

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD:
EXAMINING PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC DURING ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

John Price

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Thesis Committee:

Edward Hinck, Ph.D.

Committee Chair

Michael Papa, Ph.D.

Faculty Member

Jeff Drury, Ph.D.

Faculty Member

November 26, 2012

Date of Defense

Roger Coles, Ed.D.

Dean
College of Graduate Studies

March 21, 2013

Approved by the
College of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD: EXAMINING PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC DURING ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

by John Price

The credit freeze of 2008 and the following recession placed newly elected President Barack Obama in the mitts of the largest economic disaster the United States had seen since the Great Depression. With this in mind the question arises, how does a president address a nation during a time of economic crisis? Past research has indicated that during times of economic crisis president have turned to the rhetorical form of the American Jeremiad to address the nation. The American Jeremiad's power to unite audiences together provides possible insight to its usage during economic crisis as a method to unite audiences divided by an economic crisis. Still there remains a lack of research directed specifically at presidential rhetoric concerning the economy. This study examines three keynote economic addresses by President Obama during his first term in office in order to shed light on the different rhetorical forms present during an economic crisis. The study finds that President Obama does not use the American Jeremiad during each of his although elements of the Jeremiad, such as the American Dream, are found throughout his oratory. The study begins by examining the existing literature on Presidential rhetoric and the economy in addition to the American Jeremiad. After a review of the literature, the study creates a methodology for examining the Jeremiad elements in the selected texts and proceeded to analyze the texts. Finally the study concludes by discussing its findings and presents possible directions for future research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD1

II. METHODOLOGY AND SPEECH TEXTS22

III. OBAMA’S COOPER UNION ADDRESS32

IV. OBAMA’S DEBT CEILING CRISIS ADDRESS47

V. OBAMA’S JOINT CONGRESSIONAL ADDRESS ON THE “JOBS” ACT62

VI. FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH76

REFERENCES97

CHAPTER I

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD

Since 2009 the state of the U.S. economy has remained a hot topic for President Barack Obama. During the last three years Obama has dealt with multiple economic issues such as financial reform, the debt ceiling crisis, and attempting to pass a jobs bills to stimulate the economy. To deal with the economic crisis over the course of his first term in office, the President introduced and supported numerous economic policy changes. In an effort to help pass these policies, the President relied on the rhetoric of the presidency to influence the opinions of the public and Congress. For example during the first 100 days of Obama's presidency, Obama used the metaphor of a "sick" patient when talking about the economy, referring to the government as the "cure" for the patient (Scacco, 2009). The last century has seen a gradual role shift for what the president embodies, moving from the leader of the government to the leader of the people (Ceaser, Bessette, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). In addition, the growing power of the media has further increased the influential power of presidential rhetoric (Kuypers, 1997). This means that rhetoric, specifically rhetoric about economic issues, has become a more powerful tool of the presidency. One question that arises from examining Presidential rhetoric about economic issues is how does it differ from other forms of rhetoric? What aspects of Presidential rhetoric about economic issues have changed the way speeches are crafted?

One factor that might shape how President Obama created his speeches is that of uncertainty. Keynes believed uncertainty in an economic situation was pivotal in the growth or decline of an economic system (Lawson, 1985). Uncertainty is composed of varying levels of confidence about a situation or act to come or not come to pass (Cioffi-Revilla, 1998). Uncertainty of the economy, such that occurs during an economic crisis, becomes a primary

factor for the decision making calculus of those attempting to make decisions based on future projections (Lawson, 1985; Wood, 2007). In particular, presidential rhetoric plays a key role as a primary purveyor of information to the American people (Wood, 2007). In turn, it can be argued that uncertainty on the part of an economic actor is related directly to presidential rhetoric (Wood, 2007). This means that because the president has the power to influence an audience's perceptions on an issue, the president is able to increase or decrease the audience's level of uncertainty. Thus, the president has the potential to directly influence the economic activity of consumers through his rhetoric.

This aspect of uncertainty is interesting as the traditional genre of the Jeremiad can be used by rhetoricians to persuade an audience to move forward into the future through some change, something that might be argued is necessary to unite a population in economic crisis. The Jeremiad relates to the concept of uncertainty, that the audience might have a sacred pact, either biblically, or in the case of this study, with the values of the founding fathers (Bercovitch, 1978). Reagan took this approach during his presidency at a time when America went through a large amount of economic turmoil and the future was unclear (Johannesen, 1986). It can be argued the use of the Jeremiad helped ease fears of uncertainty. The Jeremiad then returns to the idea of the "sacred pact" discussed earlier; the speaker makes the argument that the crisis that has fallen on the people is occurring because the audience has stopped fulfilling its agreement with God (Bercovitch, 1978). In the case of the American Jeremiad, this means that the audience has begun to drift away from the values of the American founders (Bercovitch, 1978). If the audience accepts the speaker's recommendations of how to return to the pact, the speaker then claims that inevitably, the pact will be fulfilled and success will be guaranteed (Bercovitch, 1978). The rhetorician draws on the belief of the audience, that through the fulfillment of the

pact, they can turn the negative crisis into a positive experience (Bercovitch, 1978). This act of reversing the view of the audience towards the crisis is an example of the rhetorician attempting to reduce the uncertainty in the audience for the future of the nation.

Rhetoric is one of the tools a president uses to shape the public's perception of the economy (Zarefsky, 2004). Changes in economic indicators occur because a president's economic rhetoric shapes the public's view of the economy, affecting the economic activity of consumers which affect the economy (Durham, Owens, & Wood, 2002; Wood, 2004; 2007).

Although presidential rhetoric has far reaching economic implications (Durham, Owens, & Wood, 2002; Wood, 2004; 2007), limited research has been conducted in the field of communication examining presidential economic rhetoric. There are two explanations for this lack of research. First, the field of economics is a barrier a researcher must overcome to properly examine an economic appeal. Economics is a complex subject, requiring significant knowledge to fully understand the depths of an economic argument (McCloskey, 1998). The second explanation deals with the use of macroeconomic theory, much of which has a heavy mathematical basis (McCloskey, 1998). In the case of this study the barrier presented by the technical aspects of economics in general is side stepped. This study focuses primarily on the rhetoric concerning the economy, not the theoretical underpinnings of the claims made by the speaker because there is no need to examine any advanced economic concepts.

Additionally, some economists argue that their field of study is "anti-rhetorical" in nature because of its pursuit of acquiring epistemic knowledge (Hasian & Panetta, 1994). According to economists this means that economists work in a field that pursues "neutral" knowledge, knowledge that cannot be misinterpreted, and thus not affected by rhetoric (Hasian & Panetta, 1994). Similar to an equation in a math problem, economists argue "one will always be equal to

one,” there is no perceptual change that can occur. This concept of “anti-rhetoric” in economic theory is, in actuality, a rhetorical appeal (Hasian & Panetta, 1994). Though contested, the reason economic theories such as wealth maximization have had such an impact on the world, it is argued, is from this rhetorical appeal of “anti-rhetoric” (Hasian & Panetta, 1994). The reasons economists use to dismiss rhetorical studies are themselves rhetorical, meaning rhetoric is a central concern.

There is also a continuing debate on whether Presidential rhetoric affects public perception. George Edwards (2003) argued that rhetoric has no impact on public perceptions. His study polled multiple groups before and after watching a presidential speech in an attempt to see if the speech changed the groups’ perceptions on the issues discussed by the President. He found little to no change in the groups’ perceptions on the issues tested (Edwards, 2003). This contradicts the findings of Durham, Owens, and Woods (2002) concerning economic rhetoric which showed a statistical correlation between different forms of economic rhetoric and growth in the economy. In addition, this responds Zarefsky’s (2004) finding, who argued, that rhetoric is able to influence public perceptions. This contradiction further indicates the need for study of the effect of presidential rhetoric concerning the economy on public perceptions. Since economic rhetoric is an under examined form of rhetoric it might provide a unique perspective for further discussion over the power of rhetoric.

Since rhetoric continues to be a prevalent tool used by the president and since rhetoric about economic issues has been shown to impact the economy through unemployment rates as well as GDP, it seems rational to continue research on this developing field (Durham, Owen, & Wood, 2002). This chapter will examine four areas of research to justify examining president Obama’s rhetoric concerning the economy. First, I will argue that the current role of presidential

rhetoric with the public warrants an examination of the current administration's rhetoric over economic issues. Next, I will explain how rhetoric is increasingly being used by the presidency and is becoming a key political tool to mobilize support for economic policies. Afterwards I will examine how the concept of uncertainty in the economy can be a factor in presidential rhetoric. Finally, I will examine the genre of the Jeremiad and explain why the use of the Jeremiad should be employed when studying Obama's rhetoric concerning the economy.

Presidential Rhetoric in the Modern Era

Presidential rhetoric has not always been seen as a tool to influence the public's perceptions on issues. Recently, it has been noted that the public has begun to focus not only on policy actions by a president but also on the rhetoric around those actions when forming their perceptions of events. Some scholars believe that the rhetoric used by the president has similar abilities in shaping the public's perception of the situation more than a policy action would. Kuypers (1997) pointed out, for example, that the media has begun to focus on the rhetoric used by the president instead of the policy actions of a president. He argues that mass media has expanded to the point where a rhetorical choice can be as influential as a policy decision of a president (Kuypers, 1997).

Expanding on the advent of the "rhetorical" presidency as it has been sometimes referred to (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981), Bostdorff (1994) examines the ability of the president to manipulate perceptions. Bostdorff emphasized the place for the presidency in modern times:

The most prominent speakers today, American Presidents, use words to shape our view of what matters and what does not. Sometimes they direct our attention away from an "economic downturn"...Rhetoric is sometimes cynical and manipulative, sometimes high-

minded and admirable, but it is always persuasive discourse that, especially when uttered by Presidents, helps construct our political realities. (Bostdorff, 1994, p. 3)

This shaping of perceptions will become an important point throughout the literature review. By changing the perceptions of the public, presidents have a unique ability to craft decisions made by those in the public. Later, it will be argued that this changing of perceptions can go as far as affecting economic choices (Wood, 2007).

This change in the power of the president has come from a change in the view of the Presidency itself. Over the last hundred years, the role the president has fundamentally changed from a leader of the government to a “leader of the people” (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). This changes the point of view in which presidential rhetoric can be seen. Instead of the leader of the government, the public perceives the president as one of them (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). An example of this change can be seen during the Carter administration when Carter attempted to address the issue of “malaise” of a nation during his presidency. Carter believed he had to take action, rally the nation as the “leader of the people,” and revive America’s morality (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). Though Carter inevitably went back to being what he defined as “head of the government” later in his presidency, his speech shows us that the concept of what the president is supposed to represent has changed over the years.

This power of the presidency has continued to increase over the years partly because of the increasing power of the mass media. The president is unique from other politicians as the office of the presidency enjoys more media access and prestige than other offices (Cohen, 1995). This, in turn, allows the president’s messages to reach a greater audience than a congressional representative.

One of the avenues that a president has employed for changing perception is that of the definition or redefinition of terms. Zarefsky (2004) claimed that presidents have historically created and defined terms that they deem important as a method for shaping public perceptions. One example of this is the use of the term “war” after September 11th by President Bush. President Bush claimed we were at “war” with the terrorists. Technically, such a thing did not occur since war is defined as a conflict between nations and the terrorists had no sovereign nation or what many would define as a military force (Zarefsky, 2004). By defining the situation as a “war” President Bush was able to create a perception of a war mentality and carry out responses that would set the stage for military conflict.

Not surprisingly though, there are some that disagree with the idea of presidential rhetoric having a significant impact on perceptions. Edwards (2003) argued that presidential rhetoric is restricted by the popularity of the president, and even with popular presidents, the ability to change perceptions is limited. Zarefsky (2004) argued that although rhetoric might have a limited effect on public opinion, presidential discourse can have the effect of ordering important political issues in the public’s mind. This increases the public’s awareness of those issues, and in turn, can still lead to a shift in public perception of those issues, even if different from the perception put forward by the president (Wood, 2004). Even if the effect of the message is different from the intention of the president, this effect would provide evidence showing rhetoric does impact the public’s decision making process. The continuing debate over the rhetorical power of the presidency provides a reason to examine presidential rhetoric and attempt to discern its impact on the perceptions of the public.

The president’s power to define situations is not the only way in which a president attempts to shape the opinions and perspectives of the populace. Agenda setting is one avenue in

which the president can influence the public to take a certain perspective on an issue. Agenda setting is when a president identifies key policy issues and focuses their rhetoric and congressional influence on those issues (Cohen, 1995). Presidents have a unique role in setting the political agenda for the government and have been said to have the most power in setting the agenda of the government (Edwards & Barret, 2000). The use of agenda setting has been said by some to be the most powerful tool of the presidency for influencing congressional action as well as public opinion on an issue (Edwards & Barret, 2000). Presidents who use agenda setting are able to define issues and thus shape how those issues are discussed by the public and media (Cohen, 1995). So agenda setting might in some way be connected to what Zarefsky talks about as the defining power of the presidency. This relates specifically to this research project as the speeches that have been chosen for their proactive nature are similar to what has been characterized as deliberative rhetoric. In addition, when a speaker uses the American Jeremiad they use the power of definition to set the terms and values to explain how the country deviated from its past. Now that we understand some of the different rhetorical tools of the presidency it is necessary to examine the impact of rhetoric concerning economic issues has on the economy.

The Effects of Rhetoric on the Economy

Although economic rhetoric is understudied in the communication discipline, numerous studies have demonstrated that rhetoric has an impact on the economy. Multiple statistical regression studies have been performed proving a direct correlation between economic rhetoric and changes in the economy. These studies can be divided into two separate but equally important categories: the effect on the public's perception regarding expectations about the economy and economic statistics such as unemployment and growth rates.

The first study that needs to be discussed was authored by Cohen and Hamman (2003) and used a regression model to examine economic rhetoric's impact on the public's perception of the economy over the time span of Reagan to the first term of George W. Bush. Holding constant for extraneous variables such as economic changes, the authors found that the public's optimism over these periods was affected by presidential rhetoric concerning the economy (Cohen & Hamman, 2003). This provides a statistical basis for the underlying assumption that the economy is affected by economic rhetoric because the public's perception drives economic forces (Cohen & Hamman, 2003). In addition, Cohen and Hamman (2003) identified the category in which a speech falls also influences how a speech impacts its audience. It was argued that when a speech was labeled economic in nature those speeches influenced a public more than a speech not labeled as economic. This provides a rationale as to why this study should examine economic focused and labeled economic addresses. If the public doesn't perceive the economy as a key issue at the time the speech was given, then rhetoric concerning it would not be as effective in shaping perceptions.

Scacco (2009) examined president Obama's first 100 days in office by looking at the use of economic metaphors to prime and shape the population's perspective on his attempts to deal with the credit crisis. To do this Obama used rhetoric to portray the economy as a sick entity: A pervasive metaphor in President Obama's economic language was to characterize the economy as sick, weakened, and hobbled by recession. While citizens can gauge the general health of the economy, Obama used embodiment and health metaphors to explain complex economic issues in the recession and describe the nature of the crisis. (Scacco, 2009)

By attempting to shape the public's perception that the U.S. economy was "sick" Obama rationalized the government's "cure" in taking action (Scacco, 2009). Scacco concluded that Obama was able to create the perception that government intervention was required for the economy to survive (Scacco, 2009).

What is more interesting, though, is the historical basis for the use of metaphors to shape the public's perception of the economy. The use of the doctor metaphor by President Obama noted by Scacco (2009) is by no instance unique to presidential economic rhetoric. FDR and Hoover both used the doctor metaphor during the great depression (Burghardt, 2002). Surprisingly, FDR and Hoover's approach to solve the great depression were strikingly similar, even to the point of metaphors towards the economy (Burghardt, 2002). But there was a key difference between the presidents on their rhetorical appeals.

One of the most significant differences was Roosevelt's faith in using words to move people, a faith that Hoover did not share. Moreover, while FDR tried to relate to his audience, to seek "the most common forms of identification," Hoover "seemed to revel in the minutiae of technocratic jargon" (Burghardt, 2002 p.19). Although we might not be able to claim that rhetoric was the reason FDR was able to pull the country out of a depression, there is at least historical evidence that rhetorical appeals designed to influence the public's perception do have an impact on the economy.

Social scientific research has provided empirical data to support this claim of influence. Specifically, Durham, Owens, and Wood (2002) found that presidential speeches affect economic factors such as unemployment and economic growth. The authors used an auto regression model to identify a negative correlation with unemployment rates and a positive correlation with economic growth in reference to economic rhetoric. By examining presidential

economic rhetoric from 1978-2002, and holding constant for economic flux, the statistical model demonstrated that there were correlations between presidential rhetoric on the economy, unemployment and economic growth (Durham, Owens, & Wood, 2002).

In addition Durham, Owens and Wood (2005) concluded that economic rhetoric was able to affect the economy through indirect channels as well, such as the media's framing of issues of the president's speeches. Changes in public perception following from economic rhetoric do affect the economy as a whole (Durham, Owens & Wood, 2002; 2005). There is something also to be said about the lack of economic explanation in presidential appeals that further proves the power of economic expertise. This lack of economic explanation can be seen during Ford's presidency when inflation ran rampant and became one of the most important issues to face the administration (Gore, 2005). Ford attempted to examine only inflation and did not explain the importance of addressing inflation to his audience during the economic crisis he faced; this, in turn, limited his ability to address the problem since inflation is an issue that is intertwined with multiple economic concepts (Gore, 2005). Ford later rectified the inflation crisis by addressing the nation in a speech centered entirely on the issue of inflation (Gore, 2005). It could be argued that if this type of speech had been given earlier it might have allowed Ford to better address the inflation crisis. This illustrates an idea similar to what Kuypers (1997) referred to earlier, that action and rhetoric are important in shaping the public's perceptions and actions towards policies. Ford's rhetoric, in turn, made his attempts to address economic problems ineffective (Gore, 2005).

Now that it has been discussed how rhetoric has affected the economy and the different appeals used by a president to shape perceptions of the economy, it is necessary to examine how a president's choice in rhetoric on a specific policy might increase likelihood of passage,

specifically through examining the role uncertainty plays in determining the persuasiveness of a message.

Uncertainty through Economics

The concept of uncertainty is not a new one in the fields of communication and economics. In economics, both Keynesian and Hayekian economists indicate that uncertainty of future economic outcomes affect the buying and spending habits of those in the economy (Lawson, 1985). Economists deal with this concept of uncertainty by basing models on “perfect information” (Lawson, 1985) using them to predict future changes in the economy. Economic theorists focus on the mathematical equations that predict how uncertainty will positively or negatively affect market changes (Zarnowitz & Lambros, 1987) but not necessarily where and how uncertainty is created. But what is uncertainty? This project borrows a definition of uncertainty from Milken: “An individual’s perceived inability to predict something accurately” (1987). This uncertainty is found to be one of the dominant factors in the decision making process of economic actors as Wood (2007) explains:

Economic actors attempt to calculate their current and future economic situation when allocating current income. Their degree of certainty in these calculations, however, is variable. As uncertainty about current and future income increases, they become less willing to assume risk. For example, during uncertain times individuals may become risk-averse in choosing not to spend, but rather to pay down debt or save for an impending “rainy day.” (p. 139)

Uncertainty influences the buying choices of those in the economy causing individuals to purchase less at times of high uncertainty. This concept, though, is not limited to individuals. During times of recession businesses will decide not to expand or

hire new staff because of perceived instability in the market. In addition, attitudes of uncertainty, if extensive throughout an economy, have been shown to significantly determine macroeconomic futures (Wood, 2007). According to Wood “while individual economic actors are only ‘boundedly’ rational, the aggregation of information across individuals can provide a strong indicator of future macroeconomic trends” (2007, p. 140). These perceptions stem from the information available to the economic actors. As discussed earlier, the president is in a unique position to affect the economic actors in the economy because presidents are perceived to have unique information about the future of the economy (Wood, 2007). Though the citizen might not possess the knowledge to understand what exactly is being discussed, it is argued that the tone of the message shapes the citizen’s expectations of future changes (Wood, 2007). As we have seen, the dissemination and interpretation of the information available to the public is an important indicator of future economic trends (Wood, 2007). For this project, uncertainty is an element that exists in the background and provides a context for the types of crises Obama faced in his addresses. Many times the president used his rhetoric to attempt to define the economic situation through the use of values and other arguments. In the next section this project will examine the Jeremiad and its history in presidential rhetoric.

The American Jeremiad

First, I will examine how the Jeremiad has developed overtime. Next, I will examine how the Jeremiad has been applied to presidential rhetoric in general, and also examine how the Jeremiad has been used to examine presidential economic rhetoric. Finally, I will explain how I will use the Jeremiad to examine the rhetoric of the president’s speeches on the policy proposals

discussed in this chapter. By examining and discussing these different aspects of the Jeremiad I aim to build a case as to why the Jeremiad is the focus of this study.

History of the Jeremiad

The Jeremiad traces its lineage back to the biblical texts of Jeremiah, who foretold the restoration of Israel after the chosen people proved their worth to the God of Abraham (Bercovitch, 1978). Jeremiah spoke of a “national covenant” that was broken by the Israelites that caused them to be cast out of the Promised Land. This covenant was said to stretch to the end of time and will inevitably be fulfilled by the Israelites but it depends on their efforts for such a reconciliation to occur (Bercovitch, 1978). Jeremiah’s rhetorical emphasis on punishment and returning from sin by the “chosen people” became a main characteristic of the European Jeremiad and inevitably the American Jeremiad.

The transition to the European Jeremiad from the book of Jeremiah required a reinterpretation of the biblical texts by Christian scholars. It was interpreted that Jeremiah was talking of the spiritual nation of Israel and the physical nation of Israel. The miracle that was to restore the Israelites to the Promised Land was interpreted as a heralding of the second coming of Christ (Bercovitch, 1978). With this connection to Jeremiah established, the European Jeremiad began to take shape. The European Jeremiad used the wrath of God as a warning to bring the church going masses back into line with the teachings of the Bible. What wasn’t emphasized was the prospect of hope and instead the speech became a lesson on moral obedience (Bercovitch, 1978). The largest difference between the European Jeremiad and what would become the American Jeremiad was the difference between a social contract and a contract with God. Puritans viewed the Jeremiad as a way to move the “chosen people” towards the city of

God, which they interpreted as America. Conversely, the European Jeremiad was used in the more mundane sense, dealing with the contract created with society (Bercovitch, 1978).

This brings us to the beginning of what would become the American Jeremiad, the Puritan Jeremiad. As discussed earlier, the Puritan Jeremiad changed from a simple form of social control used in the European Jeremiad to a “political sermon” (Murphy, 1990) The sermon served both epideictic and deliberative purposes: it was epideictic in the sense that it upheld common values; it was deliberative in that it called for support of an action (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990). This melding of two usually distinct types of rhetoric occurred for three reasons; first, the position of the pastors in the community affected their rhetoric. The original Puritan colonies were founded as theocracies, meaning many of the spiritual leaders served in two roles: governmental leaders and representatives (Bercovitch, 1978). The second reason comes from the view that the Puritans had engaged in a “covenant with God” (Bercovitch, 1978). The Puritans saw themselves as being tasked to build a “shining city on the hill” as they were the chosen people of god (Bercovitch, 1978). This view of themselves made sermons that focused on how the “chosen” were being led astray by immorality into powerful rhetoric, as those in the community saw it as an act of betraying God (Bercovitch, 1978). The most striking and powerful aspect of the Jeremiad, though, is how the Jeremiad “inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming the world, and despite the world, the involution of the colonial cause” (Bercovitch, 1978, p. 28). This means that dire situations could be turned into positive reaffirming of original values which constitutes an epideictic appeal to value, and at the same time provided a new direction for the colonists to continue their path towards the “shining city on the hill” representing a policy action which falls into the category of deliberative rhetoric.

The ending of the Revolutionary War brought great change to the Puritan Jeremiad. The Puritans saw the founding fathers as champions of God's chosen people and viewed the victory over the British as a partial fulfilling of God's covenant (Bercovitch, 1978; Johannesen, 1986). This marked the beginning of the American Jeremiad in its modern form. Since the Puritans saw the founding of the nation as an act of God, soon the Jeremiad changed the "chosen" people from Puritans to the American nation as a whole. Later on, the original values related to God were replaced with ideas such as the American Dream (Murphy, 1990). Over the years the Jeremiad found its home in politics and speakers such as Jefferson and Lincoln both employed the Jeremiad throughout the 19th century (Murphy, 1990). Senator Kennedy's speech used the Jeremiad in an attempt to "bring good out of evil" to help prevent violence and curb revenge seeking (Murphy, 1990). Though not an example of presidential rhetoric the Kennedy speeches show how the Jeremiad is still alive today and is continually shaping modern rhetoricians. Now that we understand how the Jeremiad has evolved over the centuries its necessary to examine how the Jeremiad has been employed in presidential rhetoric, and specifically in relation to economic rhetoric.

The American Jeremiad and the Presidency

As we have seen, the Jeremiad attempts to channel what normally would be calls for revenge or feelings of despair in a community into optimism and drive for the future through the use of utopian alliterations (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990). This ability to turn crisis into positive reinforcement and rejuvenation of the community is appealing to presidents who are often times the actors who define a crisis (Bostdorff, 2003).

During Reagan's presidency the U.S. was faced with an over bloated federal budget and a faltering economy because of the "Savings & Loan" crisis that gripped the nation (Johannesen,

1986). Reagan's rhetoric painted the citizens of the U.S. as having strayed from the values of hard work and frugality that are the basis of the American dream (Johannesen, 1986). Through this rhetoric, Reagan argued that the policies instituted by the government inevitably caused the bloated budget and were rooted in the citizens' desire for entitlement (Johannesen, 1986).

Reagan then used the Jeremiad's tradition of the "chosen people" to create optimism, "We will unleash the energy and genius of the American people, traits which have never failed us" (Johannesen, 1986, p. 65). This act of reversing the crisis into a chance to grow again shows the prevalence of the Jeremiad in the existing economic rhetoric of the Presidency and provides credence to the argument that Obama's rhetoric in this time of crisis might yield interesting results pertaining to the use of the Jeremiad.

Now that we understand how the Jeremiad has changed over the years and has influenced presidential rhetoric we need to understand how this project will examine the selected speech texts. As discussed earlier the Jeremiad has a few distinct rhetorical features that separate it from other genres of speeches. Through the existing literature we can identify four separate rhetorical appeals that must be present in a speech text to qualify as following the genre of the American Jeremiad.

First, the speaker must use rhetorical appeals based on values that are endemic to the roots of the audience. Examples of this have been seen in how original Puritan priests discussed how the laws of god created a moralistic code that all Puritans strived to abide by (Bercovitch, 1978). The American Jeremiad took form when instead of invoking God's law, speakers began to appeal to the values of the American Dream, such as being frugal and working hard (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990). The important thing to note here is that the speaker is defining these values and the audience as a sort of "chosen people" and that their original values

had put them on course for greatness (Bercovitch, 1978). This type of rhetorical claim sets the stage for the Jeremiad; only when the speaker can create a sense of commonality for the audience can the speaker effectively draw on the other appeals present in the Jeremiad. Inevitably, all the appeals come back to returning to the values established at the beginning of the speech (Bercovitch, 1978).

The second rhetorical aspect of the Jeremiad is the establishment of a crisis that exists in the status quo. More importantly, the speaker must indicate that the reason the crisis exists is caused by the betrayal of the values that members of the audience once held dear (Bercovitch, 1978; Johannesen, 1986; Murphy, 1990). We saw this occur in President Reagan's address to the nation concerning how the economic crisis and bloated government budget traced their roots to a deviation from frugality and a sense of entitlement, which Reagan argued was the antithesis of what the American dream was founded on (Johannesen, 1986). Essentially, the speaker uses the crisis to point out the error in direction the audience has headed and begins to build the case that a return to the original values of the audience is necessary to alleviate the consequences.

Next, the speaker identifies the necessary actions that the audience can take to return to its original values which would, in turn, end the crisis (Bercovitch, 1978; Johannesen, 1986; Murphy, 1990). In the case of President Bush we saw him employ this type of rhetoric to direct the nation to take a more active role in the world in the fight against terrorism by returning to America's values of standing against tyranny (Murphy, 2003). Reagan employed similar rhetorical appeals by arguing that by initiating spending cuts and decreasing entitlements, the American people would begin to return to the values of hard work and frugality (Johannesen, 1986). This is where the Jeremiad combines the aspects of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric by

attempting to influence the audience to change their existing course and follow the path provided by the speaker to return to values professed during the speech (Bercovitch, 1978).

The final aspect of the Jeremiad returns to the “chosen people” concept established at the beginning of the orator’s speech. Speakers used the concept of the chosen people to insist that even during the most serious of crises that inevitably the people would rise to the occasion and prosper greater than they had before (Bercovitch, 1978). This kind of appeal was directly adapted from the Puritans as they viewed times of crisis as a way to “fetch out the evil” (Johannesen, 1986). Thus, instead of the crisis being overtly negative, it was seen as a “test of character,” and was used to create a sense of optimism for the future by using the concept of the “chosen people” to reinforce the audience’s belief in the inevitability of fulfilling the American dream or in the case of the Puritans, the covenant with god (Bercovitch, 1978; Johannesen, 1986). Reagan used this kind of rhetoric during his speeches concerning the economic crisis in the 80’s while he discussed how the American worker would triumph over foreign competition by growing stronger through these tough times (Johannesen, 1986). Now I will discuss the research questions this project will answer through the analysis of the selected speech texts.

Research Questions

Presidential rhetoric over the years has changed substantially, from the concept of the president as the head of the government to the leader of the people (Bessette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). The increased focus of media on presidential rhetoric (Kuypers, 1997) has increased the importance of the president’s rhetoric since the choice of words by an administration can be just as important as the actions taken by an administration (Kuypers, 1997).

Using the defining power of the presidency, it has been shown that the perceptions of citizens can be shaped through rhetorical appeals (Saccos, 2009; Zarefsky, 2004). Subsequently, the president is able to use rhetoric to affect decisions as well as attitudes towards different arenas of the public such as the economy. In terms of economic rhetoric, it has been shown that there is a historical precedent for the importance of presidential appeals concerning the economy. Examples such as FDR, Reagan, and the Ford administration's use or lack of use of economic rhetoric, has provided, at minimum, anecdotal evidence of the importance of rhetoric; for effective policy making in addressing economic issues (Burghardt, 2002; Gore, 2005; Johannesen, 1986). If historical evidence was not enough to show the importance of rhetoric, we have seen that statistically, over the course of the last hundred years, rhetoric concerning economic issues has had a significant correlation with economic growth (Cohen & Hamman, 2003; Wood, 2007). This leads to the conclusion that presidential rhetoric on economic issues does have an impact on the economy, and that because of its importance further study of the area would be warranted.

It has been shown economic rhetoric does have an impact on the economy through the altering of the perceptions of actors participating in the market (Wood, 2007). Previously, there had been little examination of how economic rhetoric was causing these changes. By examining the concept of uncertainty it was found that the level of uncertainty in the environment perceived by an individual changes that individual's purchasing choices (Wood, 2007). We examined the communication discipline's use of uncertainty principles and observed that information becomes the primary factor in reducing uncertainty of the individual (Berger, 1979; Sunnafrank, 1984; Wood, 2007). In addition, we saw that genre criticism examines the patterns developed over time in similar situations. We saw that Reagan (Johannesen, 1986) used the American Jeremiad

when discussing the need to cut spending and promote austerity programs. This provides us with a way to examine President Barack Obama's rhetoric since Obama might also employ the Jeremiad to influence economic policies. This leads me to the research questions:

RQ1: What rhetorical strategies did Barack Obama use in his speeches promoting financial reform, jobs, and debt ceiling policies between 2008 and 2011?

RQ2: What does the presence or absence of the American Jeremiad as a rhetorical strategy in Obama's major speeches on economic policy reveal about Obama's rhetorical strategies on economic issues in his first term?

Examining these questions will allow us to see if Obama made use of the American Jeremiad and, if so, examine how might have Obama modified the Jeremiad. In the next chapter I will discuss the rationale for choosing the speech texts for this study. Also, I will discuss genre criticism and its theoretical basis in addition to examining the Jeremiad's place in genre criticism.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY AND SPEECH TEXTS

In this chapter I discuss the rhetorical method of genre criticism. Next, I discuss the rationale I used to guide my selection of speech texts containing President Obama's economic rhetoric during his last three years in office. Finally, I present a brief analysis of the situations surrounding the selected speech texts to show how they meet the requirements presented earlier to be included in this study.

Genre Criticism

Genre criticism seeks patterns in speeches that have persisted over time and the organization of these patterns into different genres of rhetorical acts (Campbell & Huxman, 2011). Genres recognize that there are a limited amount of choices a speaker can make in a given event (Campbell & Jamieson, 1977); this view is sometimes considered controversial. Some argue this would mean that not all communication is uniquely created by the speaker since structure and even style would be the result of a progression of speechwriting development over the ages. The concept of the genre then becomes prescriptive and can potentially blur differences between speeches, thus losing contextual meaning of the singular speech act itself (King, 1993).

The counter to this position is that speech acts do not exist in a vacuum (King, 1993). Speeches are created in response to situations, to describe feelings on or around issues. Without a context for a speech the rhetorician cannot create an address; this provides evidence for the claim that a rhetorical act cannot exist in a vacuum (King, 1993). One can also argue this applies to the audience as well; the situation of the rhetorical event influences the audience's expectations thus potentially shaping the audience's receptiveness to certain rhetorical strategies

(King, 1993). By examining rhetoric through different genres we are able to generalize beyond the individual event and produce a genealogy of rhetorical acts (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990) to help future speakers to develop appeals and arguments based on similar situations and provide context for different texts' strategic rhetorical choices.

The roots of genre criticism are traced back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and are placed into three distinct categories: Rhetoric as deliberative, forensic, or epideictic. Each of these genres addresses different goals and situations in which a speaker might find themselves when giving a public address. These are not the only genres that exist; in fact, genres can exist inside genres (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). An example of this is the genre of apologia. Inside of this genre there exists a sub-genre called image restoration that shares many of the same patterns of the genre of apologia but has some distinct differences (Smith, 2009).

For this study, deliberative and epideictic rhetoric are two genres that will be important to understand. Epideictic, also known as ceremonial rhetoric, is shaped by the culture and environment of the ceremony (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). A eulogy is a classic example of epideictic rhetoric and provides an example of how flexible genre criticism can be when examining unique situations (Campbell & Jamieson 1990). For example, a eulogy in one area of the world might be significantly different compared to another culture's own ceremony. Common themes of this genre are the stressing of the future, how things will develop over time, and usually values or uses of values (Campbell & Huxman, 2011).

Epideictic rhetoric also has the unique ability to define situations and shape perceptions (Murphy, 2003). Murphy (2003) examined how President Bush immediately after the 9/11 used the epideictic genre to define and shape the post 9/11 war on terror. In the case of presidential

rhetoric on the economy, it could be argued that a president might seek to use this defining power to shape public perception as well.

Deliberative rhetoric deals with propositions of policy. Deliberative rhetoric is classically used by politicians to persuade audiences to accept or reject proposed changes to laws, for instance (Campbell & Huxman, 2011). Expedience is a primary element of this kind of rhetoric, as the situation around the proposed policy can rapidly change (Campbell & Huxman, 2011). This is important to speeches about economic issues as market situations and consumer sentiment can rapidly change the landscape of the economy. When a president speaks about economic issues it is usually to persuade an audience to support a policy dealing with the economic situation and, in turn, that would affect the future. This shows how the deliberative genre is an important element of rhetoric focusing on economic issues.

The Jeremiad combines elements of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric to influence the audience to embrace the change proposed by the speaker (Bercovitch, 1978). In terms of epideictic rhetoric in the Jeremiad, the speaker appeals to values that the culture or people revere and uses those values to characterize the situation occurring in the status quo (Bercovitch, 1978). After characterizing the situation according to the values of the audience the speaker makes suggestions on how to fix the current situation by returning to the values once practiced by the audience (Bercovitch, 1978). In the case of Obama's different economic addresses we can use the Jeremiad as a lens to examine the rhetorical strategies Obama used during his addresses. Now that we understand what genre criticism is and how the Jeremiad is part of this genre I now turn to explaining how the speech texts were chosen for the project.

Speech Text Selection

Each speech needed to meet three specific requirements to be considered for study. The first requirement was that the speech needed to have a definitive goal or aim, or the speaker needed to be attempting to persuade the audience to support some political action. Bercovitch claims that deliberative rhetoric becomes a central part of the Jeremiad as the speaker is attempting to persuade the audience to enact some sort of change to correct an existing problem in the status quo (Bercovitch, 1978). If Obama is calling for policy change, and values are advanced, or discussed in these speeches, it might be the case that the Jeremiad is being used.

The second characteristic that influenced my choice of speech text concerned the events surrounding the speech texts. Bercovitch (1978) discussed that many times the Jeremiad was used as a reaction to a crisis that had occurred during the time of the speech. An example of this might be a disaster or hardship that has occurred for the audience which brings some issue to center stage for a public discussion and deliberation. This aspect of a crisis relates to the previous requirement of deliberative rhetoric, as deliberative rhetoric seeks to solve a dysfunction that exists in the status quo (Campbell & Huxman, 2011). Since the existence of a crisis and the reaction by a presidency is linked together through the use of deliberative rhetoric, it follows that for a speech to be considered in this study it must meet these two requirements.

The final principle that guided my selection of texts was to examine texts from a variety of different contexts and points in time instead of focusing on the rhetoric surrounding only one situation. This was done to provide a chance to study multiple instances of President Obama's rhetoric from crisis to crisis in order to determine if and when he might be relying on the American Jeremiad as a rhetorical strategy. Selecting speech texts on this basis would allow the critic to identify similarities and differences in how Obama spoke about economic issues as well

as his use of the Jeremiad during these speeches. The following sections will examine each selected speech text to explain how each speech meets the aforementioned criteria.

Financial Reform: Address at Cooper Union New York, New York April 22, 2010

In 2009 President Obama inherited the worst economic crisis the United States had seen since the Great Depression (Cohan, 2010). Obama's initial economic policy as president, specifically the 787 billion dollar stimulus package, had been drawn up and prepared before taking office. When it was drafted Obama did not yet possess the mantle of president. After passing health care reform in the latter half of 2009, Obama set his sights on tackling the root cause of the 2008 credit freeze, financial regulation (Cohan, 2010). This made rhetoric surrounding Obama's proposal a good starting point for this project since it was the first economic proposal by President Obama that was not crafted before he took office. Obama's rhetoric concerning the stimulus was a product of his campaign, and not a creation or policy developed during his presidency. For this reason, I will not be examining Obama's rhetoric around the initial stimulus package passed in 2009.

When a president takes office for the first time there are often many changes that occur for the president. The role of the president is different than the role of a candidate campaigning to become the president. This shifting from candidate to president includes bearing new responsibilities and information that might change the opinion of the president on issues that they once supported. In addition, political climates change after election. The rhetoric of a president would be expected to switch from that of campaigner to the "leader of the people" (Besette, Ceaser, Thurow & Tulis, 1981). Thus, the rhetorical strategies employed by Obama might change significantly over the course of the transition between campaigning to presidency, supporting my reasoning of why not to examine the stimulus bill.

The Dodd-Frank bill, named after Representatives Barney Frank and Chris Dodd, was Obama's push to bring financial reform to Wall Street (Jefte, Khan, & Karl, 2010). The bill created a consumer protection agency, along with forcing new requirements on banks concerning securities and fiscal capital policies (Jefte, Khan, & Karl, 2010). The intention of the bill was to patch the holes in financial regulation that allowed the 2008 credit freeze to occur in the first place. This presented Obama with a difficult barrier to overcome. Republicans opposed many parts of the bill arguing it was too tough on the financial sector during an economic recession (Cohan, 2010). At one point many doubted the passing of the bill; one reporter went so far as to say after the bill was signed into law "Let me start with a few words I don't say very often: I was wrong. Let me add a few words I say even less often: I'm glad I was wrong." (Grunwald, 2010, p.1).

The speech text selected for the project is from two months before the signing of the Frank-Dodd bill. At this time, many didn't predict it would pass and this speech represented the beginning of the final push by President Obama to pass the legislation (Jefte, Khan, & Karl, 2010). When writing this speech President Obama was trying to garner support for a controversial bill. In addition, this speech is important because the subject matter of financial reform was something many Americans saw as an important issue since the financial markets were seen to have been the cause of the credit freeze in 2008. For these reasons, we can see that this speech meets the requirements set earlier for consideration as a use of the Jeremiad. Deliberative rhetoric is taking place, and the crisis of financial reform is acknowledged both politically and by the public, as well as by politicians and the financial industry.

Primetime Address on the Budget & Debt Ceiling Washington D.C. July 25, 2011

The second speech being considered for this project examines a problem that plagues all presidencies: fiscal discipline. President Obama was thrust into a crisis not of his own making but now had become the focal point for this episode of the classic fiscal discipline debate focused on the raising of the debt ceiling. The debt ceiling was originally created in 1917 to allow the Treasury Department to pay expenses for government activities through borrowing without having to submit requests to Congress to approve already allotted spending (Kessler, 2011). The ceiling itself was only a limit to how much money could be raised from creditors to pay for expenses requested by Congress. If the ceiling was close to being breached it would mean that essentially our government would be unable to pay for the debt it had incurred and, subsequently, default. Since then, the debt ceiling has been used to pay for government programs ranging from wars to Medicare (Kessler, 2011).

Obama's speech on July 25, 2011 is important because of the possible immediate consequences that would have occurred if President Obama was unable to raise the debt ceiling. Many experts and agencies argued that not raising the debt ceiling would possibly cripple the already weakened U.S. and world economies (Isidore, 2011). The serious nature of the debt ceiling debacle forced President Obama to intervene, and he became a primary negotiator with the Republicans over the debt ceiling situation. The timing of this speech was important because hours before giving the speech, negotiations had broken down with Republicans and it seemed as though the U.S. would default on its debts (Cohen & Silverleib, 2011).

My argument as why this speech should be included is twofold. First, it meets the requirement of deliberative rhetoric. Obama took a lead role in trying to pass legislation to raise the debt ceiling. In addition, President Obama scheduled the conference after the break down of

talks with the Republicans, and this might indicate that President Obama felt the need to address the nation to persuade the Republicans and the nation on the importance of increasing the debt ceiling. These reasons provide clear evidence of the deliberative nature of the speech given by President Obama following the breakdown of negotiations. Secondly, the debt ceiling situation was seen as a prominent national crisis because of the consequences that would occur immediately after failing to raise the ceiling. The Council of Economic Advisors Chairman Austan Goolsbee went so far as to call the debate in Congress over the debt ceiling “insane” and stated the following if the debt ceiling did not pass: “The impact on the economy would be catastrophic. I mean, that would be a worse financial economic crisis than anything we saw in 2008” (Jackson, 2011, p. 1). In addition to the dire economic consequences of the situation, the debt debate represented a difference in values and beliefs in how the government should be run. This value discussion potentially reflects the mixture of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric that occurs in the Jeremiad (Bercovitch, 1978). For these reasons it seemed logical to include the debt ceiling public address in this project.

A Proposal for Jobs Address to a Joint Session of the Congress September 8, 2011

After managing to raise the debt ceiling, President Obama began work on a new proposal to address the faltering U.S. economy. The Jobs Bill, as it came to be known, harkened back to the 787 billion dollar stimulus bill President Obama passed in 2009 during his first months as president (Condon, 2011). At the time the bill was introduced the U.S. economy had been faltering because of the downgrading of U.S. credit rating by international credit agencies (Goldfarb, 2011). The bill proposed by President Obama was an attempt to generate jobs and stimulate the U.S. economy in an attempt to prevent the gloomy economic predictions that were to occur over the course of the following months (Landler, 2011).

This speech is important as it represents a different kind of economic situation that Obama was forced to deal with throughout 2009-2011. The previous two speeches have unique focal points that required attention, specifically the lack of financial regulations that caused the credit freeze and the inevitable economic recession, or the imminent danger of credit default. In his jobs bill address, President Obama argued for a proactive approach to deal with the existing economic slump. This change from retroactive to proactive policy initiatives will provide a chance to see if, and how, President Obama changed his rhetorical strategies in different situations. This provides us with a look into how different choices were made in the selection of rhetorical strategies. Though the crisis that we identified as a requirement to be considered in this project might not fit as well with this speech text, it provides us with a chance to compare the different strategies used by Obama in different situations of economic crisis.

For this project I will be using an adaptation of Rosenfield's analog critical method of comparison to study the selected texts. To engage in an in-depth analysis of genre criticism a critic must examine multiple texts to show evidence of the use of a genre by a speaker. While an examination of all the presidential speeches concerning economic policies and situations would provide the most evidence supporting or disproving a use of genre by the President, time constraints make such an analysis an unreasonable undertaking at this time. Instead, I have chosen three texts that represent some of the more politically significant economic issues that arose during President Obama's first three years of office. The reasoning behind this is it is assumed that during significant political events the President might take more consideration in their rhetorical choices compared to radio address, or smaller event. Thus examining these larger events provides the best chance to examine the possibility of a genre existing in Obama's addresses on the economy, without being able to examine all of Obama's rhetoric on the

economy. In the examination of the aforementioned texts I will try to locate and describe the strategies Obama used and note elements of the Jeremiad where they exist in the text if they do. This is done to prevent prejudging the texts as containing the Jeremiad, and reserve labeling of the presence of the genre until a comparative discussion of the texts occurs in the final chapter.

Conclusion

Through this chapter I have provided the rationale for why the speeches chosen present us with an opportunity to study the Jeremiad in action during this economically turbulent time. In addition we have seen that the Jeremiad over the years has continued to appear through the political rhetoric of the presidency (Johannesen, 1986; Murphy, 1990). Finally, I explained what types of rhetoric the speech texts would need to possess to be considered part of the genre the American Jeremiad. In the following chapters I will examine and analyze the speech texts to see if Obama has continued the tradition of using the American Jeremiad to address the economic crisis that faced the American people.

CHAPTER III

OBAMA'S COOPER UNION ADDRESS

After the 2008 credit crisis sent the world economy to the brink of collapse, the American government was pressured by its people and the world community to take measures to prevent the financial markets from repeating their catastrophic mistakes. To illustrate why this issue was so important for Obama, I will provide a brief synopsis of the factors behind the 2008 credit crisis. I will then analyze the speech illustrate the different rhetorical move that were employed by Obama in his address.

There are, arguably, many reasons for the credit crisis in 2008 that led to the greatest economic downturn the world has known since the Great Depression. I will discuss two of the key reasons for the crisis. First, was the deregulation of derivatives and, second, was the use of Residential Mortgage Backed Securities also called (RMBS). Both served to set the stage for the financial credit freeze of 2008. So what are derivatives? To put it simply, derivatives are bets placed on the chance of a loan or security to default. In the financial world these bets help create insurance for investors so that if their investment goes poorly, they are covered and will not incur a large loss (Stout, 2011). In the early 2000's the regulations on these "bets" were greatly reduced, allowing for investors to take "bets" out on securities or loans that the investor did not even own. These deregulations vastly expanded the derivatives market and set up the chain of events that would lead to the credit crisis. This, though, was only half of the equation, the other half being RMBS.

RMBS are tradable commodities created by combining multiple residential mortgages into a single package and then selling the claims to those mortgages to the world market (Wilson, 2008). This allows banks to sell long term loans to investors to recoup their money spent

financing a mortgage. The power of a RMB is based on the strength of the housing market and the combined creditworthiness of those loans inside of the RMB. The problem with RMBS that lead to the crisis was twofold. First, when an RMB is created the loans are packaged together. Investors are unable to fully judge the risk of each individual loan that makes a RMB. RMB's are traded because of the constant stream of revenue from the payments of the loans. If the loans default in an RMB it becomes worthless since the cost of the RMB is paid for by the interest payments on the now defunct loans, and this is where derivatives come in. Many investors bought into derivatives on these RMB's, which meant that when the RMB's began to default, much like when a house burns down and its insured, someone had to pay (Stout, 2011). This spread the damage from the collapsing housing market to not only banks and RMB's holders, but across the entire financial market as many hedge funds and other institutions had placed these bets (BBC, 2009). When the collapse of the housing market occurred it set off a domino effect in these different markets, causing a defaulting of loans in the form of RMB's, leading to a massive devaluing of RMBS and, in turn, huge losses in the derivatives market which caused many banking firms to outright close or were saved by the government. This lapse in regulation became the rallying cry for new reforms to be passed by Congress on the financial industry.

One proposed answer to the call for regulation of the financial markets was the Obama backed Dodd-Frank act that made its way through Congress during the first half of 2010. Obama faced stark resistance in his efforts to bring reform to an industry that had sat relatively untouched since the repeal of the Glass-Steagall act by President Clinton and Republicans along with powerful financial industry lobbyists who stood in the way of reform.

During the month of April in 2010 the fate of Dodd-Frank was still up in the air, with many analysts predicting failure on the horizon for the Obama administration (Jefte, Khan, &

Karl, 2010). On April 22, 2010, Obama appeared at Cooper Union in New York to give an address to a diverse crowd of both average Americans and those Obama called “the Titans of Industry” (2010). In this chapter I will be exploring the different ways President Obama used elements of the American Jeremiad and how President Obama modified the Jeremiad to fit the circumstance surrounding the Dodd-Frank act.

Through my analysis of the speech text I have identified three strategies that Obama employed in this speech, some included elements of the Jeremiad. The first area deals with how Obama used a combination of the personae of a pastor and a mediator to craft a balance of authoritative and egalitarian rhetoric to address the diverse members of the audience for the speech. The second area, though connected to the first, looks at how Obama used the metaphor of “Wall Street and Main Street” to create a union between the audiences in attendance. Finally, I will discuss Obama’s use of urgency throughout the speech and its importance to the rhetorical situation.

Audience Adaptation and the Jeremiad

The audience of the Cooper Union address presented President Obama with a challenge to accomplishing his goal of gaining support for the passage of Dodd-Frank. Obama’s attendance consisted of not only average Americans, but politicians from both parties, and lobbyists for the financial sector. While Obama was seeking to unite the American people together in support of the idea to reform Wall Street, he faced the problem of convincing the leaders and lobbyists of the financial sector that Dodd-Frank would not threaten the livelihood of those in the industry. If Obama decided to ignore the concerns of the financial industry “Titans” (Obama, 2010) the lobbyists of the industry would continue to oppose Dodd-Frank and possibly prevent passage of the act. At the same time, if the President was not aggressive enough with the

financial industry he might be seen as pandering to the industry, which would alienate the audience calling for financial reform.

The Pastor Persona

Obama attempts to balance his address between these two audiences through the use of a Jeremiad persona of the authoritative pastor, along with the egalitarian mediator. First, consider how Obama's rhetoric provides multiple examples of the pastor persona using the American Jeremiad. From the start of the Cooper Union address, Obama address sets the tone and persona of a pastor in three ways indicative of the Jeremiad. First, Obama identifies values that he believes are at the foundation of America:

As I said on this stage two years ago, I believe in the power of the free market. I believe in a strong financial sector that helps people to raise capital and get loans and invest their savings. That's part of what has made America what it is. But a free market was never meant to be a free license to take whatever you can get, however you can get it. That's what happened too often in the years leading up to this crisis. (Obama, 2010)

This portion of the speech serves two purposes related to the Jeremiad and the persona of the pastor. It identifies a core value that the audience identifies with: the free market and its role in creating America. In the Jeremiad the speaker needs to define a value that the audience believes in, by doing so it allows for the speaker to use that value to provide evidence as to why a change is needed. Second, it connects the occurrence of the crisis to the movement away from the value of a free market in the financial sector. When a speaker identifies a crisis that has occurred with the lack of the core value identified by the speaker it creates a cause and effect argument as to why the crisis occurred. This is a classic example of the American Jeremiad. The rhetor identifies the audience's deviation from a traditional value that leads to the crisis now

plaguing the audience. In the traditional Jeremiad the deviation from a value might be characterized by a lack of devotion to God by the congregation as being the reason why some natural disaster had befallen the audience. Obama's rhetoric served a similar purpose. In this section we see Obama identify the core value of the free market, and then create the cause and effect argument. Drifting away from a free market led to the crisis. Conversely, returning to free market values resolves the crisis.

To build the connection with the value of the free market and the credit crisis caused by deviating from America's values, Obama also used the rhetorical tool of prophetic vision. In the traditional Jeremiad, pastors would routinely predict the advent of a crisis and when those crises would occur they would be used as examples of why the congregation needed to "return to God." Obama employs a similar rhetorical strategy by discussing warnings issued before the 2008 crisis:

It was that failure of responsibility that I spoke about when I came to New York more than two years ago -- before the worst of the crisis had unfolded. It was back in 2007. And I take no satisfaction in noting that my comments then have largely been borne out by the events that followed. But I repeat what I said then because it is essential that we learn the lessons from this crisis so we don't doom ourselves to repeat it. And make no mistake that is exactly what will happen if we allow this moment to pass -- and that's an outcome that is unacceptable to me and it's unacceptable to you, the American people. (Obama, 2010)

Obama used his past predictions as evidence to support his argument for the need to return to traditional American values through the adoption of the Dodd-Frank Act. Obama's rhetoric also authorizes his credibility in identifying the cause of the crisis, as a deviation from

the audience's values. This section served a second purpose. It created an argument for the need of timely action to address the issues raised by Obama. By invoking the specter of possible further crises in the future, the audience is compelled to take immediate action to amend the situation. Obama builds on this sense of need for immediate action by describing the threat of a recurrent crisis if reform is not passed:

Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but on Main Street we cannot be satisfied. Until the millions of our neighbors who are looking for work can find a job, and wages are growing at a meaningful pace, we may be able to claim a technical recovery -- but we will not have truly recovered. (Obama, 2010)

Obama used the rhetorical strategy of repetition with the word *until* to create a sense of urgency in the audience for a reformation of the financial sector. The use of *until* emphasizes the present and framed the present as a pivotal moment in ending the crisis that plagues the audience. The call for reform of the financial sector harkens back to the pastor persona that is characteristic of the Jeremiad. Part of the Jeremiad is calling for reformation and a return to the values of the audience, which would allow for a return to normalcy or in this case allow for recovery. These examples show Obama using multiple characteristics of the Jeremiad to create an authoritative tone and pastoral persona throughout the speech text. However, Obama does not maintain this persona or tone throughout the speech, also utilizing a mediator persona to resolve the crisis.

The Mediator Persona

As mentioned earlier Obama makes a concerted effort to identify and speak to different audiences throughout the Cooper Union address. For example, Obama used the metaphor of "Main Street and Wall Street" multiple times throughout his address strategically placed in the

beginning, middle, and end of the address. The identification and separation of these two audiences was a strategic choice by Obama reflected not only in the choice of venue of Cooper Union for his address but also reflected in his change of persona when addressing the different audiences. Early in Obama's address he created a symbolic connection with the location of his address to the halls of Wall Street:

It is wonderful to be back in Cooper Union, where generations of leaders and citizens have come to defend their ideas and contest their differences. It's also good to be back in Lower Manhattan, a few blocks from Wall Street. It really is good to be back, because Wall Street is the heart of our nation's financial sector. (Obama, 2010)

This identification of Cooper Union being squarely in the middle of the country's financial heart of Wall Street made Obama's speech seem as though he was not only addressing the nation as the whole but also the financial sector. Obama could have chosen to give this address at the White House or a myriad of other locations, but he deliberately chose to speak at Cooper Union. This choice of venue, I argue, is where Obama begins to create the mediator persona between himself, the financial sector, and the American people. By choosing Cooper Union, Obama attempted to portray himself as an envoy trying to find a middle ground between the American people's desire for reform and the financial sector concerns for their future. Obama clearly stated his intention for a joint effort from both audiences to support reform later in his address:

And for those of you in the financial sector I'm sure that some of these lobbyists work for you and they're doing what they are being paid to do. But I'm here today specifically when I speak to the titans of industry here because I want to urge you to join us, instead of fighting us in this effort. I'm here because I believe that these reforms are, in the end,

not only in the best interest of our country, but in the best interest of the financial sector. And I'm here to explain what reform will look like, and why it matters. (Obama, 2010)

Obama's tone and persona here are substantially different from the previous authoritative tone used to justify the reform of the financial sector. Originally Obama laid the blame for the crisis squarely on the shoulders of the financial sector. Instead of chastising the financial sector when he addressed them, he took a softer tone and to ask for their help. Obama figuratively offered an olive branch to the titans of the financial industry in order to address the problems of country. This egalitarian rhetoric is an example of Obama's goal of unifying the two audiences he was addressing as one group; by making the claim that reform is beneficial to both groups. For the Jeremiad, unity is a key element as it is the sense of unity towards the need to reform that moves the audience to embrace change. Through Obama's speech these appeals to unity occurred in an attempt to bring the financial sector together with the American public. If Obama is able to convince the financial sector of the need of regulation then passing Dodd-Frank becomes a real possibility.

Obama later returned to the mediator persona in an attempt to quell the fears of the financial sector:

Now, there's been a great deal of concern about these changes. So I want to reiterate: There is a legitimate role for these financial instruments in our economy. They can help allay risk and spur investment. And there are a lot of companies that use these instruments to that legitimate end -- they are managing exposure to fluctuating prices or currencies, fluctuating markets. (Obama, 2010)

The comments made here are placed between the sections of the address that use the pastor persona to minimize the perceived threat to the financial industry that Dodd-Frank presents. This was done by identifying that much of the financial sector plays a key role in the economy, and is a legitimate business. I argue that this example showed Obama's effort to demonstrate that he understands that need to balance regulation and the open market. Because of his emphasis on legitimate business, he is trying to cast the regulations of Dodd-Frank in a light that makes them seem as though they will not have an adverse impact on the financial sector.

One of the last rhetorical moves Obama made in the mediator persona was discussing the very nature of government and private financial industry interactions. This move further closed the gap between the two audiences:

And to those of you who are in the financial sector, let me say this, we will not always see eye to eye. We will not always agree.... You see, there has always been a tension between the desire to allow markets to function without interference and the absolute necessity of rules to prevent markets from falling out of kilter. But managing that tension, one that we've debated since the founding of this nation, is what has allowed our country to keep up with a changing world. For in taking up this debate, in figuring out how to apply well-worn principles with each new age, we ensure that we don't tip too far one way or the other -- that our democracy remains as dynamic and our economy remains as dynamic as it has in the past. So, yes, this debate can be contentious. It can be heated. But in the end it serves only to make our country stronger. It has allowed us to adapt and to thrive. (Obama, 2010)

The important connection Obama made in this section was that the debate on regulation and the implementation of regulation is distinctly part of American history and the key to our

past and future success. Identifying long existing tension between the government and the private sector reshaped the tone of the debate on regulations from a negative effect on the economy and the future of the nation into a positive effect. This connection to American successes and the values behind that success served as an example of Obama's use of the American Jeremiad. By appealing to the audience's values, and connecting them to the same values of the financial sector, Obama addressed both audiences' concerns through the American Jeremiad.

In this section we examined how Obama used the persona of a pastor and a mediator to unify the diverse audience in the Cooper Union address regarding financial reform. Obama deliberately separated the audiences and invoked elements of the Jeremiad to reinforce the need for change in the financial system. In addition, we saw that Obama attempted to bridge the gap between the audiences by using the American Jeremiad to link the values of the general population, and the "Titans" of the financial sector together. In the final section of this chapter I will examine how Obama used the metaphor of "Wall Street and Main Street" to further unify the audience.

Main Street and Wall Street

The Cooper Union speech presented President Obama with a difficult obstacle to overcome caused by the division of his audience. As discussed earlier, part of the Jeremiad's strength is unifying the speaker's audience through the use of epideictic appeals to enact a change that embraces the values of the audience. It is important though to delineate between the types of epideictic appeals. While Obama did use appeals based on the epideictic values of the American Dream and the Jeremiad, Obama also touched on values that are not normally considered part of the America Dream. For example Obama's choice of Cooper Union to give

the address has an epideictic element to it, but is not directly connected to the American Dream and is instead connected to the existing debate occurring between Washington and Wall Street.

For this section I will focus on Obama's efforts to reconnect the two audiences that Obama originally separated in the speech through the use of persona and tone. To reconnect the audiences' Obama employed the rhetorical strategy of the metaphor to connect the audience's values together. In particular Obama relies on the metaphors of Wall Street and Main Street.

Similar to how Obama started his address by separating the audience of the American people and the financial industry, Obama separated the relationship between Wall Street and Main Street, "But you're here and I'm here because we've got more work to do. Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but on Main Street we cannot be satisfied" (Obama, 2010).

Here Obama is indicating that Wall Street and Main Street were separate ideas, but still connected to each other. This separation though slowly gets smaller throughout the address. It should be asked though, why does the President deliberately separate his audience? One possible answer for why Obama identified the different audiences was that Obama was paying his respects to both parties in an attempt to fulfill the role of a mediator. From here the next portion of the address to use the Wall Street metaphor occurred when discussing how the Dodd-Frank Act deals with consumer protection. Here, Obama addressed the issue of blame for the economy and explained how both Wall Street and Main Street contributed:

Third, this plan would enact the strongest consumer financial protections ever. (Applause.) And that's absolutely necessary because this financial crisis wasn't just the result of decisions made in the executive suites on Wall Street; it was also the result of decisions made around kitchen tables across America, by folks who took on mortgages and credit cards and auto loans. (Obama, 2010)

Obama recognized and distributed the blame for some of the crisis that occurred. However he distributed equally when he compared Main Street's role with the "result of decisions made around kitchen tables." This further connected both the metaphors of Wall Street and Main Street together, both in sharing the blame for the crisis as well as sharing the need to enact reforms.

Obama's final use of the Wall Street and Main Street metaphor occurs in the final paragraph of the Cooper Union address. Before examining the use of the metaphor, we should consider the placement of the previous metaphors as well as the final usage. The first usage of the metaphor corresponds to where Obama shifted from the pastor persona to the mediator persona. The second usage occurs directly after Obama makes the argument that prosperity for the financial sector and for America are linked together. Obama, at the end of his address, redefines the meaning of the Wall Street and Main Street metaphors from that of a separated audience to a combined audience:

Because that is how we will ensure that our economy works for consumers, that it works for investors, and that it works for financial institutions -- in other words, that it works for all of us -- that's why we're working so hard to get this stuff passed. This is the central lesson not only of this crisis but of our history. It's what I said when I spoke here two years ago. Because ultimately, there is no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We will rise or we will fall together as one nation. (Applause.) And that is why I urge all of you to join me. I urge all of you to join me, to join those who are seeking to pass these commonsense reforms. And for those of you in the financial industry, I urge you to join me not only because it is in the interest of your industry, but also because it's in the interest of your country. (Obama, 2010)

Obama strategically placed this use of metaphor at the end of his speech to create a sense of unity in his audience. By slowly introducing the argument that Wall Street and Main Street are connected and the same, Obama might have been attempting to make the idea of reform more palatable to the financial industry. Metaphor, used here, also connected the success of the United States in the past with the potential for future success. Obama might have deliberately returned to the apocalyptic warning that he had issued in the past that proved to be true as a way to reinforce the urgency for financial reform. This use of prophetic rhetoric is another example of a Jeremiadic element in the President's push for financial reform.

Urgency and Financial Reform

Throughout Obama's address at Cooper Union, Obama used his rhetoric to create a sense of urgency for the need to pass Dodd-Frank. Most prominently it was seen in Obama's characterization of the road to recovery from the economic crisis on multiple occasions:

And make no mistake that is exactly what will happen if we allow this moment to pass...Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but on Main Street we cannot be satisfied...But I'm here today specifically when I speak to the titans of industry here because I want to urge you to join us. (Obama, 2010).

Throughout the speech Obama continually stressed the need for reform to come now. Urgency is an element usually seen in a Jeremiadic address as a policy speech needs urgency to advocate some change occur. However, a critic might ask, "if lack of financial regulation was so instrumental to the economic crisis, why does it seem necessary to include so many appeals to urgency?" One answer might be the President wanted to use the sense of urgency to encourage his audience to take action as soon as possible. While the hope to encourage audience action

seems simple enough, I would argue there is another reason why Obama used urgency as much as he did. One other possibility could be because of the up and coming midterm elections. Obama had a limited time to pass policy through Congress with midterm elections on the horizon; in addition, it was more than likely that the economy would be the primary issue for the midterm elections.

Obama might have seen this situation in two ways; first, that he had a limited amount of time to pass reform before the Democrats lost a large amount of seats in the House or the Senate. If the Democrats were to lose the midterms Obama would be unable to pass reform on the financial sector without facing an even harder fight against newly elected Republicans. Second, Obama might have thought that passing reform on the financial industry would be seen as a win for Democrats in Congress, since financial reform was an issue in the forefront of the American public's mind. Democratic candidates might be able to use the reform as evidence of accomplishment. It is possible neither of these elements played a role in the use of urgency, but it is important to note that there were specific elements of the rhetorical situation that might have given Obama reason to use appeals of urgency throughout the speech.

While political motive could explain Obama's use of urgency there is another possible explanation. Obama's use of urgency could be seen as an attempt to create confidence and certainly in the U.S. financial sector. It is important to remember that America was still in the depths of recession caused by the financial industry. The reforms were presented as path to recovery by amending the broken system that created the recession, in turn restoring confidence and certainty to the financial industry. In this way, Obama turns the regulations from being a constraint on growth for business leaders, to a positive policy that will aid the ailing economy. As discussed early in this project uncertainty plays a major role with decision making for

individuals and businesses alike. When an industry is uncertain of the impact that newly proposed regulations might have on their economic profitability they are more likely to try and quash the proposed changes. Obama's use of urgency might be a possible strategy to remove uncertainty of the financial sector.

Summary

The Cooper Union address provided us with an example of how a President can use the Jeremiadic elements in front of a divided and arguably hostile audience to try and unite an audience towards a common goal. Throughout the speech it was observed that Obama used the persona of both a pastor and a mediator to slowly bring together both audiences through the strategic placement of metaphor and appeals to American values, a classic example of the Jeremiad. Obama also used the Jeremiad characteristic of prophetic vision to create a sense of urgency in the audience to take action and support the financial reforms. Finally, I examined Obama's use of urgency and possible rationale behind its use. Now that I have explained how Obama used different aspects of the Jeremiad in his address to the American people and the financial sector. One question remains: If Obama had been speaking to an audience not composed of financial industry "titans" would the use of the Jeremiad have changed? As this project continues to exam the speech texts in the coming chapters it would interesting to examine how the different audiences for the addresses changes how Obama employed the Jeremiad.

CHAPTER IV

OBAMA'S DEBT CEILING CRISIS ADDRESS

During the summer of 2011 President Obama was confronted with a debate that economists labeled as being “insane” and dangerous for even occurring (Jackson, 2011). Seemingly out of nowhere the issue of raising the debt ceiling, an issue had for years been nothing but a formality and routinely unimportant, became a thorn in the President's side that threatened the very livelihood of not just the U.S. but the world as well. Many experts argued that if the debt ceiling was not raised it could cripple the U.S. economic recovery and plunge the world into another recession (Isidore, 2011).

Why the debt ceiling became such an important issue for Obama comes down to an issue of party politics and the potential for an economic meltdown. Republicans wanted a debt ceiling deal consisting of spending cuts only, without revenue increases such as taxes being included. Part of the reason Republicans were unwilling to compromise was because many of the freshmen Republican representatives had campaigned on a platform of no new taxes. In addition, some representatives did not believe in the economic doomsday scenarios that many experts were claiming would occur if the ceiling was not raised (Fahrenthold, 2011). This created a crisis for Republican leadership. If a deal was authored with increased revenue provisions it risked splintering the Republican representatives. Such a possibility forced the leadership of the Republican Party to take a hard line stance on excluding new taxes in the deal.

Democrats had a similar issue with the debt ceiling. Most Democrats were willing to cut spending, but were unwilling to accept a deal that didn't include at least some increase to revenue. At the same time members of the Democratic party threatened to oppose raising the ceiling without significant cuts in spending across the board without revenue increases

(Wallsten, 2011). The threat of defection by some Democrats put the Democratic leadership and the White House in a defensive position. Without compromise there would be no possibility of the ceiling being raised in time to prevent default.

As discussed earlier, not passing the debt ceiling risked economic collapse for the United States and the world. Experts argued that without the raising the debt ceiling, the United States would be unable to pay back its creditors. Debt default risked damaging not only the U.S. credit rating but confidence in the global market as well (Isidore, 2011). At the time of the debt ceiling debate Europe was in the midst of its own crisis concerning Greece. Economists predicted that a U.S. default on loans could be the tripping point that sent the world economy over the edge and into a double dip recession that would dwarf the 2008 credit crisis. Since the stakes of the debt ceiling debate were so high, the President stepped into the debate after negotiations with the Republicans and Democrats stalled (Kuhnenn, 2011).

Throughout the month of July the President met with Republican leaders including House speaker, John Boehner. During this process, the national and world media constantly watched and reported on the debate to the American public. On July, 25th it was reported that Republican leadership had walked away from the negotiation table after President Obama refused to accept a Republican proposal on the debt ceiling. Hours after the breakdown Obama held a national address in the east room of the White house concerning the debt ceiling. Obama's address aimed to generate pressure against the Republicans to force a deal to solve the debt crisis.

In this chapter I will examine the rhetorical techniques President Obama employed to address the nation on the issue of the debt ceiling crisis. I argue that Obama uses three distinct rhetorical tools to persuade the audience to support his appeal for compromise on the debt ceiling deal with the Republican leadership. First, Obama differentiated between two distinct tones; he

was egalitarian in nature discussing the need for compromise yet also balanced this with authoritative rhetoric that shamed the opposition for not being willing to compromise on the issues at hand. Next, Obama reinforced these tones by using historical evidence from the Republican Party itself showing how current state of negotiations with the Democrats are not what former leaders such as Reagan or Eisenhower would condone. In addition, I argue that Obama strategically avoided the word “compromise” until the final four paragraphs of the speech. Throughout the speech Obama’s language was synonymous with the definition of the word “compromise” but he never completed the connection. In the final portion of the speech he introduced the word and repeated it six times over the course of three paragraphs. He then proceeded to connect the concept of compromise to American values and the American people, arguing it was embedded in our national history. Lastly, I discuss why the Jeremiad was not overtly present in this speech.

Authoritative and Compromising tones

The situation that President Obama faced concerning the debt ceiling was a dire one as has been discussed. Negotiations had broken down and it was up to President Obama to find a way to bridge the divide between the Republicans and Democrats. The President’s address was not only an appeal to Republicans to return to the bargaining table but was an attempt to unify the public against the Republican holdouts. This represented an interesting challenge for the President. If the President was seen as being too hostile towards Republicans, the conservative portion of the population would not support Obama’s attempts to broker a deal. On the opposite side, pandering to the right would alienate the Democratic Party. To try and balance these concerns Obama adopted two distinct tones that he intertwined together in an attempt to appease both audiences and garner support for renewed negotiations concerning the debt ceiling. Obama

spoke authoritatively throughout the speech but continually tempered his rhetoric with egalitarian tone; blame was shared between the groups and when blame was specifically assigned it was not aimed at the entire Republican Party, but to specific sections of the party.

The dividing of the Republican Party into multiple sections was a key strategic choice by Obama. If Obama had criticized the entirety of the Republican Party it would divide his audience along party lines. Obama's goal was to unite Democrats and Republicans behind his debt ceiling proposal; dividing his audience would not serve this goal. By acknowledging that many Republicans were working to help end the crisis, he attempted to portray the crisis not as an issue of party politics, but as an issue of fringe representatives blocking an honest discussion of the issue. Criticizing select elements of the Republican Party served to deflect criticism that Obama was attacking the Republican Party and reframed the problem as Obama trying to prevent rogue elements of the Republican Party from damaging the country.

Even at the start of the speech the crisis was cast as being the fault of both parties. "Because neither party is blameless for the decisions that led to this problem, both parties have a responsibility to solve it. And over the last several months, that's what we've been trying to do" (Obama, 2011). Not only does this quotation direct total blame away from either party, it supported Obama's goal of encouraging the parties to work together. If Obama had not acknowledged the Republicans' efforts at negotiation so far he risked alienating the Republicans further. As seen in this passage just two paragraphs from the previous quotation: This approach is also bipartisan. While many in my own party aren't happy with the painful cuts it makes, enough will be willing to accept them if the burden is fairly shared. While Republicans might like to see deeper cuts and no revenue at all, there are many in the Senate who have said, "Yes, I'm willing to put politics aside and consider

this approach because I care about solving the problem.” And to his credit, this is the kind of approach the Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, was working on with me over the last several weeks. (Obama, 2011)

If Obama ignored the ongoing efforts by Speaker Boehner to solve the crisis he risked offending the Republican base that he hoped to tap into to solve the gridlock on the debt ceiling. Obama was trying to apply pressure to the Republicans through reaching out to the Republican base: if he was seen as not genuine in his attempt to find a deal, the strategy would not increase pressure on the Republicans and it would, in fact, decrease pressure. Ignoring the Republican efforts at negotiation would call into question Obama’s authenticity on the issue.

Obama was egalitarian in how he characterized the blame and lack of compromise on the debt ceiling. For example, Obama assigned blame to the Republicans for the current stalling of talks over the debt ceiling. The cause of the problem, though, was not the GOP overall. Instead, Obama chose to identify House Republicans as preventing progress. In Obama’s statement he continued to avoid labeling the majority of the Republican representatives as the cause of the crisis. “Unfortunately, for the past several weeks, Republican House members have essentially said that the only way they’ll vote to prevent America’s first-ever default is if the rest of us agree to their deep, spending cuts-only approach” (Obama, 2011). This quotation shows how careful Obama was in laying blame for the situation, to prevent as much backlash as possible from the Republican Party supporters concerning his address. Obama was trying to convince the Republican leadership that the stalling caused by the Tea party representatives would cause the

Republican base to backlash against the party. Obama could only prevent backlash if he was perceived as not attacking the party's ideas, but its more radical members.

We can see this passive egalitarian tone mixed with authoritative rhetoric again further in the speech when the Obama discusses the possible effects of not passing the debt ceiling:

But there's an even greater danger to this approach. Based on what we've seen these past few weeks, we know what to expect six months from now. The House of Representatives will once again refuse to prevent default unless the rest of us accept their cuts-only approach. Again, they will refuse to ask the wealthiest Americans to give up their tax cuts or deductions. Again, they will demand harsh cuts to programs like Medicare. And once again, the economy will be held captive unless they get their way. This is no way to run the greatest country on Earth. It's a dangerous game that we've never played before, and we can't afford to play it now. Not when the jobs and livelihoods of so many families are at stake. We can't allow the American people to become collateral damage to Washington's political warfare. (Obama, 2011)

Here, Obama took an authoritative tone concerning the need for a deal on the debt ceiling. He described what might happen if a deal is not made. Describing these consequences helped to illustrate the significant impact default will have on America. Specifically, he indicated the damage to American families if the legislation was not passed and characterized the damage as "Un-American." This rhetoric was aimed to infuriate the public into action. However, at the same time the object that the American people were supposed to rally against was vaguely defined. No longer was it House Republicans that are the cause, but it is not the House of Representatives, in general, either to blame.

Obama's attempt to apply pressure to the House of Representatives was also seen in his use of the rhetorical strategy of repetition. Throughout this passage Obama repeated the word "again" when referring to the constant obstructions being faced by the debt compromised. Obama was trying to convey to the public that this was not the first time Congress had engaged in this type of obstructionism, and showing this pattern to the American people illustrated the culpability of the House representatives and the need for Americans to stand up against them.

This move, though, seemed contradictory to how Obama spoke earlier when he characterized the problem as a small portion of the Republican Party. There are two arguments that might explain why Obama does this. First, as discussed earlier Obama blamed both parties for the issue of the crisis, as Democrats were also threatening to not vote on Obama's debt ceiling deal. By addressing those against the current debt ceiling deals as the entirety of the House of Representatives he casts blame on both sides. Secondly, Obama's method could be interpreted as trying to persuade the Republican Party moderates to convince the "Tea party" representatives to support the current deals, or face being blamed for the crisis along with the "Tea party" representatives. This further supports my argument that Obama purposely downplays the Republican Party members blocking the debt deal, while at the same time trying to organize the public against them.

It's important to note this passage served another purpose. Obama created a cause and effect argument concerning delaying the debt ceiling debate, claiming delaying the debate for months down the road would possibly cause economic catastrophe. There are two reasons why I think Obama did this. The first reason was to create a sense of urgency in the audience to resolve this issue now; if the audience was convinced to put off the debt ceiling debate Obama will be unable to bring Republicans back to the table. The second reason deals with the context

of when the new debt ceiling debate would occur. At the time the address on the debt ceiling was given, the presidential campaign was roughly six months away. If Obama could not gain an agreement on the debt ceiling at the time of the address, the problem would extend, potentially, into the presidential campaign cycle. Such a development would not benefit Obama since it would constitute yet another campaign issue to address, possibly one that would be attributed to presidential weakness in leadership. Therefore, it was in Obama's best interest to resolve this crisis so that instead of facing a new debt ceiling debate during the middle of the election cycle, to push the next set of debt ceiling talks past the date of the next election.

Now that we have seen how Obama carefully tried to side step naming those responsible for the debt ceiling debate let's examine how Obama used historical evidence to try and indirectly undermine the Republican position.

Historical Examples

Since Obama had to be cautious of offending Republicans in both the House as well as the Republican base he chose to use historical evidence as a primary method of supporting his arguments. I argue Obama choose this route for two reasons. First, historical evidence such as quotations from former Republican leaders such as Ronald Reagan and statistics that span multiple Republican administrations made it difficult for the House Republicans to argue against Obama without seeming disconnected from the American public and their own party. The second reason I believe Obama chose these specific pieces of evidence is because they resonated with the Republican base. Reagan was still seen as a hero of the Republican Party by its members. If Obama could convince American Republicans that the officials they elected were not following Reagan's own directions it would likely cause them to take action. We can see Obama begin to align himself with of some the Republican party's great leaders:

The first approach says; let's live within our means by making serious, historic cuts in government spending. Let's cut domestic spending to the lowest level it's been since Dwight Eisenhower was President. Let's cut defense spending at the Pentagon by hundreds of billions of dollars. (Obama, 2011)

Here, Obama compared his goals for passing his deal on the debt ceiling with the policies enacted by Eisenhower, a Republican President. He did this overtly by identifying Eisenhower's moves to cut domestic spending, as well as covertly in the sense that Eisenhower also cut defense spending. By association, Obama has strengthened his position that he better represented the Republican Party's history.

Obama's attempt to make the House Republicans seem disconnected from the Republican base was shown further when he discussed the need for a balanced approach to the debt ceiling debate:

The first time a deal was passed, a predecessor of mine made the case for a balanced approach by saying this "Would you rather reduce deficits and interest rates by raising revenue from those who are not now paying their fair share, or would you rather accept larger budget deficits, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment? And I think I know your answer." Those words were spoken by Ronald Reagan. But today, many Republicans in the House refuse to consider this kind of balanced approach — an approach that was pursued not only by President Reagan, but by the first President Bush, by President Clinton, by myself, and by many Democrats and Republicans in the United States Senate. So we're left with a stalemate. (Obama, 2011)

Obama turns the iconic figure of the Republican Party, Ronald Reagan, against the House Republicans. Casting doubt on whether Republicans in the House truly

represent the Republican base, Obama also reinforced his claim to be the one who is truly able to identify with the Republicans. On a separate note, this passage also provides further evidence of Obama's egalitarian tone towards the Republicans. Once more, it's not all "House Republicans" but only some, further supporting my claim that Obama's rhetoric shows his effort to tone down his direct attacks on the Republican Party.

Obama also used historical evidence to downplay the cry made by Republicans to stand firm and not pass the debt ceiling:

Understand — raising the debt ceiling does not allow Congress to spend more money. It simply gives our country the ability to pay the bills that Congress has already racked up. In the past, raising the debt ceiling was routine. Since the 1950s, Congress has always passed it, and every President has signed it. President Reagan did it 18 times. George W. Bush did it seven times. And we have to do it by next Tuesday, August 2nd, or else we won't be able to pay all of our bills. (Obama, 2011)

Here, Obama tried to not only undercut the Republican claims that passing the debt ceiling increases spending, but also make the Republicans in power look like they have based the entire debate on a practice that, historically, is not an issue. This served to illustrate Obama's point that those serving in Congress for the Republican base are not following ideas of who elected them. By showing that multiple Republican Presidents passed the debt ceiling with no debate, he was trying to force the Republican leadership or the Tea Party representatives to be held accountable for the actions being taken. We have seen how Obama used historical evidence to create a wedge between the Republican leadership and the Republican base in an attempt to pressure the House Republicans to return to negotiations. Next we will examine how Obama

used the term “compromise” to extend his claim that Republicans are disconnected from history, and that disconnection from history reflected a disconnection with the American dream.

Compromise

As seen earlier, Obama’s rhetoric during the previous portions of his speech stressed the need for the two parties to work together on the issue of the debt ceiling, but never did he say the word “compromise.” I argue that Obama did this strategically, as the President later discussed at this time “compromise” was seen as a bad word. To address this issue Obama used historical evidence cited previously to erode the arguments made by the Republican leadership for why compromising was not an option. When Obama finally used the term near the end of his address he used it repeatedly in connection with two key arguments on which Obama ended his speech. The first being that “compromise” was distinctly American and was part of what has made America successful and, secondly, that the American public had a role to play through its influence to solve the situation with the debt ceiling. We can see these arguments begin to develop in the following passage:

They’re fed up with a town where compromise has become a dirty word. They work all day long, many of them scraping by, just to put food on the table. And when these Americans come home at night, bone-tired, and turn on the news, all they see is the same partisan three-ring circus here in Washington. They see leaders who can’t seem to come together and do what it takes to make life just a little bit better for ordinary Americans. They’re offended by that. And they should be. The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn’t vote for a dysfunctional government. So I’m asking you all to make your voice heard. If you want a balanced

approach to reducing the deficit, let your member of Congress know. If you believe we can solve this problem through compromise, send that message. (Obama, 2011)

Obama attempted to cast the frustration felt by the American people as a result of the lack of compromise currently in American politics. While not overt, he attempted to connect the daily grind of the average citizen a grind that forces citizens to compromise between leisure and work in the political process. Finally, he provided an outlet for that frustration through informing their legislator of their opinions on the crisis.

I have shown that Obama tried to make a connection between daily American life and compromise. To reinforce this connection again, Obama drew upon American history to prove why compromise was distinctly American:

America, after all, has always been a grand experiment in compromise. As a democracy made up of every race and religion, where every belief and point of view is welcomed, we have put to the test time and again the proposition at the heart of our founding: that out of many, we are one. We've engaged in fierce and passionate debates about the issues of the day, but from slavery to war, from civil liberties to questions of economic justice, we have tried to live by the words that Jefferson once wrote: "Every man cannot have his way in all things -- without this mutual disposition, we are disjointed individuals, but not a society. (Obama, 2011)

Obama returned to the Founding Fathers to illustrate how compromise is at the heart of America. By connecting the debt ceiling debate to the word *compromise* Obama was trying to create a direct connection to American values and the American dream. He explained this relationship in the final two paragraphs of his address:

History is scattered with the stories of those who held fast to rigid ideologies and refused to listen to those who disagreed. But those are not the Americans we remember. We remember the Americans who put country above self, and set personal grievances aside for the greater good. We remember the Americans who held this country together during its most difficult hours; who put aside pride and party to form a more perfect union. That's who we remember. That's who we need to be right now. The entire world is watching. So let's seize this moment to show why the United States of America is still the greatest nation on Earth -- not just because we can still keep our word and meet our obligations, but because we can still come together as one nation. (Obama, 2011)

Two key arguments come into focus here. First, Obama connected the past greatness of America with compromise even though he did not overtly say compromise. This is evident by his rhetoric about setting grievances aside and how Americans help each other in times of need. This use of rhetoric is the same type that was used in earlier sections of the speech to describe the need for negotiation with the debt ceiling. Now, though, Obama has framed that rhetoric previously to also mean compromise. Secondly, Obama reinforced both a sense of urgency for action that had been building throughout the address, and also created hope for a brighter future. Next, I will discuss the possible reasons why this address by Obama lacks the characteristics of the Jeremiad.

The Absence of the Jeremiad

After examining the debt ceiling address it became clear to me that multiple elements of the Jeremiad were not present, or played a minor role in the speech itself. The speech was not organized similar to the four stages of a traditional Jeremiad address. There was also a definitive lack of epideictic appeals or discussions of values throughout the speech save during the

conclusion where Obama invoked compromise as a value. Even when Obama did use compromise as a value it was not used in reference to a lack of compromise in his entire audience. His intentions, as discussed earlier were to move the public against House Republicans who were not compromising. The goal of the speech was not to move his audience to return to compromise, which is a theme reminiscent of the Jeremiad; it was to move his audience against an agent opposing the value of compromise. In the case of the debt ceiling debate, the sheer concern of default and economic collapse seems to overshadow and replace any epideictic appeals. The debt ceiling speech provides contrast with Obama's Cooper Union address which was filled with epideictic rhetoric. In the case of the Cooper Union address financial reform was a pressing issue, but did not have an impending threat like the debt ceiling address.

Why didn't Obama rely on the American Jeremiad? Obama's objective was not to push a specific debt ceiling deal; it was to force the Republican leadership to return to the negotiation table. A Jeremiad is used to bring a specific policy reform in most cases; here Obama isn't looking to push a policy reform but instead to bring parties back to the table to create a policy reform.

In addition, Obama's primary audience is not the actual representatives unwilling to make a deal, but those voters that elected the officials in Congress. Since the American public is not causing the dysfunction regarding the debt ceiling negotiations the Jeremiad would be ineffective and inappropriate. The reason for why Obama would not choose to use the Jeremiad when focusing on the American audience in this situation is because the Jeremiad requires the audience to have violated some value. Since the American people were not the ones violating the value of "compromise" as Obama is arguing, the Jeremiad would not apply. I would argue

Obama chose to appeal to the American people, instead of focusing on the Republicans that decided to stop negotiating. Obama believed that pressure from the Republican base to support a compromise would force the Republicans to return to talks of compromise. Therefore, Obama chose not to use the Jeremiad to convince Republicans to return to the talking table.

Summary

In conclusion, I discussed how Obama carefully crafted his tone and used historical evidence to try and bring the American public together to call for a compromise on the debt ceiling crisis. Obama used a careful combination of an egalitarian tone and specific language directed to separate the Republican Party instead of addressing it as a single group. Using this tone in conjunction with historical evidence Obama made the case to the American people that elements of the Republican Party were betraying the ideas and values that they claimed to represent. Finally Obama strategically used the value of “compromise” to further expound upon the disconnect Republican Party representatives had with the Americans that put them into office. So while the Jeremiad was not present in this address, we found that the lack of the Jeremiad form was likely because the goal of the speech was substantially different from the goal of a traditional Jeremiad address.

CHAPTER V

OBAMA'S JOINT CONGRESSIONAL ADDRESS ON THE "JOBS" ACT

After the debt ceiling debate and the lowering of the United States credit rating from AAA to AA by Standards and Poor, President Obama was faced with a stark reality (Brandimarte & Bases, 2011). Republicans used the credit rating as an opportunity to attack Obama's leadership of the country claiming the latest downgrade as the cause of the country's economic woes and blaming Obama for the nation's plight (Brandimarte & Bases, 2011). In addition to Republican attacks, Obama was facing substantial criticism from his own party base, claiming that he and other Democratic leaders had failed to stand up to Republicans (Bard, 2011). While weathering harsh criticism from both sides of the political spectrum, Obama was suffering from the lowest approval ratings of his Presidency and a lagging economy prevented from recovering any further by the lowering of the credit rating. To resolve these problems, Obama looked to go on the "offensive" (Landler, 2011). Obama's offensive came in the form of the American Jobs Act of 2011; it was structured similarly to the 2009 Stimulus package and was aimed to help encourage growth to relieve the ailing U.S. economy (Landler, 2011). On September 8, 2011 President Obama addressed a joint session of Congress in a nationally televised event to unveil the Jobs Act to the nation urging Congress to pass his proposal.

The political context of this speech was important to note, as it likely influenced Obama's choices in crafting his address. Democrats and Republicans both were unhappy with the President at this time. Democrats were disappointed with Obama for what was seen as caving into the Republicans on key issues such as the debt ceiling; Republicans continued to issue demands to the President to cut spending further. This put Obama in a tight spot, rhetorically. To

pass any new proposal Obama would have to work to appeal to Republicans while trying not to further alienate his party who already felt abandoned by the credit crisis.

In addition, this speech is different from other speeches examined in this study as it did not address a specific crisis. The debt ceiling debate and financial reform were two crises that were front and center for the American public. Financial reform was needed in the wake of the 2008 credit crisis and the debt ceiling debate held the specter of a potential economic meltdown rivaling 2008. The Jobs bill addressed the general issue of the economy but was a measure crafted distinctly by the Obama administration. Both the credit crisis and Dodd-Frank were issues externally created from the administration, the Jobs bill was uniquely created by Obama. In this chapter I will argue three key points. First, Obama used the theme of the American dream, and an appeal to responsibility to compel his audiences to pass the Jobs bill. Second, Obama's use of the rhetorical tool of repetition and the use of statistical evidence show his attempts to create a sense of significance for the Jobs bill. Finally, I will examine how Obama's theme of bipartisanship unified the audience while remaining sensitive to the political context at the time after the debt ceiling crisis.

The American Dream and Responsibility.

I have found that the themes of the American Dream and responsibility appeared throughout the speech text. Right at the start of Obama's address in the third paragraph of Obama's address we see the values of the American Dream begin to take form:

These men and women grew up with faith in an America where hard work and responsibility paid off. They believed in a country where everyone gets a fair shake and does their fair share -- where if you stepped up, did your job, and were loyal to your company, that loyalty would be rewarded with a decent salary and good benefits; maybe

a raise once in a while. If you did the right thing, you could make it. Anybody could make it in America. (Obama, 2011)

Obama's reference to "faith" in hard work referred to the value present in American society that a person who works hard and is diligent is able to make a better life for themselves. The term "faith" served as a symbolic representation of the value of hard work; if you work hard society will reward you. This premise has been something central to the American dream of moving up. Thus, Obama's use of faith is not spiritual but based in the cultural values of Americans.

The reference to a "compact" or "contract" with a higher power is not with God, but with society. His reference to Washington grounded the contract in the physical world, in a relationship with government and society:

For decades now, Americans have watched that compact erode. They have seen the decks too often stacked against them. And they know that Washington has not always put their interests first. The people of this country work hard to meet their responsibilities. The question tonight is whether we'll meet ours. The question is whether, in the face of an ongoing national crisis, we can stop the political circus and actually do something to help the economy. The question is -- the question is whether we can restore some of the fairness and security that has defined this nation since our beginning. (Obama, 2011)

Here Obama connected the existing concept of the contract with the crisis unfolding in the economy, and combined that crisis with the issue of the "political circus." The political circus reference is especially important for when we later discuss Obama's extensive use of language and historical examples supporting bipartisan cooperation. By connecting the erosion

of the American dream compact with both the economy and the surrounding political environment it creates the inference that reform is not just passing the Jobs Act, but also the need for bipartisanship. This demonstrated how Obama began to create a separation between the American people, Congress, and the Obama administration. More on the specific language of unity President Obama uses will be discussed later in the chapter.

From here, we see Obama begin to create a sense of urgency using the theme present in the American Dream, of America being the greatest country in the world. President Obama does this by presenting multiple economic issues occurring in the country and linking those issues to the impending economic crisis and then to the relief of the Jobs Act:

Building a world-class transportation system is part of what made us an economic superpower. And now we're going to sit back and watch China build newer airports and faster railroads? At a time when millions of unemployed construction workers could build them right here in America? (Obama, 2011)

We can see Obama make three key arguments through cause and effect reasoning to support his push to pass the Jobs bill. First, he established that part of the greatness of America came from our infrastructure, creating a connection between infrastructure and the future of America. Then he drew on America's perception of China to create a sense of crisis. In the past decades, China has been seen as a rising threat to the American economy by citizens (Nathan & Scobell, 2012). The final sentence alluded to Obama's Job proposal. The use of the word "unemployed" was meant to associate the situation being referred to with the Jobs bill, the title of Jobs bill alone does this but that appeal is reinforced by Obama's claims concerning what the bill does to address the economic situation in the country. This type of language use sought to further connect the audience to the consequences of the economic crisis. Obama's use of foreign

economic threats and the issues of unemployment were brought up during the address in reference to education as well:

Pass this jobs bill, and thousands of teachers in every state will go back to work. These are the men and women charged with preparing our children for a world where the competition has never been tougher. But while they're adding teachers in places like South Korea, we're playing them off in droves. It's unfair to our kids. It undermines their future and ours. And it has to stop. Pass this bill, and put our teachers back in the classroom where they belong. (Obama, 2011)

In this passage we can see Obama's use of repetition in support of the Jobs Act, which will be discussed later. More important though was his connection again with the increasing foreign competition in the economy. From here Obama needed only to make the argument that Jobs will be increased overall and teachers will be sent back to work for him to solve the crisis America is suffering from. Again, this shows Obama's attempts to connect to the audience of American citizens; those most affected by education are average American citizens.

At the conclusion of Obama's address to the nation he used the American dream to inspire his audience to take action and participate:

Regardless of the arguments we've had in the past, regardless of the arguments we will have in the future, this plan is the right thing to do right now. You should pass it....Remind us that if we act as one nation and one people, we have it within our power to meet this challenge. President Kennedy once said, "Our problems are man-made therefore they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants." These are difficult years for our country. But we are Americans. We are tougher than the times we live in, and we are bigger than our politics have been. So let's meet the moment. Let's

get to work, and let's show the world once again why the United States of America remains the greatest nation on Earth. (Obama, 2011)

Here, Obama used former President Kennedy to tap into the symbolism of the “greatest country on earth.” Kennedy inspired America to go towards the moon and his tragic death made him an iconic figure of American culture. In addition, Obama used this section to create a sense of urgency and agency in the audience. The audience was cast as sharing part of the responsibility of passing the bill by influencing their elected officials. Obama was attempting to motivate the American public to call their congress person, to support the Jobs bill, and make hard work a center piece to American culture. Using the theme of the American dream, and particularly the value of hard work we have seen how Obama attempted to move his audience to action through the use of these shared values. Not only this, Obama used the personal connection that many in his audience feel with the economic downturn, through this connection Obama spurs American citizens to take action to help themselves and those around them that have suffered using an appeal to morals. Now, let's examine Obama's extensive use of repetition and statistical evidence throughout the address.

Repetition and Statistical Evidence

When a President addresses the nation they make strategic choices regarding rhetorical strategies ranging from the types of evidence to be used in the speech to the rhetorical devices that are used to describe their policies. In Obama's address to the nation concerning the Jobs bill one rhetorical device that appears multiple times is the use of repetition. Frequently Obama used the phrase “pass this bill” or “pass this jobs bill.” At one point, five paragraphs of the text in a chronological order start with one of these phrases and three of the paragraphs contain the same phrase a second time. Why does Obama employ this rhetorical tool? According to Claiborn

(2008) repetition and continual exposure of an idea or concept can strengthen the audience's relation to the discussed topic. Obama's use of repetition might have been an effort to associate the economic issues being faced by Americans with the need for the Job's bill. Evidence for this conclusion can be found by considering where Obama used repetition. The use of repetition was evident during the portions of the speech that directly mentioned the Jobs bill or economic crisis that would be solved by the Jobs bill. I argue Obama's use of repetition is used to continually remind the audience, that when they think of economic crisis and how to solve it, to think of passing the Jobs bill. Another reason why Obama might have used this strategy relates to the themes developed throughout the speech. Obama is trying to make the case for his audience to take action, to work hard, to pass the Jobs bill. His use of repetition drew the audience to key arguments concerning the need for hard work. This line of thought is supported by the fact we see the use of repetition disappear later during his address when not talking about the bill's direct impacts. So possibly the use of repetition is specific to addressing the crisis of the economy and that is why we see a lack of that strategy when Obama discussed bipartisanship. Now that we have examined Obama's use of repetition let's look at his extensive use of statistical evidence.

Campbell and Huxman (2009) explain that one limitation statistics have in a rhetorical address is that they are disconnected from the audience. Why then might Obama employ statistical evidence predominantly throughout his speech, when his choice of structure and rhetorical appeals were aimed at tapping into the values of the audience to form a close connection? Campbell and Huxman explain that statistics are powerful tools for establishing significance of an argument, scope of instances, and precision in measurement. My argument is that because of the context of the address, Obama employed statistical evidence to help show significance in the need to pass the Jobs bill. At the time Obama was facing not only opposition

from the Republicans, but also backlash from his own party for the handling of the debt crisis. Creating a sense of significance would serve Obama by forcing Republicans and Democrats to act; in addition it served to emphasize Obama's arguments concerning the need to pass the Jobs bill in the eyes of the American people. In addition, Obama needed to show significance since the bill itself was not a new approach to the economic crisis. As discussed previously, the plan resembled the stimulus passed in the early days of 2009. Obama needed to show why it was significant for this bill to pass and had to overcome the hurdle of the past stimulus package which did not turn the economy around.

Also, unlike the debt ceiling debate there was no impending default or massive economic down turn occurring when the bill was introduced. While there was a definitive slump in the economy, this slump had persisted over multiple years; although the economy was in distress, it was not at the end of its rope. This can be seen by Obama's use of foreign competition as being a threat to U.S. dominance that was discussed earlier. Foreign competition is not a new threat to the U.S. economy; it was something that has been present for years. Obama's own phrasing was about the future economy and its survival, not the here and now. The use of statistics helps create a sense of significance for the Jobs bill in an effort to create the need for immediate action. Now that we have examined Obama's use of repetition and statistics in his address let us examine the final theme that runs throughout his speech, the theme of unity.

Unity and the Jobs Bill

As discussed earlier, Obama was facing opposition from all sides of the political spectrum. To pass the Jobs bill he would have to bridge that gap created by partisan politics. In response to this politically charged climate Obama went beyond the basic values of the American

Dream by extensively displaying the bill's bipartisan elements. The introduction of the Jobs bill is steeped in bipartisan rhetoric:

I am sending this Congress a plan that you should pass right away. It's called the American Jobs Act. There should be nothing controversial about this piece of legislation. Everything in here is the kind of proposal that's been supported by both Democrats and Republicans -- including many who sit here tonight. And everything in this bill will be paid for. Everything. (Obama, 2011)

Obama not only stated that it is bipartisan in nature, and claimed it was not controversial, but also appeals to Republicans by highlighting the claim that it will require no unpaid spending. I argue this shows an attempt to appeal to Republican members of Congress by acknowledging the value of fiscal discipline many of the Republicans claim to represent. Many of the newly elected Republicans had run on platforms of fiscal responsibility in response to the tea party movement. By addressing the concern relating to spending, Obama sought to remove the option for Republicans to claim that the bill was spending money the government does not have. Obama's strategy forced Republicans to engage the bill's content which Obama has positioned to be in line with Republican goals through the use of historical examples of Republican leaders. Rhetorically, this puts Republicans in a tough position. If they wish to justify opposition to the Jobs bill, Obama's use of history would make Republicans look disconnected from party values.

This type of bipartisan rhetoric continued throughout the speech. At one point Obama even claims that the act helps big business:

It's not just Democrats who have supported this kind of proposal. Fifty House Republicans have proposed the same payroll tax cut that's in this plan. You should pass

it right away... This idea came from a bill written by a Texas Republican and a Massachusetts Democrat. The idea for a big boost in construction is supported by America's largest business organization and America's largest labor organization. It's the kind of proposal that's been supported in the past by Democrats and Republicans alike. You should pass it right away. (Obama, 2011)

Obama appealed both to Democrats and Republicans by invoking the support of two of the most polarizing entities in politics, big business and labor unions. I argue that Obama's incorporation of this type of rhetoric represents the political context at the time. Obama faced a Democratic party who felt disenfranchised by Obama's "pandering" to the right, while the Republicans continued to be unwilling to negotiate with the president. Obama attempted to indicate the bipartisan portions of the bill would draw Democrats and Republicans into the discussion, but are also directed at the American public. It should also be noted the length in which Obama has described why this bill was bipartisan, it is not as though it's a casual mentioning of a single element of the bill. Obama constantly talked of its bipartisan nature, and it permeated the rhetoric he uses. What might be Obama's purpose for this? As I analyze Obama's use of the term "political circus" it seems clear many of the rhetorical strategies being employed throughout this speech were not intended for the legislators of Congress. Instead they were focused at the American people to show them that Obama is trying to meet both parties half way. If neither party was willing to compromise, it proves Obama's labeling of Congress as a "political circus" true.

Throughout Obama's speech he continually refers to the "political circus" in Washington and how Americans were disgusted with what's going on. This use of "political circus" further shows why the Jeremiad isn't present in this speech, the audience of the American people were

not the ones being chastised for ignoring American values of bipartisanship and compromise, it was those in Congress. A Jeremiad needs a community that has jointly strayed from some value the audience shares. Here, though, only those in Congress have strayed. In this speech Obama used the “political circus” to set the stage for an indirect jab at those in Congress. This sentiment culminates in the following statement by Obama:

Now, I know there’s been a lot of skepticism about whether the politics of the moment will allow us to pass this jobs plan or any jobs plan. Already, we’re seeing the same old press releases and tweets flying back and forth. Already, the media has proclaimed that it’s impossible to bridge our differences. And maybe some of you have decided that those differences are so great that we can only resolve them at the ballot box. But know this: The next election is 14 months away. And the people who sent us here -- the people who hired us to work for them -- they don’t have the luxury of waiting 14 months. Some of them are living week to week, paycheck to paycheck, even day to day. (Obama, 2011)

Again we see Obama draw on the lack of cooperation in Congress with a subtle twist. Toward the end of the section, Obama mentioned the coming election and the need for swift action for the economy since many people cannot wait for relief. While the relief portion helped build urgency, it is the mention of the next election that is significant. Obama could have easily created the need for urgency without mentioning the up and coming election. Why did he here? I claim that Obama was actually threatening both the Democrats and Republican that unless they work together the American people will remember their inaction with the Jobs proposal.

In addition, the appeal by Obama concerning moral leadership played on the sense of urgency relating to the Jobs bill. The economic crisis has touched almost every facet of American life, and even if a citizen might not be suffering from the economic crisis it was more

than likely they knew someone who had. This created a personal connection to the topic for the audience; and it attempted to frame those who don't want to pass the Jobs bill as being responsible for the ongoing suffering. In the case of the Jobs bill, it would paint those in Congress as being immoral for not acting.

Obama used this appeal for moral leadership to portray himself as working for those Americans who are on hard times. This move is strategic. By describing Congress as a dysfunctional "circus" out of touch with American values, while at the same time showing himself as being concerned with the welfare of the American people, he maintained the claim for championing the American citizens' needs. Even if nothing is passed by Congress, Obama can point to the "circus" as the cause and claim the moral high ground for trying to help those in need. This, combined with the mention of the election, seemed to indicate that Obama's speech serves as a primer for his platform during the 2012 election cycle. That blame for the existing crisis did not rest on Obama's shoulders but the dysfunctional Congress.

This theme of unity and the need for bipartisan efforts are not limited to this address. Throughout all of the speeches I have examined for this project, Obama constantly discussed the lack of bipartisanship. Might this be part of a larger rhetorical strategy by Obama? I would argue that Obama was setting the foundations for his campaign over the coming months. His use of rhetoric to paint Congress as the root cause of the "political circus" and the reason why the American people have not seen the end of the recession were littered throughout the speech. Obama even used the threat of coming elections towards Congress, illustrating that this sense of timing and its relation to the election were not lost on Obama.

Summary

In this chapter we saw Obama use the American dream and responsibility themes to promote the passage of the American Jobs Act. In addition we examined why Obama made abundant use of the rhetorical strategy of repetition and statistical evidence. I argued that repetition was used to help relate the faltering economy with the need to pass the Jobs bill, and the use of statistical evidence to support the claim of significance of the Jobs bill made by Obama. Later, I argued that Obama's continual use of the theme of unity was born out of both the political climate, but also to threaten Congress with potential losses in the impending election cycle if they were to pass up the opportunity of passing the Jobs act.

The question that remains unanswered though is "where is the Jeremiad?" We saw the themes of the American dream, responsibility, even the use of rhetoric such as the "compact" but the distinctive features of the Jeremiad continue to elude us. Or maybe the better question is "why isn't the Jeremiad present?" In my mind the lack of the Jeremiad is a result of the goal of the address. Similar to the debt ceiling debate Obama, was not trying to only unify his audience as one group, but was trying to encourage his audience to put pressure on other groups. His phrasing of the crisis as being a result of Washington politics and not because of some failure on the American peoples' part reflects this goal. Obama's speech was not about how the American people lost the value of hard work; it was how Washington was no longer serving that value. A Jeremiad address needs to be able to cast the audience in a light in which they can see that a sin has been performed by the audience. In the case of the Cooper Union speech we saw Obama cast that sin as taking on loans outside the means of the American family. There is no incitement of the audience as whole, only select portions of the audience were cast in such a light. At the same time the focus of the speech was directed at those that were not guilty of abandoning hard

work. In the next chapter I will discuss the different concepts and strategies found in the analysis of the texts and answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the project. Afterwards I will discuss the limitations of the study and discuss future areas of research that could come of the project.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

During the course of this project I have examined President Barack Obama's rhetorical strategies in three different speeches on economic issues that occurred during 2010-2011. This chapter will answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the project. To illustrate my findings I will use quotations from the texts studied. Using these quotations will make clear how President Obama's rhetoric fits into the different rhetorical questions discussed in this final chapter. Finally I will discuss the limitations of the study and possible future areas of research.

Characteristics of a Jeremiad

Initially, I approached the texts looking to find if any elements of the American Jeremiad were present in the speeches by President Obama. I established through examination of the literature base surrounding the sub genre of the American Jeremiad that there existed four characteristics that needed to be present in a speech for it be deemed as an example of the genre.

The first criterion required to meet the definition of a Jeremiad was for the speaker to define a set of unifying values their audience identified as being the roots of their group and then proceed to invoke those values throughout the address (Bercovitch, 1978). The values are seen as reasons why the group, in this case the American people, had succeeded over time and would continue to succeed. In the case of the Puritan Jeremiad these values were related with the holy covenant that they, the "chosen people," had entered into, by maintaining the covenant with God they would be rewarded. In the case of the American Jeremiad it is the maintaining of the founding values of America that allows the American Dream to be actualized (Bercovitch, 1978). So if a speaker was making use of the genre of the American Jeremiad they would

remind the audience of the different American values that made America great: hard work, individualism, and freedom might be some of the values invoked by the speaker, for instance.

The second criterion for a speech text to be considered an example of the Jeremiad was the existence of a crisis. Specifically, the speaker needs to connect the cause of the crisis to the audience's deviation from the aforementioned values that made, in the case of the American Jeremiad, the people great (Bercovitch, 1978). In the case of this study, I originally argued that President Obama might try to connect the economic crisis to a lack of fiscal discipline and responsibility on behalf of the American people. By identifying this divergence from the traditional values of the audience the speaker hopes to have their audience reflect on their actions and deem themselves guilty of not holding dear the values that made their community great.

Next, the speaker reveals to the audience a metaphorical "path" back to the values that made the audience great, usually in the form of a policy action proposed by the speaker. This is where the deliberative elements of the Jeremiad begin to emerge; the speaker becomes a policy maker to return the audience back to their core values (Bercovitch, 1978). Through the proposed policy the speaker sets the stage for the final characteristic of the Jeremiad.

Finally, the speaker returns to the values of the audience established at the start of the speech. The speaker reminds the audience that they are the "chosen people," for the Puritans this referred to their pact with god. For the American Jeremiad the "chosen people" still exist but instead of a contract with God, our covenant is that of the American Dream. The speaker makes that argument that if the American people stay true to the founding documents and their values anyone can achieve the American Dream. By using the past successes over crisis the speaker argues that America will be greater than ever before once the crisis is over (Bercovitch, 1978). This turns the crisis from a negative experience into a positive one of learning for the audience.

Now that the elements of the Jeremiad have been reviewed, the first research question presented by this project will be addressed looking at the rhetorical strategies that Obama used in the different economic addresses.

RQ1: What rhetorical strategies did Barack Obama use in speeches about major economic policies he promoted between 2008 and 2011?

To fully answer this question I will divide Obama's use of strategies into three general categories and then proceed to go into detail on the strategies present. The first category will look at the use of tone and persona. Next, I will examine the use of themes by Obama during his economic addresses. Finally, I will look at the different uses of evidence and rhetorical strategies present in the addresses.

Persona/Tone

The American and Puritan Jeremiads normally exhibit qualities of an authoritative pastor when examined through the lens of persona and tone. Originally the Puritan Jeremiad was a sermon given by a church leader (Bercovitch, 1978), the literal embodiment of the pastoral persona. As time went on and the American Jeremiad took root in American politics this forceful authoritative persona continued to persist. The role of the pastoral persona in the Jeremiad was to establish credibility and expertise on morality and values originally. In Puritan communities pastors were the spiritual leaders and were viewed as the embodiment of the values for which the community stood.

At times rhetors can choose to take on this pastoral authoritative persona. Through the examination of the speech texts there is evidence of Obama using this persona. For example, in the opening passages of Obama's Cooper Union address the claim is made that a warning of the crisis was disregarded by the nation:

It was that failure of responsibility that I spoke about when I came to New York more than two years ago -- before the worst of the crisis had unfolded. It was back in 2007. And I take no satisfaction in noting that my comments then have largely been borne out by the events that followed. But I repeat what I said then because it is essential that we learn the lessons from this crisis so we don't doom ourselves to repeat it. And make no mistake that is exactly what will happen if we allow this moment to pass -- and that's an outcome that is unacceptable to me and it's unacceptable to you, the American people. (Obama, 2010)

Prophetic vision is a characteristic of the pastoral persona; in addition this rhetorical move functions to establish Obama's authority and credibility on the economic crisis and American values. While this type of prophetic vision is present in the Cooper Union address, it is not found in the other addresses. Obama does continue to have an authoritative tone present in the other addresses but never uses observable characteristics of the pastor persona similar to the Cooper Union speech.

While the pastoral persona and authoritative tone were present in different aspects of the examined speech texts there was one tone that seemed present in all of the texts, that of the egalitarian mediator. Throughout the texts Obama takes on this persona and tone to appeal to the multiple conflicting audiences of his speeches. For instance during his Cooper Union address Obama addresses the "titans" of industry who oppose financial reform:

And for those of you in the financial sector I'm sure that some of these lobbyists work for you and they're doing what they are being paid to do. But I'm here today specifically when I speak to the titans of industry here because I want to urge you to join us, instead of fighting us in this effort. (Applause.) I'm here because I believe that these reforms

are, in the end, not only in the best interest of our country, but in the best interest of the financial sector. And I'm here to explain what reform will look like, and why it matters (Obama, 2010).

Instead of demonizing the financial sector Obama attempted to work with those that opposed reform and spoke to them as equals. A similar example can be seen in the debt ceiling address where Obama attempted to cast the blame of the debate on raising the debt ceiling not on one party, but both parties: "Because neither party is blameless for the decisions that led to this problem, both parties have a responsibility to solve it. And over the last several months, that's what we've been trying to do" (Obama, 2011). This tone and persona continues to reveal itself throughout the texts and I argue was a center piece to Obama's rhetorical strategy. Now that we have examined the different tones and personas found in the speech texts attention is now turned to examine the different themes found throughout the texts.

Themes

Through my examination of the speech texts there were three reoccurring themes that emerged: The American Dream, unity, and compromise. While the emphasis on a particular theme shifted from speech to speech each was present in some form. To be clear, it could be argued that compromise and unity are also part of the American Dream. Rowland and Jones (2007) in their examination of Obama's 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention argued that Obama recast the American Dream into a more collectivist idea, where compromise and unity are promoted. This version of the American Dream stood in contrast to Ronald Reagan's more individualistic version (Rowland & Jones, 2007). This explains why Obama links unity and compromise to the American Dream, which in the past has been seen as a promise of upwards economic mobility. I make the delineation between the two themes because

at times Obama will overwhelmingly describe or develop one theme over the other, even though Obama might connect both themes together in his address. For this section I will first examine Obama's use of the American Dream and then proceed to discuss the theme of unity and compromise.

The American Dream can be a powerful tool for a speaker; the American Jeremiad is a shining example of how the theme of the American Dream can be used to persuade an audience. Obama's primary use of the American Dream comes in the form of a point of crisis, portraying the Dream as being threatened and on the verge of disappearing in his Jobs bill address: For decades now, Americans have watched that compact erode. They have seen the decks too often stacked against them. And they know that Washington has not always put their interests first. The people of this country work hard to meet their responsibilities. The question tonight is whether we'll meet ours. The question is whether, in the face of an ongoing national crisis, we can stop the political circus and actually do something to help the economy. The question is -- the question is whether we can restore some of the fairness and security that has defined this nation since our beginning. (Obama, 2011)

The compact here represents the American dream; its slow erosion prompts his audience to act or risk the loss of a fundamental part of America. It was used here to both create a sense of urgency, but also direct the audience's attention toward the source of the erosion the "political circus" Obama describes. The American Dream is also used as an encouragement, similar to how the "chosen people" in the Jeremiad uses the "sacred pact" as a motivational tool to overcome obstacles:

These are difficult years for our country. But we are Americans. We are tougher than the times we live in, and we are bigger than our politics have been. So let's meet the moment. Let's get to work, and let's show the world once again why the United States of America remains the greatest nation on Earth. (Obama, 2011)

Here Obama invokes the memory of the Greatness of America to be used as a motivational tool to move his audience forward. These examples highlight the malleable nature the American Dream plays in the speech texts, whether it is through the value of hard work, fiscal responsibility, or compromise Obama continually uses the American Dream as an underlying theme to frame his rhetorical arguments. It could be argued that this is not an example of the American Dream but is an attempt to transcend partisan politics, which in the context of the speech text makes sense since Obama faced opposition from both sides of the political aisle. In addition, Kloppenberg (2011) argued that Obama's philosophical and educational background is focused on a compromise and the goal of transcending partisan politics. Now that we have seen how the American Dream has been used by Obama let's examine the theme of unity and compromise.

The final theme of note is that of compromise and unity. Each address by Obama has some element of this theme but the purpose changes drastically in each speech. For example in Obama's Cooper Union address Obama uses the metaphor of "Wall Street and Main Street" to bring together his divided audience in support of financial reform:

Because that is how we will ensure that our economy works for consumers, that it works for investors, and that it works for financial institutions -- in other words, that it works for all of us -- that's why we're working so hard to get this stuff passed. This is the central lesson not only of this crisis but of our history. It's what I said when I spoke here two

years ago. Because ultimately, there is no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We will rise or we will fall together as one nation. (Applause.) And that is why I urge all of you to join me. I urge all of you to join me, to join those who are seeking to pass these commonsense reforms. And for those of you in the financial industry, I urge you to join me not only because it is in the interest of your industry, but also because it's in the interest of your country. (Obama, 2010)

At the beginning of the address the metaphor served as a division between the two audiences, the American public at large and the financial sector. Obama turns this division into a connection between the audiences.

This use of compromise and unity is contrasted with a threat to those not willing to compromise or work together in his Jobs bill address:

Now, I know there's been a lot of skepticism about whether the politics of the moment will allow us to pass this jobs plan or any jobs plan. Already, we're seeing the same old press releases and tweets flying back and forth. Already, the media has proclaimed that it's impossible to bridge our differences. And maybe some of you have decided that those differences are so great that we can only resolve them at the ballot box. But know this: The next election is 14 months away. And the people who sent us here -- the people who hired us to work for them -- they don't have the luxury of waiting 14 months. Some of them are living week to week, paycheck to paycheck, even day to day. (Obama, 2011)

Compromise clearly runs through this passage; but it's phrased in such a way to deliver a warning to Congress: Do your job or the country will unify against you. This example also provides a warrant as to why I choose to divide the two major themes present in Obama's

addresses. What we have seen in this section is the diversity in Obama's use of themes that underscore his different addresses.

Before examining the evidence and rhetorical strategies Obama used in his speeches, it is necessary to discuss what makes a speech epideictic in nature. The context of an address influences whether a speech's epideictic or deliberative nature comes to the forefront of the rhetor's strategy. This was seen in the instance of the address at Cooper Union where at the time there was no immediate threat of crisis, compared to the debt ceiling speech where immediate economic collapse was possible. Even though the different epideictic rhetoric might have been represented in the debt ceiling address, it was overshadowed by the deliberative action being advocated. This means as a critic it's important to understand how the situation changes the purpose and importance of the different rhetorical strategies employed by the rhetor. Now let's examine Obama's different uses of evidence.

Evidence and Rhetorical Strategies

After examining the various speech texts I identified two key rhetorical strategies and one use of evidence that forms the basis of Obama's addresses. First, I will discuss Obama's rhetorical strategies and then his use of evidence.

Obama's primary rhetorical strategies are his use of repetition and his emphasis of urgency. These might seem like two distinctly different concepts but Obama's rhetoric links these two concepts together throughout the addresses. Repetition, for instance, traditionally is used to bring emphasis and significance (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). Obama uses repetition of the word "*until*" to create urgency for the issues at hand:

Until this progress is felt not just on Wall Street but on Main Street we cannot be satisfied. Until the millions of our neighbors who are looking for work can find a job,

and wages are growing at a meaningful pace, we may be able to claim a technical recovery but we will not have truly recovered. (Obama, 2010)

Repetition becomes not only a way for Obama to show the significance of an issue but also to help create urgency for the issues being discussed. Here we can see how this use of repetition reinforces Obama's theme of unity when discussing the Dodd-Frank bill. It draws attention to the argument in support of a united effort for financial reform. This is also seen in Obama's address on the debt ceiling. In the final paragraphs the word "compromise," never mentioned before in the address, is used six times. In that case of the debt ceiling address it served a similar purpose as did "until" in the Cooper Union address.

The appeal of urgency that Obama develops throughout the speech texts takes two forms. The first is in the form of an existing crisis, the aforementioned use of "until" is a good example of this. Here Obama uses the continued existence of the economic crisis to create the need for immediate action. We can see another example of this pairing of urgency and repetition when looking at Obama's debt ceiling address:

But there's an even greater danger to this approach. Based on what we've seen these past few weeks, we know what to expect six months from now. The House of Representatives will once again refuse to prevent default unless the rest of us accept their cuts-only approach. Again, they will refuse to ask the wealthiest Americans to give up their tax cuts or deductions. Again, they will demand harsh cuts to programs like Medicare. And once again, the economy will be held captive unless they get their way. This is no way to run the greatest country on Earth. It's a dangerous game that we've never played before, and we can't afford to play it now. Not when the jobs and

livelihoods of so many families are at stake. We can't allow the American people to become collateral damage to Washington's political warfare. (Obama, 2011).

More pronounced here, Obama emphasizes “again” and connects the policy failures of Congress to the crisis at hand, specifically the debt ceiling debate. As seen in the previous examples President Obama uses urgency and repetition to influence his audience to take action and support his policies. Now that I have examined Obama's use of urgency and repetition the prevalence of historical evidence in his addresses needs to be considered.

The American Dream is innately a historical argument; its power is based on the past achievements of the American people and through those achievements and values creates the “sacred compact” that is part of the American Jeremiad. The vast majority of Obama's historical examples, though, were not used in a context that related to the Jeremiad. Much of the historical evidence was used to build support for Obama's policies but to also undermine critics. For example:

The first time a deal was passed, a predecessor of mine made the case for a balanced approach by saying this “Would you rather reduce deficits and interest rates by raising revenue from those who are not now paying their fair share, or would you rather accept larger budget deficits, higher interest rates, and higher unemployment? And I think I know your answer.” Those words were spoken by Ronald Reagan. But today, many Republicans in the House refuse to consider this kind of balanced approach — an approach that was pursued not only by President Reagan, but by the first President Bush, by President Clinton. (Obama, 2011)

Obama invoked Reagan and other past Presidents to provide evidence for his proposal, but the strategy also serves to undermine Republicans who revere Reagan yet do not support

Obama's reforms. For Obama, historical evidence becomes both a supportive argument and an offensive one by attacking the perceived connection his opponents' claim to party icons, such as Reagan and Republicans. Now that we have examined the major rhetorical strategies that exist throughout the studied texts it is possible to answer the second research question.

RQ2: What does the presence or absence of the American Jeremiad as a rhetorical strategy in Obama's major speeches on economic policy reveal about Obama's rhetorical strategies on economic issues in his first term?

There are two findings of note to answer this question. First to a limited extent, it was found that Obama did make use of the American Jeremiad. The Cooper Union address showed the four characteristics of the Jeremiad established as the guidelines for this study to determine if the Jeremiad was present. The third and final aspect of this finding deals with the context of the Cooper Union address. At the time of the address the financial industry was lobbying heavily against the Dodd-Frank bill, many in the industry certain that the bill would irreparably harm the industry. Obama's rhetoric from the Cooper Union address was specifically targeted to convince the financial industry of the benefits of reform. Earlier in the project, the possibility regarding uncertainty in the economy or uncertainty concerning the impact of a policy on the economy might be a possible reason a President would employ the Jeremiad. The context of the speech provided evidence that the financial sector was uncertain of the effects of Dodd-Frank on the financial markets. If the "titans" of industry believed the reforms would be positive why would they invest so much capital in lobbying against the bill? The action of the financial industry against the reform policy support by Obama provides evidence of the existence of uncertainty surrounding Dodd-Frank. In addition Obama seems to speak directly to the financial sector on this feeling of uncertainty concerning Dodd-Frank:

Now, there's been a great deal of concern about these changes. So I want to reiterate: There is a legitimate role for these financial instruments in our economy. They can help allay risk and spur investment. And there are a lot of companies that use these instruments to that legitimate end they are managing exposure to fluctuating prices or currencies, fluctuating markets. (Obama, 2010)

Obama never directly mentions uncertainty, but his argument here is answer to the questions a company would ask concerning the benefits or risks of a possible policy decision by Washington. Is this policy a threat to the financial industry? Obama's answer is no. This project's goal is not to say that economic uncertainty and the Jeremiad are linked directly in any way, but to indicate that in this example the Jeremiad did function as a strategy to try and address the financial industry's concerns. Future studies should be done to examine if this is a singular event or if presidents have employed the Jeremiad in similar situations.

There are two limitations of this finding that need to be addressed. First, policy makers routinely will make arguments that are aimed to reduce the perceived risk or negative effect of a policy to their audience. Even if the Jeremiad was not the form used by President Obama in the Cooper Union address, this type of rhetorical argument would be expected. So while the context of the address and the use of the Jeremiad in the speech provide possible evidence of the use of the Jeremiad to address concerns of uncertainty, more research needs to be conducted examining other addresses.

Secondly, Obama's attempt to quell fears of the negative impact might be a result of regulatory policies in general. Policies that regulate industries, whether they are proposed during good or bad economic times, are not popular with those who are going

to be regulated. The rhetorical situation seems to demand that Obama addresses those who perceive themselves as being threatened by regulation. So even if in this case we see the use of rhetorical strategies to decrease uncertainty towards a policy, it is possible that the form of the address has nothing to do with the presence of this type of rhetorical argument.

Now that the presence of the Jeremiad has been discussed it is time to address the question of why Obama did not rely on the form of the Jeremiad in the other examined speech texts. While elements of the Jeremiad existed, such as invoking the American Dream and arguing that the crisis at hand was caused by a deviation from communal values (Bercovitch, 1978), all the characteristics of the Jeremiad were not present. I would argue Obama's choices in strategy and the absence of the Jeremiad can be understood by the rhetorical situations surrounding the speeches texts. Two reasons explain why the Jeremiad is non-existent in Obama's Debt ceiling and Job bill addresses. First, the political context of the speeches made it unlikely for a Jeremiadic address to succeed because of the demands of the rhetorical situation. Second, Obama had a substantially different goal in his other addresses compared to the Cooper Union address which influenced Obama's decision to employ the Jeremiad.

First, consider the context of the Debt ceiling speech and the Jobs bill addresses. At the time of the speeches Obama was facing a gridlock on either side of Congress, in the case of the debt ceiling the partisanship had grown so terrible that the Republicans had left the negotiation table. In addition to the Republican's unwillingness to deal with Obama, some members of the Democratic Party were unwilling to raise the debt ceiling and other Democrats were unwilling to compromise with the Republicans. President Obama had been attempting to negotiate with the two parties for months to get the Debt ceiling passed, yet to no avail. The Jobs bill faced a

similar situation, while the Debt ceiling had been passed partisan politics still gripped Congress with Republicans emboldened by the Debt ceiling crisis and Democrats disillusioned after Obama's negotiation of the deal. President Obama was left to face two parties that seemed to have no inclination to work together.

Compared to the situation surrounding Dodd-Frank, Obama had the support of the Democrats. While Republicans did pose an obstacle to passage, it was seen that the financial sector was the group who needed convincing more than Republican Party members. In the Cooper Union address Obama's primary goal was to unite those calling for financial reform and the financial sector together in support of Dodd-Frank as demonstrated through the use of the mediator persona. I argue that because of the polarization of the two parties in Congress, Obama recognized that messages based only on unifying the Democrats and Republicans to pass the Jobs bill and Debt ceiling would be likely to fail. The President had been working with both parties for months to find a solution; Obama had run out of political options. Instead, Obama focused his speech on forcing the Republicans and Democrats to work together by appealing to the American public's sense of values and frustration with the "political circus" of Washington to create political pressure on the parties.

Now that the context of the situations has been examined let's look at the textual evidence. In the text of the Jobs bill address we find Obama directly threatening Congress with the prospect of the coming election cycle:

Already, the media has proclaimed that it's impossible to bridge our differences. And maybe some of you have decided that those differences are so great that we can only resolve them at the ballot box. But know this: The next election is 14 months away. And the people who sent us here -- the people who hired us to work for them --

they don't have the luxury of waiting 14 months. Some of them are living week to week, paycheck to paycheck, even day to day (Obama, 2011).

Obama reminds Congress of the upcoming election and alludes to the argument that not bridging the partisan divide will result in being voted out of office. This is not an appeal for greater unity for the purpose of return to American values of bipartisanship, it's a brazen threat. This same threat exists in the Debt ceiling debate as well:

And when these Americans come home at night, bone-tired, and turn on the news, all they see is the same partisan three-ring circus here in Washington. They see leaders who can't seem to come together and do what it takes to make life just a little bit better for ordinary Americans. They're offended by that. And they should be. The American people may have voted for divided government, but they didn't vote for a dysfunctional government. (Obama, 2011)

Again Obama invokes the specter of the election cycle to persuade Congress to move forward and work together. The argument that Obama is strategically trying to pressure Congress through the use of the American public is further strengthened when remembering Obama's use of historical evidence. At multiple points during both the Debt ceiling and Jobs bill address, Obama invokes the ideas of famous Republican figureheads, such as Ronald Reagan and Dwight D. Eisenhower, to point out the disconnect occurring between the Republican representatives and the values of the Republican base. By pointing out a division between the base of a party and its representatives, and the reminding the American public of the looming crisis that would occur if the current course of partisan politics does not stop creates a recipe for public outcry. To review, the Jeremiad is normally employed to unify an audience in support of a reform and return to the traditional set of values of the group. In the case of the Debt ceiling

and Jobs bill address, Obama tried to unify the American people against the representatives in Congress to bring about change. It is important to remember that the Jeremiad is about correcting some deviation from values held by the community. Here, though, the American people are not the community that has deviated from American values. Obama paints the Republicans and Democrats in Congress as the ones who have deviated and attempted to pressure the parties through the use of public opinion.

What is fascinating to find after understanding the differences in the rhetorical situations for the Cooper Union address and the Debt ceiling/Job Bill is Obama's strategic choice of rhetoric. In each situation Obama takes a stance that does not seek to demonize or demand complete surrender of the opposite side, instead he appeals to the need for self sacrifice and compromise from both sides of the debate. This move towards compromised can be seen in his use of historical evidence through his invoking of Republican figure heads, as well as his use of American values. I argue that Obama's strategic use of the Jeremiad and his staunch advocacy of bipartisanship and compromise observed in these texts reinforces James Kloppenberg's (2011) argument that Obama is a pragmatist. The following excerpt from Kloppenberg provides the necessary context for my claim:

Obama's commitments to philosophical pragmatism and deliberative democracy to building support slowly, gradually, through compromise and painstaking consensus building represent a calculated risk as political strategy. It is a gamble he may lose. But it is not a sign of weakness, as his critics on the right and left allege. It shows instead that he understands not only the contingency of cultural values but also how the nation's political system was designed to work. (Kloppenber, 2011, p. 98)

Kloppenbergs argument is that Obama's political and rhetorical decisions are based on the philosophy of pragmatism, and he uses Obama's education and personal experiences to provided evidence for this claim. Through this project's examination of Obama's rhetorical strategies this claim seems to be substantiated by the observations concerning Obama's constant appeal to compromise and bipartisanship. So while this project might not have found the Jeremiad as prevalent as predicted, it does provide evidence to support Obama's pragmatic nature. Next, I will examine the limitations and identify future areas for study.

Limitations and Future Research

As any study in rhetoric or any area of academia this study has limitations. Two limitations seem to have the largest effect on the study for possible generalizability and contribution to academic knowledge. First, is the limited scope of the study in the area of examined speech texts. Second, is the overlapping of the rhetorical situations of some of the selected texts.

Limitations

As the speech texts examined by the study only cover a period of a year and half of President Obama's 2009-12 term, it becomes difficult to gauge how often Obama employed the Jeremiad when discussing economic issues. In addition, while this study focused primarily on national addresses, it's entirely possible that radio addresses or interviews made by the President on the economic situation of the country might reveal a more widespread use of the Jeremiad or vice versa. To help address this issue a future study might include minor addresses as well as more examples of the larger national speeches. Another option that would help determine Obama's use of the Jeremiad would be to include campaign and senatorial addresses as well.

While this study focused on Presidential use of the Jeremiad, evidence might be discovered that Obama's use of the Jeremiad was present before he became President.

The second major limitation of this project comes from where in the timeline of the presidency they were chosen. Both the Debt ceiling and Jobs bill addresses were delivered within a two month time period from each other, and both speeches were focused on the issue of partisanship in Congress. In turn, Obama's rhetorical strategies changed very little between the speeches. A selection of texts that were not as interconnected via context would have given the project a more diverse and representative sampling of the pool of economic speech texts delivered by Obama during his first term. This would provide a better chance to understand and categorize the strategies Obama used to approach the varying economic crises during 2009-2012.

Future Research

After completing this project there are two possible research paths worth pursuing. The first area revolves around presidents and passing regulatory reform. The Cooper Union Address provides possible evidence that regulatory policy might be a possible area of presidential rhetoric that in which Jeremiadic forms could be present. The very nature of reformation present in regulation might set the stage for Jeremiads to be a useful form when changes to policy are advocated. This line of research has the possibility of extending far beyond only presidential rhetoric on the economy as issues such as environmental regulation to Federal election guidelines could be included in the study of regulatory addresses.

The second area of research from this project that warrants exploration is that of Obama's rhetoric concerning the American public. Specifically, I am referring to his use of appeals during the Debt ceiling and Jobs bill addresses where he uses the threat of the American public's backlash to try and force action in Congress. I wonder how often this form of argument has been

used by President Obama over the course of his term in office, but also the prevalence of this type of argument in presidential politics overall. A future study might entail identifying different points in the presidency where Congressional action was dead locked and then examining speech texts during those periods to determine if the Obama continually makes this appeal to the American people. Polling data following these addresses could be used to determine if Obama's threat of reelection increased the amount of letter writing, emails, and calls to different Representative's offices to examine the possible effectiveness of the message on the American people.

Conclusion

This study started as a look into the use of rhetorical strategies by President Barack Obama on issues of economic crisis. Through analysis of the selected speech texts evidence was found showing the use of the American Jeremiad, but that sub genre was not present in all of the examined texts. Obama did make use of themes such as the American dream and unity throughout the aforementioned texts in an effort to support his economic policies. In addition, it was observed that Obama employed a rhetorical strategy targeted to cause public pressure to mount on Congressional representatives in an effort to encourage bipartisanship on issues such as the Debt ceiling and the Jobs bill. Obama employed both historical evidence and appeals to American values to create a division between Congress and their voting base. What was discovered though was Obama's varied use of rhetorical strategies to address the multiple economic situations. I argued that Obama's variance in rhetorical strategies was indicative of Kloppenberg's claim of Obama's pragmatic background. One key example of this claim was seen through the different approaches taken during the address at Cooper Union and the debt ceiling debate. The context of the two events made Obama choose a drastically different

approach to the situations. It could be argued that this is only because of the rhetorical situation Obama was placed in at the time, but I argue it goes further than context. President Obama has been shown to choose rhetorical strategies based on pragmatic lines of thought (Kloppenber, 2011). In the case of the debt ceiling crisis Obama attempted to transcend party politics through by appealing to American identity, something that is an arguable a trait of a pragmatist seeking compromise on an issue. Obama's pragmatic nature is also supported by his appeal to unity. Unity is a theme normally seen in the Jeremiad, but in this case Obama used unity to apply pressure to Representatives that were in the way of compromise. In addition this observation provided evidence to the claim of Obama's pragmatic nature (Kloppenber, 2011). His emphasis on compromise and bipartisanship is reminiscent of pragmatic thought and practice. Obama's continual drive to bring compromise to Congress is the exact description of the philosophical pragmatist described by Kloppenberg that Obama is argued to be part of.

While the presence of the Jeremiad was not as pronounced as expected, it did shed further light on the use of elements of the Jeremiad in the modern presidency. The American Dream remains a popular tool in Barack Obama's rhetorical arsenal, and will more than likely continue to be in the future.

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