ARE AMERICANS READY FOR TAKE-OFF?: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND HIS ADMINISTRATION’S SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, CRISIS COMMUNICATION RHETORIC

A Thesis by

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ARE AMERICANS READY FOR TAKE-OFF?: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND HIS ADMINISTRATION’S SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, CRISIS COMMUNICATION RHETORIC

I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication

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ABSTRACT

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks created a noticeable decline in commercial aviation travel because Americans lost faith in the safety of the commercial airline system. Although a weakening in commercial airline travel is expected after a major airline crash, September 11 is unique because the event was addressed by the President of the United States and his administration, not an airline CEO or corporate spokesperson.

This study will examine the government's crisis communication rhetoric using Benoit’s Image Restoration theory as the overarching framework. Benoit has developed a series of rhetorical strategies that an individual or institution can adopt to maximize its reputation or image after an attack: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. After using Benoit’s image restoration lens to examine 30 speeches presented by President George W. Bush and his administration between September 11, 2001, and September 11, 2002, this study acknowledges that in some crisis scenarios multiple spokespeople are necessary and seemingly contradictory image restoration devices may at times compliment each other.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.”

-- President George W. Bush, September 11, 2001, 8:30 P.M. EDT

Where were you on September 11, 2001? Like many Americans, I was at work when I heard about the first hijacked commercial airliner crashing into the World Trade Center tower. However, unlike others, my initial thought was “who manufactured the airplane that crashed?”

As the media relations manager for the world’s leading manufacturer of general aviation airplanes, I knew I would be quickly engulfed with the crisis if my company manufactured that airplane. As I ran to the nearest television, I started thinking about our crisis communication plan and what my company’s first response should be. We had performed numerous crisis communication practices; however, none involved an aircraft flying into such a high profile building. When I saw the first images of the World Trade Center on television, I knew immediately we would not need to enact our crisis communication plan. The aircraft sticking out of the World Trade Center was much larger than what my company manufactured. From that point forward, I experienced the same emotions other Americans experienced; however, I also paid extremely close attention to the crisis communication rhetoric that was employed.
September 11 is unique for many reasons, but one of the most striking to me is that it marks one of the few times the United States government has responded to a company’s crisis rather than the business responding by itself. For instance, in one of the “worst mass fatality accidents in U.S. aviation history” (Shaw, 1995), USAir flight 427 out of Chicago crashed near Pittsburgh killing all 132 people on board (Church, 1994; Shaw, 1995; Underwood & Beck, 1995). Following this accident, USAir’s Chairman and CEO Seth E. Schofield responded to the crash, not the government (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Shaw, 1995; Underwood & Beck, 1995). Even in cases that have affected millions and held the nation’s attention for weeks, such as Tylenol’s product tampering (Birch, 1994; Benson, 1988) or Firestone’s product recall (Grainger, 2001; Grodsky, 2000; Nelson, 2002), the government did not co-op the crisis response.

Typically after an airplane crash, as with most corporate crises, the company’s corporate public relations department determines how to handle the crisis and disseminate messages (Pinsdorf, 1991). These messages are developed while always keeping in mind certain legal restrictions on what information can or cannot be released. “In the case of 9/11, the FBI placed a gag order on American and United Airlines for almost 2 weeks after the attacks” (Downing, 2004). During this time, President George W. Bush and members of his administration responded to Americans’ questions about the airline crashes, and the event was categorized as “a U.S. tragedy, not an airline tragedy” (Downing, 2004). Given the uniqueness of this crisis, one of the interesting communication questions that arises is what rhetorical trademarks exist in the rhetoric of President Bush and his administration as they respond to this crisis from the role of a corporate spokesperson, as well as their traditional roles.
Scholars (Armstrong, 2004; Bostdorff, 2003; Downing, 2004; Fall, 2004; Kerber & Thomas, 2003; Murphy, 2003; Strother, 2004) have analyzed the crisis that unfolded after September 11 from many different angles. From an academic perspective, these studies are critical because the crisis provides fertile ground for expanding practitioner’s knowledge on topics such as crisis communication, presidential rhetoric and domestic preparedness for terrorist attacks. These studies are also beneficial to the corporate sector, particularly the airline industry, as they attempt to identify lessons learned. To that end, no scholars have yet to examine the effect President Bush and his administration’s September 11 rhetoric had on restoring American’s confidence in the commercial airline system. This study is important because air transportation is the “center of America’s just-in-time economy, broadly responsible for more than 10 million domestic jobs in the U.S. travel and tourism industry and more than eight percent of the U.S. GDP” (Parker, 2004). Therefore, it is vital that Americans deem it a safe and viable means of transportation.

This thesis is divided into three sections. Chapter one introduces the crisis, discusses September 11 crisis communication from a rhetorical perspective from a variety of angles, and performs an historical overview of U.S. presidents’ rhetorical responses to national crisis. Chapter two then discusses the rhetorical situation from Benoit’s image repair theory perspective, which is the primary framework used to probe selected speeches given by President Bush and his administration. Lastly, chapter three will offer conclusions about the findings and will discuss implications for practitioners.
Background

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and Johnstown, Pennsylvania. These attacks, which have been defined as “evil acts” (Bush vows, 2001) caused by “hatred, prejudice and anger” (Powell, 2001), led U.S. government officials to implement changes to the nation’s civil air transportation system to try and prevent aircraft from being used as future terrorist weapons. “It was a scary day on September 11 for many reasons, because for the first time in a long, long time, other than maybe the Trojan horse, the transportation system itself was used as a weapon. This wasn’t a missile, this wasn’t a bomb; here a commercial airliner, part of our transportation system, became the weapon” (Engleman, 2003).

From September 11, 2001, to today, U.S. government officials have used tangible and intangible methods to restore the nation “back to the business of America” (Bush, 2001, September 16). One of the first tangible actions was the grounding of the “nation’s civilian air transportation for the first time” (Bush vows, 2001). Nearly 5,000 civil aircraft were directed to land on September 11, and none were allowed back in the air for two days (Lewandowski, 2001). This was “not a sophisticated approach to securing our nation’s airways but it was effective. And given the circumstances, it was appropriate” (Bolen, 2004).

One day later, on September 12, 2001, some of the nation’s new security measures were announced. At a press conference, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta said, “Travelers will indeed see increased security measures at our airports, train stations, and other key sights. There will be higher levels of surveillance, more stringent
searches. Airport curbside luggage check-in will no longer be allowed. There will be more security officers and random identification checks” (Mineta, 2001).

On September 13, commercial airlines were allowed to fly again, and Americans began to have first-hand experiences with the increased security and safety measures (Engleman, 2003; Lewandowski, 2001; Mineta, 2001). “Every time we travel, every time we take our laptops out of their carry bags to be X-rayed separately, and remove our shoes, we’re experiencing the aftermath of 9/11” (Travel Insider, 2004).

Another tangible reaction was the Congress’ provision of over $20 billion in the form of cash and loan guarantees for security and war risk insurance coverage. “In addition, $3 billion was provided to airlines for security mandates” (Young, 2004). The government also increased the resources they had allocated to monitoring the airlines via the National Guard and Federal Air Marshals. These are a few of the many steps that became part of a multi-layered strategy to physically enhance the commercial aviation industry (Garvey, 2002; Mineta, 2001).

At the same time the U.S. government was reacting in tangible ways to September 11, it was also responding in intangible ways through crisis communication rhetoric. This verbal response was essential because of the effect September 11 had on American’s conscience and confidence. September 11 marks one of the few times the American mainland and the American people were under direct military threat (Engleman, 2003). This crisis of confidence was responded to through crisis communication rhetoric designed for containment and recovery. Government leaders seeking to alleviate American’s fears repeatedly used words such as courage, honor,
freedom, trust and faith (Bush, 2001, September 11, 9:30 a.m.; Garvey, 2002; Magaw, 2002, June 18; Mineta, 2001).

On September 20, 2001, Bush presented the most famous speech of this period, and some suggest it is the most recognized of the Bush presidency (Murphy, 2003). Reminiscent of a State of the Union address, Bush gave this historic 41-minute speech from the U.S. Capitol to a Joint Session of Congress (Bush, 2001, September 20). It was broadcasted live to the American people by all major television networks. His speech provides many examples of deliberate crisis communication rhetoric aimed at bolstering American’s confidence in their country. Phrases such as “justice will be done,” “it (the state of the Union) is strong,” “the civilized word is rallying to America’s side,” “we will not tire,” and “we will not fail” are systematically placed throughout this speech. It was also during this speech that Bush refines his “get on with the business of being Americans” message. This corrective action theme (Benoit, 1997; Benoit, 2000; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997) was prevalent in the rhetoric of Bush and his administration for the next twelve months.

In addition to rhetoric restoring America’s confidence in their government, President Bush and his administration also used deliberate crisis communication rhetoric to restore American’s confidence in the airline industry. The most prominent rhetorical example occurred on September 27, 16 days after the attack, at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. The President encouraged the American public to “get on the airlines, (and) get about the business of America” (Bush, 2001, September 27).
Research Questions

This project will examine 30 damage control messages presented by President George W. Bush and members of his administration (specifically the United States Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, Federal Aviation Administrator Jane Garvey, and Under Secretary of Transportation John W. McGaw) from September 11, 2001, to September 11, 2002. These messages were chosen after reviewing and thematically cataloguing over 300 speeches presented during this one-year time frame. The goal in selecting these messages was to examine speeches that gave clear examples of how the U.S. government took control over the airline industry’s damage-control campaign.

Specifically, I will address the following research questions.

1.) What rhetorical trademarks are present in the Bush administration’s crisis communication rhetoric after September 11, 2001, particularly those addresses that feature restoring trust in the airlines?

2.) Does the crisis communication stay consistent across time and speakers among Bush and his administration spokespeople?

3.) What influence did this crisis communication rhetoric have on restoring airline travel?

Literature Review -- Crisis Communication

In the early 1900s, Edward Bernays laid the foundation for the field of public relations when he promoted the idea that a crisis could undermine the “equity” a corporation or individual had established, and proactive communication with
constituents prior to crises would ultimately be beneficial to the corporation (Barton, 2001). When companies realized the financial benefits they would have if they applied Bernay’s philosophy, they began to spend considerable dollars to manage their image (Dumcombe, 1999). This marked the beginning of public relations.

Crisis communication, or communication in times of crisis, is an extension of Bernays early work. Crisis communication consists of a set of concepts, principles, analysis, and working methods that may apply specifically to the crisis. Crisis communication is the fastest growing area in public relations (Rosenthal, 2003). It “began in the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban missile conflict when game theory and ‘what-if-scenarios’ were first applied to predict the outcome of a series of hypothetical political situations” (Fishman, 1999). The overriding objective of this type of strategic theorizing was to prevent the occurrence of a crisis and to measure the costs of a particular cause of action. The Tylenol case (Barton, 2001; Benson, 1988; Birch, 1994) expanded research on crisis communication situations from the political to the commercial and corporate domains. The study of crisis communication as a sub-field was validated with the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill (Daley & O’Neill, 1991; Johnson & Sellnow, 1995; Sellnow, 1993; Williams & Treadway, 1992). During the 1990s, research on crisis communication continued to grow and now crisis planning is becoming a centerpiece of organizational communication and public relations literature.

Today, crisis communication has shifted from its early political roots, and usually triggers memories of classic corporate cases such as Tylenol (Barton, 2001; Benson, 1988; Birch, 1994), Exxon (Daley & O’Neill, 1991; Johnson & Sellnow, 1995; Sellnow, 1993; Williams & Treadway, 1992), Three Mile Island (Baratta, 2001; Lavelle, 1999;
Definitions and Stages of a Crisis

In order to fully understand crisis communication, one must first have an understanding of “crisis.” Scholars have developed numerous definitions in their attempt to define a crisis. Barton (1993) defined a crisis as “a situation faced by an individual, group or organization which they are unable to cope with by the use of normal routine procedures and in which stress is created by sudden change.” Weick (1988) believes “crises are characterized by low probability of high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goal of an organization.” Fearn-Banks (2002) attempts to categorize the areas that may be involved in a crisis, “a crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name.” Fink (1986) defined a crisis as an event that can “escalate in intensity, falling under close media or government scrutiny, interrupt everyday activities, jeopardize the organization’s positive public image, and eventually affect the organization’s revenue.” Although all of these definitions are different, they all agree that a crisis is a major event that poses a threat. Another similarity is that none of these definitions take into account the different types of crisis, or how an organization should react once involved in a crisis.
Huxman (2003) identifies three types of crisis: immediate, emergent, and recurring. In a crisis situation, the incident is highly visible and the stakes and risks for the entity responding to the crisis are high. Once the public is aware of the problem, the crisis unfolds rapidly, erratically and unpredictably, with frequent and almost instantaneous reports from the media. As a result, it may sometimes appear as if the crisis is uncontrollable. Inaccurate information, if it is not challenged, may cause unnecessary public fear and anxiety.

To combat the chaos of an unfolding crisis, scholars have identified the different phases of a crisis (Fink, 1986; Weick, 1988). In many cases, a crisis will give “prodromes” or warning signs. If the organization will heed the warning signs, they can sometimes prevent the worst. During the crisis, the organization’s primary focus is management of the hazard (Ogrizek & Guillery, 1997). This management includes reducing, mitigating and minimizing the risk from the hazard. When this is done, the image associated with the hazard can also be minimized. Following the crisis, an organization is able to revisit the crisis objectively and determine how the crisis could have been managed better. Although it is unlikely that the exact same crisis will be repeated, the organization will be able to incorporate portions of these lessons learned into future crisis management scenarios.

The vast majority of scholarly work about communication during a crisis contends that a crisis is cyclical (Fink, 1986; Birkland, 2004; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). Therefore, crisis communication strategies examine the origins, development, maturation and resolution of a crisis. According to Fearn-Banks (2002), a crisis has five stages: detection, preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. Detection of the September
11 terrorist attacks occurred when radio contact was lost with the commercial airliners and the first commercial airliner hit the World Trade Center tower. Detection of the airlines image problem because of September 11 was recognized on September 13, 2001, when the airlines were allowed to fly again, but they did not transport as many passengers as they would have before September 11 (Parker, 2004).

Determining the U.S. government’s prevention and preparation for September 11 is difficult to measure without being able to interview President Bush and members of his administration. However, reports indicate that since the mid-1990s, the federal government has engaged in preparing the U.S. for highly destructive acts of terrorism, especially those involving chemical or biological weapons. This program is collectively known as the "U.S. domestic preparedness program" (Falkenrath, 2001). Although much of the U.S. domestic preparedness program plans are confidential, it is reasonable to suggest that a crisis communication plan for terrorism had been developed based on three facts. First, the government responded quickly to the attacks by landing all aircraft (Bolen, 2004; Garvey, 2001; Mineta, 2001). Second, America has faced terrorist attacks many times and places prior to September 11 such as New York City, Oklahoma City, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Yemen. Therefore, it is likely the U.S. government would consider future terrorist events probable. Third, many companies and city governments acknowledged they had a crisis plan for a similar type of scenario. Former New York City Mayor Giuliani said, “As shocking as this crash was, we had actually planned for just such a catastrophe” (Giuliani & Kurson, 2002).

One of the earliest stages of containment occurred on September 11, 2001, at 9:30 a.m. (EDT) when President Bush notified the nation of the “national tragedy” and
“apparent terrorist attack on our country” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 9:30 a.m.). He used containment rhetoric when he concluded his speech, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 9:30 a.m.).

America is still in the recovery and learning stages of the crisis. “Recovery involves efforts to return…to business as usual” (Fearn-Banks, 2002). Exactly one year following the attacks, President Bush addressed the nation from Ellis Island and acknowledged the past year “has been a year of adjustment, of coming to terms with the difficult knowledge that our nation has determined enemies, and that we are not invulnerable to their attacks” (Bush, 2002, September 11).

The learning phase is evaluating how the organization performed during the crisis. Exactly three years after the attack, on September 11, 2004, the President told the nation there was still learning that needed to take place. “Our country is safer than it was on September 11, 2001, yet we’re still not safe. We’re making good progress in protecting our people and bringing our enemies to account. But one thing is for certain: We’ll keep our focus and we’ll keep our resolve and we will do our duty to best secure our country” (Bush, 2004, September 11).

Like Fearn-Banks (2002), Birch (1994) agrees that a crisis is made up of different stages. Birch divides a crisis into pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis phases. Birch’s three categories parallel Fearn-Banks’ five categories. For instance, Birch’s pre-crisis stage parallels Fearn-Banks’ detection and preparation stages, Birch’s crisis stage parallels Fearn-Banks’ containment stage, and Birch’s post crisis stage parallels Fearn-Banks’ recovery and learning stages.
Another example of a cyclical crisis communication approach that more closely resembles Fearn-Banks is Steven Fink’s (1986) four-stage pattern, which includes (1) pretrial, or providing warning signs, stage; (2) acute crisis stage; (3) chronic crisis stage; and (4) crisis resolution stage. During Fink’s first stage, one should attempt to detect early warning signs of a crisis because “it’s not a question of if a crisis will occur during your career, it’s when” (Barton, 2001). The second stage is characterized as a time when events unfold with great speed and intensity. “The acute phase is the peak point of pressure, or what most people have in mind when they speak of a crisis” (Fink, 1986). The next phase, “chronic crisis,” is generally the longest of the four phases. It is during this stage that companies will conduct investigations to determine why the crisis occurred. The “crisis resolution” stage is the fourth and final stage. It occurs when the company has recovered from the crisis. When examining September 11 from Fink’s four stage approach, I suggest America is still in the chronic crisis stage.

In sum, crises are dynamic, volatile and complex. They are damaging events, exacerbated by damaging accusations, and proceed through predictable stages (Huxman, 2004).

**Birkland’s Focusing Event’s Approach**

Occasionally a crisis occurs that seems to bring the nation and/or world to a standstill. Birkland (Birkland, 1998; Birkland, 2004; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997) defines these crisis as a “potential focusing event.” This is an event that is “sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms, inflicts harms or suggests potential harms that are or could be concentrated on a definable geographical area or community of interest, and that is
known to policy makers and the public virtually simultaneously” (Birkland, 1998). A “focusing event” compels policy makers to react immediately to the crisis without filtering the information through special interest groups (Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997).

Birkland further demarcates a focusing event into two categories: normal and new. Normal events are natural disasters such as tornados, earthquakes and hurricanes. As Birkland observes, “these events occur sufficiently often to allow us to isolate events and model their influence on the agenda” (Birkland, 1998). If the event is an “act of God,” society turns its attention to what it can do to help the victims.

New events are those like the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Columbine, or the September 11 terrorist attacks. These events have never happened before, or if they have happened they are no longer a part of our memory. New events violate expectations and create unpredictability. Because they are “novel” they force the public and politicians to react in a new way. During these types of events, the public attempts to discover who to blame for the event, which is an element of Benoit’s image repair crisis strategy.

A “focusing event” also opens the political policy window by highlighting policy failures and provides policy learning opportunities (Birkland, 2004). These lessons are often recognized as problems prior to the crisis, but political leaders did not look for a solution to the problem until after the crisis unfolded. Therefore, focusing events can quickly create a tremendous amount of political pressure and repercussions.

For example, in March 1979 the United States experienced the worst accident in the history of commercial nuclear power generation (Barratta, 2001; Lavelle, 1999; Stencel, 1999; Kemeny, 1979). The crisis at Three Mile Island (TMI) Nuclear
Generating Station was initiated by mechanical malfunctions that occurred in the system that feeds water to the steam generators. The problem was made worse by a combination of human errors in responding to it.

In the report presented to the President by the President’s Commission on the accident at TMI, the commission found “fundamental fault” (Kemeny, 1979) with the existing body of regulations. The committee discovered that potentially serious scenarios involving nuclear power generation were studied “extensively and diligently” before the accident; however, these discussions were intentionally limited to the safety of the equipment. Yet, the TMI crisis was primarily caused by people-related problems, not equipment problems. The commission report said that had the repeated human errors not occurred, the major accident at TMI would have been a minor incident. “Wherever we looked, we found problems with the human beings who operate the plant, with the management that runs the key organization, and with the agency that is charged with assuring the safety of nuclear power plants” (Kemeny, 1979). This focusing event resulted in a reexamination of the entire nuclear industry in the U.S., and dramatic policy changes were made regarding how nuclear power is used and regulated in the U.S. and abroad (Sellnow, 1993; Stencel, 1999; Kemeny, 1979).

Rhetorical Approach

The study of rhetoric is over two thousand years old, yet it continues to be an extremely relevant and widely studied field. This is in part because it appeals to some fundamental beliefs about communication. “Most will readily agree that in matters of opinion it is good to hear about different sides of a question before reaching our own
judgment, so rhetoric seems to be basically necessary and useful, even though it is too often poorly done, annoying, or even seriously harmful” (Farrell & Gibbons, 1989).

The origins of rhetoric trace back to before 467 B.C. when Corax of Sicily wrote the oldest academic textbook of the western world, *Techne*, which taught citizens how to speak in a courtroom environment (Brent & Stewart, 1998; Ryan, 1995). Aristotle, as well as other scholars, further developed Corax’s ideas and rhetoric became a widely studied field. (Brent & Stewart, 1998; Black, 1993).

Aristotle, father of rhetorical genres, believed communication was a way for citizens to participate in democratic citizenship (Brent & Stewart, 1998; Parrish, 1993; Zarefsky, 2004). To this end, Aristotle understood that a speaker’s goal was to inspire a positive image of themselves and to encourage members of the audience to be receptive to the message. “Rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions…the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief, he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, in the right frame of mind” (Brent & Stewart, 1998).

Aristotelian rhetorical theory offers three basic forums for rhetorical discourse: forensic (courtroom), deliberative (legislative), and epideictic (public arenas) (Wander, 1990). Each of these forums has their own preferred “mode of reasoning” (Dascal & Gross, 1999). Deliberative oratory prefers induction from past examples to future possibilities. The purpose of deliberative discourse is to justify the expedience or practicality of an action. In contrast, forensic oratory places a focus on the past and prefers deduction, versus deliberative oratory’s induction method. The epideictic forum highlights values, and praises or blames on ceremonial occasions (Dow, 1989; Murphy,
Epideictic rhetoric is the most frequently observed type in President Bush’s September 11 speeches because “it shapes the world that provides the backdrop of values and beliefs, heroes and villains, triumphs and tragedies against which and through which deliberative and forensic judgments are made” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

Today’s contemporary scholars have expanded on Aristotle’s rhetorical theory while still holding to many of his tenants. Hart defined the components of a “speech-act” using speaker variables, audience, variables, topic variables, persuasive field, setting variables, media variables, and rhetorical conventions. This framework builds upon the premise that the individual or organization needs to carefully heed the quality and delivery of the message in any crisis situation.

Campbell and Huxman (2002) have also defined seven elements of descriptive analysis that provide a set of labels that may be used to analyze a rhetorical act: purpose, audience, persona, tone, evidence, structure, and strategies. These elements provide a framework to determine if, how, and why a rhetorical act succeeded or failed. The first of these descriptive analysis elements, “purpose,” analyzes the goal the speaker has when presenting the information. Second, “audience,” is who the speaker presents to, as well as any other individual(s) that could be affected by the rhetoric. Third, “persona,” occurs when a speaker takes on a new role(s) when presenting a message such as a teacher, preacher, and/or politician. The “tone,” or attitude, of the rhetor is important because it speaks to the speakers bond with the audience. The fifth element, “evidence,” indicates the resources or facts the rhetor has in order to substantiate their claims. “Structure” indicates how the material is organized. Lastly, “strategies” looks at the rhetorical act from a tactical standpoint and ensures that the appropriate language,
appeals and arguments are presented in order to present a rhetorical act that is received successfully.

Rybacki and Rybacki (1991) believe the standards for analyzing a rhetorical act change with time. This is why topics once considered taboo on television are now the norm. In 1964, the most hotly television happening was that Darrin and Samantha on “Bewitched” were sleeping in the same bed, versus a single bed as seen on “I Love Lucy” and “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (Robertson, 2005). Comparatively, in 2004 one of the most hotly debated television scenes was Janet Jackson’s “wardrobe malfunction” (Apologetic, 2004).

Millar and Heath (2004), contend the rhetorical approach emphasizes that an individual or organization has strategic communication message choices during all stages of a crisis. Although while in the midst of a crisis the spokesperson may feel as if no choices exist, a rhetorical approach “explicitly acknowledges that the responsibility for the crisis, its magnitude, and its duration are contestable” (Millar & Heath, 2004). For instance, a spokesperson can choose how to prepare for a crisis, how to frame a response(s) once a crisis occurs, and the method of communicating that response to the appropriate audience(s).

Political and Presidential Rhetoric

An extension of rhetorical theory is the study of political, and even more specifically presidential rhetoric. Political rhetoric research focuses on the source and message aspects of the political communication process. Researchers seek common themes in political messages, analyze the underlying motives of speakers, determine
strategies and techniques of communication devices, analyze language characteristics and styles, and suggest ways of interpreting language and message variables (Swanson & Nimmo, 1990). These aspects are increasingly important because “public speech no longer attends the processes of governance – it is governance” (Hart, 1987).

Scholars (Gelderman, 1997; Hart, 1987; Ryan, 1995; Zarefsky, 2004) have identified presidential rhetoric as its own genre because of the functions the institution holds that are undeniably unique. “The American presidency, arguably the most unique political institution yet devised by any civilized polity, reaches directly into the lives of the American people on a daily basis largely through the efforts of a second great institution – the mass media” (Hart, 1987). For instance, the president speaks in public more often than virtually any other occupation, and the number of public speeches they give is increasing. President Truman gave 57 speeches his first year in office. Comparatively, President Kennedy gave four times more speeches, 284, during his third year in office. President Carter averaged one speech a day during each of his four years in office. President Clinton gave over 600 speeches in his first presidential year alone. “Comparing 1946 to 1975, for example, public speeches by America’s chief executives increases almost 500% in just 35 years” (Hart, 1984). Today, “speeches are the core of modern presidency. Presidents are often canonized or vilified not so much for what they do but for what they say they will do and how engagingly they say it” (Gelderman, 1997).

Second, everything a president says is “on the record,” especially in today’s mass media and technological environment. Therefore, presidents must ensure the words they
speak at the beginning of the week dovetail with those spoken last month and will not be contradicted by future events (Hart, 1987).

Presidential rhetoric may also be differentiated for independent rhetorical analysis because presidents have the opportunity to persuade the public and cause them to align themselves with their views of the government. “Presidents exert influence over their environment only by speaking, and it is largely through speech that their environment responds to them” (Hart, 1987). Throughout his career, a president will address many people, but “the people” are always listening (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

Given the emphasis on the importance of and regularity that a president speaks, Campbell and Jamieson (1990) have identified eight types of presidential messages that typify the institution of the presidency and are structural supports for the edifice of the presidency: speeches of ascendant vice presidents, state of the union addresses, veto messages, war rhetoric, rhetoric to forestall impeachment, pardoning rhetoric and farewell addresses. Of these, war rhetoric is one of the few that consistently “infuses the U.S. presidency” (Murphy, 2003). Whether looking at the American Revolution, War on Terror, or any war in-between, presidents must rally the nation and engage them in the quest for victory.

**War Rhetoric**

War rhetoric occurs when the president attempts to justify the use of force and prove that military action is required to protect America. The president asks Congress
and the public to follow him on a crusade to preserve the nation (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

In U.S. history, war has only been declared five times: War of 1812 with Great Britain, U.S.-Mexican War in 1846, Spanish-American War in 1898, World War I in 1917 and World War II in 1941. However, since presidents are able to carry out major military actions without declarations of war, presidents have placed troops into Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, and Iraq. This idea – whether a president can commit troops to an area without a declaration of war – has been hotly debated since the founding fathers penned the Constitution (Murphy, 2003). Alexander Hamilton’s *Federalist* papers communicated the view held by many founders, “there can be no limitation of that authority which is to provide for the defense and protection of the community” (Hamilton, 1787). Additionally, the Supreme Court has held that “if war be made by invasion of a foreign nation, the President is not only authorized but bound to resist force by force. He does not initiate the war, but is bound to accept the challenge without waiting for special legislative authority” (Ellis, 2000).

Because there are times when the nation’s troops are committed to carry out major military actions but the nation is not “officially” at war, the use of war rhetoric has become increasingly prevalent in presidential rhetoric during “official” and “unofficial” wars. Presidential war rhetoric helps presidents reshape situations by using rhetoric that legitimizes their initiatives, and exhorts the nation to follow through on its basic mission (Hart, 1984).

Campbell and Jamieson (1990) have identified five war rhetoric appeals presidents have used when communicating war to America: (1) every element in it
proclaims that the momentous decision to resort to force is deliberate, the product of thoughtful consideration; (2) forceful intervention is justified through a chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn; (3) the audience is exhorted to unanimity of purpose and total commitment; (4) the rhetoric not only justifies the use of force but also seeks to legitimate presidential assumption of the extraordinary powers of the commander in chief; (5) strategic misrepresentations play an unusually significant role in its appeals.

In the analysis of war rhetoric, one of the centralizing themes that has been analyzed is metaphor. With metaphor, one compares two unlike thing and the listener substitutes one thing for another. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) this can cause the audience to “view the entailments of the metaphors as being true.” When the nation is on the verge of war, presidents often rely upon metaphor to reshape public perception of the enemy so there is no alternative to war. For example, during the War on Terror, President Bush has used metaphor to portray the U.S. as an “international champion of liberty and democracy,” whereas, Iraq has been portrayed as “an evil enemy bent on tyranny and oppression” (Bush, 2001, September 20). This type of rhetoric could sway citizens with anti-war beliefs because they feel that if they do not side with Bush their only alternative is to side with an “evil enemy.”

Another common element found in Bush’s war rhetoric is epideictic rhetoric, which is the use of powerfully affective language to praise or blame someone or something. The epideictic function of creating and sharing community was well received in the months after September 11 because of the enormity of the civilian loss of life. “Epideictic rhetoric strongly encourages us to believe in the world the president’s text
imagines” (Murphy, 2003). And, on September 11, “perhaps more than on any other day
in recent memory, the American people needed to hear from their president. They
needed to hear a message of reassurance, resolve, and unity that only a president of the
United States could provide” (Beasley, 2004).

Presidential Literature Review

September 11 has been likened to many national tragedies. One of the most
frequent comparisons is to Pearl Harbor because of the suddenness of the attacks
(Anderson, 2004; Flanagan, 2004; Zieger, 2004). However, scholars have also compared
it non-violent events such as the 1957 launch of Sputnik. No matter what type of
national crisis occurs, nearly all national tragedies have three common links. First, a
national tragedy is shared with others in the nation and personal feelings of sadness, fear,
and anger are considered appropriate when several people express the same emotions.
Second, a national tragedy involves “elements of fear and a sense of vulnerability”
(Neal, 1998). For instance, the Cuban Missile Crisis was accompanied by fear of
nuclear war. Third, a national crisis becomes a transitional event and some have more
long-term effects than others. “The degree to which a nation dwells upon a trauma
depends on the degree of closure that is achieved” (Neal, 1998). Americans experienced
closure when the Soviet’s missiles were removed from Cuba during the Cuban Missile
Crisis; Americans were able to put the event behind them. Comparatively, because
questions still remain about the events surrounding President Kennedy’s assassination,
Americans continue to be preoccupied with what happened in Dallas on
November 22, 1963.
Outcomes of national crisis may also be greatly affected by performance of the appropriate authority figure, which in a national crisis is often the President of the United States. Although we know from communication research that attitudes are seldom changed on the basis of a single message, a presidential message takes on a unique form. “Because of his prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the president, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public” (Zarefsky, 2004). According to Roderick Hart’s examination of presidential communication between 1945 through 1985, presidential rhetoric is a key in the president’s ability to lead and may be likened to verbal chess. “Presidents are extraordinarily active players in the game of public opinion, and all of their public statements…are strategically designed to position the president for the next one in a series of endless countermoves” (Dorsey, 2002).

As a means of comparison to September 11, several national crisis communication cases will be reviewed to show how presidential rhetoric has been used to alter public opinion.

*Case One.* The bloody trauma of the Civil War required Americans to make personal sacrifices, and was a tremendous force in shaping America’s national identity. Congressional debates between advocates of national government supremacy versus the rights of the separate states were at the heart of the Civil War. Although slavery was often a focus of these debates, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties had outlined the conflict between state and national government in the early years of the nation. Ultimately, the conflict was settled on the battlefields. “The emotionality surrounding
the issues of the Civil War became so intense that the war became a sacred crusade both for the North and South” (Neal, 1998).

As the war became protracted, restoration of the union became the President’s primary rhetorical theme (Benoit, 1997). President Lincoln communicated this new restoration focus through a series of rhetorical moves, which used Benoit’s transcendence and corrective action strategies (see methodology section for additional information on Benoit’s strategies). In 1862 he started suggesting that opposition to emancipation was “imaginary, if not sometimes malicious.” He issued the Emancipation Proclamation and defined it as a means to preserve the Union. By using rhetoric to shift the nation’s focus to a larger goal – restoration of the union versus winning the war – he was able to end the war (Stuckey, 2004).

Case Two. Early Sunday morning on December 7, 1941, Americans’ security of everyday life was disrupted. Disbelief and denial were some of the initial responses to radio reports stating Japan had launched an aerial attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. This event has become a marker in our history. “Very few Americans who were alive at that time have difficulty in remembering the activities in which they were engaged when they heard about the attacks on Pearl Harbor” (Neal, 1998). As information about the attacks unfolded, Americans’ emotions about Pearl Harbor intensified because of the United States lack of preparedness.

During this focusing event, President Roosevelt relied upon a rhetorical device known as the vox populi method, which attempts to “find a particularly striking phrase or dramatic moment to express what all are thinking” (O’Shaughnessy, 2004). He found and first used that phrase, “a date which will live in infamy,” during his famous Pearl
Harbor speech given on December 8, 1941 (Roosevelt, 1941). This speech mobilized a nation that had previously opposed involvement in the war. Some of the rhetorical trademarks found in Roosevelt’s speeches are bolstering (of America’s spirit) and attacking one’s accusers (Japan). In addition, Roosevelt’s war rhetoric is also filled with metaphors (Ivie, 1990) that identified the threat to America’s community and fundamental values (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

Case Three. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first earth satellite, Sputnik. This seemingly insurmountable obstacle marked the first time “since 1814, the American mainland and the American people appeared to be under direct military threat” (Zieger, 2004). Sputnik struck fear in the hearts of Americans because they believed it signified the Russians had developed rockets powerful enough to project nuclear warheads to America’s cities. “Unless we depart utterly from our present behavior, it is reasonable to expect that by no later than 1975 the United States will be a member of the Soviet Socialist Republics” (Zieger, 2004).

President Eisenhower’s rhetorical response attempted to use denial, transcendence and minimization to convince Americans that US achievement in missile technology was well ahead of the Soviet Union. However, his rhetoric was unsuccessful. Americans continued to fear there was a missile-gap. One of the reasons for this rhetorical failure was because Eisenhower could not openly communicate certain findings from highly secret spy plane flights over Russia that indicated Russia’s missile program was far behind the United States. He also failed to communicate the United States did not need to exceed the Soviets missile-power, rather they only needed to be able to deter a Soviet attack. Therefore, “throughout his remaining time in office,
Eisenhower consistently denied there was a missile gap favoring the Soviet Union” (Dorsey, 2002).

After Eisenhower left office in 1962, the Kennedy administration eased Americans missile-gap fears by offering a corrective action – space exploration would be a national priority in his administration. President Kennedy emphatically declared a man would walk on the moon “before this decade is over” and bolstered American’s confidence (Kennedy, 1961). Americans missile-gap fears were alleviated when this predication came to fruition and the public began to believe America was ahead of the Soviet Union in the space-race.

Case Four. On September 1, 1983, a Korean Airliner (KAL 007) carrying 269 people, including American Congressman Larry McDonald, was shot down by a Soviet fighter plane after it strayed into Soviet air space. All aboard KAL 007 died. This senseless shooting created an international crisis, and the international community quickly became concerned that war might break out between the two superpowers that had nuclear weapons at their disposal – America and the Soviet Union.

When President Reagan addressed the nation and world on September 4, 1983, a “primary strategic objective of his speech was to isolate the Soviet Union from the rest of the world as a truly evil empire that commits inhumane crimes against innocent people” (Ritter, 1995). Reagan’s rhetoric impaired the Soviet’s credibility through the use of war rhetoric and metaphors. He employed epideictic rhetoric that offered clear choices between two opposite alternatives. These choices between good and evil made it easier for the public to understand the situation. For instance, he pointed out the U.S. would never commit such a violent act. “Commercial aircraft from the Soviet Union and
Cuba on a number of occasions have overflown United States military facilities. They weren’t shot down. We and other civilized countries believe in the tradition of offering help to mariners and pilots who are lost or in distress on the sea or in the air. We believe in following procedures to prevent a tragedy, not provoke one.” In phrases such as these, Reagan reduces the offense of inadvertently flying into prohibited airspace, while highlighting the enormity of the Soviet’s action.

Reagan also used Benoit’s attacking one’s accuser and corrective action strategies (see methodology section for additional information on Benoit’s strategies) to alleviate any concerns that this attack would lead to a war, or suspend the on-going arms negotiations. “We can not, we must not, give up our effort to reduce the arsenals of destructive weapons threatening the world. We know it will be hard to make a nation that rules its own people through force to cease using force against the rest of the world, but we must try.”

Case Five. On April 19, 1995, around 9:00 a.m. the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City was destroyed killing 168 people (including 19 children). The bomb injured over 800 people and destroyed or seriously damaged more than 300 buildings in the surrounding area. It is the largest domestic terrorist attack in the history of the United States, and – until the September 11, 2001, attacks – it was the largest terrorist attack of any kind in the nation’s history (Bombing, 1995; Oklahoma, 2005).

When President Clinton addressed the nation on April 23, one week after the attack, the nation “listened to the president as they had not listened to him since his inaugural speech” (Gelderman, 1997). Clinton’s eulogy relied upon a preacher persona.
He also used subtle war rhetoric, although we were not at war at that time, with good versus evil metaphors. “To my fellow Americans beyond this hall, I say, one thing we owe those who have sacrificed is the duty to purge ourselves of the dark forces which give rise to this evil. They are forces that threaten our common peace, our freedom, our way of life…” (Clinton, 1995).

These five cases are instructive because they identify situations where Presidents of the United States rely upon Benoit’s image restoration strategies during focusing events.

**Methodology – Image Repair Theory**

Genre criticism, criticism of kinds or types, is a traditional way of approaching rhetoric. Generic critics contend that rhetorical patterns, and even more important than the rhetorical action is the similarity within that rhetoric. “Critics who employ a generic perspective seek to explain the strategies typically used by rhetors and audiences to encompass similar situations” (Murphy, 2003). When that occurs, a specific type or pattern emerges. During crisis situations, such as September 11, rhetorical patterns often emerge more quickly because “a torrent of words rushed in to fill the void, to contain the terror, and offer meaning to what had just happened. Through language people attempted to wrest some control” (Stein, 2003) over a chaotic situation.

As has already been established, the office of the presidency is filled with recurrent rhetorical tasks. After September 11, 2001, Americans became familiar with President Bush’s repeated use of phrases such as “freedom has been violated;” “America is still strong;” “a different world after September 11;” “America will never be the same
again;” and “democracy and freedom versus fanaticism and terrorism” (Bush, 2001, September 20). Yet, had these same phrases been used in the days before September 11, they would have received little, if any, attention. These words were uttered to bring restoration and hope to a shocked nation, in addition to restoring the nation and airline’s image. Benoit’s (1997, 2000) image repair theory provides a comprehensive means for understanding the crisis rhetoric employed by Bush and his administration in the one-year following September 11.

An individual or organization’s most important asset is their image (Benoit, 2004; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997). Image is “the perception of a person (or group, or organization) held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of that person, as well as the discourse and behavior of other relevant actors” (Benoit, 1997). This image is dynamic and cannot be fully “restored” to its exact state before the offensive act occurred.

Benoit has identified a two-prong test to determine if an individual or corporation’s image is at risk (Benoit, 2004). First, the act must be considered offensive. Second, the pertinent audience must hold the accused responsible for the act. If both of these conditions are true, a threat to the image – personal or corporate – exists. In this situation, Benoit has developed a series of rhetorical strategies that an individual or company can adopt to maximize its reputation or image after an attack: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Benoit has assigned sub-points to further define these categories and the accused’s reaction.

Denial and shifting blame are strategies commonly employed by individuals or corporations facing crisis situations (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Coombs,
Denial can help restore the accused’s image if it is accepted by the audience. Ulmer and Sellnow (1997) state that when an organization employs denial, their arguments focus on three rhetorical concepts: evidence, intent and locus.

Benoit’s second strategy is evasion of responsibility, which includes four variations: provocation, defeasibility, accidental, and good intentions. Provocation, or scape-goating (Scott & Lyman, 1968), occurs when some or all of the blame is shifted from the accused in order to preserve or repair the accused’s reputation. Ulmer and Sellnow (1997) state the information used to employ these tactics is “subject to the ethical criteria of significant choice.”

The second type of evasion of responsibility is defeasibility, which is when the accused claims a lack of information about or control over important elements of the situation. For example, during the Watergate investigations, President Richard Nixon announced to the public that important facts had been concealed “from the public, from you, and from me.” This defeasibility statement suggested that he did not have enough information about the situation to control it (Bochin, 1995).

The accused may also say the offensive action occurred by accident. If a company can convince the audience the event occurred accidentally, the accused will not be held responsible. For instance, if a student breaks their arm during a refereed football game, others will look on them with sympathy because the broken arm was an accident. However, if the same student breaks their arm while committing a juvenile prank, they will receive little, if any, sympathy and will have to shoulder the responsibility of their prank and injury.
Fourth, the accused may suggest the incident was performed with good intentions. When Sears was accused of overcharging its customers for auto repairs, the company spokesperson stated, “Sears wants you to know that we would never intentionally violate the trust customers have shown in our company for 105 years” (Benoit, 2004). Sears repeatedly claimed good intentions during this crisis.

Benoit’s third image repair strategy is reduction of offensiveness. He develops six variations – bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking one’s accuser, and compensation – that allow the accused individual or organization to reduce the act’s perceived offensiveness” (Benoit, 1997).

First, bolstering may be used to reinforce the audience’s positive feelings about the accused. In April 1970, after NASA’s Apollo 13 crew said, “Houston we’ve had a problem,” (Gelderman, 1997) President Nixon and NASA used messages that bolstered the agency and secured the future of American space exploration. NASA responded proactively (Kauffman, 1991). By honestly acknowledging the mission was a failure, the public accepted NASA’s claim that they were able to learn more from the flight because there were problems.

Second, minimization occurs when an organization attempts to down-play the severity of the incident. After the Exxon Valdez oil spill, Exxon’s Chairman used minimization as part of Exxon’s image repair strategy. “Exxon has moved swiftly and competently to minimize the effect this oil will have on the environment, fish, and other wildlife” (Johnson & Sellnow, 1995; Sellnow, 1993).

The third variation of Benoit’s reduction of offensiveness image repair strategy is differentiation. With this strategy, the accused distinguishes the condemned act with
other similar, but more offensive acts. In the Sears automotive repair crisis, the Chairman argued acts criticized as unneeded repairs were preventative maintenance aimed at avoiding costly future repairs (Ringer, 1993).

Fourth, the accused can employ transcendence, which is placing an act in a more favorable, broader, or different context. For example, David Howard, Director of Washington, D.C.’s Mayor’s Office of the Public Advocate, resigned his position when racial slander allegations were made about him (Woodless, 1999). In a statement about his resignation, Howard attempted to place the act in a broader context. “I used the word ‘niggardly’ in reference to my administration fund. Although the word, which is defined as ‘miserly,’ does not have any racial connotations, I realize that staff members present were offended by the word. I immediately apologized” (Fearn-Banks, 2002).

A fifth way to reduce offensiveness is attacking one’s accusers. If the accused is able to impair the credibility of the accuser, the damage to the accused’s reputation may be limited. This method is often used during jury trials when attorneys for either side attempt to discredit their opponent’s credentials in order to bolster their client’s image.

The last method of reducing offensiveness is compensation. In this situation, “the accused offers to reimburse the victim to help mitigate the negative feeling arising from the act” (Benoit, 2004). After a Japan Air Lines (JAL) crashed and killed 250 people, the company attempted to reduce offensiveness with monetary support and services rendered (Lee, 1991; Pinsdorf, 1991; Ritter, 1995). More than 400 airline employees helped bereaved relatives with everything from arranging funeral services to filling out insurance forms. The company’s president made personal apologies, attended
all memorial services, and paid financial restitution to the victims’ families (Pinsdorf, 1991).

Corrective action is Benoit’s fourth general image repair strategy. Companies or individuals who use this strategy promise to correct the problem. Johnson & Johnson has been commended for the corrective action stance they took during both the 1982 and 1986 Tylenol product tampering crisis (Barton, 2001; Benson, 1988; Birch, 1994). At a news conference, Tylenol’s CEO James Burke announced the company would suspend production of the capsule and offered to replace the consumers’ capsules with caplets, tablets or a refund. This action provided an immediate remedy to the initial crisis. Tylenol was able to provide other corrective actions, such as a triple-seal safety package, which began to move them towards the recovery phase (Fearn-Banks, 2002).

The fifth and final general image repair strategy outlined by Benoit is mortification (Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit 1995). As its name implies, mortifications requires the accused to admit their guilt, express regret, apologize, and seek forgiveness. If the audience believes the apology is sincere, they could pardon the wrongful act. For example, when nine people died after the USS Greeneville collided with the fishing boat Ehime Maru, the US Navy engaged in mortification and took responsibility for the accident (Drumheller & Benoit, 2004). The Japanese government was satisfied with the Navy’s response; however, the Navy continues to work at restoring its image with the Japanese people.

Image repair strategies were used by President Bush and his administration throughout the September 11 crisis. These strategies were employed to repair and bolster the nation’s confidence in itself and airlines, attack the accrued, show differentiation,
and offer corrective action, just to name a few. This study relies upon Benoit’s image repair theory to analyze selected speeches presented by President Bush and members of his administration. These speeches were chosen based upon their ability to provide clear evidence on how the U.S. government took control over the airline industry’s damage-control campaign. This study also analyzes Bush and his administration’s rhetoric from the genre perspective of “war rhetoric” and epideictic rhetoric, as well as from the perspective of a crisis as a focusing event.

This chapter has introduced the crisis, discussed September 11 crisis communication from a rhetorical perspective from a variety of angles, offered the distinct characteristics of political rhetoric versus traditional rhetoric, and performed a historical overview of U.S. presidents’ rhetorical responses to national crisis. Chapter two will discuss the rhetorical situation from Benoit’s image repair theory perspective, which is the primary framework used to probe selected speeches given by President Bush and his administration. Lastly, chapter three will discuss implications for crisis communication practitioners and scholars.
CHAPTER 2
A LITERATURE REVIEW

“One of the greatest goals of this nation’s war is to restore public confidence in the airline industry.”

-- President George W. Bush, September 27, 2001

In order to understand the implications of President Bush and his administration’s September 11 rhetoric, one must analyze the rhetoric with effective critical probes that stem from crisis communication theory. As was identified in chapter one, scholars have different definitions for crisis, but all agree that a crisis is a major, disruptive event that poses a threat. The September 11 attacks can be identified as a crisis, rather than a problem, because the events of that day interrupted the normal flow of business and had a “potentially negative outcome affecting the organization...or industry, as well as its publics...or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 2002). September 11 can be conceptualized as an event, a construct and a process. As an event, the terrorist attacks and grounding of all aircraft was “unexpected, negative, and overwhelming” (Barton, 2001) and therefore constitutes a crisis. As a construct, the event caused unforeseen and damaging accusations about terrorism and the safety of air travel, both of which will be discussed in greater detail later. As a process, the September 11 crisis underwent all five stages of a crisis as identified by Fearn-Banks (2002): detection, preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. A brief synopsis of crisis as a process follows:
Detection that something was awry with American Airlines flight 11 from Boston occurred on September 11, 2001, at 8:13 a.m. (EDT) when an air controller instructed American flight 11 to climb to 35,000 feet, and the pilot did not comply with the instructions. The air controller tried to use the emergency frequency to contact the aircraft, but the crew did not respond to the radio call. At 8:23 a.m. the FAA Command Center was contacted and informed that American flight 11 had been hijacked. At 8:45 a.m. American flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Confirmation that this crash was a terrorist attack occurred at 9:03 a.m. when a second hijacked airliner, United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston, crashed into the south tower of the World Trade Center.

One of the earliest stages of prevention and containment occurred when all aircraft in U.S. airspace were forced to land. According to FAA Administrator Garvey, “Never, not since the Wright Brothers, had there been so few civil aircraft aloft. Yet, as Secretary of Transportation Mineta has said, “This action saved lives, perhaps thousands of lives. It was a step that had to be taken” (Garvey, 2001).

We are still in the recovery and learning stages of the September 11 crisis, and it will take years because “there is no playbook on how to restore an aviation system” (Garvey, 2001). According to Under Secretary of Transportation Magaw, “the horrific events of 9-11 as well as the ongoing process of rebuilding and recovery that follow have reaffirmed the central importance of aviation security not only to the aviation industry’s economic well-being but also to the emotional and physical good health of travelers around the world” (Magaw, 2002, June 24). President Bush also acknowledged that Americans were changed by September 11 and therefore recovery would not mean
complete restoration to America’s pre-September 11 state. During his first State of the Union address after September 11, Bush said, “The last time I spoke here (U.S. Capitol), I expressed the hopes that life would return to normal. In some ways, it has. In others, it never will” (Bush, 2002l). Specific examples of the recovery and learning stages will be examined later in the corrective action section of this chapter.

September 11, 2001, was a cataclysmic crisis. As with many crisis, it can be examined from several angles; however, one of the reasons September 11 remains unique is because of the numerous crises that occurred in-conjunction with or because of September 11. Therefore, this cataclysmic, overarching crisis – which we call September 11 – was created. For example, some of the significant crises that layered into the overall September 11 crisis include, but are not limited to, the airline’s image crisis; the general aviation image crisis; the anthrax crisis; attack on Afghanistan and beginning of the War on Terror; economic slowdown; substantial employment declines in industries such as air transportation and hospitality; and a decrease in 2001’s yearly total of charitable giving because of the tremendous outpouring of giving following the terrorist attacks.

The airlines’ image crisis is unique among these because it is the only crisis where the U.S. government responded to an industry’s crisis, rather than the industry.

To fully understand the uniqueness of the airline industry’s September 11 image crisis, several crisis communication theories will be synthesized: Birkland’s focusing event’s theory, Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric theory, and Benoit’s image restoration theory. Each of these three theories are critical for determining how the U.S. government took control over the airline industry’s damage-control campaign because they look at the crisis from slightly different perspectives. Birkland’s theory looks at the
crisis from a political perspective and identifies the “policy window.” Campbell and Jamieson’s theory helps draw conclusions about the President and his administration’s rhetoric during this crisis, which quickly escalated into a war. Benoit’s image restoration theory, an overarching crisis communication theory, helps to identify damaged image components and what strategies were taken to repair that image.

**Image Repair Litmus Tests**

To determine if a crisis poses a threat to the organization’s image, Benoit states an act must have been committed that is considered “offensive” and the pertinent audience must hold the accused responsible for the act. If an act meets both of these criteria, an organization’s image is at risk. It is also important to note that an organization in an image crisis situation “may suffer in proportion to the extent to which they are held responsible for the undesirable act” (Benoit, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to identify a potential image crisis as soon as possible so the appropriate steps may be taken to repair the damaged image. Benoit has identified five strategies that are regularly employed to repair an organization’s image: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Denial occurs when the accused person denies committing the offensive action. Evasion of responsibility has several subsets (provocation, defeasibility, accident and good intentions) all of which center around avoiding responsibility for the offensive act. Reduction of offensiveness occurs when the organization or individual tries to reduce the believed offensiveness of the act, and it may be carried out through bolstering, minimization, differentiation,
transcendence, attacking one’s accuser and compensation. The fifth and final strategy, mortification, occurs when the accused confesses and asks for forgiveness.

So, how is the image repair theory applicable in this situation? First, was September 11 considered offensive? America’s political leaders have answered this question with an unequivocal “yes.” On September 20, President Bush addressed a joint session of Congress and described why this act was offensive.

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars – but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known casualties of war – but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks – but never before on thousands of civilians (Bush, 2001, September 20).

Members of Bush’s administration echoed Bush’s remarks and also categorized the attacks as offensive. In a joint press conference the evening of September 11, Attorney General John Ashcroft said the September 11 attacks were “heinous acts of violence [that] are an assault on the security of our nation.” Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta identified the “freedom of mobility” that came under fire because of the “horrendous attacks.” Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson recognized the grief that was caused by September 11 when he said “every single American lost something today” (Ashcroft, Mineta, & Thompson, 2001).

The September 11 attacks were also identified as offensive by numerous political leaders around the world. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany offered to send thousands of German troops to fight in the war against terror in Afghanistan. Using
phrases such as “cold-blooded terrorists” and “barbaric attacks which claimed thousands of innocent lives,” he told Germany’s Parliament the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not just a strike against the United States, but also Germany and the world (Schroder, 2001). In a televised statement, Prime Minister of Japan Junichiro Koizumi said:

These extremely vicious acts of violence can never be forgiven. I am outraged by these acts which pose a grave challenge not only to the United States but to the entire free world. Japan strongly supports the United States and is resolved to spare no effort in providing necessary assistance and cooperation. We must stand firmly together with the concerned nations of the world to ensure that such acts are never repeated” (Koizumi, 2001).

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair voiced his contempt for the acts of September 11 in an address to the House of Commons on September 14, 2001. “What happened in the United States on Tuesday was an act of wickedness for which there can never be justification. Whatever the cause, whatever the perversion of religious feeling, whatever the political belief, to inflict such terror on the world; to take the lives of so many innocent and defenceless men, women, and children, can never be justified.” (Blair, 2001).

A second component of Benoit’s image repair theory asks did the pertinent audience hold the accused responsible for the act? Prior to answering this question, a scholar must first determine who is the “pertinent audience.” Following the attacks, President Bush and his administration’s rhetoric was aimed at numerous audiences – the American people, America’s allies, and America’s enemies, just to name a few. Even
though the audience demographic was very diverse, Bush and his administration’s rhetoric recognized the “multi-faceted audience” and attempted to capitalize on this situation by speaking to each specific audience demographic (Hart, 1997). For instance, Bush realized that his audience was a “rhetorical audience,” or one that can directly implement the change the speaker is requesting (Hart, 1997). Therefore, his rhetoric is filled with ways Americans, America’s allies, and America’s enemies can respond to the war. Passages to the American people that support this claim include “I have urged our fellow Americans to go about their lives, to fly on airplanes, to travel, to go to work” (Bush, 2001, October 12); “I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children” (Bush, 2001, September 20); and “I invite you to join the new USA Freedom Corps” (Bush, 2001, December 7). Rhetoric aimed at America’s allies includes, “We ask every nation to join us. We will ask, and we will need, the help of police forces, intelligence services, and banking systems around the world” and “An attack on one is an attack on all.” To America’s enemies, Bush used verbiage such as “The United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to the United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land” (Bush, 2001, September 20). Because September 11, 2001, had a global affect, it is very difficult (if not impossible) to narrow September 11 rhetoric to only one audience. However, because of the scope of this project, I will only focus on the “American people” as President Bush and his administration’s “pertinent audience.”

Once the pertinent audience (i.e. the American people) has been established, a scholar can determine who that audience holds responsible for the act. This answer is several-fold. First, the American people identified Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and
terrorism as responsible for September 11. In a September 16 press conference President Bush was asked if he believed “Osama bin Laden’s denial that he had anything to do with this [September 11]?” The President responded, “No question he is the prime suspect. No questions about that” (Bush, 2001, September 16). Then, in his well-known September 20, 2001, speech President Bush reinforced this answer and educated Americans about Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, who they are, their goals, and what al Qaeda has done in the past. “Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goals is remaking the world – and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.” (Bush, 2001, September 20).

Unlike traditional wars or crisis communication scenarios where the accused is a defined person, belief system, and/or organization, the person or organization responsible for September 11 has been a growing, and therefore moving, target. This is in part due to the nature of the event, as well as Bush’s doctrine that states, “we will make no distinction between terrorists and those who harbor them” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 8:30 p.m.). The initial September 11 investigations looked at the 19 hijackers and Osama bin Laden as the cause of the attacks. However, as the investigation has progressed, Middle East governments, affluent business men, banking institutions, foreign militaries, and religious groups from Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia have been charged. For example, in October 2001, the U.S. government identified Yassin al-Qadi as a terrorist because he was one of Osama bin Laden’s primary terrorism financiers. According to a ComputerWorld magazine interview, a former business associate of Yassin al-Qadi revealed surprising acquaintances of Yassin, a terrorist. “He never talked to me about violence. Instead, he talked very highly of his
relationship with [former President] Jimmy Carter and [Vice President] Dick Cheney” (Verton, 2003). By recognizing that terrorists have gained access to some of the highest ranking U.S. political officials and been esteemed as a financial leader in one of America’s most prestigious cities, it is apparent that the terrorism network is vast and has been able to merge in and out of society with little detection or suspicion.

Second, the American people experienced a crisis of confidence, or loss of faith, in the American government and airlines following September 11. Many Americans have asked how could the government and/or the airlines not be aware of and prevent such a grandiose attack? This question reveals American’s skepticism in White House official’s claims that none of the information available to investigators prior to September 11 could have prevented the attacks. Since the attacks, there has been much speculation concerning the September 11 planning and execution. In August 2004, Zogby International published a poll stating 49.3 percent of New York City residents and 41 percent of New York citizens overall believed some U.S. leaders “knew in advance that attacks were planned on or around September 11, and they failed to act” (Half, 2004). Some cite for evidence interviews such as a May 2002 press conference where former FBI Agent Robert Wright said his superiors intentionally obstructed his investigation into al Qaeda financing. This press conference was followed by an ABC televised interview where Ross referred to the FBI’s hindering of his investigation into Yassin al-Qadi, a powerful Saudi Arabian businessman with extensive financial ties in Chicago (Gibson, 2002). As mentioned earlier, the government publicly identified al-Qadi as a terrorist financier in October 2001, one month after the attack.
Research also reveals numerous accounts and speculations of warnings that went unheeded prior to the attacks. For instance, some say the President’s behavior on September 11 is suspicious because he maintained his appointment to visit a Florida elementary school the morning of the attack rather than immediately address the nation or depart for Washington. Others say the United States was warned by Israel, Russia, Germany, the Philippines, and a London newspaper about the attacks in advance. The State Department’s September 7, 2001, issuance of a “worldwide caution” that said, “American citizens may be the target of a terrorist threat from extremist groups with links to Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda organization” (Grigg, 2002) has also created doubt. Some who question if the government knew of the attacks in advance point to approximately seventeen internet domain names as evidence. These web addresses supposedly indicated where the attacks were to occur and included names such as

www.attackontwintowers.com, www.nycterroriststrick.com, and www.pearlharborinmanhattan.com. Yet others point to Saddam Hussein’s action of putting his military on its highest state of alert two weeks before the attack, which had not done since the Gulf War in the 1990s. These accounts, and many others, may be found on websites or in the many books that promote alternative stories to September 11. Even though all of these accounts generally fall into the genre of conspiracy theories, they do raise some interesting questions such as the one previously mentioned – how could the government and/or airlines not have been aware of and prevent such a grandiose attack?

This question also reveals the fear American’s had for their safety after September 11 because Americans saw a hole in the airline system and realized the
system had flaws. President Bush acknowledged this fear the evening of September 11 in a nationally televised address when he asked for prayers for “all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 8:30 p.m.). He recognized it again on September 20, in his speech titled “Freedom and Fear are at War” when he said, “After all that has just passed…it is natural to wonder if America’s future is one of fear. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat” (Bush, 2001, September 20). Approximately one month after the September 11 attacks he addressed this vulnerability again. “I know that many Americans at this time have fears. We’ve learned that America is not immune from attack.” (Bush, 2001, October 8). Although Bush never links fear directly with the airline industry, his administration does. For example, in a speech to the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, FAA Administrator Garvey said, “A plane flying overhead is no longer cause for wonder. People see a plane and worry. Every day the FAA hears from citizens concerned about suspicious aircraft. It is a nation on edge. It is a nation on alert. And it should be” (Garvey, 2001). Another example of Bush’s administration acknowledging the fear and lack of confidence Americans have in relation to aircraft occurred when the Secretary of Transportation Mineta said, “It is important that we make these changes (security enhancements) and that we make them quickly, efficiently, and visibly to assure the American traveling public that we are committed to their safety. We need them to once again have trust and confidence in our national transportation system” (Mineta, 2002, March 6).

National surveys also validate Bush and his administration’s rhetoric addressing Americans’ fears and lack of confidence. According to Dr. Elaine Christiansen, Senior
Research Director for the Gallup Organization, "A significant part of the population still does not feel safe. We need to find ways to empower the American public back toward the sense of security." (Four, 2002). An October 2001 CBS News Poll indicated that more than a third of all Americans said they felt nervous or edgy since the attacks, and 17 percent had trouble sleeping (Poll, 2001). This fear and insecurity transcended into many areas of life, including travel on the airlines. An ABC News poll conducted two days after the terrorist attacks indicated that 59 percent of Americans were “personally worried” about traveling by commercial airplane because of the risk of terrorism (ABC, 2001). Approximately eight months after the attacks, a similar study conducted by the USA Today, CNN and the Gallup poll revealed 42 percent of Americans remained “personally more afraid to fly” (USA Today, 2001). American’s fear of flight after September 11 is further validated by Congressional testimony given by airline CEOs indicating the airlines did not return to 100 percent of pre-September 11 flight schedules and passenger loads until approximately one-year following the attacks (Parker, 2004, Tilton, 2004). The global economy was also impacted by the U.S. airline industry after September 11 because approximately 40 percent of the global airline travel stems from U.S. airlines (September, 2005). For instance, a study conducted by OAG, a global content management company specializing in transportation information, indicated a dramatic reduction in key transatlantic flights one year after September 11, 2001. The overall number of flights between Western Europe and the U.S. was down 13 percent. (One, 2002).
Application of Image Repair Theory

Now that it has been established that the American people hold Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda responsible for September 11, and that the acts created a crisis of confidence in the government’s ability to keep Americans safe, it is appropriate for a rhetorical critic to apply Benoit’s image repair theory to the September 11 crisis. As has been indicated by earlier statistics, America’s airline image was at risk because of the September 11 attacks. Therefore, Bush and his administration used an array of rhetorical devices to repair the industry’s image. According to Bush, “One of the greatest goals of this nation’s war is to restore public confidence in the airline industry” (Bush, 2001, September 27). Bush places a higher priority on airline travel than any other means of transportation because the air transportation industry generates more than $100 billion in annual revenue and it is the engine that drives the nation’s economy (Parker, 2004). Air travel has been described by FAA Administrator Garvey as the heartbeat of the nation (Garvey, 2002). According to Bush, the airlines were the first industry deeply affected after September 11, and “to me, that seemed like the most important initial leg of [the] strategy” (Bush, 2001, December 4). Bush has indicated that he is “hopeful that as a result of an airline stimulus package, or airline security package, as well as a safety package and an economic stimulus package, this economy will come back, people will have the money necessary to travel, [and] people will feel safe to travel” (Bush, 2001, December 4). Bush’s administration has echoed his comments that the airline system will help restore America’s economy. Mineta attempted to address American’s fears by communicating an important principle that must be adhered to in order to build a “transportation security regime for the 21st century.” Mineta said, “We must provide for
the security and safety of all who use our transportation system thereby insuring the
mobility of Americans as well as our Nation’s economic growth.” (Mineta, 2002,
March 25).

Recognizing the President and his administration’s goal of restoring the nation’s
airlines, a crisis communication critic can use Benoit’s image repair theory – which
includes denial and shifting blame, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness,
corrective action and mortification – to gain understanding of Bush and his
administration’s image restoration rhetoric. According to Benoit, entities usually use at
least two or more of these strategies to restore their corporate image. This thesis will
examine five of the image repair strategies relied upon by Bush and his administration –
shifting blame, defeasibility (a type of evasion of responsibility), bolstering (a type of
reduction of offensiveness), attacking the accuser (a type of reduction of offensiveness)
and corrective action.

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(Table 1. From Benoit, [2004])

Denial and shifting blame are commonly used strategies by individuals and organizations facing a crisis. Initially, Osama bin Laden denied being the mastermind in the September 11 attacks,

I have already said that I am not involved in the 11 September attacks in the United States. As a Muslim, I try my best to avoid telling a lie. I had no knowledge of these attacks, nor do I consider the killing of innocent women, children and other humans as an appreciable act. Islam strictly forbids causing harm to innocent women, children and other people. Such a practice is forbidden even in the course of a battle (Taleban, 2001).
However, in December 2001, U.S. forces captured a videotape in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden discussed the September 11 attacks in advance. This tape proved his earlier denial was false.

We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower. We calculated that the floors that would be hit would be three or four floors. Due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only. This is all that we had hoped for (Transcript of Osama, 2001).

Although the Bush administration did not use denial in their September 11 rhetoric, they did use shifting blame. This technique, which Burke identifies as “victimage,” shifts the blame to another who performed the heinous act. Burke’s idea of victimage resonates with many because it serves as a type of purification. “In the process of victimage, a scapegoat is offered as a, ‘vessel’ of certain unwanted evils, the sacrificial animal upon whose back the burden of these evils is ritualistically loaded” (Burke, 1973). President Bush and his administration used this rhetorical technique to shift any blame, doubts, or conspiracy theories Americans may have about the United States government and airlines to the terrorists.

One of the shifting blame techniques President Bush and his administration used to cast doubt on the claims that the U.S. government knew of the attacks in advance was to state that none of the information available to investigators prior to September 11 could have prevented the attacks. For example, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said, “I don’t think anybody could have predicted that these people would take an
President Bush also confirmed this belief when he said, “no one could have conceivably imagined suicide bombers burrowing into our society and then emerging all in the same day to fly their aircraft – fly U.S. aircraft into buildings full of innocent people – and show no remorse” (Bush, 2001, September 16). Then, during a December 2001 speech he emphasized the unexpectedness of the war when he said, “This war came oh so suddenly” (Bush, 2001, December 7).

The published Congressional findings after investigation hearings on the failure to intercept the September 11 hijackers attack also provided President Bush with ammunition to shift the blame to the terrorists. During the Congressional hearings, the investigation committee attempted to find what mistakes, if any, led to America’s ignorance of the attack and what warnings, if any, did the intelligence community provide beforehand that identified the possibility of such an attack. The committee’s most potent finding was the August 2001 President’s Daily Brief (PDB) report – the highly-sensitive digest of current intelligence presented to the president each morning – that warned al Qaeda might strike using hijacked aircraft. Acknowledging that high officials are sometimes flooded with inconclusive warnings of potential dangers, the summarized findings of the “Congressional Reports: Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001,” did not blame President Bush or the U.S. government for not responding to the PDB. Instead the report identified “missed opportunities to disrupt the September 11 plot” because of “a variety of reasons” as the cause (Congressional Reports, 2002). The
ambiguity of this published finding – “a variety of reasons” – allowed President Bush and his administration to continue shifting blame to the terrorists. Had the congressional hearings revealed specific mistakes and cover-ups, as they did after Pearl Harbor, the American people would have cast blame on President Bush and his administration for the September 11 attacks. Because no specific mistakes were revealed, the Bush administration successfully shifted blame to al Qaeda and the terrorists by using the rational that one can not prevent what one does not know.

Defeasibility, which is claiming lack of information about or control over important elements of the situation, is also common in the examined September 11 rhetoric. When discussing how long the war on terror is expected to be, President Bush has repeatedly said “This is a different type of war” (Bush, 2001, September 20). With this statement, Bush and his administration are redefining the war, stressing its unprecedented features. In one of his more emphatic responses on the topic, Bush elaborated saying, “This particular battlefront will last as long as it takes to bring al Qaeda to justice. It may happen tomorrow; it may happen a month from now; it may take a year or two. But we will prevail” (Bush, 2001, October 12).

Another example of defeasibility rhetoric occurs when President Bush and his administration attempted to educate the American people about airline security and its reporting structure. Prior to September 11, airline security was bifurcated. Individual carriers had the primary responsibility for screening passengers and baggage, and individual airports were responsible for keeping a secure ground environment and providing law enforcement support. “The government’s role was purely regulatory” (Garvey, 2002). Aviation hijackings in the 1960s and 1980s led to aviation security
legislation that gave the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) some additional responsibilities and elevated the stature of aviation security; however, responsibility for airline security remained with the individual airlines. In the aftermath of September 11, Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001 and aviation security became a “direct responsibility of the federal government for the first time” (Bush, 2001, October 12). To carry out these new responsibilities, the Department of Transportation created the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Since the TSA’s establishment in 2001, thousands of United States citizens have been hired and trained as federal agents that inspect airline passengers and screen baggage. “The TSA is the largest agency created from scratch since World War II and is charged with keeping all forums of U.S. transportation safe” (Mineta, 2002, March 6).

This historical information about the reporting structure of airline security is a form of defeasibility because it allows the government to claim lack of control and authority over the security of the airlines. On September 11, 2001, the airlines were responsible for screening passengers and baggage, not the government. President Bush’s administration emphasized this lack of control more than President Bush. Although at first glance it may appear that Bush and his administration’s messaging is divided, I contend it is not because Bush’s administration typically gives more specific details about situations, and President Bush usually uses a synopsis style of rhetoric that employs defeasibility and correction action rhetoric simultaneously. For instance, Bush’s administration educated the American people that success in aviation security is in the “absence of failure” (Garvey, 2002) and promoted the TSA as a corrective measure that will help secure the nation. While Bush looked at the event more globally
by saying, “We must address the issue of airline safety in a constructive and smart way. For the sake of every passenger, every crew member and every pilot, we are going to make our airline security stronger and more reliable.” President Bush’s combination of defeasibility and corrective action rhetoric minimizes who was responsible for the passenger screening on September 11 and emphasizes what proactive measures will be taken after September 11.

_Bolstering_ is the most dominant rhetorical device used by Bush following September 11. This technique was employed to reinforce the audience’s positive feelings about the nation and the airlines. Usually, Bush’s bolstering rhetoric also employs Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric appeals that “exhort the audience to unanimity of purpose and total commitment” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). War rhetoric is unique among Campbell and Jamieson’s other presidential rhetoric sub-genres (such as inaugural addresses, veto messages, and state of the union addresses) because war rhetoric proclaims the decision to use force is deliberate and justified. The first times President Bush used war rhetoric specifically about the terrorist attacks occurred minutes after the first aircraft hit the World Trade Center when he said, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 9:30 a.m.). Phrases such as “America is united,” “We will win this war,” and “America is strong” are also some of Bush’s common battle cries. This presidential war rhetoric “constitutes the audience as a united community of patriots that is urged to repulse the threats with all available resources, assured that, with the help of Providence, right will prevail” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). In examining Bush’s administration’s rhetoric, many examples of the President’s bolstering rhetoric can be found. It is also important to note that his administration only
attempts to bolster Americans when it is tied directly to their respective department. They do not attempt to bolster Americans’ confidence in the nation as a whole as does the President. For example, in a speech presented to the Travel and Tourism Industry, Secretary of Transportation Mineta acknowledged President Bush’s bolstering rhetoric while outlining what was being done in the transportation industry.

It is important to do our best to follow President Bush’s call to bring our nation back to ‘business as usual’ – back to a ‘new normalcy.’ How do we do that? First we strengthen our resolve and do everything possible to safeguard against future terrorist attacks. To do this we in the Bush Administration worked with Congress to pass the airline industry stabilization plan…lawmakers passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001…TSA took over responsibility for all airport screening security… (Mineta, 2002, March 6).

Bush also combines epideictic and bolstering rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric shapes the world as it “recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). Bush relies heavily upon epideictic rhetoric because it allows him to reassure the country, while at the same time instill a sense of urgency about eliminating terrorism. For example, in a speech given in November 2001, the President recaps the attack and identifies the nation’s attitude since the attack. “The moment the second plane hit the second building – when we knew it was a terrorist attack – many people felt that our lives would never be the same. What we couldn’t be sure of then – and what the terrorist never expected – was that America would emerge stronger, with a renewed spirit of pride and patriotism” (Bush, 2001, November 8). This form of rhetoric is well suited for Bush because his language is “blunt and
unelaborated…and comforting” (Feldmann, 2004). This bolstering epideictic rhetoric defines the past and shapes a new world by drawing pictures of heroes and villains, which was important for the American people because “we felt the need to understand this horrific event” (Murphy, 2003). President Bush’s successful use of bolstering epideictic rhetoric was praised by *The New York Times* because it “console[d] the bereaved, comfort[ed] the wounded, encourage[d] the heroic, calm[ed] the fearful, and …rall[ied] the country for the struggle and sacrifices ahead” (Apple, 2001).

Examining Bush’s aviation-related bolstering rhetoric reveals two findings: (1) the strategy was necessary to restore America’s confidence in the security and stability of the airlines, and (2) the strategy was necessary to encourage Americans to resume their lives and begin flying on the airlines.

Bolstering rhetoric was used by the President and his administration to inform Americans that airline safety and security was a top priority, and to educate Americans about the new measures that had been taken since September 11 to enhance safety. According to President Bush, “The first action we took was when Republicans and Democrats alike came together and put together a package to provide stability for the airline industry. For the sake of every passenger, every crew member and every pilot, we are going to make our airline security stronger and more reliable” (Bush, 2001, September 27). This included the development of the TSA, which put the federal government in charge of passenger and baggage screening; an increased number of federal air marshals; and funding for aircraft security such as cockpit protection and video monitors in the cockpit. Bush’s goal for this image repair strategy was to make
President Bush’s administration echoed Bush’s bolstering comments about the priority of security and also gave additional detail on how they would improve airline security and safety. According to Secretary of Transportation Mineta, “We are building an airline security system staffed by dedicated and competent federal aviation security agents led by highly experienced senior security and law enforcement professionals. The system will be robust and redundant and we will be relentless in our search for improvements. It is better today than yesterday, and it will be better still tomorrow” (Mineta, 2002, January 16). Mineta’s use of words such as “dedicated,” “competent,” “highly experienced,” “robust,” and “redundant” are designed to bolster America’s confidence in the airlines, as well as elevate the credentials of those responsible for the enforcement of the new aviation security measures.

The second aspect of Bush and his administration’s bolstering rhetoric was to encourage Americans to resume their lives, which included flying on the airlines. As early as September 12, 2001, Bush began encouraging Americans to resume their activities. “We will not allow this enemy to win the war by changing our way of life or restricting our freedoms,” he said (Bush, 2001, September 12). Many of Bush’s speeches use phrases such as “we will not surrender our freedom to travel” (Bush, 2001, September 27), “the American people have got to go about their business. We cannot let the terrorist achieve their objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don’t conduct business” (Bush, 2001, September 27), and “we will live in a spirit of courage and optimism” (Bush, 2001, November 8). This rhetoric is designed to assure the
American public that all aspects of life must continue, and the airlines would continue to remain a viable means of business transportation even with the increased security measures. Bush told Americans “we are returning America’s airlines back to the American people. The government and the private sector will make flying a way of life again in America.” Mineta provided more explanation to Bush’s claims by identifying one of the goals in passenger screening – “no weapons no waiting” (Mineta, 2001). Publicizing this goal was aimed at strengthening Americans’ confidence in the safety of the system and to remind citizens that the government was doing all it could to restore airline travel in a safe and efficient manner.

Bush and his administration also spoke directly to those who had a hands-on responsibility for ensuring the airlines continued to run – airline employees. At a speech given at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport, President Bush spoke to an audience comprised of individuals who worked for the airline industry. To these individuals, Bush used bolstering rhetoric to identify ways they could specifically assist in the war on terror. “We appreciate your steadfast willingness to fight terror in your own way. You stand against terror by flying airplanes, and by maintaining them.” Under Secretary of Transportation Magaw also communicated this message to the airline association when he said, “I assure you that I am aware of the hardships your industry and businesses are dealing with. You may have been the hardest hit since your customers have the option to drive or take the bus or train. We want your customers to once again embrace flying as their preferred mode of travel” (Magaw, 2002, May 13).

In addition to rhetorical bolstering, Bush and his administration attempted to reinforce their words with actions. The most prominent and dramatic example of this is
when the president said, “The American people must know that my administration is confident. Tomorrow nine Cabinet members will board U.S. airlines to fly around out country to do their jobs” (Bush, 2001, September 27). By flying on the airlines, Bush’s administration was attempting to show the American public that they are confident enough in the system’s safety measures to fly on the airlines; therefore, the American public should also feel safe enough to fly on the airlines.

*Attacking the accuser* (i.e. terrorists) is the second most common rhetorical device employed by Bush. His rhetoric focuses on the safety of the nation, not necessarily the safety of the airlines. Bush begins using this rhetorical device in his first speech after the airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center when he said, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 9:30 a.m.). His rhetoric becomes more poignant in his second speech on September 11, “make no mistake, the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 1:05 p.m.). These verbal attacks on al Qaeda and terrorism are in the form of war rhetoric; whereby, terrorism is identified as “a specific adversary whose aims must be thwarted at all costs” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

The most obvious example of Bush’s war rhetoric is the phrase “War on Terrorism.” Although America’s political and military reaction to the September 11 attacks is actually a major military action and not a declared war, the campaign to fight terrorism is still known as a “war.” Harold D. Lasswell, one of the most influential political scientists of the 20th century, argued that “in order to gain popularity for a war, it must always be portrayed as defensive” (Williams, 2004). This defensive nature is evident in President Bush’s rhetoric, “Every civilized nation here today is resolved to
keep the most basic commitment of civilization: We will defend ourselves and our future against terror and lawless violence” (Bush, 2001, November 10). Bush has continued to use this type of rhetoric as the War on Terror has progressed. In his 2004 State of the Union Address, President Bush said,

I know that some people question if America is really in a war at all. They view terrorism more as a crime, a problem to be solved mainly with law enforcement and indictments. After the chaos and carnage of September the 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers. The terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States, and war is what they got (Bush, 2004, January 20).

An analysis of the attacking the accuser rhetoric reveals four ways Bush uses this rhetorical device: attack the terrorists as individuals, attack the terrorists’ actions, attack the terrorists’ ideology, and attack adversaries who disagree America should attempt to end terrorism.

First, President Bush attacks the terrorist as individuals by identifying them as “evil-doers” (Bush, 2001, September 16). Bush draws on the freedoms that Americans hold dear to provide examples of what the “evil-doers” do not cherish. “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Bush, 2001, September 20). These attacks resonate with Americans and ultimately unify the nation because the United States is founded on liberty and individual freedoms. Although freedom to travel is not one of the inalienable
rights penned in the Declaration of Independence, it is arguable that the freedom to travel is necessary in order to obtain the third inalienable right – “pursuit of happiness.”

Second, President Bush attacks the terrorists’ actions. Bush paints vivid word pictures that stir Americans’ conscience. “This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens – leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children” (Bush, 2002, January 29). He also gives examples of terrorist acts that have occurred in the United States to other American citizens. “They slit the throats of women on airplanes in order to achieve an objective that is beyond comprehension.” One of the reasons these word pictures create a reaction among Americans is because it violates another right Americans cherish – the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.

Third, President Bush attacks the terrorists’ ideology. For example, he likens terrorism and al Qaeda to Nazi Germany, an ideology that America has fought and beaten. “They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century…they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies” (Bush, 2001, September 20). As with the previous two examples, the President uses these words to contrast the United States with other countries. In this situation, he contrasts the United States’ freedom of religion with other countries heavy-handed regimes.

Lastly, Bush is very direct when he emphatically states that terrorism will be defeated by America. This rhetoric not only attacks the terrorist network, but it also serves as a warning to any individual or nation that is not willing to stand against terrorism. Bush regularly uses phrases such as “We will make no distinction between the
terrorist who committed these acts and those who harbor them” (Bush, 2001, September 11, 8:30 p.m.), “Those who plot terror, and those who help them, will be held accountable in America” (Bush, 2001, November 29), or “We are sending a signal to the world as we speak that if you harbor a terrorist, there will be a price to pay” (Bush, 2001, October 12). One of his most powerful statements occurred on September 20 when he said, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorist” (Bush, 2001, September 20). Therefore, Bush has communicated if you are not in agreement with the War on Terrorism, you are against America and in favor of terrorists, the organization that killed thousand of innocent people on September 11.

Interestingly, Bush’s administration rarely uses this attacking the accuser rhetorical device unless they are repeating Bush’s words verbatim. One of the reasons for this could be because their words against terrorism would carry little weight compared to the President’s. However, it could also be because Bush’s administrations’ rhetoric is focused on providing specific examples of what is being done by their respective organizations to end terrorism. I suggest Bush’s administration does not use attacking the accuser rhetoric so that the American public will continually receive a strong, two-part message. First, Bush communicates to Americans that terrorist are evil and terrorism will not take root in America. Second, Bush’s administration focuses on messages that reiterate the U.S. government is on high alert and is taking proactive steps to protect America.

_Corrective Action_ is the final image repair strategy used by President Bush and his administration. This rhetoric is grounded in a quest to secure America from future acts of terrorism. This strategy takes two different forms between Bush and his
administration. Bush shows corrective actions from a high-level overview, and his administration gives more details about the corrective action.

According to Bush, “Our first priority must always be the security of our nation” (Bush, 2002, January 29). Bush focused many of his speeches on homeland security issues, which would seem to be appropriate considering a January 2002 Gallup poll named terrorism or related problems as the most important problem facing the nation (Gallup poll, 2002). On the 100th day anniversary of the campaign against global terrorism, Bush outlined some of the accomplishments, or corrective actions, that had already taken place. “In those 100 days, we’ve accomplished much. We’ve built a broad international coalition against terror…we broke the Taliban’s grip on Afghanistan. We took the war to the al Qaeda terrorists. We’re securing our airways. We’re defending our homeland. And we’re attacking the terrorists’ international financial network” (Bush, 2001, December 20).

President Bush’s administration provided additional information about the specific corrective actions that would take place. Secretary of Transportation Mineta said, “Since September 11 the federal government has taken action to raise safety standards. We have made funds available to the aviation industry to fortify cockpits. More federal air marshals ride our planes – and more fighter jets patrol our skies” (Mineta, 2001, November 15). Under Secretary of Transportation Magaw restated Bush and Mineta’s message by listing some specific corrective action measures that have been taken since September 11. For example, “We have already hired and trained several hundred screener-trainers who are moving out to train screeners around the country” (Magaw, 2002, June 18). These screeners, which will total approximately 54,000 people,
will screen some “420 million passengers and 900 million bags” per year. Magaw also
addressed screening baggage for explosives, which he identifies as TSA’s “biggest
challenge.” To meet the U.S. government’s requirement, the TSA deployed
approximately 1,100 explosive detection systems and 4,000 explosive trace detection
machines that will screen checked bags.

Many of these corrective actions are clear indicators that September 11 was a
historical “focusing event.” As was identified in chapter one, a focusing event is a
sudden, rare, harmful event that compels policy makers to react immediately to the crisis
without filtering the information through special focus groups. Often times, a focusing
event highlights a recognized problem that has not been addressed previously. In the
case of September 11 airline security, “the shortcomings of airport passenger screening
and the screeners themselves were well known before September 11, but ideas for
‘solving’ these problems were not high on the agenda until September 11 motivated their
proponents to argue that the attacks could have been foiled had their original ideas been
enacted” (Birkland, 2004).

One example of the policy changes enacted after September 11 is the Aviation
and shifts a 30-year federal mandate – moving the responsibility for airport security
checkpoints from the airlines to the federal government” (Garvey, 2002). Congress
emphasized law enforcement within the new law, and the TSA has responded to this
mandate by creating a system of overlapping, mutually reinforcing layers of security.
Some of these layers are visible to the public, such as screening stations, and others are
unseen layers, such as intelligence. All of these layers are overseen by the TSA, which
has a workforce larger than the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Border Control combined.

The September 11 attacks “opened the policy window” by changing Americans’ view of terrorism. Prior to September 11, terrorism was something that occurred in other countries and had little relevance at home. After September 11, Americans’ view of terrorism changed because Americans could suddenly comprehend the reality and seriousness of terrorism. September 11 elevated terrorism from something that only happened on TV to something that occurred in America’s backyard, and it therefore changed the behavior of Americans. For example, a study conducted of *The New York Times*’ terrorism news coverage between 1990 through 2002 found:

While there were at least three terrorist or terror-like incidents between 1990 and 2001 – the first bombing of the World Trade Center, the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing, and the unsolved Olympic Part bombing in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics – no terrorist event triggers the extent of the *Times*’ national and local coverage of terrorism than was triggered by September 11. Clearly, the September 11 attacks ‘brought home’ the issue of terrorism as a domestic problem rather than primarily an overseas issue (Birkland, 2004a).

Benoit’s image repair theory serves as an effective critical lens to analyze President Bush and his administration’s September 11 rhetoric in relation to the airlines image campaign. Through this analysis, a complex image restoration strategy is revealed that shows that Bush and his administration specifically relied upon five of Benoit’s image repair strategies: shifting blame, defeasibility (a type of evasion of responsibility), bolstering (a type of reduction of offensiveness), attacking the accuser (a type of
reduction of offensiveness) and corrective action. These strategies were used with varying emphasis. President Bush relied upon bolstering rhetoric the most, and this was followed by attacking the accuser, corrective action, shifting blame, and defeasibility rhetoric. Comparatively, Bush’s administration relied upon corrective action rhetoric the most and attacking the accuser rhetoric the least.

Although five rhetorical devices may seem excessive, each was a critical component that supported at least one other rhetorical device. For example, had the President and his administration not employed “shifting the blame,” any attempt to bolster American’s confidence and provide correction actions would have failed because Americans would have thought the government was attempting a cover-up. Likewise, had the government not used any form of defeasibility to identify the problem with the airline’s security system, the American people would have placed less faith in the corrective action measures that showed how the problems would be solved.

The rhetorical devices used support Benoit’s claim that “taking publicly announced corrective action can be an effective strategy even for those who are innocent of wrongdoing” (Benoit, 1995). In this situation, shifting blame to the terrorist for the September 11 attacks and introducing corrective actions that would enhance airline security were effective strategies for restoring the airlines’ image. The other three strategies employed – bolstering, attacking the accuser, and defeasibility – were effective at restoring the nation’s confidence in America because they “identified with values that were appropriate for…the audience” (Benoit, 1995).

In addition to analyzing which strategies were used, it is also important to consider what could have been done differently. According to Benoit, some image
restoration strategies may be intertwined, while others strategies could create conflict if used together. Looking at each strategy independently shows that the strategies chosen were more effective than any of the remaining image repair strategies – simple denial, provocation, accident, good intentions, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, and mortification. None of these remaining strategies would have been appropriate in this situation. For example, had Bush or his administration used a good intentions rhetorical device and claimed the offensive behavior (crashing of airliners into the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Pennsylvania field) was performed with good intentions, Americans would have been greatly offended, to say the least. Likewise, Americans would have questioned the President’s loyalty had he sided with the terrorists and claimed the aircraft crashing into the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Pennsylvania field were simply an “accident” committed by a friendly, neighboring country. This type of response would also resemble “transcendence,” which occurs when an entity attempts to put the situation in a more favorable light. President Bush and his administration were wise not to use these remaining image repair strategies because of the heinous and premeditated nature of the September 11 attacks.

In summary, Benoit’s image repair theory provides a means for understanding the crisis communication rhetoric employed by President Bush and his administration between September 11, 2001, and September 11, 2002. On the surface, it appears that the rhetorical devices used have little application to each other. Yet, further analysis has revealed a complex strategy whereby the President initially spent a great deal of time reassuring the public about the airline’s safety and viability. His position as the airline’s spokesperson gradually transitioned to his administration during the recovery phases.
During and following this transition, the airline’s public voice for their cause became quieter. This is in part because speeches by the President receive greater media attention than by any member of his administration. Plus, Bush’s administration’s speeches focused on corrective action measures of restoring the nation’s airline system, which although important are somewhat dry and boring and therefore did not gain media attention. Therefore, at first glance, the government’s response to the airlines’ image crisis was bifurcated because of the different spokespeople and different messages. The next, and final, chapter will discuss these nuances in greater detail and offer some conclusions about this study.
CHAPTER 3
DISCUSSION

“We’re getting back to normal.”

-- President George W. Bush, October 12, 2001

Few moments are etched in memory to the extent that you remember specific
details about where you were when you heard about an event, how you heard about an
event, and your reaction to an event. “But for those of us who lived through these events,
the only marker we’ll ever need is the tick of a clock at the 46th minute of the eight hour
of the 11th day. We will remember where we were and how we felt. We will remember
the dead and what we owe them. We will remember what we lost and what we found”
(Bush, 2001, December 11). Even though September 11 is one of those memory-etched
moments, it remains difficult to categorize because of its inconceivability. This
cataclysmic crisis goes far beyond descriptions such as “horrendous attack” or “America
under siege” because it left Americans with a feeling of vulnerability that has rarely, if
ever, occurred to this extreme. If a scholar attempted to dissect September 11 into
“common” crises, they could identify it as an airline crash or terrorist attack. Yet,
September 11 is much more than either of these.

Airline crashes are very visible, violent, and usually fatal events that occur
without warning. Because of their very nature, they are often televised live as “breaking
news” and they are saturated in news coverage. After a crash, survivors, their family, the
airline, the FAA, and the American people attempt to understand the cause of the crash.
Although every airline crash warrants a response tailored to the specifics of that crash,
September 11 is much more than a “typical” airline crash because of the number of people involved, where the airlines crashed, and who caused the crash. These factors made the September 11 airline crashes a U.S. tragedy.

September 11 is also more than a “typical” terrorist attack. The improbable aspect of September 11 is that it used an old-fashioned terrorist practice, aircraft hijacking. September 11 did not take the form of a modern day terrorist attack that focus on the most frightening categories of catastrophic terrorism such as nuclear, biological and chemical terrorism. Rather, it turned a common form of transportation into a bomb.

Because the September 11 crisis is anything but “typical,” how should it be studied? I argue that one way to gain a deeper level of understanding about September 11 is to isolate individual elements of the crisis and study each specific aspect using the appropriate critical probes. That is the goal of this study – to analyze one aspect of September 11. Specifically, this study analyzes President Bush and his administration’s September 11 rhetoric in relation to the airline’s image crisis.

Different critical theories offer different strengths. Combining key probes from different theories can provide a broader scope in identifying the characteristics of the crisis and ultimately strengthen areas that a single theory may disregard. This study relies upon three different critical theories: Benoit’s image restoration theory, Birkland’s “focusing events” theory, and Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric appeals. Despite the large quantity of articles on image restoration, focusing events, and war rhetoric, no attempt has been made to blend these theoretical applications into one theoretical framework. For example, a key element in Bush’s rhetoric is bolstering. But this rhetorical device is not discussed by Birkland, and Campbell and Jamieson only briefly
consider it as a strategy when bolstering is used during forceful interventions, such as wars. As another example, September 11 is clearly a focusing event; however, neither Campbell and Jamieson or Benoit indicate specific image restoration rhetoric or war rhetoric trademarks that occur during a focusing event. Thus, the application of these three critical probes brings about ideas that are unlikely to surface otherwise.

Benoit’s image restoration framework meshes well with Birkland’s focusing events and Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric because the latter two probes help overcome weaknesses that would be apparent if only using Benoit’s image restoration framework. For instance, one of the limitations of this study is the lack of rhetorical examples directly from the organization accused of the wrongdoing, Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. However, this could not be helped because Osama bin Laden went into hiding immediately following the attacks and little rhetoric has been recorded from him. Therefore, this study resembles the Tylenol crisis when Tylenol denied responsibility for the crisis prior to any identification of the party who was responsible for tampering with Tylenol capsules (Barton, 2001; Birch 1994).

Recognizing that no crisis model can effectively incorporate every factor and control all variables, scholars acknowledge that the weaknesses in some of the frameworks highlight strengths in others (Coombs, 1998). Benoit’s theory is also limiting in that it is descriptive and static.

As Birkland has noted, “focusing event” crises that bring about change may be divided into two categories – normal and new. September 11 falls within the new focusing event category because it has never happened before. Although novel crisis may initially appear to be more difficult to respond to because there is no precedent, new
crisis often eliminate “trained incapacity” (Burke, 1984), which causes people to look at a situation with a limited view because of training or an experience. For example, because September 11 was so different than anything ever experienced, the government’s initial response – forcing every aircraft flying in U.S. airspace to land – was a bold, out-of-the-box approach that would not have occurred if the crisis had not been so novel.

Even though this was a novel crisis, the key players relied upon familiar types of rhetoric such as war rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric. These forms of rhetoric merged seamlessly with Benoit’s image restoration theory and Birkland’s focusing event theory because they helped place an unfamiliar crisis into a somewhat familiar context. For example, Bush and his administration immediately likened the terrorist attack to a war, which Americans understood because the nation has experienced wars before. “Bush’s public messages in the months immediately following September 11 urged the younger generations of Americans to uphold the faith of their ‘elders,’ the World War II generation, and encouraged all Americans to recommit themselves to the nation by supporting the war on terrorism” (Bostdorff, 2003). However, if the September 11 attacks had occurred in a country that is familiar with and regularly experiences terrorist attacks, such as Israel, it is unlikely that September 11 would have been labeled as the beginning of a “war.” Rather, it would continue to be identified as a terrorist attack. Bush’s use of war rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric helped Americans identify what happened on September 11, recognize who was responsible for the attacks, develop a plan and mindset to respond to the attacks, and encourage the nation to reaffirm their commitment to American values and ideals.
This study began by asking three questions: 1) What rhetorical trademarks are present in the Bush administration’s crisis communication rhetoric after September 11, 2001, particularly those addresses that feature restoring trust in the airlines?, 2) Does the crisis communication stay consistent across time and speakers among Bush and his administration spokespeople?, and 3) What influence did this crisis communication rhetoric have on restoring airline travel? This study yields some answers to these questions, while simultaneously raising other questions.

The rhetorical trademarks in the crisis communication rhetoric after September 11 should be looked at from two perspectives – President Bush’s rhetoric and the Bush administration’s rhetoric. President Bush’s overall rhetoric should be praised because it provided a clear and compelling vision that gave reassurance and direction to a nation in crisis. Bush defined the world after September 11 as a new focusing event by weaving together rhetorical devices such as Benoit’s bolstering, Aristotle’s epideictic rhetoric, and Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric. Opinion polls validate the success of his rhetoric. Immediately following the attacks, in December 2001, a CBS news poll indicated that 90 percent of Americans approved how President Bush was handling terrorism (CBS, 2001). A CBS/Gallup poll conducted four years after the September 11 attacks indicated the majority of Americans still approved of the way President Bush is handling terrorism (CBS, 2004). Usually, presidents are held responsible for events on their watch, yet Bush’s approval ratings remained strong three years after the crisis.

Bush’s rhetoric led to a surge of patriotism that has not been experienced for decades. According to Bush, “None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th. Yet after America was attacked, it was as if our entire country
looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history. We began to think less of the goods we can accumulate, and more about the good we can do” (Bush, 2001, December 4). Although Bush’s rhetoric is not the only reason for the renewed patriotism, it is arguably one of the contributing elements. According to a Gallup poll conducted in June 2002, 65 percent of respondents said that they were "extremely" proud to be American, up from 55 percent in January 2001 (Wellner, 2002).

When looking at Bush’s rhetoric specifically about the airlines, it is apparent that he placed more rhetorical emphasis on restoring the airlines during the initial stages of the containment stage rather than the protracted recovery stage. At the beginning of the crisis, President Bush played the role of airline spokesperson. He gave nationally televised addresses and spoke about the importance of enhancing airline safety and security, but his messages never gave specific details about how this would be accomplished. Rather, he gave high level overviews on what the government would do to restore the airlines. As the crisis progressed, the spokesperson role gradually shifted to members of his administration such as Secretary of Transportation Mineta, FAA Administrator Garvey, and Under Secretary of Transportation Magaw. These individuals continued to talk regularly about the airline industry; however, they approached it from a corrective action perspective and their remarks were rarely nationally televised. The transition in the spokesperson position from Bush to his administration could be seen as a pitfall of the September 11 crisis response because crisis communication models have identified the importance of having an identified spokesperson throughout the entire crisis (Barton, 2001). Given the severity of this
crisis, I believe the President’s role as the airlines’ spokesperson was appropriate because his position as the President of the United States provided him the opportunity to communicate image restoration messages that were widely distributed by the media.

Nonetheless, it would have been better for the airlines if the President had continued in the spokesperson role. It is likely he did not for at least two reasons. First, President Bush recognized that recovery had started to occur and Americans were starting to travel on the airlines again. “There is, I think, some positive news about the American people reacting to what we’re doing. The load factors on airplanes are increasing. Now, I recognize certain routes have been reduced, but nevertheless, people are getting back on airplanes. That’s important that that be the case. We’re getting back to normal” (Bush, 2001, October 8). In the same speech, the President also acknowledged there was still work to do with the airline system when he said, “The American people are sacrificing now…they’re waiting in airport lines longer than they’ve ever had before” (Bush, 2001, October 8).

Second, once President Bush laid the foundation to address the airline crisis, he allowed his administration to handle the nuts-and-bolts of the plan. He does not appear to micro-manage the situation. This may be attributed to Bush’s management style, which he described himself. “I’m a performance oriented person. I believe in results. I appreciate diplomatic talk, but I’m more interested in action and results” (Bush, 2001, October 8).

Bush’s administration assumed the role of spokesperson as the crisis reached the end of the containment phases and transitioned to the recovery phase. Their rhetoric primarily used Benoit’s corrective action rhetoric. This strategy is appropriate because
“while people frequently want to know who to blame, it is more reassuring to know that steps have been taken to eliminate or avoid future problems” (Benoit & Brinson, 1994). Bush’s administration should also be praised for their rhetoric to restore the airline industry. By communicating step-by-step actions on how the government would increase aviation security, they gave Americans a reason to have a renewed sense of confidence in the airline industry. Whereas President Bush’s rhetoric was based on feeling and emotions, his administration’s rhetoric was based on tangible deliverables.

The second research question posed was: “Does the crisis communication stay consistent across time and speakers among Bush and his administration spokespeople?” This study identifies different message strategies; however, the messages themselves remain highly consistent. Therefore, the answer to this question is “yes.” I did not uncover any situations where Bush or his administration waiver from three key messages: 1) America will defeat terrorism, 2) Americans must return to their everyday routines, which includes airline travel, and 3) America has learned we are not immune from terrorist attacks and therefore the government is taking corrective actions to ensure this type of attack will not occur again – especially in the airline industry.

Bush and his administration adhere to these three key messages with varying emphasis and with different rhetorical devices. Bush primarily uses bolstering rhetoric while his administration primarily uses corrective action rhetoric. The combination of these rhetorical devices may seem to be an oxymoron because they attempt to cheer (bolster) what the nation is doing while also acknowledge that changes are being made to the current system because it is not safe (corrective action). Yet, this approach works in this situation because two spokespeople are used. Had President Bush spent more time
communicating corrective actions while de-emphasizing bolstering, the message would have been construed as doublespeak. Because Bush and his administration work as a unified body to promote the messages, the result is an effective one-two punch. Bush bolsters the nation’s confidence in the new airline system, and his administration addresses the flaws in the current system by identifying how these problems will be fixed.

The consistency in rhetoric may also be attributed to Bush’s use of war rhetoric and epideictic rhetoric. As already noted, these forms of rhetoric provide a sense of comfort because of their familiarity. For example, presidential war rhetoric was employed during times such as World War I, War World II, and the Cold War, in addition to wars that did not involve weapons or military such as the war on poverty, the war on crime, and the war on drugs. War rhetoric is employed in these situations because it relies on black-and-white, with-us-or-against-us terms that portray the enemy as evil. In the case of the war on terrorism, Bush’s use of war rhetoric portrays terrorism as evil and his epideictic rhetoric comforts, persuades and strengthens Americans resolve in the necessity for the war on terrorism. In addition, war rhetoric is comforting because it gives the impression of offering a precise beginning and end. The beginning of the war occurs when the nation is attacked or when the president announces the nation is at war. The end of the war occurs with the evil is eliminated or the leader of the evil country is captured. From past experience, Americans know that war rarely concludes at the “end” because it is often the victor’s responsibility to reconstruct the shattered society they helped create in order to eradicate the evil. However, Americans are still accepting of
war rhetoric because of its frequency of use and our innate desire to protect ourselves and others from harm.

The third research question: “What influence did this crisis communication rhetoric have on restoring airline travel?”, is challenging to address because it is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment Americans’ faith was restored in the airline industry or specific reason(s) they began flying again. However, it is possible to draw some conclusions by looking at national surveys and statistics about airline passenger loads. For instance, a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll survey conducted in July 2005 stated 57 percent of Americans think the federal government is doing the “right amount” to prevent acts of terrorism on airplanes (CNN, 2005). In addition, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, passenger load factor has steadily increased since September 2001. In August 2001, the load factor on commercial aircraft was 77.2 percent. This percentage plummeted after September 11, 2001, to 58.6 percent. In July 2005, the load factor had climbed to 84.0 percent (Bureau, 1995-2005). This load factor information allows us to conclude that more passengers are traveling on airlines now than before September 11, 2001. Therefore, either the nation’s confidence in the airline system has been restored, or people have chosen to travel on the airlines despite their fears because it is the most convenient form of transportation. Most likely, it is a combination of both.

The rise in airline travel may also be attributed to a “theme of renewal” (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002) that is found in the government’s rhetoric and actions. This theme is most prominent when examined from Birkland’s “focusing event” perspective.

Following the terrorist attacks, the airlines debated safety issues for several weeks, and
they eventually approved regulations on the construction and performance of cockpit doors. Congress also addressed the problem of airline security in the Aviation and Transportation Security Act. These policy changes enforced a theme of renewal in the airline industry because antiquated practices were put to rest, while new state-of-the-art methods and security was established. This renewal is still ongoing today, four-years later. According to a September 2005 *Wall Street Journal* article:

> The Transportation Security Administration is currently reviewing several post-9/11 security guidelines that air travelers have grown to loathe. ‘Our vision is for passengers to not have to remove their jacket, not have to remove their shoes, not have to remove their laptop from their bag – to go through a checkpoint rapidly,’ said Dennis Cooke, president of GE Security’s Homeland Protection business (Meckler, 2005).

Therefore, September 11 has brought about a renewed appreciation for regular evaluation of airline practices to determine if the practices are serving a specific purpose. If they are not, the government is proactively looking at alternatives that will improve airline travel without sacrificing security. Perhaps the government’s willingness to proactively respond to airline security has been one of the greatest motivators in restoring American’s confidence in the airlines. Americans heard the government discuss the need for enhanced safety measures, watched as new safety measures were enacted, and now experience the new safety measures when walking through airport security checkpoints. In essence, Americans are reminded every time they board an airplane and prepare for takeoff how America was before September 11, and how it is
now that the government is proactively implementing new security measures designed to keep Americans safe from future terrorist attacks.

So, where do we go from here? The combination of these three theories also yields questions for future academic research. One of the limitations of this study is that it does not take into consideration any communication from the airlines to the American people, such as press releases or websites. However, because the government restricted the airlines from communicating messages during the initial stage of the crisis, anything that may have been allowed to be distributed would have been approved by the government and therefore would possibly contain the same messaging as that presented by the President and his administration. Yet, examining the airline’s messages after the government lifted their gag-order, approximately two weeks after the attacks, in-conjunction with the President and his administration’s rhetoric is a possible study for future research. Other possible fields of research include examining the cross-cultural meanings of the airline crisis after September 11; tracing the role of the media in restoring America’s confidence in the airline industry; and comparing Bush’ crisis rhetoric strategies with another new focusing event: Hurricane Katrina.

**Conclusion**

The September 11 attacks posed a substantial threat to the airlines’ image. In addition to Americans’ realization that terrorism could happen close to home, they also realized terrorism could occur by turning a modern-day convenience into a weapon. Within an hour of the first airline hitting the World Trade Center, the government took control of the crisis by forcing all airlines to land. This was followed by numerous speeches by President Bush and his administration as they attempted to reassure
Americans about their safety and encourage them to resume their normal activities as soon as possible. Specifically in relation to the airlines, America saw two sets of spokespeople communicate two different, yet unified messages. These messages were communicated using five of Benoit’s rhetorical devices. These devices may clash in many situations, but they compliment each other in this situation. President Bush primarily used bolstering, attacking the accuser and shifting the blame to restore Americans’ confidence in the nation, as well as the airlines. Bush’s administration focused on corrective action and defeasibility rhetoric to communicate what had gone wrong with airline security and how it would be corrected in the future. The corrective action rhetoric is essential because the September 11 attacks were a focusing event for our nation. Following the attacks, Americans saw the policy window open and great changes were made in the airline industry specifically in relation to security.

Throughout this focusing event, Bush relied upon Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric to bring about a single-minded approach to responding to the attacks, as well as epideictic rhetoric to bring comfort and restoration following the cataclysmic attacks. These strategies, messages, and spokespeople were evaluated as appropriate for the situation. Because all rhetorical theories highlight certain components of a crisis while disregarding other components, the rhetoric discussed here probably does not exhaust the range of possibilities. Yet, combining the work of three rhetorical theorists helps provide understanding about how the President and his administration respond to the airlines’ September 11 image crisis. Concomitantly, it provides another example for how to study complex rhetorical situations that involve the United States government and businesses. Benoit’s image restoration rhetoric allowed me to see the value of using
several image restoration strategies to repair an organization’s image. Birkland’s “focusing events” allowed me to see that even though a policy window is opened by a focusing event, effective communication of the crisis and solution is mandatory if the proposed policy change is to be accepted by the affected community. Rhetorical theories such as image restoration rhetoric and war rhetoric are two effective means of communicating the policy changes that result from a focusing event. Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric allowed me to see that war rhetoric promotes destruction as it seeks to eradicate the evil; however, it also promotes unity among those standing against the evil. This unification theme ties with the therapeutic value of epideictic discourse. This theme of unification, which is found in epideictic rhetoric and war rhetoric, brings us full-circle to image restoration and focusing events because unification is essential if a policy change (from a focusing event) or image restoration (from an image crisis) is to occur. In all, Bush and his administration's September 11 crisis rhetoric on behalf of the airline industry can be better understood for its complexity, artistry and effectiveness.
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APPENDIX A

LISTING OF 30 ANALYZED SPEECHES PRESENTED BY PRESIDENT BUSH AND HIS ADMINISTRATION (in date order)


APPENDIX B

CHRONOLOGY OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, EVENTS

Posted September 12, 2001 12:27 PM EDT (1627 GMT).

Bold text indicates speeches given by President George W. Bush.

8:45 a.m. (all times are EDT): A hijacked passenger jet, American Airlines Flight 11 out of Boston, Massachusetts, crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Center, tearing a gaping hole in the building and setting it afire.

9:03 a.m.: A second hijacked airliner, United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston, crashes into the south tower of the World Trade Center and explodes. Both buildings are burning.

9:17 a.m.: The Federal Aviation Administration shuts down all New York City area airports.

9:21 a.m.: The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey orders all bridges and tunnels in the New York area closed.

9:30 a.m.: President Bush, speaking in Sarasota, Florida, says the country has suffered an "apparent terrorist attack."

9:40 a.m.: The FAA halts all flight operations at U.S. airports, the first time in U.S. history that air traffic nationwide has been halted.

9:43 a.m.: American Airlines Flight 77 crashes into the Pentagon, sending up a huge plume of smoke. Evacuation begins immediately.

9:45 a.m.: The White House evacuates.

9:57 a.m.: Bush departs from Florida.

10:05 a.m.: The south tower of the World Trade Center collapses, plummeting into the streets below. A massive cloud of dust and debris forms and slowly drifts away from the building.

10:08 a.m.: Secret Service agents armed with automatic rifles are deployed into Lafayette Park across from the White House.

10:10 a.m.: A portion of the Pentagon collapses.

10:10 a.m.: United Airlines Flight 93, also hijacked, crashes in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh.

10:13 a.m.: The United Nations building evacuates, including 4,700 people from the headquarters building and 7,000 total from UNICEF and U.N. development programs.

10:22 a.m.: In Washington, the State and Justice departments are evacuated, along with the World Bank.

10:24 a.m.: The FAA reports that all inbound transatlantic aircraft flying into the United States are being diverted to Canada.
10:28 a.m.: The World Trade Center's north tower collapses from the top down as if it were being peeled apart, releasing a tremendous cloud of debris and smoke.

10:45 a.m.: All federal office buildings in Washington are evacuated.

10:46 a.m.: U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell cuts short his trip to Latin America to return to the United States.

10:48 a.m.: Police confirm the plane crash in Pennsylvania.

10:53 a.m.: New York's primary elections, scheduled for Tuesday, are postponed.

10:54 a.m.: Israel evacuates all diplomatic missions.

10:57 a.m.: New York Gov. George Pataki says all state government offices are closed.

11:02 a.m.: New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani urges New Yorkers to stay at home and orders an evacuation of the area south of Canal Street.

11:16 a.m.: CNN reports that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is preparing emergency-response teams in a precautionary move.

11:18 a.m.: American Airlines reports it has lost two aircraft. American Flight 11, a Boeing 767 flying from Boston to Los Angeles, had 81 passengers and 11 crew aboard. Flight 77, a Boeing 757 en route from Washington's Dulles International Airport to Los Angeles, had 58 passengers and six crew members aboard. Flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Flight 77 hit the Pentagon.

11:26 a.m.: United Airlines reports that United Flight 93, en route from Newark, New Jersey, to San Francisco, California, has crashed in Pennsylvania. The airline also says that it is "deeply concerned" about United Flight 175.

11:59 a.m.: United Airlines confirms that Flight 175, from Boston to Los Angeles, has crashed with 56 passengers and nine crew members aboard. It hit the World Trade Center's south tower.

12:04 p.m.: Los Angeles International Airport, the destination of three of the crashed airplanes, is evacuated.

12:15 p.m: San Francisco International Airport is evacuated and shut down. The airport was the destination of United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania.

12:15 p.m.: The Immigration and Naturalization Service says U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico are on the highest state of alert, but no decision has been made about closing borders.

12:30 p.m.: The FAA says 50 flights are in U.S. airspace, but none are reporting any problems.

1:04 p.m.: Bush, speaking from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, says that all appropriate security measures are being taken, including putting the U.S. military on high alert worldwide. He asks for prayers for those killed or wounded in the attacks and says, "Make no mistake, the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts."

1:27 p.m.: A state of emergency is declared by the city of Washington.
1:44 p.m.: The Pentagon says five warships and two aircraft carriers will leave the U.S. Naval Station in Norfolk, Virginia, to protect the East Coast from further attack and to reduce the number of ships in port. The two carriers, the USS George Washington and the USS John F. Kennedy, are headed for the New York coast. The other ships headed to sea are frigates and guided missile destroyers capable of shooting down aircraft.

1:48 p.m.: Bush leaves Barksdale Air Force Base aboard Air Force One and flies to an Air Force base in Nebraska.

2 p.m.: Senior FBI sources tell CNN they are working on the assumption that the four airplanes that crashed were hijacked as part of a terrorist attack.

2:30 p.m.: The FAA announces there will be no U.S. commercial air traffic until noon EDT Wednesday at the earliest.

2:49 p.m.: At a news conference, Giuliani says that subway and bus service are partially restored in New York City. Asked about the number of people killed, Giuliani says, "I don't think we want to speculate about that -- more than any of us can bear."

3:55 p.m.: Karen Hughes, a White House counselor, says the president is at an undisclosed location, later revealed to be Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, and is conducting a National Security Council meeting by phone. Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice are in a secure facility at the White House. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is at the Pentagon.

3:55 p.m.: Giuliani now says the number of critically injured in New York City is up to 200 with 2,100 total injuries reported.

4 p.m: CNN National Security Correspondent David Ensor reports that U.S. officials say there are "good indications" that Saudi militant Osama bin Laden, suspected of coordinating the bombings of two U.S. embassies in 1998, is involved in the attacks, based on "new and specific" information developed since the attacks.

4:06 p.m.: California Gov. Gray Davis dispatches urban search-and-rescue teams to New York.

4:10 p.m.: Building 7 of the World Trade Center complex is reported on fire.

4:20 p.m.: U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, D-Florida, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, says he was "not surprised there was an attack (but) was surprised at the specificity." He says he was "shocked at what actually happened -- the extent of it."

4:25 p.m.: The American Stock Exchange, the Nasdaq and the New York Stock Exchange say they will remain closed Wednesday.

4:30 p.m.: The president leaves Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska aboard Air Force One to return to Washington.

5:15 p.m.: CNN Military Affairs Correspondent Jamie McIntyre reports fires are still burning in part of the Pentagon. No death figures have been released yet.
5:20 p.m.: The 47-story Building 7 of the World Trade Center complex collapses. The evacuated building is damaged when the twin towers across the street collapse earlier in the day. Other nearby buildings in the area remain ablaze.

5:30 p.m.: CNN Senior White House Correspondent John King reports that U.S. officials say the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania could have been headed for one of three possible targets: Camp David, the White House or the U.S. Capitol building.

6 p.m.: Explosions are heard in Kabul, Afghanistan, hours after terrorist attacks targeted financial and military centers in the United States. The attacks occurred at 2:30 a.m. local time. Afghanistan is believed to be where bin Laden, who U.S. officials say is possibly behind Tuesday's deadly attacks, is located. U.S. officials say later that the United States had no involvement in the incident whatsoever. The attack is credited to the Northern Alliance, a group fighting the Taliban in the country's ongoing civil war.

6:10 p.m.: Giuliani urges New Yorkers to stay home Wednesday if they can.

6:40 p.m.: Rumsfeld, the U.S. defense secretary, holds a news conference in the Pentagon, noting the building is operational. "It will be in business tomorrow," he says.

6:54 p.m.: Bush arrives back at the White House aboard Marine One and is scheduled to address the nation at 8:30 p.m. The president earlier landed at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland with a three-fighter jet escort. CNN's John King reports Laura Bush arrived earlier by motorcade from a "secure location."

7:17 p.m.: U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft says the FBI is setting up a Web site for tips on the attacks: www.ifccfbi.gov. He also says family and friends of possible victims can leave contact information at 800-331-0075.

7:02 p.m.: CNN's Paula Zahn reports the Marriott Hotel near the World Trade Center is on the verge of collapse and says some New York bridges are now open to outbound traffic.

7:45 p.m.: The New York Police Department says that at least 78 officers are missing. The city also says that as many as half of the first 400 firefighters on the scene were killed.

8:30 p.m.: President Bush addresses the nation, saying "thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil" and asks for prayers for the families and friends of Tuesday's victims. "These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve," he says. The president says the U.S. government will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed the acts and those who harbor them. He adds that government offices in Washington are reopening for essential personnel Tuesday night and for all workers Wednesday.