You, the People
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INTRODUCTION

Presidential Rhetoric and the Challenge of a Diverse Democracy

On September 11, 2001, as I listened in disbelief to news of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, I could not stop asking myself two questions: What was happening to us, and what might we do in response to the attacks?

Like most people, I asked these questions in part because of the attacks' obvious geopolitical implications. Surely these were calculated acts of aggression, meaning that the United States was likely to go to war, even if it was not immediately clear against whom. Yet as an observer of language, I was also struck by something else as I heard myself and others ask these two questions all day. Although I had been studying the rhetoric of citizenship and national identity in the United States for almost ten years, I had never before felt the weight of the pronouns "us" and "we" in quite the same way as I did that Tuesday. The "we" I uttered and, more to the point, felt so profoundly on September 11 was a different "we" than I might have used on September 10. It was not a "we" that referred to my most immediate and pragmatic everyday alliances—my family, my friends, my colleagues, and so on—but instead to something larger, something almost ridiculously ephemeral that was somehow, on that day especially, overwhelmingly meaningful nonetheless. My September 11 "we" was, in effect, the same "we" of the U.S. Constitution, the monosyllabic signifier of a national political community.

But how is this "we," this sense of civic camaraderie, created? In this book I ask how such a sense has been constructed rhetorically in the United States. More specifically, this book asks how U.S. presidents have used language to try to develop and maintain feelings of shared national identity within a wildly

diverse democracy. In other words, this book asks who presidents have told the American people they are. Although I completed the research presented in this book before September 11, 2001, such questions about the relationship between presidential rhetoric and national identity perhaps have taken on a renewed sense of importance after that date. Many of us might recall, for instance, waiting anxiously that evening to hear President George W. Bush speak to the nation in a televised address. On September 11, perhaps more than on any other date 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.

Before September 11, however, it might have been more difficult to speak so plainly about the American people's needs. I certainly would not have presumed to make such sweeping statements about an "us" or a "we" that might constitute "the American people." In fact, I would have used the quotation marks around those phrases primarily to reveal my intellectual awareness that these phrases are themselves reifications, words that generate the feelings that make nationalism possible in the first place.[1] Within rhetorical studies especially, many scholars have been persuaded by Benedict Anderson's claim that nations are only "imagined communities." Even in the smallest of them, Anderson has explained, compatriots "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[2] Similarly, Michael Walzer has suggested that the concept of "the people" is necessarily only a symbolic one that has "no palpable shape or substance."[3]

Nevertheless, as imagined as this fellowship may be, it represents nothing less than the "starting point for politics," according to Walzer.[4] The events of September 11 and their aftermath have demonstrated Walzer's point in obvious ways by showing how powerful the felt communion of a national "we" can be; it is compelling enough for people to willingly sacrifice both their livelihoods and their lives in its name. Although feelings of nationalism are most obvious during times of war and turmoil, they can also be invoked to great effect during more peaceful times, when citizens may take pride in their nation's Olympic athletes, for example, or light fireworks on the Fourth of July or Bastille Day. As these examples reveal, feelings of nationalism can sow powerful seeds of connectedness where there might otherwise be none.

Yet nationalism has an undeniably evil side as well. The ghosts of its twentieth-century manifestations, most notably Nazism and fascism, loom large over contemporary international politics, causing many people to denounce the ancient hatreds fueling violence in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa,

Northern Ireland, and elsewhere. In spite of such concerns, some countries seem more anxious than ever to protect their allegedly unique national identities. The French government has banned some forms of American popular culture lest their influence erode French cultural identity, just as many Canadians have sought to legislate English as the primary national language. While these latter matters may seem less dangerous than the former, they all suggest that nationalism is ultimately a double-edged sword, an efficient tool for promoting shared identity, perhaps, but one that may also encourage exclusion, intolerance, and even inhumanity.

The challenges of maintaining a balance between these two potential functions of nationalism are strikingly obvious in a country as large and demographically diverse as the United States. Because the American people have never been characterized by the level of ethnic or religious homogeneity that has historically marked the inhabitants of most other nations, Americans have always had to imagine their national political community in alternative yet compelling ways. Throughout U.S. history, however, especially when there existed stark contradictions between the nation's imagined ideals and its citizens' less noble practices, Americans have repeatedly had to confront the limits of their own imaginations. If the United States was idealized as a haven for immigrants, for example, how could members of this type of imagined community justify an interest in restricting certain types of newcomers? Likewise, if the United States was born out of a quest for freedom, how could its people systematically deny the same to an entire race of people? And if equality is the cornerstone of American democracy, why has so much of the nation's history been marked by recurring inequities?

In the weeks after September 11, there were similarly discouraging signs of disjunction between some Americans' self-perceived nature and their actual behavior. For example, even as "United We Stand" billboards and bumper stickers proliferated, the national press started to report incidents of alleged hate crimes against U.S. citizens of Arabic descent. If the terrorist attacks had prompted an unmistakable resurgence of patriotism, they had apparently also led some citizens to a newly heightened fear of immigrants.

When President Bush spoke to a joint session of Congress and to the American people on September 20, 2001, he addressed this contradiction by speaking about both of its impulses directly. The president offered as evidence of the country's strength and united purpose "the courage of the passengers" who sacrificed their lives to prevent a fourth attack and the "endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion" at ground zero in New York and at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.: "We have seen the unfurling of flags, the

lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers—in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own." Later in the speech, however, the president acknowledged that the American people were fearful too, not just of foreign aggressors but also of each other. "I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat. I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here," Bush implored, with an explicit reference to anti-immigrant sentiment. "We are in a fight for our principles," he continued, "and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith."[5]

With such plain entreaties President Bush urged a shocked and grieving nation to embrace the compassionate fellow-feeling of nationalism without giving in to more destructive reactions such as suspicion and intolerance. Put in terms of my previous discussion of pronouns, Bush offered his listeners an affirming, post–September 11 sense of "us" while urging the American people to resist the temptation to name and blame an internal "them." Although presidential rhetoric alone could not have met this latter goal, Bush's speech demonstrated that the United States' diversity presents certain rhetorical challenges to its leaders, who must persuade their constituents that they are part of a historic, expansive, and enduring national community.

George W. Bush was not the first president to use the bully pulpit to respond to this challenge. Other presidents have done similar rhetorical work in response to crises that threatened the unity of the American people; Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Lyndon Johnson's speech on the Voting Rights Act immediately come to mind as two other good examples. Like Bush's address, these speeches are memorable in part because presidents used them to appeal to, in Lincoln's memorable phrase, "the better angels of our nature."[6] In such historic moments, presidents use rhetoric to try to "remake America," in Garry Wills's terms, and to ensure that the nation's democratic unity is strong enough to sustain its diversity.[7]

Yet how is the American "we" made and remade rhetorically by presidents during quieter, less remarkable times? Certainly chief executives cannot afford to engage in constitutive rhetorics of American identity only in times of turmoil. Indeed, whatever the country's fears after September 11, the conditions and frustrations of multiculturalism are not new in the United States, nor are they evident only during times of national or international crises. During times of both war and peace, the American people's cultural differences have

always been salient in a democracy whose ethnic diversity is unmatched throughout the world.[8] Similarly, economic disparities and class distinctions have always mattered greatly in the United States, as has gender. We might say, then, that the American "we" has always been a dramatically stratified one, as much of a sociological riddle as a political necessity.

Whatever the citizenry's demographic differences, there are some perennial occasions during which the U.S. president must speak to the citizens—and, more importantly, speak *of* them—as one people. For this book I have chosen to study two such occasions, the inaugural address and the state of the union messages, to trace how presidents rhetorically constructed the "American people" in these discourses from 1885 through 2000. As a result, the analysis I present here is based on close reading of a longitudinal collection of two genres of presidential rhetoric. By focusing on just these two genres, this book invites readers to pay closer attention to some of the platitudinous and perhaps even predictable ways in which multiple presidents have asked the American people to think of their common bonds.

Ultimately, then, instead of asking what individual presidents have said about their constituents' national identity in speeches specifically designed to respond to issues or events that have threatened it, this book looks to two of the most ritualistic genres of presidential speech to ask a slightly different set of questions. What have presidents said about civil rights, for example, when they were not giving civil rights speeches? Likewise, what have they said about the relevance of ethnicity and gender to American citizenship when they were not speaking directly about immigration crises or women's voting rights, but were instead merely expected to report on the nation's values, current state, and future?

In this introductory chapter I make a case for the importance of such questions and explain some of the book's argumentative premises. First, I explain my methodological choices as well as the scope and limits of the analysis. Then I turn to a larger justification of this reading by proposing an alternative approach to a phenomenon known as the "rhetorical presidency." Here I argue that the rhetorical presidency can be understood as an institutional response to the United States' diversity. Rather than "going public" solely to promote specific legislative or policy measures, chief executives may have also used the bully pulpit to "form a mass" out of an increasingly diversifying American people.

RATIONALE, SCOPE, AND FINDINGS

Questions about the creation and maintenance of American national identity are not new, to be sure. Although there can be no complete accounting of any generation's understandings of its nationalistic bonds, some observers have tried to find clues within the nation's canonical texts. Within social science, among the most influential of these studies is Garry Wills's *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence;* among the most recent is Rogers Smith's analysis of citizenship laws in *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History.* Within the humanities, Priscilla Wald examined in *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* some of the most celebrated writing in U.S. history, including the works of Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, and W. E. B. Du Bois, for these authors' definitions of American identity. Similarly, Dana Nelson explored a wide range of texts, ranging from the Federalist Papers to medical lectures, for *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men,* her study of the ideals of citizenship in the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Less explored, however, is an additional set of texts: presidential rhetoric. This omission seems odd, for if the diverse American people have somehow imagined themselves as being united, then surely their visions have been captured in the words that come from the office that presides over all of the American people.

While there might be other elected individuals who would also have an interest in promoting a shared social idiom among the American people, few could deny chief executives' interest in this cause. As Rogers Smith has written, within a democracy, political elites "require a population to lead that imagines itself as being a 'people,' and . . . they need a people that imagines itself in ways that make leadership by [them] appropriate." As sole chief executives presiding over a radically heterogeneous *demos,* U.S. presidents face both of these needs, which ultimately, Smith argues, "drive political leaders to offer civic ideologies, or myths of civic identity, that foster the requisite sense of peoplehood."[9] Such myths, Ernest Gellner has suggested, can result in a view of the nation as not only an "anonymous, internally fluid and fairly undifferentiated, large-scale and culturally homogeneous communit[y]" but also as the "only legitimate respositor[y] of political authority."[10] In other words, for there to be an American nation, an American "we," or even an American presidency at all, U.S. presidents must find ways of breathing life into the otherwise abstract notion of American political community.

Producing myths of civic identity is not unique to the United States, of course. After studying the independence movement in Quebec, for example, Maurice Charland found that "claims for Quebec sovereignty [were based] upon the asserted existence of a particular type of subject."[11] In addition to studying one particular myth of civic identity, Charland has argued persuasively that the investigation of these myths invites a decidedly rhetorical perspective. Heeding Michael McGee's directive to attend to the rhetorical construction of "the people," Charland noted that such rhetoric's constitutive nature requires a Burkean view of rhetoric as something larger than just overtly suasory discourse ("rhetoric as persuasion").[12] This perspective enables critics to grapple with the ways in which discourse, à la Althusser, interpellates its subjects as political beings "through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that 'always already' presume the constitution of subjects."[13] To find evidence of how presidents have promoted certain forms of American national identity within their discourse, we need not look for overt appeals in which chief executives have told their listeners what to think or which policy to support. Instead, critics can look at ways that presidential discourse subtly reinforces the audience's presumed collective identity as national subjects.

Such constitutive rhetorics are ubiquitous, according to Charland, who calls them "nothing less than the discursive background of social life."[14] So which types of presidential rhetoric might be especially good places to find them? For this analysis I chose to investigate only two genres: inaugural addresses and state of the union messages. As Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, genres provide an extremely useful vantage point through which to view social history; genres, he wrote, are the "drive belts from the history of society to the history of language."[15] Similarly, viewed from a more traditional anthropological perspective, these two highly ritualized instances of presidential speech can be expected to affirm idealized cultural norms. In *The Interpretation of Cultures,* Clifford Geertz recalled Ward Goodenough's influential argument, stating that "a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members."[16] In this sense, I have done this reading under the rubric of what Raymond Williams refers to as the "idealist" approach to culture, in which my purpose has been to view presidential rhetoric in general and these two genres in particular as an "informing spirit" that "manifest[s], in relation with other institutions and activities, the central interests and values of a 'people.'"[17]

In *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance,* Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson provide a more specific rationale for looking at institutional genres of presidential discourse to find

constitutive rhetorics of nationalism and peoplehood. Noting that a focus on genre enables them to "examine the roles that presidents have invited the American people to assume, the people that they have asked us to be," the authors also explain that "when we say that presidents constitute the people, we mean that all presidents have the opportunity to persuade us to conceive of ourselves in ways compatible with their views of government and the world. At the same time, presidents invite us to see them, the presidency, the country, and the country's role in specific ways."[18] As instances of discursive ritual, these two genres of presidential discourse can be expected to teach American culture to its listeners, giving chief executives the chance to remind the American people what they *ought* to know or believe and thus fulfilling the didactic function of rhetoric described by Roderick Hart.[19]

This didactic function is perhaps most evident in inaugural addresses. This genre of presidential discourse is both ritualistic and epideictic, a combination that invites chief executives to promote certain basic understandings of American political community that transcend their own personal agendas and partisan views. As Theodore Sorensen once noted, inaugural addresses should "address the American people of our time but [also] have meaning for all people for all time. . . . they embody the best of our heritage from the past and the best of our hopes for the future."[20] As a result, inaugural addresses as a genre are likely places to find rhetorical linkages between the present moment and the nation's past as well as its future, thereby providing glimpses into both a nostalgic and an idealized vision of American political community.

Yet these speeches are more than merely a forum for the pronunciation of allegedly transcendent national values. They also provide an opportunity for the ritual reenactment of peoplehood. On Inauguration Day, as partisan bickering or other forms of political disharmony are (usually) put aside, Americans are invited to perform their role as a unified people by participating in this ritual, even if their participation is limited to watching the events on television, listening to them on radio, or reading about them in newspapers days later. As Campbell and Jamieson have suggested, inaugural addresses therefore provide "an essential element in the ritual of transition in which the covenant between the citizenry and their leaders [is] renewed."[21] Indeed, Campbell and Jamieson suggest that the constitutive function of these addresses is foremost among their other generic requirements. "The presidential inaugural . . . unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as 'the people' who can witness and ratify the ceremony," they note.[22] In other words, we might suppose that inaugural addresses are important ritualistic moments in which U.S. presidents reassure the American people that they are a people after all.

State of the union messages are also ritualistic, and although these texts may be considered by some to be less epideictic and less didactic than inaugural addresses, Campbell and Jamieson have argued that they can also be characterized as "public meditations on values."[23] "Facts do not speak for themselves," they write, adding that "assessments must be grounded in values. As a consequence, State of the Union addresses not only assess and recomment; they also articulate the values underlying assessments."[24] Thus, state of the union messages are an important set of texts for this analysis exactly because they typically feature presidential recommendations framed within value-oriented terms presumably associated with protecting or advancing a common nationalistic good. Furthermore, if, at any given point in U.S. history, there are contradictions between American policy and American philosophy, these messages might be good places to look to see how presidents dissipate such tensions.

State of the union messages also serve other purposes that are both symbolic and institutional. For example, Campbell and Jamieson write that these messages "ritualistically reaffir[m] the existence of three branches of government" in the United States, thereby reminding "the country that presidents have a unique function in our system of government. They are to view questions in the aggregate and as they pertain to the whole, to the Union."[25] If the inaugural provides an opportunity for the American people to listen as one people, then the state of the union message gives a chief executive the opportunity to speak as the sole and supreme leader, the symbolic guardian of the common good.

The Constitution requires that these executive pronouncements be offered regularly, but it does not require that they be delivered orally. Indeed, in the texts studied in this analysis, the first president to give the address orally was Woodrow Wilson. This difference among texts does not necessarily present a problem for my analysis, however. Even in those years when the messages were only printed and/or read to Congress by clerks, they had symbolic import that went beyond their constitutional or legislative purposes. Campbell and Jamieson recall Charles Beard's insistence that the state of the union or "annual message" is "the one great public document of the United States which is widely read and discussed."[26] Indeed, if Benedict Anderson is correct about the symbiotic relationship between nation-keeping and the rise of print capitalism, then state of the union messages, like inaugural addresses, may be vitally important to the symbolic maintenance of American political community, regardless of whether they were heard by constituents when they were first offered.[27] Both types of speeches are commonly reprinted in newspapers and,

more recently, broadcast on television, radio, and Internet sources. Thus, even the production and subsequent dissemination of these messages themselves may be understood as ritualistic processes vital to the reification of imagined political community within the United States.

To summarize the rationale behind my textual choices, I have assumed that both inaugural addresses and state of the union messages are particularly ripe with constitutive rhetorics of American nationalism. If it seems to some readers that there was a bias in my selection of these texts, it was a purposeful bias for two reasons. First, for this analysis I was most interested in the idealized versions of American national identity and the visions of democratic political community that stemmed from them. Any presidential address delivered to the nation is a well-crafted piece of rhetoric, carefully designed to advance specific themes as well as the speaker. Rather than seeing the contrived nature of these speeches as a detriment to what they can reveal about the culture, one might view them instead as *especially* meaningful precisely because they provide information about the ideal. Family photographs, for example, may not tell us much about tired marriages or unhappy childhoods, but they do speak volumes about the high hopes of a clan who purposefully puts aside its everyday problems to dress up for a photographer. Like family photographs, formal addresses record values, providing a rare, unobscured glimpse of a vision of ideal community.

Secondly, although there are other genres of presidential discourse that might also feature such themes, for this analysis I chose to limit the texts to those that occurred with predictable frequency throughout the presidency. Put differently, although Franklin Roosevelt's War Message undoubtedly explained the country's entry into World War II in terms of the United States' characteristics and philosophy (e.g., "the national interest"), I did not include that text in this analysis because other presidents did not have comparable opportunities to craft such messages. Likewise, even though certain presidents have used their veto messages to speak directly to the people when they knew a congressional override was likely, I did not include these messages either. Although I am aware of the potential disadvantages in choosing to limit the data in this manner, I wanted this book to tell a story whose main character was the U.S. presidency in general rather than certain presidents in particular.

Throughout this analysis, I have viewed inaugural addresses and state of the union messages as mythic discourses that bear the implicit imprint of their audiences' perceived characteristics as national subjects, even as they simultaneously attempt to constrain their actions in order to promote a sense of national unity. This critical framework borrows heavily from Edwin Black's no-

tion of a "second persona," the "you" implicitly addressed within this discourse, and it has also been informed by Philip Wander's concept of a more ideologically conscious "third persona."[28] As I read through each inaugural address and state of the union message, then, I looked for rhetoric, both implicit and explicit, that seemed to answer the following types of questions: Who are the American people? How are they explained, defined, and portrayed in these texts? What central and/or defining characteristics are they assumed to share?

Having explained my textual choices and critical framework, I should also explain why I limited the study's temporal scope. Rather than begin with George Washington's first inaugural address in 1789, I chose to focus instead on the years that currently constitute the second half of the U.S. presidency, beginning with Grover Cleveland's first term (in 1885) and ending with Bill Clinton's last year in office (2000). In part this choice was a pragmatic one, because coming to terms with the entire corpus of presidential inaugural and state of the union messages simply seemed too large of a task for one book. It may be, then, that I am guilty of writing volume 2 of this project before writing volume 1.

More importantly, however, focusing on the second half of U.S. presidential history also enabled me to best address specific questions about the role of presidential rhetoric within the United States' diverse democracy. Even if it is true that the American people have always struggled with their own diversity, they did so more obviously during the nation's second century than in its first. By beginning with the late-1880s, for example, I was able to start the analysis with texts produced during the peak years of nineteenth-century immigration and thus see if the growing nativism of the American people was either captured or rebutted in some of its leaders' most ceremonial speech. Likewise, by continuing the analysis through the end of the twentieth century, I was able to follow the ways in which presidents spoke about American national identity in some of their most public messages, even as the "face" of the American people was changing due to demographic shifts, the expansion of civil rights for women and minorities, and another immigration boom.

From 1885 to 2000, there have been many times, of course, when presidents have had to comment specifically about the nation's diversity and its discontents—times when they could neither wait to do so until their next state of the union address nor hope that they would be afforded the opportunity to give another inaugural address. In these moments, presidents may have chosen to respond in various ways, through speech, legislation, or a combination of both. Other scholars have thoroughly studied such responses, to be sure.[29] Yet as I have already noted, here I am using a different set of texts to ask a

slightly different set of questions. What have presidents said about American national identity in moments that were "under the radar," that is, ceremonial moments that have required presidents to speak more obliquely about such things? Given the ritualistic and epideictic nature of inaugural addresses and state of the union messages, presidents presumably faced certain constraints in talking about national unity in these speeches. In such moments, for example, they have presumably been eager to steer clear of more direct and/or overly programmatic discussions of such matters, but they also could not ignore them altogether. Instead, they would presumably have had to offer, either explicitly or implicitly, some very basic definitional and even normative answers to some difficult questions: How are Americans supposed to get along with each other within their diverse democracy? What is it, exactly, that holds Americans together?

At first glance, one might presume that presidents giving these high-profile addresses would prefer to answer such questions via platitudes and blatant appeals to patriotism. And sometimes presidents have gotten away with merely that—a fact that I will argue later is not as unimportant as one might initially suspect. But chief executives could not get away with such easy answers all of the time, even within their inaugural and state of the union messages. Consider the constraints they might have faced by virtue of their constituents' diverse heritages, for example, especially when formulating their answers during crises of immigration or race relations. If chief executives appealed too blatantly to their existing constituents' prejudices and fears, they would risk encouraging a dangerous brand of nationalism that lionized intolerance and thus repudiated the allegedly American ideals of equality and individualism. Yet if they ignored popular concerns altogether, they might appear unresponsive to voters' desires and thus risk political suicide. In such moments, the only politically viable solution might be to balance both impulses. In order to preside over a diverse yet peaceful democracy, presidents would have to craft a sense of political community that could both promote an enduring vision of national unity and also respond to the changing needs of a changing constituency. To acknowledge the American people's diversity without allowing it to rhetorically overshadow their democratic bonds, presidents would presumably have to navigate between the Scylla of a pure ideology and the Charybdis of naked pragmatism.

This book is based on my reading of these navigations. Using an interpretive approach, I identified in each text the words and phrases presidents used when describing or otherwise characterizing the "American people." Having made note of these passages, I compared and contrasted them across time in order to search for common themes and/or anomalies within the inaugural

addresses and state of the union messages given from 1885 to 2000. In general, I found this discourse to be fairly uniform. Overall, presidents have used these highly ritualized moments to define American nationalism in exactly the ways we might have expected them to: They have promoted an ideational standard for American identity that could easily accommodate diverse constituents. The notion that American identity comes from holding certain principles is not a new one, nor is it uniquely presidential, as I discuss in chapter 1. Just as Crevecoeur, Tocqueville, Hartz, Lipset, and countless other commentators have, U.S. presidents have also repeatedly stated in their speeches that American national identity is based on certain shared beliefs. And they have just as regularly promised that anyone who holds these beliefs is fit to be an American. The appeal of such a definition is obvious. In a country whose citizens may share few of the types of hereditary or biological ties that bind other nations, it makes sense to define national identity ideationally, thus making it available to all comers—at least in theory.

Yet U.S. presidents have not associated American identity with just any type of ideals in these texts. In chapter 2, I argue that they have typically associated it with the nation's traditional civil religious beliefs, an association that I suggest has both advantages and disadvantages. Indeed, after explaining and documenting this type of rhetoric, I spend the remainder of the book focusing on specific examples that underscore some of the more unfortunate implications of this tendency. In chapters 3 through 5, I argue that the conflation of American identity with civil religious themes has sometimes made it far too easy for some presidents to suggest that not all people are worthy of inclusion in the *demos.* Thus, even within the idealized and presumably inclusive discourses chosen for this study, there are times when certain presidents have also suggested that not all types of people are fully equipped to take on the mantle of U.S. citizenship, that there are some who simply cannot be expected to cherish American ideals in the proper way. In chapter 3 I explain how this suggestion has been made during immigration crises, while chapter 4 focuses on times in which presidential rhetoric has implied as much during racial crises. Likewise, in chapter 5 I analyze presidential discussions of the "woman question." Overall, then, although the great majority of the presidential rhetoric featured in this analysis reveals exactly the ideational definitions of national identity that we might expect from presidents, there are also notable moments throughout the second half of U.S. presidential history to date when particular chief executives have offered an altogether different message. Within texts that we might expect to be only inclusive and inviting, I argue, lurks another discourse of exclusivity and dismissal.

Thus, for more than one hundred years and perhaps even longer, in the two genres of presidential rhetoric studied here, chief executives may have simultaneously encouraged tolerance and sanctioned intolerance among the American people. If we can find such a contradictory yet hardy blending of themes within even this type of rhetoric—when presidents are assumed to be talking about the American people in the most positive terms—then what does that mean? In chapter 6 I argue that it might mean that some of the enduring contradictions of American democracy are written plainly into the some of the nation's most ideal-driven texts. If this is so, then, Gunnar Myrdal's "American Dilemma," in which Americans' deeds do not live up to their creed, is such a quintessential part of the U.S. democracy that even presidents cannot overcome it in some of their most well-crafted and rosy messages.

As troublesome as this implication may be, in the pages that follow I will not blame individual presidents for their collective mixed messages. The purpose of this book is less to allege conspiracy or xenophobia among particular presidents than to try to use presidential rhetoric to uncover a dominant cultural logic that may explain some of the more curious contradictions of American nationalism. I will ultimately suggest that this logic may have "used" presidents as much as they have used it, for even their most worrisome messages may be read as being extremely functional. In fact, one of my conclusions is that this curiously contradictory message within presidential rhetoric may in fact be an important kind of glue that holds the American people together, for better and for worse.

Two main concepts central to this book—American national identity and presidential rhetoric—have both been studied before. Legions of scholars have speculated on the roots of American nationalism, for example, and as I have mentioned, I will review some of the most influential arguments in chapter 1. For the moment, though, it is worth noting the main difference between this work and one of the most recent additions to the corpus described above: Rogers Smith's 1997 *Civic Ideals.* There Smith analyzed citizenship laws for their definitions of American character and found that "multiple traditions" of both egalitarian and ascriptive themes were the conflicting yet constitutive basis of the nation's civic ideals. Although Smith uncovers some of the same types of contradictory messages that I explore here, this study is different from Smith's because it is a rhetorical analysis. Whereas Smith used legal, institutionally codified texts for his analysis, this book is based on political speeches, which respond to more public types of exigencies and felt needs and are thus crafted to be both meaningful and motivating to a live audience of citizens.

Likewise, other scholars have studied historical cases of presidential discourse to see how it has enabled chief executives to meet particular challenges. Yet within rhetorical studies especially, most of these types of accounts have focused mainly on one president, administration, and/or distinct historical period.[30] Notable examples of this line of inquiry include David Zarefsky's *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* and Martin J. Medhurst's *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Strategic Communicator.* In covering the time period of 1885 to 2000, however, this book differs by offering both an interpretive and a longitudinal reading of the presidency. In other words, by providing critical analysis of the rhetoric of multiple presidents, this book offers an alternative perspective that, while enabling me to offer only relatively minor insights into individual office holders, can hopefully provide a broader lens through which to view the institution of the presidency and, more specifically, its symbolic functions within a diverse democracy.

In describing and defending this reading, I have written mostly as a rhetorical critic in these pages. At times I have asked multidisciplinary questions, to be sure, most often related to history, sociology, and politics. I have asked whether or not the tensions behind the changing norms for U.S. citizenship have been reflected in presidential speech, for example, and I have also used historical evidence to reference specific challenges during the citizenry's growth. As changes in economic, legislative, and other structural conditions affected who was eligible for citizenship from 1885 to 2000, we might expect that presidential descriptions of the voting constituency had to change as well. Or, alternatively, we might suppose that presidents' use of constitutive rhetoric in the speeches studied here did not change at all, as chief executives merely worked harder to assert a particular kind of transcendent national subject in the face of all evidence to the contrary. Here we shall see that although some changes have occurred in this discourse, the second hypothesis seems to be truer than the first.

As a rhetorical critic, however, I have obviously also interpreted this discourse, and my primary purpose throughout this book has been to make a persuasive case for that interpretation. To that end, I have used in the pages that follow numerous textual examples to support my claims. I have not, however, taken care to include one example from every president, nor has that been my goal. Instead, I have tried to select representative examples of presidential discourse that together present a compelling account of how American national identity has been constructed in presidential rhetoric over time, especially during contentious points in the nation's history. Having thus described the book's focus, I should also briefly clarify what this work is not.

First, because this book is not based on a content analytic or otherwise quantitative analysis of presidential speeches, it does not provide a detailed charting of when, where, or how often U.S. presidents have talked about diversity. It does not reveal which president spoke about such matters the most, for example, and it does not attempt to correlate such discussions with campaign strategies, audiences' voting habits, or any other variables. Those are very good questions, but they are not answered here. Instead of documenting such trends quantitatively, this book investigates presidential rhetoric qualitatively by using a historical-critical lens to trace its major constitutive themes regarding American nationalism.

Second, this book does not offer a definitive historical account of the American people's diversity, nor does it attempt to offer a comprehensive account of every federal or otherwise governmental response to that diversity. Other scholars have answered those questions well, and we can assume, happily, that such literature will only continue to grow.[31] Instead, this book recounts the ways in which U.S. presidents have tried to provide such an accounting to the American people at certain points in their history. If this book can be read as a history, then, it is a self-consciously strategic and thus impartial history, told by way of the stories that presidents have themselves told, sometimes at the expense of the actual facts. Although I routinely draw attention to discrepancies between presidential rhetoric and socio-political reality in the pages that follow, my primary critical focus is geared more toward the former than the latter.

Third, this book does not dwell on individual presidents' motives nor does it attempt to provide a detailed recounting of the rhetorical situation that each one faced. In this latter sense especially, this work is not one that easily fits under the umbrella of traditional public address scholarship. Instead, it tries to provide a broader view of the discursive landscape painted by multiple presidents. In other words, this book seeks to provide insights into the nature and implications of a particular strain of presidential rhetoric that has emerged within a particular set of political, institutional, and cultural circumstances. Scholarship on individual presidents is important, to be sure, and I have relied on it heavily in writing this book. Yet here I have been less interested in determining Grover Cleveland's personal feelings about immigration than in seeing what Cleveland's words and, say, Ronald Reagan's—offered one hundred years later on the same subject—had in common. What might we make of their symbolic brotherhood?

Throughout this book I have tried to demonstrate the benefits of listening to past presidents' words as a means toward understanding the past as well as the emergent challenges of the United States' diverse democracy. Some may

say that listening to the voices of a group of white men, most of whom are dead, is an odd way to study diversity. In defense of this larger methodological choice, it is worth remembering that, in some respects, the United States is itself an odd place for both nationalism and democracy to flourish. As we will see, both the history and heterogeneity of the United States make it a special case among nations, meaning that its democratic leaders face unique challenges and that we might want to look at their discourse in some new ways. More specifically, as I argue in the following section, we might want to reconsider the reasons why modern presidents in particular would need to speak more often to—and about—the American people.

NATIONALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF THE UNITED STATES: AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF THE RISE OF THE RHETORICAL PRESIDENCY

Benedict Anderson has argued that the modern idea of nationalism gained prominence in the eighteenth century with the waning supremacy of both religion and monarchs. After the demise of sacred and feudal communities, he suggests, a new type of union emerged to give individuals sociological solidarity.[32] The "nation" was not merely a substitute collectivity, however. Like its predecessors, it both demanded and promoted a certain way of thinking about individual identity, one inextricably linked to a relatively new technology, the printing press, as well as to an emerging economic system, capitalism.

Print capitalism helped nations disseminate ideas. Whereas churches with illiterate congregations had spread their messages through iconology, and whereas monarchies had employed artisans to portray their magnificence, statist institutions fostered a "national imagination" through books and other works.[33] "Print-capitalism . . . made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways," Anderson notes.[34] These new modes of thought were in turn abetted by the rise of state vernaculars. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, for example, the Latin language mutated gradually as printed materials written in more specialized, local dialects spread through western Europe. This distribution fostered the development of what are now known as the Germanic languages, and this linguistic diversity in turn hastened the formation of national communities, according to Anderson.[35] By the eighteenth century, then, many believed that individuals who shared language necessarily shared other characteristics and allegiances as well.

But the United States was a different case altogether. The "new American states of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are of unusual interest," Anderson writes, "because it seems almost impossible to explain them in terms of the two factors . . . which dominated . . . European thinking" about nationalism.[36] First, the American colonists shared a common language with the British, but they rejected the British form of government. Second, the colonists were not peasants, the usual instigators of revolt, but were largely middle class, literate, and relatively well educated. These distinctions are key to the original conceptions of American nationalism, Anderson suggests, which held that even away from their home soil, northern Europeans were better suited for citizenship (and, of course, leadership) than anyone else. Thus the "idea" of America was first perceived as both the product and the exclusive realm of the Protestant, English-speaking colonists.[37]

This belief would cast a shadow over domestic affairs long after the young nation had established its new government. As the country expanded geographically and as more newcomers landed on its shores, its still largely Protestant and all English-speaking leaders would greatly need both the ideological support and willing labor of non-northern Europeans, much in the way feudal barons needed serfs.[38] Yet how could these leaders explain the idea of America to such newcomers? Some immigrants did not speak English, and even those who did were assumed to be incapable of understanding the Enlightenment philosophy of John Locke, for example, or the colonial manifestos of Thomas Paine. Government officials would have to explain citizenship in a way that they thought these newcomers could understand, even if that meant adapting some of these original, allegedly untranslatable principles.

As daunting as this translation process seemed, it would become even more important to the nation's continued stability by the end of the nineteenth century, the time period when this analysis begins. By the late 1880s the United States was swelling with record numbers of immigrants, newcomers whose eagerness and foreignness were equally repellent to more established citizens.[39] In addition, thousands of displaced Native Americans and former slaves struggled to build new lives during this period, even amidst great resentment on the part of many Americans. The women's suffrage movement was also growing, and although women would not win the right to vote nationally until 1920, debates about women's entry into the public sphere were becoming more common and more combative. In short, as the population's differences grew at the nineteenth century's end, so did its discontents. At times, the only thing that the American people seemed to share was a federal government.

Not coincidentally, perhaps, at around this same time U.S. presidents began speaking directly to the American public more and more often. Jeffrey K. Tulis and others have named this historical phenomenon the "rise of the rhetorical presidency" and have attributed the increase in chief executives' speechmaking to a few select presidents' shifting views of statesmanship and their constitutional responsibilities at the century's end. Noting that the rhetorical presidency "puts a premium on active and continuous presidential leadership of public opinion," Tulis has suggested that rhetorical presidents have used speech-making to increase their legislative and political power with Congress by garnering popular support for specific policy or agenda items.[40] While Tulis's analysis is persuasive and this function is undeniably important, the rhetorical presidency may serve an additional purpose as well.

Consider the fact that the presidents credited with establishing the rhetorical presidency, namely Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, were all charged with leading a nation that was experiencing rapid growth and, in some areas, fragmentation. Between 1890 and 1909, for example, the decennial immigration to the United States more than doubled, from 3,694,294 to 8,202,388.[41] At roughly the same time, thousands of former slaves struggled with their new freedom—one far newer to some than others, as it took years for news of the Emancipation Proclamation to spread and decades longer for local governments to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Similarly, the American economy felt the Civil War's effects long after its end. Although some parts of the country enjoyed a postwar boom, many southerners were more impoverished than ever, with philosophical resentments compounding their financial woes.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that both Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson in particular saw an urgent need to "refound" the nation and that both viewed public speech as central to this effort, according to Tulis.[42] Roosevelt, alarmed by the incendiary tactics of demagogues and fearful of the possibility of a national class war, responded by using rhetoric to "act as a brake on public opinion." Wilson went even further, Tulis argues, by "reinterpreting" the Constitution and the presidency so that a chief executive might have "more intimate contact with Congress and the people."[43]

According to Tulis, Wilson advocated this access because he saw interpretation of public opinion as the "core of leadership." For him presidential speech was more than mere translation; a chief executive could also use rhetoric to instruct the American people about collective wishes.[44] Wilson saw this type of leadership as crucial to democratic governance, where "policy—where there is no absolute and arbitrary ruler to do the choosing for the whole people—

means massed opinion, and the forming of the mass is the whole art and mastery of politics."[45] Before he could govern, then, a president first had to "form the mass," an increasingly difficult task in a nation whose population was expanding, and in some cases on the verge of splintering, at unprecedented rates.

Instead of viewing the rhetorical presidency solely in terms of its more obviously political functions, then, we might also view it as involving more subtle ministrations. In this sense, the concept of "going public" might mean something slightly different than it has in the work of Tulis or Samuel Kernell. Kernell, for example, conceptualizes "going public" as "a class of activities in which presidents engage as they promote themselves and their policies before the American public." The point of going public, Kernell continues, is "to place the president and his message before the American people in a way that enhances his success in Washington."[46] Yet if we take a more expansive and symbolic view of the presidency, such as the one offered by Walter Fisher in which it can be viewed as a "symbolic, suasory force, a source of inducement to belief, attitude, value, and action . . . [and] a focal point of national reason and rationality," then chief executives might also be viewed as symbolic guardians of national unity in the United States.[47] If so, then Kernell's influential definition might need to be amended; going public might also function to promote the *idea* of an American people *to* the American people. Especially at times when the American people seem concerned about their own diversity, presidents may be in a unique position to reassure citizens that there is in fact a "national reason and rationality" and that they, too, are a part of it. Such persuading in fact can increase presidents' chances of success in Washington, at least to the extent that they and the Congress continue to preside over a united (and at least partially engaged) democratic public.

Indeed, throughout most of the twentieth century, U.S. presidents appear to have been increasingly charged with managing their constituents' wildly diverse demographic, cultural, economic, and political differences. In spite of Theodore Roosevelt's infamous rejoinder decrying "hyphenated Americans," his executive successors have appeared to become more and more responsive to their constituents' problems of diversity. To wit, even candidates for the presidency in the year 2000 had to carefully craft their responses to the case of six-year-old refugee Elián González, lest they risk the voting-booth fury of a community of Cuban immigrants. It may be, then, that one of the most important but least investigated challenges of the rhetorical presidency has been, in Jean Bethke Elshtain's words, the creation and maintenance of "a political body that brought people together and created a 'we' but still enabled people to . . . respect one another's individualities."[48]

Readers will undoubtedly have their own opinions about how admirable or successful presidents have been in their attempts at using rhetoric to create and maintain such a political body. For my own part, I was ultimately both encouraged and disheartened by the implications of my findings, an ambivalence that may itself be central to American national identity. As banal as presidential constructions of American national identity might seem at times, they may serve an important social function by promoting a sense of enduring democratic unity in the United States. In other words, it may be that presidential platitudes themselves are an important type of "glue" that holds the American people together. If so, there is considerable rhetorical and political genius in that. Nevertheless, to some readers, the rhetorical moves discussed in this book may not seem smart at all; some may be discouraged by the extent to which centuries-old sensibilities regarding ethnic, racial, and gender differences can still haunt more recent pronouncements from the bully pulpit.

Lest this latter conclusion seem too pessimistic, readers might also remember at the outset that the United States' diverse democracy is still very much a work in progress and that its relative stability is as unprecedented as it is unexpected. After all, as Robert Dahl has reminded us, for the ancient Greeks, "the only thinkable site of democracy was, of course, the city-state," with its limited size, shared ethnicity, and exclusively male, property-owning voters.[49] They would never have predicted that democracy could be possible in a place where the *demos* comprises more than 270 million people who may live thousands of miles apart without necessarily sharing any common ethnicity, class interests, gender, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs.[50] That such a political community is possible, even if only in our imaginations, is remarkable. This book explores some of the words that may have made it so.