

[Back to index](#)

"I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about that people would hate us. I, like most Americans, I just can't believe it, because I know how good we are". George W. Bush, President of the United States.

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**This paper is based on a discussion led by Prof. Lucas at the conference on September 25, 2002.
The hyperlinks are intended as a guide to the web sites that were utilised on the day as well as a number that have subsequently come to light.**

Since September 11, 2001 and America's declaration of a "War on Terrorism," there have been repeated declarations that the battle is as much for [hearts and minds](#) as it is for military or economic security. Even if the War on Terrorism is the latest organising concept for US foreign policy, the battle for hearts and minds began long before the attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. US diplomacy and power have been bound up with declarations, from Manifest Destiny to Wilsonianism through to Kennedy's New Frontier, all of which encompassed the notion of "America" as the embodiment of universal values. Just two years before 9-11, President Bill Clinton announced that the [American Century](#) was moving seamlessly into an [American Millennium](#). If the concept of a powerful "America" was shaken momentarily by the attacks of 11 September, it almost immediately was restored as a priority for US policymakers and private citizens alike. President Bush's apparently ad hoc [declaration](#) that people around the world would hear from America and the audience's visceral response of "USA! USA! USA!" was a powerful affirmation of Americanism. The idea of an American Millennium had not been abandoned; rather, Al Qa'eda's attack served as a catalyst for a reinvigorated, arguably more "fundamentalist" campaign for Americanism around the world.

As Liam Kennedy has demonstrated through his study of [Joel Meyerowitz's photography and 9-11](#), projection is far more than Presidential speechmaking. The power of the "image" embodies and projects an American freedom that has survived recent traumas to renew itself. The technology of communication from photography to television to the Internet, as well as the technology of economics from McDonald's to Nike, has ensured an immediate global presence for this 'freedom', yet that immediacy and range has also brought a paradox. The magnification of an American 'freedom' can bring not unquestioned acceptance but a magnified opposition, one which notes the contradictions within the US conception of itself and the world.

US Government Reaction

The tensions within the American campaign for hearts and minds are immediately apparent on the State Department's website. Since the Department is a vital part of the US Government, it projects an "official" US definition of the War on Terror. At the same time, the Department is making use of the 'private' photography of Joel Meyerowitz. Department officials try to resolve any questions over 'State' and 'private' projection by insisting that the photographs are not being used for propaganda nor should they be taken from the website by any visitor for such a purpose. The illusion can only be maintained if one insists that Meyerowitz's photographs and the State Department's presentation of them are "neutral". That neutrality, however, is achieved by the

ultimate sleight-of-hand: the American message is neutral because it is universal, embracing values that all people should hold not as propaganda but as essential beliefs.

The Department's website is at pains to stress the all-encompassing nature of American society, one open to followers of all faiths, where the only absolute is the Constitution. The compatibility of American values and Islamic values is demonstrated with eloquent [testimony](#). Not only 'America' but Islam has spread from sea to shining sea, with maps pinpointing the location of [mosques across America](#). American/universal benevolence is endorsed by the Tagouris family of Maryland, the living embodiment of Muslim life in America, when they declare that "we can practice our religion more freely here than probably anywhere else in the world. It is a blessing to be in a country where there is freedom of expression, justice, and the Constitution is applied to everyone. [We feel truly blessed to be living in America.](#)" The battle for tolerance and compassion is waged through [The Doors to Diplomacy project](#), a Department initiative in which schoolchildren around the world produce Internet-based projects to teach others about the importance of international affairs and diplomacy.

In the campaign to assure the world that, in the words of President Bush, "[we do not fight a religion](#)," it seemed that American values merely needed the expertise of American advertising. Once again, the 'State' drew upon the 'private' sector, appointing Charlotte Beers, chairman of J. Walter Thompson and Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, as Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.

Beers was renowned for her campaigns for Uncle Ben's rice ("Perfect every time"), Head and Shoulders shampoo ("Helps bring you closer") and American Express ("Don't leave home without it"). She claimed she would "really connect with the hearts and minds of those people"; after all, Secretary of State Colin Powell stated, "She got me to buy Uncle Ben's rice." (The [visual symbol of Uncle Ben's](#) is a smiling, elderly African-American man who, for some, is a stereotyped Uncle Tom figure.) Beers enthused to NBC News about her plans to sell America to the Muslim world: "This is definitely the most elegant brand I've ever had to work with, and I have a lot of facets of the brand. First it's President Bush and Secretary Powell embodying the brand. [That's a pretty inspiring place to start.](#)" Powell, also using the language of the marketplace, declared that the appointment of Beers would "[change from just selling the U.S. to really branding foreign policy... branding the department, marketing the department, marketing American values to the world, and not just putting out pamphlets](#)".

Almost immediately, questions were raised over the role of the advertising industry in shaping world opinion about the United States. Yet the long-term issue was not over the place of the "private" sector but its effectiveness. One critic quipped, "[If we can't effectively fight anthrax, I guess it's reassuring to know we can always win the war on dandruff](#)," while a more plaintive question came from [Rep. Henry Hyde](#), Chairman of the House International Relations Committee: "How is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue has such trouble promoting a positive image of itself overseas?"

By the end of July, the Council for Foreign Relations was offering a [damning report](#) on the [failure](#) of the American sales effort, and the White House was placing the blame on Beers' lack of aptitude in her Government post. This may have been a mere reshuffling of the chairs on the Titanic, however. As Lee McKnight of the Edward R. Murrow Centre noted, it was not weaknesses in organisation or personnel, or an American inability to understand Arab thinking that was preventing the USA from winning the propaganda war: "[We can't convince anyone we're right if we don't understand their point of view.](#)" [Osama Siblani](#), publisher of the Arab American News, added, "They could have the prophet Muhammad doing public relations and it wouldn't help."

Even more radical sales efforts were being devised across the Potomac, where the Pentagon was considering the production of ‘misinformation’ as well as ‘information’ for release at home and around the world. Overseen by a newly created department, the [Office of Strategic Influence](#), the policy was to extend the American effort by involving news organisations not just in the Middle East and Asia but in also in Western Europe. Initially the rationale for the office was the standard “response to concerns in the administration that the United States was losing public support overseas for its war on terrorism, particularly in Islamic countries.” However, in early 2002 Brigadier General Simon P Worden, the proposed head, was reported to have suggested the running of “black” information campaigns. A senior Pentagon official confirmed, “It goes from the blackest of black programmes to the whitest of the white.”

After the press revealed the plans, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ended a few days of discomfort by announcing that the creation of the office was being suspended. Yet Rumsfeld’s announcement may have been window dressing. The Pentagon continued to employ the services of ~~the Rendon Group~~ [Rendon Jr.](#), a former campaign aide to President Jimmy Carter, the Group has carried out overt and covert propaganda campaigns in Arab countries since the Gulf War of 1991.

The ‘private’ [Rendon Group](#), formed more than twenty years ago, has developed a close alliance with world governments and organizations. This has been achieved “through admiration and respect for cultural diversity. The Rendon Group helps clients identify and achieve their desired outcome by understanding their goals and objectives, and provides comprehensive and personalised communications counsel. TRG seeks to empower people with technology and concepts that give them opportunity and vision.” John Rendon describes himself as “[an information warrior, and a perception manager](#)”. When President Bush authorised the CIA in May 1991 to engineer Saddam Hussein's removal, ideally through a military coup, the CIA hired the Rendon Group to run a covert anti-Saddam propaganda campaign. The output included videos and radio sketches ridiculing Saddam Hussein, a traveling photographic exhibit of Iraqi atrocities, and radio scripts calling on Iraqi army officers to defect.

While Rendon was receiving several million dollars for its work for the US Government after 11 September, Bush and Rumsfeld were carrying out a reorganisation that promised a further expansion of propaganda activities. Admiral John Poindexter, the former National Security Advisor who left the Reagan Administration because of his role in the Iran-Contra scandal, was brought back to head the [Information Awareness Office](#).

These “State-private” initiatives in cultural projection, overt and covert, are far from new. [NSC 68](#), the 1950 blueprint for an American global offensive to vanquish Soviet Communism, begins not with a checklist of its recommendations --- development of the hydrogen bomb, a large increase in conventional forces, sweeping authorisation for covert operations, economic and military aid to allies, support for colonial regimes such as the French role in Vietnam --- but with ~~Several pages setting out the ideological battle~~ challenged by the Soviet system. No other value system is so wholly irreconcilable with ours, so implacable in its purpose to destroy ours, so capable of turning to its own uses the most dangerous and divisive trends in our own society, no other so skillfully and powerfully evokes the elements of irrationality in human nature everywhere, and no other has the support of a great ~~and the winning of the war, finally for us~~ “hearts and minds”.

Even before NSC 68’s adoption, in October 1949, the US Policy Planning Staff drafted plans for “[Political Warfare against the USSR](#)”, from balloon drops of propaganda and consumer items into Eastern Europe to the development of the National Committee for Free Europe. NCFE was ostensibly a “private” group, incorporated in the state of Delaware, but it was created by the

State Department and the Office of Policy Coordination (the special agency established in 1948 for covert operations and merged with the CIA in 1952), led by officials with State Department or intelligence backgrounds in World War II, and staffed by Eastern Europe emigrés supported by the US Government. It was soon publishing books, supporting a Free European University in Exile, distributing pamphlets, and launching [Radio Free Europe](#).

This was only half the story, however. Concerned that the “Free World” was being challenged by Soviet propaganda, from 1948 the US Government had begun covert support of the international activities of “private” American organisations. The first projects, notably the American Federation of Labor’s pursuit of “free trade unions” and an emergency intervention by “private” American groups into the French and Italian elections of spring 1948, were supported by ad hoc funding of millions of dollars; however, by 1951 these activities were given a formal foundation with the creation of the CIA’s International Organizations Divisions. By the mid-1950s every sector of American life, from the National Student Association to the painting of Abstract Expressionists to the activities of women’s organisations to the symphonies of the Boston Philharmonic, had covert support.

Although the CIA’s support of the network would be exposed in 1967, the US Government maintained its promotion of the “private” crusade. The Reagan Administration, renewing the Cold War, established the [National Endowment for Democracy](#) to combat the malignancy of communism the world over.

Hooray for Hollywood

In the 1950s President Eisenhower held stag dinners for Hollywood executives to discuss over cigars how the American “dream factory” could help win the Cold War. Almost 50 years later, the campaign was renewed. “It’s possible the entertainment industry could help the government formulate its message to the rest of the world about who Americans are, and what they believe,” said [Bryce Zabel](#), chairman of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

Two months after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, more than forty top film and television executives met for two hours with Karl Rove, George W. Bush’s chief political advisor, at the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills. All the major studios were represented, as were the US television networks, and the film industry unions. Despite the supposedly contentious relationship between the worlds of entertainment and politics, “there was a seamless web of unity that was really quite affectionate to behold”, said [Jack Valenti](#), President of the Motion Picture Association of America, in a news conference after the meeting.

During the two-hour meeting Rove reportedly outlined [seven themes](#): that the US campaign in Afghanistan is a war against terrorism, not Islam; the government’s call for “community service” should be publicised; US troops and their families need to be supported; the September 11 attacks were global attacks requiring a global response; the US campaign is a “war on evil”; the government and the film industry have the responsibility to reassure children of their safety; propaganda should be avoided. After the meeting, everyone involved hastened to assert that the Bush administration was not attempting to dictate in any fashion the content of Hollywood’s films. “The industry decides what it will do and when it will do it,” Rove told reporters. Apparently lost on media commentators was the obvious: the government would not impose its views in an arena where its policies found no opposition: Sherry Lansing, Paramount Pictures chairwoman, explained after the meeting, “All of us have this incredible need, this incredible urge to do something.”

Sylvester Stallone in particular was interested in assisting the administration, offering to breathe new life into the moribund Rambo series. The Italian Stallion suggested taking on the Taliban by

skydiving into Afghanistan in [Rambo IV](#). In [Rambo III](#) (1988), Stallone had fought against the Soviet army in Afghanistan alongside the mujahedin and “Arab Afghans” such as Osama bin Laden. It is unknown if he appreciated the irony.

Another champion was also recruited by the meeting to fly the flag in the war on terrorism. As America’s most famous [living Muslim](#), Muhammad Ali could promote the nation to the world. One plan to put [Ali on Al Jazeera](#), the station from Dubai which was disrupting US propaganda by presenting alternative news and opinion, never came to fruition. However, Hollywood companies did make a short film in which [Ali reassured American Muslims](#) that the US was not engaged in a war on Islam. All major cable operators have agreed to air the campaign free of charge to reach more than [70 million households across the US](#).

Of course, the State-private network does not dictate the output of American film and television. The West Wing, with massive critical and popular success in its first two series, had depicted a liberal President coping with the crises of the present day, and the show’s creator, Aaron Sorkin, decided that the series must address the events of September 11 in a hastily written and produced episode, “[Isaac and Ishmael](#)”. While the narrative considered anti-Muslim sentiment after terrorist acts, with White House staffers expressing “tolerance for other ideas and cultures”, it also projected the fear of an extreme “Other” which was now inside the United States.

And other programmes, spurred by the Rove meeting, were far more direct in promoting a ~~by 2002, the Democrat~~ America fighting the War on Terror. On April 2002, the TV show [JAG](#) (Judge Advocate General) broadcast an episode in which the protagonists prosecuted a suspected Al Qaeda terrorist, alleged to be the chief architect of the attack on New York City. The Pentagon briefed the programme makers on the intricate rules governing military tribunals, two weeks before Defence Secretary Rumsfeld announced them at a news conference on March 21. JAG’s producer Donald P. Bellisario, a former staff sergeant in the Marines and creator of the popular 1990s show [Quantum Leap](#), supported the Administration’s case that tribunals, not a proposed international court, were the appropriate forum to try terrorists in a telling [statement](#): “The tribunals are not what many people feared they would be, that they would have no foundation in law, that this was a way of taking these people and killing them. I wanted to show that we still have a system of justice. Personally, though, I believe they should all be taken out and blown up.” (The popularity of JAG soared in 2002 as it rose from 28th to 10th in the rating of prime-time programmes.)

This is [militainment](#), an effective way for private allies to put across a message fostered by the State. The Pentagon has also been cooperating with VH-1, a cable television network, for the documentary [Military Diaries](#). The show is not drama but “reality”, with 60 soldiers recording their daily activities in Operation Enduring Freedom on digital video cameras. The personal stories are all supportive of American policy and operations, but the [programme’s makers](#) are clearly very touchy over suggestions that they are pawns of the military. “We’re storytellers. We work with people who have stories to tell. But we’re not propagandists for the military, and we never said we were. Our goal is to ask a lot of questions and find out what the experience is like.”

One of America’s foremost newscasters, [Dan Rather](#) of CBS launched a [scathing attack](#) on militainment in June 2002. Moreover, the anchorman declared that fear of offending politicians had kept journalists, including himself, “from asking the toughest of the tough questions”. So-called “reality” television had filled a vacuum left by the absence of a journalism ready to question the authorities. Rather argued, “There has never been an American war, small or large, in which access has been so limited as this one,” but news divisions had not challenged the restrictions and continued to rely upon “information” provided by the US Government, he contends.

However, Rather did not make his statement on American television but the BBC, and he has not broken ranks on his evening news programme. The Bush Administration has continued to project itself abroad through outlets such as [CNN](#). There has been no need to dictate to media such as [Fox News](#), which has sounded the call for the War on Terror. Its head, Roger Ailes, was not only a key advisor to Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and the first President Bush; he told the current Administration within days of 9-11 that it must pursue an all-out campaign against America's "enemies".

The Culture is US

Perhaps the most striking representation of a "political culture" underpinning the Administration's efforts came in two issues of the glossy magazine [Vanity Fair](#). Better known for its coverage of an American society centred upon business and entertainment than its political content, the magazine still had an "investigative" dimension with columnists such as Christopher Hitchens and correspondents like the crime writer Dominic Dunne. On 12 October 2001, however, Vanity Fair took up a space as the representative of "America". A 54-page tribute to those who died in the attacks of 9-11, featured a photographic essay with images of heroes such as firefighters and of the civilians who lost friends and relatives in the World Trade Centre attacks. The issue also included an essay from contributing editor David Halberstam on the character of the US and a poetic eulogy to the dead of September 11 by Toni Morrison. As Halberstam put it, "I have come to admire the loyalty and energies and resolve of free men and women freely summoned."

A subsequent issue at the start of 2002 took the message into the "State" sphere. A striking series of photographs by the magazine's best-known photographer, Annie Leibowitz, portrayed Administration officials as tough, vigilant, but very human. Captions identified "The Chief" (President George W. Bush), "The Vice" (Vice President Dick Cheney), and "The Director" (Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge)..

There could be no relaxation in this effort, however, as the Administration moved from the target of Al-Qa'eda and the Taliban to an Axis of Evil to the menace of Saddam Hussein. As toymakers produced reminders of the war to date with the '[Fortress Command Center](#)', including the soldier Ted of Tora Bora and the head of Osama bin Laden (there are two alternative Centers, one for overt, the other State private network were maintaining the message of the ever-present threat. The Advertising Council, the coalition of advertisers producing non-profit campaigns for the Government, launched its "[Campaign for Freedom](#)" series of six 30-second spots. Reminiscent of the 1950s call to beware the Red Menace, the campaign featured good citizens being detained in libraries for requesting banned books and being arrested for having the literature of "freedom" in their cars. The series began and ended positively, however, with images of a street with an American flag in front of every house and of a trolley rolling through the aisles of a supermarket stocked with the products of freedom.

There Is No Alternative?

In the US, not all media sources have been as accommodating of the Bush Administration and its message. On the internet, [Alter Net](#), [CounterPunch](#), and [ZNet](#) have become key locations of articles critical of the administration's stated aims, such as the necessity of war in Iraq to help defeat terrorism. Sites such as [Metafilter](#) are channels of alternative information which challenges the official account, before and after 9-11, of US policy and its aims. On a more partisan basis, [Democratic Underground](#), with articles deriding the Administration and its attempts to monopolise patriotism, has been a thorn in the flesh of the White House, along with

others such as the [Smirking Chimp](#) and [Bush Watch](#).

The Internet has also supported the rise of one of the administration's most ardent critics has been [Michael Moore](#). First known for the "alternative" documentary, *Roger and Me*, Moore cut against the grain of "political culture" with the publication of *Stupid White Men* in late 2001. The story captures the tension between the State-private network and possible resistance: Harper Collins wanted to pulp the book, which was scheduled to appear in September 2001, but a librarian used a chatroom to launch a rebellion which eventually forced the publisher to relent. *Stupid White Men* became the best-selling work of non-fiction in the US in 2002. The spirit of the book is captured in an [on-line chapter](#) where Moore suggests that the administration removed cigarette lighters and tobacco from a list of items prohibited from being taken aboard a plane after receiving pressure from the Tobacco Lobby.

Moore has subsequently released the documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, which has been critically acclaimed and become the biggest-grossing documentary of all time, and he has completed a sell-out month of shows in London. In a sense, he has become the 'popular' face of a resistance long championed by activists such as [Noam Chomsky](#).

Yet is "America" the cultural space where the projection of US foreign policy will be undermined? Despite the presence of the "alternative" through the Internet and exceptions such as Moore who now feature in the "mainstream", the dominant message in business, the media, and cultural life is that of the necessity for the continuing War on Terror, even if Al-Qa'eda has been replaced by Iraq. When Chomsky's 9-11 sold 160,000 copies in eight months, CNN belatedly decided to profile the book, not through an interview with Chomsky but with a [discussion with William Bennett](#), prominent neo-conservative and former Reagan Administration official. (CNN, as a partial remedy, did air a short "discussion" between [Chomsky and Bennett](#) three weeks later.)

It is our contention that the challenge to American policy and its projection lies outside the United States. Beyond US borders, the attempt to convert American exceptionalism into universal values has run into difficulties. One structural example of the tension is the story of the Qatar-based [Al-Jazeera](#) satellite channel. Considering Al-Jazeera's news coverage unbalanced and anti-American, the White House took two initial steps. Firstly, they attempted to discourage news organisations, such as CNN, from running material provided by al-Jazeera, claiming this could carry [coded messages](#) from Al-Qa'eda and Bin Laden. Secondly, the administration applied direct pressure on the Qatari government to influence the news coverage of Al-Jazeera, filing a [formal diplomatic complaint](#) on 2 October 2001.

The Administration appeared to relent in following weeks, trying instead to promote its message through appearances by officials such as Secretary of State Colin Powell on Al-Jazeera. There was still a sting in the American tail, however. On 12 November 2001, the Kabul offices of Al-Jazeera were destroyed in a [missile attack](#). Suggestions that part of US war policy was to deliberately target news organisations drew attention from the [Newsworld](#) conference of media executives, meeting in Barcelona. Reflecting the broad concerns amongst journalists, BBC World correspondent Nik Gowing told the conference, "It seems to me there is some evidence to be put to the Pentagon about the targeting of news organisations, al-Jazeera has been providing some material that has been very uncomfortable." (The Administration is now in another cycle of its response to Al-Jazeera with Powell granting Al-Jazeera a [face-to-face interview](#) on 8 November 2002, ostensibly to discuss Iraq.)

The story of Al-Jazeera opens up a more complex possibility. Whereas the Bush Administration, and many of the American people, have bound up an acceptance of American "culture" with an inevitable acceptance of American policy, responses overseas have raised the contradictions in

the equation. On 11 September 2001, in the background of news footage purportedly showing Palestinians dancing in celebration of the terrorist attacks, there was a Pepsi vending machine. Recently an Indonesian suspect in the bombing of a Bali nightclub, killing hundreds of Western tourists, was detained while wearing a Converse T-shirt.

These are only the most extreme examples of a process in which “Americanisation” brings not unity but complexity, for with knowledge and often embrace of a “good” American culture, the question of how that culture can coincide with a “bad” foreign policy is advanced rather than answered.

In Pakistan in October 2001, a large protest against American action in Afghanistan featured a poster with a collage of Osama bin Laden images. In the corner of the poster, Osama was shown with a new friend, Bert from Sesame Street. The picture had been downloaded from the [Bert Is Evil](#) website and reproduced not only on poster but on shirts throughout the region. The resulting uproar, lightened somewhat by the black comedy of the incident, over the misuse of Bert missed the central point. It was possible not only to adopt American cultural icons but to subvert their meaning in the service of an anti-American position.

A series of surveys since 9-11 around the world have come to the same uncomfortable conclusion. In February 2002, CNN staff were unsettled by a survey of nine Muslim countries which indicated that, whatever the individual regard for the American people and their culture, there was overwhelming [animosity towards US foreign policy and operations](#). Surveys of countries closer to the US, notably [Canada](#), have arrived at the same finding. And in December 2002, a ~~survey~~ of people around the globe repeated that, although a majority spoke with approval of aspects of American life, two-thirds opposed the approach of the US Government to international affairs.

The problem lies in the contradictions of American ‘freedom’, in a world where the proclaimed values of an exceptional ‘America’ are not always accepted as universal and where there is no room for negotiation between policies, if not cultures. By establishing a clash of civilizations, Bush has removed any middle ground. As he declared in January, 2002, “[If...you don't hold the values we hold dear true to your heart, then you, too, are on our watch list.](#)”