, and while all of these “success stories” are inspiring, the issue once again is not that the GI Bill is harmful to society, but *how* the discourse surrounding it has the power to influence motive and action on a large scale.

Prospective Army recruits toiling with the idea of enlisting will more than likely be persuaded to make the decision to join if they are told what “a blessing” the GI Bill was—or how it provided “equal opportunities for women.”

Perhaps the most persuasive rhetoric within this text is the idea that the bill “opened doors that otherwise would have remained closed.” Often times the young people Army Recruiters target are looking for new paths, journeys and new opportunities or the elusive “door” to lead them to a “better life.” The result of employing this type of rhetorical strategy of including the “success stories” in this brochure is extremely powerful and succeeds in not only effectively reaching their intended audience, but perpetuating the dominant discourse as well.

In the chapter discussing the theoretical framework for this thesis, I included a statement from Foucault regarding his theory of docile bodies, which is relevant to this analysis of the changing “shape” or “form” of the soldier. Foucault suggests that by the late 18th century

...the soldier [had] become something that [could] be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has “got rid of the peasant” and given him “the air of the soldier (179)

As I mentioned earlier the idea of the pliability of the soldier parallels to the role of the student, and in the terms of attaining a higher education; the role of the “soldier” leaving his “peasant” status behind could be supplanted with the role of the “student.” The government’s involvement in higher education and the passing of the GI Bill did not occur because of the government’s desire for a truly educated populace. I argue that the government’s interest in higher education stemmed from motives to maintain an already existing power structure. The GI

Bill was simply another way of the government to acquire control and discipline of the masses through the military and institutions of higher learning. GI Bill benefits that funded education for enlisted soldiers to pursue higher education and place them in a “new class” speaks to Foucault’s theory of the “docile body.” Foucault explains that a body is docile when it can be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (180). This concept not only demonstrates the changing motives and orientation of the soldier and student created by the GI Bill, but the shifting semiotic positions and the similarities between the performative roles of the soldier and student.

Although countless veterans can attest to the invaluable educational benefits of the GI Bill, and their rise out of a “working class” position and elevation to the middle class, Christopher Jenks and David Riesman, authors of *The Academic Revolution* raise some interesting questions regarding class issues and higher education. Rather than creating a more egalitarian society, Jenks and Riesman believe that offering higher education to the masses has created an increasingly divided society. They argue that “perhaps partly as a result of mass education, American subcultures are more hierarchical than they used to be and that the “lower” cultural strata increasingly defer to the higher” (75). In other words, although these educational opportunities provided by the GI Bill may actually provide recipients of the bill with upward mobility, there is no guarantee this new position will not come with more problems and perpetuating binaries.

Caroline Bird, author of *The Case Against College* shares a similar opinion with Jenks and Riesman about the social inequalities found within higher education. Bird states that we should not “...expect young people to go to college to bring about social equality—even if it could be attained by putting everyone through four years of academic rigor...this seems to be a very roundabout and expensive way to narrow the gap between the highest and lowest in our society” (23). Are these “opened doors” and educational opportunities provided with the GI Bill actually serving the recipients? Or are they serving further deepened class distinctions? Furthermore, what are the consequences of the continuing influx in college enrollment and perpetuating dominant discourse? How will these implications affect the future of higher education? These are important questions to keep in mind in the following rhetorical analysis of Barack Obama’s political speeches.

Chapter Five: Rhetorical Analysis of President Barak Obama's Speeches from
2008-2010

"Tonight, we gather to affirm the greatness of our nation not because of the height of our skyscrapers, or the power of our military, or the size of our economy; our pride is based on a very simple premise, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Barak Obama

Keynote Address at the Democratic National Convention, July 27, 2004

As I watched the 2004 Democratic National Convention listening to a virtually unknown senatorial candidate with my family nearly seven years ago, I casually noted to my sister that we were watching the next president of America. I predicted Barak Obama would be our future president not because of his powerful, passionate and encouraging speech, but because of the language and style he used and the manner in which he delivered his speech. He was charismatic, empathetic, humble and most importantly, he was relatable. For the first time in many years Americans saw a politician with a genuine love, hope and compassion for the humanity of their country—he appeared to be the antithesis of the typical politician. Obama's speech reminded Americans what their country stood for: a nation built upon values that allowed *all* men to achieve their dreams. Obama's address was exactly what we wanted to hear and Americans hungered

for the optimism and intelligent humanity this young congressional hopeful exuded.

Although I am not performing a rhetorical analysis of Obama's address at the Democratic National Convention, I preface this portion of analysis with the mention of this speech to illustrate his superior rhetorical strategies displayed long before he entered the presidential race. When I watched Obama deliver his speech at the convention several years ago I was unfamiliar with many the terminologies of rhetoric, but it was clear Obama's use of ethos, pathos and logos forced Americans to listen and take note of this unknown candidate for the Senate. As mentioned earlier in chapter two, the speeches to be used for analysis in this chapter are a speech Obama delivered during his campaign on September 9, 2008 in Dayton, Ohio and one addressed to the University of Texas in Austin August 9, 2010. Both of the speeches reiterate the same idea: higher education is *the* economic issue of our time and America has to continue its commitment to providing higher education for everyone if our nation is to succeed in the global economy. In these speeches Obama discusses his education reform plan called Race to the Top. This is a program that challenges schools and teachers to perform better to produce more "educated" students ready to compete in a free market system.

In both of Obama's speeches he begins by creating a rapport with his audience through brief personal narrative and jokes. Obama then states "facts" surrounding education that are not easily disputed. The audience of his 2008

speech was primarily made up of teachers and administrators and his 2010 speech was delivered to students and faculty at the University of Texas in Austin. Obama's subdued language and clear and straightforward tone and his presentation of education issues already familiar to his audience not only succeeds in convincing the audience that higher education is an economic issue, but perpetuates the same dominant discourse established by politicians before him. To establish his ethos, Obama discusses his ambition to succeed and explains how America gave him the opportunity to pursue his dream of higher education despite the barriers he had to break through. The audience relates to this and establishes Obama as the epitome of the American dream—an inspirational rhetoric indeed.

Obama's ardent belief in the possibility and change for America was expressed in his campaign catch phrase "Yes We Can!" The end of his 2008 speech ends with the audience chanting, "Yes we can! Yes we can! Yes we can!" Mike Rose discusses in his book *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* America's "yearning" for a better society and describes this yearning as "one of the forces that drove the election of Barack Obama" (x). Obama's "yearning" for a better society matched the public's own desire for change. In the same 2008 speech Obama states "the day of reckoning is here (Cheers, applause)...our children and our country can't afford four more years of neglect and indifference (Cheers, applause)" (Obama 2008). Obama's reminder of the unsuccessful terms of the Bush administration is exactly what the audience wants to hear. Obama's empowering language and message of change persuades the nation to fully accept

the idea that a nation of “educated” college graduates will ultimately solve America’s economic issues and social problems.

Obama is a powerful speaker and it is his charisma and seemingly genuine care and hope for a better nation that led him to office. Rose suggests in his chapter “Politics and Knowledge” that “The best political speech is both inspirational and pedagogical...Americans respond powerfully to red-meat political rhetoric, but it is also true that once the balloons drop and the pulse returns to normal, people want a few facts, want to be spoken to as though they have brains in their heads” (70). Barack Obama does just that. He speaks intelligently to the American public using successful rhetorical strategies to persuade, if not empower his audience, and presents his argument in a logical way. Obama’s views on the importance of education are easily accepted by Americans because many of his beliefs echo the same political discourse surrounding education used by many great leaders of our past.

In his speeches Obama uses phrases and reiterates egalitarian values of education. Obama’s belief in America being a “beacon of hope” is illustrated in his discussion of the Government’s historical involvement in higher education that provided Americans with opportunities. Richard Weaver’s book, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, discusses the idea of the spaciousness of old rhetoric and correlates this spaciousness with the resonance of political language. Obama’s use of rhetoric displays this very notion and his language and phrases are what Weaver refers to as “widths of sound and meaning; they tend to echo over broad areas and

to call up generalized associations” (169). Weaver’s view of political rhetoric being used to “assume that precedents are valid, that forms will persist, and that in general one may build today on what was created yesterday” and that “yesterday’s achievements are also contributions to progress” correspond with Obama’s political discourse. Obama’s reiterations of past political discourse is successful in persuading his audience to believe in the same values in education to lead to further progress and prosperity in America.

The purpose of the analysis in this chapter is to not only to illuminate Obama’s use of varying rhetorical strategies but to explore the perpetuation of the ideologies regarding education through the analysis of political rhetoric. This analysis will further illustrate how political discourse plays a key role in establishing the belief that in order to be successful one must have a college degree. What I hope to achieve in this analysis is to call attention to my original premise: while education for the masses may seem benevolent enough, there is much to be gleaned from the language and political discourse surrounding education to prove many “beneficent” government policies are not always established with the interests of American citizens in mind, but are rather often times self-serving political agendas.

The common theme of the two speeches is the focus on the need for America to remain a global economic leader into the 21st century. According to Obama, the way to achieve this goal is for *every* American to have a college education to retain a top position in the global economy. It should be noted that

Obama began his campaign for presidency in the midst of one of America's worst economic crises since the Great Depression, so it is not surprising that much of his campaign platform focused on education as the means for Americans to pull themselves out of the economic downward spiral. Yet, there are several questions I hope to address in this portion of analysis: Who, in fact, is mass education serving? How will providing the masses access to higher education help our economy? Does Obama insist upon an educated populace for them to achieve their dreams and the "pursuit of happiness" or is he influenced by political pressure to push education on the masses to keep up appearances in a global economy? And finally, will our citizens truly be an *educated* populace? To draw back to Rose, he concludes his book by asking one of the pivotal questions that greatly influenced my decision to research the topic of this thesis: "We are a society with a system of mass education, but to what degree do we define ourselves as an educated society?" (168).

The rhetorical analysis of the following speeches will not provide *answers* to these pertinent questions per se. The aim of the analysis is to examine the political discourse to illustrate how and why the idea of mass education continues to be so easily accepted as a part of our cultural makeup. The analysis will also touch on several other ideas such as the implications of education and human capital serving government purposes, rather than creating a truly educated populace. Another element of the analysis will discuss the idea of education being masked as the overarching solution to social, economic, and infrastructural

problems in America. As mentioned in the previous chapter outlining the theoretical framework of this thesis, I will be drawing from the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke and Richard M. Weaver, and also from the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams, among other contemporary education theorists.

Establishing Perpetuating Ideologies and Motives: Analysis of Political Rhetoric and Higher Education in America

“Indeed, colleges often seem to have been founded and maintained primarily as a reaction against the very fluidity of society and the rapid pace of change, as a part of a vain struggle to maintain the old standards and the old ways.”

“Since college diplomas are a key to future power and affluence, they cannot simply be sold at auction to the highest bidders or automatically conferred on the sons of previous alumni. Instead, the distribution system must be in keeping with traditional American mythology, which portrays America as a land of opportunity with unlimited room at the top.”

Christopher Jenks and David Riesman *The Academic Revolution 2002*

The excerpts above illustrate the implications of mass education and how the American mythology is just that—a myth—not everyone graduating from college is guaranteed with a position at the “top” of the social chain. Yet the perpetuating myth continues and politicians keeping with the “old ways” maintain the same political rhetoric used by Jefferson and the chain of presidents that followed. The following analysis of Obama’s speeches will involve several ideas from the theories of Kenneth Burke and Raymond Williams among others to illustrate how Obama’s rhetorical choices perpetuate the ideologies surrounding

higher education. Looking at these speeches through historical and rhetorical lenses in correspondence with these theorists will not only lend significant insight as to how political discourse permeates our culture, but will also reveal how this type of rhetoric continually persuades and influences behavior. The idea of education for the masses was not an original idea fostered by Obama's vision of an educated populace, but by the visions and purposes our government has systemically produced through dominant discourse throughout the centuries.

As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter Raymond Williams' concept of the dominant, residual and emergent is displayed throughout Obama speeches. Williams states, "...certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation" (122).

Obama's speeches discuss new ideas to make education better, and the main threads of his speeches echo the same dominant discourse. As Williams suggests we cannot let go of the dominant discourse and although the discourse may slightly shift according to the needs of society, the residual will always influence the emergent trends. Obama speaks of the future leaders and the importance of their decisions that will ultimately affect the future of America in the following excerpt:

The decisions our leaders make about education in the coming years will shape our future for generations to come. They will help determine not only whether our children have the chance to fulfill their God-given potential or whether our workers have the chance to build a better life for their families, but whether we as a nation will remain in the 21st century the kind of global economic leader that were in the 20th century” (Obama 2008).

The phrases “God-given potential” and “building a better life” have virtually always been a part of the political discourse surrounding education. Obama uses this rhetoric not as persuasion but as a reaffirmation of what most Americans already know about education, for these are not revolutionary ideas, but rather the same motives for aspiring to a college degree. Williams’ discussion of hegemony parallels with Obama’s mentions of how the future of education will be made by “our leaders” to ensure not the success of the people, but America’s top position in the global economy. Williams speaks of hegemonic forces as “...a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (110). Williams continues his discussion of hegemony, stating that it is “a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear reciprocally confirming” (110). The idea of democratic higher education does indeed “appear” to serve the individual and Government, yet the problem lies within Obama’s goal of an educated populace by the year 2020. How exactly will higher education for the masses ensure America’s lead in the global economy in the 21st century? What is the benefit of an educated populace who only pursue a college degree because they *have* to do so in order to have a “better life” and fulfill their “God-given potential?”

Obama establishes himself as a product of the “American dream” and associates a college degree with the American dream by implying that that was what inspired immigrants to come to America. Obama’s rhetoric exemplifies Williams’ discussion of the dominant, residual and emergent theory in the way Obama builds upon established ideologies to further ingrain such beliefs on an audience already in possession of such values. Obama praises the benefits of past government endeavors in higher education stating,

You know when I dropped my daughters off at school yesterday, I couldn’t help but think about all America had done over the years to give me and my family a good education. This is a country that put my grandfather through college on the GI Bill after he left Patton’s army in World War II (Applause.) This—is a country that drew my father—like so many immigrants—across an ocean in search of a college degree. And this is a country that let the child of a teenage mom and absent father reach his dreams” (Obama 2008)

These rhetorical strategies work to influence behavior and help perpetuate the view of the pursuit of higher education as a mandatory act. Each generation American presidents discuss the importance of higher education and how an educated populace will “save” the economy by successfully competing in the global economy. The nation believes these concepts to be true because as Williams suggests “definitions of the emergent, as of the residual, can be made only in relation to a full sense of the dominant” (123). An example of emergent discourse is Obama’s statement that immigrants fled to America “in search of a college degree.” Is this a valid statement? Were immigrants coming to America specifically for a college degree? Or has Obama simply created this discourse

from an existing belief that America has *always* offered a prosperous future and world-class education for everyone?

Furthermore, Obama's discussion of the "American dream" represents an emerging discourse stemming from the residual belief that everyone can be successful simply because they live in America. In Obama's 2010 speech at the University Texas he reminds the audience of his previous visit to the school during his 2007 campaign stating:

You were there because you were hungry to see some fundamental change in America (Applause) because you believed in an America where all of us—not just some of us, but all of us—no matter what we look like, no matter where we come from, all of us can reach for our dreams. All of us can make of our lives what we will; that we can determine our own destiny (Obama 2010).

Obama perpetuates the increasingly mythical dream stating that "not just some of us, but all of us—no matter what we look like, no matter where we come from, all of us can reach for our dreams." These are empowering words and particularly persuasive since they are being espoused from America's first African American president. Williams' chapter on "Language" speaks of key points of Marxism that the "development of thinking about language, are, first, the emphasis on language as an *activity*, and, second the emphasis on the *history* of language" (21).

Williams also suggests that each of these positions (language as activity and history) has transformed those "habitual conceptions of language which depended on and supported relatively static ways of thinking about humans in the world" (21). The dominant discourse of America being the place where everyone can

make their “dreams and destinies come true” is how we Americans have come to view our position in the world. Barak Obama’s rhetorical strategies work to further represent that one’s dreams can come true through education and this ideology becomes further engrained among the masses.

In similar fashion to Raymond Williams’ theories of dominant, emergent, and residual and the significance of the history of language, Kenneth Burke discusses that it is historical influence of perpetuating hegemonic discourse that establishes ideologies and behavior. Throughout Obama’s speeches he reminds his audience of the virtues of American education illustrating our nation’s history of resilience in time of crisis. The following excerpts from Obama’s speeches illuminate the various rhetorical strategies employed to persuade his audience that in order to create a better future for America an affordable education for the masses must be taken seriously.

- “We—are a nation that’s always renewed our system of education to meet the challenges of a new time. There is—the last president from Illinois, Lincoln, created the land grant colleges to ensure the success of the union he was fighting to save. Generations of leaders built mandatory public schools to prepare our children for the changing needs of a nation. And Eisenhower doubled federal investment in education after the Soviets beat us into space. That’s the kind of leadership we must show today” (Obama 2008).
- “...I want to remind everybody here to remember, at each juncture throughout history we’ve always recognized that essential truth that the way to move forward, in our own lives and as a nation, is to put education first” (Obama 2010).

- “It’s what led Thomas Jefferson to leave as his legacy not just the Declaration of Independence but a university in Virginia. (Applause.) It’s what led a nation that was being torn apart by civil war to set aside acreage, as a consequence of President Lincoln’s vision, for the land-grant universities to prepare farmers and factory workers to seize the promise of an Industrial Age. It’s what led our parents and grandparents to put a generation of returning GIs through college, and open the doors of our schools and universities to people of all races, which broadened opportunity and grew our middle class, and produced a half a century of prosperity (Applause)” (Obama 2010).

The rhetorical strategies used here are extremely persuasive because while the discussion of history forces the audience to reflect on these moments Obama’s audience simultaneously is reminded of the urgency for future success that is fostered from past ideologies. To further extrapolate on this concept Burke explains that “Historic textures can be said to “cause” our frameworks of interpretation in the sense that they present varying kinds of materials for us to synthesize—but synthesis is necessarily made with reference to non-historic demands, the genius of the body as projected into its ideological counterparts” (229). Obama not only associates himself with Lincoln, but associates Lincoln with education and his intention to “ensure success with education.” This corresponds with Burke’s notion that the audience situates itself with ideologies instead of looking to the historical facts. The audience plays almost a word association game with themselves: Lincoln—Great President—Education—Success—Sputnik—Global Leader, and so on. These words conjure up more than historical facts; they work to further instill already deeply embedded ideologies.

What is even more interesting is that Lincoln was merely the signing president of the Morrill act—he did not necessarily have a vision for the land grant university yet Obama’s blurring of historical facts may easily be overlooked by his audience. Many Americans believe Lincoln to be one of our greatest presidents, and Obama’s tactic of perpetuating the belief that it was Lincoln’s vision that established the land-grant universities is a powerful rhetorical tool which is quite effective with his audience.

Obama’s reference to Thomas Jefferson and other great presidents in his speech to present his message of the importance of higher education for the masses correlates with Burke’s discussion of historic textures in rhetoric. Burke states “...we believe that in many respects it is the *historical* point of view which leads to such surrender on the grounds that one must adjust himself to temporal conditions as he finds them (teaching himself...to *accept* more and more mechanization simply because the trend of history points in this direction)” (271). The historical point of view Burke mentions is executed quite effectively in Obama’s speeches. Obama claims democratic education provided American farmers the chance to “seize the promise of an industrial age” and it was education that provided GI Bill recipients’ upward mobility and “grew our middle class, and produced a half a century of prosperity.” These facts are indeed true, and I am certainly not suggesting higher education should be provided for a select group. What I am concerned about are the implications of what the dominant discourse may produce. A possible outcome of the perpetuated discourse is a

“mechanization” of beliefs of history that may lead to a blind acceptance of these ideologies.

A World-class Education from the Cradle to Career as Social Reform: Analysis of Political Promises and Argument of Circumstance

“We also resort to the public schools to solve the broad social and economic problems that we cannot or will not adequately address by other means. One of the purposes of school desegregation, for example, was to disrupt residential patterns resulting from racism, demographic shifts, and housing policy. And we continue to look up to the schools to address the effects of deindustrialization, immigration, chronic poverty—and now in an increasingly globalized economy.”

Mike Rose *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* 2009

The epigraph above alludes to the concept of mass education serving as the antidote to social problems. Included in Obama’s speeches is the idea that offering universal higher education is the driving force that will lead America out of the economic crisis and fix any existing or future problems. Obama states his premise that ensuring a “true” educated populace to help build better futures and a strong America begins with early education. Yet, despite the appearance of Obama’s good intentions and logically sound political agenda with his Race to the Top education reform program there is a flawed logic in the way he presents his case to his audience.

In his book *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, Richard M. Weaver describes different rhetorical strategies, discussing flawed rhetorical strategy of the “argument of circumstance.” Obama employs the rhetorical tactic of the

“argument of circumstance” in the following statement: “What matters, then, isn’t what you do or where you live, but what you know... Without a good pre-school education, our children are less likely to keep up with peers. Without a high school diploma, you’re likely to make about three times less than a college graduate” (Obama 2008). Weaver sees this argument as detrimental in that the audience merely “reads the circumstances—the facts standing around”—and accepts them as coercive, or allows them to dictate the decision” (57) also asserting this type of argument as “the argument philosophically appropriate to the liberal” (58). Obama uses this rhetorical strategy throughout his speeches when presenting such “facts” and slippery slope logic when he implies that without early education the chances of a prosperous future are slim. These facts are indeed “coercive” and to his liberal-minded audience there is little doubt that his “innovative” idea of providing education to children when they are young would be denied.

One of Obama’s main points reiterated throughout his speeches is the idea of education being the “solution” to all social and economic problems. Obama claims

If we want to build a 21st century infrastructure and repair our crumbling roads and bridges, we can’t afford a future where a third of all fourth graders and a fifth of all eighth graders can’t do basic math, and black and Latino students are even further behind...if we want to see middle-class incomes rising like they did in the 1990’s, we can’t afford a future where so many Americans are priced out of college...” (Obama 2008)

Diane Ravitch, a former advocate of progressive education and proponent of the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) discusses her disenchantment with education reform initiatives in her book *Left Back*. In her book she traces education and critiques the assumption that education should be seen as a means to social reform. Ravitch asserts "...the belief that schools should be expected to solve all of society's problems" is a great error (465). Ravitch questions the validity of the "progressives of the twentieth century" who claimed that "schools had the power and responsibility to reconstruct society" (459). The rhetoric of education being the primary tool to solve all social problems is often a part of political discourse especially in time of economic crises or war. Obama's discussion of America's troubled infrastructure and "crumbling" cities being placed in the hands of educated students appears logical, yet in his speech Obama does not explain how a college degree will fix these problems. He merely states his "facts" that are not exactly supported by anything, and these statements are little more than empty yet "hopeful" promises.

Obama critiques the Bush administration's NCLB act discussing the difference of his education reform program, stating:

We can't accept anything but the best in America's classrooms. And that's why we've launched an initiative called Race to the Top, where we are challenging states to strengthen their commitment to excellence, and hire outstanding teachers and train wonderful principals, and create superior schools with higher standards and better assessments. And we're already seeing powerful results across the country (Obama 2010).

The components of the initiative sound good in theory but the questions are: What do “outstanding teachers,” “wonderful principals,” and “superior schools” resemble? Again, these descriptions are mere words that serve as empty, yet politically persuasive rhetoric. Ravitch’s experience and strong advocacy for NCLB in its beginning and extensive background in education policy lends to her credibility when she states “If there is a lesson to be learned from the river of ink that was spilled in the education disputes of the twentieth century, it is that anything in education that is labeled a “movement” should be avoided like the plague” (453). These are strong words, but Ravitch’s position as a former advocate to such programs which she says to “avoid like the plague” suggests these programs and initiatives do not always live up to their promises. Ravitch has seen both sides of the issues and makes a persuasive case against these programs. In other words Obama’s Race to the Top initiative is simply another example of political agenda disguised as education reform.

Foucault’s discussion of power and his view that “political economy” corresponds with the idea of the government establishing educational reform programs to solve economic and social problems through education. Obama’s belief that his Race to the Top initiative will help students go on to college and provide them with opportunities for higher education sounds good in theory, yet the question of *who* the program serves is raised once again. Foucault’s defines “political economy” of truth as a concept that is

...subject to constant economic and political incitement...(circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations)...produced and transmitted under the control, dominant, if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media) (73).

The “political economy” Foucault refers to implies that hegemonic structures producing benevolent outcomes for the public and the “benefits” they produce for the masses is what allows political apparatuses to maintain their power. The rhetorical strategies Obama employs parallel to Foucault’s theories throughout his speeches. Obama successfully builds upon existing ideologies surrounding education, expressing the urgency for a “world-class” education to be offered to every American. The idea of higher education for the masses does not bring much public or political opposition because this concept is often viewed as inherently beneficial for the nation and individuals.

Obama reminds his audience once again of the virtues of America and how our nation will not stand to have its children robbed of a higher education. He reiterates the point of early childhood education leading to successful attainment of a college degree which is seldom opposed because more recently it has become an inarguable “fact” in our society. The following statements illustrate these points:

- “...I am absolutely confident that if you keep pouring yourselves into your own education, and if we as a nation offer our children the best education possible, from cradle through career, not only will American workers compete and succeed, America will compete and succeed” (Obama 2010).

- “...I’m absolutely committed to making sure that here in America nobody is denied a college education, nobody is denied a chance to pursue their dreams, nobody is denied a chance to make most of their lives just because they can’t afford it. (Applause.) We are a better country than that, and we need to act like we’re better than that” (Obama 2010).

Foucault poses the following question and provides insight to the analysis of the above passages: “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think anyone would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (61). Obama’s political rhetoric is successful in persuading his audience because his discourse perpetuates morally sound and positive values. However, Obama’s statement that “we are a better country than that” does not mean anything unless the larger social issues are taken into consideration. How does Obama plan to fund education for the masses? How does he plan to provide funding for education from the “cradle through career?” These promises are imbued with the ideology of achieving success that can only be reached by a college degree and the audience does not question the dominant discourse.

It is safe to assume that there would not be many Americans who would oppose higher education for the masses, and there is little said about already existing class inequalities in Obama’s speeches—only the message that individuals can do whatever they want with a college degree. Yet unfortunately

the “truth” of the dominant discourse is not always the same for everyone. Obama’s rhetoric of “truth” can be juxtaposed with Foucault’s discussion of the “political economy” of truth. Obama’s commitment that “nobody is denied a college degree” resounds of egalitarian principles. Yet the questions that remain are—how does higher education guarantee a successful individual and successful country? And who is a universal education actually serving? Obama’s hope for an educated populace by the year 2020 is not necessarily for the benefit of the masses, but for the economic and political needs of the Government.

In Obama’s 2008 speech he emphasizes the importance of technology in the classroom and the necessary steps in providing the education system with the proper tools to move education into the 21st century. Obama plants the dream of the most technologically advanced classrooms across the nation, stating “Imagine a future where our children are more motivated because they aren’t just learning on blackboards, but on new whiteboards with digital touch screens; where every student in a classroom has laptop at their desk...by fostering innovation, we can help make sure every school in America is a school of the future” (Obama 2008). Rose, an experienced educator, asserts that the idea of providing technology in the classroom will not necessarily solve education problems. Rose states “[t]here are many students who, historically, have been ill served by our schools. And our schools are bedeviled by a host of ongoing problems, from funding to curricular faddism. But it is also true that some of the reports of failure rely on flawed studies, or inappropriate generalizations, or statistics taken out of context” (148).

Once again Obama's promises appear benevolent but as Rose points out the issue of funding for lower socio-economic areas may be problematic.

In his book *Why School?* Rose raises an interesting point regarding the idea of offering technology to all students specifically those of lower socioeconomic status with little or no access to technology outside the institution. Rose states: "We must ask whether, for example, donating a slew of computers to a school will make kids see the connection between doing well in the classroom and living a decent life beyond it when all they feel is hopelessness the moment they walk out the schoolhouse door" (61). Obama's plea for America to have classrooms to meet the needs of the future is well and good, but there are limitations to funding, access, and training which he does mention in his speeches, but only on a superficial level, avoiding discussion of implications or problems with his vision.

When considering Obama's Race to the Top initiative where funding goes to the schools who accept the "challenge" of creating top scores for standardized tests among their students, it is most likely the impoverished school districts will not be provided with the "innovative technology" Obama speaks of. These impoverished school districts are not staffed by "ill-equipped" teachers turning out "unintelligent students." The problem should not be blamed on "bad" teachers who are hindering student learning, it stems from the difficult living situations of the children in impoverished areas where their ability to learn is decreased. Although Obama speaks of egalitarian principles where "everyone can achieve their dreams through education" it is an inescapable truth that our education

system does not always provide “equal” opportunity. Obama reiterates the facts and benefits of Race to the Top, but does not reveal the possible shortcomings of the initiative that may actually create further bifurcated education. A common theme throughout both Obama’s speeches is the implied reasoning that an early education determines whether or not a child will not only go to college, but succeed. American parents who want the best education for their children heed the advice of Obama and make sure their children are educated “cradle to career.” Not only is Obama helping to further the discourse of higher education for the masses, but he is creating the ideology that without government ensuring “quality” education and implementing education reform policies for primary and secondary schools the future of American education is dismal.

Winning the Lead in the Global Economy: An Analysis of Human Capital and Education as a Commodity

“Higher education was long viewed by many primarily as a method for increasing economic growth, for elevating the gross national product. Attention now needs to move toward the net-social product and its advancement through human capability.”

Clark Kerr et al. *Higher Education Cannot Escape History: Issues for the 21st Century*

Obama may have once agreed with the above statement since he claimed in the keynote address he delivered at the Democratic Convention in 2004 that our country’s greatness could not be measured “by the size of our economy.” Yet during his 2008 presidential campaign, and now as president, this statement no

longer exists as a part of Obama's rhetorical repertoire. Although Obama may genuinely believe that education should serve more than economic purposes it is important to note the context of the time in which he became the presidential candidate. America was going through a horrible economic downturn and citizens were looking to the next president to fix the broken economy, so it is not surprising that Obama's platform for his campaign focused on the idea of "education" being "the economic issue of our time" (Obama 2010).

The tactic of using education as the universal solution to all social problems is not an uncommon political maneuver. Obama's political platform was used to establish education as the way for the country to bounce back from economic hardships. The rhetorical strategies expressing the dire need for America to remain the leader in the global economy is repeated throughout his speeches and the use of the "argument of circumstance" is displayed throughout. However for this part of the analysis I will once again employ the theoretical framework of Williams and Burke and other contemporary sources discussing human capital and higher education.

The concept of education being the ultimate driving force to keep up with the global economy is not a new political tactic. We are a nation constantly competing with other countries in the global market. Once again Obama takes the historical point of view, reminding his audience of the past endeavors our nation underwent to maintain a competitive and strong force in the global economy in the following statements:

- “...at this defining moment, we will do what previous generations of Americans have done and unleash the promise of our people, unlock the promise of our country, and make sure that America remains a beacon of opportunity and prosperity for all the world” (Obama 2008).
- “We’ve got to prepare our graduates to succeed in this economy. We’ve got to make college more affordable. That’s how we’ll put a higher education within reach of anybody who is willing to work for it. That’s how we’ll reach our goal of once again leading the world in college graduation rates by the end of this decade. That’s how we’ll lead the global economy in this century, just like we did last century. (Applause)” (Obama 2010).

America’s need to “out compete” other nations in the time of war, political unrest and social upheaval have typically served the impetus behind much of the government’s involvement in higher education. Kerr et al. discuss the “golden age” of education in their book *Higher Education Cannot Escape History* and draw attention to the fact that “research expenditures of universities, basically from federal funds, began expanding with World War II and then again after the challenge of Sptunik” (220). They also mention that from 1945 to 1965 higher education enrollment “expanded enormously” and that “there were three waves of veterans in attendance subsidized by the federal government—from World War II, from the Korean War, and from the Vietnam War” (220).

Now, with a dwindling war in Iraq Obama uses the same political rhetoric as politicians and presidents used before him—for America to “succeed” in the future, to retain our position as a global force or “super-power” “an educated workforce is essential to compete and win...” (Obama 2008). Kerr et al. explain

how new knowledge “is more central to the conduct of society” and how higher education has become “of more interest to more institutions within society than it once was, and is more entwined with them, including the “military industrial complex”” (189). Obama’s current vision of our country’s “greatness” seems directly correlative to the size of our economy.

Obama’s belief that “...knowledge is the most valuable skill you can sell” and it being not only the “pathway to opportunity” but a “prerequisite for opportunity establishes the idea of humans being no more than capital when he refers to college graduates as “shares.” The following excerpts of Obama’s 2008 speech illustrate the concept of human productivity and the importance of competing in the global economy:

- “ If we want to keep building cars of the future here in America, then we can’t afford to see the number of PhD’s in engineering climbing in China, South Korea and Japan as it’s dropped here the United States. We can’t afford a future where our high school students rank near the bottom in math and science among industrialized countries, and our high school drop-out rate is one of the highest in the industrialized world” (Obama 2008).
- “When the story of our time is told, I don’t want to be said that China seized this moment to reform its education system, but the United States did not. I don’t want it to be said that India led the way on innovation, but the United States did not. I want it to be said that we rose to meet this challenge and educated our people to become the most highly-skilled workers in the world, just like we’ve always been” (Obama 2008).
- “It’s not just that a world-class education is essential for workers to compete and win, it’s that an educated workforce is essential to compete and win...if

we want to out-compete the world tomorrow, we must out-educate the world today. (Cheers, applause.)” (Obama 2008).

Although Obama states the importance of an “educated workforce” he neglects to specifically mention what that may entail, suggesting only the necessity of an education to “compete and win.” The question that is raised here is what exactly will education “win” the individual? This type of discourse is ambiguous, yet Obama’s use of the term “win” in association with education is rhetorically effective. Kenneth Burke’s discussion of John Dewey’s concept of “occupational psychosis” corresponds with Obama’s rhetorical strategies. Burke explains that “occupational psychosis” relates this to the Marxist doctrine of “a society’s environment in the historical sense is synonymous with the society’s method of production” (38). Burke continues, and suggests that “...our psychotic openness to fads, the great cry for innovation engendered by competitive capitalism, could seem to be in keeping with the marked unstableness of our economic and social expectancies” (39). Obama reiterates the importance of keeping up with countries like China and India, and America’s need to “out-educate” these countries in order to “out-compete” them in a global economy. Yet, unfortunately Obama’s goal of providing affordable education for the masses is not for the betterment of society and a truly “educated” populace but rather the *appearance* of an educated populace in the ranks of global capitalist super-powers.

Obama discusses the importance of America’s productivity and its capacity to maintain its power in the global market in the following:

- “I said we’d build an economy that can compete in the 21st century—because the economy that we had even before the recession, wasn’t working for too many Americans...And I said we need an economy that puts Americans back to work, an economy that’s built around three simple words—Made in America. (Applause). Because we are not playing for second place. We are the United States of America...we play for first. (Applause.)” (Obama 2010).
- “And I want us to produce 8 million more college graduates by 2020, because—(applause)—because America has to have the highest share of graduates compared to every other nation...In a single generation, we’ve fallen from first place in college graduation rates for young adults. Think about that. In one generation we went from number one to 12” (Obama 2010).

Obama’s statement about the restoration of the American economy “that’s built around three simple words—Made in America” is what Williams refers to as “signification.” The term “Made in America” and the concept of America playing for first in the global economy are mere symbols and signs representative of our global power. Not only does this correlate to the perpetuation of ideologies, but relates to Williams’ explanation of signification being the “social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs” and a “practical material activity” that he believes to be a literal “means of production” (38). Williams quotes Marxist philosopher, Valentin Volosinov and his argument that ““consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws”” (36). The terms “Made in America” and “First Place,” are signs that have become engrained in America consciousness that “reflects our logic and laws.” Obama uses these

terms as powerful rhetorical tools that once again work to perpetuate the dominant discourse.

The benevolent act of providing the 8 million expected college graduates with an affordable education is the way for America to retain its symbolic first place standing. While Obama does not explicitly suggest this in his speeches, one could surmise that not agreeing with the notion of providing affordable education for the masses to “out-compete” with other countries would be unpatriotic.

The dominant political discourse surrounding higher education has been espoused by countless politicians and presidents who constantly remind Americans of the power of education and its ability to fix all economic and social problems. Each decade there are new education reform policies providing hope and promise of a better future that reassure Americans that we will re-establish our top position as a global leader, and that higher education will lead to everyone’s dreams coming true. This type of political rhetoric is not hard a sell for most politicians since these adages have historically produced beneficial results. However the problem with such discourse is that the initial goals and aims are not always created with American public’s best interests at heart. The analysis of these speeches returns me to the question posed by Mike Rose raised earlier in this chapter: “We are a society with a system of mass education, but to what degree do we define ourselves as an educated populace?” (168). I am convinced Obama’s push for higher education for the masses will not necessarily foster intelligent, critically thinking “educated” individuals. I foresee Obama’s utopian

vision of an “educated populace” as individuals acting and performing in a society that has been programmed to believe their worth is decided by their ability to achieve prosperity to “win” an elusive prize by simply attaining a college degree.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have primarily focused on the dominant discourse of the politicians and the historical perspectives of higher education in attempt to answer the following questions: How have the rhetorical structures of historical and contemporary political speeches and the dominant discourse of higher education influenced enrollment in American universities and colleges today? How has government involvement in higher education and legislation, such as The Morrill Act and the GI Bill, shaped American perceptions of attaining a college degree as a “mandatory” act? And, if the American government had never become involved in higher education and did not implement acts such as the Morrill Act and GI Bill, would Americans continue to pursue higher education with hopes of entering the middle class? I hope to have answered these questions through the analyses of the political speeches and historical texts and have illuminated these issues. However, for the conclusion, I want to leave readers with a student perspective on higher education. This last portion of my thesis will include student responses to the question “Why are you in college?”

Caroline Bird and Student Perspectives

I did not set out to gather student responses on the question of why they were in college, but rather stumbled upon an opportunity to hear students’ perspectives on higher education through a discussion with my colleague and

friend, a first-year composition instructor at Colorado State University. Mary was familiar with the premise of my thesis and mentioned that she had asked her students to write a blog response to the question of why they were in college and what they would be doing if they were not in school. She said the responses were quite interesting and suggested that I take a look at the students' responses to use as background material.

After reading the blog posts I noticed that many of the students' responses fit with my assumption that dominant discourse greatly influences student motivation to seek higher education. At this point of my research I had just finished reading Caroline Bird's book *The Case against College* and I found many of the student responses matched Caroline Bird's theories. I decided to use Caroline Bird's book and parallel her views with the student responses to the question "Why are you in college?" To ensure permission from Mary's students, I visited her four classes, briefly discussed my thesis and objectives with her students, and asked their permission to include their anonymous responses in my thesis. I received permission from many of Mary's students, yet I will only discuss a handful of the responses I viewed.

This comparison is significant since Bird's book (published in 1975) and current student voices on higher education match the dominant discourse of higher education espoused by countless politicians since the time of Thomas Jefferson. This comparison in the concluding portion of this thesis will illustrate

how the same issues and rhetoric of higher education continue to lead students to believe the dominant discourse and act upon the ideologies with little hesitation.

Before I present the student responses in conjunction with Bird's book I will provide a brief overview of Bird's book to illustrate the parallels of her findings and data she gathered on higher education. Bird's research led her to view institutions of higher education as a place where youth are sequestered believing college students are often viewed as "superfluous" and are "of no immediate use to society" so are set apart from the "real world" and placed in college (4). Bird suggests American ideologies surrounding higher education resemble a force-fed logic in which students are sent to college for "their best interests" and are sold on college like "...the way we sell them on spinach—because it's good for them. Some of course learn to like it, but most wind up still preferring green peas. College students are forced to eat spinach—go to college—even when they don't like it" (12). Bird's chapter, "The Liberal Arts Religion" examines the power of institutions of higher education, stating "...like the church, American colleges have used their credibility to exercise political, economic, and social power in an irresponsible way" (111). The irresponsible ways Bird references connote the "power they have to issue the diploma" and how a college diploma seems to weigh on the "fate of individuals" (111).

One of the most common answers given by Mary's students when asked why they were in college was discussion about the "real world." Students claimed they *had* to go college to prepare themselves for the "real world." Interestingly,

Bird suggests “a great majority of our nine million (1975 statistics) postsecondary students who are “in college” are there because it has become the thing to do or because college is a pleasant place to be (pleasanter at least than the “outside,” sometimes called “the real” world)” (3). Thirty-five years later, students still view college as a place where they hide away from the outside world. One student stated, “I honestly believe that knowledge is power and that a degree is almost expected when looking for a career out in the real world.” It is not surprising many students view college as a “make-believe,” liminal space where they are expected to hone their skills to be successful members of the “real world” with the promise of a good job once they leave the confines of higher education. It is logical that many students gave the same response about college not being a “real” place, for while they are in college, (most typical college students) have very little responsibility, so the act of going out to the “scary” outside world where individuals depend on themselves is easily put on hold by attending college. Another student shared, “My parents are strong believers in a college education and they would not support me if I was not in college. So in the real world I would be working at the same job I had in high school.” A prolonged adolescence or rather a moratorium of adulthood has been fostered by the institution of higher education, and once college students graduate, and venture out into the “real world” they are often met with harsh realities and disappointment.

An overwhelming amount of student responses included the idea of college being the “next thing to do” after high school. Many students discuss how they never questioned *why* they were in college and claimed it was expected by parents, teachers and society in general. Most Americans strongly believe in the importance of higher education and pass those values and expectations on to their children. It is not difficult to convince young people of the virtue of higher education since we have been indoctrinated to believe through political and dominant discourse that college is the *only* way to improve oneself socially, morally, economically and intellectually. Here are a few more examples of student responses echoing the same instilled parental and societal values

Americans have been hearing for centuries about higher education: “I find myself in this routine of society, attending college because it's what my parents did and it is what's expected,” “College has been something every teacher in every school has told me I needed to do since I could remember.” And finally, “...one thing I was always raised to know is that college is the next thing after high school and it was never an option [to do anything else].” These students grow up believing college to be the natural step after high school and that there are no other choices for them because they have grown up to believe the dominant discourse without question.

College may in fact create more opportunities for students however, the problem is the belief many students expressed that not choosing the college route immediately after high school would leave them with limited prospects for a

successful future, or mark them as “inferior.” With more and more people graduating from college, the job market is a bleak place, especially in an uncertain economy. A common theme of the students responses was the idea of an often dichotomous choice one has after high school—go to school and get a well paying satisfying job—or work in the service industry. One student claims “We are told that if you don't attend college then you will be pumping gas. I know I came to college so I wouldn't have to pump gas.” Another student states that “...college *is* an institution in this country. Most jobs beyond the food service industry require a degree and I'm not flipping burgers. I'm a vegetarian.” It is a popular notion that an individual has limited options without a college degree, yet what these students have not yet learned is that there is no guarantee their degree will provide a job pertaining to one's discipline or major. The more college graduates in the job market, the more difficult it may be to find a “decent and satisfying” job. Bird claims “Young people and their parents read the message loud and clear: The world is becoming so complicated that you're not going to be able to make a decent living in the future without a college degree” (128). This has become a veritable mantra of high school guidance counselors, parents and teachers, and will likely continue to be passed on to generations who follow.

Although many student responses reiterated political rhetoric and parental lectures regarding higher education, some students discussed other options they thought about before going directly to college after high school. One student went

into great detail about her passions and desires she wanted to pursue if she had not chosen college:

I want to travel, to see foreign secret places, to meet indigenous people, to help starving people in Africa, to swim the Great Barrier Reef, to be a full time gypsy, all by the time I'm thirty. There are so many ways to be successful in this world and not all of these ways include college. I'll give myself the rest of the year to figure things out, see where this route takes me, and decide next summer if the college or nomadic life is for me.

This type of attitude toward college is refreshing, illustrating how options outside of college are not always limited. The decision to go to college is a logical and easy choice for many students since there are few consequences when going the “traditional” route. Furthermore, the sense of belonging and having the “college experience” with other peers is more attractive than toughing it out in the “real world.” Another student discusses his time he took off after high school where he explored other options: “I have made the choice to return to college after a four year hiatus living in Steamboat Springs after being a snowboard bum and partying entirely too much. I prefer college life to my past life as a ski-bum.” It is the time off that can make all the difference in a successful and fruitful college experience. Speaking from my own experience, taking time off to see what other options are available is extremely beneficial when deciding if college is the right choice. Taking time off to live the life of a “ski- bum” or “gypsy” can offer young people an authentic opportunity for real growth and a chance to gain “real world” experience.

I believe the first year composition students whose responses I included in this thesis are cognizant that a good job does not automatically come attached with their diplomas. Yet many of them responded in the same fashion because they may not really know *why* they entered college other than “because it is expected.” Many students shared thoughtful responses, and I sincerely believe the question Mary posed to her students is one of the most important questions a young person should ask themselves before pursuing a college degree, especially, if the answer is “Because I have to.”

My decision to become the first the person in my family to attend college was not fostered by familial discourse, but rather the dominant discourse of our culture. I chose to enroll at a community college, not under a family member’s or friend’s suggestion but on behalf of the functioning cultural ideology that one must have a college degree to be successful, happy and prosperous. I took time off from school to think about why I was in college and without that break I do not think I would have flourished in an academic environment or appreciated my experience with the amount of pride and sense of accomplishment as much as I do today. Without the support of encouraging teachers and professors who saw my potential I would have never discovered the value of a college degree. As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, I do not believe that pursuing a college degree is a

pointless endeavor. The intention of this thesis was not to persuade individuals to disregard higher education and to write it off as a meaningless pursuit. I would be a hypocrite to suggest that not all Americans have the right to higher education. What I hope to have succeeded in doing is informing readers through the analysis of the political speeches and texts regarding higher education that we must be more critical of hegemonic structures and question their motives before we blindly act upon their dominant discourse.

I would have liked to further explore the implications of the increasing rate of college enrollment and the possible decline of college standards in this thesis, but that is another topic to be explored at a later time. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the rhetoric of these political acts to answer the overarching question of why students go to college, not to analyze the quality of higher education as a whole. As a future teacher in the humanities in the community college system, I feel it is important to have an awareness of the dominant discourse that influences students' motivation to pursue a college degree. If students choose the college path simply because they feel that *have* to and view a college degree as no more than a commodity or credential, they lose out on an opportunity for an enriching education. It is our job as teachers to inform students that higher education is more than just a "ticket to the middle class" and prosperity, but rather a way to become a more intelligent, well rounded individual. We must let students know there are greater benefits of a college degree than increasing one's human capital. Higher education should provide

students with the opportunity for interesting jobs and careers, but also allow them to view their world with a critical lens and better understanding.

In his book, *What's College For?* Zachary Karabell argues for a similar type of rhetoric I would like to more individuals employ when discussing higher education. Karabell states, "As for a larger society, it would help if we focused less on making sure that everyone gets a college degree and more on what that college degree consists of" (245). Although I do not claim that having students merely think about why they are in college will change the future of higher education, I do believe that informing students of the virtues of college and demonstrating how it fosters intellectual growth and empowerment rather than perpetuating the dominant discourse is extremely important. As a future teacher I hope to provide students with genuine and fruitful education that will give them a better sense of *why* they are there. Being aware of the motives of the dominant political discourse of higher education is the first step in creating a *truly* educated populace.

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