



PROJECT MUSE®

“A Complicated and Frustrating Dance”: National Security Reform, the Limits of *Parrhesia*, and the Case of the 9/11 Families

Hamilton Bean

Rhetoric & Public Affairs, Volume 12, Number 3, Fall 2009, pp. 429-459
(Article)

Published by Michigan State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.0.0108>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/363158>

“A COMPLICATED AND FRUSTRATING DANCE”: NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM, THE LIMITS OF *PARRHESIA*, AND THE CASE OF THE 9/11 FAMILIES

HAMILTON BEAN

The case of the 9/11 families represents both disruption and continuity in the rhetorical history of citizen participation in U.S. national security affairs. The 9/11 families were “outsiders” who used parrhesia—speech uniquely characterized by frankness, truth, criticism, danger, and duty—to access inside arenas of national security policymaking. Once inside, however, the families’ inability to sustain their preferred framing of accountability for 9/11—a framing that sought to assign concrete and specific responsibility for the catastrophe—demonstrates the limits of parrhesia in the face of institutional rhetoric that persistently excludes, contains, and suppresses citizen-stakeholder voices. Thus, although national security policymaking remains the domain of technocratic elites, the aftermath of 9/11 nevertheless represents an exigence in which established elements of the relationship between elites and citizens were at least partly and temporarily destabilized. As a result, a critical analysis of the competing rhetorical strategies used by the groups responding to this exigence illuminates tensions useful for conceptualizing the development of a rhetorical democracy.

I am more afraid of our own mistakes than of our enemies’ designs.

— Pericles, speech to the Athenians, 432 BCE

Hamilton Bean is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Colorado, Boulder. This essay is related to the author’s doctoral dissertation now in progress. The author would like to thank his advisor, Bryan C. Taylor, as well as Lisa Keränen, Daniel Lair, Karen Tracy, and the anonymous reviewers of R&PA for their guidance in the development of this essay.

© 2009 Michigan State University Board of Trustees. All rights reserved.
Rhetoric & Public Affairs Vol. 12, No. 3, 2009, pp. 429–460
ISSN 1094-8392

The weeks following the death of her husband at the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, were a blur of confusion and pain for Kristen Breitweiser. Like many others who lost their loved ones on that day, Breitweiser initially had no interest in the broader national security issues surrounding 9/11. She simply tried to manage her grief and rage while attending to her dead husband's affairs and caring for their three-year-old daughter. In November 2001, however, a neighbor convinced Breitweiser to attend a meeting regarding the newly established 9/11 Victims' Compensation Fund (VCF), a taxpayer-funded initiative created by Congress to compensate the victims of 9/11 for their losses. There, Breitweiser's pointed questioning of the VCF attorneys concerning 9/11 victims' abilities to pursue alternative legal action against the U.S. government and the airlines caught the attention of others in attendance. A woman approached Breitweiser and said, "You're a lawyer and you understand all this [the implications of the VCF]. You need to give a speech explaining this stuff to the other families."¹

Breitweiser reluctantly agreed, and she delivered a speech concerning participation in the VCF later that month to 600 survivors and victims of 9/11 at a New Jersey law firm. For Breitweiser, her speech that night symbolically marked her transformation from passive victim to activist and eventual spokesperson for the Family Steering Committee (FSC) for the 9/11 Independent Commission. Breitweiser states, "Our attitude was that if the government [via the VCF] took away our right to sue and hold people accountable in a court of law, then we wanted accountability through an exhaustive investigation."² The FSC worked closely with lawmakers to establish a commission to investigate 9/11 despite 14 months of intense opposition from the Bush administration. The administration finally yielded after a 90–8 Senate vote in favor of a commission, and President Bush signed the law establishing the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (otherwise known as the "9/11 Commission") on November 27, 2002. Through subsequent laws based on the 9/11 Commission's recommendations—including the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007—the Commission's influence continues to reverberate across the U.S. national security apparatus.

In this way, the 9/11 families temporarily achieved what appeared to be a remarkable level of direct participation in U.S. national security affairs, scrutinizing the nation's "own mistakes" to help prevent future terrorist attacks.³ For example, members of various 9/11 family groups testified before Congress, participated in closed-door meetings with lawmakers and White House officials, and held routine meetings and conference calls with 9/11 Commission leaders and staff members.⁴ The 9/11 families also submitted hundreds of questions to the 9/11 Commission during the course of its 18-month investigation, and

representatives of some of the family groups were invited to testify during the Commission's first public hearing.

Despite early appearances of collaboration, however, the relationship between the Commission's leadership and the 9/11 families became fraught with distrust and ambivalence as each group realized that they were pursuing different agendas. For the Commission's leadership, maintaining legitimacy, credibility, and authority with the Bush administration, lawmakers, and the public required that the Commission not be perceived as playing the "blame game" by pointing fingers at specific government officials.⁵ Reassuring audiences of the Commission's bipartisanship thus became the leadership's top priority.⁶ For many of the families, however, attributing concrete, specific accountability for the 9/11 failure was crucial.⁷ Given these conflicting objectives, it is unsurprising that Breitweiser recalls of the Commission, "At times we were their biggest adversaries, and at other times we were their biggest advocates. . . . It was a complicated and frustrating dance that even to this day we don't fully understand."⁸ Frustration and ambivalence were felt on both sides. Some Commissioners appeared supportive of the families' participation. For example, Commissioner Tim Roemer stated that "[the families] were the backbone and the moral suasion and the real motivating force for [the Commission]. . . . They were what the Founding Fathers had in mind for constituency groups making the government work." Commissioner Fred Fielding, however, disagreed, "[The presence of the families] just doesn't work. . . . Their view is so personalized that everyone is a demon. They can't be objective because they're just too full of angst and anxiety and resentment."⁹

These comments underscore the difficulty of pinpointing the families' specific influence within the 9/11 Commission. This difficulty is exacerbated by the dearth of academic literature on direct citizen participation in national security affairs, as well as the lack of structural opportunities for that participation.¹⁰ The 9/11 families resemble an advocacy group, yet one possessing an exceptionally complicated relationship with institutional elites and intermediaries. The 9/11 families affected change through public and interpersonal forms of communication. Focusing principally on the families' communication, however, ignores the influence of institutional communication that significantly shaped the unfolding of events. In this essay, I examine both public and institutional communication to understand how the 9/11 families were able to secure a voice—however faint and fragile—within institutional structures characterized by well-established and obdurate asymmetries of power.¹¹ I also show how national security elites subsequently reasserted their authority and control to contain an undesirable challenge.

Specifically, I build here on the work of Jonathan Simon, Professor of Law at the University of California, who argues that the 9/11 families' "parrhesiastic

truth” spurred the 9/11 Commission’s leaders to challenge executive and congressional privilege in a way never before seen in a public investigation.¹² In conceptualizing “parrhesiastic truth,” Simon relies on Michel Foucault’s definition of *parrhesia* (par-rez’-i-a)—a type of speech characterized by “frankness,” “truth,” “criticism,” “danger,” and “duty.”¹³ For Foucault, *parrhesia* is “a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth.”¹⁴ One who uses *parrhesia* views truth-telling as a “moral duty.”¹⁵ For Simon, the “cultural availability of the victim of violent crime as a valorized—even idealized—model of the democratic citizen” allowed the 9/11 families to shape events temporarily through their public and private *parrhesiastic* truth telling.¹⁶

Beyond this characterization of the 9/11 families’ “parrhesiastic truth” as a discursive phenomenon, however, Simon does not explore its complexity as a situated rhetorical performance. Simon also overlooks the powerful countervailing rhetorical strategies that opponents used to circumvent the families’ influence. I therefore argue that the case of the 9/11 families represents both disruption and continuity in the rhetorical history of citizen participation in U.S. national security affairs. Most participants agree, for example, that the 9/11 Commission would probably not have been established without the 9/11 families’ extensive lobbying of congressional leaders and unusually favorable treatment by mainstream media outlets.¹⁷ Breitweiser states, “We had become the outsiders who had forced their way inside.”¹⁸ Once inside, however, the families’ inability to sustain their preferred framing for 9/11—a framing that sought to assign concrete, specific accountability for the catastrophe—demonstrates the limits of *parrhesia* in the face of persistent patterns of institutional rhetoric that operate to exclude, contain, and suppress citizen voices.¹⁹ On this issue, communication scholar William Kinsella states that “potent rhetorical strategies are required for discursive containment, or for the oppositional task of opening up new discursive possibilities.”²⁰ By focusing on both *parrhesia* and the oppositional rhetorical strategies that its use induces, this essay responds to calls from rhetorical scholars to identify “the specific rhetorical strategies that people actually use” in promoting or impeding citizen participation within national security affairs.²¹ This case study focuses on the scene of citizen participation within a national security-related investigatory commission. Such commissions have consistently served as key sites of national security strategizing and policymaking in the post–World War II era.²²

Although national security policymaking remains the domain of technocratic elites, the aftermath of 9/11 nevertheless represents an exigence in which established elements of the relationship between elites and citizens were at least partially and temporarily destabilized. As a result, critically analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the competing groups responding to this exigence is useful for theorizing the development of a rhetorical democracy.²³ A rhetorical

democracy has been defined as "a democracy constituted by its rhetorical practices."²⁴ Scholars pursuing this topic, however, immediately encounter complex normative and empirical issues. In his introduction to a recent special issue of *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, rhetorical scholar Robert Ivie describes the normative impulse of rhetorical democracy as "some way of redirecting [rhetoric] from war making, of strengthening the means of democratic dissent and deliberation, of reinforcing democratic values, and of turning myth toward the ends of peace building."²⁵ Contributors to this special issue adapted Ivie's foundational work for their own projects. For example, Bryan Taylor's integrative analysis of nuclear rhetoric, rhetorical democracy, and presidential discourse explicitly describes how rhetorical scholars might reconceptualize ideals of deliberative democracy, assess their associated discursive practices, raise questions about how and with what effect these practices hail citizens to participate, and critique the ethics and politics of these processes. Taylor states that "rhetorical scholars of democracy oppose corrosive discourse which forecloses the possibility of achieving mutual identification between opponents and thus cooperation."²⁶

Exploring what productive and corrosive discourse actually looks like in the context of a national security-related investigatory commission develops our understanding of how citizens and institutional elites use language to advance toward or retreat from the ideals of a rhetorical democracy. As a result, the case of the 9/11 families adds to our knowledge of rhetorical and cultural phenomena, influencing when, why, and how citizens are excluded from directly participating in national security affairs.²⁷ Alternately, this essay promotes consideration of the potentially productive role of citizen discourse. Ideally, scholars and citizens focused on the development of a rhetorical democracy can use the case of the 9/11 families to detect institutional strategies used by national security elites to impede citizen participation, as well as anticipate opportunities for successful citizen intervention in "demo-phobic" uses of power.²⁸ Even with this knowledge, however, direct participation will continue to be difficult to achieve as citizens confront assumptions concerning the (in)appropriateness of their involvement in the national security arena.²⁹

The essay proceeds in four parts. I first outline a theoretical perspective on *parrhesia* in the context of national security affairs. This perspective uses the underlying "container metaphor" of national security to argue that the use of *parrhesia* marks its speaker as an institutional outsider, thereby inciting insiders and their supporters to contain the implications of that speech through practices of discursive closure.³⁰ Discursive closure is compelled because the stridency of *parrhesia* induces elites' fear of the "demented demos" that is central to American political philosophy and Western cultural history.³¹ However,

because citizen *parrhesia* and institutional discursive closure operate in dialectical tension within the context of national security affairs, scholars can expect to find moments of both stability and rupture within this relationship. Following this section, I interpret the case of the 9/11 families as the latest manifestation of a periodic and consistent challenge posed by ordinary citizens to their subordination by national security elites.

In analyzing the case of the 9/11 families, I focus primarily on the families' rhetorical activity displayed during two periods: first, the period following the 9/11 attacks but prior to the 9/11 Commission's formation (September 12, 2001, to November 27, 2002); and second, the period of the Commission's investigation (November 28, 2002, to August 21, 2004). These two periods demarcate phases of a single, evolving rhetorical situation, usefully illustrate the families' shifting objectives (but consistent rhetorical strategies), and demonstrate reactive institutional efforts to exclude, contain, and circumvent the families' influence. I then assess the use of *parrhesia* by citizen-stakeholders of national security policy vis-à-vis the normative ideals of a rhetorical democracy. Specifically, contrasting *parrhesia* with "comic" rhetorical strategies highlights the limitations of *parrhesia* as an overall strategy for spurring the development of a rhetorical democracy.³² I conclude with a summary of the lessons provided by the case of the 9/11 families for citizens and scholars of national security rhetoric.

PARRHESIA, DISCURSIVE CLOSURE, AND NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

In his 1983 lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault traced the evolution of *parrhesia* from ancient Greece to the beginnings of Christianity. He focused especially on its occurrence in the six tragedies of Euripides: *Phoenician Women*, *Hippolytus*, *The Bacchae*, *Electra*, *Ion*, and *Orestes*. Foucault states:

In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.³³

In *parrhesia*, a speaker gives "a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks."³⁴ To do this, a speaker chooses frank words and forms of expression. These words and expressions typically criticize an interlocutor's actions; yet *parrhesia* obtains only when criticism comes from "below" and is directed "above." In other words, elites generally cannot speak *parrhesia* to common

citizens because it is not "dangerous" for the powerful to criticize the less powerful. Nevertheless, for a citizen to direct *parrhesia* "above," one must be "the *best* among the citizens, possessing those specific personal, moral, and social qualities which grant one the privilege to speak."³⁵ Foucault explains, "Someone is said to use *parrhesia* and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him in telling the truth." *Parrhesia* is thus "linked to courage in the face of danger."³⁶ Despite this danger, the *parrhesiastes* feels morally compelled to speak the truth.

The 9/11 catastrophe thus momentarily destabilized the institutional status quo, enabling the circulation of multiple and competing national security discourses—from neoconservatism, unilateralism, and preemption on one hand, to citizen *parrhesia* seeking collaboration, accountability, and democracy on the other. However, Erik Doxtader argues that institutions "outflank those who seek to question or revise the form and content of public good" by using "stability" to trump "criticism." To accomplish this maneuver, Doxtader claims that "institutions sustain their power by using the form of public deliberation in order to empty its content."³⁷ Illustrating Doxtader's argument, national security commissions serve both as a symbol of democratic accountability and as a practical way to neutralize the risks of democratic practice in that commissions enable institutions to maintain tight control over who will be allowed to participate in both public fora and official decision making. The commission form enables institutions to prescribe the type, sequence, and duration of citizen participation—if such participation is permitted at all.³⁸ In other words, national security elites use investigatory commissions to preserve stability and "overcome the uncertainty of political debate by prescribing 'acceptable' modes of interaction. The possibility of representation based on critical public dialogue is replaced by decision-making techniques that screen out expressions of interest which do not comport with pregiven norms."³⁹ In this way, national security commissions are ideal for maintaining institutional insularity, authority, and control over decisionmaking by perpetuating an illusion of public accountability.⁴⁰ Doxtader states:

In an advanced democracy, institutions both rely on and are threatened by processes of deliberative public will formation. Charged with the task of making decisions and taking actions on behalf of others, institutional actions depend on relational norms that are not of their own making. As such, institutional claims to act on and preserve universal interests sometimes spur social criticism that strives to show that such interests are in fact not universal. Dissent threatens to disrupt the very stability which institutions are charged with preserving, so institutional actors are often forced to justify their actions, change behavior or create negative sanctions against criticism.⁴¹

In light of this argument, scholars of national security rhetoric should be particularly sensitive to how institutional dynamics shape communication appearing within the public sphere.⁴² Increasingly, for example, it is organizational communication concepts that prove useful for theorizing these conditions—a situation that accounts for the use of associated perspectives in this essay.⁴³ Specifically, Stanley Deetz's theorization of “systematically distorted communication” and “discursive closure”—drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas—usefully explains patterns of rhetoric that develop in response to the perceived threat that the 9/11 families' *parrhesia* posed to institutional authority and control.⁴⁴ Discursive closure can be defined here as the suppression or elimination of alternative stakeholder perspectives and of conflicts that promote open reflection and genuine deliberation.⁴⁵

Practices of discursive closure examined in this essay include: *issue containment* of the post-9/11 national security crisis, *topic avoidance* related to the families' framing of accountability, and *disqualification* of certain 9/11 family members from holding 9/11 Commission staff positions.⁴⁶ Analyzing these practices provides a more granular understanding of the ways in which “discursive containment” is enacted in institutional settings.⁴⁷ The concept of discursive closure complements and extends rhetorical criticism generally in that, for Deetz, “Rhetorical analysis, properly understood, is discourse which functions as a critique of ideology. Its role is to examine conditions of discursive *deformation*.”⁴⁸ This essay thus responds to calls from communication scholars to identify processes of discursive closure distinctive to public and institutional communication.⁴⁹

The rhetorical perspective advanced here leads to the following questions:

- How did the 9/11 families' rhetoric evince the qualities of *parrhesia*? What were the scenes of its deployment? How did audiences initially interpret and respond to this rhetoric?
- How did the 9/11 families' initial use of *parrhesia* construct those speakers as certain types of citizens? What opportunities and obligations did this construction afford those speakers?
- How, subsequently, did this construction undermine the families' participation in the 9/11 Commission? What responses did this construction eventually provoke?
- What does the case of the 9/11 families suggest about *parrhesia* as a rhetorical strategy for citizen participation in deliberation of national security policy? What lessons does this case hold for the development of a rhetorical democracy?

To explore these questions, this essay assembles and critiques representative “fragments” of public and institutional rhetoric informed by the theoretical

perspective discussed above, drawing material from the following types of sources: participant accounts of the 9/11 Commission; print and television news and commentary; formal case studies and scholarly analyses of the 9/11 Commission; a documentary about the 9/11 families; official organizational websites and archives; public statements by 9/11 Commission stakeholders, such as speeches and press releases; and government documents.⁵⁰ This approach finds support from recent rhetorical and critical-cultural studies of both national security and institutional rhetoric.⁵¹

THE 9/11 COMMISSION AS A SITE OF RHETORICAL STRUGGLE

In ancient Greece, *parrhesia* required "both moral and social qualifications which come from a noble birth and a respectful reputation."⁵² The 9/11 catastrophe provided the victims' families with the moral authority necessary to challenge institutional norms that have obstructed citizen participation in U.S. national security policymaking. For the families, the supposed benefits of technocracy and its promise of security had been shattered.⁵³ The deaths of their loved ones provided the families with the reservoirs of emotional energy necessary to confront the intensely secretive institutions of national security.⁵⁴ Thus, in early 2002, one group of family members—the "9/11 Widows" or "Jersey Girls," as Kristen Breitweiser, Patty Casazza, Lorie Van Auken, and Mindy Kleinberg called themselves—began repeated media appearances and visits to Washington, DC, to lobby congressional leaders to establish a commission to investigate the 9/11 attacks. Breitweiser describes the group's two-part rhetorical strategy with lawmakers:

Patty would start things off with pictures of handsome men in the fullness of their lives, with strong bodies and sure smiles, playing tennis or basketball or frolicking in a swimming pool with their children the weeks before 9/11. Patty would pass the pictures around the room and say, "All of these men playing volleyball in the pool are dead. See these guys on the tennis court? They are all dead. . . ." Patty would establish the emotional connection between us and whomever we were meeting. She never failed. It was heartfelt and genuine time after time.⁵⁵

After Casazza's jarring introduction, Breitweiser would set down five two-inch binders brimming with pages of facts related to 9/11 and lawmakers' stated positions on national security issues—material the women had gleaned during sleepless nights filled with hours of Internet research. Breitweiser would then argue for the establishment of a commission.

These inside strategies were mirrored during family members' media appearances. For example, during an August 13, 2002, appearance on the

television program *Donahue*, Breitweiser recounted her final telephone conversation with her husband, Ron:

And he's, like, "I have to go. We're going to go watch it on the television. Don't worry, though. I love you." And I'm, like, "OK, just be careful." And that was the last I spoke to him. And about three minutes later, I saw his building explode. . . . I just said, "My God, he is gone." And I fell to the floor.⁵⁶

Breitweiser's description of her experience established her status as a victim—her "moral qualifications"—thus legitimating subsequent criticism of the institutional response to 9/11. Breitweiser ridiculed President Bush for remaining in a Sarasota classroom after the second plane hit the World Trade Center. Phil Donahue, however, was reluctant to challenge Breitweiser and tried to change the subject:

Well, I don't want to argue this with you at all. You know, there's lots of things that would make Americans upset, to be sure. I think the president might argue, you know, those kids were there. . . . I'm less generous about the issue of what happened after those planes took off. And I think you feel this way, too. Do you want to talk about that?

Breitweiser followed Donahue's lead, stating, "I'm a reasonable person. But when you look at the fact that we spend a half trillion dollars on national defense, and you're telling me that a plane is able to hit our Pentagon, our Defense Department, an hour after the first tower is hit?" Later in the interview, Breitweiser acknowledged that the other "widows" had accompanied her to the show, declaring:

At this point, we are fighting for an independent investigation, an investigation into 9/11 removed from the political process. . . . We want politics removed. We want pure accountability, and we feel that an independent investigation is needed to have that. . . . We have waited eleven months, and I think it is deplorable that these women and myself have to leave our children, our homes, and go down to Washington and beg for answers. To have the right to have answers, we have to beg. And it's disgusting.

The families were thus able to criticize national security elites severely without significant resistance because their status as victims provided them a moral authority that opponents lacked. Opponents relied instead on familiar arguments, asserting that the conduct of national security affairs was best left to insiders and experts. For example, Representative Pete King (R-NY, and

ranking member of the Homeland Security Committee) and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani "told [the families] to trust the government and to stay out of areas that were better left to people who knew what they were doing."⁵⁷ Similarly, unsupportive policymakers and officials repeatedly claimed that the timing of a commission was inappropriate, would distract the nation in a time of war, and compromise sources and methods of intelligence collection.⁵⁸ The families were undeterred, however, and had assembled a group of congressional champions: the FSC website listed Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Richard Shelby (R-AL), and Representatives Tim Roemer (D-IN), Chris Shays (R-CT), and Chris Smith (R-NJ) as "supporters." Such support suggested that—like the 9/11 families—post-9/11 congressional leaders could not simply be construed as a monolithic group with consistent assumptions and goals.

With public support for the families' efforts swelling in light of emerging disclosures of mishandled information by the CIA, FBI, and NSA prior to 9/11, Breitweiser was invited to testify before the Senate-House Joint Select Intelligence Committee on September 18, 2002.⁵⁹ Joining Breitweiser was Stephen Push, cofounder of the group Families of September 11th. The hearing was carried live on C-SPAN and covered by national media outlets.⁶⁰ As 9/11 victims, Breitweiser and Push's speeches were imbued with moral authority that sanctioned their calls for an independent investigation. Push's testimony was direct. He declared, "If the intelligence community had been doing its job, my wife would be alive today." Significantly, however, Push also introduced a subtle *aporia* regarding the relationship between expertise and accountability, one that would eventually undermine the families' influence by reinforcing their nonexpert status: "A number of intelligence experts have said that such preventive work is easier said than done. I don't know if that's a fair excuse, but one conclusion is incontestable: The 9/11 attacks exposed serious shortcomings in the American intelligence community."⁶¹

Breitweiser's testimony, by contrast, was unambivalent and evinced distinctly *parrhesiastic* rhetoric. After first establishing her rights to *parrhesia*, Breitweiser constructed a withering inventory of institutional "failures" for the audience's consideration. Breitweiser opened her speech by evoking her duty to the families:

I ask the members present here today to find in my voice the voices of all of the family members of the 3000 victims of September 11th. I would also ask for you to see in my eyes, the eyes of the more than 10,000 children who are left, now forced to grow up without the love, affection and guidance of a mother or a father who was tragically killed on September 11.⁶²

Breitweiser then justified her right to speak frank and dangerous truths with reference to her loss: “[Ron’s] wedding band was recovered from Ground Zero with a part of his arm. The wedding band is charred and scratched, but still perfectly round and fully intact. I wear it on my right hand, and it will remain there until the day I die.” Following her intense introduction, Breitweiser abruptly declared, “September 11th was the devastating result of a catalog of failures on behalf of our government and its agencies.”⁶³ Unflinching accusations of incompetence and outright lies by “culpable parties” followed. Drawing extensively from media reports and contradictory official statements, Breitweiser critiqued the performance of the nation’s intelligence services and other government agencies, repeatedly urging lawmakers and officials to establish an independent commission to investigate the families’ many unanswered questions. She stated:

Soon after the attacks, President Bush stated that there would come a time to look back and examine our nation’s failures, but that such an undertaking was inappropriate while the nation was still in shock. I would respectfully suggest to President Bush and to our Congress that now, a full year later, it is time to look back and investigate our failures as a nation. A hallmark of democratic government is a willingness to admit to, analyze and learn from mistakes. And, it is now time for our nation to triumph as the great democracy that it is. The families of the victims of September 11th have waited long enough. We need to have answers. We need to have accountability. We need to feel safe living and working in this great nation.⁶⁴

For Foucault, a *parrhesiastes* never doubts his or her beliefs. In *parrhesia* “there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth.”⁶⁵ Such certainty is potentially dangerous for the community because in its “negative” form, *parrhesia* evokes a pejorative meaning of rhetoric—speech characterized by hollow emotional appeals and a lack of prudence and wisdom otherwise developed by learning from experience. Foucault found that negative *parrhesia* is typically spoken by “arrogant,” “loud,” and “emotional” “outsiders” who lack education.⁶⁶ Positive *parrhesia*, by contrast, displays courage, moral integrity, and reasonableness, and it is spoken by citizens possessing “political competence.”⁶⁷ Breitweiser appears to have been deemed a “positive” *parrhesiastes* by at least some institutional elites because, on the day following her Joint Committee testimony, she received an invitation to attend a meeting at the White House. This meeting would lead to the formation of the 9/11 Commission. White House staff had seized on Breitweiser’s recounting of President Bush’s statement about “a time to look back” (which was later determined actually to have been uttered by Press Secretary Ari Fleischer) to

provide political cover for the administration's U-turn in the face of mounting congressional and public pressure for the establishment of a commission.⁶⁸

The *parrhesiastic* speech of Push, Breitweiser, and members of other 9/11 family groups eventually put their reputations in danger. For example, Dorothy Rabinowitz of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote in 2004, "[No one can] miss, by now, the darker side of this spectacle of the widows, awash in their sense of victims' entitlement, as they press ahead with ever more strident claims about the way the government failed them."⁶⁹ In 2006, conservative commentator Ann Coulter caustically attacked the widows, accusing them of being self-obsessed and enjoying the media spotlight afforded by their husbands' deaths.⁷⁰ Such comments capture the sense of ambivalence—the drama of mixed feelings and motives—that surrounded the development, circulation, and reception of the 9/11 families' discourse. Therefore, although it is tempting to perceive a causal connection between the families' *parrhesia* and the administration's acquiescence, it is worth considering an alternative explanation. Specifically, the repeated analogies drawn by officials between the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the events of 9/11 required a proportional response, including a commensurate investigation. In framing 9/11 as a Pearl Harbor–like event, institutional elites sparked "public memory" of the related 1942 Roberts Commission, and with it expectations that constrained elites' rhetorical options.⁷¹ From this perspective, the families' *parrhesia* cannot be definitively construed as a causal force; rather, such rhetoric may have been incidental to slowly unfolding events and merely tolerated by institutional elites. To deny the families' rhetoric at this juncture, however, would have further compromised the legitimacy of institutional structures that had already been destabilized on 9/11.

THE 9/11 COMMISSION INVESTIGATION AND HEARINGS

Following the formation of the 9/11 Commission in late 2002, a former Republican Governor of New Jersey, Thomas Kean, was appointed Chair.⁷² Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman from Indiana, was appointed Vice Chair. The 9/11 Commission was composed of five Republican members and five Democratic members, each appointed by his or her party leadership.⁷³ Kean and Hamilton appointed Philip Zelikow as Executive Director. Zelikow was a historian from the University of Virginia and well known to Washington insiders. Investigative journalist Philip Shenon describes how Zelikow quickly became a controversial figure within the 9/11 Commission because of his various connections with Bush administration officials, especially Condoleezza Rice. Shenon also explains that the Commission's staff members were recruited mostly from academic institutions, think tanks, and institutional sites including the CIA.⁷⁴ The question thus arises whether the members of the 9/11

Commission were “ordinary citizens” analogous to the 9/11 families. In this essay, the 9/11 Commission is interpreted as an intermediary between the 9/11 families and institutional elites. As acknowledged and accepted experts, the members of the 9/11 Commission were sanctioned to make official recommendations (which were later codified into law). These participants were afforded a level of access, authority, and credibility that was unavailable to the 9/11 families. Moreover, the Commission leadership’s objectives often aligned with institutional interests.

Although the Bush administration had agreed to support the work of the 9/11 Commission, the families soon discovered that “‘support’ and ‘subvert’ were almost synonymous.”⁷⁵ Patterns of discursive closure involving containment of the families’ influence, topic avoidance related to the families’ framing of accountability, and disqualification of certain family members from directly participating in the work of the Commission quickly developed and reasserted traditional institutional norms, boundaries, and authority. These strategies undermined the families’ influence by depicting the families as emotional, subjective, and irrational outsiders who needed to be kept away from the Commission’s official policy deliberations. The success of these strategies depended, in part, on their imperceptibility. As Paul Leonardi and Michele Jackson observe, “The key to discursive closure is that it is difficult to notice.”⁷⁶ However, the 9/11 Commission’s leadership also believed that they needed to maintain the families’ support—or at least an appearance of their support—to bolster the Commission’s favorable image with the public.⁷⁷ It is important, therefore, to examine how encouragement of the families’ efforts and the circumvention of their meaningful participation were simultaneously and rhetorically accomplished.

Charles Conrad finds in his investigation of the major corporate scandals of 2002 that “issue containment” has become standard rhetorical practice for policymakers. Conrad explains how leaders of executive branch agencies prefer to have “public policies . . . made in private.”⁷⁸ Officials use issue containment strategies as a way of precluding public scrutiny of decision-making processes. According to Conrad, issue containment involves two primary substrategies: symbolic placation of stakeholders and “individualizing” a crisis. Through public pronouncements and the appearance of effective crisis management, symbolic placation aims to calm stakeholders’ emotions and delay policy response. Individualizing a crisis involves attributing a crisis to the poor decisions of a few “bad apples,” thereby leaving larger systemic issues unaddressed.⁷⁹

The establishment of the 9/11 Commission placated the 9/11 families for months by encouraging their hope that culpable officials would be held formally accountable for the government’s failures. The families’ patience

evaporated, however, following long delays in the investigation and the commissioners' posing of "softball questions" to high-status witnesses.⁸⁰ The second strategy of issue containment—individualizing a crisis—involves evoking the bad apple analogy to pin blame on individuals. During the 9/11 Commission, however, this strategy was reversed. Kean, Hamilton, and Zelikow agreed, "The Pearl Harbor inquiries were perceived as partisan—intent on finding individuals to blame, and not looking at the flaws across the government that enabled the attack to take place. . . . We would not miss the forest for the trees in the 9/11 story by looking solely for individuals to blame."⁸¹ Instead of individualizing a crisis, stakeholders can "systematize" a crisis to avoid the risk and discomfort arising from pointing fingers at politically powerful bad apples. Here, the legitimacy of an explanation for failure is grounded first in the attribution of its comprehensiveness, and second in the attribution of that comprehensiveness as preferable. For the 9/11 Commission's leadership, blaming the flawed national security *system* and its processes seemed the better response, and blaming specific officials was depicted as both insufficient and politically reckless.

Avoiding institutional and public perceptions of partisanship was thus the leadership's primary goal and became the measure of the Commission's success. The ramifications of this goal were widespread. For example, during public hearings, interactions between commissioners and witnesses were carefully scripted. Significantly, the commissioners, staff, and witnesses generally knew what questions and responses would be offered because Kean and Hamilton had insisted that there be no "big surprises" that could lead to partisan attacks: "All [witnesses] were interviewed in private in advance of the public hearing. . . . We did not want witnesses at our hearings presenting information that we were not prepared for."⁸² Each commissioner was given a set time—usually either five or fifteen minutes—in which to ask questions and receive witness testimony. Witnesses tended to deliver long stretches of commentary, and overall, interruptions from the commissioners were infrequent. In some cases, only a handful of questions were asked of witnesses before the next commissioner's turn, and the order of the questioners was determined ahead of time.⁸³ Tight scripting limited the ability of some commissioners, who may have been sympathetic to the families' concerns, to question witnesses on issues of accountability. However, impromptu lines of inquiry that might have undermined the "systematization" of the 9/11 crisis by revealing individual negligence and error were more or less prohibited. Possibilities for such lines of inquiry were already slight given that commissioners risked being rhetorically (and even physically) attacked by fellow commissioners, witnesses, the press, and segments of the public if they were perceived as having blamed individuals for 9/11.⁸⁴

Commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste's opening remarks demonstrate how issue containment—specifically systemization—was performed rhetorically:

No department or agency in this administration, or any other, is exempted from our careful review. I do not, however, interpret our investigative mandate to be an invitation to engage in finger-pointing or to participate in the blame game. Rather, it is the essential precursor to a reasoned analysis of how changes and improvements to our security apparatus can and should be made.⁸⁵

Ben-Veniste implied that blaming individuals might somehow impinge on the Commission's ability to effectively construct lessons learned and help prevent future attacks. The apparent contradiction between holding officials "accountable" while simultaneously not "pointing fingers" can be reconciled if accountability and blame are conceived of as antithetical categories. Here, accountability is associated with the future, and finger pointing and blame with the past. Accountability is associated with changes and improvements designed to make the American people safer, and subsequently evokes images of interconnection, integrity, and security. Finger pointing and blame, on the other hand, become a distasteful "game," and evoke images of imprudence and partisanship. Whereas individuals can and should be held "accountable," they should not be "blamed."

For Senator Jon Corzine (D-NJ), this categorization made sense. Corzine stated, "I am very much of the view that this is not about finding blame, assigning blame. This is about genuine reform and accountability going forward."⁸⁶ Harry Waizer, a Cantor Fitzgerald employee who survived the attacks, argued, "This commission cannot turn back the hands of time. There's nothing to be gained by asserting blame, by pointing fingers."⁸⁷ Testifying with the survivors, Craig Sincock commented, "If there is anything to blame, it is our systems, our bureaucracies and our inflexibility towards change."⁸⁸ These sentiments were echoed in later hearings; Commissioner Lehman remarked to FBI and CIA witnesses, "Please understand that the questions I am posing to you have nothing to do with the blame game or finger-pointing. Our high responsibility is to draw the right lessons and to make real achievable recommendations for change."⁸⁹ Former Attorney General Janet Reno stated, "What I think is important for me to do today . . . is to try to come to the issues so . . . that we can provide the best advice we can on how we can prevent this for the future, not talking about blame, not talking about partisan politics."⁹⁰ Addressing emergency response officials from New York, Commissioner Roemer declared, "We're not here to blame the three of you or anybody else, but to find answers, learn and fix it because we know they're coming and we know they might be coming back to New York City."⁹¹ The construction and maintenance of the accountability

versus blame categories by institutional members, the Commission's leadership, and some survivors thus helped to contain the 9/11 families' *parrhesia*. As a result, the families' primary motive for establishing the Commission—accountability—was quickly and successfully coopted by institutional members and intermediaries in a way that protected institutional interests.

A second prominent strategy used to blunt the families' *parrhesia* involved avoiding the substance and implications of the families' framing of accountability. This strategy differed from issue containment in that it did not involve an explicit reframing of accountability; rather, this strategy relied on simply avoiding the issue. The families consistently rejected the premise that the mistakes surrounding the 9/11 attacks precluded holding individuals to account. For example, responding to Chairman Kean and Commissioner Ben-Veniste's assertions during the first public hearing that the Commission needed to avoid "pointing fingers," Stephen Push argued, "I think this Commission should point fingers. I'm not suggesting that you find scapegoats, someone to hang out to dry, but there were people, people in responsible positions, who failed us on 9/11."⁹² Push's fellow panelists agreed. During her testimony, Mary Fetchet repeatedly asked the question "Who was accountable?" and Mindy Kleinberg asked, "If at some point we don't look to hold the individuals accountable for not doing their jobs properly, then how can we ever expect for terrorists not to get lucky again?"⁹³ For these witnesses, both systems *and* individuals could be held accountable.

However, in 2006, Vice Chairman Hamilton recalled:

What we decided was two things: the mandate did not ask us to identify people or even did not use the word "accountability." We did not want to go beyond our mandate. . . . What we thought was really important in all of this was not so much that a particular person failed in their responsibility, whatever that responsibility might be, but that there were systemic problems in the government that we really thought need to be identified and corrected.⁹⁴

The Commission's leadership thus interpreted their mandate as providing an insufficient warrant for deliberating the relationship between pre-9/11 national security decision making and accountability. The Commission nevertheless implicitly proclaimed its view of this relationship in its *Final Report*, which held no government official at any level formally responsible for their actions or inactions preceding the 9/11 attacks. Avoiding consideration of this issue during the Commission's investigation and hearings preserved the commissioners' ability eventually to assign accountability in a way that ensured that the hierarchical relationship between national security elites and citizens remained intact. The Commission's leadership could not allow institutional elites to

perceive that citizens were directing the Commission's investigation. Honoring the 9/11 families' requested framing of accountability not only risked the appearance of partisanship, but also risked undermining of the very foundation of the insider-outsider dichotomy that has historically separated citizens from national security decision making.

Avoiding the issue of accountability was thus a significant institutional strategy. For example, during the Commission's fourth public hearing on October 14, 2003, Commissioner Max Cleland finally asked a panel of former CIA officials the question that the 9/11 families had consistently sought an answer to: "Who is responsible for warning this country of an attack on this nation, and who's accountable?" Mary McCarthy, a former National Intelligence Officer for Warning, responded, "As far as who is accountable, I think that's what the Commission is discovering, and hopefully what we will discover is that our systems were not adequate."⁹⁵ McCarthy's statement epitomizes the rhetorical strategy of topic avoidance, as well as an environment where accountability was located within abstract, institutionally acceptable discourses of "systems" and "cultures" and was not attributable to specific individuals.⁹⁶ Similarly, Kean followed the testimony of family members Push, Fetchet, Kleinberg, and Vadhan by remarking:

Thank you all very much. This is an extraordinary panel and you have given us a tremendous charge. . . . There wouldn't be a Commission if it was not for the work of the victims and the families. And we're all very very aware of that. I also want to say, as Chairman, that every single time that this Commission has asked the families to help in any way in the execution of our mission, they have been there, from setting out the mission to helping us get an adequate budget. I just want to say to you all, as representatives of the families, thank you very, very much, and we look forward to working with you in the future.⁹⁷

Other commissioners followed Kean in praising the families but avoiding the substance of implications of their framing of accountability. In contrast to his later statements about the families, Commissioner Fielding stated, "Your stories are very compelling, your advice is good and sound, and obviously you have strengthened our resolve. I know I speak for all of us, you're obviously one of our best assets. Please, stay with us, please keep giving us guidance, please keep us direct."⁹⁸ Commissioner Roemer stated, "I hope you will stay involved in this Commission's work. And I hope that you will stay involved in helping us implement recommendations of the Commission. That will be one of the most difficult parts we get to."⁹⁹ However, even as they acknowledged the families' important contributions, the commissioners simultaneously reinforced the families' position as laypeople and victims rather than competent stakeholders in policy

debate. Such praise positioned the commissioners as insiders and experts with more dispassionate, authoritative, and legitimate perspectives on accountability than the families.

A third institutional strategy used to manage the families' *parrhesia*—and the final strategy discussed here—was disqualification, which involves determining who has a right to participate in decision making. According to Kean and Hamilton, "Initially, the Family Steering Committee (FSC) had lobbied for one of their prominent representatives [Breitweiser] to be hired onto the commission's staff."¹⁰⁰ Instead, for the staff teams, the Commission's leadership "looked for the best experts in the United States. We wanted to hire eclectically: people from inside and outside of government . . . people who could bring a fresh perspective."¹⁰¹ The Commission also refused to hire anyone possessing an activist political history.¹⁰² Three of the Commission's expert staff members had lost loved ones during the attacks; however, selection of the staff teams using the institutional *sine qua non* of "expertise" ensured that family members who believed that holding *individuals* accountable would be disqualified from participating in the most meaningful deliberations.

Here, rhetorical scholars of democracy can assess how the category of victim works to legitimize the disqualification of citizens from debates and promotes associated practices of discursive closure. The label of victim is a potent moral and political category, and it is constructed in complex—and often contradictory—ways to promote or impede a given agenda.¹⁰³ Victims of violent crime may skillfully employ *parrhesia*, yet the connotations surrounding their categorical status may simultaneously mark their speech for audiences as subjective, emotional, and something less than rational. For the Commission's leadership, the families' *parrhesia* was thus to be acknowledged (or at least publicly tolerated), but only if it remained *outside* the Commission's official deliberations. Following the investigation, Commission staff members openly expressed mixed emotions about the families. For example, a liaison to the families, Emily Walker, stated, "The families, especially the four 'Jersey Girls,' were not nice. They were not cordial. They were not respectful." Walker understood the complexity of the situation, however, "That they were not nice does not mean they were not effective. If not for those four ladies a lot would never have happened."¹⁰⁴

In summary, issue containment, topic avoidance, and disqualification were prominent strategies used by institutional elites and the 9/11 Commission's leadership to circumvent the families' meaningful participation in national security affairs. These strategies remained obscure because they were often accompanied by praise for the families' efforts. However, praising the victims of 9/11 amounted to a subtle form of patronizing speech that reinforced the families' subordinate status to national security elites and further contained the

threat that the families' *parrhesia* posed to institutional authority and control. I next consider whether the 9/11 families' use of different rhetorical strategies might have altered this situation.

PARRHESIA AND RHETORICAL DEMOCRACY

Contrasting *parrhesia* with other rhetorical strategies contributes to our understanding of the development of rhetorical democracy. For example, comic strategies are less threatening to institutional elites than *parrhesia* because the comic not only unmasks vices and unjust practices, but also creates a feeling of collaboration and trust among participants.¹⁰⁵ For example, Caitlin Wills Toker explains how, during the 1980s and 1990s, one activist rhetor used comic strategies to promote dialogue between citizen groups and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) officials at a nuclear weapons production facility located in Fernald, Ohio. Toker found that activist Lisa Crawford's performance of the comic frame—manifested in “identification,” “perspective by incongruity,” and “clowning”—“ultimately altered Fernald's practices to allow for the incorporation and consideration of public values and interests.”¹⁰⁶ Identification involves building shared interest and trust *before* participants engage social issues. Perspective by incongruity joins contradictory statements together to question the adequacy of a given frame. For example, Crawford referred to Fernald as a “national sacrifice zone” to undermine the sterile, technical language of DOE officials.¹⁰⁷ Finally, clowning uses parody to disrupt conventions and encourage participants to reflect on their unjust practices.

The 9/11 families rarely used comic strategies in confronting institutional elites. Indeed, the 49 formal statements issued by the Family Steering Committee reveal a consistent pattern of *parrhesia* employed throughout the duration of the 9/11 Commission's investigation. For example, a statement released on February 10, 2004, declares, “The [FSC] is outraged by the failure of [the 9/11 Commission] to subpoena the White House for complete access to the Presidential Daily Briefings. The public needs to be aware that the President's statements on *Meet the Press*, on February 8, 2004, were misleading.”¹⁰⁸ Dozens of formal statements similar in tone are representative of the families' sustained use of *parrhesia* in the hopes of spurring officials to respond favorably to the families' calls for accountability. For example, a February 3, 2004, statement concerning the need for an extension of the Commission's investigation asserted that the Commission must “fulfill its promise to conduct a transparent investigation that provides accountability and fixes responsibility to those who contributed to the failures that led to 9/11.”¹⁰⁹ However, a July 26, 2004, statement contained a trace of a comic frame mixed with antipathy for the Commission's *Final Report*: “The Commissioners have concluded that September 11, 2001 resulted from a ‘failure of imagination.’

Although accountability was not assigned to specific individuals, it is clear that one solution is to hire new people with better imaginations."¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the families' rhetorical strategy of *parrhesia* was maintained throughout the Commission's investigation even as evidence of its effectiveness faded.

The question here is whether the 9/11 families might have achieved more substantial and successful participation in the work of the 9/11 Commission—and thus transformed the calculus of accountability—if they had shifted their rhetorical strategy to a comic frame once the Commission's investigation was underway. Toker's analysis of Lisa Crawford's performance is grounded in such assumptions of deliberative democracy as equal access, cooperation, inclusivity, and dialogue. Deliberative democracy's emphasis on egalitarian consensus, however, differs from the norms of a rhetorical democracy, which is based instead on the ideal of agonistic pluralism.¹¹¹ As Ivie states, "Burke's notion of the comic corrective acknowledges that political relations are agonistic and recognizes that social cohesion and tolerance are promoted by people 'acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another.' It does not . . . assume that agonistic politics are inherently self-correcting or that their potential for realizing democratic ideals is easily fulfilled."¹¹² Ivie explains that the deployment of comic strategies need not be wedded to deliberative democratic assumptions. Both agonistic pluralism and *parrhesia* provide alternatives to the idealized principles of deliberative democracy. Indeed, to the extent that a rhetorical democracy relies on the practical achievement of deliberative democracy's idealized principles, its development will likely be thwarted by national security elites who neither aspire to uphold nor respect these principles.

The question remains, however, whether *parrhesia* is compatible with the development of a rhetorical democracy. Foucault argues that *parrhesia* is based on moral certainty; therefore, it may be disruptive to the rhetorical task of producing *identification* among participants. In its unequivocal adherence to a particular conception of accountability, the families' *parrhesia* encouraged the demonization of all those opposed to that conception. Such practices, according to Ivie, are anathema to the ideals of rhetorical democracy, where enemies are not demonized, but instead depicted as "wrong," "misguided," or "stupid" rivals in need of respectful engagement. Victimization is also eschewed in a rhetorical democracy; however, the families' *parrhesia* was derived from their victimization. A paradox was thus created that proved irresolvable during the 9/11 Commission's tenure. The 9/11 families' *parrhesia* may have helped to establish the 9/11 Commission; yet their *parrhesia* subsequently alienated the Commission's leadership, provoked discursive closure, and foreclosed opportunities for meaningful participation.

While the 9/11 families exemplify the potential for citizens to use *parrhesia* to intervene successfully in the development of national security policy in

the aftermath of a catastrophe, *parrhesia* may also unintentionally hinder the development of a rhetorical democracy. This study advances our understanding of *parrhesia*, yet future critique should develop insights concerning its form and rhetorical functioning within national security affairs. Scholars and citizens have only begun to explore what democracy's rhetorical idiom might look like in the context of citizen participation in post-9/11 national security deliberations. In light of the case of the 9/11 families and the paradox of *parrhesia*, investigating democracy's untapped potential remains a complicated and challenging—but nonetheless enticing—opportunity for rhetorical scholars.

CONCLUSION

The case of the 9/11 families represents both disruption and continuity in the rhetorical history of citizen participation in U.S. national security affairs. Above all, however, this case reveals stakeholders' deep ambivalence regarding such participation. Because the 9/11 Commission's leadership worked persistently to contain the 9/11 families' calls for specific accountability, it is remarkable that following the disbandment of the 9/11 Commission, all ten commissioners formed a 501(c)(3) organization, the 9/11 Public Discourse Project (now defunct), to "educate the public on the issue of terrorism and what can be done to make the country safer." The 9/11 Public Discourse Project's final report in December 2005 declared, "Change and reform doesn't happen in this country unless the American people demand it. . . . The 9/11 families are an example for every student of government: Citizen involvement makes a huge and positive difference."¹¹³ In light of this essay's critique, this statement suggests that the commissioners were either hypocritical or, more likely, blind to their own rhetorical practices—practices that helped to circumvent the 9/11 families' meaningful participation.

The families similarly demonstrated ambivalence concerning their participation in national security affairs. During the 9/11 Commission's first public hearing, Push, Fetchet, Kleinberg, and Vadhan repeatedly called for accountability, yet consistently reinforced the distance between the families and the Commission. For example, Fetchet stated, "It is your moral and legal responsibility to ensure that no stone is unturned. . . . Ultimately, you are accountable for the success of this commission."¹¹⁴ This rhetoric suggests that the 9/11 families not only deferred to the Commission's experts regarding the technical aspects of national security reform, but also believed that issues of *accountability* were "outside the boundaries of the public sphere."¹¹⁵ In private meetings, however, it appears that at least some family members attempted—with little success—to overcome this assumption and actively participate in the work of the Commission to try to ensure that their standards of accountability were met.¹¹⁶

The families' ambivalence suggests that they may have tacitly accepted the historical depiction of themselves as unqualified to participate in national security deliberations, thereby illustrating a public that has forgotten, in Doxtader's words, "how to authorize actions in behalf of its own needs." This condition may have contributed to the "complicated and frustrating dance" that occurred between the 9/11 families and the Commission's leadership. Critical exploration of this condition, however, was precluded by forms of institutional communication endemic to investigatory commissions. Doxtader suggests that national security commissions are institutional sites that serve as a "vicious surrogate" for deliberation; they are a place where interaction is replaced by "opinion extraction." As a result, rhetorical democracy's normative goal of "strengthening the means of democratic dissent and deliberation" and "reinforcing democratic values" remained out of reach during the 9/11 Commission's investigation. This case study suggests that such commissions—as they are currently structured—may accommodate citizens' national security concerns, but "only if [those concerns] do not challenge the given terms of [institutional] stability."¹¹⁷

Thus, despite the 9/11 families use of *parrhesia* to promote the ideals of accountability, participation, and democracy, this essay demonstrates the persistence of institutional elitism, systematic distortion, and general discursive closure within institutional arenas of national security decision making. Although citizen rhetoric served as a catalyst for the 9/11 Commission and subsequent reform legislation, the changes enacted since 2004 have done nothing to stimulate the inclusion of citizen voices in national security policy deliberations. Unfortunately, it may take another catastrophe to remind citizens of their democratic responsibility to deliberate the development of national security policy.¹¹⁸

For those considering opportunities for direct citizen participation in national security affairs, several lessons from the case of the 9/11 families stand out as particularly important. First, *catastrophe provides temporary cultural sanction* for citizen involvement (but not necessarily permanent or substantive influence) in institutional arenas dominated by elite, technocratic discourse. The category of victim is a potent, but ultimately unstable, source of *parrhesia* that can be used to challenge the institutional status quo. The case of the 9/11 families also demonstrates, however, how institutions can skillfully appropriate victims' *parrhesiastic* truth to serve their own interests. Second, if it is to spur direct citizen involvement, *catastrophe must affect citizens with the knowledge, connections, resources, and time to devote to seeking redress*. Comparison of the 9/11 families and Hurricane Katrina victims clearly demonstrates the value of socioeconomic status, education, social networks, race, and bureaucratic savoir faire in gaining media and political attention.¹¹⁹ Finally, if permitted to enter institutional arenas of decision making, *citizens must remain attuned to changing rhetorical situations and flexible in their choice of rhetorical strategies*. Once

“inside,” citizens must carefully consider how their rhetorical strategies may spark institutional demophobia, impeding identification and cooperation. Such participation, in other words, is never safe.

The 9/11 Commission’s mandate was to “examine and report upon the facts and causes relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.”¹²⁰ However, participants did not consider whether the historical relationship between citizens and institutional elites in the development of national security policy played some role in the ultimate causes of the attacks. Nevertheless, reconsideration of this relationship is unlikely in an environment where “the national impulse is to identify with the symbol of democracy but to contain and defer democratic practice until it can be properly and rationally disciplined.”¹²¹ Robert Asen asks us to remember, however, that “democracy asks not for people’s unlimited energy and knowledge, but for their creative participation.”¹²² For Asen, the value of citizen participation lies in its qualitative contributions in bolstering public agendas, raising issues and questions, and enhancing the democratic process. Asen states, “Democracy requires a *leap* of faith. Belief in democracy is like belief in God; either one has faith or one does not. Radical skepticism cannot be met with irrefutable, empirical proof. Democracy . . . constitutes a moral project.”¹²³ The same can be said for a *rhetorical* democracy. Citizens and scholars taking a leap of faith in the context of national security affairs would do well to learn from the 9/11 families’ experience. Their endeavor to hold policymakers accountable and to help ensure that Americans never again experience the horror of catastrophic terrorism offers valuable insights for those who would dare to enter this risky rhetorical context.

NOTES

1. Kristen Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call: The Political Education of a 9/11 Widow* (New York: Warner Books, 2006), 64.
2. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*, 86.
3. Although the term “9/11 families” generally refers to the relatives of all those who died during the 9/11 attacks, it increasingly demarcates a select group among them who have lobbied government leaders for investigations into the catastrophe and continue to advocate for policy reform. See 9/11 Families for a Secure America (<http://www.911fsa.org>), The September 11th Families’ Association (<http://www.911families.org>), and Families of September 11 (<http://www.familiesofseptember11.org>).
4. Philip Shenon, *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation* (New York: Twelve, 2008).
5. Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
6. Kristen Lundberg, “Piloting a Bi-Partisan Ship: Strategies and Tactics of the 9/11 Commission,” Kennedy School of Government Case Program, C15–05–1813.0 (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2005).

7. Shenon, *The Commission*.
8. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*, 158–59.
9. Lundberg, "Piloting a Bi-Partisan Ship," 27.
10. Citizen participation is defined here as "the process by which members of a society (those not holding office or administrative positions in government) share power with public officials in making substantive decisions and in taking actions related to the community. The focus is on direct participation (when citizens are personally involved and actively engaged) as opposed to indirect participation (when citizens elect others to represent them) in the decision process" (320). Nancy Roberts, "Public Deliberation in an Age of Direct Citizen Participation," *American Review of Public Administration* 34 (2004): 315–53. Rhetorical and critical/cultural scholars have usefully examined citizen participation surrounding public health and environmental cleanup issues related to U.S. nuclear weapons production. See, for example, William J. Kinsella, "Nuclear Boundaries: Material and Discursive Containment at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation," *Science as Culture* 10 (2001): 163–94; Caitlin Wills Toker, "Debating 'What Ought To Be': The Comic Frame and Public Moral Argument," *Western Journal of Communication* 66 (2002): 53–83; Bryan C. Taylor et al., eds., *Nuclear Legacies: Communication, Controversy, and the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007). In their concern for accountability and wide-ranging structural reforms, the 9/11 families represent a related but distinct example of citizen participation in national security policy development.
11. Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 339–61.
12. Jonathan Simon, "Parrhesiastic Accountability: Investigatory Commissions and Executive Power in an Age of Terror," *Yale Law Journal* 14 (2005): 1419–57, quote on 1423. Simon's argument focuses narrowly on commissions; scrutiny of activists' and protesters' use of *parrhesia* in national security contexts is largely omitted.
13. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 12–19.
14. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19.
15. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 20.
16. Simon, "Parrhesiastic Accountability," 1450.
17. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*; Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*; Shenon, *The Commission*. A ProQuest search of national and regional newspaper coverage of the 9/11 families from September 11, 2001, to November 27, 2002 (the date of the 9/11 Commission's establishment) reveals consistent support for the 9/11 families' efforts. Commentators cite Dorothy Rabinowitz's April 14, 2004, piece in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "The 9/11 Widows: Americans are Beginning to Tire of Them" (<http://www.opinionjournal.com/medialog/?id=110004950>, [accessed April 2009]) as a turning point in the 9/11 families' otherwise general valorization. See Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).
18. Breitweiser, *Wake-up Call*, 130.
19. Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 189–211; Maarten A. Hajer, "Setting the Stage: A Dramaturgy of Policy Deliberation," *Administration and Society* 36 (2005): 624–47; David S. Meyer, "Framing National Security: Elite Public Discourse on Nuclear Weapons during the Cold War," *Political Communication* 12 (1995): 173–92; Gordon Mitchell, *Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000); Roberts, "Public

- Deliberation”; Taylor et al., eds., *Nuclear Legacies*; Scott Welsh, “Deliberative Democracy and the Rhetorical Production of Political Culture,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5, no. 4 (2002): 679–707.
20. Kinsella, “Nuclear Boundaries,” 166.
 21. Toker, “Debating ‘What Ought To Be,’” 79.
 22. The commission form is an increasingly commonplace feature of U.S. federal, state, and local government; see Simon, “Parrhesiastic Accountability.” The Roberts Commission (Pearl Harbor, 1942), the Warren Commission (Kennedy assassination, 1963), the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee (Watergate scandal, 1973–1974), the Rockefeller Commission (CIA abuses of power, 1974–1975), the Tower Commission (Iran-Contra scandal, 1986–1987), and the 9/11 Commission (2002–2004) are among the more well-known investigatory commissions established by the U.S. government during the last 70 years. During the Bush administration, both the 9/11 Commission and the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction were primary sites for deliberating U.S. intelligence and national security policy and institutional structure.
 23. Gerard A. Hauser and Amy Grim, eds., *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement* (Philadelphia: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003); Robert L. Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Robert L. Ivie, “Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric: An Introduction to the Special Issue,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 577–79.
 24. David Depew, “A Review of ‘Democracy and America’s War on Terror,’” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36 (2006): 331–34, quote on 332.
 25. Ivie, “Shadows of Democracy,” 578.
 26. Bryan C. Taylor, “‘The Means to Match Their Hatred’: Nuclear Weapons, Rhetorical Democracy, and Presidential Discourse,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 667–92, quote on 670.
 27. Bryan C. Taylor and Stephen J. Harnett, “‘National Security, and All that It Implies . . .’: Communication and (Post-) Cold War Culture,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, no. 4 (2000): 465–91.
 28. Taylor, “‘The Means to Match Their Hatred.’”
 29. Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror*.
 30. Paul A. Chilton, “The Meaning of Security,” in *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*, ed. Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 193–216; Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Andrew Ross, “Containing Culture in the Cold War,” *Cultural Studies* 1 (1987), 328–48.
 31. Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror*.
 32. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
 33. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19–20; emphasis in original.
 34. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 12.
 35. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 18.
 36. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 15–16.
 37. Erik Doxtader, “Learning Public Deliberation Through the Critique of Institutional Argument,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 31, no. 4 (1995): 185–203, quote on 185.

38. Taylor et al., *Nuclear Legacies*.
39. Doxtader, "Learning Public Deliberation," 186.
40. Kenneth Kitts, *Presidential Commissions and National Security: The Politics of Damage Control* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006).
41. Doxtader, "Learning Public Deliberation," 189.
42. Rhetorical and critical/cultural scholars of national security rhetoric have, of course, also downplayed institutional dynamics so they might focus productively on socially and culturally oriented issues associated with national security. See, for example, Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Elizabeth Walker Mechling and Jay Mechling, "The Campaign for Civil Defense and the Struggle to Naturalize the Bomb," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 55 (1991): 105–33. By contrast, communication theorist Stanley Deetz's theorization of discursive closure includes the institutional practices of disqualification, naturalization, neutralization, topic avoidance, legitimation, and pacification. Each of these practices is evident in the case of 9/11 families, but disqualification and topic avoidance are prominent and especially relevant for assessing some of the dilemmas associated with the development of a rhetorical democracy. Stanley A. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Jennifer A. Thackaberry, "'Discursive Opening' and Closing in Organisational Self-Study: Culture as Trap and Tool in Wildland Firefighting Safety," *Management Communication Quarterly* 17 (2004): 319–59.
43. Charles Conrad, "The Illusion of Reform: Corporate Discourse and Agenda Denial in the 2002 'Corporate Meltdown,'" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2004): 311–38; Taylor et al., eds., *Nuclear Legacies*.
44. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization*; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (London: Beacon Press, 1981).
45. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization*.
46. "Issue containment" is not explicitly theorized by Deetz as a discursive closure practice; see Conrad, "The Illusion of Reform."
47. Kinsella, "Nuclear Boundaries."
48. Stanley A. Deetz, "Negation and the Political Function of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 4 (1983) 434–41, quote on 439; emphasis in original.
49. Paul M. Leonardi and Michele H. Jackson, "Technological Determinism and Discursive Closure in Organizational Mergers," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 17 (2004): 615–31.
50. The 9/11 Commission transferred legal custody of its records to the National Archives in 2004. In accordance with the Federal Records Act, the Commission established a general restriction from public access on these records until 2009. The Commission's records are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requirements.
51. Conrad, "The Illusion of Reform"; Sharon M. Livesey, "Global Warming Wars: Rhetorical and Discourse Analytic Approaches to Exxonmobil's Corporate Public Discourse," *Journal of Business Communication* 39 (2002): 117–46; Mitchell, *Strategic Deception*; Michael Billig and Kate MacMillan, "Metaphor, Idiom and Ideology: The Search for 'No Smoking Guns' Across Time," *Discourse and Society* 16 (2005): 459–80; Mary Simpson and George Cheney, "Marketization, Participation and Communication within New Zealand Retirement Villages: A Critical-Rhetorical and Discursive Analysis," *Discourse and Communication*

- 1 (2007): 191–222; Taylor et al., *Nuclear Legacies*; Bryan C. Taylor and Judith Hendry, “Insisting on Persisting: The Nuclear Rhetoric of ‘Stockpile Stewardship,’” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2008): 303–34.
52. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 31.
53. Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
54. Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).
55. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*, 96.
56. This and the following excerpts from the *Donahue* show are quoted in “UQ Wire: 9/11 Debate Opened Wide On Donahue,” August 15, 2002, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0208/S00082.htm> (accessed April 2009).
57. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*, 122.
58. “Cheney Warns Democrats,” *CBS News*, May 17, 2002, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/05/17/politics/main509395.shtml> (accessed April 2009); “Bush Opposes 9/11 Query Panel,” *CBS News*, May, 23 2002, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/05/15/attack/main509096.shtml> (accessed April 2009).
59. “FBI Chief Acknowledges 9/11 Errors: Says Terror Plot Might Have Been Detected if Leads Were Followed,” *CBS News*, May 30, 2002, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/05/30/national/main510607.shtml> (accessed April 2009); Kate Snow and Dana Bash, “Lawmakers Get Details on 9/11 Intelligence Lapses: Senators: Information Could Have Thwarted Attacks,” *CNN.com*, June 18, 2002, <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/06/18/congress.911.probe/index.html> (accessed April 2009).
60. Kathy Kiely, “Warnings Not Passed Down, 9/11 Inquiry Says,” *USA Today*, September 19, 2002, A9; Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*.
61. “Statement of Stephen Push, Treasurer, Families of September 11, Inc., Washington, D.C., Concerning the Joint 9/11 Inquiry, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence,” September 18, 2002, http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2002_hr/091802push.pdf, 1 (accessed April 2009).
62. “Statement of Kristen Breitweiser, Co-Chairperson September 11th Advocates, Concerning the Joint 9/11 Inquiry, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence,” September 18, 2002, <http://www.unansweredquestions.org/timeline/2002/senatecommittee091802b.html> (accessed May 2009).
63. “Statement of Kristen Breitweiser,” 3.
64. “Statement of Kristen Breitweiser,” 4.
65. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 14.
66. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 63–67.
67. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 67–71.
68. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*.
69. Dorothy Rabinowitz, “The 9/11 Widows.”
70. Ann Coulter, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* (New York: Crown Forum, 2006).
71. Denise M. Bostdorff, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); G. Thomas Goodnight, “Reagan, Vietnam, and Central America,” in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin. J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 122–52.

72. Kean was appointed Chair after Henry Kissinger withdrew from that position following a confrontational meeting with the 9/11 families during which the families suggested that Kissinger's international consulting work constituted a conflict of interest. Kissinger refused to divulge his list of clients to the public or to the families and abruptly resigned.
73. Thomas Kean, Fred Fielding, Slade Gorton, John Lehman, and James Thompson were the Republican members of the Commission. Lee Hamilton, Richard Ben-Veniste, Jamie Gorelick, Timothy Roemer, and Max Cleland (later replaced by Bob Kerrey) were the Democratic members.
74. Shenon, *The Commission*.
75. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*, 126.
76. Leonardi and Jackson, "Technological Determinism and Discursive Closure," 625.
77. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*.
78. Conrad, "The Illusion of Reform," 313.
79. Conrad, "The Illusion of Reform," 317.
80. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*.
81. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 29–30.
82. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 154.
83. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 176.
84. For example, during the eleventh public hearing, Commissioner Lehman described the lack of unified command and cross-communication during the emergency response at the World Trade Center. Two witnesses, former New York Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen and Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik, responded as though Lehman had engaged in a personal attack. After the hearing, Kerik stated, "It's almost pitiful that this is what [Lehman] had to stoop to get his name in lights," and Von Essen declared, "If I had the opportunity, I probably would have choked him, because that's what he deserved." Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 226.
85. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/archive/hearing1/9-11Commission_Hearing_2003-03-31.pdf (accessed April 2009), quote on 30.
86. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, May 22, 2003, 63.
87. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 116.
88. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 157.
89. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, April 13, 2004, 102–3.
90. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, April 13, 2004, 51.
91. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, May 18, 2004, 111–12.
92. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 167.
93. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 202.

94. "9/11: Truth, Lies and Conspiracy: Interview: Lee Hamilton," August 21, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/sunday/911hamilton.html> (accessed April 2009).
95. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, October 14, 2003, 56.
96. Ester Barinaga, "'Cultural Diversity' at Work: 'National Culture' as a Discourse Organizing an International Project Group," *Human Relations* 60 (2007): 315–40.
97. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 209–10.
98. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 216–17.
99. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, 220–21.
100. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 46.
101. Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 38.
102. Lundberg, "Piloting a Bi-Partisan Ship."
103. Bryan C. Taylor, "'Our Bruised Arms Hung Up as Monuments': Nuclear Iconography in Post-Cold War Culture," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 1–34.
104. Lundberg, "Piloting a Bi-Partisan Ship," 28–29.
105. Toker, "Debating 'What Ought To Be,'" 63.
106. Toker, "Debating 'What Ought To Be,'" 77.
107. Toker, "Debating 'What Ought To Be,'" 70.
108. "Statement Regarding the Failure of the 9/11 Independent Commission to Subpoena the White House," *Family Steering Committee*, February 10, 2004, www.911independentcommission.org/archives/021004subpoenapdb.doc (accessed April 2009).
109. "The Need for an Extension to January 10, 2005," *Family Steering Committee*, February 3, 2004, <http://www.911independentcommission.org/feb032004.html> (accessed April 2009).
110. "The Final Report," *Family Steering Committee*, July 26, 2004, <http://www.911independentcommission.org/reactfinalreport72604.html> (accessed April 2009).
111. Ivie, *Democracy and America's War on Terror*, 168.
112. Ivie, *Democracy and America's War on Terror*, 39.
113. 9/11 Public Discourse Project, "About the Project" and "Final Report" (December 12, 2005, 7), http://www.9-11pdp.org/press/2005-12-05_report.pdf (accessed April 2009).
114. "Public Hearing," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, March 31, 2003, quote on 186–87.
115. Doxtader, "Learning Public Deliberation," 193.
116. Breitweiser, *Wake-Up Call*; Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*; Shenon, *The Commission*.
117. Doxtader, "Learning Public Deliberation," 194–95.
118. Citizen deliberation does not guarantee national security policies that reflect the ideals of rhetorical democracy. As Tarla Rai Peterson states, "The ideal democracy is not hidden from our vision; it does not exist" (238). Peterson argues that the role of communication critics is to "surface hegemonic configurations that grow out of nepotism, corruption, and [institutional] pressures," thereby creating a space to reconsider or renegotiate these configurations. Following Peterson, an assumption underlying my claim is that "healthy democratic process

requires recognition of different beliefs, interests, and values and the recognition that open conflict over those differences is not only legitimate, but desirable" (252). Tarla Rai Peterson, "Nuclear Legacies and Opportunities for Politically and Ethically Engaged Communication Scholarship," in *Nuclear Legacies*, ed. Taylor et al., 237–54.

119. Comparing Google searches of "9/11 Families" and "Hurricane Katrina victims" aptly illustrates this point: there were no "Hurricane Katrina families" organizations as of January 2008.
120. "About the Commission," *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*, August 15, 2008, <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/about/107-306.pdf> (accessed April 2009), quote on 2408.
121. Robert L. Ivie, "Democratic Deliberation in a Rhetorical Republic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 491–530, quote on 491.
122. Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 196.
123. Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," 198; emphasis in original.