

“Although American political life has rarely been touched by the most acute varieties of class conflict, it has served again and again as an arena for uncommonly angry minds.”

--Richard Hofstadter²

“Democracy is a bloody business demanding blood sacrifice.”

--Tony Kushner³

The residents of Arizona were furious. The federal government’s bald-faced intrusion, once again, into the sanctity of their lives and the affairs of their state could be tolerated no more. While news coverage of events droned on ceaselessly, no one was getting at the real story. Or so thought three men. What to do? Why, speak up, of course. They left Bagdad, Arizona, and drove 2,500 miles to Washington, D.C., where they testified at a hearing convened by Connecticut’s favorite political son. Mr. Dodd hoped legislation might make a substantive difference; the issue seemed at once so intractable and the potential outcomes, if not reined in by the rule of law, so very tragic. But the men were not convinced. They denounced the proposed legislation, decrying it “a further attempt by a subversive power to make us part of one world socialistic government.”⁴ Moreover, if it passed, the bill would “create chaos” and help “our enemies.”⁵

The above scenario may seem eerily familiar. In truth, the three Arizonians were railing not against legislation concerned with immigration or healthcare, but against a bill sponsored in 1964, whose chief sponsor, Senator Thomas E. Dodd, desired to tighten federal controls over the sale of firearms through the U.S. mail. The impetus for the legislation had been the recent assassination of President Kennedy. What makes the scenario relevant has less to do with the specific legislation than with the outrage these citizens expressed at their government, an outrage characterized, some might claim, by an uncivil zealotry.

Public anger may be the new zeitgeist of our age. Writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sasha Abramsky remarked that “Whether our political leanings are left, right, or middle of the road, rage is our shared experience these days.”⁶

Moreover, Abramsky noted, while incivility, or rage, is nothing new in American politics, “the offsets that used to restrict rage’s reach have started to break down; the walls sealing the anger off to a specific community or locale, or around a specific issue, have started to crumble. As a result, rage is becoming an ideology unto itself.”⁷ Where Abramsky paints in broad brushstrokes the angry colors of our age, reporting in the *Washington Post* attributes the confrontation and contentiousness of our politics to the brokenness of the town hall meeting.⁸





If the anger and incivility at the core of our public talk are thoroughly familiar, they nevertheless merit continued scrutiny. A casual survey of well-regarded newspapers seems to indicate that our political culture is severely fractured. How bad are things, from a rhetorical standpoint, really? I want to examine some recent examples from our public discourse to ascertain the depth and character of the incivility and civility these contain. While incivility and rage may be all the rage, I am not convinced our public rhetoric is broken. If James Davison Hunter has accurately characterized our public discourse as “predictably shrill and unhelpful” and consisting “in large part of overwrought accusations and empty sloganeering,” it is important to reflect on rhetorical acts that may model nuance and distinction (even though these may not show themselves at first blush), models that suggest a wider vision of civility.⁹ My aims, then, are historical, interpretive, and reflective.

This essay begins first by situating civility in particular scholarly and historical contexts. A brief review of some of the relevant literature will show, in fact, that incivility, outrage, violence, and their counters, reason, rationality, and deliberation are, at a minimum, slippery terms. I then will undertake readings of incivility and civility as these have been given recent expression in three cases: Representative Joe Wilson’s “You lie!” outburst during President Barack Obama’s September 2009 address on healthcare, the rhetorical soundings of Sarah Palin in her speech at the 28 August 2010 “Restoring Honor” rally in Washington, D.C., and the intersection of violence, civility, and what I term the “politics of theodicy,” as that politics found expression in Barack Obama’s memorial address for the victims of the shooting in Tucson, Arizona, in January 2011. By closely attending to the putative incivility and civility that characterizes these cases, I will suggest ways by which authenticity, real pluralism, and rhetorical courage might become new hallmarks of our rhetorical landscape. My argument concludes by imagining the tenets of a new kind of populism. The rhetorical habits of this new populism draw upon the best of our existing rhetorical norms, while acknowledging that our public talk has evolved in ways our classical forebears never could have envisioned. Like Bryan Garsten, I believe that what is now required of us, perhaps more now than ever, is to “pay attention to our fellow citizens and their opinions.”¹⁰ A new rhetorical courage, and a corresponding rhetorical imagination, is needed to navigate the times in which we live.

From Rhetorical Norms to Uncivil Forms: What of “Civility” in American Public Discourse?

As J. Michael Hogan reminds us, “social and political fragmentation is hardly unprecedented in the United States.”¹¹ While a comprehensive review of that fragmentation is beyond the scope of this essay, two anchors should help to stabilize the inquiry. First, how have scholars thought about civility,



and what from their writings may we cull to sharpen our thinking about the current polarization in which we are mired? And second, is the “grammar of hostility” about which James Davison Hunter wrote nearly twenty years ago, and which may be said to characterize aptly the tenor of our contemporary political rhetoric, so qualitatively different from the uncivil sins of our predecessors?¹² In putting forth these questions I wish not to answer definitively what civility “is,” or to wield lessons from history in ways that close down avenues for further reflection and conversation. Instead, this essay will underscore the importance of situating contemporary examples of political incivility and civility in wider contexts.

Thomas B. Farrell’s *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* makes no explicit mention of civility. Yet the book’s first sentence could well be read to imply the importance of civility in public discourse. “A rhetorical culture,” he wrote, “is an institutional formation in which motives of competing parties are intelligible, audiences available, expressions reciprocal, norms translatable, and silences noticeable.”¹³ As Farrell subsequently demonstrated with characteristic rigor and eloquence, a rhetorical culture hinges upon participants embodying shared understandings of particular goods. Included in this mix are such values and habits as practical wisdom, judgment, reason, prudence, agency, civic friendship, and moral responsibility.

It would seem, then, that civility, a set of ideas and practices that embody rhetorical and civically-minded commitments by which citizens strive to achieve a shared trust between one another, fundamentally matters. This trust need not entail shared agreement, or even that we like one another. Yet as Danielle Allen observed, such trust may serve as the foundation for expressions of political friendship, in that phrase’s richest sense. Such friendship, she noted, “begins in the recognition that [we] have a shared life—not a ‘common’ nor an identical life—only one with common events, climates, built-environments, fixations of the imagination, and social structures.”¹⁴ And still: Must such political friendships wither in the face of incivility? Could civility be overrated?

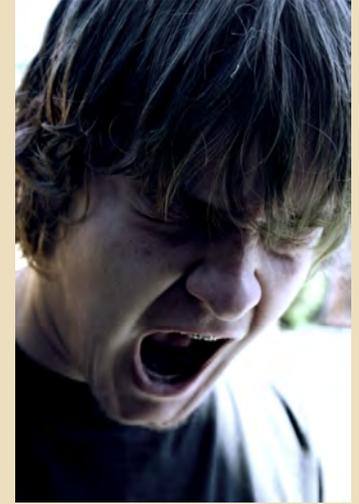
At first cast, the answers to these questions would seem to be “Yes” and “No.” Reflecting carefully over the questions and these provisional answers, however, it may be more accurate to wonder if occasional incivility is what our democratic culture requires. This assertion may seem counter-intuitive, and certainly not in step with how our public discourse typically is imagined and talked about. Abramsky, for example, expressed concern about the hyperbolic rhetoric poisoning our culture,¹⁵ while Ohio State University President E. Gordon Gee issued this clarion call:

The need for a national common conversation has never been more acute. The signs are all around us. The profusion of fractious talk radio and bias disguised as cable news. Costume parties that provide great televised spectacle, but reflect



*a poor understanding of our country's history. And national leaders spouting violent metaphors instead of well-reasoned dissent. The danger in all of this is great: More heat than light, more bite than right.*¹⁶

On the one hand, it is difficult to argue with Gee's characterization of our fractious public conversations. Students of American public discourse will recognize that Gee participates in a long thread of concern over the quality and efficacy of the ways we talk to one another in our public lives. Abraham Lincoln named the issues well in his 1838 address to the Young Men's Lyceum Association, in which he noted that the "principles of hate, and the powerful motive of revenge" had to pass into the twilight along with the revolutionary generation that had given these principles their concerted expression on behalf of American independence.¹⁷



On the other hand, might clarion calls like Gee's may work against the letter and spirit of authentic public debate? Gee clearly has in mind a notion of the correct and proper forms citizenship and civility must assume. As Kimberly K. Smith wrote about the relationship between citizenship and political debate in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "Becoming a citizen is a process of learning to reason and listening to its dictates. The angry mob is the foil for the virtuous, temperate, dispassionate citizen; the citizen is defined in contrast to the member of the mob."¹⁸ Yet what if our anxieties about civility and its expressions burden our efforts to speak authentically and courageously in the warp and woof of public talk?



I want to be clear. I am not against reason and its corollaries for principled public debate. I am mindful, however, of the ways that arguments which insist upon a particular style of public talk are fraught with implication. Robert Hariman knew well how much style mattered. As he astutely recognized, style is an "analytical category" through which we may understand our social reality. Likewise, the social reality that is politics seems almost to demand that we consider "how a political action involves acting according to a particular political style."¹⁹ An understanding of style, then, is not confined merely to the putative disinterest of rhetorical scholarship. "To the extent that politics is a product of its discourses," Hariman elaborated, "it is capable today of being rapidly transformed at any time, in any place, for unstable duration. As we choose, often unthinkingly, between different speakers, we often are choosing particular styles that in turn shape our decisions."²⁰ In the examples of Joe Wilson, Sarah Palin, and the aftermath of Tucson, Arizona, we have utterances that resist and challenge and expand the convenient label of "civility" and the rhetorical styles that inform it and which may, I will attempt to show, be read as examples of much needed "light" in our political rhetoric.



Civil Reckonings: Reconsidering the Appearance of Civility in our Public Discourse

At first glance, the cases at the center of this essay may not seem especially remarkable; indeed, they may seem readily predictable. At their worst, perhaps they collectively represent the kinds of rhetorical utterances Susan Jacoby recently lamented, when she observed that our public discourse is characterized by “a new species of anti-rationalism, feeding on and fed by an ignorant popular culture of video images and unremitting noise that leaves no room for contemplation or logic.”²¹ Like Jacoby, I too am concerned about a public culture in which ignorance and noise seem to have drowned contemplation and logic. Amidst the lamentations and alarms, however, it seems worthwhile to pause and ask after the kind of rhetorical climate in which we find ourselves.

In particular, I am interested in the shared (mis)understandings of civility that characterize

our public talk. In one sense, I agree with Susan Herbst, who recently maintained that “debates over [civility’s] definition[s], its rise or its fall are a distraction.”²² Borrowing the words of Raymond Williams, Herbst elaborates: “It would take an advanced degree in alchemy, not political science, to draw a tidy but reasonably comprehensive definition out of the literatures to which one must turn today to learn about civility as it is understood today.”²³ More important than comprehensive definitions of civility, then, are insights about its rhetorical performance. These performances may not always be civil. What these specific utterances model, however, are modes of (in) civility from which to fashion new guises of rhetorically consequential public talk. Consider, for example, the anger of Joe Wilson.

Joe Wilson’s Outrageousness: Authenticity in the Guise of Rhetorical Antics

The South Carolina Representative had had enough. Sitting with his colleagues in the House Chamber in early September 2009 listening to President Barack Obama allegedly dismiss Republicans’ claims that illegal immigrants would exploit health-care reform, the Army Reserve veteran said aloud what was on his mind: “You lie!” Suddenly, it seemed the serpent had been let loose in the garden, wreaking unimaginable havoc. We would do well, I think, though, not to let the havoc and resulting discord serve as the last word on Wilson’s heckling of the President. We have the opportunity to consider anew the potential merits of his incivility. In particular, the outburst embodies thoroughly rhetorical commitments, ones concerned with speaking truth to power, with unbinding the constraints of occasion and context and status in order to rupture discursive and political assumptions judged false. Wilson’s dissent





and its corresponding utterance, I will demonstrate, give us a window into the ways in which incivility may render nuanced understandings of conventional political and ideological binaries.

Of course, we cannot simply ignore what the Representative said, or where he said it. Critics chastised Wilson for an utterance of colossal impropriety. Reaction was swift and unforgiving. Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., appeared on *Good Morning America* the day after the outburst and remarked, “I was embarrassed for the chamber and a Congress I love. [Mr. Wilson’s utterance] demeaned the institution.”²⁴ Obama’s Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, contended, “No President has ever been treated like that. Ever.”²⁵ Representative Wilson’s political kin were no less stern in their collective opprobrium. Former Republican congressional representative Mickey Edwards offered both a primer in procedure and a guilty verdict: “There are rules of civility and decorum that are supposed to keep [the Congress]

a place where mutual respect that allows a workable democracy, and when you turn into a shout fest the whole process breaks down.”²⁶ *Time* reporter Michael Scherer reflected that Wilson’s outburst served to prove the President’s larger point, that the on-going debate about health care reform which had played out over a summer of town halls “had been less a discussion than a circus, a forum where misinformation was vindicated by passion, where disrespect was elevated to a virtue.”²⁷

Yet if we want to take civility seriously, Wilson’s example is one over which to linger, for the outburst as an outburst may reveal that a good bit is wrong with the conditions and structures meant to serve as guides and foundations for our efforts at democratic deliberation. I want to read Mr. Wilson’s remark, in other words, for how it may have functioned to disrupt the form and the sentiment of the President’s remarks on healthcare. That disruption seems particularly productive because of the risks it assumed, what Farrell has likened as “openly disputing the integrity of discourse in an acknowledged public place.”²⁸

“You lie!” may encompass just two words, but the reach of those words as Wilson spoke them—to whom he spoke them, when he spoke them, where he spoke them—cannot be overstated. That reach, moreover, concerns refining and deepening our understanding of such issues as decorum, propriety, and the ritual performances which mark and sustain our political



spectacle. It is easy to condemn Wilson's outburst and consign him a bit role in a discursive circus of vitriol. Such categorizations are consistent with the public language of our civil society, as Jeffrey C. Alexander recently has described. Elaborating on the insight Alexander wrote, "The discourse of civil society is divided into either/or binaries. In real life, political actors are not either rational or impulsive, honest or deceitful but more than a little of each. . . . The dark side of [this] symbolic dichotomy justifies exclusion from civil society and sometimes repression inside it."²⁹

If we are tempted to disparage Wilson and consign him to irrelevance, we overlook what may be gleaned from the rhetorical irreverence that marked the outburst to begin with. Seemingly unconcerned with the trappings of political formality, Wilson tersely called out the President to defend a claim. He rebutted the President's argument not with logic or reason or syllogism, but with a kind of dazzling rhetorical audacity—an authenticity, really—radical in its particularity. The accusation is akin to what one would speak in earnest rebuttal to a friend's claim in a tavern; one is rarely cognizant about decorum and formality over bottles of beer and baskets of pretzels. The utterance serves to remind us of the deeply entrenched norms of civility and tolerance and propriety that allegedly sustain our political theater. As Smith suggests, the norm of civility in politics requires, "at a minimum, making [uncivil] behavior look less like a normal concomitant of popular politics and more like an aberration from legitimate and normal political behavior."³⁰



I want to stipulate two insights. First, I do not believe, as Wilson seemed to, that the President lied during his address. And second, I am reluctant to banish Wilson's rhetorical example to the dust pile of impropriety; for his example may have consequential lessons to teach us. Among them these: Wilson reminds us of the powerful relationship between discourse and context, symbolic meaning and the power relations that inform any effort to advance rhetorical claims in the world. The swift repudiation of the Representative's remarks as a violation of the decorum of Congress confirms why vigilant attention should be paid not merely to what political actors utter, but the myriad webs of relationships in which their speech acts are ensnared.

Moreover, in shouting "You lie!," Wilson made the case for the authentic and outrageous in political discourse, and the ways in which authenticity and outrageousness may be used to unsettle political convention. In advancing this second observation I am not advocating a rhetorical free-for-all in our political deliberations. Instead I want to suggest that, for all the homage we give civility, the practices of incivility and dissent merit pride of place.

Finally, critical-interpretive understandings of Wilson’s remark should not be clouded by narrow political agendas. While it is true that critics along the political spectrum condemned Wilson’s behavior, his rhetorical example should be seen foremost as a “teachable moment,” one that may serve to remind us yet again of the fallacy of (rational) deliberation, a commitment too often tethered to potentially exclusive norms like rationality and expertise and disinterest, which can function rhetorically to marginalize the productive contributions that moral passions might inject into our public discourse. As Jon A. Shields has observed, scholars of public discourse should acknowledge more forthrightly “the critical role that moral passions play in energizing civic participation” even as liberals and conservatives in the political arena also accept “both the promise and limits of deliberation in public life.”³¹ In the case study of Joe Wilson, we are reminded of the ways the threads of decorum, passion, and civility weave together normative (often taken-for-granted) understandings of democratic practice. As the remaining cases illustrate, we would do well to interrogate those understandings more deeply.

The Wounded Body of Our Civility: Sarah Palin’s Peculiar Pluralism

Moving outside of the United States Congress and into the broader deliberative, contentious spaces where our shared civic identities and commitments are tested, showcased, and even sometimes transformed, I wish next to linger over Glenn Beck. Well, more



photo credit: Cristi Li

precisely, my concerns settle upon Mr. Beck’s penchant for organizing grand events where questions about American identity and the very meaning of civility itself is called into question. The media personality never passes on an opportunity to announce himself, and such was the case for his “Restoring Honor” rally, an event dedicated to the celebration of American ideals and values held on 28 August 2010 and attended by upwards of 300,000 people. (The National Park Service no longer provides official estimates, so crowd size is an approximation and may be tethered to the potential biases of those doing the counting; figures ranged between 300,000 and half-a-million.) Given that Mr. Beck was the principal initiator of the event, and given the divisive nature of his television and radio programs, many observers wondered if it was even possible that civility would show its face at the rally. Critics before the fact insisted the event would be concerned foremost with “spreading hate and intolerance” or, less insidiously, simply “fill up dead summer space” at the behest of the FOX News Network

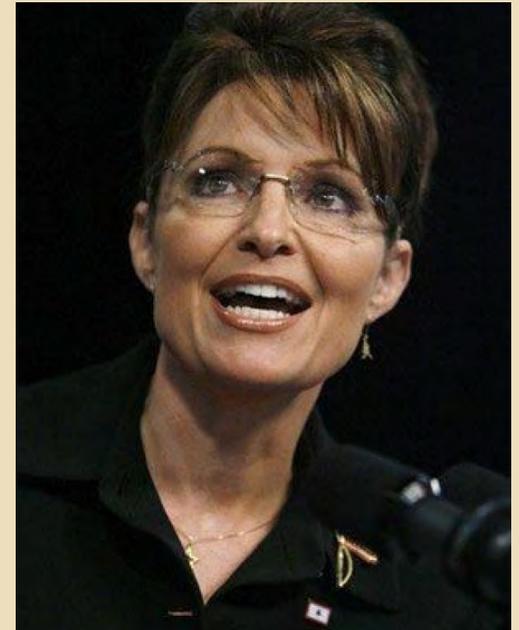
(Mr. Beck's employer).³²

Other commentators framed the rally differently. Ross Douthat, for example, remarked playfully that the rally “served up something considerably stranger [than expected]. This was a tent revival crossed with a pep rally intertwined with a history lecture married to a USO telethon—and that was just the first hour.”³³ The eminent civil rights historian Taylor Branch commented in his accustomed seriousness that Beck seemed to “have made peace for one day with the liberal half of the American heritage. That is a good thing. Our political health, in the spirit of Dr. King’s march, requires thoughtful and bold initiatives from all quarters.”³⁴ C.C. Campbell was more guarded. Choosing to forgo condemnation or tongue-in-cheek description or potentially excessive praise, she instead genuinely wrestled with what the rally suggested about our political culture. As she asked: “What was the meaning of Glenn Beck’s ‘Restoring Honor’ rally last weekend? Neither liberal nor conservatives can decide, but the huge gathering on the National Mall unsettled Americans in both camps.”³⁵

One particular reason the rally may have been unsettling could be attributed to the keynote address delivered by former Alaska governor Sarah Palin. While one observer characterized the speech as little more than the “usual pep talk,”³⁶ Greg Sargent was more stern, asserting that Palin “followed a script familiar to students of American history’s most storied demagogues,” a script that played, according to Sargent, on “followers’ murky fear that a sinister and godless other [was] trying to transform our country into something that no longer resembles America.” The speech, for Sargent, re-inscribed the “classic politics of resentment.”³⁷

Were we to pause and proffer cuts in kinder terms, we might say that certainly Ms. Palin has resolutely managed to ingratiate herself permanently into popular culture. A fervent user of Twitter and Facebook, analyst for Fox News, and star of a popular reality show, the former governor has recycled her fifteen minutes of fame on a continuous feedback loop. That fame, of course, began with her historical nomination as the Republican candidate for Vice-President in 2008. Given the curious turns Palin’s involvement in our public life has assumed, her political forte and rhetorical acumen may be readily overlooked or dismissed altogether. Given her ubiquitous presence in popular culture, why should we judge her a credible guide over anything having to do with the seriousness we attempt to bring to bear upon our public talk? Why should Palin be taken seriously as a student of American civility? What can we learn from her example?

Herbst contends, convincingly, that Palin’s public address merits closer examination. As she writes: “Putting aside the media interest, Palin’s charisma, her approach to political speech, and her ambivalence about the role of gender, all provide a tremendously rich portrait of civility and incivility in public life.”³⁸ For Herbst, Palin’s vice-Presidential run distinguished her as “breakthrough candidate” due in no small part to the “rhetorical ‘multitasking,’” she displayed over the duration of the campaign, prompting Herbst to judge this ability of Palin’s as confirmation that she is “one of the shrewdest strategic users of both civility and incivility.”³⁹





I am in partial agreement with Herbst: Palin's performances of (in) civility invite continued attention. I seek here to establish a textured consideration of the ways her "Restoring Honor" keynote pronounced a peculiar kind of rhetorical force upon the world. Critical attention to this rhetorical force aligns well with the other cases examined here because Palin's keynote demonstrates in compelling fashion the ways civility may assume not merely strategic valence, as Herbst recognizes, but also normative valence. Civility for Palin, in other words, uncomfortably demands we come to terms with notions of sacrifice that leverage violence, broken bodies, and the courage which may flow from valiant patriotism. Moreover, the text sustains its rhetorical force through an intriguing array of rhetorical commitments where matters of civility are concerned; in particular the text's troika of themes concerned with the male body, the courage of war, and the ways civility must be measured against such physical courage.

What Palin argued, in other words, was that civility is best understood as an earned condition: Its realization, and whatever corresponding honor and accolades we may tether to the virtue of civility itself, should be modeled after the examples of those who have suffered bodily wounds in military service to America's highest ideals. The culminating achievement of Palin's performance is to compel citizens to choose between a wanton nihilism as she construes the popular landscape; or a steady valor wherein honor, civility, and dignity superintend any other values that might make for a more raucous, if open, democratic stage. This dichotomy is important to understand, for a variety of reasons I explore below. Foremost, the dichotomy may serve to shed light on the tensions between civility and a robust, if peculiar, pluralism. I will explore these tensions over the subsequent course of this analysis.

Palin's address opens with gestures toward states of feeling, invoking the pride felt among the audience and the larger sense of honor that informs the rally. These feelings give way to the first key pivot in the text: Palin advances a set of commitments—patriotism, duty, sacrifice—tethered to the physical monuments that serve as both backdrop and foreground for her efforts to substantiate compelling definitions of honor and civility. As listeners are reminded:

We stand today at the symbolic crossroads of our nation's history. All around us are monuments to those who have sustained us in word and deed. There in the distance stands the monument to the father of our country. And behind me, the towering presence of the Great Emancipator who secured our union at the moment of its most perilous time and freed those whose captivity was our greatest shame.⁴⁰

The physical setting spurs listeners to recall that monuments do not function merely to commemorate; they also may compel a deep reflection of the sense of history and courage and duty to which American citizens are accountable.⁴¹ The examples of Washington and Lincoln, in



this calculus, rhetorically invite the audience to connect to a past comprised of valor and wise leadership. Through her invocation of this past, Palin establishes the terms that will guide her argument: Her address is not merely a keynote for a rally; the speech will perform an altogether different task, that of rhetorically inscribing upon its listeners the fundamental obligations with which to celebrate America's best traditions and resist any challenges to those traditions. Central among those obligations is the espousal of unwavering conviction in America's ordained mission (as Palin understands that mission) and a kind of tenacious pluralism, one that insists on open, democratic exchanges foreground in the esteemed recognition of traditional values of honor, (physical) courage, and a peculiar patriotism.

Monuments and memory and tradition give way to a shift in role. In arguing for the ways America may restore its honor, Palin next designates the key in which she will reflect upon those efforts of restoration and the values that must inform them. Namely, she draws lines of clarification, underscoring how she will (not) speak over the duration of her address: "Now, I've been asked to speak today, not as a politician. No, as something more—something much more. I've been asked to speak as the mother of a soldier. . . ." As a soldier's mother, Palin will build a rhetorical platform characterized by the compelling imagery of soldiers' wounded bodies. These images remind listeners of the stakes central to the day's rally: "We honor those who served something greater than self and made the ultimate sacrifice, as well as those who served and did come home forever changed by the battlefield."



In building a platform dedicated to honoring wounded warriors and their valiant service, Palin advances a set of commitments implicitly concerned with the nature and structures of civility. Through the object lessons found in soldiers' exemplary leadership and deeds, Palin argues by way of synechode that our public discourse must always serve as backdrop to this larger ethic of sacrifice. Civility, then, is characterized by Palin through the lessons of an acute, uncompromising dichotomy: Words never can trump deeds, particularly when those deeds are clothed in the sacrifice, valor, pain, and courage of military service. The wounded body always trumps the rhetorical flourish, and civility, then, must be most properly understood as a series of paradoxical norms: From the wounded and the broken we may learn what it means to be whole; warring soldiers' bodies serve as the texts onto which we may write the canons of peaceful citizenship; from the unspeakable horrors of war we may yet sow eloquence.

Civility's paradoxical transformation deepens across two stories Palin shares, stories that comprise the moral universe of the address. She begins by focusing upon the "raw courage" of Marcus Luttrell. A U.S. Navy SEAL, Luttrell and three of his fellow SEALs were carrying out a mission to capture one of the Taliban's leaders in Afghanistan when some men herding goats stumbled upon their position. According to Palin, the dilemma for Luttrell and his fellow SEALs was one of trust and certainty. Were these shepherds friend or foe? Would they betray the SEALs' location? Should they be killed? The SEALs took a vote and determined that letting the men go was the humane choice, "the American thing to do." What happened next is staggering in its horror. "[W]ithin hours," Palin notes, "over

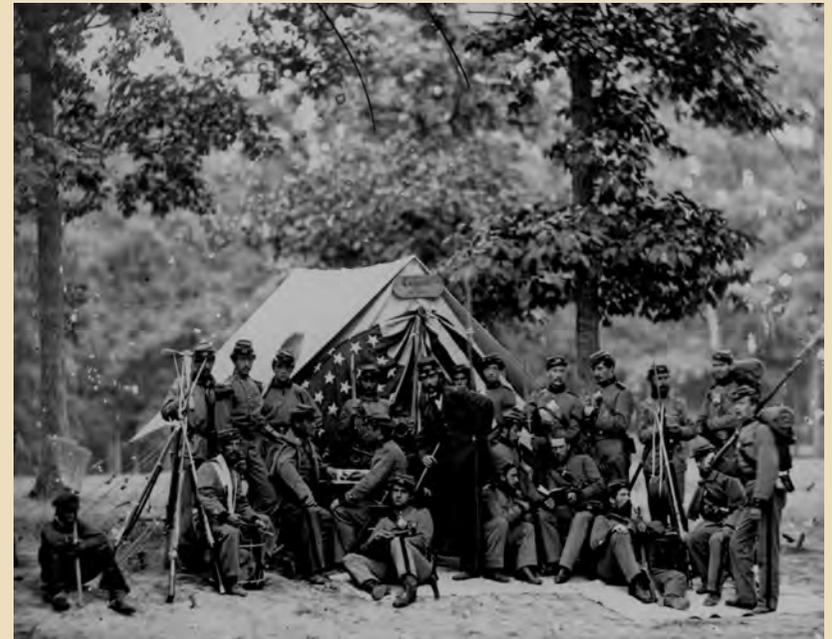


a hundred Taliban forces arrived on the scene. They battled the four Navy SEALs through the surrounding hills. A rescue helicopter came, but it was shot down. By the time the sun set on June 28, 2005, it was one of the bloodiest days for American forces in Afghanistan.” Nineteen men were killed; Luttrell was the only survivor. Badly wounded, he staggered through the mountains for miles, struggling to outrun the Taliban forces. Stumbling upon a village, Luttrell asked for mercy and his request was granted. The villagers took him in, cared for him, honored their ancient customs of hospitality, and eventually returned Luttrell back to United States’ forces. Palin transforms the parable into a platform for object lessons about the meanings of mercy and civility itself. “Marcus’ story,” she intones, “teaches us that even on the worst battlefield against the most brutal enemy, we adhere to our principles. The American love of justice and mercy is what makes us a force for good in the world. Marcus is a testament to that.”

That citizens removed from the battlefield may learn moral object lessons is not a novel insight. What merits pause over Palin’s remarks to this point is how she is able to invoke a tradition of inscribing meaning upon brutality, meaning that affirms fundamental principles and couches those principles in actions wherein the warrior ethos serves as staunch reminder that the horrors and brutalities of war will not have the last word. Writing about the letters soldiers wrote home during the American Civil War, Drew Gilpin Faust impresses how crucial were the meanings the soldiers articulated about the battles and the wounded and the dying cascading around them:

Civil War soldiers seem themselves desperately to have wanted to believe in the narratives they told and in the religious assumptions that lay behind them. The letters may have served in part as a way of reaching across the chasm of experience and the horror that separated battle from home front, an almost ritualized affirmation of those very domestic understandings of death that had been so profoundly challenged by the circumstances of war. . . .⁴²

In the context of the “Restoring Honor” rally, Palin’s narrative of Luttrell, its putative lessons of mercy and justice, reaches across a similar chasm, this one a kind of post-modern nihilism wherein norms and mores that might inform our shared public efforts at deliberation have given way to insidious advertising and hyper-distraction. Might Luttrell’s wounds, the very perilousness of his circumstances, the mercy he and his fellow SEALs displayed, serve Palin’s efforts to provide an object lesson about the politics of





civility itself?

Leadership in battle serves as the foundation for a second moral lesson, one Palin recounts in the saga of Sergeant James “Eddie” Wright, a Marine who served in Iraq. Wright’s service was punctuated by the pivotal battle for Fallujah. Leading a unit that was ambushed, Wright was “knocked out when a rocket propelled grenade hit his Humvee. When he came to, he saw that both his hands were gone and his leg was badly wounded.” What Palin describes next may be understood as the provocative rendering of woundedness, valor, and sacrificial duty.

[Wright] couldn’t fire his weapon, he could barely move, and he was bleeding to death. But he had the strength of mind to lead the men under his command, and that is exactly what he did. He kept them calm, he showed them how to stop the bleeding in his leg, he told them where to return fire, he had them call for support, and he got them out of there alive.

If physically incapacitated, Wright nevertheless marshaled the intellectual and moral resources to lead. He attended diligently to the social cohesion and welfare

of his unit, provided instruction in caring for his wounded body, and sustained the structures necessary for self-defense against an uncompromising enemy, and ensured each man in his unit survived. Recognized with the Bronze Star for Valor, Wright reflected that he was, “Just doing my job,” an aphorism Palin foregrounds as part of a larger argument concerned with the selflessness and determination and moral courage civility requires. Implicitly acknowledging the contentious rhetorical climate in which debates about healthcare and spending and the conduct of war were unfolding, Palin reminds listeners of the simple moral that may be drawn from Wright’s exemplary behavior: “And if you want to see the American spirit of never retreating, no matter the odds—the steady confidence and optimism, no matter the setbacks—look at Eddie’s story. No matter how tough times are, Americans always pull through.”

Physical and moral courage are tied to civility in the texture of Palin’s recounting of Wright’s saga in this way: Our public arguments require a confidence and optimism and a sense of destiny Palin finds wanting in our national discourse. The examples of Luttrell and Wright reinforce that rhetorical civility is not without risks. The lessons of the battlefield accord with citizens’ efforts to make meaning from the horrible wounds and deaths propagated by war. If Palin’s rhetorical efforts to divine meaning from soldiers’ wounded bodies are not new, her meditation at the “Restoring Honor” rally participates in a long conversation about memory and sacrifice, war and the obligations of responsible citizenship. As Faust reflects on the American Civil War, “The war’s staggering human cost demanded a new sense of national destiny, one designed to ensure that lives [and wounded bodies] had been sacrificed for appropriately lofty ends. So much suffering had to have a transcendent purpose. . . .”⁴³ For Palin,



the transcendent purpose of suffering in war is crystalized in a vision of civility that insists upon physical courage, violence, and a peculiar pluralism that is at once uncompromising and enlightening in its realization.

Where Palin's rhetorical discourse is concerned, it is tempting, as Herbst does, to characterize those discourses principally as "tactical." As she writes, Palin may be said to embody "how civility and incivility are both thoroughly and self-reflexively tactical, thrown on and off, in an age of constant media attention and Internet chatter."⁴⁴ I would counter in a key more explicitly normative, however. Palin's address should be seen as an example of the ways in which civility may be imbued with moral force derived from appeals to wounded, sacrificial bodies. These bodies carry with them both ramifications political and aesthetic. The seemingly conventional sentiments or feelings upon which Palin plays—honor, valor, duty, patriotism—are transformed within the rhetorical calculus of the address to embody profound civic commitments, ones that serve to name who falls within the fold of American civility and who is destined to stand outside. An insistence upon insiders and outsiders may seem, on the surface, thoroughly anti-pluralistic, but I am not so sure. The basis for exclusion as Palin articulates that basis seems, finally, tied principally to the affective arguments the address advances. These states-of-feeling reach into and profoundly complicate the intellectual claims we might make about civility (and pluralism).



The complications are perpetuated in no small part because of the ways in which the text enacts what James Jasinski has identified as rhetoric's power to promote "communal reconstitution." Such reconstitution, he notes, "can take a variety of discursive forms and rely on different textual practices as specific questions of social and political authority, power, bonds of affiliation, meaning, value and institutional practice are confronted and negotiated."⁴⁵ In her "Restoring Honor" keynote, Palin models an example of communal reconstitution at once benign and contentious. The text insists on fundamental (traditional?) notions of valor, honor, and courage. As it does so, the speech also gestures to the slippery contours of pluralism: If we insist upon a kind of full-throated democratic engagement with difference, such an engagement, at least for Palin, must unfold in the shadows cast by wounded soldiers. Their object lessons simply cannot be overlooked. In Palin's rhetorical universe, finally, we are forced to gaze upon constellations whose formations we viscerally grasp, but which finally do not tell us anything about the ground on which we stand or the sky over our heads. Civility and its cousin incivility, then, become fleeting celestial bodies, wholly normative, thoroughly ephemeral. What remains, at last, are our wounds.

Violence, Rhetorical Courage, and Civic Redemption: Barack Obama's Politics of Theodicy

As Christina-Taylor Green made her way toward the "Congress on Your Corner" event sponsored by Representative Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ), the nine-year-old surely never could have imagined the violence that would mar the pleasant January Saturday. The precocious third-grader, lover of baseball and politics and the guitar, wanted to meet Giffords and learn more about serving in government.⁴⁶ Jared Lee Loughner assured Christina would never satiate that curiosity: He allegedly murdered her, along with five

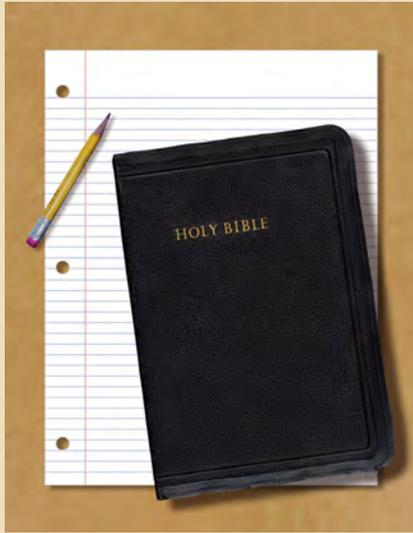
others; eight more were wounded. If the shooting lasted only minutes, its reverberations shook our national psyche.⁴⁷ Cries of outrage and frustration boiled over across the political spectrum after the shooting as commentators struggled to name motive and cause. Principal among the reasons offered for Loughner's alleged act was that our political rhetoric was ill; a virulent strain of outrageous invective rendered all the more potent within in the hyper-technologized civic space that now served as the public sphere.⁴⁸ Generally overlooked in the crucible of vitriol was the potential of civility amplified by a particular set of theological convictions to offer solace, explanation, and robustly articulate a compelling set of rhetorical commitments with which to make sense of what transpired in Tucson.

In President Barack Obama's 12 January 2011 address commemorating the victims of the Tucson, Arizona, shooting, we have a particularly rich exemplar of the ways notions of civility cohere within a rhetorical text to constitute a political performance from which to glean insights about violence, suffering, and habits of civic action. Along with performing the customary duties of Presidential solace in the aftermath of tragedy, the address presents a compelling example of rhetorical courage in the face of such tragedy. The President's address specifically is an exemplary meditation on what I will term the politics of theodicy. Concerned with reconciling pain spurred by unimaginable violence and loss, the text demonstrates how citizens might embrace the urgent, difficult necessity of shared sacrifice through symbolically constructing the rhetorical, civic, and theological foundations on which such sacrifices might be built. A provocative locus of violence, politics, and faith, the address re-imagines civility as a collection of habits forged from suffering and tempered by humility, courage, and moral generosity.

If the attempted assassination of Representative Giffords provided a familiar stage from which an American President might console a grieving nation, the familiar script should not obscure important questions, and in particular what I will demonstrate are the provocative threads of faith and civility at the very center of the ritual.⁴⁹ In the aftermath of such inexplicable pain, could a rhetoric woven with religious sentiments heal and uplift a public in mourning? Could the President identify and articulate arguments that might move our polity into richer understandings of suffering, violence, and the ways our shared political obligations to one another might serve to promote fuller understandings of the sacrifices democracy requires? After briefly reviewing some of the key assumptions of theodicy, I turn to a consideration of the ways Obama's address promotes rigorous civic and rhetorical reflection on the ideals and practices of civility.

Stated plainly, theodicy encompasses what might be translated as "God's justice," and principally concerns efforts to present what John Thiel has described as a rational defense of God before the evil of nature, humanity, and history.⁵⁰ Put simply, why do good persons suffer while the





wicked thrive? The foundation for the question is found principally in the Book of Job. More broadly, theodicy is an academic or philosophical inquiry concerned with advancing rational explanations for the reality of evil. As Terrence Tilley has traced, the “theodicy project” is a modern undertaking, one whose origins can be pinpointed to the late seventeenth century.⁵¹ Perhaps most helpful are the insights of the journalist and speech writer William Safire, who recognized some twenty years ago the ways “Job reaches across the millennia to express modern Man’s [sic] outrage at today’s inequities.”⁵² That outrage’s expression is most properly and precisely, for the purposes of this essay, understood as the primary concern of theodicy. Importantly, theodicy need not be equated with resignation. As Safire eloquently noted, the Book of Job may in fact be read as a “sustained note of defiance. The book’s message is not that we should accept the dictates of Fate, but rather that we should object to Authority’s injustice or unconcern, and assert our morality as best we can.”⁵³ Central to my argument in this section of the essay is to demonstrate the ways in which Obama’s address creates and uses the resources of language to promote deeper civic reflection and concerted practices central to an authentic civility and the rhetorical courage that must inform it.

The text’s key rhetorical pivot commences with the end of the roll call of those killed in the shooting. Mentioned last among those murdered is nine-year-old Christina-Taylor Green. The death of innocence and curiosity and possibility as modeled in young Christina’s life serves to infuse the text with a compelling stasis. We are rendered mute by the horror of the tragedy: A child is dead. The President does not wallow in the maudlin about this one particular death, however. Instead, he reminds us that Christina’s murder was one of six and that the collective pain we feel in light of this tragedy crosses any and all divisions. In our grief we have opportunity: That opportunity is one in which we may realize that “our hearts have reason for fullness.”⁵⁴ That fullness, however, is not confined to good feeling and sentimentality. The text asks considerably more.

Foremost among the speech’s solicitations is its recognition to make meaning from the horrible tragedy that ensued on a pristine January morning. How we undertake that shared work of creating and establishing those meanings, however, is tied irrevocably to the politics of theodicy that drive the rhetorical action of the text. This politics shows itself, for example, when the President remarks, “You see, when a tragedy like this strikes, it is part of our nature to demand explanations—to try to impose some order on the chaos, and make sense out of that which seems senseless.” What is distinct here is the open-handed recognition about the sheer unpredictability that bleeds across our shared lives. And while we may, as the President acknowledges, take up conversations concerned with the alleged shooter’s motive or the soundness of gun safety laws or the adequacy of our mental health systems, these conversations, the intense desire for control they belie, are not enough.

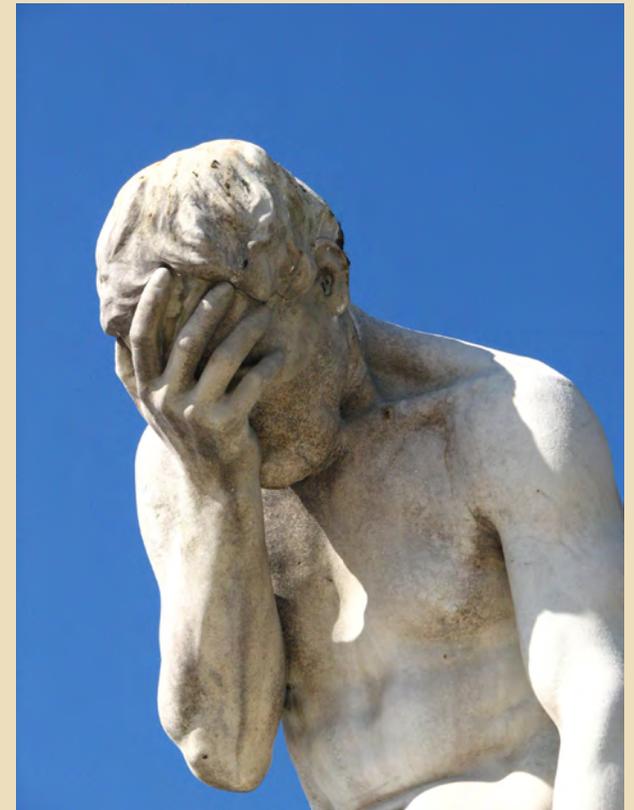




photo credit: Gareth Weeks

Rational explanations will neither comfort nor redeem us.

What is required is a rhetorical vulnerability best precipitated by an honest recognition that we have shared obligations to one another, and that such obligations are sustained foremost by gestures of reflection, and the values of generosity and tempered heroism which may follow from them. Resources for such generosity and reflection may be found across the discursive landscape; the President posits that Scripture provides one key source for how we might conceptualize a rhetorical vulnerability informed by the politics of theodicy. As he remarks, “Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, ‘when I look for light, then came darkness.’ Bad things happen, and we must guard against simple explanations in the aftermath.” That guard against reductive (and reactive) explanations may find its most compelling expression in reflection. That reflection, though, is of a peculiar sort, for what the President seems foremost to advocate is a process of reflection untethered to the banal, if earnest, conventions of procedural liberalism.⁵⁵ Stated another way, Obama fashions from theodicy a rhetorical courage that models the sort of dissidence Safire esteemed. In this case, however, Obama’s object of resistance is not Authority but the specter of violence, and particularly the ways in which such violence may render imaginations of civility stillborn.

If the tragedy of Christina’s death provides the first rhetorical pivot in the text, the culminating effort of that pivot finds its eloquent expression in the address’s injunctions about the rhetorical values which might inform our deliberative processes in the aftermath of the shooting. Within these injunctions we see explicitly the civic acumen that informs the larger politics of theodicy to which the text is wedded. As the President remarks,

What we can’t do is use this tragedy as one more occasion to turn on one another. As we discuss these issues, let each of us do so with a good dose of humility. Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let us use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together.

These injunctions are at once civic and rhetorical and theological. In its marriage of politics and religion, civics and faith, the text articulates a set of convictions by which to navigate tragedy and to render what may be understood best as a rigorous, courageous form of civic engagement, theologically informed.⁵⁶ The culmination of that engagement is not exclusion; on the contrary, the text anticipates and leverages a rich pluralism—“[We are] an American family 300 million strong” — to challenge politics, and political rhetoric, as usual. “If this tragedy prompts reflection and debate, as



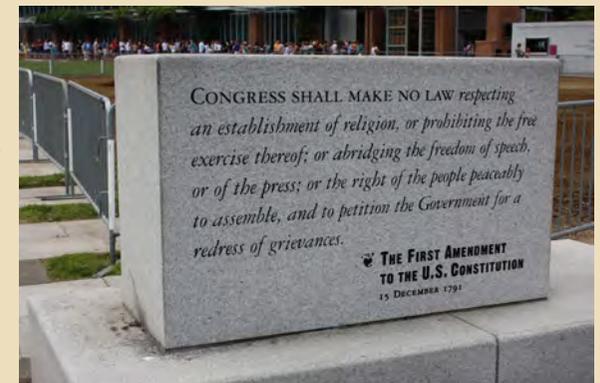
it should,” the President intones, “let’s make sure it’s worthy of those we have lost. Let’s make sure it’s not on the usual plane of politics and point scoring and pettiness that drifts away with the next news cycle.”

The theodicy occasioned by the tragedy is given compelling rhetorical force within the texture of the address through appeals to civil discourse and an authentic and courageous civility—a civility tied deeply to notions of sacrifice, compassionate attention toward those within and without our circles of concern, and demonstrated efforts to expand the moral imagination. Such sacrifice can encompass how a society might learn to live with loss along the spectrum of public policy and the attendant feelings that accompany such loss, from rising unemployment to educational inequity. The sacrifice the President implores is of a different but related sort. It is, foremost, the relentless evidence of inexplicable violence and its surrounds of loss and pain and outrage. These emotions, however, must not have the final word. Like the novelist Ralph Ellison, Obama recognizes the certain fact that we are not merely citizens in the same boat; our fellow citizens are the boat. This kind of expansion of our shared moral imagination is rendered possible within the calculus demanded by the text: “I want us to live up to [Christina’s] expectations. I want her democracy to be as good as she imagined it.” May it someday be so.

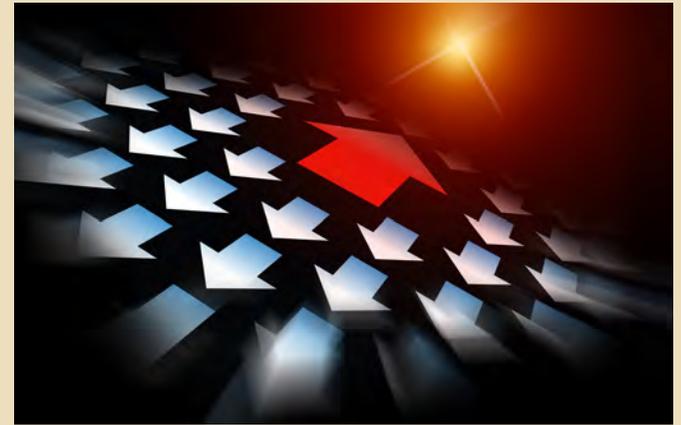
What of the Future for American Civility?

If the seemingly “uncivil” turn of our political discourse has become ever more conspicuous over the last ten years, I will not use this essay to wring my hands and offer solutions. Instead, I conclude with a set of speculative descriptions about the apparent nature of civility in our politics in the twenty first century. These descriptions will be general and brief; my hope is that they also might be sufficiently worthwhile to spur continued conversations about the state of our political discourse, and that, finally, we may move toward genuinely honest conversations about the place of civility in our shared public life.

Reviewing the cases considered here, I am struck, first, by the salience and power of such normative conventions as propriety, decorum, rationality, the homage we owe the past, the gratitude we owe our military personnel, and the faith we must sustain in recovering from unspeakable tragedy. To point out these conventions, the ways the different cases chafe against them (in the example of Wilson) or capitalize upon them toward what we judge potentially interesting rhetorical and civic ends (Palin, Obama), is not to acquiesce to their sheer power as much as to underscore their centrality to our efforts to act together on the public stage. It is to say, in other words, that any consideration of civility must encompass the recognition of how overtures toward civility entail commitment to fundamental rhetorical norms, and that these norms enact peculiar kinds of discipline upon participants’ efforts to argue their convictions. If this observation is obvious, it nevertheless must be reckoned with as a starting point of paramount importance. Discourses of civility, pleas for civility, are not merely (are never merely) longing paeans for some sort of golden age of public discourse, for such an age never has existed. Instead, what matters is reading civility for the normative forces at work within it.



Second, these cases together reinforce what may be articulated as the limits of pluralism. Rhetorical scholars are particularly well-positioned to advance anew critiques of the ways in which pluralism may in fact function in keys monolithic and stifling. In the examples of Wilson, Palin, and Obama, we have before us an invitation to consider more carefully the putative substance that underlies our calls for more civil discourse, and to re-imagine instances of rhetorical action (broadly pitched) whereby we realize qualitatively different understandings of civility. These understandings showcase, as I have tried to demonstrate here, the ways in which civility may be fashioned rhetorically to highlight the ramifications that may follow for public discourse by taking more seriously the notions of authenticity, pluralism, and rhetorical courage. As Mark Kingwell observed: “Civility [should allow] ample room for giving offense and for making politically unpopular or dangerous claims.”⁵⁷ Central to Kingwell’s observation is the idea that we make claims upon one another in our public lives, and that such claims hinge upon justification, broadly understood. In the cases considered here, we have intriguing examples of how claims for civility might be realized.



Finally, I will end this essay where it began, with the observation and corresponding conviction that our age requires new forms of rhetorical imagination and the corresponding courage to sustain them. My hope is not for some rhetorical free-for-all; nor will I insist upon what that imagination must look like across all cases, contexts, and forms. Rhetoric historically always has been a particular art, bent toward the specific constraints of occasion and audience. That history, in all its disruption and contention, should be brought to bear upon contemporary discussions of our public arguments with one another and the place of civility in those arguments. Whatever else may be said about the character of our public talk, it seems foremost that we have forgotten certain fundamental ideals. These ideals are not the philosopher’s quibbling over logical consistency or the putative value of rationality. What we seem to have forgotten might be more closely aligned to the examples embodied in the discourses of the Populists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If the sheer diversity that characterized this movement cannot be encapsulated in this essay’s conclusion, we might nevertheless agree that these women and men remind us how thoroughly, wonderfully, and profoundly messy our public arguments should be, and that from such messiness we might cull a semblance of the “people” we are meant to be. C. Vann Woodward understood as much when he remarked, “One must expect and even hope that there will be future upheavals to shock the seats of power and privilege and furnish the periodic therapy that seems necessary to the health of our democracy. But one cannot expect them to be any more decorous or seemly or rational than their predecessors.”⁵⁸ Civility must reign. But then again, a little incivility may be good for us.

Endnotes

¹Jeffrey B. Kurtz is Associate Professor of Communication at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. He would like to thank the Editor of *Relevant Rhetoric*, Professor Nancy Legge, and two anonymous reviewers for their professional stewardship of this essay. Gratitude also is owed to Denison University students Lindsey Audette, Lizzie Borchers, Christian Payne, and Hongyi Tian for valuable research assistance. Dr. B. Wayne (Buddy) Howell at Virginia Tech University served as an engaged interlocutor and faithful friend throughout this essay's many drafts.

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⁵Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style," 5.

⁶Sasha Abramsky, "Look Ahead in Anger: Hyperbolic Rhetoric Threatens to Swamp Our Politics," in the *Chronicle Review* from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on-line (<http://chronicle.com>). Accessed July 14, 2010.

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¹¹J. Michael Hogan, "Preface: Rhetoric and Community," in *Rhetoric and Community: Studies in Unity and Fragmentation* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), xiii.

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¹⁴Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xxi-xxii.

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¹⁷Quoted in Kimberly K. Smith, *The Dominion of Voice: Riot, Reason, and Antebellum Politics* (Lawrence, KS: University

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¹⁸ Smith, *The Dominion of Voice*, 62.

¹⁹ Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9.

²⁰ Hariman, *Political Style*, 12.

²¹ Quoted in Smith, *Dominion of Voice*, 3.

²² Susan Herbst, *Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 3.

²³ Quoted in Herbst, *Rude Democracy*, 12.

²⁴ Quoted in Carl Hulse, "In Lawmaker's Outburst, a Rare Breach of Protocol." <http://nytimes.com/>. September 11, 2009. Accessed August 2, 2010.

²⁵ Quoted in Hulse, "Lawmaker's Outburst."

²⁶ Quoted in Emily Friedman, "Did Joe Wilson's 'You Lie' Outburst Cross the Line on Congressional Courtesy?" ABCNews.go.com. September 10, 2009. Accessed August 2, 2010.

²⁷ Michael Scherer, "You Lie!": Representative Wilson's Outburst." www.time.com/time/politics. September 10, 2009. Accessed August 2, 2010.

²⁸ Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 308. In citing Farrell I mean not to imply he would agree with Wilson's outburst. I simply wish to maintain that one way to read the Representative's utterance is through the lens Farrell proposes, one concerned, as I understand his argument, with the ways in which rhetoric may disrupt and challenge discursive conventions.

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³⁰ Smith, *Dominion of Voice*, 67.

³¹ Jon A. Shields, *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 147.

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³⁵ C.C. Campbell, "Tent revival, 21st-century style: Point of View: The Glenn Beck Rally Was a Reminder of the Appeal - and Limits - of American Civil Rights" *St. Louis-Post Dispatch*, September 2, 2010: Sec. A.

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³⁷ Greg Sargent, "Stoking Fears of the 'Other'" *The Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk, VA), August 31, 2010: Sec. B.

³⁸ Herbst, *Rude Democracy*, 31.

³⁹ Herbst, *Rude Democracy*, 32.

⁴⁰ The keynote address was downloaded from Sarah Palin's Facebook page. All subsequent citations are taken from this version of the text.

⁴¹ For elaboration on the rhetorical power of monuments and memorials, please see especially the work of Carole Blair.v

⁴² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008),

31.

⁴³ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 268.

⁴⁴ Herbst, *Rude Democracy*, 67.

⁴⁵ James Jasinski quoted in “Ethical and Moral Judgment and the Power of Public Address,” Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles in *Public Address and Moral Judgment: Critical Studies in Ethical Tensions*, eds. Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2009), xvii.

⁴⁶ See Krissah Thompson and Theola Labbe-DeBose. BlogPost. <http://washington.post.com/>. January 9, 2011. Accessed June 13, 2011.

⁴⁷ Helen Cooper and Jeff Zeleny, “Obama Calls for New Era of Civility in U.S. Politics.” <http://nytimes.com/>. January 12, 2011. Accessed June 13, 2011.

⁴⁸ See “Rhetoric Intensifies After Giffords Shooting.” *All Things Considered*. By Jeff Brady. Natl. Public Radio, January 10, 2011. <http://npr.org/>. Accessed June 13, 2011.

⁴⁹ Adam Nagourney, “Facing Challenge, Obama Returns to Unity Theme.” January 12, 2011. NYTimes.com. Accessed June 13, 2011, and Sarah Wheaton, “Executive Consolation.” January 12, 2011. <http://nytimes.com/>. Interactive Feature. Accessed June 13, 2011.

⁵⁰ John E. Thiel, *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering: A Theological Reflection* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), ix.

⁵¹ Terrance W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1991), 2.

⁵² William Safire, *The First Dissident: The Book of Job in Today's Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), xiv.

⁵³ Safire, *The First Dissident*, xiv.

⁵⁴ Barack Obama. “Remarks in Tucson.” January 12, 2011. <http://nytimes.com/>. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition of the text.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey B. Kurtz, “‘How is it that ye do not discern this time?’: Public Faith, Moral Conflict, and the Recovery of Rhetorical Democracy,” *Journal of Communication and Religion* 32 (March 2009): 111-134.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Heft. “Obama’s living virtues.” May 14, 2009. *The Immanent Frame*. Accessed June 13, 2011. <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2009/05/14/obamas-living-virtues/>.

⁵⁷ Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue, and the Politics of Pluralism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 245.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, rev ed. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 290.