

# “W” Stands for Women: Feminism and Security Rhetoric in the Post-9/11 Bush Administration

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Feminist criticisms of the Bush Administration distinguish its feminized security rhetoric, which claims to support women’s rights in Iraq and Afghanistan, from its actions at home and abroad, which undermine hard-won gains for women. This distinction between words and deeds obscures, on the one hand, the tremendous progress that feminists have made in framing women’s rights as an issue that ought to be taken seriously and, on the other hand, the way that this rhetoric is itself a significant form of political action: It aims to influence how Americans will conceptualize the struggle for women’s rights. I correct for these problems by developing a political theory of what I call the “framing effect” of rhetoric—its power to shape our worldview. Frames, I suggest, are related to one another dialogically: They build on one another by transposing old rhetorical frames into new contexts. The Bush Administration draws on existing feminist rhetoric, but transforms it by combining it with two other kinds of discourse: a rhetoric of chivalrous respect and a rhetoric of democratic peace. I show that in both rhetorical frames, the Bush Administration bases its concern with women’s rights abroad upon the presumption that the women’s movement in the United States successfully achieved its goals long ago. My analysis of how current security rhetoric frames women’s rights can help us to understand both how the Bush Administration is able to use feminist ideas in new and nonfeminist ways and how we in turn might redeploy the Bush rhetoric so as to challenge the presumption that women at home already enjoy their full rights.

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*[T]he worldwide advancement of women's issues is not only in keeping with the deeply held values of the American people; it is strongly in our national interest as well.*

— Secretary of State Colin Powell, March 7, 2002

Since 9/11, the Bush Administration's rhetoric on national security has been sounding more and more feminist. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was justified not only in terms of the war on terror but also in terms of restoring the rights of women mistreated under Taliban rule. The U.S. government has openly supported the codification of women's equality and participation in both Afghani and Iraqi interim governments and constitutions, on the grounds that women's inclusion in these emerging democracies is essential to our national security. The U.S. Mission to the United Nations sponsored Resolution 58/142, which was passed by the General Assembly in December 2003 and expresses a commitment to women's equal political and economic participation around the world based on its importance to international security. Arguing for these policies, Bush Administration officials sound almost indistinguishable from feminist activists.

Feminists have responded to this new security rhetoric in two ways. Not surprisingly, many feminists are cynical. They have dismissed the rhetoric as mere rhetoric, noting that the Bush Administration has a pattern of saying it supports women's rights, while at the same time it is actively dismantling feminist political gains, especially in the areas of reproductive health, AIDS policy, and violence against women.<sup>1</sup> One commentator has referred to this as "stealth misogyny" (Goldstein 2003). This disjunction between rhetoric and reality has led numerous feminists and others to be deeply skeptical of the administration's increasing use of feminist rhetoric to support its policies abroad.<sup>2</sup> The concern is that the Bush Administration is not actually committed to women's equality and rights, but has cynically used this rhetoric to increase support for its foreign policy and to win reelection by appealing to women voters.<sup>3</sup>

1. For a sampling of feminist views on Bush, see the collected essays in Flanders 2004c.

2. For example: "Even though Bush used Afghan women's rights to drum up support for his war, this did not lead to a sustained commitment to Afghan women" (Bunch 2002).

3. "Bush has feebly attempted to use feminism to justify invasion [of Iraq], fantasizing that a 'democratic' Iraq would show 'that honest government, and respect for women, and the great Islamic tradition of learning can triumph in the Middle East and beyond.' But feminists aren't buying it; few see reason to hope war will relieve the miserable condition of the Iraqi people, women included" (Featherstone 2003). She is quoting here from Bush 2002. Laura Flanders examines the cynical use of women within the Bush Administration in her book (2004a).

What is surprising is that a coalition of feminist groups—the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), the Feminist Majority, and the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)—has greeted the Bush Administration’s rhetoric on women and security with praise. In their periodically updated “Global Women’s Issues Scorecard on the Bush Administration,” they have given the administration grades for its rhetoric about women in Iraq and Afghanistan that have risen from Bs and Cs in August 2003 to a peak of straight As in March 2004.<sup>4</sup> In their most recent report, the grades for rhetoric range from A (for “Women in Political Decision Making in Afghanistan and Iraq”) down to C (for “Women’s Security in Afghanistan and Iraq”). Yet even they have been deeply skeptical of the administration’s willingness to act accordingly. The Global Scorecard’s grades for what they call the “reality” of the Bush record on women’s issues in Afghanistan and Iraq are strikingly lower than those for the “rhetoric”: Its grades here have been consistently Ds, Fs, and Is for “incomplete.”<sup>5</sup>

It is my contention that neither of these responses is adequate to a feminist analysis of the Bush Administration’s feminized security rhetoric. Both reactions rest on a distinction between words and deeds that obscures the very political work that words do in framing how we see the world.<sup>6</sup> For example, when we dismiss the Bush Administration rhetoric as a cynical strategy to get votes, we overlook how it is an indication of the success that feminists have had in altering security rhetoric in recent years. The Bush Administration’s use of feminized security rhetoric is only possible now because feminist and other peace activists have been struggling for decades to reframe how political actors con-

4. The grades fell for the first time to a mix of an A, a B, and a C in June 2004, the last date for which there is a report (Center for Health and Gender Equity, Feminist Majority, and Women’s Environment and Development Organization 2004a). The Web page is designed to mimic a child’s report card. This site also reports on the Bush Administration’s performance in other policy areas, in which notably it has scored less well. Most significant of these are issues having to do with population control and women’s reproductive health, as well as CEDAW—the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In these areas, the Bush Administration has earned grades of C, D, and Incomplete for its rhetoric.

5. Center for Health and Gender Equity, Feminist Majority, and Women’s Environment and Development Organization 2004c. In August 2003 and again in March 2004, the Iraq reality received an I for “incomplete.” When Iraq has been grouped together with Afghanistan, the reality has always received D and F grades.

6. It may be that these feminists are not actually committed to the idea that words are not deeds, but are simply using this idea for political purposes. Even in this case, I would argue that this is politically problematic for feminists because this rhetoric aims to shape how others should understand the Bush Administration in terms of words vs. deeds. Regardless, then, of the assumptions these feminists make about the ontological status of words, their own rhetoric performs a separation of words from deeds that I consider to be problematic for reasons I discuss here.

ceptualize security (Blanchard 2003; Grant and Newland 1991; Peterson 1992; Tickner 1992, 2001). Over the past decade, we have witnessed signs that their activism is beginning to have an impact. In 1998, the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia set a precedent that found rape to be a war crime. In 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace, and Security,” which draws an explicit connection between women’s rights and international security. Now, the officials of the most powerful government in the world seem so conversant with this feminized security rhetoric that their words often appear to be indistinguishable from those of feminist activists. Even if we accept the claim that the Bush Administration has been using this rhetoric only to get votes, we should still see this as a sign of the progress feminists have made: A neoconservative administration believes that feminized security rhetoric is viable enough to attract voters—unthinkable 20 or 30 years ago. If we dismiss the rhetoric as mere words, then we fail to appreciate the work feminists have done to make the connection between women and security sound reasonable and mainstream to our contemporary ears.

Similarly, when we praise the rhetoric of the Bush Administration for being feminist, we risk missing the work that this rhetoric is doing to frame women’s rights *in a particular way*. This is why I refer to it as *feminized*, rather than feminist—to leave open the question of whether what sounds at first to be feminist rhetoric is indeed so. As the diversity and contention within feminist scholarship demonstrates, there are many different ways of arguing for women’s rights, each of which brings certain political issues to the foreground while others recede to the back. When we simply accept that this rhetoric is feminist, we stop asking critical questions: *How* is it feminist? How does it frame women’s issues? How does it shape which issues appear salient and which do not? How does it constrain and limit possible discursive responses?

Neither of the responses that has emerged so far provides the analytical tools necessary to think about how rhetoric works, since each participates in the myth that words are not also deeds. Accordingly, we end up with a Manichaean set of alternative evaluations: Either the language of the Bush Administration is feminist (and therefore gets good grades), or it is a cynical co-optation of feminist ideas (and therefore must be rejected). However, when we think about the framing work that rhetoric performs, it is impossible to read this as either an unqualified success or a complete failure for feminism. By shifting our attention to framing, I hope to open up space to consider successes and failures where we did

not think to look for them before. I want to appreciate how the Bush Administration rhetoric is a particular kind of response to the growing influence of feminist ideas about security—and as such, it represents *both* a failure and a success.

In the following section, I situate my argument within the interdisciplinary literature on framing. I then analyze the Bush Administration’s feminized security rhetoric by showing how it draws not only on feminist ideas about women’s rights but also on discourses of respect for women and democratic peace. I conclude by making some suggestions about how these two feminized frames have shifted the terms of discourse on women’s rights in the United States, and how feminists might effectively respond in this climate to the administration’s policies on women at home and abroad.

## FRAMING REALITY

*We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.*

—A senior Bush adviser in a 2002 interview with Ron Suskind (2004)

I assume in this analysis that how issues of women’s rights and equality are framed matters—and it matters even more when the framing is being done by the spokespeople for the world’s most politically, economically, and militarily dominant state. Rhetoric is never merely rhetoric; it constructs a particular (if incomplete) worldview that enables us to see certain connections, yet occludes others. Like a picture frame, the rhetorical framing of political issues shapes and contextualizes the perspective of the audience.

This idea of “framing” has been theoretically elaborated in a number of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and political science.<sup>7</sup> While scholars have not reached consensus about how precisely to define the term, they converge on the basic idea that frames are conceptual structures that enable us to make sense of information by selectively

7. Two interesting attempts to survey and synthesize the insights of these different fields are Entman 1993 and Pan and Kosicki 1993.

presenting it from a particular viewpoint. This concept primarily has been used to explain how journalists frame stories in mass communication (Iyengar 1991) and how surveys frame questions in social science research (Kahneman and Tversky 1984), although the concept broadly understood has relevance to a variety of applications. For example, Robert Entman describes framing as a feature of “a communicating text” (1993, 52). This suggests that the analysis of framing may be helpful for understanding speeches, protest signs, literature, advertisements—in short, anything that we can characterize as a text.

The empirical literature on framing confirms my contention that frames do matter because they affect audience perceptions.<sup>8</sup> However, this does not mean that when issues are presented to us in a particular way, we simply adopt that perspective uncritically. Rather, as researchers have noted, we respond to frames on the basis of our existing perspectives.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, we should not expect that the Bush Administration, nor any other source of framing discourse, will succeed at imposing a single perspective on its audience. Different people will respond to the same framing rhetoric in different ways.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on this work, I characterize frames as constructions that *enable* a particular view of the world but do not guarantee that audience members will adopt it.

While to this extent I follow the general trends of the literature, I also add to it an account of an aspect of framing that has been largely undertheorized: its dialogicality.<sup>11</sup> Rhetorical frames are introduced into an existing discursive context in which other frames are already operative. Like interlocutors in a dialogue responding to what the other says and how it is said, agents attempting to frame an issue respond to the framing discourse that has preceded them. This response is neither identical with nor wholly unrelated to what has come before. Rather, it makes use of

8. The clearest examples of the impact of frames on audiences are found in research on surveys. Numerous studies have shown that how a survey question is asked—that is, how the problem is framed—can significantly affect responses. See Kahneman and Tversky 1984; McClendon and O'Brien 1988; Schuman and Presser 1982.

9. For example, Pan and Kosicki write that frames “will interact with individual agents’ memory for meaning construction” (1993, 4). See also Entman 1993, 53.

10. One surprising finding is that “political knowledge and sophistication, whether narrow or broad, do not insulate one from the effects of framing . . . but rather seem to promote framing effects” (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997, 235).

11. I should note that I do not expect that my theoretical addition of dialogicality would be controversial to many scholars of framing. Indeed, some research seems to presuppose certain elements of dialogicality as I present it here: that framing rhetoric takes place in an existing context, and that it shapes options for the future. Nonetheless, to my knowledge these aspects of framing have not been explicitly theorized until now.

and redeploys existing modes of discourse. Indeed, even where a frame is intended to construct an entirely new issue for an audience, it is intelligible as a frame only insofar as it builds on narratives and ideas already in currency.<sup>12</sup> We might think of this in terms of how William Sewall has described human agency: as “the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts” (1992, 18). In political discourse, we use existing rhetorical frames, but we also transform them as we apply them to different situations.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, influential framing rhetoric does more than just respond to what has come before: It also shapes the discursive context to which future actors will have to respond. Clever framing disarms opponents by making likely lines of attack seem illegitimate or morally questionable. Consider how opposition to Senator Eugene McCarthy’s witch-hunt was immobilized for a long time by the rhetorical threat of being named un-American. Or consider how opponents of abortion reframed their position as pro-life, a frame which has the effect of placing pro-choice activists on the moral defensive. Even the most hegemonic of discourses never completely forecloses alternatives, but it does help to shape the terrain for resistance. Accordingly, attention to dialogicality shows that framing rhetoric does work, not just by placing limits on how we view the world but also by placing limits on how our interlocutors may respond to our worldview.

This dialogical understanding of frames can help us to analyze the Bush Administration’s feminized security rhetoric as a kind of political action that aims to shape how Americans think about women’s rights. It accomplishes this by drawing on an already existing feminist rhetoric of women’s rights. However, I hypothesize that the Bush rhetoric on women

12. This idea does find articulation in the literature on framing in the idea of “cultural resonance.” This is the notion that frames must resonate with “words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say *noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged*” (Entman 2003, 417, emphasis in original).

13. In this way, frames that aim at opposing worldviews may not be mutually exclusive: One frame may transform and thereby co-opt the discourse of another, blurring distinctions between them. This is an important feature of framing discourse that is often occluded by the neatly oppositional examples used in the literature, which give the impression that there are always only two possible ways to frame an issue. The classic case of this is Kahneman and Tversky 1984. Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson also give an example of this while discussing different ways of framing the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (1997, 222). This dyadic thinking sometimes seems to be a feature of our thinking about framing: Competition over how to frame an issue or a situation is often described as if there are only two competitors. For example, Entman writes, “Successful political communication requires the framing of events, issues, and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that *benefit one side while hindering the other*” (2003, 417, emphasis added). I can see no reason to presume that such competition will always be restricted to only two parties.

is not a straightforward repetition of feminist discourse (whether cynical or sincere); rather, it represents a *different* way of framing women's issues. We should not presume that just because this rhetoric often sounds familiar, it is necessarily feminist. The Bush Administration, as I argue here, makes use of existing discourses of respect, democratic peace, and feminism; yet it alters each of these discourses by combining them in novel ways and extending them to new contexts. Accordingly, we should not assume that the administration's use of the rhetoric of women's rights will look exactly like preexisting modes of feminist discourse: We should expect to find differences.

However, many political actors might attempt to reframe women's rights without achieving any results. What makes the Bush Administration's rhetoric worthy of study is the likelihood that it has had and will have *significant* influence over how women's rights and equality are framed. This is likely since, at least within American public discourse, the Bush Administration has enjoyed a kind of hegemonic authority to set the terms for discussion of women's rights and status—because of its access to media, political, and budgetary resources. While this authority is not unchallenged, we can expect that the executive branch has the opportunity to shape how many Americans think about women's rights and feminist issues.<sup>14</sup> In particular, as a right-wing administration with a reputation for social conservatism, the current government may have the capacity to influence citizens who would not give credence to arguments for women's rights coming from feminist organizations or leftist politicians. While there is no reason to suppose that the Bush Administration rhetoric will be uniformly influential on Americans, there is reason to suppose that it can have some effect on how many citizens view their world. The coalition behind the Global Scorecard, for instance, has seemingly accepted this rhetoric as feminist.

When we examine the Bush Administration's words from the perspective of framing, then it is clear that these are not mere words but, rather, a form of political action—one that aims to change how we think about women's rights. Consequently, separating criticism of words from criticism of deeds, as many feminists have done, is an ineffective response. We need to reveal that these words *are* deeds—that the Bush Administration is engaged in the very political act of shifting the discursive terrain for women's rights. As the official quoted at the beginning of this section

14. Entman 2003 makes a similar argument about the influence of the administration in framing 9/11 and the war on terror.



states, “we create our own reality.” Insofar as this is the reality in which feminists now find themselves, we need to analyze its logic as fully as possible. Accordingly, in the remainder of this essay I engage in interpretive analysis of the Bush Administration’s feminized security rhetoric in order 1) to reveal how it frames women’s rights, and frames them in a way that is different from what came before; and 2) to contest it by identifying what kinds of responses it renders ineffectual and what kinds it enables.

### A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Before turning to the analysis of the Bush Administration’s rhetoric, I should clarify the methodology I have used to identify it. First, by the term “Bush Administration” I mean to refer to a collection of individuals in prominent positions in the executive branch under President George W. Bush: These include Bush himself, First Lady Laura Bush, cabinet members, and other top executive branch officials and political advisers. I focus on the leadership because I assume that of all the people working in the administration, these few will have the greatest access to the media to convey their message, and they will be perceived as the most authoritative by their audience. In short, I expect the leadership of the administration to have the greatest influence on how citizens frame their world.

I take the statements of these officials as indicative of the position of the administration as a whole. I do not presume anything about the intentions of any particular individual, about whether he or she is a sincere or cynical advocate of women’s rights.<sup>15</sup> I find it reasonable to suppose that most if not all public comments made by these people have been approved as representing the position of the administration: They are spokespeople for the administration and so can reasonably be expected to be expressing a somewhat coherent, consistent, and coordinated position on the issues—regardless of their individual motives or beliefs about the language they use. Indeed, the rhetorics used by these officials are consistent enough that it is either extraordinary chance that

15. I find it entirely plausible to believe that some (if not all) among the Bush Administration do believe in the importance of women’s rights in and of themselves, rather than simply as a rhetorical tool to achieve policy and electoral goals. The question, then, is—regardless of their intentions—what is the *effect* of the particular way in which they frame women’s rights and its relation to national security?

they are so coordinated or they really have intentionally coordinated with one another.

This feminized security rhetoric has become commonplace in the administration, so much so that it is typical for an official who gives a speech about American actions in Iraq and Afghanistan or about the U.S. policy of promoting democracy around the world to draw the connection to the pursuit of women's rights. Accordingly, I have focused my attention here on speeches and other texts that are focused on women's issues or that announced new policies or initiatives regarding women. These include a variety of official and public documents produced throughout Bush's first term in office, from both before and after September 11, 2001. I have examined documents posted on [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov), the official White House Website (such as speeches by the President and the First Lady, policy reports, and press briefings); op-eds and other opinion pieces written by members of the Bush Administration; interviews and quotations reproduced in the media; and other policies and public speeches available from additional sources (such as former UN Ambassador John Negroponte's speeches before the Security Council).

The majority of these texts are attributed to President Bush, Laura Bush, or former Secretary of State Colin Powell. The most surprising absence from these texts is Condoleezza Rice, who served as National Security Adviser during Bush's first term in office. As a woman in charge of national security, we might suppose her to be an obvious choice to be a spokesperson for this rhetoric. However, where she has talked about the relation of women's rights to national security, it has been only as a passing reference in a speech focused on some other matter (e.g., Rice 2002). She is often mentioned in speeches as an example of the success of women's rights in the United States,<sup>16</sup> but she was never the one who introduced any new policies or initiatives on women. Rather, Laura Bush is the woman who most frequently represented the administration on women's issues. Rice's relative silence about women may be due in part to her role as National Security Adviser. For example, at the G-8 Summit in 2004, she attended the meetings, while Laura Bush hosted a separate event about women's issues for the other wives of world leaders (Rice 2004).

However, having Laura Bush be the primary female spokesperson for women's rights may also be a strategic choice on the part of the admin-

16. This was a part of Laura Bush's stump speech on the 2004 campaign trail. As a sample, see L. Bush 2004.

istration.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Dr. Rice is a single, childless, and ambitious career woman, Mrs. Bush is a wife and mother who quit her job to raise her children. She has evidenced no career aspirations at odds with those of her husband. Through her role as First Lady acquired by virtue of her marriage to the president, she literally embodies the notion that women’s primary identification should be with her family. Consequently, she seems comparatively nonthreatening as an advocate of women’s rights since her personal choices to date seem to correspond with relatively traditional gender roles.

## TWO RHETORICS OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS

When I began to examine how the Bush Administration was framing women’s rights issues in relation to national security, I realized that there is not one but multiple rhetorical strategies at work. This is because Bush and his spokespeople draw upon different preexisting discourses to express a commitment to women’s rights: first, a discourse of chivalrous respect for women, which reinforces the administration’s contrast between the civilized world and the barbaric Taliban and Hussein regimes; and second, a discourse of democratic peace, which reflects the administration’s policy of seeking to build democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. I distinguish two different rhetorics, corresponding to these discursive sources. While these rhetorics are often used separately, they are also frequently deployed in the same speech or statement. Consequently, I feel justified in treating them as if they are each different components of the same overall framing strategy.

These two rhetorics share one very important feature in common: They both position Americans as superior to some particular others in terms of their treatment of women; accordingly, both rhetorics motivate and justify intervention in other countries in the name of women’s rights. However, whereas the rhetoric of democracy clearly positions women’s rights as a national security concern, the rhetoric of respect draws no similar connection. This is significant because it means that, in the current political climate in which national security is of prime importance, the rhetoric of democracy is much more rhetorically powerful in making women’s rights a central (rather than a marginal) concern in U.S. foreign policy. I treat each of these rhetorics in turn.

17. This conjecture is supported by the fact that none of the other women in Bush’s cabinet during his first term acted as spokespeople for women’s rights.

## The Rhetoric of Respect

*Respect for women is a Bush Administration foreign policy priority.*

—“U.S. International Women’s Initiatives Fact Sheet,”  
March 8, 2004<sup>18</sup>

There was little discussion of women’s rights by the Bush Administration before September 11.<sup>19</sup> Women’s rights were generally mentioned only on ceremonial occasions celebrating women (e.g., G. W. Bush 2001e), they were usually mentioned by Laura Bush rather than her husband, and they were mentioned as an achievement that had successfully occurred in the past.<sup>20</sup> The primary message of these early speeches is that women’s rights have already been achieved in the United States; gender inequality no longer exists. Insofar as women’s rights are today only imperfectly enjoyed, this is simply a function of a lack of enforcement of the existing laws.<sup>21</sup> No new laws, no new rights are necessary. Consequently, the women’s movement is always referred to in the past tense—women struggled once upon a time for their rights, and inequality is a matter of the past (G. W. Bush 2001e; L. Bush 2001b). Suffrage is an achievement that we should all be proud of, but there is no continuing need for women to organize and struggle for rights—at least in the United States. Indeed, reading through the statements by the president and the First Lady during the first 233 days of the admin-

18. United States Mission to the United Nations 2004.

19. The Bush campaign in 2000 used the slogan “W stands for women” to capture Bush’s support for women’s rights. This support does not seem to have translated into any meaningful discourse about women’s rights until after 9/11. See Flanders’s analysis (2004b). The slogan has also been used in the 2004 campaign.

20. Laura Bush on one occasion says: “For our girls, women’s suffrage is ancient history. They’ve never known the inequalities that women had to endure and overcome a couple of generations ago. That’s why it’s so important for us to be vigilant in our remembrance, and vocal in our celebration of women’s history—because we owe the great women in our past for the opportunities that we enjoy today” (L. Bush 2001b).

21. Bush notes that “my 2002 budget requests increased funding for Federal initiatives to combat violence against women and to *continue* the guarantees of basic civil rights and liberties for women” (2001d, emphasis added). He also notes that women’s equality is not yet achieved, but he does so with such a positive spin that there does not seem to be any need for activism or radical change. The tone is one of reassurance: We are already on the right track, even if we haven’t reached complete equality between the sexes: “More than 150 years later, we are closer than ever to realizing Margaret Fuller’s dream. Women account for nearly half of all workers. Today, women are ‘captains’ of their own destinies, and they will continue to help shape our Nation’s future. Women hold 74 seats in the United States Congress, more than at any time in our country’s history, and women own more than 9 million businesses employing more than 27.5 million workers. Through their tireless service on a daily basis, the women of our Nation have woven the fabric of families and communities. They contribute immeasurably through faith-based and community organizations” (G. W. Bush 2001d).

istration, one might never know that the women's movement is still quite active.

Immediately after 9/11, this narrative of women's rights as already achieved in the United States appears in Bush Administration discourse in the context of a rhetoric of *respect for women*. Our respect for women at home should motivate us to care about the status of women abroad.<sup>22</sup> This rhetoric predates 9/11, but it does not seem to have been explicitly connected with women's rights until afterward.<sup>23</sup> After September 11, the recognition of women's rights is figured as a sign of respect for women. Civilized nations and civilized peoples respect women, and therefore treat them with dignity and recognize their rights. The United States clearly respects its women since it has for almost a century now recognized women's rights. Afghanistan, by contrast, did not respect its women under Taliban rule. Accordingly, Afghanistan was uncivilized and needed to be brought under control and domesticated. This rhetorical strategy works, then, by redeploying an existing conservative narrative of chivalry: Those who respect their women are civilized; those who do not are barbarians.<sup>24</sup>

Laura Bush delivered a key speech that connected this rhetoric of respect to U.S. national security policy on November 17, 2001, in the first presidential radio address to the nation delivered in full by a First Lady.<sup>25</sup> In her brief speech, Bush catalogs the horrible acts committed or threatened by the Taliban against Afghani women: "Women have been denied

22. This logic of American superiority justifying foreign intervention is at work, for example, in a speech given by Lynne Cheney that expresses the idea of respect in the language of the desert. She stated, "The United States is a land where women are free, and we are defending the freedom of our daughters as well as our sons against a foe that has decided that women do not even deserve to go to school" (Cheney 2001).

23. The rhetoric of respect is tied to the Bush Administration's faith-based initiatives. Pre-9/11, it emerges in discussions of faith-based groups that are teaching boys to have respect for women. See, for example, G. W. Bush 2001b, 2001c.

24. The connection between respect and civilization has often been made without specific reference to respecting women. Consider one of Bush's major speeches in the months following 9/11: "This new enemy seeks to destroy our freedom and impose its views. We value life; the terrorists ruthlessly destroy it. We value education; the terrorists do not believe women should be educated or should have health care, or should leave their homes. We value the right to speak our minds; for the terrorists, free expression can be grounds for execution. We respect people of all faiths and welcome the free practice of religion; our enemy wants to dictate how to think and how to worship even to their fellow Muslims. . . . We wage a war to save civilization, itself. We did not seek it, but we must fight it—and we will prevail" (G. W. Bush 2001a).

25. She had on previous occasions joined her husband in giving the address. While much has been made about the historic nature of this event, it really was not a new role for Laura Bush. Certainly the fact that she was the sole speaker performatively underscores the content of her speech: that Americans, and the U.S. government, and the Bush Administration in particular, already respect women. Indeed, George W. Bush respects women to such a degree that he will allow his wife to perform a (relatively symbolic) presidential task in his stead.

access to doctors when they're sick. Life under the Taliban is so hard and repressive, even small displays of joy are outlawed—children aren't allowed to fly kites; their mothers face beatings for laughing out loud. Women cannot work outside the home, or even leave their homes by themselves" (2001a). Yet she is quick to tell us that this disrespect is a characteristic of the Taliban regime in particular, not of Islam in general, which we learn is a civilized religion that emphasizes respect for women: "Only the terrorists and the Taliban forbid education to women. Only the terrorists and the Taliban threaten to pull out women's fingernails for wearing nail polish. The plight of women and children in Afghanistan is a matter of deliberate human cruelty, carried out by those who seek to intimidate and control" (2001a). The Taliban have shown themselves to be uncivilized not only because they have harbored terrorist organizations but also because they lack respect for women.

Listening to her speech, we learn that we should therefore equate the struggle for women's rights with the war on terror: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (2001a). We are instructed by her model to feel a kind of instinctual, natural outrage at the Taliban. This is what her example of having one's fingernails pulled out does: It elicits a visceral revulsion, a kind of Rousseauian pity at the pain of another.<sup>26</sup> We should do more than just feel outrage, however. We should also speak out about it. We should speak out against the Taliban, which is to say that we should speak out in support of the U.S. military action against the Taliban. This is what civilized people do: Like chivalrous knights in shining armor, they rush to the aid of defenseless women and children everywhere: "Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us. All of us have an obligation to speak out" (L. Bush 2001a). Here the language of respect enters the picture: "We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters. Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity—a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent" (L. Bush

26. It also suggests that one of the rights we should be fighting for is the right of women to wear nail polish without fear of persecution. While I do not mean to trivialize the violence women have faced for a variety of "crimes" having to do with their personal appearances, I think it is worth noting that the crime in question here is that of conforming to a particular standard of female beauty associated with feminine weakness and vulnerability. This example, then, reinforces the notion that women should have the right to beautiful nails—a symbol that resonates at least in the West with the fragile femininity that requires a chivalrous, male protector.

2001a). Unlike the Taliban, *we* respect our mothers, sisters, and daughters. This is a sign that *we*, unlike they, are civilized people.

This rhetoric obviously was politically useful at the time; it helped to demonstrate that the Bush Administration was not anti-Muslim, only antiterror; it also helped to construct an image of a natural solidarity among “civilized peoples” who ought to support a U.S.-led war on terror. This language does so not only by drawing a distinction between civilized and uncivilized people but also by calling for a vague course of action: respect for women. Laura Bush does not specify a catalog of rights that women do or should have; she simply calls for *respect*. This is a language that is not threatening to those U.S. allies who do not themselves fully recognize women’s rights but who do claim to respect women.<sup>27</sup> In other words, this language of respect is only contingently connected to women’s rights: There are lots of ways to respect women, only some of which include recognizing women as rights-bearing subjects.

However, this language of respect is also consistent with other ways of conceptualizing women. As I have been suggesting, Laura Bush invites us to imagine ourselves as the chivalrous masculine protectors who must defeat the misogynist enemy and show Afghani women the respect that the Taliban refuses them. Women are victims, vulnerable, in need of masculinist protection, here embodied in the figure of the United States, which is willing to intervene and protect them from the indignities suffered at the hands of the Taliban.<sup>28</sup> Women are identified with the family: They are mothers, sisters, and daughters—rather than citizens.<sup>29</sup> They are conduits of civilization and culture: The Taliban *men* are uncivilized, but there is no corresponding concern that the Afghani women are also uncivilized. Rather than being a radical rhetoric in unconditional support of women’s rights, the rhetoric of respect is only contingently related to rights, and it reinscribes traditional gender roles of chivalrous male protectors rescuing female damsels-in-distress.

27. Karen Hughes, at the time a counselor to the President, gave remarks in a press briefing that are typical of the Bush Administration rhetoric on Muslim countries at the time. In response to a question about the treatment of women in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, she said: “Well, first of all, I would encourage you not to make a comparison. No other countries, for example, don’t allow nine-year-old girls to be educated or to learn to read. And in many other Muslim countries, women are, in fact, greatly respected. And women in most of those other countries have the opportunity to work outside the home and to be—certainly, none of those other countries forbid women or little daughters at 9 and 10 years old from literally learning to read” (Hughes, Conlon, and Lenkowsky 2001).

28. I take this language of “masculinist protection” from Young 2003.

29. This is, of course, reinforced by the fact that it is the president’s *wife* who delivers the message—rather than the president himself, or the secretary of state or defense, or even (if it must be a woman) a female cabinet member.

Not only is this rhetoric contingently connected to rights but it is also only contingently connected to national security. In other words, in an era immediately following 9/11 in which security concerns dominated and legitimated all kinds of political programs, women's rights were being framed in terms having little or nothing to do with security. We can see this by looking at the September 2002 "National Security Strategy" — the document that outlines the Bush doctrine of preemptive war. It contains only three passing references to gender in 35 pages of text.<sup>30</sup> The most important of these is found in a list of eight "nonnegotiable demands of human dignity" that the United States must "champion": the rather ambiguous demand of "respect for women" (2002, 3). Although respect for women is nonnegotiable, it makes no other appearance in the document. The message is that national security is not really related to respect for women—or to women's rights—in any significant way.<sup>31</sup> The failure of the Taliban to respect women simply demonstrates how uncivilized they are; the Taliban do not pose any particular threat to the United States on account of disrespecting women. The fight against terrorism may also be a fight for the rights and dignity of women, but according to the logic of this rhetoric, it is simply unclear whether supporting women's rights would be an effective way to fight terrorism.

### The Rhetoric of Democracy

*Ensuring women's rights benefits individuals and their families, strengthens democracy, bolsters prosperity, enhances human rights and advances religious tolerance. It is at the core of building a civil, law-abiding society, which is an indispensable prerequisite for true democracy. The advancement of issues of concern to women has been a long-standing American goal. This administration has intensified that pursuit.*

—Under Secretary for Global Affairs Paula J. Dobriansky<sup>32</sup>

The connection between supporting women's rights and achieving national security is made explicit in the second rhetoric: a rhetoric that relates women's issues to the creation of stable democracies around the

30. These include references to the importance of educating children—male *and* female, and to fathers *and* mothers who "want their children to be educated and to live free from poverty and violence"—the first in Bush's introductory remarks and the second on page 3 ("National Security Strategy" 2002).

31. Indeed, protecting women's rights is not mentioned at all in the four action points suggested in response to these eight demands.

32. Office of International Women's Issues 2004.



world. The framing logic of this rhetoric differs from that of respect in several important ways. First, whereas the rhetoric of respect was only contingently connected to women's rights and a conception of women as rights-bearing citizens, the rhetoric of democracy is unmistakably a rhetoric of women's rights. Second, this rhetoric ties women's rights directly to U.S. national security. This has the effect of making women's rights an issue that (rhetorically, at least) is central to U.S. foreign policy. This is the kind of language that has earned the Bush Administration's rhetoric on Iraq and Afghanistan good grades from feminist groups for over a year: it is a rhetoric that takes women's rights seriously.

As an example of this rhetoric, consider an op-ed entitled "Women in the New Iraq." The article was written by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and appeared in the *Washington Post* on February 1, 2004. Wolfowitz begins by discussing a new women's center in Iraq dedicated to women's rights. Soon, however, he gets to his main point: democracy. The women he met on his recent visit to Iraq want to protect their rights. Yet, by his account, these women want their rights not so much for themselves but because they understand that women's rights are necessary in order to create and maintain democracy in Iraq, and in order to make the world as a whole safer. While in Iraq, Wolfowitz met with a delegation of women leaders, who "told us that *if Iraq is to become a democracy*, women must have an equal role and more women should be included in Iraqi governing bodies and ministries."<sup>33</sup> These women have numerous concerns, among them being a concern "that if women are not involved [in drafting a new constitution for Iraq], women will not be guaranteed equality under the law," but this concern is hardly the most important one for Wolfowitz. As he notes, "they also pointed out that we are now engaged with Iraqis in seeking *a far greater prize*: a chance for lasting change in the region that will help make our country and the world safer."<sup>34</sup>

Wolfowitz clearly agrees with the logic of this delegation as he reports it. Women's rights are not to be protected qua rights, but rather because they are an important indicator of the democratization of a state: "A government that does not respect the rights of half its citizens," Wolfowitz continues to write in language that evokes feminists all the way back to Mary Wollstonecraft, "cannot be trusted to safeguard the rights of any." It is because we need to be able to trust other governments to be demo-

33. Paul D. Wolfowitz, "Women in the New Iraq," *Washington Post*, 1 February 2004, sec. B. Emphasis added.

34. Emphasis added.

cratic (that is, to respect the rights of all of its citizens) that we need to make certain that they recognize women's rights. This, he tells us, is the rationale for U.S. policy and funding to support women's rights in Iraq. President Bush himself, Wolfowitz reminds us, made the connection between women's rights and Iraq policy clear in his State of the Union address in January 2004, when he said that "our aim is 'a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman.'" <sup>35</sup>

We can now trace out the reasoning that leads Wolfowitz to support women's rights in Iraq. First, it is essential to our national security that other countries democratize. The peace that Bush refers to in the State of the Union address is, as he himself notes, a democratic peace (G. W. Bush 2004). In other words, the Bush Administration is appealing to a long-standing view whose roots can be traced back to Immanuel Kant ([1795] 1991) that democracies will not go to war against one another. The presumption made by Wolfowitz and others is that only if countries like Iraq are democratic can we expect that their leaders will not seek to go to war with the United States and will not harbor terrorists. Accordingly, the security of the United States requires the creation of democracies to replace failed and dictatorial regimes around the world. Second, Wolfowitz's argument rests on certain assumptions about what counts as a democracy. Most importantly, a democracy is a form of government that respects the rights of *all* of its citizens—whether male or female. Therefore, it is in the interests of U.S. national security to support women's rights in Iraq in order to make sure that the new Iraqi government is indeed a democratic one.

Women's rights are then best understood as an instrumental good, according to the logic of this rhetoric. They are instrumental first in securing democracy: A state that recognizes women's rights is a democratic state. In turn, then, women's rights are instrumental in securing U.S. national security. Yet the rhetoric often sounds more idealistic, as if Americans ought to be committed to ensuring women's rights as a good in and of themselves. We can see this when we look at the larger context of the quotation Wolfowitz takes from the State of the Union address. Bush stated: "America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a *democratic peace*—a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we under-

35. He is quoting from G. W. Bush 2004.

stand our special calling: This great republic will lead the cause of freedom” (G. W. Bush 2004).<sup>36</sup> Here, Bush speaks idealistically of freedom and rights as if they are ends in themselves. Yet he simultaneously reaffirms the realist premise that if rights are important, it is because international peace *requires* the recognition of rights: Even as Americans lead the cause of freedom, they do so with the aim of creating a democratic peace.

In fact, it is characteristic of this rhetoric connecting women’s rights to democracy that it conflates idealist and realist positions on rights. Consider Laura Bush’s remarks on efforts to promote women’s human rights globally on March 12, 2004: “For a stable world, we must dedicate ourselves to protecting women’s rights in all countries. Farahnaz Nazir, founder of the Afghanistan Women’s Association, said, ‘Society is like a bird. It has two wings. And a bird cannot fly if one wing is broken.’ Without women, the goals of democracy and peace cannot be achieved. Women’s rights are human rights, and the work of advancing human rights is the responsibility of all humanity” (G. W. Bush and L. Bush 2004).<sup>37</sup> Women’s rights are human rights—but we must dedicate ourselves to protecting them *for a stable world*.

The argument epitomized by Wolfowitz’s op-ed is only one version of the rhetoric of democracy. I have identified three different arguments that connect women’s rights to democratic peace, and it is in these arguments that we can see the tremendous influence of feminist activism on the Bush Administration. All three are present in the quotation with which I began this section: “Ensuring women’s rights benefits individuals and their families, strengthens democracy, bolsters prosperity, enhances human rights and advances religious tolerance.” The first argument is the Wolfowitz argument: Where women’s political rights to vote and participate in self-government are recognized, there

36. Emphasis added. Many commentators suggested after Bush’s second inaugural speech that he was unveiling a new direction for his second term in office: encouraging the spread of democracy around the world. However, it is clear from this, as well as from much earlier speeches by Bush and other members of the administration, that this doctrine of democratic peace was well established long before January 2005.

37. She continues: “President Bush is firmly committed to the empowerment in education and health of women around the world. The President knows that women are vital to democracy and important for the development of all countries. And he has three very strong women at home who won’t let him forget it.” Her words fill the function of reassuring the listener that George W. Bush is committed to women’s rights both politically and personally—a part of the rhetorical strategy which I discuss here. Her comments also paradoxically signal that the president needs three women at home to keep reminding him of the importance of women’s rights. As with the rhetoric of respect, Laura Bush’s remarks serve to remind us of the familial role of women, even as she is speaking of women’s rights.

we can be assured is a democratic government. This claim is as old as the movement for women's suffrage.

The second line of argument takes the recognition of women's rights—political, social, and economic—to be necessary for sustainable prosperity. As George W. Bush notes, “The economic empowerment of women is one effective way to improve lives and to protect rights. Each year for the past five years, the United States government has provided an average of \$155 million in small loans, micro-loans. About 70 percent of those benefit women. It turns out the world is learning what we know in America: The best entrepreneurs in the country are women. In America, most new small businesses are started by women. With the right help, that will be the case around the world, as well” (G. W. Bush and L. Bush 2004).<sup>38</sup> Entrepreneurial women, in turn, are the sign of a free market economy, which is itself taken as a stand-in for a democratic government. The connection between women's enjoyment of their rights and general prosperity—while it is not always linked to free market economics as it is here—has been well established.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, feminist Katha Pollitt makes a very similar argument in her criticisms of Bush's policies.<sup>40</sup>

The third line of argument is a bit more subtle. It connects the recognition of women's rights to a secular society—which in the context of Afghanistan and Iraq means a society governed by secular rather than

38. Similar evidence is also cited in the UN Resolution on women's political participation. Three of the clauses read as follows: “*Affirming* that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social and economic status are essential to the achievement of representative, transparent and accountable government, democratic institutions and sustainable development in all areas of life,

“*Affirming also* that the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy . . .

“*Recognizing also* that women's full and equal participation in the political process and decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society, is needed to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning, plays a pivotal role in furthering women's equal status, and contributes to redefining political priorities and providing new perspectives on political issues” (United Nations General Assembly 2003).

39. The literature on gender and development shows this connection quite clearly. For an example of arguments linking gender to various aspects of development, see World Bank Gender and Development Group 2003.

40. Katha Pollitt's articles in *The Nation*, which are critical of the Bush Administration's policies toward women, draw on the same kind of data. She writes, for example: “Where women are healthy and well educated and self-determined, you can bet that men are too, but the situation of women is not only a barometer of a society's general level of equality and decency—improving women's status is key to solving many of the world's most serious problems” (Pollitt 2002). She takes her argument perhaps a bit further than the Bush Administration would, by arguing that aiding women also would alter the gender inequality of the family: “Recognizing and maximizing women's key economic role would have a host of benefits—it would lessen hunger, improve women's and children's well-being, improve women's status in the family, lower fertility” (2002).

*sharia* law. Dobriansky suggests, for example, that ensuring women’s rights also ensures religious tolerance. The institutionalization of women’s rights is in direct contradiction with the imposition of *sharia* law; therefore, the support of women’s rights and political participation is a way of supporting secular government, government that tolerates a variety of religions. This, again, is a claim made by feminist activists, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

In all three of these logics, women’s rights are taken to represent democracy: whether these rights signal women’s political participation, women’s social and economic participation, or the absence of *sharia* law. Indeed, the Bush Administration goes so far to connect women’s rights and democracy that they are often treated in speech as if they were synonymous: The one stands for the other. Speaking on global women’s human rights, George W. Bush tells us that “[t]he advance of women’s rights and the advance of liberty are ultimately inseparable” (G.W. Bush and L. Bush 2004). And so, in his remarks, Bush slides back and forth between talking about women’s rights and talking about democracy, as if he is always talking about the same thing. I quote from his speech at length to show how he constantly shifts from women to democracy and vice versa—as if they really were the same:

By radio and television, we’re broadcasting the message of tolerance and truth in Arabic and Persian to tens of millions of people. And our Middle East Partnership Initiative supports economic and political and educational reform throughout the region. We’re building women’s centers in Afghanistan and Iraq that will offer job training and provide loans for small businesses and teach women about their rights as citizens and human beings. We’re active. We’re strong in the pursuit of freedom. We just don’t talk a good game in America [sic], we act.

In Afghanistan, the U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council is developing projects to improve the education of women, and to train the leaders of tomorrow. You heard Laura talk about her deep desire to help train women to become teachers, not only in the cities, but in the rural parts of Afghanistan. We’ll succeed. We’ll follow through on that initiative. We’re pursuing a forward strategy of freedom—that’s how I like to describe it, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. And I believe there’s no doubt that if America stays the course and we call upon others to stay the course, liberty will arrive and the world will be better off.

The momentum of freedom in the Middle East is beginning to benefit women. That’s what’s important for this conference. A free society is a society in which women will benefit. (G. W. Bush and L. Bush 2004)

What are the rhetorical effects of equating democracy with women's rights in this way? To begin with, this way of framing women's rights has the effect of occluding the fraught relationship between real democracies and women's rights. Even a cursory look at the history of democracy shows that there is no necessary connection between democracy and women's rights: Most democracies have not recognized women's rights, or at least have only partially done so. Furthermore, the elision of women's rights with democracies makes it difficult to see any tension within contemporary states between the realization of democracy and the realization of women's rights.

Bush's words are also very reassuring to Americans. His equation of women's rights with democracy means that if the United States has already successfully achieved women's rights, then it must be a democracy; and if the United States is a democracy, then it must already recognize women's rights. He accomplishes this in his speech through a variety of techniques. First, he begins by showing his audience that women are present in the highest levels of U.S. government. He makes a point of introducing all of the female cabinet members, as well as other women serving in the administration who are present at the meeting. (Three of the women he mentions are his sister, Dick Cheney's daughter, and Donald Rumsfeld's wife, all of whom hold their positions arguably because of patronage and nepotism—but he shows no trace of irony in referring to these women as examples of women's rights and democracy at work.) He demonstrates that women have arrived in the United States—just look at how many of them he can show us! We are reassured that women can rise to the top and that, therefore, we must live in a democratic society.

Next, just as Laura Bush listed the train of Taliban abuses against women in her radio address, George W. Bush reminds us of what women suffered under the Taliban and Saddam Hussein—and that they no longer suffer because of U.S. military intervention. By contrast, his list of abuses reminds us that women in America really do seem to enjoy their rights after all. In the United States, we know that women and girls can become educated. In the United States, women can already receive the training to become teachers. In the United States, we do not have rape chambers or torture chambers. In the United States, women are not forced to wear the burka or to stay in at night. The United States seems to be an egalitarian paradise by comparison with these oppressive regimes—what could women have to be concerned about here? Therefore, his narrative reassures us that women in the United States have their full rights—there

is no additional work necessary to achieve them—and consequently, the United States must be a democracy.

Correspondingly, this narrative motivates us to be concerned about women’s rights and democracy *abroad*. We are liberators, agents of civilization, progress, democracy; because we have already achieved these things for ourselves, we must now bring them to others. In a new way, this rhetoric lands us in the same place as does the respect rhetoric: We need to act as masculinist protectors of women’s rights around the world. We can see this in a story that Bush recounts of being hailed by an Iraqi woman (and member of the Iraqi Governing Council) as “my liberator,” just before she burst into tears. Her tears provoke laughter from Bush’s audience—a gentle laughter. Yet when he admits that he himself cried in response, he is greeted with enthusiastic applause.<sup>41</sup> This is the appropriate response to the rhetoric of democracy: We must feel compassion for those around the world who do not have rights or democracy, and we must be motivated to bring it to them—for the sake of national security.

### SHIFTING THE FRAME

Now that we have taken a closer look at the logic of the Bush Administration’s feminized security rhetoric, we can turn to analyzing what this way of framing women’s rights *does*. Recall that frames are sources of meaning; they help us to structure and make sense of our world. Consequently, the successful reframing of an issue alters how many people perceive it. It creates, as the Bush official suggested to Ron Suskind, a new reality. How we perceive “reality” in turn affects our priorities, our allegiances, and our decisions. So what kind of a reality is created by this rhetoric?

I suggest that it can be captured by two narratives.<sup>42</sup> The first of these is a narrative of masculinist protection. We are superior to you (because we are civilized, or because we have a democracy), and therefore we must take on the role of your protector. We will go to war against those who would hurt you, and we will bring you civilization

41. A transcript of this speech is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/03/20040312-5.html>. A Webcast is also available from this page.

42. I take my understanding of narrative from Patterson and Monroe 1998. They describe narratives as the stories we tell ourselves in order to make sense of the world. Narratives differ from frames in that frames do not require a narrator. In other words, narratives are stories that reflect my self-understanding.

and democracy. As Ann Tickner (2001, 57) suggests, a variant of this narrative has long been used to motivate military forces: Men must fight wars in order to protect innocent women and children. Here, the feminization of the victims of the Taliban and of Saddam Hussein serves to masculinize and justify U.S. military actions. The second narrative is that of international women's liberation. Women's rights were achieved for Americans long ago, and so there is no need for feminists to agitate for them at home. The work to be done is to be done abroad. Even if there are still problems that American women face—for example, sexual harassment, domestic violence—these are nothing compared to the atrocities that women suffered under the Taliban and in the rape camps of Saddam Hussein. So our attentions are best directed toward liberating women in other countries.

Both of these narratives are problematic from a feminist perspective. The first is troubling because it trades on notions of men as protectors and women as victims that feminists have long criticized. In particular, by casting the United States as a protector, it obscures the many ways that our military actions increase the insecurity of women in the countries where we wage war and try to install democracy.<sup>43</sup> The second is disturbing because it undercuts the motivation for domestic activism. Feminists clamoring for rights at home are more likely than not to be seen as privileged whiners who cannot appreciate how good they have it, in comparison to the brave women of Iraq and Afghanistan who struggle against true adversity.

Yet even as the Bush Administration rhetoric frames women's rights in these objectionable ways, I do not believe that we should simply condemn it, for there are also reasons to celebrate this feminization of security. I celebrate this rhetoric not because it is feminist (as the Global Scorecard coalition seems to think), but rather for the perverse reason that it represents the co-optation of feminism. The Bush Administration's repeated insistence on its record of standing up for women's rights demonstrates how feminists have successfully reshaped the worldviews of many Americans over the years. Appeals to women's rights are no longer treated as completely marginal, nor are they voiced primarily by members of the Democratic Party. Rather, Bush—a very socially conservative Republican—ran for re-election in 2004 in part on his record of pursuing women's rights in Afghanistan and

43. Tickner 2001 describes many ways that militarization and military action increase women's insecurity in the stated interest of national security.



Iraq.<sup>44</sup> As uncomfortable as some of his policies may make feminists, we have to allow ourselves to recognize the gains we have made in framing women's rights as an important political issue for the Left and the Right.

We should also be heartened by the Bush Administration's ability to co-opt feminist concerns, because this suggests that we, in turn, might co-opt their concerns for feminist ends. Rhetorical frames, as I have argued, are transposable. Our worldviews are not fixed once and for all, but may be shifted. Just as the Bush Administration has lifted elements of feminist rhetoric to suit its own agenda, we in turn can lift pieces of its rhetoric and redeploy them in new contexts for feminist ends. This, I expect, is a difficult process, especially since feminist groups have considerably less influence and power than the office of the president. Nonetheless, I believe that we need to embrace the struggle to frame women's rights in a feminist way as an important political activity. This is an activity in which many feminists are already engaged, but it is an activity that is devalued and undermined when feminists themselves insist upon drawing a stark division between words and deeds.

What my analysis suggests is that the more effective strategies of resistance will be those that respond to and directly contest the shift in the rhetoric of women's rights effected by the Bush Administration. For example, if we are told that women's rights are instrumentally valuable for national security, then feminists might do well to reframe their demands in terms of security. In other words, the Bush rhetoric gives women's groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the United States a powerful lever to use against Washington's foreign policy. Insofar as women's rights are seen as instrumental to national security, they have a kind of centrality and rhetorical purchase in the war on terror that they have not had in the past—especially with a conservative administration. If feminists can frame their concerns as concerns about security, they may be able to expand their domestic audiences. The feminist scholarship in international relations on the concept of security provides an example of what this might look like: It aims to replace a notion of state security with one

44. See the campaign's official 2004 "W stands for women" page at <http://www.georgewbush.com/women/>. The Republican National Convention in 2004 also featured a special "W stands for women" event, at which various female family members of Bush and Cheney spoke of their record. According to one report, the event focused upon "boasting of President Bush's character, his appointments of women to high positions and his decisions to wage war in Afghanistan and Iraq" (Enda 2004). Furthermore, in the presidential and vice presidential debates, both Bush and Cheney mentioned the administration's achievements for women's rights in Afghanistan. For transcripts, see Commission on Presidential Debates 2004a, 2004b.

of personal security for women—that is, security from war, from domestic violence, and from rape (e.g., Tickner 1992, 2001).<sup>45</sup> To demonstrate that many women in the United States lack this personal security is to undermine the Bush logic that women at home no longer have anything to complain about, for it reveals the continuity between our grievances and those of the women of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>46</sup> Yet mainstream feminist activists in America have been surprisingly reluctant to take advantage of the power of security discourse. Insofar as they have made use of it, they do not seem to make any attempt to resignify or challenge the dominant understanding of security.<sup>47</sup>

Another approach might be to resist the Bush Administration's framing of women's rights by redeploying the rhetoric of democracy. Recall that part of the logic of this rhetoric is that the recognition of women's rights and the realization of democracy are equivalent. Why not take this equation seriously and use it to examine democracy in the United States? If a democracy is a government that recognizes women's rights, then can we say that the United States is truly democratic? After all, if we restrict our notion of equal rights to political rights, American women are significantly behind women from other countries. Consider that Iraq and Afghanistan have equal rights provisions written into their constitutions, and they have quotas for female representatives that far exceed the current percentage of women in Congress.<sup>48</sup> The administration has supported these attempts to institutionalize women's rights—abroad. Why not leverage the administration's record of supporting women's rights in new democracies in order to pressure it to support similar provisions at home: an Equal Rights Amendment and legislative quotas?<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, we could use the rhetoric of democracy to critique Bush's domestic policies regarding women. Insofar as his domestic pol-

45. She also includes economic and environmental security in her resignification.

46. In fact, one of the organizations that has deployed this kind of rhetorical strategy to great effect is the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq. For more on how this organization is contesting the Bush Administration's rhetoric of women and security, see Ferguson 2005.

47. The Global Scorecard is a good example of this failure to interrogate the meaning of security. The commentary on the F that the Bush Administration received for the reality of the security situation for women and girls in Afghanistan and Iraq distinguishes between "personal security" and "security," with the latter referring to a conventional understanding of security as the exercise of sovereign authority and of the state's monopoly over violence. See Center for Health and Gender Equity, Feminist Majority, and Women's Environment and Development Organization 2004b.

48. Both countries' constitutions include equal rights statements, as well as quotas for women in the legislatures as high as 25%. See the Global Database of Quotas for Women, <http://www.quotaproject.org>.

49. Barbara Ehrenreich makes a related argument in an editorial calling on John Kerry to counter Bush's efforts at machismo on the campaign trail with a greater commitment to feminism ("The New Machismo: Feminism," *New York Times*, 29 July 2004).

icies undermine women’s rights, the logic of his own rhetoric would suggest that they simultaneously undermine democracy in the United States. So, for example, we might argue that the administration’s underfunding of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) encourages the violation of women’s rights. Since American women’s security in their own persons is denied by a government that does not actively seek to eradicate gendered violence, women cannot be expected to enjoy citizenship equally with men. Accordingly, the United States under Bush’s rule, while it aspires to be democratic, is actually wide of the mark.

Both of the rhetorical strategies I have only briefly outlined here refuse to accept the Bush Administration premise that feminism at home is irrelevant. Yet they do so in ways that importantly acknowledge the power of words to shape our way of seeing the world. They contest and redeploy the dominant framing rhetoric by transforming it anew into a rhetoric that is feminist.

My analysis does not point to a wholly new strategy or course of action for feminists. Indeed, it confirms the value of some of the actions that many feminists are already taking. It helps us to understand better why we should be engaged in rhetorical struggles over the framing of women’s rights in relation to national security. This struggle is difficult—but we should be heartened by the power and influence feminism has had in framing public discourse, given that Bush clearly thinks he needs to talk about women’s rights in order to woo women voters. We should also be heartened by the example that the Bush Administration gives us of how the terms of discourse can be shifted through co-optation and transposition. Understanding that the Bush Administration’s rhetoric neither wholly embraces feminism nor completely rejects its accomplishments gives us reason to be optimistic—*cautiously* optimistic—that we, too, can again have a significant impact on how women’s rights are framed, at home and abroad.

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