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A Situational Application Of Myth To A New Conservative Narrative: The Rhetoric Of Thad Cochran

Nickolas James Nickols

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**A SITUATIONAL APPLICATION OF MYTH TO A NEW CONSERVATIVE
NARRATIVE: THE RHETORIC OF THAD COCHRAN**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts, Communication

By

Nickolas James Nickols

May 2016

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Communication

Missouri State University, May 2016

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

In 2014, Republican Senator Thad Cochran became “the fifth-longest serving senator in the nation’s history” (Ward, 2014, para. 5). Yet, Cochran lost to an upstart conservative in the first round of Mississippi’s Republican primary and, in response, wielded the power of myth to realign his state’s conservative trajectory. In light of this event, the following analysis positioned a rhetorical reading of Cochran’s campaign materials thru the lens of myth, revealing three strategic elements that allowed the senator to coalesce an unlikely base. Particularly highlighted are Cochran’s transcendence of party labels and ideology, his attempt to position himself as the hero of a new narrative, an attempt to negate the existing conservative order, and a demonization his competitor. It is argued that these rhetorical elements were constructed in such a way as to ultimately change the trajectory of Mississippi’s conservative narrative.

KEYWORDS: myth, discourse, conservative, functional, formal

This abstract is approved as to form and content



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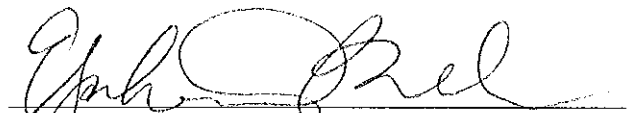

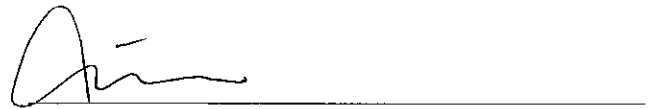
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INTRODUCTION

The Republican Party's constituency is dwindling. According to popular statistician Nate Silver (2014), "from 2004 to 2008, Republican incumbents got an average of 88 percent of the vote in their party primaries, compared to 78 percent from 2010 to 2012" (para. 11). Silver (2014) again identified this downward trend when Republican's amassed "an average of 67 percent of the vote, a little worse than the party average in 2010 and 2012" (para. 12).

In addition to their diminishing voter base, contending iconoclastic conservative voices are fracturing the Republican Party. Currently, researchers and news outlets alike present the internal struggles of the Republican Party as "the great Republican crackup" (Krauthammer, 2014, para. 1). For example, Alan Satlin (2015), infers that present turmoil points towards "long-term implications of Republican divisions" (para. 5). The Pew Research Center has also noted that within the Republican Party "there are fissures on some of the most important dimensions" pitting "the Steadfast Conservatives" against the "Business Conservatives" (Beyond Red vs. Blue, 2014, para. 47). Thomas Edsall (2015) goes on to suggest "Republican strategists and policy mavens are wary of the potential divisiveness of a public battle between the party's mainstream and its cultural right that could split the party, even though many agree that such a split is inevitable" (para. 14). That is to say, "there is not wholesale agreement on the political right" (Suh, 2014, para. 21).

As a result of both eroding constituencies and an attestation of aspirational party-members, reputable conservatives have felt prompted to pursue new ways to warrant their elected positions while also differentiating themselves from capricious titular

associations. Specifically, some established Republicans have drastically reformed their rhetorical strategies, attempting to expand the reach of traditional conservative narratives, and attract a new base.

Sen. Thad Cochran's 2014 re-election campaign is a prominent example of how the Republican establishment are pursuing new rhetorical strategies. In his case, Cochran changed the conservative message for Mississippi by altering its scope to both include nontraditional constituents and position himself as the favorable candidate to both Republicans and Democrats alike. Therefore, this assessment traces the trajectory of Cochran's reformed rhetorical strategy for the purpose of building a foundation on which to understand recent shifts in political strategies. In the chapters that follow, readers are presented with requisite information concerning myths, political uses of myths, how the literature illuminates the rhetorical elements implicit in Cochran's campaign, and how Cochran's rhetoric illustrates the changing function of myth in political systems.

Senator Thad Cochran's Campaign

Senator Thad Cochran's 2014 reelection campaign serves as a noticeable example of how established Republican members are pursuing new myths in hopes of identifying with constituents and disassociating with dissidents. Cochran is a Mississippi senator who stands among the political elite of the Republican Party. During his career, Cochran has achieved great heights, including becoming "the fifth-longest serving senator in the nation's history" (Ward, 2014, para. 5). Yet, despite Cochran's longstanding appeal, his loss in the first round of the 2014 Mississippi Republican primary suggests either a failure in strategy or a significant shift in the state's political landscape.

One explanation for Cochran's loss is perhaps the rhetorical strategy of his opponent, Tea Party candidate Chris McDaniel. Analysts agree tea party contesters are prominently renowned for closely identifying with the myth of the United State's founding fathers (Chernow, 2010). Specifically, these politicians subsume the founding fathers' myth of defenders of freedom into their own reformist identity (About Us, 2012). In this light, McDaniel's campaign materials limited the scope of his messages, targeting ultra-conservative voters who identify with the tenants of the tea party movement, and promulgated ideological piety as a means to rectify pressing matters. In particular, McDaniel presented himself to voters as an idealist vowed to stand "opposed to federal spending as a matter of course" and promised to abandon federal dollars for "the sake of ideological purity" (Bouie, 2014, para. 7). In other words, McDaniel committed to voters a promise to wield orthodox principles as a means to re-unite efforts and rectify dilemmas facing both Mississippi and the Republican Party; a promise that earned him a first round win in Mississippi's 2014 primary.

Cochran, Mississippi's long-term incumbent, responded to both McDaniel's rhetoric and the loss by aiming to regain control of the conservative rhetorical trajectory. Throughout this analysis, I detail how Cochran achieved success by discussing three key rhetorical elements that surfaced during the campaign. I begin by highlighting Cochran's public shaming of his competitor for deplorable and villainous behaviors and how this message disjoined voters from McDaniel. I then discuss how Cochran began to actively court nontraditional voters, such as black Democrats and Mississippi's farming communities in efforts to build an unassailable voting block for the second round of the nomination process. I finish my analysis by illuminating how Cochran portrayed himself

as not only a capable politician, but as a hero who could lead voters along a new conservative trajectory. Each of these elements are considered through the lens of myth as each feature of the campaign is critically positioned to build the foundation of the new conservative narrative for Mississippi's voters.

Overview of the Remaining Chapters

In order to understand how Cochran's contemporary conservative myth drastically parted with traditional campaign strategies and engaged new audiences, I discuss the rhetorical forms and functions of myth. In the following chapter, I put forth a selection of contemporary literature regarding myth, identifying both the construction and the function thereof. Understanding the frameworks of myth, or how they can be identified is crucial when applying its aspects to a rhetorical situation. Then, in chapter four, I offer an evidence based application of both myth's form and function to American politics, namely Sen. Thad Cochran's re-election campaign in 2014. In that chapter, I define the underlying rhetorical pattern of Cochran's discourse, specifically his use of mythic characteristics to reshape Mississippi's conservative myth. I accomplish this end by drawing attention to three rhetorical strategies implicit in Cochran's discourse that serve as evidence for a shift in Mississippi's conservative myth.

Following the analysis of Sen. Cochran's campaign strategies, I then reflect on the power of myths in present day American politics in the final chapter. Particularly, I argue that the use of myths in politics serve to congeal voting bases that rise above political ideology. This method of coalition politics has been presented in other studies. One prominent case is that of President Ronald Reagan. Rowland and Frank (2011) argued

that President Reagan used the myth of the American Dream to achieve a widespread and heterogeneous ideological constituency. In like manner, I argue that Sen. Cochran achieved similar results when harnessing the power of mythic rhetorical elements when he created a new conservative myth for Mississippi's voters. An analysis such as this serves to contribute to the corpus of literature that already crystalizes the power of myths and their ability to achieve political ends.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stories, in all of their varieties and forms capture our attention, our hearts, and leave lasting impressions. Yet, some stories play important roles in our societies. Myths, for example are used to help explain the world and all of its confusing dilemmas. Both ancient and modern societies alike have turned towards myths during moments of grave uncertainty. Reflecting the nature of myths, scholars have produced various frames and definitions. Though, there has been little agreement regarding the exact structure of myths and their features. For the purpose of explaining the functions of myths, I present how and why a limited definition best illuminates the nature of myths. Particularly, I narrow the research towards contemporary political uses of myths and explain how these stories shape modern societies and how modern societies shape myths. In this light, the lens of myth becomes a viable tool useful for understanding and explaining contemporary political messages.

A Formal and Functional Definition of Myths

In response to a widespread use of myth in rhetorical scholarship, Rowland (1990) has argued for a narrowed definition. Previously, scholars used myths as a means to understand archaeological, historical, and social artifacts. As mythic frameworks became augmented towards communication scholarship, many perspectives materialized (Burke, 1969; Burke, 1971; Coupe, 2005; Lévi-Strauss, 1972; Rowland, 1990; Rushing, 1985). Particularly, along with the work widely advanced, scholars put forth unique and often situational definitions of myth. Rowland's categorization of myth into formal and

functional components has since been adopted as a leading standard for rhetorical scholarship. Concerning the formal characteristics of myths, Rowland (1990) perceived myths as requiring a story or narrative prose, an archetypal hero, to take place during a special time or outside of history, to occur in a powerful location, and adorned with archetypal language.

Formal Features

Of the formal aspects set forth by Rowland (1990), the requirement for myths to possess a narrative or story prose is chiefly important. Myths are neither moral nor scientific, but rather they are stories, strictly formed to solve problems. Myths, however do not resolve mundane concerns. The nature of certain problems that occur among societies may be of such grand manifest that they require solutions which transcend intuitive judgment. When faced with these concerns, groups may turn towards myths as a tool for resolution. Particularly, myths as stories, offer symbolic resolutions that are not permissible within other symbol systems due to disregard of “discursive logic” (Rowland, 1990, p. 103). As a result, paradoxical idioms often adorn mythic stories. To resolve public dilemmas, myths also typically require a savior, most often cast as a hero.

Myths need to present a main character in the role of hero. The hero’s status is required as the character must possess strength, an attribute central to their ability to resolve problems. Particularly, the hero’s problem-solving skills are showcased as they strive to resolve the tension between the community and their pressing dilemma. Moreover, the hero not only symbolically solves the problem, but they also provide “a model for social action” (Rowland, 1990, p. 104). In other words, the hero impresses

upon the society a path to righteousness.

Another core component of myths is that they take place in a special time or period. Some periods in human history leave such an impact on societies that they inspire mythic speculation (Rowland, 1990). For instance, the founding of the United States of America inspired the myth of the founding fathers as the great framers of a sacred constitution of democratic practices. The characteristic of time is vital to the power of myths as it allows for solutions to problems to take place outside of history (Rowland, 1990). Rowland (1990) further relates the timelessness of myths to the significance of beginnings and endings in referencing the constitution as having a “significant” and “valid” token. Furthermore, myths allow special events to assume timelessness, such as September 11th, 2001, a time remembered all-around-the-world as an attack on democracy and freedom. Lastly, myths’ timeliness and relationship with beginnings and endings may capture a turning point or a historical change in the rhetorical trajectory of a society. Myths require a significant time or period to fulfill their purpose within a community.

Additionally, myths situate events as taking place in a special or powerful location, either real or otherworldly. The myth’s hero is dubbed the great champion of the society, geared to solve the pressing dilemma, and therefore should be immortalized in a powerful, special, and ornate setting. Credibility is believed to derive from the myth’s fantastic scene (Roland, 1990). Burke (1969) argues a consistent relationship between characters and their scene empowers the myth and sets the stage for audiences to identify with the transcendental resolution. To this end, archetypal language often serves as the bridge between characters, status, and the scene.

One final component required for the structuring of myths is that of archetypal

language. Particularly, the language used to coalesce myths is such that it derives strength from the “most powerful symbols in a society” (Rowland, 1990, p. 104). Yet, this final characteristic has been a point of contention for many scholars. For instance, Rowland (1990) cites Jung as advancing a universal perspective regarding archetypal language. It follows that all humanity faces similar environmental characteristics, such as water, blood, and fire. Thus, these elements are common to the myths of many given societies. Further, these archetypal characteristics are given power as they often come to represent complex ideas such as life, love, innocence, and sacrifice (Rowland, 1990).

However, these archetypal symbols often represent various and at time contradictory notions, where fire may represent strength and also destruction. Therefore, the presence of archetypal symbols does not always equate mythic status for a story or narrative. To this point, Rowland (1990) elates that one should not revere the film *Psycho* as a myth merely because water and blood are present in certain scenes. Rowland (1990) concludes, “the presence of archetypal symbols functions as weak proof that the work is in fact a myth” (p. 105). Nonetheless, archetypal language is considered to be a formal characteristic as it aids the homogeneity of characters, locations, times, and scenes. These formal attributes, taken together constitute the basic elements necessary for a narrative to possess mythic potential.

Concerning the formal characteristics of myth, the presence of the five elements listed above are required for a narrative to be considered mythic. In the absence of these characteristics, a story is not necessarily a myth. Moreover, a myth is not entirely powerful in the absence of certain formal requirements. Though, the formal characteristics merely serve as a foundational requirement for the functional aspects of

myths. Without these two components, it is believed myths are entirely ineffectual (Rowland, 1990).

Functional Features

Myths present three functions. The first function of myths is to resolve problems with transcendent solutions. Throughout history, communities have encountered perplexing concerns that baffle conventional philosophers, academics, or priests alike. When faced with great dilemma's communities sometimes respond by rearranging their mythic rhetorical artifacts in such a manner as to make sense of the situation and promote resolutions that transcend common knowledge. As a result, the proposed resolutions may operationalize latent mythic power. In the second functional movement, myths invoke action among constituents. Particularly, myths' resolutions are crystalized in a trajectory of growth as their stature and assurance within some community stir individuals to action. In this light, myths' power lay not solely in their formal elements, but rather when their rhetorical elements are combined power streams thru the function of defeating the dilemma facing the community by inducing action. From here, myths' final function peaks when the faithful adopt the newly resolved principles; as doing so makes identity anew for the community. The remaining section of this chapter will continue to expound on these functions, specifically detailing myths' ability to transcend rational solutions, myths' power to invoke action among adherents, and myths' ability to bestow identity to hearers.

Transcendental resolutions. Myths predominantly function to resolve crises; the manner in which they achieve resolutions, however has not met uniform agreement

among scholars. For instance, Lévi-Strauss (1972) emphasized the reasoned arrangement of myths, arguing that they “provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction” (p. 193). Categorizing myths in this manner stresses their calculated framework. Along these lines, Rowland (1990) also suggested, perhaps myths are our “most powerful cognitive instruments for making sense of the world” (p. 102). Yet, other scholars argue myths either function to organize and reflect the world around us or resolve matters of personal and psychological conflict (Jung, 1963; Malinowski, 1948; Rowland, 1990). Of the various definitions related to myths’ function to resolve crises, Rowland’s (1990) perspective seems to narrow the province of myths’ power to resolve problems “not subject to rational solution” (p. 102). This reference appears most appropriate as it focuses attention on both myths’ rhetorical and transcendent qualities; two features Burke regarded as integral to the function of myths (Coupe, 2005).

Aiming to explain myths’ power to transcend rational solution, Rowland (1990) argued that discursive rationalization could not achieve resolutions of values or morals. To this end, Rowland (1990) first reasoned that adherents to a system of myths must wholeheartedly accept the stories as true. Myths’ power, he argued, resides in being both believed and embraced as serious objective truth (Rowland, 1990). In addition, Rowland (1990) maintained that rational, or discursive reasoning is limited to the realm of facts and figures. This perspective provides grounds for resolving the differences between the various viewpoints listed above. For instance, Rowland (1990) proposed, “[d]iscursive reasoning cannot justify the good society, answer basic moral conflicts, or aid the individual in confronting psychological crises” (p. 103), whereas “[t]he function of myth is to transcend ordinary life and provide meaningful grounding for that which cannot be

supported rationally” (p. 103). Therefore, rational solutions “work well for problems of fact” and myths resolve matters of principle.

Yet, mythic transcendence, as argued by Rushing (1985), can be understood as a community’s attempt to create a sense of wholeness. For instance, Rushing (1985) perceives communities as using various communication modes, such as films, as a means of conveying messages of transcendence/wholeness. Specifically, mythic messages are argued to target the uneducated strata of a community’s population for the purpose of seeking unity. Most particularly, Rushing (1985) suggested, “space science fiction and fantasy [films] make cosmic connections in mythic form” (p. 71). Rushing (1985) believes that these cosmic connections are instances of resolutions that transcend conventional wisdom and prompt societal cohesion. From this perspective, we can assume that audiences unite around common thinking; for instance, regarding the unknownness of space and science, thus creating wholeness (e.g. individual and communal identities). However, Rushing later reconsiders her position.

Tangentially, Rushing analyzed myths that are not fully matured. Considering her work with the Frankenstein myth, Rushing (1989) opined, “a conception of the myth as evolving rather than static”, suggesting “that the tensions unearthed in such popular art are not always dissipated” (p. 63). In other words, myths may at times promote transcendental trajectories believed to overcome the problem facing the community without introducing assured resolutions. This later notion implies that myths’ transcendental products need not be complete, but rather products of hope, creating the belief that the trajectory alone will bring about settlement.

Comparing Rushing’s line of mythic inquiry with Rowland’s principled perspective

creates tension between communities' need for fictional rhetorical trajectories and their need for transcendental rhetorical resolutions rooted in true and serious stories. If fictional rhetorical trajectories can meet other functional requirements of myths, such as inducing action and instilling identity, then complete resolutions may perhaps overstep their formal requirement. Rowland (1990) strongly disagrees, specifically charging fictional rhetorical trajectories as "folklore with an implicit message", concluding that these instances do "not make it a myth" (p. 108). Taking both approaches into account, the denouement may not reside with arguments concerning structural observations, but rather may concern a deeper understanding of myths' communal functions.

Kenneth Burke suggested myths present transcendental resolutions as having "socially unifying potential" (Coupe, 2005, p. 8). More specifically, it was Burke's view that myths' solutions have the ability to attach individuals to a cause (Burke, 1971; Coupe, 2005). That is to say, "a myth is the social tool for welding the sense interrelationship" between members of a community and for the purpose of allowing them to work "together for common social ends" (Coupe, 2005, p. 8). Nimmo and Combs (1980) understand Burke's framework as leading us towards a pointed definition of myth: "A credible, dramatic, socially constructed re-presentation of perceived realities that people accept as permanent, fixed knowledge of reality, while forgetting (if they ever were aware of it) its tentative, imaginative, created, and perhaps fictional qualities" (p. 281). Operating under the belief that myths function to provide transcendental resolutions to quandaries, we can draw on the implications that communal response may perhaps be myths' most important underlying rhetorical strategy regardless of the use of fact or fiction. Therefore, myths' solutions need only to stir communal members to act.

Invitations to action. Myths accomplish their ends by presenting invitations to act (Burke, 1971; Rowland, 1990; Rushing, 1989). While this notion is largely accepted among scholars, there is not wholesale agreement concerning both the nature of the acts and the character of participants involved. Some would argue, external behavioral adjustments among adherents reciprocates myths' calls to action (Rowland, 1991). Particularly, Rowland and Frank (2011) perceive myths as motivating "groups of people to action" (p. 42), which is vital to their power. Yet, this definition seems to prescribe action to any external response among audience members. Therefore, invitations to act may reach fruition when hearers adopt messages internally and externally alter any/all behaviors. In like manner, political myths fit this formula as they are also routinely used to align voters' convictions with physical responses (e.g. voting for a specific candidate or policy). Though, the action inaction would also appear to fulfill the above model. Alternative directions regarding myths and action have been provided.

Burke (1971) proposed the notion that myths are intimately related to human action by saying, the "ingredients" for action are found "in all of us, to varying degrees" (p. 102). Defining these degrees of separation, Burke (1971) perceived myths as demarcating participants into dialectical groupings. One group are those telling the myth, whom he called "myth-man" (Burke, 1971). Another group are those who cohere to myths' instructions. Burke's (1971) purpose for distinguishing these two types of participants gives an account for the varying consequences of mythic actions.

Myths result in diverse manifestations of action. For instance, material action or the constituent symbolic instructions of myths are carried out by those who adhere to its explanatory functions. On the other hand, an alternate consequence is sense of "gala

occasion which calls for a mode of the corresponding completion *beyond* strictly material operations themselves [sic]" (Burke, 1971, p. 102). That is to say, certain partisans will seek to illuminate a symbolic divination of the material act. Uniting these two degrees of consequential action with the two factions of participants listed above, Burke (1971) defined mythic action thusly; "While Hominid A is materialistically planting seeds, Hominid B is enacting a ritual (perhaps composed of words, melody, and dance-steps) designed to *round out* this notable occasion by corresponding acts of symbolism [sic]" (p. 103). Here, hominid B, or the "myth-man" is characterized as a symbolic authority "who endow[s] such expressive analogues with a kind of formal completing, or perfecting" (p. 104). Burke (1971) suggested that "in primitive societies, such symbolizings are needed" (p. 104). Though, modern societies still use myths to both instruct and solemnize. Again referring to political myths as an example, this definition would draw attention to both the individual(s) telling the myth and their action of solemnizing while the audience members are internalizing the myth and carrying out its instructions. As a result, the relationship between symbol users who follow material instructions and those users who serve as "mythic *specialists* [sic]" (Burke, 1971, p. 104) creates or perfects material uses of symbols through myths.

Further explicating the nature of "mythic *specialists* [sic]" (p. 104), Burke (1971) categorized those who induce symbolic action as artists, doctors, priests, and prophets. Yet, Burke (1971) carefully withheld "[a]d writers, publicity men, and the like" from belonging to the order of specialists. For these individuals however, he did allow the notion that "they are on the fringes of the mythic motive, and often exploit it, in bastardized form, thereby helping build popular attitudes that goad the genuinely expert

myth man to a search for relevant completion” (p. 105).

It is safe to assume that a modern example of these experts of public attention and opinion are perhaps best emulated in that of the politician. In this light, Burke would agree that politicians utilize myths as a means of perfecting the ritual of voting. In other words, “the event [is] in effect be[ing] doubled, completed by a ceremonious, symbolic counterpart” (Burke, 1971, p. 105) and the politician is the agent.

Symbolic doubling as mythic action, according to Burke (1971), also helps navigate myths to a route of institutionalization and ultimately results in a convoluted sense of causality. Burke (1971) tore relational bounds between myths and correlative occasions by suggesting that “the life of a tribal myth is not confined to any such symbolic correspondence” (p. 106). Rather, myths’ powers are often wielded as an act of coronation for various events. As such, this action may induce audience members to desire symbolic duplication. In other words, when a “new event is commemorated by traditional rites, not only has this ritual in effect *classified* the event under some more general head, it has also by the same token proclaimed a *principle* [sic]” (Burke, 1971, p. 107). The notion of imprinting a principle implies that the act of symbolic doubling empowers the occasion as “a kind of “necessity”” for success (Burke, 1971, p. 107). To clarify, if myth specialists coronate an event, then audience members identify with the occasion as being placed on a trajectory towards perfection. Negating an occasion’s trajectory towards perfection, then, would simply occur in the absence of mythic coronation. Therefore, the presence of myth, in a deserving context, legitimizes both the appropriateness of action during the occasion and the necessity of the myth for the occasion’s success (Burke, 1971). Despite Rowland’s notion of general motivation,

Burke carefully gives meaning to myths' actions by discerning their functions of appropriation and coronation as they relate to both adherents and specialists. Though, others perceive myths as merely organizing a coalescing effect.

Rushing (1986) touched on a similar notion, suggesting that rhetoric unites humanity as it pushes or pulls us towards or from our own perfection, or telos. Specifically, Rushing (1986) understood rhetoric as enacting "wholeness" (p. 417). She argued, implicit in humanity is its telos and rhetoric is the 'action' (both past, present, and future) along humanity's path (Rushing, 1986, p. 417). By placing rhetorical action on a spectrum of either symbolically moving towards or away from an ultimate object, Rushing (1986) was free to suggest that a single "species of rhetorical narration" was altogether responsible for spurning hearers (i.e. myths). Myths, Rushing (1986) promoted, were both responsible for urging humanity towards its ultimate goal of community, and are responsible for shaping the symbolic nature of community. In this light, myths possess the power to synchronize audiences' expectations of community with external manifestations of wholeness. Taking an account for myths' ability to induce action, the above perspectives present myths as either urging hearers to (re)act, to carefully compartmentalize roles and responsibilities, or to induce community; however, what is most relevant of myths and action is that they tell of an "unfolding of human consciousness" (Rushing, 1986, p. 417).

Identification. Myths are "central to identity" (Rowland & Frank, 2011, p. 41). Hearers who internalize myths' messages and respond with some form of accommodating behavior learn identity as a result of this call-to-action process. Mainsprings for this identity-shaping processes are "those instances of rhetoric which,

taken collectively, constitute...identity-defining myths” (Rushing, 1986, p. 417).

Communities and individuals both may achieve identity in this manner, yet doing so intimately relies on the group’s symbolic interpretation of their myth (Habermas, 1987).

The sensitive nature between myths and identity is such that if a change in a group’s rhetorical setting were to occur, the group may rearrange their use of symbols (Coupe, 2005) and as Malinowski (1982) pointed out, such a disturbance in a community’s symbol system may result in a reinterpretation of their myth (Malinowski, 1982).

Rowland and Frank (2011), therefore conclude that communities intimately tied to their mythic system will often emerge with new found identities when faced with significant events or disturbances.

However, changes made to myths’ symbolic systems do not solely relate to large events (Rushing, 1989). Particularly, Rowland and Frank (2011) argue, “Human beings are not entelechial beings by nature. They can and often do change their myths in response to the empirical facts of the world” (p. 43). Elaborating this notion, Rushing (1989) suggested that myths can at times change as a result of achieving vast adoption. This perception presents myths as a social status that can be achieved when lore or fables attract enough adherents. Though, Rushing (1989) does not go onto define the parameters of adherence, causing the label of myth to be loosely appointed to largely popular stories. However, relating myths to achieved social status does imply that a change in popular status influences the symbol system used in conjunction with myths’ (Rushing, 1989). Therefore, myths may change as a result of either sizable disturbance within a community or as a result of alternative changes within a community. In either case, changes to the interpretations of myths will result in altered communal/individual identity as adherents

again move to internalize new transcendental solutions and enact new behaviors.

Lastly, myths rhetorically influence identity because they function to persuade. Specifically, myths fulfill communal needs to overcome dilemmas. This is carried out by way of articulating a new arrangement of myths' rhetorical elements in a way as to draw upon the power of archetypal language, characters, and other features relating to the situation. Channeling this power towards a transcendental solution motivates both action and identification in response. Constituents found adhering to the entelechial properties of myths achieve both community and status as victors over the dilemma. Myths' function of problem-solution moves not only thru a metaphysical logos of resolution, but also changes both hearers' behaviors and internal discernment, thus imposing new identity. Eager to wield myths' power, contemporary politicians often rely on myths to influence constituents' senses of community, identity, and responsive action. Thus, modern uses of myths have become particularly popular among politicians.

American Political Myths

Many times myths fulfill both their formal and functional elements in politics. One way politicians employ myths is to provoke transcendental resolutions to pressing dilemmas. For example, Ronald Reagan used myth to reframe the U.S. citizens' understanding of technology (Rushing, 1986). Rushing (1986) concludes that President Reagan rewrote the script for technology in the public sphere as not only possessing the power of destruction (a thought prevalent following the detonation of the atomic bomb), but that technology gained a new power for both discovering and protecting new frontiers. Rowland (1990) argues, "myths are stories which symbolically solve the

problem facing the society, provide justification for a social structure, or deal with a psychological crisis” (Rowland, p. 103). Here, Reagan’s mythic discourse met a nation’s growing concern for its protection, justified the need for an emerging policy (the space program), and offered a symbolic solution to both social and cultural anxieties about technology. In other words, myths’ ability to press resolutions provides a strong advantage to politicians, yet myths’ are also at times used to manifest identification among voters.

Another strategic purpose for myths’ use in politics is to urge identification and unite curious voting constituencies. For instance, the success of conservatism following the Reagan administration is believed to have resulted from an articulate use of myth. Specifically, Rowland and Jones (2007) suggest, “conservative ascendance for most of the last twenty years has not been tied to an ideological victory, but to a narrative victory” (p. 427). Highlighting an observable gap between myth and ideology, Rowland and Jones (2007) noted that voters embraced a version of the American Dream myth, which appealed largely to individual values, rather than party politics. In particular, these voters’ “underlying ideology is not conservative at all, the variant of the American Dream which they embrace has masked that point” (Rowland & Jones, 2007, p. 427). In other words, voters’ communal cohesion was achieved as a result of identification with the American Dream myth, regardless of ideological convictions. As this example illustrates, political uses of myth can at times motivate heterogeneous voting bases regardless of tyrannizing political preferences.

Recent uses of myth in American politics may indicate continued desires to offer solutions that transcend political ideologies and engage a broader swath of voters’ by

means of archetypal language, specific messages of values, and invitations to act. Thad Cochran, recognizing the perilous state of his political position rejected his party's traditional narrative and instead framed a new provocation where he presented a conservative myth that would appeal to a broader base of constituents. Cochran's strategy, to exhaust Mississippian communal values rather than strict Republican standards, harnessed the symbolic power of myth and changed the trajectory of his state's conservative narrative.

Summary

This study elicits a situated understanding of myths as a means for rhetorical criticism, specifically adducing Rowland's (1990) principled definition of both myths' formal and functional characteristics. Particularly, I frame a definition limited in scope and yet sufficient in depth to cover political uses of myth as a rhetorical strategy. In this vein, both Burke and Rushing read myths as providing social means to unite communities for purposed persuasion: a common theme present across these various perspectives. Myth, then, lends credence to the following analysis in that it highlights both the structural features and functional consequences of Cochran's rhetoric.

Great caution, however has been aired regarding the use of myth as a theoretical lens employed by rhetorical scholars. Permissive uses of myth can not only dilute the value of rhetorical artifacts, but may also damage the plausibility of myths' impetus. Myths' power streams not from their identifiable characteristics, but by their eminence among adherents. Therefore, one must resist hasty attempts to generalize assessment findings unique to "archetypal themes" or "specific myths" (Rowland, 1990, p. 113). To

avoid rash conclusions, I present sufficient rhetorical evidence to meet the attenuated halves of “the structural/functional definition of myth” (Rowland, 1990, p. 113).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the visceral division of definitions regarding myth; moreover, I discussed the need for a narrowed understanding of myth as it applies to rhetorical criticism. Further, the review of this corpus reveals previous studies utilizing myth to assess American political rhetoric. Likewise, Cochran’s rhetoric from his 2014 reelection campaign can be stationed as a present attempt to employ the expansive power of myth. Additionally, this assessment draws attention to not only the continued need for literature regarding myth, but also its application to contemporary political messages.

In the chapter that follows, I frame this assessment’s methodological structure by referencing selected formal and function elements of myth, and identifying the artifacts chosen for analysis.

METHODOLOGY

As discussed in chapter one, the Republican Party is both losing constituents and facing internal conflicts. The problem that has been created is how established members are now pushed to consider alternative strategies to both reaffirm their position among voters and their dominance over contending voices. Reflecting on the issues at hand, John Mixon (2014) perceives the Republican Party as having “painted themselves into a corner and they are looking for a method to get out” (para. 1).

In order to explore this dilemma, an artifact must be created to bring meaning to the party’s new course of action. Sen. Thad Cochran’s re-election campaign in 2014 serves as an exemplar case study, representing the new rhetorical strategy presently employed by the Republican Party. My use of critical rhetorical methods, particularly an inductive analysis (Campbell & Huxman, 2003) of the elements present in Cochran’s campaign materials helps to better make sense of these new messages. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to argue why rhetorical criticism best serves to illuminate these strategic messages implicit in Cochran’s campaign and suggest a situated arrangement of campaign materials that will best elucidate their overarching story.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism has long served scholars as a means for both “understanding and evaluating the products of human effort (Black, 1965, p. 2). In this light, political campaigns as products of human manufacturing adequately serve scholars as artifacts ripe for criticism. As a result, the works of rhetorical scholars who employ these methods

as a course to explore the depths of meanings found situated in political campaign materials swell the corpus of criticism.

Though, Black (1965) forewarned modern critics about facing a “vastly increased quantity of” artifacts (p. 2). For example, contemporary political campaigns now extend messages in various manners across multitudes of channels, such social media which allow campaign messages to reach millions of individuals around the world. To overcome the burden of accounting for an abundance of artifacts, critics are presently required to both narrow the scope of their field and legitimize/specialize their methodologies, “or be engulfed” (p. 3). It follows, when approaching rhetoric from a critical perspective, it is most advantageous for scholars to clearly demarcate their methodology and their artifact. Therefore, crystalizing my approach to understanding Cochran’s strategy, I seek to establish an inductive analysis of particular campaign materials.

Inductive Analysis

Inductive analysis allows scholars to first construct and then critically assess their artifact. Kuypers (2009) believes that inductive research allows the critic to “[discover] the implicit narrative pattern in a given story” (p. 126). Critics have often employed this method to better understand both individual events such as films and speeches and events that unfold over time (Kuypers, 2009). They have also used inductive research methods to collect and sort various artifacts looking to uncover and then report newly discerned meaning(s). An example of this later effort is that of William F. Lewis (1987), who catalogued President Ronald Reagan’s speeches, stories, messages, and public address in

hopes to better understand the deeper meaning and influence of these materials. Continued efforts to uncover meanings implicit in political materials may therefore benefit from inductive analysis, as it can be used to discover and understand “the narrative patterns present” (Kuypers, 2009, p. 126) in campaign materials.

Cochran’s Rhetoric as Artifact

Cochran’s reelection campaign broke ties with previous Republican strategies and promoted a new and unexpected discourse. Some of the discourse surrounding the campaign has been selected and subjected to an inductive analysis in order to first categorize and then elicit meaning from its content. Particular selections were chosen to assist in richer analysis of the rhetoric as they directly represent the shift in discourse that was presented between the first and second round of the primary. Among the first materials selected was a video advertisement the Cochran campaign promoted. Specifically, this advertisement was selected as it presented character attacks waged on McDaniel, Cochran’s competitor. Second, McDaniel publicly rebutted the attacks on talk radio. McDaniel’s public rebuttal was thus selected as an artifact as it validates other campaign materials, particularly new pamphlets and a new Facebook page that were both created and promoted from the Cochran campaign following the first-round loss. These materials were then amassed and categorized.

Initially, these campaign materials were grouped according to desired audience(s). Here, it was made clear that the intended audiences were black democrat voters and rural conservative voters. These intended audiences were then considered in regard to their association with Mississippi’s political climate.

Black Voters. Black democrat voters appear to be an unexpected target audience given Mississippi's "painful history of Jim Crow laws" (Parker & Martin, 2014, para. 3). Parker and Martin (2014) observe, Mississippi "may have the most racially polarized electorate in the country" (para. 3). Which leads one to question Cochran's decision to single out this particular audience. Bouie (2014), offering clarity regarding Cochran's black-centered approach, remarked, Cochran's "step of trying to entice black voters" may have been an attempt to make his campaign "the most high-profile Republican contest in the country" (para. 3). Cochran's messages, targeting this curious base, specifically black voters, leads this critic to desire an investigation into the messages in hopes of reaching a deeper understanding of the campaign's motivation.

Rural Voters. Considering rural conservative voters, Cochran has been praised for keeping Mississippi's "agriculture his top priority" (Coalition, 2014, para. 4). Perhaps Cochran's direct appeal to the farming community members is genuine, though some commentators feel that state finances may have played a significant role in the development of his new rhetoric. Murphy (2014), for example, commented on how Mississippi's agricultural industry "employs almost a third of all Mississippians and contributes \$7.5 billion to [the] state's economy" (Coalition, 2014, para. 4). Reaching the core of Cochran's decision to explicitly target these voters may further uncover motivating factors that lead to the establishment of the new strategy employed by his reelection campaign.

Mythic Frameworks

Contemporary scholars often employ the framework of myths as an appropriate

lens for understanding unique facets specific to political discourse (Rushing, 1986; Rowland, 1990). Particularly, Rowland (1990) argued, myths have unique features and functions that can be directly observed in political discourse. From this perspective, “[m]ythic criticism has much to offer the rhetorical critic” (Rowland, 1990, p. 113).

However, critics who employ the frames of myths must head caution. Rowland (1990), concerned with misuse of myths forewarned scholars of how “[a]n overly broad interpretation of myth both could obscure the important function of those works falling into the narrow definition of myth and also obscure more useful interpretations of works that fall outside that narrow definition” (p. 113). That is to say, loose dealings with myths may muddy our understanding of certain rhetorical artifacts, situations, or events and their function. Therefore, a clear application of myths’ narrowed elements is integral to critical work.

Specific to Cochran’s campaign, the assembled artifact is established as presenting both of the principled elements of myths. Respectively, I highlight aspects of Cochran’s campaign that resemble formal features of myths. These features include a direct negation of the opponent (Chris McDaniel) as a villain and a portrayal of Cochran as Mississippi’s hero. Each of the formal features are then confirmed across multiple channels as used to construct a single underlying narrative. Regarding myths’ functional aspects, I draw attention to the artifact’s movement through requisite elements. Particularly, I illustrate functional characteristics of Cochran’s new rhetoric as moving from opposition of the competitor, to unification, and ending with a progression towards a new trajectory. Each of these functional aspects are discussed in the context of campaign materials disseminated prior to the final vote.

Discussion

Cochran's reelection campaign greatly veers from established Republican strategies and promotes new unexpected messages. Utilizing an inductive research strategy, these messages have been collected and sorted in an effort to clarify and understand the underlying narrative. Messages present as clearly targeting two particularly audiences, black democrats and rural conservatives. The messages that were used to target these audiences are considered in the light of mythic frames. Contemporary uses of myths are often seen as attempt to construct meaning and eliciting action from voters, which is reflected in Cochran's reelection campaign. This case study, therefore, serves to establish both an understanding of conservative attempts to reify their position among voters and the power of myths as used in contemporary American politics.

Conclusion

In chapter three, the methodology of this study was detailed; specifically drawing attention to the requirement of both formal and function aspects of myth for rhetorical criticism. Moreover, evidence was presented to appropriate the selection of artifacts from Cochran's campaign. The following chapter uses these lenses and assess Cochran's reelection campaign. Thus, chapter four presents both the discourse and findings of this study.

DISCOVERY AND DISCOURSE

Amid both the Republican Party's diminishing voter base and a chorus of competing conservative voices, Senator Thad Cochran approached Mississippi's voters for re-election in the spring of 2014. Cochran, however was dealt an early round loss in the state's Republican senatorial primary to upstart Chris McDaniel. In response, Cochran noticeably changed the trajectory of his rhetoric in the weeks that lead up to the second round vote.

Regarding rhetorical contexts, Burke noted that "[i]t is a principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (Nave, 2014, para. 4). In this vein, Cochran's new rhetoric noticeably framed a different reading of the scene and introduced new roles and characters. First, McDaniel was given a new role as a villainous devil who opposed Mississippi's communal values. Next, Cochran introduced both black Democrat voters and Mississippi's farming communities as having new positions of power within the Republican political scene. Then, Cochran established limits to the power of his new constituents by escalating his own authority to a new status as communal hero; a title later accepted by media and voters alike. Hence, Cochran's new rhetoric began by outlining his competitor as an oppressive fiend.

Negating his Opponent

Cochran's new rhetoric began by casting Chris McDaniel as a villain in hopes of invoking doubt in the minds of voters. Initially, a particular TV advertisement portrayed McDaniel, according to one journalist as "[a] hostile screamer" (Bouie, 2014, para. 8).

This advertisement further presented McDaniel as a fiend who is both divisive and unsympathetic regarding a particular female politician by quoting him as saying, “it’s so interesting to see this woman using her...breasts to run for office” (Citizens for Mississippi, 2014). McDaniel was also quoted as frequently using sexist language, calling women “hot momma” or a “fine looking young thing” (Citizens for Mississippi, 2014). In the shadow of these quotations, McDaniel seemingly began fit his new role as an oppressive villain, undeserving of voter support.

Next, expanding his rhetoric, Cochran assailed McDaniel, personifying his competitor as an enemy of Mississippi’s agricultural industry. Intensely, Cochran used a Facebook page, Farmers for Thad (FFT), to campaign against McDaniel. On this page, McDaniel is portrayed as using of hollow language, positioned against farm subsidies, and enslaved to ultra-conservative ideology. One FFT post attacked McDaniel’s rhetoric suggesting, “Chris McDaniel stands for feisty generalities and vague national talking points” (Farmers for Thad, June 24, 2014). Another FFT post asked voters to go “to the polls and show that effective, experienced conservative leadership means more to Mississippi's farm families than fiery rhetoric” (Farmers for Thad, 2014). Condemning McDaniel’s position against farm subsidies, a FFT post claimed, “Chris McDaniel hasn't said much about what he would do, but he's promised that he wouldn't vote for the farm bill” (Farmers for Thad, 2014). Additionally, McDaniel’s adherence to strict ideology was accused for its lack of substance in a FFT post that argued, “you can't put ideology on the supper table” (June 24, 2014). Resulting from both the TV advertisement and the Facebook attacks, McDaniel was demonized and Cochran’s portrayal of his opponent began to change the election’s scene.

A New Scene. Cochran's efforts to deteriorate McDaniel's character situated both candidates in a new context. A FFT post described this new setting as a "contest...really a choice between practical politics and rigid ideology", suggesting, "Mississippians should vote their own interests" (Farmers for Thad, 2014). Cochran had successfully begun to present McDaniel to voters as a depraved candidate who stood against Mississippian values and who desired to push an alternative agenda. Thereafter, McDaniel's new characterization gained even more attention as political news media began to spin stories about the contest.

News Media on McDaniel. News media promptly emphasized Cochran's characterization of McDaniel as a villain, specifically regarding Mississippi's agricultural industry. Clay Chandler (2014), a journalist for The Clarion-Ledger wrote, "[a] 10-minute press conference in the home of a Cleveland businessman did little to reveal if farm subsidies were among the federal spending cuts on which McDaniel has built his campaign" (para 2). Bouie (2014), a journalist for Slate argued that McDaniel presented as "opposed to federal spending as a matter of course", and he would abandon federal dollars for "the sake of ideological purity" (para. 7). In this light, Cochran's strategy to render McDaniel as Mississippi's foe matured as his rhetoric echoed in the news chamber. In response, McDaniel acted to defend his character.

A Rebuttal. McDaniel, frustrated by his new character as a villain, attempted to both clear his name and reconfigure his reputation on talk radio. McDaniel's response, however summed both Cochran's strategy and his own role within a changing conservative narrative:

It's bad enough they called me a racist. They said if I'm elected, and we get our way, that we're going to end food stamps. They said if I'm elected, and we get our

way, we're basically going to keep minorities from voting. They said if I'm elected, and I get my way, I'm going to cut off funding for historically black colleges and universities. (Nave, 2014, para. 14)

Regarding McDaniel's comments, two matters are relevant. First, McDaniel attempted to strengthen the existing conservative order. This is made clear when McDaniel expresses remarks regarding Mississippi's political scene. Particularly, McDaniel uses collectivistic language, framing his remarks with 'us/them' references. Further, McDaniel frequently used the phrase "we get our way", to exclusively reference the pious faction of the conservative order to which he identifies, known as the tea party. Therefore, it can first be noted that McDaniel's attack of Cochran was an attempt to reaffirm the conservative hierarchy and lay grounds for a counter-movement.

Second, by calling out specific punctuations that appeared in Cochran's new narrative, McDaniel sought to expose Cochran's strategy to break ties with traditional conservative principles. Mostly, this was achieved by acknowledging a shift in discourse towards nontraditional voters. Put another way, McDaniel's suit to save face brought light to Cochran's endeavor to negate the conservative order. Thus, Cochran's "rhetoric of dissent" was exposed and as a result, "rhetor and counter-rhetor" began "to flower into public notice" (Griffin, 1969, p. 464). However, following a campaign of negative characterization, Cochran then employed his second and perhaps most prominent rhetorical element, to convert black Democrat voters, mobilize Mississippi's farming communities, and unite a new constituency.

Identification in Opposition

The second strategy Cochran endeavored to execute was to create unity through

identification. Particularly, Cochran targeted voters who, like himself, were at odds with the traditional conservative order, such as black Democrat voters and rural farming voters. In order to achieve identification, Cochran took into account that voters are equipped with more than political tendencies, rather they also revere their principles, which Burke (Coupe, 2013) suggested could be reached with myths. Accordingly, Cochran promoted messages that highlighted similarly shared values common to both himself and the nontraditional constituents. Moreover, after having previously exposed his “counter-rhetor” (Griffin, 1969, p. 464) as sexist, discriminatory, and opposed to Mississippi’s agronomy, Cochran’s rhetoric further built on the indecision he had hoped to evoke in the minds of these nontraditional voters. Cochran’s second rhetorical strategy, therefore can be read as an attempt to reach for the highest fruit by arguing in an arena of principles rather than strict political ideology.

A Call to Nontraditional Voters. Cochran’s rhetoric exhibited a clear call to communities that were previously unnoticed or inaccessible to conservative politicians. First, a particular print advertisement was circulated among digital news media, newspapers, magazines, and passed out pamphlets at several events touting a new conservative trajectory. This individual advertisement is suggestive in that it explicitly called upon Democrats to join Cochran in his efforts to achieve reelection. Likewise, this message is important in that it empowered nontraditional voters to further reject McDaniel’s poisonous agenda and turn toward Cochran’s myth where they were to receive positions of privilege at the new conservative order.

One line from this advertisement juxtaposed Cochran’s character to the villain McDaniel and beckoned voters, saying he “[t]reats constituents fair and impartial

regardless of political affiliation” (Pittman, 2014, line 4). Another line of the advertisement swooned new converts by saying, “Cochran’s long record of service gets praise from Democrats & Republicans” (Pittman, 2014, line 1).

Further exhibiting Cochran’s plan to unite a new constituency of opposition is a paragraph neatly concealed towards the bottom of his advertisement: “[t]he decision on who is going to be our next senator is going to be made in the republican primary. We’re asking democrats to cross over and vote in the republican primary to ensure our community’s interest is heard” (Pittman, 2014) Here, Cochran’s message focused on communal interests as the most important value at stake. This approach is unique in that it put his audience “in the correct psychological or spiritual posture for right action” (Rowland & Frank, 2011, p. 42). In other words, Cochran’s appeal to voters, regardless of their previous political affiliation, provided a rhetorical space for them to consider the action of unification across common values and stand together as a “negation of the errant symbols they oppose” (Griffin, 1969, p. 464).

Moreover, it is clear that Cochran was attempting to elevate a new constituency “above their hellish status of indecision and division” to a new and transcendental “arena of minds” (Griffin, 1969, p. 464). Chiefly, this strategy broadened Cochran’s narrative of values and action beyond the scope of party politics. Therefore, Cochran’s aim reached to coalesce traditionally ignored groups of voters and sought their support in defending Mississippian values rather than political ideologies. However, Cochran stepped even further away from traditional Republican ideology and implicitly invited black Democrat voters to join his new order.

A Specific Call to Black Communities. Implicit within Cochran’s rhetoric is a

specific appeal to Mississippi's black Democrat voters. For instance, one advertisement from the campaign claimed that Cochran has delivered "more than \$18M in federal funding" to some of Mississippi's most diverse universities (Pittman, 2014). Cochran's reference to minority groups serves to illustrate his trajectory and its "symbolic rejection" (Griffin, 1969, p. 464) of the traditional conservative order. Furthermore, this advertisement goes on to claim that Cochran has "[e]stablished blight protection in minority communities by providing resources to remove debris from channels, reshape eroded banks, correct damage to drain facilities, and repair levees across the Jackson metro and Delta region" (Pittman, 2014). This claim further lays the foundation for Cochran's broadened trajectory to include not only inner city black Democrats (Jackson metro), but also rural farm communities (Delta region). Consequently, following the introduction of his new conservative narrative, inclusive of Democrat voters, specifically black voters, Cochran's rhetorical trajectory further enveloped another neglected coalition, rural farmers.

A Specific Call to Farming Communities. Cochran's campaign again utilized its FFT Facebook page to both energize and engage Mississippi's farm communities. Facebook has been deemed an invaluable asset to campaigns like Cochran's in that it can both "foster political discourse as well as sustain certain political mobilization activities" (Morin and Flynn, 2014, p. 116). Additionally, Morin and Flynn (2014) suggest Facebook can "serve to crystallize and polarize opinions" (p. 116). Attempting to mobilize Mississippi's farming communities and rally their support through political discourse on Facebook, Cochran again submitted messages troubling McDaniel's infamous indecision "to say whether he'd support or oppose farm subsidies" (Farmers for

Thad, June 23, 2014). Messages like this advanced Cochran's strategy to assail McDaniel. Conversely, FFT was also used to hail Cochran for his efforts to empower Mississippi's farming communities. For instance, one post claimed,

Senator Cochran has always been a strong supporter of agriculture. His work and support for policies and programs—including agricultural research, rural development, trade and market development, food aid, risk management, disaster assistance, and conservation—have benefitted farmers and rural communities in Mississippi and across the nation, as well as people around the world. (Farmers for Thad, June 23, 2014)

The post presented above targets farmers' opinions, seeking to praise Cochran's agricultural accolades and reinforce a campaign of values. Verbosely, other posts on FFT detailed Cochran's enrichment of Mississippi's farming communities. Reminding voters of such boons, one FFT post read, "Senator Cochran helped develop and pass the 2014 Farm Bill" (Farmers for Thad, 2014). These posts and others continued to add to FFT's environment of positive political discourse regarding Cochran and negative assaults of McDaniel. As a result, Farmers for Thad furthered Cochran's second strategy by situating farmers between McDaniel the villain and a new conservative trajectory that promised to continue upholding a long history agronomic values. Following the success of his digital efforts, Cochran's rhetoric again gained local and national media attention.

News Media on Cochran. Cochran's new conservative rhetoric became known for appealing to both Mississippi's black liberal voters and farm communities while transcending traditional conservative ideology. News anchors and writers alike became consumed with Cochran's appeal to black voters and frequently discussed his exceptional strategy. For instance, Bump (2014) noted Cochran had taken "a decidedly more moderate push to get black voters to support him" (para. 1). Similarly, Parker and Martin (2014) praised how Cochran's "campaign [was] taking the unlikely step of trying to

entice black voters” (para. 4). Cochran’s new rhetoric had clearly enticed the media. However, this attention boomed Cochran’s campaign to becoming potentially “the most high-profile Republican contest in the country” (Parker & Martin, 2014, para. 4).

Cochran’s approach to unite Mississippi’s farming communities had also captured the attention of news media. Particularly, the discourse surrounding Cochran’s strategy to target farmers with digital media was discussed. Hagstrom (2014), for instance, remarked how “Mississippi farmers—led by their soybean growers—sprang into action in ways that appear unprecedented” (para. 2). In this light, Cochran’s tactic to rally farmers certainly garnered attention; though, his transcendental appeals were perhaps the most significantly discussed aspects of his campaign.

The discussion of Cochran’s campaign grew in national significance as various news media chorused conversations about his appeals to both black voters and farmers, yet the conversation almost always seemed to focus on and analyze his use of value-laden messages. Speaking to Cochran’s transcendental candidacy, his campaign manager, Austin Barbour, told reporters, “Thad Cochran is someone who, even with his conservative message, represents all of Mississippi” (Bouie, 2014, para. 9). Additionally, Bouie (2014) plays into this conversation saying, “[i]f I were voting in Mississippi, I’d swallow my partisanship and cast a ballot for Thad Cochran” (para. 11). Other sources argued that Cochran’s value-based appeals were not only shifting voters’ perceptions, but their donations as well. Pointing out the new conservative message’s resonance among voters, Pettus (2014) projected “almost \$145,000” was donated “to All Citizens for Mississippi” (para. 2), the PAC responsible for creating some the campaign materials mentioned above. Consequently, it was clear that the media perceived Cochran’s new

rhetoric as it was both significant in that it was unprecedented and also profound.

Taking media responses into account, Cochran's new rhetoric was legitimized. Cochran's transcendental appeal to an impious community united by values, rather than a pious political order ravaged by sociopolitical labeling had established a space where individuals could analyze his triumphs for Mississippi aside from political ideology. Further, Cochran's call to black Democrats and rural farmers was uniting an unprecedented base. As a result, this new conservative rhetoric created room for the final movement in Cochran's myth as he recast himself into the scene as a hero.

Cochran as Hero

Rowland (1990) argued, "the main characters in myth must be heroic" (p. 104). Further, it is understood that heroic characters must undertake a "mysterious adventure" and return bestowing "boons on his fellow man" (Rowland, 1990, p. 104). Cochran posited himself as such in his new rhetoric.

Cochran situated himself as a hero, undertaking a hazardous experience into a new political landscape, following both his first-round loss in the Republican primary and his subsequent disassociation with the existing conservative order. Offering hope to his new followers, Cochran's rhetoric highlighted more of his past accolades when facing similar circumstances. For example, various campaign messages began to circulate proclaiming Cochran's previous adventures to Washington, where he had to battle political giants in defense of Mississippi. One advertisement that encompassed this position and lent credibility to Cochran's new constituency read, he is "behind the latest farm bill that funds the SNAP program and supports local farms" (Pittman, 2014). This particular line

is of merit as the SNAP program provides food vouchers to both the underprivileged and Mississippi's subsidized agronomy (Salter, 2012. para. 7).

Cochran's campaign continued to hail him as a champion for Mississippian interests and sought endorsement for many of his other successes. For example, Cochran was applauded as being "a champion for free enterprise and an important voice for job creation in his state and the country" (Palmer & Bresnahan, 2014, para. 21). These messages were not only establishing Cochran as a hero, but they were also highlighting his past efforts to endow his newly coalesced constituency with shared "boons" (Rowland, 1990, p. 104). Therefore, it became understood that Cochran was an archetypal hero who had all along been looking out for and attempting to escalate the status of his constituency, specifically calling out his previous returns from various journeys.

Cochran continuously portrayed himself as hero to his new constituency by citing circumstances in which he elevated their status. For example, Cochran hyped his funding of "more than 20 free clinics in our neighborhoods" (Pittman, 2014). Cochran also celebrated his hand in creating a medical mall for Mississippi's underprivileged citizens (Pittman, 2014). Cochran's new rhetoric also went on to elevate the medical needs of "our neighborhoods" above political labeling and venerated his role therein (Pittman, 2014). Consequently, Cochran's self-as-hero once again thrust him into the spotlight as he was celebrated across public and social media.

News Media on Cochran as Hero. Cochran's new character as hero again roared his mythic rhetoric through the chamber of political news media. Particularly, he was mentioned as "[a] champion of Mississippi agriculture for over 40 years" and for being

“one of four leaders negotiating the Farm Bill” (Salter, 2012. para. 9). His successes as a champion were also distinguished on social media. One Facebook post on FFT suggested, “[Cochran’s] leadership role on farm issues in Washington will continue to benefit Mississippians” (Farmers for Thad, June 23, 2014). Additionally, Cochran’s role as a hero grew were Facebook posts commented how “Farmers are outdoorsmen by nature, and a huge part of the land we farm also serves as habitat for the game, fish and fowl that Mississippians hunt. Sen. Cochran is a champion of the Second Amendment and a supporter of this great pastime of ours” (FFT, June 22, 2014). Cochran’s continued exposure regarding his triumphs and his communal importance were essential components in constructing his character as hero and as a result, Cochran was being presented to the world as a champion who represented all of Mississippi’s communities and values. Clearly Cochran’s new conservative myth exhibited his heroic character as a seasoned communal champion who enriched both the state of Mississippi and the lives of his followers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I situated materials from Cochran’s 2014 reelection campaign and analyzed his attempt to invoke myth as a rhetorical means for reelection. Using myth as rhetorical lens, I traced three strategies that surfaced from the campaign materials and explained how the strategies worked together to ensure Cochran’s political ends. The following chapter draws the analysis to an end by discussing the consequences of the new rhetorical trajectory for Mississippi’s conservative myth, the limitations of my analysis, and the continued need for analysis of political myths.

CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that due to both internal and external forces alike established Republican politicians are considering new measures for garnering their constituents' support. As an exemplary case study, Sen. Thad Cochran's loss to upstart Chris McDaniel illustrated how alternative readings of the conservative myth resonates among voters. Identifying power in shifting narratives, Cochran tapped into the sway of myths and recast himself as a communal hero on a new conservative trajectory. Thus, Cochran's strategy represents a rhetorical shift towards myths soon becoming, if not already *ad rem* within American political discourse.

Cochran's rhetoric seems to indicate that contemporary politicians rely on both formal and functional mythic features in their discourse. Particularly, politicians may facilitate the power of myths' as a means of resolving issues both in their party and among the public at large. Cochran's rhetoric demonstrated this when he appealed to a broader coalition with a new myth as a means to resolve both intraparty and public tension. Furthermore, Cochran's case seems to suggest myths function in concert with political ends in that they both seek to achieve identification, which has long been considered a central tenant of myths' persuasive power (Coupe, 2005). However, Cochran's use of mythic elements is not without consequence.

Consequences

The power of myths, as demonstrated by Cochran's campaign embolden nontraditional constituencies. For instance, Cochran's rhetoric coalesced estranged

conservative voters among Mississippi's farming communities. One could conceive that financial and geographical barriers may limit politicians from actively campaigning in and among rural farming communities. Yet, Cochran's campaign points out that entirely ignoring this block of constituents is not without significance. Consider Cochran's resurgent efforts, his shift in rhetorical territory included rural voters and thus ensured his success. This strategy, therefore demonstrates the value of this latent block of constituents. Though, Cochran's strategy to include farming communities may also have future effects. Particularly, the trajectory on which Cochran has placed the future of Mississippi's conservative myth is one where the value of Mississippi's farming communities has been increased beyond previous significance. Therefore, future campaigns may now have to continue considering innovative ways to coalesce these voters. Further, the newly valued farming constituents are not the only consequential outcomes of Cochran's campaign.

Black Democrat voters have also now been escalated to a position of power among Mississippi's Republican constituencies. This shift is due to Cochran's reach across party lines to invite oppositional voters to the Republican primary. Again, Cochran's actions may have created far-reaching consequences. For instance, the artifacts assessed in this analysis specifically highlight Cochran's continued reference to his financial contributions to urban communities, medical facilities, and food-aid programs. Cochran cited these accolades as means of valuing black democrat voters and their communities. Subsequently, the power of these messages rests not only in their appeal to oppositional constituents, but their promotion also broadens conservative rhetoric to include Mississippi's communal values rather than relying solely on traditional conservative

ideology. Accordingly, Cochran's break from traditional messages, for the sake of political success, may require future candidates to follow the newly broadened trajectory of conservative rhetoric. Similarly, the power of black Democrat constituents is such that future Republican candidates cannot ignore these voters' political values or communal needs. That is to say, the consequence of these constituents may now contend with the value of ideological purity. In this light, rural conservatives and black Democrats alike have entered Mississippi's Republican landscape and due to their newly granted positions of power, they may be there to stay.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it only reviewed campaign materials presented between the first and second round of Mississippi's 2014 Republican primary. The materials produced from the Cochran campaign during this window had drastically broke ties with traditional conservative rhetoric and therefore required investigation. However, these messages appear to only hold relevance during the period in which they were promoted. Prior to his first-round loss, Cochran's campaign distributed messages akin to traditional Republican ideology. Likewise, Cochran's post-nomination messages similarly resumed traditional tones. Though, the total of Cochran's materials produced during the rhetorical window appeared to directly target specific audiences and warranted examination.

This analysis is further limited in the sum of campaign materials. Specifically, materials were collected and assessed based on availability and target audience implications. In other words, materials produced by the Cochran campaign that specifically targeted nontraditional constituencies were selected for this analysis.

Furthermore, the materials assessed in this analysis reach across multiple channels. For instance, few of the sampled materials were made available in digital format while others were distributed by hand to community members. Other materials were presented on broadcast radio and television. Later studies may consider resolving the limitations of this analysis by considering additional areas of investigation, such as summing the total of materials crafted during the rhetorical window of the second round vote or the total of materials from Cochran's campaign at large. Nonetheless, the limitations of this study simply outline the rhetorical situation in which Cochran's new conservative myth was realized.

Therefore, this study is limited both methodologically and in profusion. Particularly, the lens of myth, exclusively political myth was used to illuminate a dimension of the 2014 senate race that took place in Mississippi. Although this dimension is valuable in that it both furthers the body of research encompassing political myths and it articulates a reading of the distinctive rhetoric from the race, it is limited to the rhetorical situation. That is to say this rhetorical practice is not prescriptive. Future researchers, thus, may continue developing analyses of myths as used in political discourse for the purpose of better understanding situational reading of political myths or endeavor to cast overarching presumptions about myths at large.

Future studies

Later analyses may consider campaign materials from before, during, and after the Republican primary. Such studies could continue to criticize the use of mythic features and functions present among Cochran's rhetoric. It may benefit scholars to learn if these

messages share similarities. Moreover, it would be of value to know how the situational use of myths in Cochran's discourse particularly affected his rhetoric post nomination. Also, researchers could consider situational uses of myths and their long-term effects beyond campaign messages. The later investigation may aid researchers' understanding of myths' influence in political discourse. Cochran's use of myths may have been limited to the window between the first and second round of the primary election, though future research may reveal if this new conservative trajectory has lasting consequences as outlined above.

Attempts to better understand situational retellings of the conservative myth may require various analyses across multiple states. Understanding Republicans' use of myth to reaffirm their position with constituents requires investigation in various contexts. Moreover, future studies may consider how far politicians deviate the conservative myth at multiple political tiers. Sen. Thad Cochran is now the 5th longest serving senator in U.S. history and his attempt to recast the conservative myth cannot generalize to all tiers and contexts. Gubernatorial races and races for positions in the U.S. House of Representatives must also be considered. Additionally, establishing a standard by which to measure deviation would greatly benefit researchers who consider investigating the conservative myth, its development, and its change during present political history. Such a standard would allow researchers to estimate the degrees of variation between retellings.

Lastly, future studies could consider utilizing a mixed methods approach to better understand the effect of new conservative myths. Much of this study relied on the analysis of mythic elements and the ultimate success of Cochran's campaign. Yet,

measuring the effect of mythic deviation might also serve to illuminate the power of contemporary political uses of myth.

Conclusion

This study highlighted three rhetorical strategies implicit within Cochran's discourse, all culminating in an altered trajectory for Mississippi's conservative myth. Cochran's tactics first began with video advertisements that demonized his competitor, Chris McDaniel. This phase in Cochran's campaign successfully cast McDaniel as a villain who abused political symbols and stood in opposition to Mississippi's communal values. Moreover, this phase achieved fruition when McDaniel defended his character on broadcast radio. McDaniel's refutation, albeit an attempt to save face, served to consecrate the iniquitous claims and gave-way to Cochran's second rhetorical strategy; inviting black Democrat voters and voters in and among the farming communities to unite in opposition of prevailing conservative rhetoric.

Drawing from commonly shared values latent among Mississippi's voters, Cochran's second strategy aimed to transcend party politics in an effort to unite a new constituency. To achieve this end, Cochran, harnessing myth's power to project transcendental solutions, spoke to voters regarding both their core individual and communal values. This approach remarkably unified voters across a common ground of opposition to the existing conservative order, an oppressive order represented by McDaniel, the villainous devil, who was presented as desiring to threaten voters' values. Cochran's new myth was further supplemented when the news media acted as a platform for furthering discussions relating to Cochran's rhetoric and his portrayed successes as

directly reflecting Mississippi's voters' communal beliefs and political enthusiasm.

Taking the above into account, Cochran quickly ascended to a position of sole communal Champion. Throughout the third phase of Cochran's campaign, he sanctified his rhetoric by delivering messages about his past successes in Washington, where he had previously defended all of Mississippi's voters. Moreover, Cochran identified his new conservative narrative as a universal problem-solving method where resulting policy would be devised to benefit voters equally. Thus, Cochran, facing a shrinking constituency, a first-round loss, and a competing conservative voice, abandoned traditional narratives, crafted a new message, united a broader constituency, and boldly proclaimed his place in Mississippi's political class as a defender of all voters.

Senator Thad Cochran embraced his journey into uncharted political territory using both the function and structure of myth as his guiding light. Implicit within Cochran's discourse is evidence that not only do myths continue to prove to be a powerful political tool, but it also suggests Republicans are willing to seek new ways to counter their antagonistic concerns. As Republicans begin to employ new political narratives and strategies, it is necessary that researchers continue to analyze these discourses and discover the motives that reside within.

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