Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

SELF AND POWER IN THE PRESIDENTIAL LIFE WRITING OF GEORGE H. W. BUSH, BILL CLINTON, AND GEORGE W. BUSH

Meryem Elif DOĞDU

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2019

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KABUL VE ONAY

Meryem Elif Doğdu tarafından hazırlanan "Self and Power in the Presidential Life Writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush" başlıklı bu çalışma, 6 Eylül 2019 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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23/09/2019

Meryem Elif DOĞDU

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(3) *Madde 7. 1. Ulusal çıkarları veya güvenliği ilgilendiren, emniyet, istihbarat, savunma ve güvenlik, sağlık vb. konulara ilişkin lisansüstü tezlerle ilgili gizlilik kararı,* ***tezin yapıldığı kurum*** *tarafından verilir *. Kurum ve kuruluşlarla yapılan işbirliği protokolü çerçevesinde hazırlanan lisansüstü tezlere ilişkin gizlilik kararı ise,* ***ilgili kurum ve kuruluşun önerisi*** *ile* ***enstitü*** *veya* ***fakültenin*** *uygun görüşü üzerine* ***üniversite yönetim kurulu*** *tarafından verilir. Gizlilik kararı verilen tezler Yükseköğretim Kuruluna bildirilir.*
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ABSTRACT

DOĞDU, Meryem Elif. *Self and Power in the Presidential Life Writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush,* Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2019.

This thesis analyzes of three US Presidents' understandings of self and power as reflected in their life writing. The scope of this thesis is limited to the period between the years 1989-2009, during which George H. W. Bush (1989-1993), Bill Clinton (1993-2001), and George W. Bush (2001-2009) served respectively. Now defined as the post-Cold War era, during these presidents' administrations, "hostility against communism" gave way to the "War on Terror." Acknowledging that current American politics and foreign policies were shaped during these two decades, this thesis examines the notion of power in relation to the subject position of the president. In their autobiographical works, *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (2013), *My Life* (2004), and *Decision Points* (2010) George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush attempt to reassert their power, which ended with their presidency and was diminished by media images and criticisms. In doing so, they revere the ideology of values such as individualism, democracy, freedom, and religious morality, which are identified with national and international American policies. Chapter I offers a close reading of these three works as presidential life writing and analyzes the self in relation to a nationalist American identity. Chapter II further studies the core nature of presidents' power in relation to America as a superpower. The power invested in presidents is often used in a way that exposes efforts of maintaining a public image (or self) and agreeing with preconceived practices; public opinion and American values are instrumental in making decisions regarding interactions with Middle Eastern countries, and presidential actions often show compliance with former presidential actions. Thus, such power requires justification. These presidents' exercise of power in their authorship reflects an attempt to influence historical perceptions, and contend and rationalize their former power.

Keywords: Life Writing, Autobiography, American Presidents, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush

ÖZET

DOĞDU, Meryem Elif. *Amerikan Başkanları George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un Özyaşam Öykülerindeki Güç ve Benlik*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2019.

Bu tez, üç ABD Başkanı'nın özyaşam öykülerinde yansıtılan öz benlik ve güç anlayışlarının bir analizidir. Bu tezin kapsamı, sırasıyla George H. W. Bush (1989-1993), Bill Clinton (1993-2001) ve George W. Bush'un (2001-2009) Amerikan başkanlığını yaptıkları 1989-2009 yılları arasındaki süre ile sınırlıdır. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönem olarak tanımlanan bu başkanların yönetimleri sırasındaki dönemde, "komünizme karşı düşmanlık" yerini "teröre karşı savaş" kavramına bıraktı. Günümüz Amerikan iç ve dış politikalarının bu yirmi yıl boyunca şekillendiğini göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tez güç kavramını Amerikan başkanı öznesine ilişkin olarak inceler. *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (2013), *My Life* (2004), ve *Decision Points* (2010) adlı otobiyografik çalışmalarında, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un başkanlıklarıyla sona eren ve medya imgeleri ve eleştirileriyle azalan güçlerini yeniden kazanmaya çalıştıkları savunulmaktadır. Bunu yaparken de ulusal ve uluslararası boyutta Amerikan politikalarıyla özdeşleşen bireycilik, demokrasi, özgürlük, ve dine dayalı ahlak gibi değerlerin ideolojisini kutsamaktadırlar. Birinci bölümde bu üç eser başkanların özyaşam öyküsü olarak incelenmektedir ve benlik milliyetçi bir Amerikan kimliği ile ilişkili olarak analiz edilmektedir. İkinci bölümde ise başkanların gücünün temel niteliği Amerika'nın bir süper güç olması ile ilişkili olarak analiz edilmektedir. Başkanlara verilen güç, genellikle toplumdaki imajını (veya benliğini) koruma ve önceki uygulamalara ters düşmeme çabalarını gösterecek şekilde kullanılır; kamuoyu ve Amerikan değerleri Orta Doğu ülkeleriyle ilişkiler konusundaki kararlarda etkilidir ve başkanlık faaliyetleri genellikle eski başkanlık eylemleriyle uyum gösterir. Dolayısıyla, böyle bir güç gerekçelendirme gerektirir. Başkanların yazar olarak otonom güçlerini kullanmaları, tarihsel algıları etkileme ve eski güçlerini savunma ve rasyonelleştirme girişimlerini yansıtmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Özyaşam Öyküsü, Otobiyografi, ABD Başkanları, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush

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INTRODUCTION

Since its philosophical conception in the minds of the Founding Fathers, the political (and cultural) tradition of the United States has been established on the assumption of exceptionalism, which signifies a unique place for the United States in the history of Western civilization. The presidents of the United States have been the symbolic personifications of this cultural and political tradition, which is characterized by the ideals of individualism, freedom, democracy and religious morality. A puritanical tradition, saturated with the ideals of American exceptionalism, has been perpetuated by political leaders since Benjamin Franklin and the other Founding Fathers, up to modern day American presidents, regardless of their affiliations with different political parties. Autobiography, or life writing, by American presidents is the distinctive cultural product of the United States that reflects and aims to sustain this unique American ideology that bears the power of the presidency and the nation. Studying such works of presidential life writing reveals the methods through which their authors aim to achieve this objective.

This thesis offers a life writing critique and Foucauldian analysis of the presidential life writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush in order to observe how notions of self and power contribute to the function of such narratives, which is to recreate preferable histories and legacies, justify American power, and perpetuate American cultural values. This thesis explores the presidential self as produced in American history and maintained in life writing. The self is an instrument through which a national American identity is promoted and used to rationalize presidential power, while presidential life writing is an attempt at salvaging presidents' reputations and justifying their terms. These works fail to redeem their authors and their actions for they explicitly ignore the individual fragmented self (instead constructing a unified presidential self) and the exploitation of presidential power, especially in foreign policy. This introduction intends to assess presidential life writing as a tradition in light of life writing criticism. The life writing of previous American presidents are offered as historical examples. Furthermore, the interrelated issues of self and power are given a synopsis.

The primary texts[1] analyzed were chosen for being representative of a particular period in American history, in which the United States became a superpower through its foreign policies. George H. W. Bush, the first of three presidential writers impactful in the post-Cold War era, served as the 41st president of the United States from 1989-1993. He succeeded Ronald Reagan as the second consecutive Republican president. Prior to his presidency, throughout a long career in politics, he worked in Congress, was Ambassador to the United Nations, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office, Director of the CIA, and Vice President to Ronald Reagan. Bush's presidency is remembered for many international affairs and decisions. He was instrumental in ending the Cold War era and coercing Iraq to evacuate Kuwait. While this book is mainly a collection of letters spanning a large portion of his life (starting in his teenage years), there is an organization/selection of letters, reinforced with different types of writing, such as diary entries, notes, speeches, and a contemporaneous narrative voice between letters. For these reasons, this thesis considers these practices as having similar effects with more traditional autobiographies and thus, this work is referred to as life writing.

Succeeding George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton was elected as the 42nd president and served for two terms through 1993-2001. Although he was a Democrat, he is commended for his centrist political views. His presidency is credited with bringing the nation economic prosperity, yet his impeachment due to sexual harassment charges has overshadowed his achievements. Bill Clinton's *My Life* (2004), a number one New York Times bestseller, differs in organization in that it is much more typical of a "story" throughout. Bill Clinton starts with a short family history and goes on to depict his life onwards from birth. As an underprivileged child, Clinton was raised in Arkansas in an abusive home with multiple stepfathers. He went on to attend Oxford and was eventually elected the governor of Arkansas at the young age of 32. He was elected twice and served 12 years before his election as president. While the length of the book allows for the most detail of a life, it still greatly focuses on Clinton's political career. The stories of others contribute greatly to the formation of his own narrative.

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[1] This thesis makes use of the Ebook and Kindle versions of the primary texts, and are documented as such in the Bibliography. Due to the inconsistency of page numbers in electronic books, they are referenced by chapters.

George W. Bush Jr. succeeded Clinton as the 43rd United States president. His presidency is marked as the beginning of the global war on terror and the invasion of Iraq. In the following years after his term ended, he has been widely regarded as one of the least favored presidents due to the prolonged war in Iraq and plummeting economy. George W. Bush's *Decision Points* (2010) is another number one New York Times bestseller presidential life narrative, having sold two million copies in only a couple of months (Mitchell). It was published a year after the end of his term and mainly focuses on presidential decisions of value that Bush deems worthy of examination. Each chapter is a backstory and aftermath of a particular significant decision. He begins with the more personal decision to quit drinking and goes on to explain the rationale behind important presidential decisions regarding stem cell research, the war on terror, and Hurricane Katrina, to name a few. His concerns for his family and religious views are interconnected with his concerns for America. His writing conveys a favorable American president's image; one who engages in the deep contemplation that is the backdrop for each decision in his life with his reflections accompanying the reflections of others from his administration.

These three presidents' autobiographical works are examples of "life writing," which is used as an encompassing term for writing "that takes a life as its subject" (Smith and Watson 3). Life writing written by American presidents is not a new phenomenon; it has been existent since Thomas Jefferson. However, with the proliferation of postmodern theories and the relatively recent field of life writing studies, the methods of critically reading these works have changed. *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (George H. W. Bush, 2013), *My Life* (Bill Clinton, 2004), and *Decision Points* (George W. Bush, 2010) reveal the function of presidential life narrative, construct particular selves for their narrators/authors, give insight into the political environment of the 1990s and 2000s, and define presidential power on their own terms.

The constructions of textual self and experience are compared to their historical referents in this thesis. Parallels are drawn, while differences are highlighted. In contemporary life writing studies, the self is fragmented in that it assumes different subject positions and identities. On the contrary, as seen in these particular works of presidential life writing, the writers strive to present a unified self in which all subjectivities reinforce the presidential self, which is primarily defined as the American identity. This identity encapsulates the ideals of America, such as freedom, democracy, individualism, and religious morality. Thus, the presidential self is a cultural formation that is perpetuated and maintained through life writing, which legitimizes and reproduces a presidential norm.

In order to read these works critically, the term “life writing” and other popular terms must be defined. Most life writing today is still popularly termed as autobiography or memoir and the distinctions between them are often blurred. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, as stated in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, autobiography as a genre, which came into being in the Enlightenment age, is a celebration of the self-governing individual and their “universalizing life story.” The term is associated with Western canonical representations, which has led scholars to label it a non-inclusive term for the many practices of life writing (Smith and Watson 3-4). The genre of autobiography has served as a grand narrative of “Western rationality, progress, and superiority;” and autobiographies have been deemed testimonies of “representative” subjects and lives—particularly public figures (Smith and Watson 113-114). “Memoir” is more concerned with the experience and actions of another self (as “observer or participant”) situated in a particular historical moment (Smith and Watson 198). “Life writing” refers to all non-fiction acts of writing that “engage the shaping of someone’s life.” (Smith and Watson 197).

Presidential life writing, that is writing produced by former presidents of the United States who chronicle their lives with a focus on their presidency, is a genre that may fall into a number of other genres defined by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. The diverse practices they employ often put them at intersections of various genres. For the purpose of studying them from o broader framework developed by life writing critics, this thesis refers to them as examples of life writing. By reading the autobiographical works *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (1999)*, My Life* (2004)*,* and *Decision Points* (2010), written by George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George Bush respectively, it is possible to critically reconsider presidential life narrative as a subgenre, and evaluate the issues of subjectivity in relation to administrative power and discourse.

LIFE WRITING CRITICISM AND THE "SELF"

To begin this analysis of presidential life writing, the ideas revolving around the more traditional term "autobiography" must be clarified. Autobiography as a genre has been defined by scholars in multiple ways, in terms of the criteria that establish a work as such. The similarities between fiction, historical work/biography, and autobiography have brought to light major differences as well. Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (193). Lejeune stresses the importance of four elements—form, subject, the author's position, and the narrator's position—when distinguishing autobiography from other forms (193). In order for a text to be considered an autobiography, according to Lejeune, the main style of writing should be narrative prose, and it must be a reflection on past events. The subject matter should be predominantly concerned with the individual's own life and character (Lejeune 193). While there are many exceptions that can apply to this definition, such as an autobiographical work not being entirely retrospective, or the inclusion of social and political events, Lejeune settles the matter by pointing to the flexibility of this definition in terms of style and focus. He concludes that there is leeway as long as the exceptions do not divert attention from the characterizing features of autobiography (194). However, he is adamant on the singleness of the writer, narrator and protagonist in autobiography. This, he claims, is the defining feature of this genre (194).

Literary criticism leads to questioning the correlation between the narrator (usually expressed as “I”) and the author (as inscribed on the cover of an autobiography). As Lejeune states, this form of identity expressed through “I” can be encountered in many fields of discourse, written and oral; in fiction and life writing; however, its reference proves difficult to distinguish, for it does not always connote the speaker or writer himself/herself—as seen in the novel or theatre (198). Even if the reference to the speaker or writer is confirmed, this leads to further questions of whether there can be a reference outside of discourse and the veracity of this confirmation: “…the idea crosses the minds of even the most naïve of us that it is not the individual who defines the ‘I,’ but perhaps the ‘I,’ the individual, that is to say, the individual exists only in discourse…in terms of autobiography itself, we find evidence that the first person is a ‘role’” (Lejeune 198). As the first chapter elaborates, in the life writing of H. W. Bush, Clinton, and W. Bush, the references to previous presidents and the parallelisms between their character and experiences show the presidential self to be a role.

To resolve the problem of identity within autobiography, according to Lejeune, the author must find a way to identify himself/herself, or rather to confirm this identity between author and narrator, and the solution becomes the “proper noun” (199-200). Lejeune claims that the name of the author is what identifies him/her, allows for individuality within discourse (as opposed to just “I”), distinguishes the author/narrator from this role contained in discourse, and accredits him/her with writing the text (200). The correspondence of the name on the cover and in the book produces an “autobiographical contract” between the author and the reader, confirming the identity and in most cases the historical reality of the “I” in the book (Lejeune 203). The referential[2] aspect of autobiography, similar to biography, in that it refers to real people and events, presents a “referential contract” which promises truth to a certain degree. However, Lejeune claims that adhering to the referential pact in autobiography is of no importance, contrary to other historical works (211-212). Our acceptance of identity between author, narrator, and protagonist suffices. Therefore, in Lejeune’s view, what changes within the text, that does not align itself with the referent or real past, becomes insignificant; because interpretation, perspective, and issues with remembering render the textual as an entity in itself rather than a representation of an outside reality. The individual and narrative found in the autobiographical text constitutes its own truth for the most part. Between a referent (real) and text, there can only be similarity, not equivalence (Lejeune 219). The presidential life narratives studied in this thesis are loyal to this autobiographical pact. They are all consistently narrated in the first person and their narrators and authors uncritically claim the proper name. As for the referential contract, these narrators of life writing insist on the authority of their own truths and perspectives.

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[2] The “referential” denotes the real or historical existence found outside of language in the external world.

The reader or writer of autobiography presumes it is the author's real life that brings forth an autobiography. Paul de Man in "Autobiography as De-facement" (1979), argues that the reverse of this process is also possible; autobiography and its methods are what determine "life" as we read it in autobiography (920). Furthermore, he discusses the difficulties in differentiating autobiography as a genre because of its close ties to fiction; the autobiographical can be found in a plethora of fictional texts. These similarities include the first person perspective and narrative style. Thus, he claims, it is not autobiography itself that constitutes its own features, but the manner of reading/understanding of autobiography that gives meaning to its definition (921). As de Man observes:

> For just as autobiographies by their thematic insistence on the subject, on the proper name, on memory, on birth, eros, and death, and on the doubleness of specularity, openly declare their cognitive and tropological constitution, they are equally eager to escape from the coercions of this system. Writers of autobiographies as well as writers on autobiography are obsessed by the need to move from cognition to resolution and to action, from speculative to political and legal authority. (922)

As de Man states, the autobiographer's main interest in conveying knowledge of the self and the reader of autobiography's search for this knowledge do not yield satisfactory results because these efforts succumb to textual boundaries (922). The referent, or the real self, becomes unattainable through tropes in language; the historical self can never be fully represented through language (de Man 922-923). Nevertheless, the desire for this resolution and authority on self is significant; it is the cause and also unproductive result of autobiography. "Political and legal authority" within writing proves to be impossible as autobiography's representation is like prosopopeia: "a figure of speech in which an imaginary or absent person or thing is represented as speaking or acting" ("Prosopopeia"); it is essentially defacement of the self (de Man 930). Presidential life writers claim to represent their presidencies; however, the real presidency is lost in the past; it is absent in the present.

Different from de Man's textual perspective of the self, Paul John Eakin discusses the implications of "self" in relation to neurobiological theory in "What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography" (2004). According to Eakin, memory allows for the existence of narrative (124); it is its essential tool for autobiography. However, where memory fails to conjure details, imagination proceeds with the task of narrative construction. Moreover, the truthfulness of narrative can only be determined by the author, as it is only his/her remembered history of the self one can be held accountable for (125). In light of this concept of autobiographical narrative, Eakin continues to state that a sense of self comes from knowledge and feeling, both neurological processes (126). Self is inherently bodily, preexisting language, but rather situated in consciousness. Eakin explains that self is developed at the moments when the individual processes his/her surroundings and claims them as his/her own (127). In this understanding, self, defined in terms of interpersonal and geographical relations, is a construct in the form of a narrative: "…what we are could be said to be a narrative of some kind" (Eakin 124). He claims that self cannot be thought of separately from narrative (or experience), for a person is as long as s/he experiences, knows, and feels. Although self is thought of as the embodiment of an idea told or expressed, it is also a network of experiences. The presidential self comes into existence owing to the experience of being president. However, this self continues to exist after a term ends, and is represented in life writing as having its beginnings much before the presidents' election.

Smith and Watson explore the multiple facets of real life experience that complicate the writing process. They argue that the writer is both the subject and object in question (1). Accordingly, when representing the past in the present, Smith and Watson emphasize, the past self is represented with the present self (3). One should take into account that the autobiographical writer is also aware of the reader. S/he is conscious of representation being perceived by others; thus, self-image becomes an influence in the process of writing (Smith and Watson 6). Although life writing resembles conventional fiction writing in many ways, it differs in that it claims to refer to reality (Smith and Watson 7). Smith and Watson deliberately argue that while life writing can be regarded as historical document, this does not mean they are "factual history." The act of referring to historical persons and events only implies that life writing constitutes a form of representation of a lived past or living identity. Facts are recycled into subjective truth and autobiographers fail at recognizing their subjectivity, which results from their inability of placing themselves outside of the events they write about (Smith and Watson 12-13). On the facticity of autobiographical writing, Smith and Watson state:

> … they are also performing several rhetorical acts: justify- ing their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures among others. The complexity of autobio- graphical texts requires reading practices that reflect on the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text. (10)

Memory, experience, identity, space, the physical sense of the body, and agency all have effects in the construction of life writing (Smith and Watson 15-16). The truth of representation is further discredited, as memory itself never fully represents actual past reality. Memory only serves as a function to interpret past experience (Bruner 693). Smith and Watson state that personal, social, and political factors invade the process of remembering (17-19). Experience is also situated in social contexts that give individuals certain subject positions. Social status shapes identity, as it shapes experience (Smith and Watson 24-25). The United States as a nation provides a social context while the presidency provides a social status for the narrator of these three works of life writing. The self is compelled to adopt an American identity characteristic of an American president. He is subjected to this identity, confined within it, and unable to retrieve an individual self. Thus, life writing becomes an ultimate space to construct and preserve this self reflecting American cultural values. These values give meaning to the self and his experience, but also situate the presidential self within a larger group—their political party and their country—and justify acts of power in their use of force in other countries.

Smith and Watson claim that for a writer of "self life writing,"[3] the writing process is a means of interpreting the self and subjectivity; class and gender, among other social constructs and ideologies, shape these identities (33). Discourses that give meaning to existence are prone to change just like past experiences. Experience is interpretation and that interpretation is based on changing discourses (Smith and Watson 26). Identities are established through difference and one person possesses multiple identities that exist within different social contexts (Smith and Watson 33-36). The president is a family man, a father, a son, a husband, a politician, and a ruler who exercises ultimate power based on different social situations. Smith and Watson state that autobiographical works are usually expressions of individual human agency, although that agency is often suppressed by discourses of power (42-43). While American presidents are assumed to play a role in the creation of these discourses, their life writing shows that agency or power does not always belong to presidents either. The power of ideology suppresses any individual self the president might have. There is only one identity of the presidential self that is given attention to in these works—and that is the American identity.

Presidential writers strive to present their selves and experience in a cohesive manner. However, there is no unity or stability in autobiographical identities or lives/experiences (Smith and Watson 61). The past only exists in memory, which is constantly changing; the self only exists in the stories created in autobiographies. Thus, the claim to truth that autobiographies have is highly questionable. Yet, in later chapters, truth is revealed to be one of the most prized assets of political figures such as presidents; truth is also what is most questioned by the public and media. The life writing of presidents straddle the line that separates historical authenticity and rhetoric (Li and Hutner 419).

Life narratives must omit, organize and rearrange to become meaningful and exude this cohesiveness. George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush organize their life writing in order to give meaning to the presidency and the presidential self. Earlier memories can construct a moral character, as H. W. Bush does in *All the Best* with his service in the Navy (ch.1). Childhood experiences may foreshadow future experiences, as Clinton's childhood reveals tendencies towards a political character (ch.1). One course of action can be shown to lead to other actions on the same trajectory, as W. Bush's decision to quit drinking prior to the presidency paints future presidential decisions in a similar positive light (ch.1).

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[3] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson translate the Greek origins of the word "autobiography" into "self life writing" in English; "*autos* signifies 'self,' *bios* 'life,' and *graphe* 'writing'" (1).

Autobiographical storytelling is further complicated by the involvement of multiple forces or individuals. Life writers are "coaxed/coerced," as Smith and Watson claim, into telling their life narratives by other people or institutions that want to hear it (50). In the case of presidents, they are persuaded to tell their stories by publishers, the public, and other government officials. Writing is a way for them to reflect on their principles and character, and place themselves within an accepted community, especially their political party. Editors, translators, and other collaborators are not often thought of as integral parts of such life writing, but they control the narrative through their choice of style and/or inclusions and exclusions; inevitably, these outside influences shape life narratives and also reveal life writing as a product of the publication market (Smith and Watson 55). George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush all acknowledge their editors' central role in the process of life writing.

In addition to coaxers, it is possible to name more than one writing subject when considering the main writers of life writing. Smith and Watson name four different "I"s active in the writing process: the historical "I," the narrating "I," the narrated "I," and the ideological "I." Although it is possible to certify that a historical "I" exists (be it through various other records in the form of text and memory), it by no means exists in autobiographical writing. The "I" in writing is the narrating "I" which is constructed when a person decides to write; the narrated "I" is the object of life writing, and is once again a construction of the self based on the historical "I" and created by the narrating "I" (Smith and Watson 59-63). Then, there is the ideological aspect of these "I"s.

Individuals are never free from ideologies produced by institutions, and thus they are subjects of different discourses. The ideological “I” represents the relationships that the self has with others and the world. All “I”s are prone to the impact of time and change (Smith and Watson 62-63). American ideological/political tradition is built on the cultural myths of freedom, democracy, American exceptionalism and individualism, which play a significant role in the ideological “I,” (which is) extant in presidential life writing.

Voice is another factor to consider when analyzing works of life writing. Smith and Watson argue that the narrating “I” is usually polyvocal, meaning that the narrator shifts through many voices as s/he shifts through aspects of the self. The register changes as the subject position of the narrator changes (Smith and Watson 60). The narrating voice can be accompanied by outside voices as well, be it someone the narrator knows or a collective voice of a community (Smith and Watson 174). The relational self and history are reflected in this polyvocal “I.” Presidents, for instance, are cultural “models of identity” that permeate the American self (Smith and Watson 34). However, presidents themselves are also influenced by this model. Every “I” or “self” is inevitably linked to others and exists only in relation to others, or in their interconnectedness to others (Smith and Watson 36).

The influence of U.S. Presidents in their decisions leading a nation and the world cannot be overlooked (Leighton). Their life writing may be considered of equal value in this regard. There are many types of life writing that has been produced by presidents since the eighteenth century. Many US presidents, before or after their terms, have authored memoirs and autobiographies. More than half of all American presidents have some form of life writing to their name. There are common themes and objectives in these works that can be traced by close examination. They are autobiographies in the sense that they “universalize” the values they uphold, and are about supposedly sovereign individuals who possess power within their own governments and the world. However, they merely fall into a category that has repeated itself many times over and ultimately serves a grand narrative of America.

Some of the writings by earlier presidents were published posthumously. While some focused on their presidential terms, others were preoccupied with their former lives leading up to it. Some were written for autobiographical purposes, to be published and read as such, while others were uncovered by publishers. Nonetheless, there is a wide array of different types of life writing by presidents produced and published since the eighteenth century, including diaries and collections of letters. Some of the earliest examples include *Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson* (1821), *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (1885), *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography* (1913), and *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (1920).

Presidential life writing, specifically focused on the presidency or political careers of former presidents, and written purposefully as autobiographies or memoirs, have become prolific and more of an obligation in the last half of the twentieth century. Examples of such life writing include *Memoirs* (1955-56, Harry S. Truman), *RN – The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (1978, Richard Nixon), *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (1982, Jimmy Carter), *An American Life* (1990, Ronald Reagan), and the books primarily discussed in this thesis. Some of these life narratives reveal a tradition of American presidential letters. As Kevin L. Jones states in his dissertation *American Post-Presidential Memoirs And Autobiographies*, the life narratives analyzed in this thesis have many similarities with their predecessors, as they are a continuation of a subgenre, which began with Ulysses Grant and Theodore Roosevelt (1): “Former presidents use established roles and accepted strategies of communication, extending their rhetorical strategies through various media. The post-presidential memoirs constitute a recognizable subgenre, sharing their purposes, their audiences, their format, and their function” (3). In order to assess presidential life writing as a subgenre, former works must be taken into consideration in tracing such an American tradition.

Regarded as a classic within autobiographies written by American presidents, the *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (1885), a post-Civil war life narrative, gives much insight into this distinct genre. It was written after Grant’s presidency (1869-1877) and is focused on his time in the military and Civil War. Although his presidency is mostly overlooked, the tone and underlying intent has been duplicated in the many autobiographies after it; it has been said to change historical perceptions of a former US president and is a contribution to a “national memory” (Jones 6). George W. Bush prefaces his own autobiography, *Decision Points,* by mentioning Grant’s book as a reference point.

Rod Paschall claims in the Introduction to *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* that history has revealed that Grant’s presidency was pervaded with corruption (15). Especially after his death, Grant’s reputation suffered greatly (Paschall 18). However, Paschall claims that with an increase in the studies examining his term, Grant’s character has been salvaged (19). While there is a plethora of opinions today, it can be said that life writing is central to the survival, preservation, and reclamation of public reputations. They provide a voice to individuals, particularly public figures, who feel silenced by critics. However, practices of ghostwriting lead to questioning of authentic voice; Grant had the support of Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) in writing his autobiography (Paschall 19). Paschall argues that this memoir is not a distraction from a problematic presidency or an attempt to redeem Grant because “presidential memoirs are a twentieth, not a nineteenth century phenomenon” (22). However, Ulysess Grant’s accomplishments as a military leader nonetheless are rhetorical by nature. American values are brought into play, and a successful and honorable military man offers the idea of an honorable president. Similarly George H. W. Bush’s life narrative exalts the idea of “serving one’s country” as part of the moral integrity of a citizen (ch.1).

In his foreword to the *Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson* in 1914, George Haven Putnam states what he believes should be valued in the narrative form of autobiography; not factuality, but “the distinctive personality of a man” (iii-iv). Putnam addresses concerns regarding the trustworthiness of such works due to “vanity” or “the natural human desire to put the best appearance upon one’s individual actions and utterances” when writing about one’s own life (iv). Nevertheless, it is the personality or ever changing self and perspective that make this kind of writing autobiographical (Putnam iv).

Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography (1913), an early twentieth century life narrative, is prefaced with the statement that the book will not give an exhaustive account of his life: “Naturally, there are chapters of my autobiography which cannot now be written” (Roosevelt 2). Similarly, the life writing of George W. Bush and Bill Clinton make the same acknowledgement. This recognition of omission acknowledges the limits of writing and representation. In Roosevelt’s autobiography, there is a promise of giving the reader both sides—a loving family man as well as a leader of a country. Roosevelt specifically states that it would not serve a purpose to just tell of one side (2). The family man and leader do not necessarily contest one another, but on the contrary, they support and validate each other’s existence.

The readers’ expectations of the common work of life writing can differ greatly from that of the president’s. Presidential life writing parallels a public reality; it offers “truth” as well as giving meaning to that truth. It presents its own logic and justification for outcomes of agency and an emphasis on a public subjectivity whilst not discarding the father or son subjectivity. Both claim to reflect one another and reveal a truth, which the public has supposedly not seen in other media. Theodore Roosevelt writes in his autobiography:

> Justice among the nations of mankind, and the uplifting of humanity, can be brought about only by those strong and daring men who with wisdom love peace, but who love righteousness more than peace. Facing the immense complexity of modern social and industrial conditions, there is need to use freely and unhesitatingly the collective power of all of us; and yet no exercise of collective power will ever avail if the average individual does not keep his or her sense of personal duty, initiative, and responsibility. (2)

Roosevelt’s statement says a great deal about the role of the president and the power he possesses. This narrative’s objective is provided upfront: Providing an ideal representation of the self and the power that leads to justice and peace. Furthermore, there is an ideal of a just and peaceful nation led by this president. As Smith and Watson suggest, autobiographies are historical tools for presenting Western notions of supremacy (113). Roosevelt tries to justify his own power through self-evident American values (justice and peace) while simultaneously acknowledging the power of the reader (“the average individual,” “those strong and daring men”) (2). The three presidents whose life writing is analyzed in this thesis similarly justify their power through American ideals pertaining to an American identity.

Many motives are at play when constructing the autobiography, as Jones states: "Another element recurrently found in presidential texts is the formation of a newly configured public self, or the exposure of a previously hidden or private self. Memoirs and autobiographies often explain previous actions, account for current situations, or provide a reflection upon people, places, and events" (3). While he states that these initial revelations of the president's private self is connected to the relief that comes with an ending presidential term (3), the presidential self is still intact and continues to restrain the author self in terms of what can or should be revealed. Political scandals are unforgotten and must be taken into consideration in presidential life writing—the stakes are high in terms of further ruining their legacies. Richard Nixon expressed his intentions of writing a memoir as part of mental recovery from the Watergate Scandal and an opportunity to reassess past events; he deemed his book a guide for others vulnerable to the same mistakes (Nixon et al.). However, critics were unconvinced by his defense of what happened with Watergate ("Nixon's Memoirs"). Moreover, his editor assured readers that the book was narrated by the president himself and was meant for many generations to come ("Nixon's Memoirs"). Bill Clinton was similarly aware of the threat his sexual misconduct scandal posed towards his moral presidential image. It can be said that for this reason he avoided discussing his obstruction of justice verdict in his life writing. Similary, George W. Bush, aware of his failure to find weapons of mass destruction, failed to adequately defend his going to war in Iraq.

Presidential life writing has been subject to harsh critique and condemned for its imprecision and less than truthful nature (Rubin). Ronald Reagan's (nicknamed "the Great Communicator") first post-Cold War memoir, *An American Life,* first published in 1990, nearly two years after his second term ended as the 40th president of the United States, was criticized for not dealing with the "tough issues" (Rubin) and failing to offer anything new or unknown (Thorndike and Annichiarico), but what it did offer was insight into "how the Great Communicator communicates" (Thorndike and Annichiarico). For American presidents and authors of life writing in general, the objective of providing a new "truth" often proves unsuccessful. However, rhetorical skill and the ideological workings behind the process of writing become more valuable in deciphering presidents' lives.

Craig Fehrman argues that the presidential memoir is "a tradition that began to standardize" with Harry Truman's *Memoirs* (1955-56) and was shaped by blockbuster political publishing with professional ghostwriters, editors, and researchers (477). Claiming that the narrative utilizes language typical of blockbuster publishing, Fehrman argues that actions carried out by the president and emotions felt, along with the book itself, were subject to the tradition of presidential life writing (482). Another important appeal of blockbuster political publishing was the nearly guaranteed national readership (483). Fehrman comments on Reagan's celebrity status attracting publishers and his inevitable subjection to the marketing industry:

> Here was a man torn between the production of content and the marketing of content, between the public self and the private self, a man who became an avatar for political celebrity and branding, for the consolidation and capitalization of American industry. Which is to say that, in more senses than one might initially suspect, America's blockbuster publishers found in Ronald Reagan their ideal subject. (485)

A considerable section of Reagan's memoir is devoted to a staunch defense of his actions in the Iran-Contra affair. His justification of what happened in Nicaragua and his support of the Contras comes through his antagonizing of Congress and exaltation of the presidency and its powers. Reagan blames Congress for its passivity on acting against communism and protecting the nation:

> Unlike members of Congress, the president is elected by *all* the people. He is the chief executive, and his principle responsibility is the security of the nation and its people. I don't claim that he (or someday, she) should be able to do anything he wants to do. But every four years, the American people elect a president following a long campaign that gives them the opportunity to observe him in action, learn his views, test his judgment. The voters then make a choice. They've heard what he (or she) stands for. Then they bestow their trust upon the winner. (chap. 63)

It is important to demarcate presidents' life narratives from the large array of life writing that has been studied by literary critics. While presidential life writing shares many aspects with other kinds of life writing, they differ in their selection of content, presentation of self, and intentions; as seen in *All the Best, My Life* and *Decision Points*, the political lives of presidents are the focal point; their tone is rhetorical as they attempt to justify their past decisions and actions as presidents; and they claim authority over their own stories, which have been told many times previously by others. These presidential life narratives are stories about the lives of former presidents, with a primary focus on their time as president. With this conception at the forefront, these life writing can be realized as fictional, historical, and political at once. They are fictional for being life "stories"; they are historical as they refer to real lives and selves; and they are political in that they choose to elevate certain experiences, i.e. the presidency above others.

Postmodernists and life writing critics have greatly contemplated the distinguishing elements of autobiography and fiction. They have mostly concluded that autobiography possesses many fictional qualities, contrary to prior assumptions. Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir states in *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing,* "…there is no intention here to differentiate between the 'purely' literary and 'purely' referential, rather to attempt to identify aspects of the fictional within the autobiographical" (5). However, presidential life writing does present such an intention, as the writers share a main purpose for writing. While they do contend that their representation of the past provides their unique perspective, they still claim it to refer to an all-encompassing "truth," that is, their thoughts, self, and decision-making processes.

Presidential life writing has a close relationship with history on account of their claim to reality. As they undertake the venture of representing real people and real events, they are not entirely historical material, nor can they be absolutely placed in the fictional realm. The autobiographer sets out to dissect his own history, which intersects, is central to and involved with American history. Furthermore, historical works themselves are open to critique of possessing literary aspects. As Hayden White discusses in *Tropics of Discourse,* what is deemed history is not merely a set of real events that happened at one point in time; they are events interpreted by a subjectivity, and shaped by narration and literary tropes. History is a "literary artifact;" both history and literary works "provide a verbal image of 'reality'" (*Tropics of Discourse* 122).

Jeremy D. Popkin in "Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier" observes the difficulties plaguing historians who write autobiographies due to the similarities between autobiographical writing and historical text. Telling the past is always a reconstruction of the past, not a real past (725). What is called history is formed in the present, with the methods constructing meaning out of events (726). In other words, it is a reconstruction of a real past. While president autobiographers set out to give their take on historical events, to both recount and interpret a history in which they partook in, they are incognizant of their role in "making history" (Smith and Watson 10). President autobiographers are comparable to historian autobiographers in the sense that they both position their individual histories within a collective history (Popkin 748). The personal stories are relevant to the extent that they relate to a shared history.

As Hayden White discusses in his essay "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," narration is a natural and inevitable outcome of life (5). Life is not inherently story-like; however, people tend to narrate their experiences to make their lives meaningful and comprehensible (*The Content of Form* 1-3). Presidential life writing strives to present cohesive narratives and non-fragmented selves, with the intention of revealing meaningful experience to readers despite such writing being complicated by issues of reflexivity and writing the past in the present: "Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult" ("The Value of Narrativity" 8). Historical or real events are only available to the autobiographers through memory and previous writing. The "reality" of the subjects of autobiography is lost through modes of representation and acts of remembering. While authors presume that they are unrivaled in relaying their own experiences through writing, writing is nevertheless complicated by a will to create desired realities within narrative: "Historiography is an especially good ground on which to consider the nature of narration and narrativity because it is here that our desire for the imaginary, the possible, must contest with the imperatives of the real, the actual" ("The Value of Narrativity" 8). However real a narrative claims to be, there is always a real element that is excluded ("The Value of Narrativity" 14). Moreover, the autobiographer writes about himself, thus he is writing from a position of bias. The present self differs from the past self that is written about.

In his article, “The Proper Study-Autobiographies in American Studies,” Robert F. Sayre states that autobiography is ultimately a source for history as well as literature in that it seeks to transcribe facts (reality) whilst entertaining an audience (242). Sayre further concludes that authors of autobiographies tell reality as they perceive and arrange it in the form of writing; autobiographies provide an “unorthodox” history of events, which reflect American cultural values (243-245).

Robert Sayre claims that writing autobiography, for many Americans throughout history, has allowed for an unearthing of self (“The Proper Study” 251). However, individual ideas of self are often lost within the myriad of selves appointed in society: “...from about 1900 onwards the concept of self in America is very closely related to the concept of civilization and that the forms and structures of autobiography reflect this…” (“The Proper Study” 254). Authors venturing into self-discovery within autobiography have shown the connection between their experience and a collective experience, furthermore a collective identity. The struggles and values of a particular period are the thematic struggles and values that dominate autobiographical works. Presidents are overseers and participants in the construction of an American identity, which they wish to perpetuate through their life writing.

The similarity between the autobiographical works of these three former presidents leads to the question of whether the presidential narrative predates their acts of writing. There is conformity to a certain representation of presidents frequent in historical works, cultural products, and ideological thought. Smith and Watson claim:

> Understanding how individual representations of subjectivity are “disciplined” or formed enables readers to explore how the personal story of a remembered past is always in dialogue with emergent cultural formations. This brief anatomy, then, examines autobiographical genres that are both formed by and formative of specific kinds of autobiographical subjects. (83)

Autobiography becomes an asset in affirming to a wider consumer—the American public—it is in compliance with this familiar presidential character situated in presidential narrative. This alludes to a "president self" that is not innate, but grounded in language present in cultural, historical and literary discourse.

In examining *All the Best*, *My Life* and *Decision Points*, it can be said that the president-authors engage in autobiographical writing for the purpose of defense, justification, and clarification. Diverse methods of life writing are employed; but nonetheless, the narratives are preoccupied with one identity and the experience in one period of time: the presidential self and the presidency. Multiple selves—the father figure and other presidents—are explored throughout the life narratives in attempts to validate and substantiate the presidential self. Many experiences are retold in efforts to make presidential acts intelligible and agreeable. As Jones states:

> Presidential memoirs typically have apologia and explanation as central purposes. From Grant onwards, presidential memoirs cite a variety of public and private materials to support their own narratives. Presidents and those who contribute to the production and promotion of post-presidential texts understand the crafting of messages for specific audiences and purposes. (2)

The tradition of presidential life writing demonstrates that president writers of life narrative do not write for self-improvement, self-discovery, or to create a personal archive for remembering their experiences. Their writing is calculated and assumed for a greater audience with expectations. The representation of the past has the power to change the future through audiences of autobiographical acts (Smith and Watson 21). President writers are aware of their impact as public figures, thus they are aware of the impact their writing will have. Making meaning of past experience turns into making history for future generations. As to the extent of this change in the public's understanding of history, it is limited to the president's exoneration and his incorporation into the list of favorable presidents. As Smith and Watson state, "In autobiographical narratives, imaginative acts of remembering always intersect with such rhetorical acts as assertion, justification, judgment, conviction, and interrogation. That is, life narrators address readers whom they want to persuade of their version of experience" (6).

When considering the presidential self and what goes into the making of it, it is important to also consider the life “story” of a president, how it is created, and its purpose: “Narrating lives becomes an occasion for assembling and claiming identities, securing and releasing social relations…” (S. Smith 565). While the framework of life writing demands that we read narrative as a construction, a process of meaning making, based on “real” life, presidential life writing differs from traditional autobiography in that the construction of their narrative begins much before the actual writing process. The president’s actual life (as it is lived) is not a natural process, or natural series of events (Schmitt 478). It is a life preconceived and predetermined. The decisions, acts, behavior, speeches, etc. are mostly thought out beforehand, by presidents themselves as well as their counterparts.

On the nature of autobiography, Diane Bjorklund claims: “They are much more than straightforward attempts at personal histories; they are an amalgam of cultural ideas, scruples, art, imagination, rhetoric, and self-presentation” (x). The self found in autobiography is no less immune to the influence of culture, rhetoric and fabrication. The subject, while constructing self, is influenced and created through ideas (Sayre, “Autobiography and the Making of America” 150). These ideas give the president the foundation for his existence, for he lives by these notions and goes through life projecting them.

Karl J. Weintraub argues in “Autobiography and Historical Consciousness” that the autobiographical self is structured on a cultural or historical “model,” thus, while different subjectivities can be explored, there is a central self, which the author adheres to (837). The core self is a model, which is comprehensible, acceptable, and defensible. Its character is familiar and preconceived. The story revolves around this model, careful to avoid threatening dissent from this model (Weintraub 837). However, Weintraub argues that Western and modern notions of self strictly reject models, for they are preoccupied with the idea of individuality (838). The presidential self in life writing tends to strive for establishing individuality within a familiar foundation of the presidential self. The self, as this thesis explores, is a complex concept that involves multiple contingent subjectivities, many “other” selves, experience, memory, and ideology in the making. Identity is established through differentiation, but also through resemblance (Smith and Watson 33). Presidents compare themselves to former presidents according to their decisions, beliefs and character.

Diane Bjorklund claims in her book, *Interpreting the Self,* that narrators' attempts at interpreting the self within autobiography inform on the evolution of thought surrounding the self (8). This evolution is the result of cultural change. The self as presented in autobiography is a culmination of experiences, interactions or encounters with other selves. Life writing offers a platform on which the author reveals their reaction to culture. Furthermore, the self is interpreted and reinvented within life narrative, which shows alterations and adjustments when reflecting on self (Bjorklund x). This new self within life writing reflects the norms of a "good" self that is accepted within the culture it is written in (Bjorklund 20). While the act of life writing is largely considered an act of self-interpretation, the act of interpreting the self is in turn considered a revelation of cultural thought. Presidents utilize American values such as freedom, democracy, individualism, and morality in perpetuating American myths such as "American exceptionalism" and the "American dream" in order to rationalize all types of exercise of presidential power across the world.

Bjorklund claims that cultural ideas about the self and experience are learned through language (x). In this regard, the experiences in presidential life narrative are not exceptional or unmatched; there is familiarity between various narrations. George H. W. Bush, his son, and Bill Clinton display similarities in their life writing through voice, character, and narrating their experiences. They take on an American identity that praises American values, tend to draw parallels with earlier presidents, and use these to justify their terms. The self that permeates presidential life writing is discernable in its representation as a figure whose virtues trump his vices and his faulty behavior is supposedly corrected and eventually prevailed over.

THE POLITICS OF PRESIDENTIAL NARRATIVE

Recalling the past and devising meaning from the past is a politically stimulated process

(Smith and Watson 18). In other words, memory works in a selective way; politics, both collectively and personally, affect the things that are remembered. Presidents are challenged with incorporating their own memories of the past with a national memory, both saturated in politics. Their political perspective is expected to fulfill certain expectations of authoritative institutions, the media, and the public. These presidential life narratives comply with these authorities through different methods and relations of power. These works superficially challenge "others" and try to assert the president's power as much as they tread carefully so as to not threaten other agencies at work. While presidents are subjects born out of power relations, they are also resistant to them by means of attempting to claim and exert power themselves, be it literally in their position as president or figuratively through their writing. Life writing is complicated with the political issues of memory and power.

In this thesis, textual/authorial power is critiqued in light of historical presidential power. Presidential power functions as a mechanism of influence, control, and the legal right to act. In the case of life writing, presidential power is also the privilege of making history, creating a legacy, and redeeming reputations. Michel Foucault's concept of power can be applied to presidential power found in presidential life writing; power both creates the subjectivity (thus, the self) of the president, but is also exercised through the president. The president is essentially an actor in the systems of power found in the government, the nation, and the world. The president is powerful as long as he has someone to act on and be acted upon by. The rulers in the Middle East, and government officials in other parties and Congress, are "others" which presidential power can act on and in turn face resistance. This power exists through the production of truth by discourse, as Foucault claims (*Power/Knowledge* 93). Presidential life writing contributes to the discourses of truth, which allow for power's existence. While the narrative memorializes the experience and actions of a president (thus, his power), the rationalization of presidential power is an attempt at preserving it through life writing's attempt to create a national memory/history.

Foucault, on the "right of death and power over life," discusses the modern system of sovereign power in *The History of Sexuality.* Touching upon older "mechanisms of power," he claims the sovereign went from engaging in complete autonomy over his subjects' lives to partial autonomy—only waging war (and risking the lives of his subjects) if he was threatened or opposed (135). This right of death left its place to the power over life in modern societies, in which the sovereign is preoccupied with protecting the system of power through maintaining life (136). The power to destroy evolved into the power to control: "Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital" (*The History of Sexuality* 137). The Iraq War among other conflicts involving the U.S. and the Middle East reflects the objective to control and preserve a nation, its population, and its values.

Foucault further claims that the purpose of survival—not of just the sovereign but of whole populations—has become the driving force of wars causing "all-out destruction" (137). The role of power is to ensure the protection of life; however, protecting life is done through causing death (138). Foucault defines this period an "era of biopower" in which populations are controlled through multiple practices (140). Knowledge is used to control, and power is utilized through intervention (142). Through the control of lives—without the right to death—power has to "qualify, measure and appraise" creating a "norm" (144). The Constitution is a form of making "normalizing power acceptable" (144). The president controls his subjects through knowledge of the American psyche—American values and myths. This norm of American identity allows for the exercise of power.

According to Foucault in "The Subject and Power," in regards to the existence of the individual, s/he is a part of a complex system of "power relations" (778), which involves "resistance" and "rationalization" as important concepts (779-780). Power is not a commodity; it should be viewed as a phenomenon, which is in motion and travels from one to another (*Power/Knowledge* 98). On the one hand individualism is a form of resistance; "the right to be different" is significant in establishing one's own authority ("The Subject and Power" 781). However, this separation is also constraining in that it divides one from community and consigns the individual to their own identity, as

Foucault observes:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. ("The Subject and Power" 781)

The state is the most prominent institution through which power is exercised ("The Subject and Power" 793). As Foucault states, "…power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions" (793). The political power of the modern state is both concerned with the individual and the population as a whole; this conception of the state's power originates in the institution of Christianity ("The Subject and Power" 782). An individual, such as the pastor, can "serve" other individuals, effectively having power over them in such service. Foucault claims that the pastor pays attention to the individual as well as the whole flock; he exercises power through "knowledge of the conscience" of people (783). The modern day sovereign operates within a new system of pastoral power in which the objective is guaranteeing people's welfare ("The Subject and Power" 783-784).

On the nature of power itself, Foucault claims that it cannot be spoken of outside of relations or without it actually functioning: "Power exists only when it is put into action…" (788). It is essential for an "other" to exist; power is ultimately a form of reaction to the actions of "others" in the present or possibly the future (789).

> In itself the exercise of power is not violence; nor is it a consent which, implicitly, is renewable. It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. ("The Subject and Power" 789)

Power should not be studied through a lens of violence, consent, or confrontation; rather it should be studied in relation to "government" or the act of governing (789). Freedom must exist for this governing power to exist: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized" (790).

Furthermore, power is effected through knowledge or the "privilege of knowledge" ("The Subject and Power" 781). In *Power/Knowledge,* Foucault claims that power pervades society through the production of truth in discourses: "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (93). In its simplistic form, ideology, or in Foucault's terms "apparatuses of control" can be found within power systems: "It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge—methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research…" (102). History is an example of a "production of truth," which is powerful in subjecting presidents to the realities it produces; thus, presidents' life writing strives to present its own truth as a way to claim and exercise power as opposed to history books. However, as this study presents, they do not have access to truth outside of the dominant discourse the presidential self finds himself in.

Foucault claims that there are "subjugated knowledges" or "low-ranking," "disqualified" knowledges, which have been concealed in totalizing discourses and can be revealed through historicity and criticism (*Power/Knowledge* 81-83). These knowledges are thought to somehow lack scientific merit or "truth" and thus are ignored or covered up and other legitimized/qualified knowledges are privileged over subjugated knowledges (82). Foucault states that popular knowledges, sciences, or dominant discourses are arbitrary (83). Formal history is one of these discourses or practices that neglects autobiography and is in favor of biography, which excludes the presidential voice and perspective. Thus, it is presidential life writing's plea for an authentic and authoritative voice in relaying history. The presidents studied in this thesis present their life writing as subjugated knowledges that can contribute to historical discourses. By the very act of writing with motivations of influencing history, presidential life writing attempts to go against the powers of “scientific” discourses (i.e. history) and assert its own power. However, as this thesis proves in later chapters, this attempt falls short due to presidential life writing’s voice/self dissolving into a rhetoric of American values and a presidential model which serves to rationalize presidential power. The life writing of these presidents cannot be taken as subjugated knowledges; on the contrary, they are continuations of the dominant discourses pertaining to the presidency. Life writing fails to give the presidents agency and power, which they are presently lacking and trying to reassert. They are powerless in the face of the ideological functions of the presidency and presidential life writing.

The life narratives studied in this thesis were chosen with the purpose of revealing deeper meanings underlying their life stories, and present cultural understandings. Their consecutive terms represent the height of America’s global power and reach. As presidents, they are figures representative of this power. These works are a representation of national and institutional power as well as individual power; contradicting traditional life writing’s incentive and objectives. The beginnings of America’s current wavering status as superpower can be traced in these life narratives.

Melani McAlister, in *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (2005)*,* analyzes the role of the media in manipulating public perceptions and public opinion regarding the tumultuous relationship between the Middle East and the United States. She contends that encounters with representations have a greater impact than actual encounters; culture and media have created our understandings of foreign policy regarding the Middle East (Preface 14). It can be said that these presidential life narratives are a significant part of the media that have influenced our understandings of America’s exercise of power in the world:

> …we must consider the politics of representation: that is, the negotiation of political and moral values, as well as the development of an often uneven and contested public understanding of history and its significance. I argue that cultural products such as films or novels contributed to thinking about both values and history in two ways. First, they helped to make the Middle East an acceptable area for the exercise of American power. Second, they played a role in representing the Middle East as a stage for the production of American identities—national, racial, and religious. (McAlister 3)

Moreover, McAlister claims that “foreign policy is a semiotic activity” that “constructs meanings;” it keeps nationalism alive and in turn this allows for “political identities” to thrive in spaces allocated to nations (5). Presidents are crucial in the processes of making foreign policy and producing a wider cultural conception of national identity. Cultural products have been influential in shaping public opinion on political matters (McAlister 45); in the same sense, presidential life writing is a tool to guide, influence, or manipulate political opinions.

The prospective perils that concern the nation and threaten to strip it of power are reflected in the constant justification to exercising presidential power in life writing. Although it seems debilitating, this threat is a primary source for that power: “The constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to the state’s identity or existence; it is its condition of possibility” (McAlister 5). Without the hazards, or what Foucault defines as resistance, there is no power to be spoken of. They legitimatize the existence of such power. The Middle East and its rulers allow for American presidential power to exist.

These life narratives employ similar themes, tone, and selves. By studying them, presidential life writing as a subgenre can be assessed by its distinct features and purpose. This thesis presents an analysis of these three primary works, from the perspective of notions of the notions of self in Chapter I, and the notions of power in Chapter II. Chapter I offers close readings of *All the Best*, *My Life,* and *Decision Points* in light of the autobiographical/presidential self, how it is constructed and what it purposes to do. Chapter II analyzes these works in light of the Foucauldian concept of power, how it operates in presidents’ lives as well as in their life writing. For presidents, life writing is an opportunity to retell a well-known story and hope their version is preferable. The presidential self emerges as a cultural formation existent since the earliest presidential life narratives. As global and national figures representative of America’s power, presidents are assumed to possess power; however, the books analyzed in this thesis reveal countless actors involved in presidential decisions and exercise of power—public officials, the limitations of the constitution, the American people and history. The same can be said for power in authorship; editors, readers, political ideology and previous writers of presidential life writing hinder true agency in writing. Presidents strive to claim self and power in the face of history, but fail to. American myths, such as freedom, democracy, and exceptionalism are reinforced and power is not for the individual self, but for the subject position of the presidential self.

CHAPTER I: SELF IN PRESIDENTIAL LIFE WRITING

> This book tells part of the story of the acceptance of what can be called ‘individualism’ that is, the belief that ordinary men and women have a dignity and value in their own right, and that they are sufficiently trustworthy to be allowed a measure of autonomy in their lives. The right to self-construction is the right to decide what kind of person one wishes to be and also the right to fulfill one’s potential.
>
> —Daniel W. Howe, *Making the American Self*

According to Daniel W. Howe, to consider self means to consider awareness and activity; without action that is knowingly carried out, there can be no mention of “self” (3). Self is marked by its will and desire to do and experience certain things (Howe 3). Thus, the self becomes a site for agency, autonomy, and power to act and be acted upon. Autobiographical selves strive to procure individuality and autonomy, but ultimately fail due to a preceding cultural identity and power relations that reduce it to a subject. While individualism, as Daniel W. Howe defines it, becomes utopic for president writers of life narratives, individualism as an American hallmark of identity is crucial for the sustainability of the presidential self. Life narrative, through the construction of the self, “produces its political effectiveness and rhetorical power” (Whitlock 12). In observing presidential life narrative, the construction of self proves to be not for the benefit of portraying an individual self but for the solidification of a presidential self/subjectivity. The real self is destroyed for the sake of the presidential self.

The autobiographical self observed in presidential life writing is a mesh of cultural factors. Presidential character, liberalism, neo-conservatism, third way politics, nationalism, morality, religion and Americanism all play their part in constructing a unified self exemplary of an appropriate presidential self situated in presidential life writing. This chapter begins by offering a brief historical background accompanied by a survey of three presidential life narratives, with a particular focus on the autobiographical self, and more specifically in this case, the presidential self. It continues by discussing how different subject positions contribute to the creation of this self as portrayed in presidential life writing. This chapter further analyzes the appearance of other selves—of family members, other presidents, and the rulers in other countries—within narrative that serve as models or antagonists, in helping to better represent the presidential self. It concludes with an assessment of external, cultural, and ideological factors that affect the process of representing and creating this self, such as editorial assistance and marketing concerns, an idealized American national identity, and Puritan ideology.

1.1. THE ADMINISTRATIONS AND LIFE WRITING OF GEORGE H. W. BUSH, BILL CLINTON, AND GEORGE W. BUSH

The last decade of the twentieth century brought an end to the Cold War and the threat of communism. The outlook of American foreign policy changed as the global landscape changed with the dissolving of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nevertheless, the presidents that held office during this period and after ensured America's centrality in world conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. The Cold War and the Vietnam War ended only for America to refocus on Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. As Douglas Little states in *American Orientalism*, "When the Cold War ended, some Middle East watchers began to worry that the threat was changing from red to green—the color of Islam" (xi). The new "other" or enemy became the Middle East and its religious ideology.

The election of George H. W. Bush (1989) came after serving as vice president to Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), a conservative Republican whose tax cuts and involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair left Congress and the American public disillusioned with his administration. Bush, on the other hand, with his political background (as former Congressman and Chair of the Republican National Committee) was elected as President despite Reagan's underwhelming term, and promising "a more moderate, more reasonable era of American politics" (Duffy 34). During his term, Bush signed his name under positive changes such as the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). In addition to these, he promised "no new taxes" only to fail to keep his promise towards the end of his term due to the federal budget deficit. While he tried to implement Republican ideology, he was nevertheless "a social moderate" (Duffy 34). He was effective in removing a dictator from power in the country of Panama and became involved in the Persian Gulf War driving Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. Bush refrained from invading Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein, believing it would destabilize the country (Duffy 37). His foreign policy decision was praised in this respect: "He had put on one of the finest displays of raw presidential power in a generation" (Duffy 37). Although his numbers rose, and general public opinion favored him for his successful strategies in the Gulf, an economic recession and rising unemployment rates prevented his reelection for a second term (Duffy 37).

Six years after his presidency ended and one year after his co-authored book *A World Transformed*[4] was published, he published *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings*, a vast collection of mostly handwritten letters he had accumulated for a lifetime. Ken Gormley stated in a review in the Washington Post that *All the Best* "reintroduced Americans to the 41st president and his family":

> In the end, the new edition of *All the Best* is a valuable update of the life of an honorable American leader. It captures the reflections of a man who has scaled the highest mountain of political success — then moved beyond ambition and discovered peace and fulfillment in simpler things in life: his friends, his family and a genuine love of the country he once led. (Gormley)

Another review claimed that the book changed the "misconception" of Bush and disclosed the "inner George" ("Writer in Chief"). By the same token, in his article "The Prudent Professionalism of George Herbert Walker Bush," Fred I. Greenstein claimed that *All the Best* is noteworthy for conveying Bush as a "thoroughly decent and unpretentious public servant" (386). Although George H. W. Bush's presidency, limited to one term, has been considered at risk of being remembered as inconsequential, his success in leading "the largest United States military venture since the Vietnam War" is indisputable (Greenstein 385). Greenstein believes *All the Best* will be an "asset to historians" for those ready to reconcile with Bush's term (385). These views are problematic; presidential life narrative does not convey historical knowledge, nor does it offer a unique self. "Unpretentious" is far from the truth considering Bush's belief in age-old American values that justify his "New World Order[5]," which he mentions multiple times throughout his book.

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[4] George H. W. Bush co-wrote A World Transformed, which details his administration's foreign policies, with his former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. It was published in 1998.

Bush starts off by claiming he does not intend his book to be an autobiography: "This book is not meant to be an autobiography. It is not a historical documentation of my life" (Preface). Regardless, this chronological selection of letters organized into narrated topical chapters and representing Bush's political experience/life/narrative can be said to have an autobiographical mission. George H. W. Bush's *All the Best* allows the reader to discern many different selves/subjectivities/voices of Bush through letters he has sent during his lifetime. "Life writing" is an umbrella term that comprises many genres and forms throughout history, such as biography, memoir, autobiography, diary, and letters among many others. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define letters as a life writing genre:

> Letters become vehicles through which information is circulated, social roles enacted, relationships secured, often in a paradoxical mix of intimacy and formality. And they are highly stylized in terms of conventions of politeness and modes of conveying information that are implicated in ideologies of gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality. (196)

The absent voices of the recipients of letters are compensated with Bush's present voice as he relays the responses and events following the conversations. Representing a past self, characteristic of life writing, proves somewhat more accurate than traditional life writing in the sense that a self has been captured in time through a letter. The work begins with letters written by 18-year-old Bush to his parents, newly enlisted in the Navy in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. As the narrating I[6] reflects, he was "very innocent," living in a different era when America harbored different values (ch. 1). His letters in this time are preoccupied with concerns over the war, propaganda, and homesickness. The tone, as the narrating "I" notes, is naive, but the issues—of war and service—are relevant to this time and to the presidential experience. The first chapter, "Love and War" is comprised of letters mostly to Bush's mother and father. They represent a young self that is more within the confines of family, not yet involved in a political and ideological world. However, Bush's expressed zeal in serving his country—"The Navy itself is great, but what we are here for is even greater…" (ch.1)—in the Navy is actually a very political self in the making. It reinforces core American nationalism and patriotism through the idea of serving.

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[5] This concept is discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.

[6] While the narrating "I" makes up a small proportion of *All the Best* in its entirety, it is a contemporaneous Bush commenting on and contextualizing the letters.

Presidents define themselves with their actions, namely the decisions they make in their political careers, for this is what they are remembered by. George H. W. Bush negotiates the boundaries of his agency with President Nixon, saying that if he is ordered to act in a certain way that makes him "get too far out of character," he will risk being unconvincing (ch. 4). While action defines identity (Howe 3), presidents' characters are also presented as unified throughout their lives. Every act and decision is compared with a prior decision. The president sets a standard that he is expected to amount to during his entire career.

In many chapters, letters addressed to family and friends are juxtaposed with official letters that employ a formal tone. Bush's voice oscillates between different voices pertaining to different subject positions. Bush's letters to his family and friends are discernibly different from letters to colleagues. As a mature and married public figure, he projects a sentimental and loving self, even though he believes this sentimentalism is not characteristic of a presidential self. In a letter to his sons concerning what president Nixon thinks of him: "…I must confess that I am convinced that deep in his heart he feels I'm soft, not tough enough, not willing to do the 'gut job' that his political instincts have taught him must be done" (ch. 5). Bush reflects on criticism from opponents concerning his "toughness" and concludes that he has no reason to be disconcerted. He affirms his toughness by recounting his life's important jobs and decisions and the reverence he has induced in people (ch. 8).

Daniel W. Howe claims that construction of a "balanced" self was an American tradition concerning ideas of an American self (6). By balance, he means control over the "faculties of one's nature," particularly undesirable emotions. Logic was more favorable than the passionate side of humans and this balanced character was sought after in private and well as public life (Howe 6). When conversing with the secretary of state, ready to assume his position as director of the CIA, Bush advises the president—Gerald Ford—to appear “tough” in the public arena, not afraid in handling problems concerning other countries (ch. 7). This advice symbolizes the image typically associated with presidents. Toughness exudes strength, which is symbolic of power, whether executive or political. This is the manner and conduct presumed in a president.

The contrast between the personal and the political is not so much a contrast but an admittance of two different selves that intermingle on more than one occasion. This gives the reader the notion that the presidential self is not merely a figure of rhetoric and ideology; he appeals to readers and the American public through his “softer” side as a father. Bush claims in a letter to a friend that he normally keeps his personal and political life separate (ch. 3). Although there is an expectation regarding the division between political and personal in real life, life writing nonetheless melds the two: “I must make a slight confession, I shed a few tears as she and I drove to the Church, but don’t worry! The Secret Service didn’t see them” (ch. 9). The personal is always existent alongside the political. Not only figuratively, but literally. The presidents’ families occupy political spaces. Bush represents himself as the ultimate “family man,” which paints a picture of virtue and integrity, as well as a sound thinker and decision maker showing his leadership skills. The “family man” picture contributes to the presidential self.

The self, tied to its experience (Eakin 124), is reflected in Bush’s organization of his chapters. Each chapter brings a different self to the forefront. Most of them are Bush’s professional personas. The second chapter “Texas, Our Texas” revolves around Bush’s time in college, his entering the oil business, and the birth of his son. Alongside descriptions of his wife, marriage, and children, Bush depicts his business endeavors in the oil industry and his entrance to the political world through his letters. His early experiences give insight for the greater issues to come in his presidency. His experiences as a navy officer in World War II teach him about duty and the implications of war. The loss of his younger sister Robin due to cancer teaches him the “true meaning of grief” (ch. 2).

He details his opinions on political matters such as the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, both as the narrating "I" and the letter writer. He explains and justifies his stances, responding to his opponents, by saying "I opposed discrimination of any kind and abhorred racism…but felt strongly this bill was unconstitutional and threatened more rights than it protected" (ch. 2). Bush does not elaborate on why exactly he disapproved of the bill as unconstitutional; he expresses his sympathies for African American soldiers (ch. 3) and claims to defend their rights but falls short in action. His personal defense fails to escape Republican ideology.

While some omissions are not acknowledged in this work, others are. Bush incorporates memorandums from his days working in the CIA into his book. Parts of the memorandum are taken out for confidentiality, but are "reflected" to preserve authenticity:

> China: We talked about the need to get the information from Nixon. The matter will stay rather dicey and tense. I showed him the cable xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx The president read the entire cable. I gave it to him to show that China was indeed trying to send a signal to us that they wanted good relations, etc. (248)

There seems to be an underlying intent to portray truthfulness and authenticity, even though this is challenged in instances such as the discussion of the civil rights bill. Furthermore, Bush expresses ultimate loyalty to government institutions and the president throughout his book. Politics, the presidency, and governmental affairs are often upheld regardless of partisanship. Bush solidifies his approval of power in the presidency not only through his own experience as president, but also as a subject to presidential power. He takes pride in values instilled in him by his father; one of which is submitting to his country and president. His pre-presidential self is an example to current subjects of power (ch. 7). As he describes Barbara Bush's reaction to his nomination for chairman of the Republican National Committee, he recognizes a familiar reaction of disdain for politics. Bush hopes to restore the "nobility" he views characteristic of politics (ch. 4). This book is an apologia from start to finish; Bush is adamant in defending and seeking approval for government and president, as exemplified below:

> It is essential that CIA continue to work with the Congress, with the rest of the Executive Branch, and to some degree with the public, to demonstrate that CIA the Reality is very different from CIA the Myth. We are cooperating fully with all concerned; and this is bound to result in the Truth. We honor the Truth; we do not fear it. (ch. 7)

The roles are reversed; the government claims to hold “Truth” while the public (or media) is blamed for its misgivings. Bush’s capitalization of certain words is striking—especially “Truth,” which he assumes to be a definitive and unassailable reality. The effort to maintain truth in politics is also demonstrated in life writing. The objective is to deliver only truth. This notion ignores the complete rhetorical and ideological nature of the government and presidency.

Bush defends president Lyndon B. Johnson amidst his critics during the Vietnam War by saying “I detest this suggestion that the President really doesn’t care about human lives” (ch. 3). Bush makes a case for the presidential self—it is not power-hungry or devoid of humanity. The narrating “I” criticizes his colleagues in Congress for their “abuse” of the president, remarking that he would face the same challenges as Johnson in the years to come (ch. 3).

Bush writes a letter to a one-year-old in order to contribute to an uncle’s 21st birthday present: a collection of letters from leaders. In this letter, Bush praises America for being “unique” in being attentive towards and concerned with other countries (ch. 8). Bush defines the character of America; this character is reflected in his own self. He is sensitive and caring to others, whether it is other countries, other Americans, or others in his personal life. His collection of letters shows his consideration of other people, as America supposedly considers the well-being of other countries. America and its government are idealized to the extremes, justifying its most condemned conduct in the world. In dealing with the communist regimes of the world, particularly Vietnam after the war ended, Bush dictates a diary entry:

> Where is our ideology? Where is our principle? What indeed do we stand for? These things must be made clear, and the American people must understand that, as soon as America doesn’t stand for something in the world, there is going to be a tremendous erosion of freedom. It is true…And yet it is awful hard to convince

> people of it at home. (ch. 6)

Although these statements are taped for his own records, it is not unimaginable that Bush had considered the possibility of these statements being published. In fact, he mentions pondering the idea of writing a book in a letter in 1977 (ch. 8). He practically addresses the reader—the American people—and warns them of the loss of freedom, the importance of its preservation, and their implicit power in deciding the nation's course of action. The culturally relevant ideal of freedom finds its central place in the life narratives of the Bushes. It serves to exemplify the proper American identity and justify American leadership in the world. Bush utilizes a didactic voice addressing his readers—the American public.

The letters in the third chapter, "Potomac Fever," belong to his time as a congressman. Many of them deal with his political beliefs: his opposition to gun control and abortion, his support of a freer economy, and his ideas about the presidency and government. Many letters are given a backdrop with the issues of the era to give better understanding for the letter-reader and give the narrating "I"'s personal reflections on the past. Bush reevaluates the protests against the war, reflecting neoconservative discourse that prevailed in politics at the time. There is an us against them mentality underlying his statement; his generation against a younger generation with more liberal views:

> Those of you who are old enough to remember the 1960s—no matter what your age at the time—have to agree it was a challenging time for America. The Vietnam War was tearing our country apart…Furthermore, I felt—as did many of my generation—that too many young people used the war as an excuse to break the law, practice free sex, take drugs, and eschew responsibility of any kind. (ch. 3)

He gives a speech on the Open Housing bill of 1968 (an extension of the civil rights bill) to "angry" Republican members of Congress who were opposed to him even speaking, however the power of the speech is proven as the narrating "I" writes, "No one was more shocked than I when, at the end, they gave me a standing ovation." He ends his speech with "I knew it would be unpopular…but I did what I thought was right." He also mentions he has been "accused of killing the Republican Party" (ch. 2). Bush shows his own agency and authority in play—voting for a bill that is highly contested among Republican citizens—however, this authority is contested as he later acknowledges that the majority of Republicans in the House actually voted for the bill. While Bush recalls the event as one of an instance of personal conviction, he nonetheless draws power from the majority.

In the fourth chapter, which deals with his correspondence during his time as UN ambassador, the press (Bush mentions *The New York Times*) is held responsible for showing a "distorted impression of America" (ch. 4). Bush questions the press and its credibility and he believes the president must be careful in his encounters with the people and the press. Image constitutes much of presidential power (Neustadt x) and giving one's opinions as president in hopes of stamping out the opposition can prove harmful. Bush acknowledges this when he mentions president Nixon was careful in his demeanor when faced with demonstrators (ch. 4). Bush further describes Nixon as "nice" and "gracious" for doing minor acts of kindness that people often overlooked (ch. 4). Bush commends Nixon for the image he creates and emulates him in his own presidency.

After George H. W. Bush was defeated in his second run, Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992. As a "New Democrat," after working as governor of Arkansas for twelve years, he won the 1992 election; his centrist views attracted many votes from an increasingly "right" leaning nation. In a time when the nation was polarized on issues of gay and lesbian rights, feminism, abortion, gun control and education (M. White 102), Clinton offered a resolution to the divide between the left and the right. Presidents' image play a significant role in their leadership abilities and ultimate success (M. White 100)—Clinton's image helped secure the 1992 election (M. White 101). His "new" ideology and presence in Hollywood, connecting with younger generations while revealing his personality, allowed for his image as a New Democrat to come to fruition (M. White 106). Despite the fact that Clinton shifted away from Great Society liberalism (M. White 110), as an admirer of Martin Luther King Jr., he was also the first president to appoint so many government officials with different ethnicities (M. White 112). His policies prioritized the middle class, but acknowledged the needs of environmentalists, feminists, and other minority groups. He failed to secure liberal policies; for example, he signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which curbed welfare programs, and upheld the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy in the military. After continued allegations about sexual misconduct within the White House, Clinton faced an impeachment trial; although he was later acquitted of the charges against him.

Clinton’s presidency was marked with an economic boom. Clinton, while in office, was involved in conflicts in Somalia, Haiti, the Middle East and Bosnia. The United States was part of a UN operation to restore peace in Somalia where there was a civil war. The United States also intervened in Haiti during this time, when a military coup left the country in political turmoil. Clinton also authorized military action in support of NATO forces in bombing Serbian military bases. Clinton was instrumental in bombing Iraq in the face of assassination threats and Saddam Hussein’s violent and unlawful conduct in the region. Meanwhile, globalization and the problems of a new surge of immigrants persisted within the nation.

Three years after his second term ended, Clinton published *My Life,* his long-winded life narrative. The reception of *My Life* generally focused on the length of the book: “Clinton’s memoirs are much like his presidency, stuffed to overflowing with ambitions unleavened by a sense of limits, proportion, perspective, or prudence” (Renshon 608). *The Harvard Political Review* commented on Bill Clinton’s *My Life* saying, “…he creates an autobiography that is not just a portrait of an American icon, but also an intentional portrait of the country that elected him in the latter decades of the twentieth century” (Premaratne). The article further praised the book for revealing Clinton to be an individual much more than his mistakes and as someone who aspires to tell the story of America and its people. *The New York Times* called *My Life “*the richest American presidential autobiography” and “political picaresque, a sort of pilgrim's progress” (McMurtry). *The Guardian* refrained from calling it a “great book,” but admitted it is a representation of Clinton and his presidency offered in an engaging narrative, acknowledging that it avoids giving new or uncomfortable details of political battles (Freedland). While the reviews were critical in some respects, they were also positive in others.

Clinton begins his life writing with a detailed recount of his childhood, growing up in Arkansas and the struggles of living with an abusive stepfather. Multiple stepfathers, who prove to be problematic, come and go later in his life. His relationship with his real father proves no less problematic: “The brief sketch is about all I ever really knew about my father. All my life I have been hungry to fill in the blanks, clinging eagerly to every photo or story or scrap of paper that would tell me more of the man who gave me life” (ch.1). The absence of his father creates turmoil in Clinton’s life; the formulation of his self suffers from this absence. Even though his stepfather, Roger Clinton, is a problematic father figure due to his alcoholism and abusive behavior, Bill Clinton calls him “daddy” and eventually decides to take on his name.

The narrated “I” as a child is portrayed in his life writing as having unusual interests for his age. Clinton reflects on his 10-year-old self being intrigued by politics:

> But strange as it was for a kid of ten years old, what really dominated my TV viewing that summer were the Republican and Democratic conventions. I sat on the floor right in front of the TV and watched them both, transfixed. It sounds crazy, but I felt right at home in the world of politics and politicians. I liked President Eisenhower and enjoyed seeing him renominated, but we were Democrats, so I really got into their convention. (ch.5)

This moment in his childhood becomes a pivotal experience that foreshadows his political career. This past experience gives meaning to his future experiences. His preferences as a child carry on into his later life. Clinton observes a linear history while constructing his life narrative. The self is constructed in a way that legitimizes the future presidential self.

Clinton includes descriptions of and commentary on many contemporary public figures that had an impact on him. These personalities are presented as having a hand in the formation of Clinton’s character, his presidential self, and his life experience. Individuals are not immune to the influence of other subjects (Atkins 1); they are constantly engaging their selves with other selves. As he mentions his love of Elvis Presley, Clinton says, “Beyond his music, I identified with his small-town southern roots. And I thought he had a good heart” (ch. 5). Social context produces a traditional understanding of identity (Atkins 2). Elvis Presley plays a role in encapsulating a particular time in history. Clinton uses Elvis as a part of his personal narrative; the good southern man of humble beginnings is the main feature of Clinton’s presidential self. The autobiography goes on to detail prominent political leaders (as well as public figures) and the portion of their lives pertaining to national memory, giving the reader the feel of the cultural and political climate in the sixties and seventies, as well as how Clinton’s self developed in this climate.

Clinton adopts a political stance as early as at age 10, an avid watcher of Republican and Democratic conventions on television. His interest in politics does not dwindle in his teens as he becomes active in student elections for president and goes on to work as an intern for Senator Fulbright. His affinity to the Democratic Party leads to many Democrats criticizing him for being a “closet Republican” due to his centrist views (ch. 26).

Clinton reflects on his own character (the conclusion that he hopes readers to draw): “Whether I’m a good man is, of course, for God to judge. I know that I am not as good as my strongest supporters believe or as I hope to become, nor as bad as my harshest critics assert…” (Prologue). His narration is an example of self-promotion through supposed self-awareness and openness to criticism. Moreover, the self, procured in narrative, has a moral presupposition; what constitutes a “good life,” is reflected in the seemingly unified self (Atkins 80). His assertions on his goodness and badness reveal the need for Clinton’s self to achieve the portrayal of a wholesome identity.

As the narrating “I,” he addresses a real self (the historical “I”) situated in a crafted narrative. His comments on “stories” are multiple:

> Perhaps most important, I learned that everyone has a story—of dreams and nightmares, hope and heartache, love and loss, courage and fear, sacrifice and selfishness. All my life I’ve been interested in other people’s stories. I’ve wanted to know them, understand them, feel them. When I grew up and got into politics, I always felt the main point of my work was to give people a chance to have better stories. (ch. 2)

The presidency and presidential authority gives power to the individual, the every day American, allowing him/her to find a voice within the national narrative. However, Clinton's optimism of giving people their own voice and individual stories is curtailed by his life writing's creation and adherence to a collective identity. Stanley A. Renshon describes *My Life* as "the latest edition to a permanent campaign that began when he first decided he wanted to be president" (608). Clinton's life writing is nothing more than propaganda for his presidential term, its legacy, and the American presidential character. In an excerpt from an autobiographical essay Clinton wrote as student, he says:

> I am a person motivated and influenced by so many diverse forces I sometimes question the sanity of my existence. I am a living paradox—deeply religious, yet not as convinced of my exact beliefs as I ought to be; wanting responsibility yet shirking it; loving the truth but often times giving way to falsity…I detest selfishness, but see it in the mirror every day... I view those, some of whom are very dear to me, who have never learned how to live. I desire and struggle to be different from them, but often am almost an exact likeness… (ch.7)

The paradoxical nature of self reveals itself. Clinton's struggle to achieve individuality and assert his own self fails in the wake of so many other selves, conditions and ideologies that affect him. On the nature of self and the meaning of life Clinton mentions the works and ideas of writers Ernest Becker and Immanuel Kant. He acknowledges that death is the inevitable end of things, and that the self is only a fantasy. Although he seems hopeless at first, he resolves to spend his life trying to learn what makes a self (ch. 19).

The book extensively details his years studying in law school, working in election campaigns and moving on to work at a university, becoming governor and attorney general of Arkansas, and ultimately winning the presidential election. While his political career is filled with success, his personal life overshadows his public life and threatens his political career greatly. His sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky eventually lead to his impeachment, although he is acquitted. He becomes the second president ever to face an impeachment trial[7], confronting humiliation on a national—even global—scale.

Furthermore, Clinton's mentions of his shortcomings are widespread in his life writing. His early struggles with the absence of family stability, drug and alcohol abuse among family members, and his disorderly relationships with women are addressed partially. Regardless of his unfaithfulness, Clinton depicts his relationship with Hillary and their daughter Chelsea as less than perfect, but still one that is as good as can be. Clinton holds his family in the highest regard while apologizing for his mistakes and condemning his own actions. Following the Lewinsky scandal, in which Clinton was exposed for participating in sexual acts with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, Clinton reveals that he sought comfort in his wife, his daughter and religion:

> But the biggest factors in my ability to survive and function were personal. Hillary's brothers and my brother were wonderfully supportive. Roger joked to me that it was nice to finally be the brother who wasn't in trouble. My mother-in-law and Dick Kelley were great to me.
>
> Despite everything, our daughter still loved me and wanted me to stand my ground. And, most important, Hillary stood with me and loved me through it all. From the time we first met, I had loved her laugh. In the midst of all the absurdity, we were laughing again, brought back together by our weekly counseling and our shared determination to fight off the right-wing coup. I almost wound up being grateful to my tormentors: they were probably the only people who could have made me look good to Hillary again. I even got off the couch.
>
> During the long year between the deposition in the Jones case and my acquittal in the Senate, on most of the nights when I was home in the White House I spent two to three hours alone in my office, reading the Bible and books on faith and forgiveness…(ch. 51)

Clinton's description of unconditional support from family members does not resonate with realistic assumptions concerning sex scandals. He seems to withhold the grim details and reactions towards adultery. He uses religion to induce forgiveness in the reader, quoting Jesus and his famous line, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (ch. 51). His misconduct threatens the morality of the presidential self. Clinton's apology does not include his reasoning for lying during his impeachment trial. Clinton avoids what he cannot justify for the presidency as an institution and the presidential self. Public life and private life test each other, while the private self sometimes invades the public self. This contrast reveals a desire to reconcile the two, however difficult it proves to be.

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[7] The first president to be impeached was Andrew Johnson (17th president of the United States) for going against Congress and trying to appoint a new Secretary of War—Ulysses S. Grant.

Following Clinton's presidency, George W. Bush, son of a former president, came to office, after a disputed election. His presidency was marked by 9/11; the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center resulted in the death of nearly 3000 civilians (Little 1). George W. Bush asserted that American freedom was the main reason for the attacks—Arabs "hated" their freedom (Little 2). The culprits, Osama bin Laden and the terrorist network al-Qaeda, were soon after pledged to be dealt with. Bush engaged in the use of unilateral powers to counter-attack the new threat of the century: terrorism. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda were also critical in shaping America's new foreign policy strategy, which was offensive rather than defensive. Soon after Afghanistan, Bush started a "preventive war" in Iraq on the claims that Hussein had developed weapons of mass destruction (Little xii). As the war progressed, with no weapons found, major losses, and a country completely devastated, the realization of an "impulse to remake the world in America's image" came forth (Little 3). Free America was contrasted with the image of savagery in Iraq and stereotypes were further perpetuated (Little 8).

With a harsher conservative outlook on politics, following the September 11 attacks, Bush's administration was instrumental in passing the USA Patriot Act, which enabled the government to collect personal information about suspicious individuals. In 2002, the Department of Homeland Security was established. Major tax cuts were passed in Congress and environmental policies experienced a setback. Bush withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol and the federal government's mishandling of the crises in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (2005) reflected badly on his presidency. Michael L. Butterworth claims that despite being regarded as one of the most unfavorable presidents in US history, Bush's work after his term ended has rebuilt his image, as has been the case for many unpopular presidents in the past (2). Pivotal in this process of rebuilding is the "construction of public memory," for it affects "how we remember previous presidents” as well as “how we navigate current and future political issues (2). An example is presidential libraries and museums, which adopt “mythological and ideological” configuration (3). Butterworth asserts that an “idyllic” image of the president is promoted through historical American myths (3). Baseball, he argues, serves as a rhetorical device in redeeming Bush’s legacy through ideas such as “unity.” As one of Bush’s pastimes, baseball was used to represent a certain character that pertained to the nation (Butterworth 4).

Just one year after his second term ended, George W. Bush published *Decision Points* in the midst of harsh criticism for his failure to procure weapons in the Iraq War. *Decision Points* has been called a “tome of breezy self-justification” (Cornwell) giving little insight into the “inner man” (Brands). The title and organization of *Decision Points* alone demonstrates the intent of justification and restoration of power exercised in Bush’s presidential terms. As stated in John P. Burke’s review, the book aligns with public knowledge, and may be read “as James Buchanan’s self-serving memoirs redux” or as “Reagan-esque vindication” (235). The book has been discredited for not satisfactorily dealing with the issues revolving around his presidency: “Bush closes by saying he's comfortable with the fact that history's verdict on his presidency won't come until after he's gone. That's just as well, since history isn't likely to be as easy on him as he is on himself” (Brands). *Decision Points*’ objectives of redeeming the president were claimed to be to no avail, as Bush’s presidency was marked by inadequacy and lack of success (Cornwell). Reviews were just as critical of *Decision Points* as they were of George W. Bush’s presidency.

In *The Los Angeles Times*, Bush was said to be unaware of himself as a man of contradictions in his book: “passive and strong; intelligent but not curious; a public person apparently at his best in private; willing to admit shortcomings, but not particularly self-critical; unfailingly civil himself, but happily surrounded by bare-knuckle partisans” (Rutten). *The Guardian* was far more lenient with Bush, claiming the book confirms that Bush was elected twice for a reason—being “reflective and self-analytical,” contrary to public opinion (Campbell). *The New York Times* wrote, “It is a book that is part spin, part mea culpa, part family scrapbook, part self-conscious effort to (re)shape his political legacy" (Kakutani).

Ryan Grim, writing for *Huffpost*, called George W. Bush "too lazy to write his own memoir," claiming that many quotes were taken from other life writing produced by his contemporaries or other writing concerning his presidency. Grim presents 16 instances in Bush's life writing that are taken from other sources. Bush's recounting of meetings he didn't witness (such as the inauguration of Afghan president Hamid Karzai) and comments from people that weren't actually made to him (such as John McCain's defense of war strategies in Iraq) are "crimes against the craft of memoir" (Grim). Ryan Grim further claimed Bush took parts of his life writing from the *Washington Post* and Ahmed Rashid's writing in *The New York Review of Books.* This greatly subverts the authority of the narrating I in life writing. Rather than a product of individual memory, the presidential life narrative proves to be in this case, a product of collective memory. Nevertheless, the publishing company of Bush's book, *Crown*, responded to the criticism by saying this was testament to Bush's truthfulness in his life writing (Grim).

The beginning chapter recounts George Bush's story of sobriety and decision to quit drinking. As the beginning of a long series of important decisions in his life, he characterizes this moment as portraying a willpower that is essential in assuming presidential power. "Quitting drinking was one of the toughest decisions I have ever made. Without it, none of the others that follow in this book would have been possible" (ch. 1). It signifies the moment he becomes the man that will become president of the United States. The thematic organization reveals Bush's meaning making through life narrative. Furthermore, Bush relates his decision to quit drinking to finding God. Bush's self is subjected to the powers of religious ideology. However, there is a consciousness in this subjection, which does not eliminate individual agency. Regarding his coming to terms with his faith, Bush writes: "The notion of a living God was a big leap, especially for someone with a logical mind like mine. Surrendering yourself to an Almighty is a challenge to the ego. But I came to realize that struggles and doubts are natural parts of faith. If you haven't doubted, you probably haven't thought very hard about what you believe" (ch.1).

Religion and God hold a significant place in his life writing. When asked in a debate which political philosopher he relates to, Bush answers Jesus Christ (ch. 3). After political upheaval ensues following his comments, Bush comes to the realization that politics do not mix well with religion. Although he promises not to promote religion as president, his rhetoric is heavily religious in tone. This is observed in his life writing and his presidential decisions: “The freedom agenda…was both idealistic and realistic. It was idealistic in that freedom is a universal gift from Almighty God. It was realistic because freedom is the most practical way to protect our country…‘America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one’” (ch. 13). Bush portrays himself as someone who believes, no matter the consequences, that “he is doing God’s work” (Cornwell).

Bush’s memoir is divided into chapters organized thematically, each covering an important decision he made in the White House. Despite the book’s emphasis on his time as president, Bush nevertheless gives a brief family history. His autobiography is a story made up of many stories. He connects his own experiences to his father’s; they both attend Yale and Bush accepts his father as his unrivaled “role model” (ch. 1.). Bush follows in his father’s footsteps in portraying himself as a loving husband and father—this carries much significance in painting a respectable image for the presidential self. The integration of the many contexts of one’s life constitutes what is regarded as a “good life” (Atkins 85). This virtue and integrity found in the personal self affirm that there must be the same integrity in the public self. Detailed descriptions of the work and character of members of his administration are laid out in an effort to show his own character. Owing to his life writing being a defense of his character, Bush expresses that he is hurt from comments made about it. He is accused of being insincere, which leads him to confront the difficulties of being a “public person.” Jenna Bush writes to her father in a letter, “I hate hearing lies about you. I hate when people criticize you. I hate that everybody can’t see the person I love and respect, the person that I hope I someday will be like” (ch. 9).

The book conveys that every word spoken as president, every action carried out, and every decision put forth has a well thought-out objective. Orthodox thinking would allow the people to put more blame on failed decisions. However, in the life writing of George W. Bush, the means are justified while the end is often times forgiven. The focal point of the book is the decision making process; thus, the means are what matter for Bush and are justified. This serves the purpose of clearing the president of intentional wrongdoing. The intent comes off as genuine and shows that Bush has always meant well, avoiding the responsibility of the consequences of his decisions.

As a staunch Republican who embraces Republican attitudes such as pro-life, Bush utilizes his mother's miscarriage story in this book in order to prove his exposure to the ending of human life, and substantiate his views on abortion. On other matters, he is cautious in presenting his views; for example, there is no mention of same-sex marriage policies or gay rights except for one brief part acknowledging that Dick Cheney's daughter is gay. In George W. Bush's desire to appoint Dick Cheney to the vice presidency, Cheney expresses hesitation because of his daughter's orientation. Bush brushes-off Cheney's comment as irrelevant to his decision:

> Then he said, "Mary is gay." I could tell what he meant by the way he said it. Dick clearly loved his daughter. I felt he was gauging my tolerance. "If you have a problem with this, I'm not your man," he was essentially saying. I smiled at him and said, "Dick, take your time. Please talk to Lynne. And I could not care less about Mary's orientation." (ch. 3)

Bush's nonchalance on the matter is a manipulation of reader response; he deliberately stays clear of reiterating right-wing commentary on the issue. He reflects presidents' dislike of seeming to be an "ideologue" (Langston 730), but his neglect of the issue further highlights the ideology he subscribes to.

Photos accompany the stories behind each decision. Many moments are revealed in photos that substantiate and bring them to life for the reader. Even the most uncomfortable and unprecedented moments are captured; such as the time of crisis on 9/11 when George Bush is arguing with his staff aboard Air Force One, frustrated that he can't get in touch with Laura Bush.

As the narrator of his book, Bush's voice carefully avoids coming off antagonistic in the face of harsh criticism. There is a portrayal of levelheadedness that is characteristic of a president. Neither unresponsive to critics, nor hesitant to speak his mind, Bush portrays himself as a middleman between government and the people. After reading a magazine column that mocks his father, Bush expresses his contempt for "political journalists and their unseen editors" (ch. 2). What he fails to acknowledge is his own role and participation in the world of publishing. Furthermore, on the distinction of his political self from other political selves, Bush comments: "I learned that allowing your opponent to define you is one of the biggest mistakes you can make in a campaign." He strives to define his own self and worth in the political realm, but falls short. His self is a presidential archetype reminiscent of Lincoln, Reagan and his father, George H. W. Bush.

The theme of freedom, "a staple of political discourse," as Kevin Coe states in his article "The Language of Freedom in the American Presidency, 1933-2006" (376). It is repeated throughout the book—freedom for individuals, freedom for America, and freedom for other countries somehow all correlate and justify Bush's decision to go to war. Nicholas Lemann, in a review, compares Barack Obama and George W. Bush both as writers and as presidents. He claims, in *Decision Points*, stereotypes of Bush are substantiated by Bush himself, through the example of Bush's impetuous decision-making regarding military action in the Middle East (27), even though Bush claims that his decisions were well thought out and at times necessary to carry out in the face of opposition on all ends of the political spectrum. In *Decision Points,* Bush juxtaposes images of the Middle East and the U.S. through mythic universal values. America's freedom contrasts with the East's oppression; individualism is sacrificed for the powerful rulers in Middle Eastern countries; and power is concentrated in the hands of totalitarian governments. Bush's perspective raises questions about the real America as opposed to the one depicted in *Decision Points*. Chapters devoted to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq inevitably paint a different picture of American "freedom" and power. The Iraq War is depicted as a success in terms of protecting the freedom of Americans and also Iraqis; military power and the sacrifice of the lives of servicemen and women, as well as civilians, is justified in this cause. In the epilogue of his book, Bush reveals what he tries to accomplish in his life narrative:

> Decades from now, I hope people will view me as a president who recognized the central challenge of our time and kept my vow to keep the country safe; who pursued my convictions without wavering but changed course when necessary; who trusted individuals to make choices in their lives; and who used America's influence to advance freedom. And I hope they will conclude that I upheld the honor and dignity of the office I was so privileged to hold. (Epilogue)

Bush reveals the American values and ideology that are representative of this life narrative: individualism, freedom, nationalism, and power. Ideologies as such have proven to be less alienating (Langston 730). Nevertheless, Bush's war in Iraq was a consequence of neoconservative thinking in his administration (Langston 731). While Bush reflects his own ideological background, this is also illustrative of a shared ideology that affects other Americans (Özman Kaya 62). His identity's ties to the Christian religion, Republican beliefs, as well American nationalism allows for Bush to garner support (Özman Kaya 63). Bush's life narrative is ultimately a way to affect history and induce acceptance for his own version of it.

The making of difficult decisions, the ideals of leadership, and frustration with media disapproval characterize these presidential narratives. The balancing of family life and political life is a shared concern in all of them. Although these three life narratives are focused on their presidencies (including the events leading up to it and the consequences), family has a commanding presence. Subjectivities such as father, husband, and son are displayed as loving and caring selves that lead their families as they do their country. The media is presented in these works as an antagonist. As an agent between the public and the president, it has the power to shape public opinion. It "informs" the people, "uncovers" the truth, and more than often undermines the public figure at hand. The reader is presented with an attempted counter-statement in these narratives. There is an unequivocal stance against the media and press. The president strives to restore his integrity in these narratives. In doing so, a source of power for presidents is family, but also God/spirituality: another theme observed in presidential life narrative. Whether it is the strength to make difficult decisions in leadership, or faith in the outcomes of these decisions, God appears to be a source of agency and belief. Attaching the self to certain religious beliefs shows favorable characteristics and values of the self that appeal to the American people.

While most autobiographies are chronological, at times the writer goes back and forth between periods, excludes some events while including others, and details some while neglecting to elaborate on others. All of this is in an attempt to give meaning to the story, which is their own life (Weintraub 826). This meaning holds true within the present time of writing; it is meant to hold true for much longer in the minds of historians and the American people. All three presidents relevant to the discussion in this thesis detail their family background and adolescence in the first chapter, moving on to their education and careers, and eventually discussing the presidency. The narratives construct a linear and meaningful narrative.

Presidents portray an exemplary self, not only for other presidents but for the American public as well; this self has internalized nationalistic values and is preoccupied with the greater good. Furthermore, the American people are a part of the narrative as well as readers of the same narrative. They are a powerful agent in power relations involving the president, as they grant power through their votes and exert power in their reading/interpretation of life writing. In presidential life writing, presidents aim to explain themselves and their motives in representing American people; and the extent to which they persuade is a measure of success for the presidential narrative.

As an ultimate testament to character, these life narratives defend the president's character through his past actions, decisions, and their consequences. Presidents are seen as having a moral compass that is structured by family members, American values, and religious beliefs. While presidents are seen as straying from the right path—as Clinton did with his promiscuity or George W. Bush with his poor judgment regarding WMD—life writing allows for them to fix these moments of diversion through an apologetic voice and narrative defense. As Kim Atkins claims:

> The developmental and intersubjective nature of selfhood requires that one's identity takes a narrative form and that it is always already articulated within a

> moral sphere. Contemporary societies are characterised by pluralities of moral spheres, each with its own historical cultures and trajectories: relations of family, ethnicity, religion, and so forth. These different moral communities provide different and sometimes competing moral frameworks and conventions concerning the meaning and value of actions. (85)

Many public selves appear throughout these autobiographies offering the narrating self a likeness and a point of reference. These "other" selves are archetypes for the presidential self. Their character and experience give meaning to the narrating self's character and experience. Others' characters are mirrors to the narrated selves: "The mediating role of our relations with specific others gives selfhood its second-personal character, and is the source of recognition, self-respect, and moral obligation" (Atkins 3). George H. W. Bush's mention of his encounter with Lyndon Johnson in 1954 shows Johnson's as well as Bush's commitment to being "good Americans":

> Dear dad: I saw Senator Lyndon Johnson…He announced that you were the best thing that had happened to the 83rd Congress. I countered with the statement that I was glad to hear that coming from a staunch Democrat, to which he replied, 'Your father and I don't like to be thought of as Republican or Democrat, rather as good Americans! (ch.1)

Furthermore, this bridging of a divide between Republicans and Democrats is reflected in George H. W. Bush's own amicable relationship with Bill Clinton in the years to come. Kennedy's image as the young strong leader of America is mirrored in Clinton's own self. Clinton goes on to become one of the youngest presidents of the nation, hailed for the economic boom in the nineties. These parallelisms prove the continuation of presidential selves throughout history as well as substantiating the self in history—a form of validation. Clinton's admiration of Kennedy is telling:

> I had been for LBJ in the primaries because of his Senate leadership, especially in passing a civil rights bill in 1957, and his poor southern roots. I also liked Hubert Humphrey, because he was the most passionate advocate for civil rights, and Kennedy, because of his youth, strength, and commitment to getting the country moving again. (ch. 5)

George W. Bush's multiple references to Abraham Lincoln force the reader to make the connection between the two selves; albeit Bush reveals his intentions: "One space on the wall was reserved for the president's most influential predecessor. I chose Lincoln. He'd had the most trying job of any president, preserving the Union" (ch. 4). W. Bush's experience would not be so different from Lincoln's when his presidency would lead to the most taxing decisions a president has faced since Lincoln. While these other selves contribute to the construction of the presidential self, one can take issue with the actual existence of a presidential self. If self connotes individuality, then the idea of self as merely a copy of other selves is hardly individualistic or autonomous ("Autobiography and the Making of America" 152). Even so, if the ultimate objective for the autobiographical writer is to construct a self that is particularly in conformity with certain previous selves, then this should be accepted as a successful construction.

Autobiography, while a means of creating a coherent self within narrative, is more so a declaration of what this self is not, as George H. W. Bush expresses, "…I'm also frustrated by the press treatment about the distortion of who I am…when they distort your character and try to make you ugly—that's a little too much" (ch.15). With the proliferation of media images that pervade public opinion, the president is compelled to construct his self as the opposite of what has been misconstrued.

The subject position of father is crucial in the crafting of these presidential life narratives. The presidential self clearly resembles his father and idealizes his father. His reputation is connected to the image of his father. George H. W. Bush, in multiple letters, acknowledges his social status as the son of a Republican congressman. Early on, his fate seems decided, as one that will follow in the footsteps of his father. He holds his father in the highest regard saying, "My dad was the real inspiration in my life—he was strong and strict, full of decency and integrity; but he was also kind, understanding and full of humor" (ch. 4). This depiction falls nothing short of the presidential self evident in his collection of letters. Bill Clinton's relationship with his father is not so idealistic. His biological father dies before Clinton is born and his mother remarries with Roger Clinton, an abusive and alcoholic man. Clinton expresses his insatiable desire to know more about his biological father. Never having met him, Clinton still idealizes and preserves his memory, feeling he has to "live for two people" (ch.1). Making up for an absent father figure, Clinton reveals his grandfather to be "the first male influence” in his life (ch.2). He is depicted as a caring and liberal man who supported African Americans and impoverished people that he came across. Clinton identifies with his grandfather’s morals and character. His policies, later as president, are grounded in his grandfather’s ideals. Similarly, George W. Bush’s own memories are fused with the memories and experiences of his father: “Dad excelled in the classroom, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in just two and a half years. I attended his commencement in Mother’s arms, dozing through much of the ceremony. It wouldn’t be the last time I slept through a Yale lecture” (ch.1).

George W. Bush emulates his father’s experience by attending the same school, preserving the same Republican ideals, and ultimately running for the same positions in government. The similarity between their experiences and representations of their selves is reflected in the narrating “I”’s chauvinistic voice. His father’s experience gives his own experience validity. Consequently his “self” finds validity in the self of George H. W. Bush (W. Bush ch. 1). Throughout the book, George W. Bush holds his father in high regard. He seeks to follow in his father’s steps and gain his approval. Interestingly, perhaps in contrast with earlier presidential life writing, Bush also identifies with his mother as much as his father. He attributes his personality to his mother: “We have the same sense of humor. We like to needle to show affection, and sometimes to make a point. We both have tempers that can flare rapidly. And we can be blunt, a trait that gets us in trouble from time to time” (W. Bush ch.1). Bush’s own verdict on his personality lays it on the line for the reader. His “bluntness” and “temper,” which causes him to face criticism in his presidential years, are given a justification, but also given as reasoning for his decisions.

Presidents’ assumption of the subject position of father is equally important in devising the presidential self. As a father, the letters assume a personal but paternalistic voice representative of a president’s authority. When writing to his sons, George H. W. Bush says, “Dad helped inculcate into us a sense of public service I’d like you boys to save some time in your lives for cranking something back in” (ch.5). Values are passed down from generation to generation, as is the legacy of politics. George Bush’s presidency, less than a decade later, reveals that this legacy continues. Bush’s father, in *All the Best*, states, “My Dad inculcated into his sons a set of values that have served me well in my own short public life. One of these values quite simply is that one should serve his country and his president” (H. W. Bush ch.6). He recognizes the president subject long before he adopts it onto his own self. This recognition allows for a careful study of what assuming the subject position of president entails. While this allows for emulation by his son, it threatens any individuality or distinction. Seeing this threat, senior Bush also conveys to his sons that they must not be in agreement with him at all times, that they should be free to think for themselves and make their own decisions in order to “define themselves” (H. W. Bush ch.16). His son, in *Decision Points*, reflects on the same issue: “Nobody was asking me to match Dad’s record, and I didn’t need to try. We were in completely different situations.” The difference is not so much obvious as the similarity is. Both became Republican presidents, assumed similar ideas of America, its mission, and the presidency.

Family is at times in conflict with the political self, but at other times offers a safe place for the self outside of the political realm. It becomes a refuge that represents something pure and dependable compared to the “evils” of politics as pointed out by George H. W. Bush: “That’s all that really matters…not politics—not public life but family, kids and now grand kids” (ch.10). About his wife George H. W. Bush proclaims that they are two separate individuals, but they are also “one” (ch.16). Regarding Laura Bush, George W. Bush says they were “a perfect match” (ch.1). Clinton explains his wife’s decision to take on his name, in hopes of gaining more votes from people put off from her keeping her maiden name (ch. 22). All three presidents attempt to portray a deep connection to their wives; a connection that is supposed by the president himself but also the public; a connection of selves, which are recognized and act in accordance with each other. Clinton’s infidelity is ultimately overlooked in trying to procure this connection.

Life writing as a genre prioritizes the individual self and experience above all. Attention is drawn to the identity, its construction, and the actions deriving from its agency. Presidential life writing, in contrast, emphasizes the significance of the collective/political experience, endangering the individual self of the president, making it vulnerable to dissolving into an archetype of presidential self. This is characteristic of presidential life writing and where this subgenre parts with the classic autobiography or life writing. In these presidential life narratives, the self comes to fruition through learning from experience, and thus becoming the presidential self, one that asserts his authority in claiming the title. This learning starts at a young age and nearly always contributes to the political self. George H. W. Bush claims that his experiences in World War II, and the oil business in later years, taught him about honor, risk-taking, and recovering from failure, qualities that were essential to be president (ch.2). Clinton's childhood encounters with African Americans and the way his grandfather set an example in his interactions with different races influences Clinton's outlook on race and prejudice, teaching him about civil rights (ch. 2). George W. Bush's experience of being the son of a president teaches him the hardships of political life as well as the "potential" that the presidency holds (ch.2). Even the earliest memories of presidents are presented as learning experiences that shape the presidential self.

Life writing has always drawn on memory to recreate that which has seemingly disappeared from our reality; that is, the past (Birkerts 31). Putting the presidency into words, writing it down, not only helps for the autobiographical subject to relive it, but the audience to relive and remember as well. The president's autobiographical act of writing is reenacting the presidential term, substantiating it, making it more tangible and accessible for generations to come; in short, solidifying the presidential term and the power it represents. The desire to "continue" and "live on" is reflected in Clinton's words, "We pursue activities, both positive and negative, that we hope will lift us beyond the chains of ordinary existence and perhaps endure after we are gone" (ch. 19). While the presidency is certainly an experience beyond "ordinary existence," the end of the presidency has forced the president back into this averageness. Presidential life writing is the remedy for *normal*; it is the gateway to the political and powerful. It is also the protection against being forgotten. It helps satisfy the basic human need to "memorialize" experience (Birkerts 12).

In addition to remembering and securing experience's place in history, there is the intention to decipher this experience (Birkerts 18). By using the advantage of present time, the president revisits the past with the intention of vindicating their experience as the autobiographical "I." In many instances in presidential life writing, problems with memory arise: "Memory? A definite problem now," remarks George H. W. Bush (ch.16). Clinton thanks those who helped creating his book in the acknowledgments section, stating, "…my memory is far from perfect. If any factual errors remain, it is not for lack of effort to correct them on their part." George W. Bush writes in his Introduction, "There were instances in which I had to rely on my memory alone. If there are inaccuracies in this book, the responsibility is mine." These claims evidently hinder any attempts to charge these authors with inaccuracy or fabrication. While accepting memory's flaws is revealing it as a problem of life writing, it is also empowering in that it loosens its ties to history while claiming its own truth. On the other hand, memory can become an excuse for omissions.

Moreover, creating a new national memory through life writing can be regarded as a solution to the issue of forgetting. Autobiography, in the classic sense, is a mode of the transforming the private self and experience into one that is public or shared (Birkerts 34). Presidential life writing, on the other hand, is arguably the exact opposite, for it offers a private perspective on a very public life. Sidonie Smith states in "Presidential Address 2011: Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries," that "The personal story…does the political work of individualizing the candidate as a recognizably self-made American and situating his or her story in family legacies that reproduce nationalist norms of citizenship" (566). In this regard, presidents can be seen as reproducers of a presidential norm.

What is inevitably overlooked in presidential life writing is the multiplicity of narrating persons. While the cover and author promise the singularity of the narrating "I," consumers are led to believe otherwise, given the practices of ghostwriting, editing and dictating among others. Presidents are "coaxed" (as Smith and Watson would say) to write their life narratives by editors. These editors are also so involved in the writing process that they most probably undermine writer agency. George H. W. Bush acknowledges in his autobiography the many people who helped him put together his letters and diary entries:

> …many thanks to Alicia Lee in my Houston office, who dutifully inputted every single word of the letters and diary entries into the computer…Barbara: I hope you notice that we *almost* took out or added in everything you suggested…Although the majority of the letters in the book were either handwritten or self-typed, many of them (and thousands over the years) were produced with the help of my assistants. (H. W. Bush Acknowledgements)

These acknowledgements further prove that the narrating “I” is obscured through many levels of transmission. Others, such as his wife and assistants, were influential in constructing this life narrative. To say that this book offers the unique perspective of the president would be implausible. Time and multiple autobiographical acts render the presidential self and perspective a plural construct. Clinton acknowledges his editor’s contributions to his work:

> Justin Cooper gave up more than two years of his young life to work with me every day and, on many occasions in the last six months, all night. He organized and retrieved mountains of materials, did further research, corrected many errors, and typed the manuscript over and over from my illegible scrawling in more than twenty large notebooks. (Clinton Acknowledgments)

Not only editors, but friends are also involved in the life writing process. George W. Bush states in the acknowledgments of his book, “Many trusted friends contributed to this book. I am particularly grateful to those who reviewed the full manuscript…” In light of the multiple agencies at work in presidential life writing, questions arise concerning authority. While the president’s name on the cover and the first person narration convey him as the all-powerful agency, the hidden voices endanger the president’s voice. Omissions and revisions are inescapable in the life writing process. However, the implications must be considered. This is not the truth of an individual; it is the truth of the presidential self as perceived by others. Most autobiographical writers “must comply with editors and publishers who, as gatekeepers, want the work to be intelligible and interesting to a general readership” (Bjorklund 10).

Speaking of his aide Justin Cooper, Clinton says, “he sometimes seemed to know me and what I wanted to say better than I did” (Acknowledgements). The idea that another person can know one’s self and experience better than them reveals an unspoken agreement between editors and presidential writers. Therefore, it can be deduced that the life narrative is not a representation of a true inherent self, but of an externally imposed model of the self. As much as Clinton's editor follows the narrating "I"'s instructions, he has notable input in creating meaning within the life narrative:

> "I was told that my editor, Robert Gottlieb, was the best there was at his craft…Without his judgment and feel, this book might have been twice as long and half as good. He read my story as a person who was interested in but not obsessed with politics. He kept pulling me back to the human side of my life…" (Clinton Acknowledgements).

Clinton's life "story" is revealed to be a construction in the process of meaning making. This guidance towards a "human side" reveals the narrative nature of life writing, which is essentially a construction of a non-fragmented favorable self that is removed from the historical "I."

Jeff Smith, in his *The Presidents We Imagine,* explores the idea of an imagined presidential character that precedes and succeeds the actual president. He points to the constant re-conceptualization of the president and presidency throughout fiction, movies, and plays (3). The story of the president often portrays what the American people think of themselves as a nation with power and also many drawbacks. Smith continues to say that these "stories" have significance in politics (4). They create the "fiction that is America" (J. Smith 9). Smith concludes that representation of the presidential character is not only relevant to fiction, but also presidential memoirs (10). Correlated to this idea is that the president exists as a character not only existent in literature, but in American culture and politics (J. Smith 11). A two-way communication occurs between representations and reality; the presidential character and the real president. The real-life president informs and is informed by the presidential character; idealized and fictionalized variously in popular culture and presidential letters.

As embodiments of this presidential character, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush also represent a distinct era in U.S. history in which the "us versus them" rationale outlived the Cold War, and continued to hold afterwards going into multiple wars in the Middle East. The presidential character that they portray in their life writing reveals a preexisting presidential self that embodies American ideological values that have their roots in their Puritan ancestors. These presidents use their ideological characters to defend and legitimize their questionable use of presidential power.

1.2. IDEOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL SELF

The notion of power must be studied through the notion of self in presidential life writing. As Stuart Hall suggests in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” the act of representation always unfolds in relation to our “positions” as writers (222). The narrating “I” exists within a cultural context at the moment of writing, and is unavoidably expressive of a “cultural identity” (223). To analyze a unified historical self would yield limited substantial outcome—subject to time, culture and authoritative discourses, the self cannot continue unchangingly. If the self only exists in representation (222); it should be evaluated within the perimeters of representation. In presidential life writing, the self is culturally and ideologically positioned in American idealism, which has its roots in Puritan notions of the elect few and confrontations with European forms of aristocracy. The most treasured values of American ideology, such as classless society and exceptionalism are embedded in its culture and history dating back to the first settlers. It has been represented by the Founding Fathers and American presidents. American exceptionalism, the basis on which the nation and its ideology formed, is based on the principles of religion and patriotism (Kılıçarslan 8-11). This American ideology, through language/text establishes and preserves “a social system” that harbors these conservative and religious values (Kılıçarslan 12).

Alden T. Vaughan, in the “Introduction” of *The Puritan Tradition in Americ*a, claims that the Puritan legacy has carried on into “the assumptions and aspirations of modern America” (xi). Historically, Puritans’ beliefs and were not solely confined to religious spheres; they were very much formative of their opinions on government, society, and life in general (xiii-xiv). Puritan culture possessed a predominantly Christian and male-oriented understanding of politics (Kılıçarslan 35), while the “well-ordered” family held a significant place (Vaughan xv). George H. W. Bush defends his political stance on family planning, which he supports whole-heartedly, as opposed to abortion. He claims women should be educated on and have access to birth control (ch. 12). Clinton claims that one of the successes of his first term as president was "reestablishing the family as the primary unit of society" through policies such as the increase of minimum wage and the facilitating of adoption (ch. 47). George W. Bush, on the other hand, put forth policies that minimally allowed for embryonic stem cell research to continue, in order to help save lives and preserve families (ch. 4). Family is seen as something to be preserved and protected by government in presidential life narratives. Furthermore, Vaughan claims that the New England Puritans differed from their British descendants:

> Conforming to neither the religious nor the political norms of the mother country—the Puritans' critics charge—New England's leaders imposed a self-righteous, quasi independent, intolerant regime on all who entered their corner of the New World, a corner to which they had no right of absolute rule. (xvi)

Although Vaughan claims the rule of these first Puritans was met with resistance and did not last, turning the rule into "Yankee democracy," many values and ideals—such as morality, work ethic, distrust of foreigners—persevered up until the twentieth century (Vaughan xvi). The presidential life writing of H. W. Bush, Clinton and W. Bush, reveal an adherence to Puritan ideals and the continuation of a historical ideology. As stated by Dr. Harry S. Stout, in an interview concerning Puritans in modern-day American culture:

> …they gave us a world-regenerative creed, a vision that America is "a city set upon a hill." That vision infuses American literature, foreign policy—our entire sense of identity.
>
> Listen to Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, or Bill Clinton. They often speak of "destiny" and "providence." Or civil-rights leaders speak of a dream of equal treatment under the law. All of these people are drawing from Puritan roots, whether they know it or not. (qtd. in Miller and Galli)

There is a connection between the historical ideological tradition of a nation and identity. Smith and Watson emphasize that social status is imperative in the construction of identity (33). The social status granted by the presidency and its connection to America as a nation influences the self of these individuals examined in assuming a certain identity. Presidents can be observed in these works of life writing as portraying their selves encapsulating all that is traditionally regarded as "American." Moreover, in line with Foucault's theory of the creation of the subject, the president is identified as the subject only in terms of the regime and its institutional network. He fails to resist, to establish individuality separate from the American nation.

American examples of life writing have been known to reflect American cultural values ("The Proper Study" 245). Values that are deeply embedded in American identity (such as individualism, freedom, morality, and democracy) are propagated through the presidential self, expressed in life writing. Amy A. Kass, in "Who Am I? Autobiography and American Identity," adopts a rather limited viewpoint of the American autobiographical tradition, claiming it should be a space for educating Americans on their cultural identities. The engagement in life writing "teaches one about oneself" and "points one beyond oneself" (93). It allows for an individual to not only to assess their own identity, but also to acknowledge the power and workings of those outside one's self that have impacted them—such as their core beliefs and principles. For readers, this may mean finding common ground in order to understand their own lives and selves; in this case particularly, understanding the fundamentals of being an American and living such a life (97).

Autobiography (now more commonly accepted as life writing) is considered to be the first "American literary form" as Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is an example of the first uniquely American literature (Kass 97). Autobiography or life writing is "American" by nature (97). Studying the lives of people especially concerned about social and civic issues—for example, the lives of statesmen, writers, social reformers, and public servants—might help educate readers in citizenship. Social consciousness may be acquired through reading these life stories (93). Kass observes the characteristics of canonical American autobiographers:

> These autobiographers did more than live lives that vindicate American principles. Most of them sought actively to advance and defend these principles, through public speech and deed…still others became professional writers. Each sought, in his or her own way, to contribute to the

> improvement of the larger American society. (Kass 98)

Furthermore, Kass argues that autobiography is a space for “recovery of particular ways and traditions,” “group identification,” and a “human concern with freedom and equality” (Kass 98-99). These distinctions are observed full-scale in presidential life writing; however, contrary to Kass’s optimism in claiming this does not threaten individual expression (99), an authentic self is misplaced.

Founding Father Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography gives a glimpse into how the tradition of American life writing started. Written by Franklin himself and published after his death, the work gives insight into the “American experience” (Baker 274). The personal self is universalized (Baker 274); Franklin tells a story of financial and social success, made possible in America, and achievable by other Americans (Baker 275). The individual (Franklin) is a representation of American possibility (Baker 275). This is the myth of the American dream and self made man that is also found in the primary life narratives studied in this thesis. Regarding the creation of an “American self” throughout history, a tradition can be traced “about the importance of constructing oneself” (Howe 1). Examples of “self-made men” were offered in hopes that they would serve as models for other individuals wishing to construct their own selves (1). George H. W. Bush’s starting his own oil business and becoming successful (ch. 2), his son doing the same (ch. 1), and Clinton’s pursuance of education through scholarships and internships eventually landing him a university job (ch. 9-18) are attempts at portraying the autobiographical self as “self-made.” However, the privileged background of the Bush family is not incorporated into this narrative of self made men, as it would undermine the self-made American found within the presidential self.

As Sacvan Bercovitch claims, American individualism holds a place in Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography (140). On the nature of Franklin’s autobiography and its equivalents, Bercovitch states: “They are the canonized do-it-yourself guides to Americanization, handbooks to self-assertion that issue in a standardization of the self” (141). This standardization is evident in the presidential life writing of the Bushes and Clinton—a nationalist American self that reiterates the importance of upholding universalized American values.

Robert F. Sayre, in his essay “Autobiography and the Making of America,” notes autobiography’s historical and cultural significance by claiming that the genre has an unusual connection to America, the nation itself. The autobiography writer’s American identity is the precursor to life writing (147). Sayre further argues that autobiography is a “commodity” for Americans. They want it but also need it. Autobiography is a version of history that one may compare their own experiences with. It is also a model of a national life, which it made “new” compared to the real one—it is more idealistic. It reveals a nationally claimed “creative power” (“Autobiography and the Making of America” 148).

Moreover, American autobiographers have shown the tendency to reveal a connection between the autobiographical subject’s life and national life. The former is situated within the latter. What is more is that national life, in turn, reveals its connection to national ideas and ideals (Sayre, “Autobiography and the Making of America” 149). American values are not only revered but sought after and claimed; they are presented as cause and sometimes effect of experience. Nevertheless, they are central to the narrative; these values or American ideas give the president authority in claiming their identities and in their exercise of presidential power. To name a few of these “national ideas”: democracy, freedom, education, leadership, equality and hard work are repeatedly referred to in these works as a form of logic and rationalization behind presidential policy, decisions or more broadly, acts of power. George H. W. Bush presents such an instance of rationalization through American values. Bush defends America’s foreign affairs policies by affirming them through the American value of leadership—the idea that America must lead everyone else to freedom and prosperity:

> To achieve this ‘vision’ we must remain as the active leader of the entire world. We must be sure our word is credible—that means we must not only have the convictions about democracy and freedom, but we must have a strong National Defense posture. Our security comes first but the security of other friends around the world is vital too. (ch. 15)

The idea of freedom and pertaining values being spread to other countries is conventionally considered a conservative viewpoint. However, Clinton reveals his true preference of American global power, similar to the Bush presidents. He defends his political views and summarizes them as follows:

> I…believed in, the DLC's five core beliefs: Andrew Jackson's credo of opportunity for all and special privileges for none; the basic American values of work and family, freedom and responsibility, faith, tolerance, and inclusion; John Kennedy's ethic of mutual responsibility, asking citizens to give something back to their country; the advancement of democratic and humanitarian values around the world, and prosperity and upward mobility at home…(ch. 26)

In expressing his political stance and personal beliefs, Clinton validates his position through former American presidents, constitutional rights, and American nationalistic ideals. Acknowledging criticism for being too "Republican" in his opinions, Clinton defends himself through unassailable American truths. The narrating "I" draws an image of the ideal presidential self encompassing all the qualities and ideals of earlier American presidents.

George W. Bush goes beyond defending his "freedom agenda" but also defends the reasoning behind it: "Critics charged that the freedom agenda was a way for America to impose our values on others. But freedom is not an American value; it is a universal value" (Bush ch. 13). The act to interfere in other countries' domestic affairs is upheld through the expansion of the American value of freedom to the whole world. Clinton touches on Americans' values as he explains his policies as governor of Arkansas, "In their heart of hearts, most Americans know that the best social program is a job, that the strongest social institution is the family, and that the politics of racial division are self-defeating" (ch. 26).

Similarly to these American values and ideals, perhaps the greatest ideal, the "American dream" is omnipresent in presidential life writing. On his announcement of running for president, Clinton recalls his speech: "…to make a commitment to a larger cause: preserving the American dream, restoring the hopes of the forgotten middle class, reclaiming the future for our children" (ch. 26). In a speech concerning his vote for the civil rights bill as congressman, George H. W. Bush defends the bill by saying it is a "realization of the American dream" (ch. 3). His conviction that America is founded on the idea of opportunity for all gives meaning to his decisions and his exertions of authority. His son, George W. Bush, recalls pleasant childhood memories, commemorating his hometown Midland as the idea behind the American dream he later envisioned in his political career (ch.1).

Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004)*,* claims that Americans have always attributed their identities to ideological and cultural values (xv). Thomas Jefferson's concept of the "American Creed" epitomizes a large portion of American identity (Huntington xv) with its essential features being Anglo-Protestantism, adherence to laws and leaders, individualism, work ethic, and the idealism of American exceptionalism (Huntington xvi). Although the orthodox notion of American identity faltered in the twentieth century due to the rise of multiculturalism and different ethnic identities, September 11 acted as a catalyst for the full-blown resurgence of identification with American nationalism (Huntington xv).

In Huntington's view, equality and individualism—essentials of the American Creed—came under attack as a result of multiculturalism and the close of the Cold War era (Huntington 11). Thus, an incentive to reconstruct American identity arose, as was evident after 9/11. This renewal of national identity was crucial to finding commonality and ensuring unity in a new and changing post-Cold War (Huntington 12) and in the ongoing struggle with "others" (or the Middle East, its culture and values). Presidents Bush Senior, Clinton and W. Bush find themselves in the midst of this new world calling for a stronger sense of American identity. Their life narratives not only encapsulate their own commitment to American characteristics, but are also didactic in their rhetoric of the virtue of such characteristics.

Religion plays an important role in American identity. Benjamin Franklin, although a Deist, possessed a moral religiosity (Kılıçarslan 36) characteristic of modern day presidents. The post-Cold War America saw a need for return to religious values. Huntington states, "The twenty-first century…is dawning as a century of religion" (15).

The increasing identification with religion in the world (as seen among tyrannical regimes and affiliated terrorist organizations pitted against the United States) led to the concurrent identification with religion in the U.S. (Huntington 15). The resolution of conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union essentially threatened the preeminence of American national identity. An “other” is instrumental in securing the unity of a nation (Huntington 18). The new “other” that began to take center stage during the first Bush presidency—terrorists, tyrants, and Iraq—could precipitate newfound “national coherence” (Huntington 18).

The national presidential self is portrayed as having a religious/spiritual identity that reinforces his moral beliefs. Christianity and God, whether directly or indirectly, permeate these presidents’ politics and writing. All three presidential writers mention Bill Graham, well-known American evangelist, in their narratives. In a defense of the “Religious Right,” George H. W. Bush writes, “Now, clumsily at times, vindictively at others…they are trying to stand up for things that fundamentally I believe in. I differentiate between the ‘extremists’ and the Religious Right in general. I love Billy Graham, I really do…” (ch. 9). Bush, while claiming that the Religious Right are justified in defending their views, also says that their views are line with his own political beliefs. Religion’s verdict on the family and abortion—highly politicized topics—are not far off from Bush’s own verdict in his presidency (ch. 9). Clinton describes Graham preaching at his junior high school in the midst of racial tension at the time:

> When he gave the invitation for people to come down onto the football field to become Christians or to rededicate their lives to Christ, hundreds of blacks and whites came down the stadium aisles together, stood together, and prayed together. It was a powerful counterpoint to the racist politics sweeping across the South. I loved Billy Graham for doing that. For months after that I regularly sent part of my small allowance to support his ministry. (ch. 5)

Clinton references God in many instances recounted in his life writing. Many of these references are made by other people and pertain to their beliefs. However, religion is central in his life narrative. Although Clinton seems to be careful not to come off as too religious by not explicitly discussing his own ideas surrounding faith, he nonetheless utilizes religion for his own benefit—in a very political way. For instance, in a conversation with his pastor, Clinton explicitly explains and justifies American foreign policy through Christianity:

> The final thing Dr. Vaught said took me aback. He said, "Bill, I think you're going to be President someday. I think you'll do a good job, but there's one thing above all you must remember: God will never forgive you if you don't stand by Israel." He believed God intended the Jews to be at home in the Holy Land. While he didn't disagree that the Palestinians had been mistreated, he said the answer to their problem had to include peace and security for Israel. (ch. 24).

Bush reveals his "born again Christian" background through his conversations with Graham and how he learned about the importance of faith and its implementation in day-to-day life (ch. 1). On describing how Graham shaped his religious beliefs, George W. Bush states:

> I was captivated by Billy. He had a powerful presence, full of kindness and grace, and a keen mind…I talked to him about the girls and shared my thought that reading the Bible could make me a better person. In his gentle, loving way, Billy began to deepen my shallow understanding of faith. There's nothing wrong with using the Bible as a guide to self-improvement, he said. Jesus' life provides a powerful example for our own. But self-improvement is not really the point of the Bible. The center of Christianity is not the self. It is Christ. (ch. 1)

George H. W. Bush reveres the age-old American values of white Christian statesmen. He defended America's need to readopt traditional Americanism. Clinton was a proponent of the rise of multicultural identities and his term was representative of his beliefs. He exalted minority groups with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. George W. Bush, on the other hand, followed in the footsteps of his father, even more aggressively, in his opinions of patriotism and national identity, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. As a result, people faced a new wave of nationalism coupled with religious fervor and the belief in spreading American values to the rest of the world. Although Clinton adopted centrist politics, his administration did not draw back from promoting the United States as the instigator of "human progress" (Lieven xii).

Individual identity is shaped through group identity (Huntington 22). Presidents locate themselves comfortably in American nationalism, Republicanism, Liberalism, and other group identities that constitute their own politics. Furthermore, their identities are constructed or “imagined” owing to the coercion of groups and individual preferences (Huntington 22). They pick and choose, but are also inevitably inclined to adopt identities based on their association with political parties, the presidency, and geography. Moreover, presidents are not alone in the construction of their selves of identity: “…identities are defined by the self but they are the product of the interaction between the self and others” (Huntington 23). Interactions with other politicians, family members, despotic rulers and the American public define how the president views himself. Having a Congressman father, George H. W. Bush describes conversations with other politicians before entering politics himself (ch. 2). His beliefs are shaped through his father and his political background. Clinton describes the beliefs of other Democrats and how he identifies with the party through these other individuals, particularly Lyndon B. Johnson (ch. 5-9). George W. Bush’s intense political identification with his father fuels his Republicanism. Circumstance is also relative to the discussion of identity and self (Huntington 24). Presidents are seen to elevate their presidential selves—which embrace a distinctly American identity—due to the situation they are in, which is the act of presidential life narrative. Presidential life writing becomes a space for the perpetuation of American identity in continuation of his predecessors.

In trying to define one’s self, a need arises for an “other” or an enemy (Huntington 24). The idea of being better than this particular enemy gives meaning to the self (Huntington 25). Thus, the motivation to defend one’s own identity and beliefs that it entails against an “other” emerges (Huntington 26). This holds true for presidential life narrative. Values of democracy, freedom, equality and individualism are contrasted with their opposites of non-existence in Middle Eastern countries and their rulers.

Daniel Howe claims Republicanism and liberalism have also been essential to understanding the American self throughout history (10). They have structured “early American political consciousness and institutions” (10), and still do. Republicanism and liberalism are both related to what is required to benefit the “common good” (11). While subscribers to the Republican ideology have believed moralism to be central to this common good, liberals have upheld individualism (11). Presidents, as both

Republicans and liberal Democrats, as believers of virtuousness and individualism, both pledge to work for the common good of the American people.

Furthermore, Thomas S. Langston claims in his article "Ideology and Ideologues in the Modern Presidency" that ideology is a dominant factor in presidential politics (735), and ideologies such as "Americanism" have become so ubiquitous in society that their ideological nature is not often criticized, but accepted as undeniable realities (735). Presidents are expected to adhere to certain ideologies (pertaining to American national identity) given their position (735). George H. W. Bush subscribed to beliefs of anti-Statism and enacted more conventionally democratic policies (in areas of education and environment), and Bill Clinton, a "New Democrat," was from the left in policies regarding trade and welfare (744). Contrary to senior Bush and Clinton's centrism in their domestic leadership, George W. Bush, on the other hand, was intensely compared to Ronald Reagan in his neoconservative understanding of foreign policy, the economy, and taxes. He subscribed to the belief that America was losing its powerful edge—and becoming "soft" (745). Nationalism, pro-war ideology, and unity were sub-ideologies of neo-conservatism (746).

In their life writing, the three presidents studied in this thesis both represent their parties' ideologies, as well as the widely accepted "American truths" of freedom and democracy. Presidents being the most legitimate "political storytellers," freedom has been a major rhetorical "device" for them (Coe 376-377). Kevin Coe states that the use of the word "freedom" by presidents has a direct relation to the "construction" of the United States and its people (Coe 378):

> …ideographs—such as freedom, justice, equality, and so on—are imbued with historical and cultural significance, which makes them especially likely to resonate with an audience. The normative risk is that this easy resonance will encourage presidents to invoke these symbols at the expense of more complete and considered deliberation. (Coe 377)

Through the fuse of political and private experiences and relationships, the modeling of the self on other selves such as other presidents and family members, acknowledgement of different subjectivities, and the projecting of a non-fragmented American identity, presidents aim to construct their selves as exemplary presidential selves. There is no evidence of an individual self; a traditional American presidential identity usurps upon the self or the narrated “I.”

CHAPTER II: POWER IN PRESIDENTIAL LIFE WRITING

While autobiography, memoir, and other practices of life writing are a medium for exercising agency—considering that they are life narratives shaped and constructed by their own subjects—theories revolving around discourse and power have shown this agency to be undermined greatly. “Power” is not simple to assess in life writing; it requires a critical perspective to lay out how it functions. In reading *All the Best*, *My Life*, and *Decision Points*, the order of events reveal a significant process in the narrative: a process beginning with the establishment of self which leads to the assertion and justification of power. The autobiographies begin with the early years of life, constructing the self through family, experience, and ideas, which ultimately give way to an attempt of establishing authority and claiming agency in their presidency. Through writing, they further attempt to justify and reinforce presidential power. This agency is compromised in turn by the external forces prevalent within the institutions these presidents exist.

The subject matter of these autobiographies is public knowledge. There will scarcely be an event, information, or even a photograph that has not been relayed to the public at large through the press, news broadcasts, speeches, biographies, history books, and presidential libraries. As a result, this may lead scholars to question what can be gained in reading these works. These works may not provide further knowledge about their main characters and history, but taken as constructions of historical narrative and self, they do give us a glimpse into the ways of presidential acts, presidential selves and presidential power: all constructs and parts of grand narratives. Presidents’ power is not only a representation of their own autonomy, but also a reflection of America’s status as superpower.

This chapter analyzes the concept of presidential power (in relation to Foucault’s conception of power and the president’s power in political science), how it functions globally in terms of foreign policy, and further dissect the approaches in these three presidential life narratives to both justify and regain the authority bestowed in presidents. George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George Bush attempt to reestablish their power in life writing by justifying the outcomes of their former decisions, acknowledging the perennial presidential self (in history), and engaging in political acts of persuasion and historicizing. The autobiographical "I" attempts to achieve this through his "truth," embracing his mistakes, acknowledging his historical presence and his relationship with America as a nation and people. By exemplifying such instances in these life narratives, conclusions regarding power can be drawn. It is also important to consider concepts such as authority, influence, and strength; while power can be an encompassing term for all these qualities, they are also used interchangeably when needed.

2.1. PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND ITS RELATION TO THE U.S. AS A GLOBAL POWER

In order to analyze the notion of power that is manifested by presidents in their life writing, the nature and source of power both in literature and the political institution of the presidency must be perceived. "Power" must be distinguished from "powers" as the former implies "personal influence" while the latter can be described as constitutional authorities bestowed in presidents (Neustadt ix). From Foucault's perspective, juridical power is:

> …taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate, wither wholly or partially, through a legal act or through some act that establishes a right…power is that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established. (*Power/Knowledge* 88)

However, Foucault, in *Power/Knowledge,* prefers a different analysis of power; power should be analyzed through relations, and thus, through "repression" and the "struggle" or "war" this produces, rather than as a right someone possesses (90). Furthermore, the individual is born from power while it is at the same its "vehicle" (98). The presidency ultimately creates the president subject and defines it through multiple power struggles in the form of relationships with "others" other countries, other government branches and other ideologues). Power should be studied not simply as something that is possessed by an individual agent, but as something that is defined through relations (98). Power, in this sense, can define the constituents in a relationship. Presidents, Congress, the American public, former presidents, and dictators are all in a relationship imbued with power; similarly America is in a power relationship with the Middle East.

George W. Bush states in *All the Best*, "…the institution of the presidency is more important than the person who holds it" (ch. 4); in other words, the system has the capacity to subdue the president, making him insignificant in the grander scheme of events. The president is merely a "subject." Presidential power is empowering in the sense it gives its subject the authority to act and decide as world leaders, but suppressing of individual agency in the sense that presidents are inclined to act in accordance with a historical and political model and are subject to forces that threaten to confiscate their power. The presidential subject seeks out this power—which he exercises but also submits to—for this is where the president finds meaning and existence. "President" as a subject position has shaped his identity and allowed for his self to find validity. Power has become synonymous with president and the president's actions are regarded as exercises of power. Thus, this action/power is ultimately where the self can exist.

While there is always an "A" who assumes power over a "B," there is also a "C" (culture) that controls the field in which "A" and "B" engage with each other (Favre et al. 249). Culture not only influences the "self," but it is vital to understanding how power functions. American ideals are utilized in constructing fitting narratives in which the United States and the Middle East can interact with one another. Similarly, these ideals are central to the interaction or power play between the president and his subjects/audience/the American people.

According to Raymie E. McKerrow in "Foucault's Relationship to Rhetoric," power can be seen as constructing truths (as well as being created by them), defining subjects, and pervading relationships between these subjects (264-266). Nevertheless, agency is possible, although an individual subject may seem trapped in a power relation (267). The action one takes in a specific "space" affects what one can do, their limitations based on the workings of discourse, or the possibility of changing the discourse (268). Presidents claim to disclose their “truth,” what really happened during their terms through their eyes, in hopes of creating a discourse of truth which may dominate history and affect their legacies. However, presidential life writing is a space in which the president is limited by his predecessors—presidents who came before him and have produced life narratives. Although the presidents clearly attempt to affect the historical narrative, they yield to prior practices.

The concept of presidential power is difficult to define in terms of its parameters and features. It is important to analyze the nature of presidential power, for it is explicitly acknowledged, referred to, analyzed and critiqued by presidents themselves in their life writing. The presidency is a constantly evolving position that is not solely confined to the Constitution. American presidents hold various powers assigned to the executive branch, such as the power to veto legislation, issue executive orders, sign statements, and control the actions of the military as commander in chief, according to Andrew Reeves and and Jon C. Rogowski in “Public Opinion Toward Presidential Power” (744). These powers may be observed as unilateral undertakings; however, their implementation often involves consideration of public opinion (744). Presidential power is always contingent on popular support (745). Presidents’ reputations are a main component of presidential power. Higher approval ratings enable further exploitation of power given to presidents (742). While Americans have been found to be skeptical and disapproving of vast presidential powers (751), higher support and approval of an individual president has garnered higher support for presidential powers (755). Life writing is an opportunity to gain that public approval which legitimizes presidential power.

The presidential right to issue executive orders implies ultimate authority and power (over the legislative branch of government), but Andrew Rudalevige argues that executive orders are no longer based on a president’s personal inclination but rather they reflect discussion and persuasion within the executive branch (138). Even Congress can be instrumental in the issuance of executive orders (153). Executive orders are not mere reflections of unilateral power (156). Nonetheless, the Constitution does not clearly expound on executive orders (145), which allows for presidents to manipulate their constitutional rights.

Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell state in their article "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power," that one of the first political scientists to point at the personal aspect of presidential power, Richard Neustadt's theories revolve around power's individualistic source; skillful leadership, personal experience, and stature (Moe and Howell 850). Richard Neustadt studies presidential power through "presidential weakness" in his book *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (first published in 1960), claiming that weakness stems from the president's abilities not meeting expectations (ix). The president's abilities are entwined with the governing authority bestowed upon Congress, the judiciary, and the media (x). While these other entities are limiting of the president's power; a president's reputation is where he draws power from; "…power rests not only on official authority but also on the subjective views of others…" x). Neustadt claims that the Constitution allows for power to be shared among the branches of government (29). When power is shared among different institutions, the president becomes compelled to persuade (30). Furthermore, Neustadt believes that power should be considered prospectively, that is, the effects produced through presidential acts are essentially the markers of power (xi).

However, Moe and Howell assert that at the turn of the century, views on the matter shifted and an institutional outlook on presidential power gained prominence; unilateral powers, that are perhaps inadvertently granted by the Constitution, place presidents in a position of authority to make laws (850-851). Presidential power defines the presidency for it is not precisely addressed in the Constitution, and it provokes presidents to constantly seek for more of it (Moe and Howell 852). The ambiguity of the Constitution on executive powers has led to a "struggle over the allocation of power and the practical rights" (853) and this struggle has dramatically changed the modern governmental institution "in favor of presidents" (Moe and Howell 852-853). Some presidents are known to have pushed the limits within their time in office, depending on the amount of authority they choose to claim (Seymour-Ure 3). For George H. W. Bush, intervention in the Gulf War proves to be a legitimate opportunity to exercise presidential power: "I believed strongly that the constitution gave me the authority to send our troops into battle without Congress officially declaring war" (ch.13). Presidential power has become so vast in capacity; "…the Constitution's incomplete contract sets up a governing structure that virtually invites presidential imperialism" (Moe and Howell 856). On the question of presidents' motivation to take unilateral action and expand their powers, scholars deduce that the aftermath of a presidential term is influential:

> Broadly speaking, however, it is fair to say that most presidents have put great emphasis on their legacies and, in particular, on being regarded in the eyes of history as strong and effective leaders. They have a brief period of time—four years, perhaps eight—to establish a record of accomplishments, and to succeed they must exercise as much control over government and its outcomes as they can. For this they need power—which, as Neustadt (1960) reminds us, is the foundation of presidential success. (Moe and Howell 854)

Nevertheless, the people have held the president accountable for the government's success in dealing with issues (Moe and Howell 854), which has led presidents to seek actions that are favored (Moe and Howell 871).

The three works of life writing in question portray power as something the authors possessed in the past during their terms. Their life writing is a means of reestablishing power and agency (albeit a form of soft power exercised through authorship) devoid of the oppressing powers of Congress, other political actors, media and historical interpretation. Past and present, two inextricable realms in which life writing works, support each other in a way which transmits authority; for the past authorizes the present to tell the story and the present allows for the past to persuade (Birkerts 16). Another vital source of presidents' power and rhetoric found in life writing is the United States' status of power observed in international relations. These presidents are empowered by the cultural, historical and ideological background of the nation they lead. Their foreign policies both reflect and perpetuate a system of power that is reinforced by ideological aspects and was established before them.

The presidential life narratives of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush extensively cover their foreign policy decisions, their relationship with the Middle

East and their autocratic rulers, justification of their decisions of intervention and the exercise of American global power. Examining America's relationship with other countries through Foucault's definition of power reveals a vital function of these presidential life narratives: Their defense and justification (of their power) is actually not for their own selves; it is a defense for American power in the world. This power relation with the Middle East defines America as well as the president.

Since 1989 and the growing threat of terrorism—alternatively, the creation of an "other" as Samuel Huntington says or the construction of a "discourse of terrorist threat" as Melani McAlister puts it (200)—the character of American leadership has changed or become refined (Crockatt 19-20). As stated in *A World Transformed* (2011), co-authered by George H. W. Bush and his former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, detailing US foreign policy during the first Bush administration, "The US soon found that it had to lead the international community in finding innovative ways to deal with terrorism" (Foreword). Bush and Scowcroft staunchly defend the right of the U.S. authority and leadership in the Middle East and the world. Their stance on power is that it is derived from a sense of a nationalistic American "self":

> Reawakening an understanding of self, of promise, and of optimism is the first step in finding our new role, one not reactive or habitual, but based instead on who we are and what we seek. Yet rarely has the nation been more divided than it is now. Without a sense of who we are at home, we cannot know who we are or what we wish to be abroad. It is time to bridge differences, and build on the nation we have been. It is an era to fulfill the promise of potential. (Brent and Scowcroft, Foreword)

This idealistic version of American power is relevant to studying presidential life writing, for these works employ the relationship of the United States with the world to portray American identity and ideals, and justify presidential power in relation to America's power. Power corresponds to the possession by a state of assets it can leverage to shape events in international politics in the pursuit of its national interests. Power is multidimensional: it includes military, economic and ideational elements. It is also relative: a state is powerful to the extent that its rivals are weaker (Juneau 40). These presidents discuss the different elements of power in their life writing.

In the last chapter of his book, Clinton comments on the significance of American military power and the president's power as Commander in Chief. Clinton's depiction of the military portrays it as an all-powerful organization that uses its power to protect and defend peoples not just in the U.S., but all over the world:

> Being President carries no greater honor than being Commander in Chief of men and women of every race and religion…They are the living embodiment of our national creed, *E pluribus unum.* I had seen them cheered in refugee camps in the Balkans, helping the victims of disasters in Central America, working against narco-traffickers in Colombia and the Caribbean…standing guard in the deserts of the Middle East… (ch. 55)

On American power that is economical, George W. Bush states that free markets and capitalism are transformative of nations into spaces of opportunity (ch. 14). In a letter to the leader of the People's Republic of China Deng Xiaoping, George H. W. Bush discusses the ideational aspect of American power:

> …the principles on which my young country was founded…are democracy and freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of assemblage, freedom from arbitrary authority. It is reverence for those principles which inevitably affects the way Americans view and react to events in other countries. It is not a reaction of arrogance or of a desire to force others to our beliefs but of a simple faith in the enduring value of those principles and their enduring universal applicability. (ch. 12)

Arguing that religion is at the forefront of political motivations, John M. Owen argues, "American presidents who talk of a divine mission to spread liberty are using such language and symbols to aggrandize themselves and their wealthy constituents" (303). The objectives of the United States—particularly in the Middle East—of establishing freedom, peace and democracy are reiterated by its chief leader in order to preserve their personal reputations as well as continue an agenda of power in the global arena. George H. W. Bush, in a letter to the Syrian president, states that Gulf War was just the beginning of a "peace process." He urges the president to join him in spreading "peace to a part of the world that has too often known war" (ch. 14). Bill Clinton, in his undertaking of ending the Palestinan-Israeli conflict, claims that achieving peace was the ultimate goal (ch. 55). By the same token, George W. Bush claims, in the beginning of the chapter dealing with his decision to go to war with Iraq, that Operation Iraqi

Freedom was launched for the purpose of assuring world peace (ch. 8). The president's interests are closely tied to US global interests. Freedom, in particular, is needed for power's existence ("The Subject and Power" 790). The language of freedom is heavily employed by presidents in order to keep the power relation alive.

William Kristol and Robert Kagan claimed in their article "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy" (1996) that the United States needed to assume its position in the international arena as a "benevolent global hegemony" (20). This stemmed from the need to uphold American principles internationally (20). Foreign countries' continuing necessity for American troops to establish or maintain peace posits an argument for America as superpower (20-21). Other countries' vulnerability poses an opportunity for US power; "Most of the world's major powers welcome US global involvement and prefer America's benevolent hegemony to the alternatives" (21). Kristol and Kagan, calling for a "neo-Reaganite" conservatism that employs a more active foreign policy, acknowledge the lack of awareness and education of the American public for the purpose of supporting the U.S.'s "international mission"—this awareness they claim is indispensable (27). Kristol and Kagan claim that "History…shows…that the American people can be summoned to meet the challenges of global leadership if statesmen make the case loudly, cogently, and persistently" (29). These presidential life narratives are an example of the persistent propaganda of American power—bloody conflicts in other countries initiated by the U.S. are topics and themes that are exhausted with the purpose of defense.

Kristol and Kagan further argue that American values are not only American but also universal, and that America has the responsibility to protect them worldwide. The "monsters" of the world that threaten these values can be repressed or removed altogether by the U.S., for the U.S. has that power (31). With previous presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, and American "exceptionalism" as inspiration (32), the U.S. is inevitably compelled to assume power. Exceptionalism connotes America amounting to a world on its own (Crockatt 16); it entails a stance that is "inclusive and exclusive, outward looking and deeply chauvinist, internationalist and nationalist" (Crockatt 18). American "exceptionalism" is typified by notions of freedom and equality; Americans have accepted but also questioned this ideal for its chauvinism (Altschuler 501). Nevertheless, exceptionalism has provided America a source of rationalization to fall back on for justifying its foreign policy actions; and it has been enforced through "missionary zeal" and "visceral military power" (Christie xx).

Richard Crockatt in *After 9/11,* draws attention to the underlying cultural implications of American power exercised globally: "…the policies of the Bush administration are rooted in assumptions which underpin American culture" (2-3). Culture is a source of coercion; being "dynamic" and "intangible" when compared to other types of power (military, economic, etc.), it is often correlated to soft power and underestimated in impact (3). Culture is power's weapon: "…power depends on culture to manifest and function" (Favre et al. 246). American values, which a lot of Americans accept as obvious "truth," are expected to be accepted across the board (Crockatt 5).

Clinton, in his 1992 acceptance speech for being nominated as the Democratic candidate for president, quotes one of his professors who said, "America was the greatest nation in history…" (ch. 27). This was a political inspiration for Clinton and it says something about American culture and beliefs (Crockatt 6). This idea of greatness is something many, if not all, politicians give credence to. It harbors within it the exalted American ideals of exceptionalism, democracy, and freedom. George H. W. Bush's assertion of a "New World Order" and Clinton's idea of "democratic enlargement" have been used as tools of legitimization of military intervention overseas (Crockatt 20). They were a consequence of need for a new vision in a new world with redefined international relations (Crockatt 134). Furthermore, cultural rationality for wars allows presidents to avoid blame for faulty policy (Crockatt 56). George W. Bush, in his State of the Union Address, says, "America is a nation with a mission and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs." Crockatt claims that this type of rhetoric with moralistic undertones is not novel; in fact, it can be found in other presidents' speeches dating back a couple of centuries (10-11). The campaign for democracy in American foreign policy ever since the end of the Cold War has borne the belief that democracy is or should be universal; however, it risks becoming the most recent manifestation of imperialism (Crockatt 56-57).

A unique and idealized conviction of "Americanism" has been central to discussions surrounding American foreign policy. It is largely associated with extreme nationalism, national unity, and compliance with certain principles (Crockatt 111). However, the belief that hostility towards military intervention in the Middle East stems from "anti-Americanism" has proven to be false. Foreign resistance to or objection of American values and culture is not a generalized truth (Crockatt 94). Rather, the failure of policy and use of excessive power to implement self-serving American values led to the anti-American sentiments in the Middle East.

According to Melani McAlister, from the 1980s onwards, academic circles, journalists, and writers became preoccupied with the subjects of terrorism and America's handling of it (223). This produced a discourse or widespread "knowledge" on the matter (223)—military interventionism against terrorism was justified on the grounds that tyrants threatened the domestic sphere or the private realm, which is families (250). "Terrorism's presence on the world stage enabled a narrative that constructed the United States as an imperiled private sphere and the Islamic Middle East as the preeminent politicized space from which terrorism effected its invasions…that narrative had worked to produce a certain kind of American identity…" (234). Furthermore, conservatives were criticizing liberal academia for doing away with democracy and "challenging the idea of timeless values and universal truths" (248) during this time. American power was under threat within its own nation. The media, literature, and scholarly teaching and writing were held responsible for restoring faith.

The accounts of involvement with the Middle East and foreign policy in general takes up a considerable portion of the life writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Their justifications of US intervention depend heavily on antagonism towards figures such as Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden; the drive to endorse freedom, democracy, and peace; and the protection of innocent lives. While their justifications read in a limited context seem to be convincing, scholarly work on the following widely covered events prove otherwise. Concerns over overreaching power within government and abroad, and problems with the motivations behind military action have further complicated the role of the U.S. as superpower. War is defended as a means of protecting populations and their existence (*The History of Sexuality* 137).

As Jeffrey A. Engel states, George H. W. Bush was not known for generally making public statements or employing rhetoric on his administration's policies, nor for having an extensive collection of documents he left behind to shape the majority of the public's opinion on his foreign policy acts (25). Nevertheless, his foreign policies attracted more attention in the post-presidential years (26). Furthermore, his articulation was hindered by his predisposition to "words that came to him naturally" (27). This is mirrored in his life writing, for he resorts to diary entries and letters more than writing in an autobiographical voice. However much he desires to come off "natural," rhetoric is ingrained in presidential writing; there are multifarious mentions of Bush's "vision" in *All the Best:* "I have a vision of America as a strong, purposeful, compassionate, nation in need of new leadership for the decade…" (ch. 8). His speeches pertaining to the United States' role in international leadership has been deemed reminiscent of previous presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman (Engel 32).

The world was changing as the Cold War came to an end, not by virtue of Bush; his presidential term has been marked with non-preferred stability in such changing times and his lack of rhetorical speech, often the trademark of successful presidents, proved his preference for being reserved and hesitancy in international affairs (27). Bush adopted a rather outdated vision for diplomacy—identical to the post World War II "American led international order" (27), which was reliant on age-old American aphorisms such as "democracy" and "freedom" (29). He was only another president that believed in America's leadership in the world (29). The Cold War's outcomes gave the impression American values were finally corroborated; democracy had prevailed over communism. Thus, these values' appeal only strengthened. Consequently, Bush applied what he learned from the Cold War in his presidency (30).

George H. W. Bush's presidency is mostly remembered for the Persian Gulf War, which took place in 1991 after Iraq invaded Kuwait under the rule of Saddam Hussein, and ended with Iraqi forces withdrawing. In *All the Best*, H. W. Bush mentions he has bipartisan support for military action policy regarding the situation of Iraq and Kuwait (ch. 13). In the aftermath of Iraqi threats to "detain foreigners," Bush notes in his diary: "Another blatant disregard of international law by a cruel and ruthless dictator. I cannot tolerate, nor will I, another Tehran. I am determined in that. It may cost American lives, but we cannot sacrifice American principle and American leadership…" (ch. 13). Referencing the Iran hostage crisis (1979-81), Bush displays an early determination to take military action as president. Throughout his letters, diary entries and notes, he deliberately states that Saddam Hussein is the ultimate target of the U.S.'s condemnation. He also states his hopefulness about the intervention citing the public's support as well as government officials. He later expresses awareness of the importance of public approval: "I'm worried that the American people might think this will be another Vietnam and it isn't and it won't be" (ch. 13).

Bush believes his executive powers are justified when sending American troops into Kuwait, even though Congress refrains from the declaration of a war (ch. 13). Presidential power outperforms Congress; the will of the president is the reflection of American power in the world. In a letter addressed to Saddam Hussein himself, but never sent, Bush warns Hussein against failing to recognize "America's will" and urges him to evacuate Kuwait, stating that Iraq's continued presence will be detrimental for Iraq's future as this is "a war between Iraq and the world" (ch. 14). Furthermore, Bush acts in accordance with the UN Security Council and an international coalition in his decision to interfere in the Gulf War, but ultimately realizes Congress's support as being vital in going forward. He writes a letter to the Speaker of the House, urging Congress to officially announce its support for the UN Security Council Resolution and the president, stating that this would strengthen chances for peace and send a message of unity (ch. 14). Bush believes in multilateralism—cooperation with international allies as well as administration officials—in achieving his ideal of international superintendence (Engel 29).

H. W. Bush describes going to war with Iraq/Saddam as "standing up against evil" (ch. 14); he constantly defends his position by directing attention to the plight of Kuwait and innocent people suffering under brutal dictatorship. This war, for Bush, is part of the United States' responsibility in restoring peace and democracy in the Middle East. After

Operation Desert Storm has been launched and 148 American lives lost, Bush records his thoughts on the objective of the war: “Our goal is not the elimination of Saddam Hussein, and yet in many ways it’s the only answer in order to get a new start for Iraq in the family of nations” (ch. 14). One hundred hours later, and after Iraq decided to withdraw its troops from Kuwait, Bush ends the war. He expresses disappointment in not being able to completely eliminate Saddam but stands behind his decision to cease war for he believes the U.S. accomplished what it set out to do (ch. 14). Nonetheless, defeating Iraq in Kuwait helped to supersede the American defeat in the Vietnam War (Engel 33).

Steven Hurst in his article argues that the Bush administration’s shifting objectives for interfering in the Gulf created an avoidable public discontent with the war. While the public’s disillusionment cannot be deciphered through *All the Best*, this discontent is expressed through Bush himself in the concluding diary entries and letters concerning the outcome of the war. Furthermore, Hurst believes Bush developed the consensus that the involvement of the United States in the Gulf War was unsuccessful despite polls showing public satisfaction with foreign policy prior to action (376-377). He claims that initially, thwarting Saddam Hussein was not an objective, but public support required a more legitimate goal (377-378). Bush clearly reveals it as an undisclosed, but underlying, objective in a diary entry several weeks before the war: “…I am convinced more than ever that we can knock Saddam Hussein out early…” (ch. 13). He also addresses this indeterminate objective in *A World Transformed*: “As to dealing with Saddam personally, I worried he would emerge from the war weakened but as a ‘hero’ still in charge. We discussed again whether to go after him. None of us minded if he was killed in the course of an air attack.” (ch. 18). Although Saddam was not pursued directly, the idea of his elimination was definitely a desired outcome of the Gulf War. He was the “other” in this equation of power.

While concerns over oil are claimed to have underpinned the objectives of the war, Bush has backtracked on this as a consequence of backlash (Hurst 379). In his book, on the other hand, there is only one reference to oil in regard to the war; in a letter to Saddam: “…the United States will not tolerate the use of chemical or biological weapons or the destruction of Kuwait's oil fields and installations" (ch. 14). Bush clearly refrains from acknowledging US oil interests, but focuses on Saddam's brutality in painting a picture of the war. George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft (in a joint voice) write on the implications of the Gulf War in *A World Transformed*:

> The Gulf War became, in many ways, the bridge between the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. At the outset, the Baker-Shevardnadze press conference, when the United States and the Soviet Union stood together against Iraqi aggression, was epochal. It symbolized the changing US-Soviet relationship. Superpower cooperation opened vistas of a world where, unlike the previous four decades, the permanent members of the UN Security Council could move to deal with aggression in the manner intended by its framers.
>
> But the war's impact on international relations went beyond breaking the diplomatic logjam in the United Nations. The United States had recognized and shouldered its peculiar responsibility for leadership in tackling international challenges, and won wide acceptance for this role around the globe. American political credibility and influence had skyrocketed. We stood almost alone on the world stage in the Gulf Crisis, with the Soviets at best in sometimes reluctant support. Our military reputation grew as well…The result was that we emerged from the Gulf conflict into a very different world from that prior to the attack on Kuwait. (ch. 19)

This perspective shows the tendency to define periods of time by war and thus, by power. American power not only defines the presidency, but also the world and international relations; it positions other nations and leaders in the system/relations of power which Foucault describes in "The Subject and Power." Saddam and Iraq are the "other" upon whose actions the U.S. and the UN react to and exercise power. This becomes the "New World Order," or new system of power, as defined by Bush.

During Bill Clinton's presidency, although recalled as one of economic prosperity, new jobs, and peaceful conduct in foreign affairs, the absence of a clear-cut full fledged American "war" obscures the reality of the Clinton administration's decisions of violent interaction with multiple countries. In June 1993, a missile attack was launched against Iraq for attempting to assassinate George H. W. Bush (Clinton ch. 33). In October, American troops were sent off to Haiti in order to support the democratization of Haiti and were met with resistance from the Haitian military. In *My Life*, Clinton refers to Congress as an obstacle in conducting his foreign policy: "I spent much of the rest of

October dealing with the aftermath of Somalia and fending off efforts in Congress to limit my ability to commit American troops to Haiti and Bosnia" (ch. 36). In "The Law: The Clinton Theory of the War Power," David Gray Adler argues Clinton did not require Congress's authorization of these actions (Adler 159-160). In the following two years, the U.S. and NATO issued air strikes in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Clinton firmly opposed congressional restrictions to his unilateral decision making process in conducting foreign policy and relied on organizations such as NATO and international relations for approval of military intervention overseas (Adler 160-161). Furthermore, missile strikes were ordered by Clinton in Afghanistan and Sudan where Osama Bin Laden was known to have been residing. Bin Laden had been on the U.S. radar since American embassies in Africa were bombed in 1998 (Adler 162). It is argued that this command was "arbitrary and usurpatious" for not being recognized by Congress (Adler 162). Clinton defends himself against such accusations in his life writing by mentioning that he was credited for having one of the highest success rates in passing bills through Congress in the first year of the presidency (ch. 36).

In efforts to expose Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, Clinton contemplated using force, but conceded when an agreement was established by UN officials. The eventual failure of this agreement led to Clinton resuming and carrying out his previous plan of bombing Iraq (Adler 162): "Clinton's abuse of power, as gross as it was, was but a prelude to Clinton's assertion in Yugoslavia of an unlimited, unreviewable, unilateral presidential war power" (163). In order to avert the ethnic cleansing taking place in the former country of Yugoslavia, Clinton decided to strike cooperatively with NATO allies. It was "the most intensive and sustained military campaign since the Vietnam War" (163). Although the issue of intervening in Yugoslavia was taken up in Congress, the House vetoed the proposal, making it constitutionally impossible to declare war. However, this decision did not hinder Clinton's power to order military action (Adler 163). Although Clinton's unilateral actions triggered legal action by members of Congress, the case failed to impede Clinton's war power; Clinton's supporters argued the indeterminacy of the Constitution in matters of when, how, and by whom war is declared (Adler 165). In his life writing, Clinton states that he had congressional support to order attacks in Yugoslavia (ch. 52), contradicting other historical records.

Clinton describes the events leading up to the retaliatory attacks in Afghanistan and Sudan, in hopes of ending bin Laden and his terrorist network al-Qaeda. The American embassies located in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed and resulted in 257 casualties, 12 of which were of American nationality. Clinton particularly remarks on the innocence and "Americanness" of these 12 individuals (ch. 48). Clinton rebukes bin Laden for believing he was "free to play God by killing innocent people" (ch. 48). After the CIA and FBI affirm suspicions of al-Qaeda's culpability and intelligence points to further attacks, Clinton and his staff are decided on striking bin Laden and his terrorist organization. Although some worry that the coinciding impeachment trial would complicate matters: "They were afraid that it would make me reluctant to strike, or that if I did order the attack, I would be accused of doing it to divert public attention from my problems, especially if the attack didn't get bin Laden" (Clinton ch. 48). Clinton concludes that national security was of utmost importance and not to be intermingled with his personal problems. He later issues orders for air strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan. Clinton states that Congress generally approved of the orders (ch. 49).

Adler argues that Bill Clinton defies the Constitution in numerous instances regarding US military action in foreign countries, and exercises power that he (constitutionally) does not possess. While Clinton's administration has attempted to vindicate his unilateral decisions by suggesting they are in fact constitutional, at other times Clinton has defended his own right to decide on foreign policy (156). As the commander in chief, he possesses the authority to declare war and make ultimate decisions regarding the United States' security (156). Adler contests Clinton's version of presidential power, claiming that the Constitution is deliberately designed to restrict an all-powerful executive (157). Clinton, while avoiding discussing his foreign policy decisions in light of the Constitution and Congress's verdict, states his belief in greater executive power; he signs legislation that grants the president a line-item veto, even though some members of Congress believe it to be an "unconstitutional infringement on the legislative branch by the executive" (ch. 46). The Constitution and Congress have both yielded their authority to the president, as Adler acknowledges:

> But with the immense accretion of presidential power in the post-cold war era,

> congressional fires have been damped and the congressional control of the war power has been eclipsed. Suddenly, rapacious, aggressive, and impatient presidents have turned to unilateral war making, leaving constitutional norms in their wake. The tides of power, which once flowed steadily from congressional control, now run toward the executive … [P]ower has replaced law, usurpation has replaced amendment, and executive fiat has replaced constitutionalism. (167)

Following the Clinton administration and its exercises of power, George W. Bush's term further established the power of the U.S. presidency and its role internationally. According to Richard Crockatt, September 11 changed the relationship between national and international interests for the United States; domestic policy became dependent on foreign policy (157). National security depended on the containment of foreign dictators. However, foreign policy's objectives were often misguided during the latter Bush presidency. Around 2006, the deteriorating situation in Iraq led to questioning of the American logic behind war. The cultural reasoning or rhetoric in support of the war loses its force when policies fail (159). Presidents and their administrations assumed American values could be enforced in countries like Iraq, but they ultimately failed (217-219). There was no real correlation between the Iraq War and the September 11 attacks. Insufficient evidence led to unsuccessful planning and ultimate disillusionment among the people (218). Names such as "Operation Enduring Freedom" and "Operation Iraqi Freedom" for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were put together recklessly and ignorantly (220). America's presumed universal values were not actually universal and did not have relevance in Iraq (221). The war also changed Bush and the presidency as an institution. Bush's image was an "amiable" and "moderate" one, as opposed to when he left office as someone who assigned a new meaning to presidential power; the Iraq War came to be seen as the president's "maximalist use of power" (Lemann 27).

Bush states in *Decision Points* that he exhaust all options on deterring Saddam Hussein before deciding on going to war (ch. 8). However, threats and sanctions imposed were all in order to force Saddam to reveal his weapons of mass destruction. With no actual weapons to come clean about, Bush's justification eventually turned out to be beside the point. In *Decision Points,* he goes on to give reasons for his decision to confront Saddam Hussein with war, stating Saddam's unruly and violent behavior towards his own people and neighboring countries, his connections to terrorists, and his attacks against the U.S. pilots (ch. 7). George W. Bush's national speeches, prior to the invasion of Iraq, demonstrate deception; the linkage of the September 11 attacks, al-Qaeda, and Iraq (Fritz et al. 2) allowed the president to enact his agenda of war. In *Decision Points,* Bush fails to acknowledge his false public statements—based on the location of trailers possibly used to develop weapons—confirming the discovery of weapons of mass destruction (Fritz et al. 3). Bush's twisting of truths, or subtle lies, have gone largely undetected and helped him promote most of his administration's policies (Fritz et al. 4).

Furthermore, in his eighth chapter Bush details intelligence briefings and the professional opinion of his staff members, much of which was in support of the Iraq War and Saddam's alleged weapons. Later in the chapter, Bush asserts the future of Iraq and its people to be of utmost significance for his administration, claiming that well thought out plans helped to relatively secure peace in the region along with the "rebuilding of schools and hospitals" (ch. 8). Bush concludes that the media ignored the "upsides" of the war. While expressing regret for not finding any WMD, he relays his perspective of the outcome as such: "As I record these thoughts more than seven years after American troops liberated Iraq, I strongly believe that removing Saddam from power was the right decision…America is safer…The region is more hopeful with a young democracy…" (ch. 8). On Bush's relation to the war, Thomas S. Langston states:

> For Bush, the war to remove Saddam Hussein from power was an act of redemption on multiple levels. In his view, his bold action redeemed the nation's honor after the weakness shown by his own father in ending the Persian Gulf War with Hussein still in place. It redeemed, as well, the nation's eschatological role as a uniquely good country with an exceptional mission to bring God's gift of freedom to the world. And, of course, it was the climax of a story of personal redemption whose foundation was laid in a troubled early adulthood. (745)

According to James P. Pfiffner, similar to Clinton, George W. Bush, during his term, pushed the limits of presidential power and paved the way for future presidents and their legal capacity to exercise power (728). As an example, hundreds of suspected terrorists were detained after the war in Afghanistan was launched. They were sent to the notorious naval base in Guantanamo and tortured for information. The procedures enacted were approved by the government (728-729). Although rules and regulations for handling captives belongs to Congress, according to the Constitution, the Bush administration defended its actions based on the grounds that the president possesses power as commander in chief (728-729). In *Decision Points,* Bush describes Guantanamo as a "model prison," hailed as such by a Belgian official, where prisoners were given copies of the Quran, efficient medical care, and even opportunities to watch DVDs (ch. 6). He goes so far as to defend the highly criticized torture method of waterboarding, claiming that "Had I not authorized waterboarding on senior al Qaeda leaders, I would have had to accept a greater risk that the country would be attacked" (ch. 6). Furthermore, Bush made a habit of signing statements to curtail the effects of laws that hindered his personal discretion on matters, issuing over a thousand disputes to laws (Pfiffner 732). He launched the President's Surveillance Program, allowing the NSA to observe communication regarding foreign intelligence (730). It created controversy later on when it was discovered that unlawful monitoring was occurring—although, it continued (731).

John Dumbrell claims in his article "Unilateralism and 'America First'? President George W. Bush's Foreign Policy," that George W. Bush and his administration's policies were drawn towards an "irresponsible, 'America First' unilateralism" (279). Bush's policies going forward with war in Afghanistan and Iraq displayed national interests at the forefront; the protection of oil supplies in the Middle East seemed to trump efforts of capturing the culprits of 9/11 (Dumbrell 285). While Bush expresses concern over America's "alleged" oil interests in the Middle East, as he states, "Others alleged that America's real intent was to control Iraq's oil or satisfy Israel. Those theories were false. I was sending our troops into combat to protect the American people" (ch. 8); he contradicts himself in the same chapter, and many times throughout the book: "I worried about Saddam sabotaging the oil fields…" (ch. 8). Bush's objectives for the war are unapologetic (in references to oil), but also wrapped in the discourse of freedom: "If anything, the consequences of defeat in Iraq would be even worse than in Vietnam. We would leave al Qaeda with a safe haven in a country with vast oil reserves. We would embolden a hostile Iran in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. We would shatter the hopes of people taking risks for freedom across the Middle East"

(Bush ch.12).

Military-wise, the U.S. is the supreme force in the Middle East (Juneau 40-41). In terms of ideational power, or power that comes from ideas/principles, the United States lost its leverage with the Iraq War (Juneau 47). From George W. Bush's administration and onward, the situation has turned bleak for the United States' ideational power; ideas have lost their credibility in conducting foreign policy, especially in the Middle East (Juneau 47). Presidential life writing serves to reinstate some of this credibility; however, it fails in its mission to do so; ideational power does not work on the assumption of universalizing American values; the failure to restore peace in the Middle East proves this. The United States' relationship with the Middle East and the wars waged by the U.S. presidents is reflective of the modern system of sovereign power that Foucault discusses. It involves maintaining the life of America through the destruction of other countries. The Constitution, in this system, is the "normalizing" or rationalizing asset in exercising power (*The History of Sexuality* 144). The growing powers of presidents (regardless of the constitutional and congressional limits) in their conduct with foreign countries may be characterized by Foucault's notion of a situational power: "The exercise of power is not a naked fact, an institutional right, nor is it a structure which holds out or is smashed: it is elaborated, transformed, organized; it endows itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation" ("The Subject and Power" 792).

2.2. REESTABLISHING POWER IN PRESIDENTIAL NARRATIVE

George H. W. Bush's defeat in his second time running for president along with an economic recession he left behind, Bill Clinton's impeachment due to sexual misconduct and obstruction of justice, and George W. Bush's failed foreign policy regarding weapons of mass destruction left them in a state of powerlessness. After a presidency ends, a president finds himself stripped of institutional power. The loss of executive authority coupled with the disappearance of constant press coverage leaves former presidents in a state of stagnancy and inability. This is where an incentive to engage in autobiographical act develops. Life writing gives the illusion of an opportunity to recapture presidential voice and influence that was once essential to their status and roles.

There is no question, and it has since long been established, that literature bears power. While most assume its power for individuals, the power that is endowed in groups of people, nations, and governments cannot be overlooked. Life writing, may be considered more powerful than other genres because of its relation to the referential world. Essentially, life narrative is "authoritative" (Couser viii). The act of the narrator narrating his/her own life, a life that has a real referent, allows the writer of life writing to claim a certain type of authority. Claims of truthfulness and rhetoric are employed to convince readers that what they are consuming through autobiography is factual, historical, and thus, powerful. This power does not exalt the individual president in question, but it gives more significance to the presidential subject in general, as a national leader and writer of presidential life writing.

David Zarefsky, in his article "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," examines the significance of rhetoric and the element of "definition" in "presidential performance" (609). He claims that presidential rhetoric "defines political reality" and that his eminent status in the political sphere allows for him to make definitions and shape the public's perspective on matters—for example, Bush defining 9/11 as a "war" (611-612). Although the attacks shared certain features—attack and casualties—with a war, they did not target a government or its military, and neither did any country declare war on each other when pursuing the attacks. The president's definition of it as such induced the desired reaction; the nation came together in support of the president on patriotic grounds (617). This definition was widely accepted (618). Presidents' main audiences are statesmen and the press; the public, on the other hand, receive presidential messages through the media's rendition of them (611).

Zarefsky identifies three aspects of presidential rhetoric to be studied: the "relationship between messages and audiences," "rhetor and text," and "the text and the rhetorical critic" (609). In other words, rhetoric can be studied for how it influences public opinion, how it portrays a president's principles and beliefs, and how it is a "work of practical art," in the sense that it is literary/artistic through its attachment to deeper meanings (609-610). These narratives justify political policies, acts and beliefs through religion and American ideals. Presidents as rhetors speak on behalf of the nation and its people. While the rhetor chooses his methods of persuasion considering his audience, the audience is not only affected by rhetoric but is influential in assigning meaning through interpretation (608-609). To exemplify this:

> President Bush employed frame shifting in his *ex post facto* justification for the 2003 war in Iraq. When no weapons of mass destruction were found, he invited listeners to see the war from the perspective of the benefits of eliminating a tyrant, even though that had not been the original justification, rather than from the frame of protecting the United States and other nations against the risk of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. (Zarefsky 613)

Rhetoric often presents itself in patterns observed in typically similar situations (Zarefsky 610-611). Clinton's speeches and writings have endowed him with a personable image, and his rhetoric has brought him overall success in politics in spite of his misconducts and policy failures (Whittington 199). His administration is exemplary of a "modern rhetorical presidency" that caters to the public and popularity more than the formal authorities of policymaking (Whittington 199). Before the twentieth century, the American president was a representative of the government and its constitutional values (Whittington 199-200). The public was not directly involved in governmental affairs and the president's course of action. The president's authority was procured through law, not his personality. The president was not meant to seek power for himself; he was entrusted with the responsibility to "impart constitutional wisdom" (Whittington 200).

Nevertheless, the conventional rhetorical presidency has been supplanted by the modern day presidency; the people's approval has become of utmost importance in determining policies; "The characteristic presidential speech in the twentieth century has been directed at popular rather than congressional audiences…" (Whittington 200). This withdrew the president from following conventional practices of policymaking and creating "a legislative imperative" (Whittington 201). Hastiness replaced careful contemplation of policy proposals. Clinton's healthcare reform was not the outcome of a carefully devised legislative proposition; it was central to Clinton's campaign and his need to gain public approval; it was personal (Whittington 202). Moreover, statements were fashioned to attract popularity and dramatize issues assigning them an immediacy for resolution: "Policy problems were characterized by the president as 'crises'; policy responses became 'wars,' whether the target of the moment was poverty, inflation, energy, drugs, or crime. Legislative measures were more likely to be drafted within the executive branch and then rushed through Congress…" (Whittington 201).

Presidents have increasingly been engaged in a power struggle with Congress. The partisan nature of twentieth century politics has led to conflict between the executive and legislative branch. As George H. W. Bush puts it: "It's tough when you don't control Congress…" (ch.13). Moreover, Congress's Republican majority in 1995 created an incentive for Clinton to reassert his authority. By publicly attacking Republican congressmen for their cuts in Medicare, Clinton's administration aimed to build public support and regain what he felt was endangered by Congress (Whittington 203-204). However, reliance on public support does have its drawbacks:

> The practices of the modern rhetorical presidency are both empowering and constraining…authority for action is dependent on the fluctuations of the opinion polls…Presidents make less effort to reason with political elites and more effort to move mass audiences. Presidents are less concerned with persuasion and more concerned with political coercion. (Whittington 205-206)

Rhetoric is an important aspect of power. The intent of persuasion (of the autobiographer's truth) is considerably at the forefront of incentives for presidential life writing, and thus, an ultimate endeavor for claiming power. "…autobiography is not a literary genre, but an altogether rhetorical modality, serving different purposes, literally referential ones" (Schmitt 472). Moreover, rhetoric is mostly compelling through narrative. As Jeff Smith states in *The Presidents We Imagine,* "Political leaders, ideas, and systems gain power, for good or ill, by telling stories that large numbers of people find persuasive" (4). These stories, designed to influence public opinion, are carved in the lives of the presidents, beginning with their campaigns as nominees and ending in their engagement in life writing. Life writing, being an end-product of presidential terms, reinstate presidential power through the reiteration of formerly told stories and a relatively new story: past speeches and diary entries serve as this reiteration, while as a whole life writing serves as the new story.

The “rhetorical” aspect of life writing is demonstrated in the preface of *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (1999). George H. W. Bush reflects on the decision to write his book. He is told by friends to “be sure the historians get it right”; and others said “you owe it to yourself to help people figure out who you really are” (H. W. Bush, Preface). The concepts of “getting it right” and “who you really are” insinuate the probability of a correct version of history/experience and a true self, discounting the subjective nature of such notions. Bill Clinton remembers the intentions of his past self in the prologue of his autobiography: “I wanted to be a good man, have a good marriage and children, have good friends, make a successful political life, and write” (Prologue). This is a declaration of the narrative’s meaning: an attestation of character and experience. George W. Bush is more straightforward in his intentions for autobiographical writing: “I met with more than a dozen distinguished historians...they told me I had an obligation to write. They felt it was important that I record my perspective on the presidency, in my own words…My hope is that this book will serve as a resource for anyone studying this period in American history.” Bush establishes the historicity of his autobiography whilst acknowledging his subjectivity. The incentive to write influences the act of narration and meaning making. Presidents’ use of rhetoric is a part of their former power, and their life narratives offer them a space in which they can continue their “rhetorical presence” (Jones 1).

Presidents utilize language in their speeches, writing, and statements among other forms of communication. Colin Seymour-Ure states in *The American President: Power and Communication,* “Communication is central to the idea of power, and public communication is an inescapable part of presidential behavior” (xi). The reason for this stems from the fact that the American people and the president are a binary that rely on each other’s existence; presidential power cannot exist without people who are subject to that power (1). Communication entails a relationship where information is passed on to subjects who are able to “act upon” one another (“The Subject and Power” 786). Communication with the American public is a way for presidents to exercise their power. Life writing is a method of transferring information about the presidency, American mythic values, and how they relate to exercising power worldwide. Hence, communication is key. In presidential life writing, an unconventional dialogue between the president and the people is observed. The president recounts public speeches and statements as ways of reaching the American public and conveying his message. "…these speeches allowed me to articulate the ideas and proposals I had developed over the previous decade…" (Clinton ch. 26). The public, in return, is seen to be responding through personal letters, the media and occasionally face-to-face. Regarding his keynote address for the Democratic Leadership Council convention, Clinton writes, "That speech was one of the most effective and important I ever made. It captured the essence of what I had learned in seventeen years in politics and what millions of Americans were thinking." Furthermore, presidential power has its basis in information. Knowledge about the American people and their way of life yields the power to govern and control those people and their lives (Seymour-Ure 11). Clinton's knowledge of the American mindset gives him the right to exercise power over them. However, his assumption that he knows what they actually think and feel is presumptuous and displays a certain ignorance characteristic of the president.

Foucault argues that power is exercised and rationalized through the institution of the state. The president arguably plays the most important role in the state's systems of power. This state is concerned with the individual so far as it is indispensable for the unity of the whole nation ("The Subject and Power" 782). Knowledge of people's morals and values allows a form of control ("The Subject and Power" 783). The president falls back on knowledge of the American people—their most valued characteristics and ideals—to rationalize his use of power and "protect" the people. Truth (everything they write about and its accuracy/authenticity/genuineness) is valued in their writing as a form of justification; it ultimately entails a discourse reiterated by presidents for the purpose of legitimizing and continuing presidential power.

As knowledge correlates with power—and the assumption that knowledge is objective proves to be a consequence of power (Miller 118), truth, perhaps the most important attribute of factual knowledge, is empowering for the self. Expressing truth, claiming it, and abiding by it are acts of empowerment for the self. While there is value in the belief that 20th century life writing is more centered on the self, sometimes to the detriment of factuality in narrative (Yagoda, Author's Note), truth, or possessing historical merit is of utmost importance for the president and presidential life writing. The idée fixe of these autobiographies is the claim of "truth": "Tell the whole truth…Push for prompt revelation of all facts. Get the truth to the American public…" (H. W. Bush ch. 10). What this truth is is complicated. History is out there for everybody to consume freely. The president's personal truth or perspective may have been unique in life writing if the president was free from his ideological identity and pursuit of portraying his presidential self.

Truth, according to Foucault, is a way of neutralizing rhetoric (McKerrow 253). Truth shapes our social norms and way of life, disguised as a separate entity from life, and often constricting individuals' freedom (255). Truth leads to "the exercise of legitimized power" (256). However, through acknowledgement of and resistance against these discourses of truth, it is possible to go against these "truths" (255), and deconstruct them to be able to replace them with new meaning, until those new meanings become the new "truths" that govern society (257). These presidential life narratives offer their own truths against the truths of history.

> Prior discourses, coalesced into ''discursive formations,'' function as the ''truth-statements'' governing who is empowered within a given historical time to speak, on what subjects, in what voice, and with what impact…truth is what, over time, a community has endorsed, complete with the procedures for its determination, its legitimization, and its evocation by those sanctioned to speak on its behalf. (McKerrow 257)

Presidents become authorities to write the truth concerning their presidencies and the nation. This truth has been endorsed throughout the history of the U.S. by other presidents. Presidents are subjects that have been created with the purpose of regurgitating American values in justification of exercising power on a global scale. According to Foucault, "rationalization" comes forth in relation to the "excesses of political power" ("The Subject and Power" 779). The (presidential) subject is not self-determining because he is a historical creation, or in other words, an archetype

(McKerrow 257). Presidents are the corporeal embodiment of the state and all that it stands for, most importantly: power. They are the effect of American voters and their power. They represent not only government, but also nation. These presidents clearly find the source of their power in the American people, also known as the prime audience of their life writing. Their power is granted through the people, while exercised for the benefit of the people, as well as terminated by the people. As politicians climb the political ladder, they often lose touch with the people whom they claim to represent. Life writing proves useful in bridging the distance caused by the presidency. Life writing is the former president's constant attempt at reconciliation. Sven Birkerts writes that the success of narrative in autobiography is measured by its ability to persuade and gain the audience's understanding (35).

While life writing's relation to truth is deeply complicated, it cannot be stripped of all ties to the factual. Truth, that is historical accuracy, or a degree of truthfulness, needs to be recognized in life writing, not because it is straightforward or a simple conviction (Hamilton 201), but because it is an inevitable part of reading presidential life writing. Along with a unique perspective of historical events, these works of life writing use historical material as much of their source. Furthermore, the purpose of the presidential life writing's audience is not (or rarely) seeking pleasure or aesthetic. Most read them in search for this "truth," however speculative that may be. While autobiographical representation does not equate with a historical "I" or referent, there is nonetheless resemblance (Lejeune 219). Considering the referential world, our real lives, are as real as codes, and codes are as real as language, and language is as real as discourse, ideology, and meta-narratives, it is acceptable to say that there is some truth in this discussion of presidential life writing and life-writing at large. As truthful or factual our life is, so is autobiography and the autobiographical self.

The ultimate source of power is narrative: an organized selection of events specifically appeasing reader curiosity. Possibilities are endless within language. The power of word can change public opinion, ideas regarding right and wrong and most importantly the course of history. Moreover, the most noteworthy aspect of presidential power is observable in speech. Their speeches (or word) possess the power to influence and guide opinions of people in their time and after (Cole 2).

Power is realized through the leadership of presidents; critics, political actors, and the American public assess American presidents' powerfulness based on their "leadership" (Neustadt 3). On how to "handle" the presidency, H. W. Bush records: "'Family, faith, friends…your innate good sense, kindness, and understanding of the American people.' That is where a president gets his strength" (ch. 11). H. W. Bush elaborates on leadership: "Leadership is listening then acting. Leadership means respect for the other person's point of view, weighing it, then driven by one's own convictions acting according to those convictions" (ch. 10). George W. Bush concludes: "…I admired Churchill's courage, principle, and sense of humor—all of which I thought were necessary for leadership" (ch. 4). Clinton says on American leadership: "…reasserting America's leadership in the post–Cold War world as a force for democracy, shared prosperity, and peace…" (ch. 48). Clinton further remarks on his own leadership: "I had a record of leadership and was 'a person who will get things done, and done well'" (ch. 9). Taking all of these beliefs into account, the American president emphasizes the need for a leadership, which is inherently good and human, but also based on American principles. This leadership employs strength in representing the American people and looking out for their best interests. This is or should be the starting point of presidential power, according to them.

These three presidents comment on what they view as the abuses of power, dismissing the individuals and nations that seek it for themselves, instead of the public. As Foucault states, this is the hypocrisy of a society that "denounces the powers it exercises" (*The History of Sexuality* 8). The presidents are careful to distinguish their own relationship with power—they deem this relationship noble; power that comes with the presidency gives them an opportunity to help their people, country and the world. Clinton defends presidential power by justifying its sources. He claims that he does not crave power in the way other politicians do, nor does he seek it for his own betterment. In contrast, he rebukes those who abuse power and promises to "prevent" it (ch. 21). Clinton tries to immunize himself to the disorderly aspects of power found in politics, and turning to a more positive perspective of political power: "…the power of leadership to lift and unite people in a common cause could overcome the South's old politics of division" (ch. 17). Similarly George W. Bush comments on the abuse of power in other nations and concludes that freedom is the only solution to this "sickness" that is the misuse of power (ch. 1). The greater part of his presidency is dedicated to trying to ensure democracy in other countries and the "freedom agenda." George H. W. Bush, on the other hand, claims there is "decency" in politics, which is threatened by individuals who are deeply entranced by the power. Their rhetoric fails to realize their actual relationship with power; their unilateral actions against world countries reveal an "abuse" that is dismissed in presidential life writing. George W. Bush's acknowledges that presidential power is too vast, but defends he does not fall into the category of presidents who use this type of power:

> One of the biggest surprises of my presidency was the flood of pardon requests at the end. I could not believe the number of people who pulled me aside to suggest that a friend or former colleague deserved a pardon. At first I was frustrated. Then I was disgusted. I came to see the massive injustice in the system… I resolved that I would not pardon anyone who went outside the formal channels. (Bush ch. 3)

By determining the limits of his power, Bush seemingly holds all authority, superseding the system that precedes him. This rhetoric on power reveals presidents attempts to vindicate their exercise of it, by attributing to it the American mission they adopt in working for the common good of their own people and others around the word.

As employers of their administrations, presidents not only possess power, but share their power, and most probably their power is affected in return. As Bush states in the third chapter of *Decision Points*, "The people you choose to surround you determine the quality of advice you receive and the way your goals are implemented" (ch. 3). Bill Clinton acknowledges his success in becoming president as an outcome of the "dedication and ability" of his staff during his time as governor (ch. 24). A president is only one individual out of many who work for the presidency (Neustadt 3). It is the influence the president exerts on the many political constituents in his administration that determines his power (Neustadt 3-4). Presidential life writing is riddled with names of public persons, government officials, citizens, supporters, opponents, friends, family members, and many more. The mass of other subjects that can be found in presidential life writing threaten to displace the presidential self and his power. The story revolves around encounters with other people. The autobiography becomes a space where authority is shared and persuasion is key.

Presidential life writing's objective to affect historical accounts and perceptions of their presidencies is a clear effort to regain power over their own stories. History is a recurrent theme in presidential life writing; in this sense, the presidential life writing is self-reflexive, for it refers to its own historicity, as these statements exemplify: "I don't know how history will treat us" (H. W. Bush 578) and "Yes, I am the George Bush that once was President of the United States of America. Now, at times, this seems hard for me to believe. All that is history and the historians in the future will sort out the bad things I might have done from the good things" (H. W. Bush 596). Bush concludes that history is the ultimate judge, but neglects his own authority in influencing history. "…I do not want to try to direct history. I am not writing a Memoir," says Bush in a letter towards the end of *All the Best,* revealing autobiography's role in history making, but also ultimately conflicting with the claim of *All the Best* as presidential life writing. George W. Bush comments on the nature of history in his defense of the war in Iraq: "But history's perspective is broader. If Iraq is a functioning democracy fifty years from now, those four hard years might look a lot different" (ch.8). Bush accepts that history is not fixed or determined, that it is constantly changing its ideas about events and the world. This autobiography contributes to that change. Clinton refers to his autobiography as an evaluation of history: "Whether my historical analysis is right or not, I judge my presidency primarily in terms of its impact on people's lives" (Epilogue). Clinton acknowledges his life writing's connection to history and offers his own verdict on what the history of his presidency should communicate.

Another point to consider is the adaptation of history in presidential narratives. Extensive accounts of historical moments in former presidents' periods either reveal a continuum or a turning point of deflection. The presidential narrator uses these historical moments to justify his course, whether it is similar of different. If his decisions in making history prove to have its equivalents in history, then he is merely reenacting what is expected of him. If he departs from the familiar course, then he is refusing to repeat former mistakes. In the world of autobiographical narration, the possibilities of historical understanding and meaning making are endless. Presidential authors further prove their intent in narration and self-representation: justifying the presidency.

Citing history is indispensable for leaders in their decision making processes (Neustadt 40). The experience—or narratives—of former presidents provides a guidebook for the next president in successfully carrying out his duties and choosing how to use his power. In addition to illustrating how presidents use history, the presidential life writing also shows how they are creators of history themselves. “I was struck by the power of words to shape history” (Bush ch. 1). The autobiography functions in the shaping of history, and the (presidential) author is the quintessential shaper of this history, which he inhabits: “I couldn’t control what happened to my policies and programs; few things are permanent in politics. Nor could I affect the early judgments on my so-called legacy. The history of America’s move from the end of the Cold War to the millennium would be written and rewritten over and over” (Clinton ch. 55).

Readers determine the effect and outcome of autobiographical acts as mush as their authors. In the case of the presidential life writing, readers are not concerned with literariness, nor are they seeking aesthetic pleasure. They are readers interested in discovering the true self of high profile narrators. They want to get to know the person behind the media image; more than the presidents’ actions, his character becomes the focal point for the reader’s curiosity (Cole 7). With the proliferation of media outlets and sources, the personal lives of public figures have been more increasingly probed into. Personal failures have become as defining as government policies. The personal experiences and subjectivities of American presidents shape their historical selves, thus shaping American history. Autobiographies, essentially, are tools for political leverage in that they help effect the presidential image in the public’s mind (Cole 8).

As Roberta S. Sigel expresses in her article “Image of the American Presidency—Part II of An Exploration into Popular Views of Presidential Power,” several decades ago, the public looked for qualities such as strength and willpower in presidents; they were not so much interested in the basic sought-after human characteristics, such as friendliness (124). Today, this is far from the truth. Public opinion is not only shaped by the personal lives of presidents, but qualities centered on morality are at the forefront when assessing the competency of leaders. This was ultimately proven when Clinton's sexual misconducts led to his impeachment trial. The media, starting three decades ago, has been increasingly concerned with personality, scandal, and smear campaigns (Palmer 47). Characteristics that are not pertinent to leadership or governing still hold a prominent place in the eyes of the general public. Nevertheless, this does not mean that power is not sought in today's leaders. Power is expected, but is often debilitated due to distrust of government and efforts to expose their greatest scapegoat, the president.

The autobiographical "I" in presidential life writing strives to achieve a balance between accepting flaws in his character, decisions, and life writing, and exude self-assuredness concerning his point of view. This balance conciliates and holds more power in influencing audiences. *All the Best*, *My Life*, and *Decision Points* address the criticisms and negative images of presidents, providing apologies in hopes of clearing their names, but negate many other ideas perpetuated by the media. Stories circulated by the media are opposed by the presidents. The rumor of Clinton's alleged protesting against Nixon in a tree without clothes on (ch.16) is falsified and used against the media as an excuse for mistrust. George W. Bush claims that Iraqis were grateful to the United States for the liberation of Iraq and the rebuilding of a nation with health and education opportunities, as opposed to the media's attitude that the war was not accomplishing anything (ch. 8). George H. W. Bush blames the media for not recognizing his true self: "…what I hate the most is the charge by the liberals in the media that I never stood for anything, that I didn't care about people…I stood for a lot of things on issues…" (ch. 15).

These former presidents do not hesitate to downplay the effect of media by attacking it and its actors. In a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, George H. W. Bush writes " I am sure that you agree when I say we never got any credit in the media for any of the good things…All good news was pooh-poohed and written down…" (ch. 15) Clinton mentions, "The Center for Media and Public Affairs issued a report saying that in my first sixteen months, there was an average of nearly five negative comments a night on the evening network news programs, far more than the first President Bush had received in his first two years” (ch.39). George W. Bush reflects on the absurdity of images created by the media: “I had seen Dad and Bill Clinton derided by their opponents and the media. Abraham Lincoln was compared to a baboon. Even George Washington became so unpopular that political cartoons showed the hero of the American Revolution being marched to a guillotine” (ch. 4). Bush diminished the credibility of media through examples of previous presidents’ portrayals, many of which he claims have been redeemed today.

Every newcomer to hold the office has a tendency to change the perspective on his precursor. The wrongdoings and shortcomings of the past lose their initial impact with time and the subsequent failures that arise with a new president. Thus, the former president’s image has an opportunity to be rehabilitated. When Clinton became the second president in U.S. history to face impeachment, George H. W. Bush’s errors during his term and inability to fulfill expectations were forgotten. Moreover, as George Bush’s war on terror extended to Iraq and failed to unearth weapons of mass destruction, Clinton’s offenses did not seem so atrocious (Joffe 51). Opinions change drastically and relatively quickly in the world of politics. Life writing is no less instrumental in transforming the politics surrounding former leaders. Book reviews have stated *Decision Points* reveals an amiable character and competent leader; one that is juxtaposed with his successor Obama. His candid admissions of faulty judgment are said to make him likable (Joffe 52).

Moreover, political mistakes, that have compromised political power, are acknowledged in presidential autobiographies. They are constantly referred to as moments that they recovered from. There is experience, learning and knowledge in these mishaps, which is a way of regaining power. In other words, mistakes empower; “In 2000, I looked at the defeat as a chance to prove I could take a blow and come back” (W. Bush ch. 3); “…and that if they’d give me another chance, I’d be a governor who had learned from defeat…” (Clinton ch. 22). Upon being elected governor after losing the previous election, Clinton reflects, “…the people of the state I loved so much were willing to give me another chance. I was determined to vindicate their judgment" (ch.22). Thus, this objective of "vindication" can be seen in the autobiography as a whole: an attempt to justify the political career and presidential power exercised. "…sometimes men of integrity, myself included I hope, realize they have made mistakes and say so" (H. W. Bush ch. 9). Admitting to mistakes is seen as a moral act. Although *All My Best* does not dwell too much on mistakes, Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's offer a different narrative: one that employs acceptance of and apologia for the biggest mishaps of their political careers.

Clinton gives somewhat of an assessment of his relations with Monica Lewinsky, stating, "What I had done with Monica Lewinsky was immoral and foolish. I was deeply ashamed of it" (ch. 48). Clinton goes on to detail the events before and leading to his impeachment in the same apologetic tone. Nonetheless, he does not refrain from attempting to redeem himself, to an extent. Clinton discusses his impeachment in light of the conflict between him and Republicans. He outlines the stark differences between them, mainly in terms of their treatment of minorities, women and the environment. He is a president who appeals to larger diverse groups of people while the Republicans fall short with their tradition and old convictions in politics. As William C. Berman writes in his review, this is a "cultural war" of conflicting ideologies (131). This fight between ideologies seems to be a distraction from his own wrongdoing and the Lewinsky scandal.

Clinton's tone seems apologetic but his simultaneous discussion of conflict with Republicans reveals he is actually distracting from the real issues revolving around his trial. He does not adequately address his charges of obstructing justice. David Palmer, in "'What Might Have Been' -Bill Clinton And American Political Power", claims that Nigel Hamilton's biography of Bill Clinton presents a very different story from that of *My Life* (42). The difference is one rooted in the motives of two different narrators: one who is not hesitant to reveal even undermining experiences about another, and one who treads carefully in relaying experiences that might ruin his own self. Personal vices involving relations with women are explored more deeply in Nigel Hamilton's book, *Bill Clinton, An American Journey: Great Expectations*. Palmer further outlines the discrepancies in evaluations of Clinton's term. While Clinton describes his administration's economic policies as triumphs, many critics hold him accountable for the recession following the end of his term (45). Clinton's neglect of Afghanistan in his autobiography corresponds with his inaction in foreign policy regarding the country (Palmer 51).

Regarding his mistake in waging war in Iraq on the unfounded grounds that Iraq had developed biological, chemical and nuclear weapons of mass destruction, George W. Bush admits to failure: "No one was more shocked or angry than I was when we didn't find the weapons. I had a sickening feeling every time I thought about it. I still do" (ch.8). However, Bush also claims that intelligence misled him and his administration, that their findings of WMD were convincing enough to risk war. He criticizes those who accuse him of purposefully engaging in war in the middle east, defending his position as protector of the American people's safety and their freedom: "The left trotted out a new mantra: 'Bush Lied, People Died.' The charge was illogical. If I wanted to mislead the country into war, why would I pick an allegation that was certain to be disproven publicly shortly after we invaded the country? The charge was also dishonest" (ch. 8).

While considering the source and nature of presidential power, it is useful to consider the presidential tradition; actions carried out by presidents and the mark they have made in history may reveal answers to these questions. The source of power comes from constitutional rights; however, another important source is cultural image. This cultural image is the end product of many texts considering the representation of the presidential self. All three autobiographies constantly refer to former presidents, and offer their experiences as a backdrop of their own presidencies. History is used in the decision making process "for advocacy or for comfort" (Neustadt and May Preface). Not only does history repeat itself, but also presidents repeat themselves, or rather each other.

> The shrill debate never affected my decisions. I read a lot of history, and I was struck by how many presidents had endured harsh criticism. The measure of their character, and often their success was how they responded. Those who based decisions on principle, not some snapshot of public opinion, were often vindicated

> over time. (Bush ch. 4)

Bush rehabilitates his image through historical presidential narratives, and concludes his authority to surpass the power of media criticism. Clinton recalls Ted Kennedy's words on John F. Kennedy:

> He should be remembered as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it, saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it. Those of us who loved him…pray that what he was to us and what he wished for others will someday come to pass for all world." Afterwards he remarks that this "is what he wants, too. (Clinton ch. 13)

Clinton acknowledges the resemblance between his own experience of the presidency and George H. W. Bush's: "What happened to me in 1980 was strikingly similar to what happened to President George H. W. Bush in 1992. The Gulf War kept his poll numbers high, but underneath there was a lot of discontent" (ch. 21). In other instances, presidents divert from the familiar path of presidential narrative, asserting their difference, and essentially asserting their agency in their presidential terms: "I had no desire to turn the NSA into an Orwellian Big Brother. I knew that the Kennedy brothers had teamed up with J. Edgar Hoover to listen illegally to the conversations of innocent people…I thought that was a sad chapter in our history, and I wasn't going to repeat it" (W. Bush ch. 6).

While other subjects help advance the presidential subjects authority throughout, they also contest it at times. On the offer of then vice president Dick Cheney to step down from re-nomination, Bush states, "One myth was that Dick was actually running the White House. Everyone inside the building, including the vice president, knew that was not true. But the impression was out there. Accepting Dick's offer would be one way to demonstrate that I was in charge" (ch. 3) The "myth" is debunked in autobiography, reinstating presidential power; Bush further explains his support for Cheney and the inaccuracy of supposed power struggles. When told that he is "unsuited for politics," Clinton resolves that the reason for this is because he "never loved power for power's sake." Power is not dismissed or concealed; Clinton acknowledges the relationship of the political and power but nevertheless justifies it in his own terms.

Presidents are actors in their realm of government; they are skilled in the methods of performance. As H. W. Bush acknowledges, this type of performance (of the president) is often attacked for its rhetoric nature (328). Nonetheless, history is attributed to their acts, decisions, or execution of power. They lead in the national—and global—experience. However, it is possible to question the presidential authority in creating this experience and assuming the presidential role's acts (J. Smith 248). As presidential life writing reveals, there are countless actors in the political field surrounding the president's actions. Every decision of the president is debated and negotiated. The exertions of power are granted by constitutional practices and previous presidential acts. More than often the president is assumed to take action by his administration, Congress, and the American people. History is the grand narrative that guides and oversees the president's own narrative. Autobiographical narration is yet another performance (Lejeune 198). The presidential subject is crafted with precision to fit the preconceived character and the narrative is organized meaningfully to convey truths about America, history, culture and politics. The life writing, too, must be questioned on the grounds of authority. How much of the president's agency prevails in the making of life writing is questionable. Editors craft the narrative advising the president to include and omit; readers have a lingering existence throughout; historians provide documents and information that make up the content of the books. Thus, presidential power, authority, and self dissolve within the mass of voices, selves and preexisting narratives, both in real experience and life writing. Authority for the subject in his/her own life is a vexed issue caused by these many impediments (Couser 12).

There is a perpetual struggle between two sides—the president and history—to claim the self and power. The writer is engaged in an ongoing battle to reclaim what is theirs in spite of "extraliterary conventions" (Couser ix). These conventions are predetermined practices of the presidency as well as authorship. Juxtapositions of previous presidents and their successors, and distinguishing methods of life narrative (different organizational methods and sources) are attempts to found power and agency that is unique to each presidential life writer. However, presidential power's illusory characteristics coupled with the rhetorical nature of presidential life writing reveal this subgenre as one that reinforces American myths in favor of the president. Power is not for the individual self, but for the presidency as an institution, a subject position, and an identity.

CONCLUSION

Presidential life writing as a genre has been under-studied in the literary field; presidents' lives have been a more of a realm to study for historians and political scientists. This thesis aims to reveal such life narratives as objects of analysis in cultural studies by observing how self and power are constructed in *All the Best: My life in Letters and Other Writings*, *My Life*, and *Decision Points* by George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, respectively. This thesis also assessed how self and power construct the life narratives of presidents. Life itself becomes a construction within life writing, meant to give meaning to the presidential experience, presidential power and American power.

Although these presidents strive for what Paul de Man calls "political authority" (922), through their life writing, their efforts are in vain. Conveying a true self becomes impossible against the ideology that consumes presidents. The politics of the presidency coupled with a tradition of presidential life writing that precedes them does not allow for true agency as authors. Asserting authority on historical events and their outcomes is unsuccessful due to their rhetorical voice that omits and is permeated with American mythic values and American political discourse.

Representing the past in the present is how life writing functions (Smith and Watson 3) and the process of such writing is politically charged (18). The presidents' retelling of historical narratives that have been extensively retold already by other writers does not disclose new information; it exposes president's remembering processes or rhetorical agencies, and its promotion of Americanism and the powerful presidency. While presidents acknowledge the limits of memory, they also omit certain sides to their stories. Their lives are recorded extensively by other media; thus, they do not require exhausting the faculties of memory. Nonetheless, the deficiencies of "memory" are used as an excuse to omit.

Conscious of readership, the narrating “I” in life writing assumes a position of persuader (Smith and Watson 6). The presidents use rhetorical language, justifying reasoning, culturally widespread American ideals and personal subjectivities such as the father to persuade the reader of their version of the presidential experience, which is overall positive. However, taking into consideration these practices of persuasion, and the conflicting historical narratives of the American presidency and its exercise of power, these presidential narratives are not satisfactory in their versions of history.

These life narratives claim to refer to reality (Smith and Watson 7). Furthermore, they acknowledge that it is their own perspective, their own realities, and their own historical perceptions. However, their rhetorical voice and defensive position on recounting presidential acts reveals their imposing of certain “truths” to the reader. These presidents as writers fail at recognizing their life writing’s “subjective truth” because they are the object of their own writing (Smith and Watson 12-13). The narrating “I” constructs the narrated “I” while under the influence of the ideological “I.”

The self, as observed in life writing, is bound together with experience (Eakin 124). Presidents’ lives create their sense of self and the identity the self attaches to. The presidency being the focal point of their narratives, or experiences, the self inevitably is a presidential one. All experiences that are retold and all identities that these presidents assume in their life writing serve the purpose of substantiating and fortifying the presidential character.

The presidents’ father and son subjectivities are utilized in their life writing as a supplement to the presidential self and subjectivity. Presidents represent similarities between themselves and their fathers (or grandfathers in the case of Clinton); they identify with them. Moreover, they commend their best qualities and strive to continue in their footsteps. Their fathers selves and experiences validate their own identities and narratives. Their honorable, hardworking, law-abiding, nation-serving characteristics inspire these presidents to become like their fathers with their own children, but more importantly, fathers turn out to be instrumental in these presidents’ rise to the presidency. Nevertheless, Clinton’s disloyalty in his sexual affairs with Monica

Lewinsky and George W. Bush's break from his father's policies and his ultimate exercise of unilateral presidential power in Iraq reveals the breakdown of the father—son connection.

These presidents assume an American identity characteristic of previous presidents and noticeable through the tradition of presidential life writing that upholds American values such as democracy, freedom, individualism, equality, exceptionalism. These values are not only praised and imposed upon the reader as characteristic of a presidential self, but they are used to justify acts of power in their presidential terms. The ideological "I" in life writing is perceived. The United States' status as superpower, its relationship with Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, presidents' relationships with despotic leaders in other countries, and their exercise of presidential power (usually through military intervention with devastating outcomes) worldwide is vindicated through these American values. Presidents seek the support of their readers and hope to affect their legacies by eradicating critical perceptions perpetuated by the media.

These presidential life narratives are texts representative of American political culture and national identity in the post-Cold War era. Neoconservative tendencies of perceiving American identity through "universal" values that should be emulated everywhere is characteristic of the presidency's outlook during this period, despite liberal tendencies proliferating through American society. The value of "truth" is obtained through religion and moralism.

Life writing, a space for agency, is empowering for the writer's voice, self, and perspective to come to fruition (Smith and Watson 42). However, these presidents' agencies are often subject to the power of presidential discourse. Although presidents' language claims power for presidential selves in their governmental affairs, decisions and foreign policies, they are in turn subject to the power of American ideology and the archetypal presidential subjectivity. Their exercise of presidential power is more so an outcome of an ideology that controls the presidency (the concept of the universality of American values and its role as a global power), while the presidential self is imposed on the individual president by his predecessors, both in office and life writing. The individual character or self of these presidents is unattainable in their life writing because life writing is “both formed by and formative of specific kinds of autobiographical subjects” (Smith and Watson 83). The presidents studied in this thesis are revealed to model a historical presidential self that has been formed through the presidential life writing tradition.

Individuality of the self suffers in these presidential narratives. Cultural identity takes over the self; collective experience is brought to the forefront causing the individual experience to dissipate; and power relations usurp the presidents’ autonomy in their writing. This cultural identity is a combination of idealistic traditional American values, political ideologies and the president archetype. The president’s personal life is a part of the national experience. Broadly defined as “Americanism,” the belief in and promotion of certain values such as freedom, democracy, and individualism, is the cultural stamp of presidents. They use these values and the American identity pertaining to it, to give meaning to their selves as presidents, but also to justify their exercise of (American) power in the world. These values, although American, are enforced by presidents as universal values. While these values are instrumental in shaping their experience as presidents, the cultural climate creates a need for such values to be propagated. Moreover, “other” selves are prevalent throughout these life narratives. The narrating “I” compares the narrated “I” to other presidents in history, often drawing similarities of character and experience, and expressing admiration.

Challenges made by cultural studies theorist Michel Foucault have altered understandings of autobiographical narration, the probability of an autonomous self and the power of Western master narratives (Smith and Watson 135). According to Foucault’s theory of power, power is not for one to possess and exert over another, but it is the formative factor of relationships where it is circulated (*The History of Sexuality* 92). Power can be everywhere and affects everyone (*93).* It creates individuals as subjectivities (“The Subject and Power” 781). Moreover, Power produces and is produced through discourses of knowledge. This sort of knowledge is forcefully accepted as truth, which is the consequence of power; but also for the continuation of power. Power, through its mere existence, always acts as a catalyst for producing resistance. "Subjugated knowledges" are formed against prevailing discourses as a form of resistance. They claim to reveal "truths" that have been suppressed by the master narratives (*Power/Knowledge* 81-83).

The presidents are subjects that have been created by the institution of the American presidency. They possess power, but are also subjected to it through multiple relationships: the president and the legislative branch, the president and tyrants, the president and the American public, and the president and the media. Through these relationships Bush Senior, W. Bush and Clinton are seen exercising power more over the previous two than the latter two. Their life writing is ultimately their idea of a "subjugated truth" that they are finally sharing with the world, ready to influence the dominant discourses revolving around their presidencies. However, they succumb to their own political and ideological selves that are immersed in the dominant culture of presidents. The power they exercise does not benefit their individual self but furthers the presidential self, the presidency and America's role as a superpower. Their life writing becomes a national project more than the writing of the "inner self." In this sense, these texts work against the assets of the genre—agency in individual voice and authority over experience. These works are manipulative of history and reflect a deterioration of the life writing genre among presidential writers.

The American self or presidential self is ultimately a vehicle through which power in exercised and justified. George H. W. Bush's "New World Order," Bill Clinton's "human progress" and George W. Bush's "freedom agenda" present a similarity in the language employed in their presidencies as well as their life writing; a post-Cold War need for new endeavors and leadership in the world is facilitated through the presidential self's adoption of an American nationalist self. American values and their power are idealized and universalized.

Presidential power is the president's power to make laws, issue executive orders, enforce military action, and other constitutional powers vested in him. While presidents have been criticized for taking advantage of constitutional loopholes and exercising ultimate power through their actions and decision as presidents, these presidents' life narratives justify the use of this power by appealing to American notions of leadership and a mission in spreading universalized American values. Power is also symbolic in its representation of the cultural and ideological notion of American power. Power is defined through "others"; the compliance of other governmental actors, the subjection of rulers such as Saddam Hussein, the votes of the American people deem the president "powerful." Power is also a president's influence in society, which also correlates to his influence and rhetorical presence as a life writer.

Power is revealed to be lost on the president for he is merely a vessel through which the American ideational power does its deed. When presidents give their accounts of wars and foreign policy decisions, they are ultimately trying to justify all that America represents and implementation of hard power. While the Cold War justified the spread of American values in its exercise of power; the Iraq War did the opposite. After much criticism of America's presence in the Middle East after the Iraq war, a defense of American power became imperative. Salvaging the presidency and its exercise of power meant salvaging the legacy of individual presidents such as George W. Bush. In their defense of presidential power, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush fail to acknowledge the limits of American power or the devastation caused by its immoderate use.

While the historical value of presidential life narratives has been contested greatly through life writing criticism, presidents are still obsessed with historicity and truth. Historical "truth," or the "truth" of individual perspective is an important feature of these works of life writing. Presidents use their rhetorical skills to persuade readers of their versions of events, their justifications of presidential power, and the imperativeness of accepting American values to be self-evident truths. In their attempts to convince readers, these presidents draw parallels between themselves and earlier presidents, they condemn the abuse of power, acknowledge political mistakes but undeservedly try to redeem their actions, they debunk rumors perpetuated by the media, and manipulate history—where they claim parallelisms are due to effectiveness, but differences points to a better course of action employed by the president.

The value of the presidential life writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush is their historicity and their revelations of an American tradition that dates back to Founding Father Benjamin Franklin. Presidents reveal themselves as participants in a system of power where power is effected through subjectivity (of the president) and rationalization (by American ideals). While presidents' efforts of influencing history's take on their presidencies is ultimately unnecessary due to the "real" past's disappearance in the present and its inevitable transformation into interpretation (Popkin 725); these works contribute to the historical knowledge of the presidency, American power, and the universal values it employs. These works ultimately "make history" (Smith and Watson 10), but consequently, they fail to empower presidents; they are testaments to the fact that presidents are trapped in their subjectivities.

Furthermore, *All the Best: My life in Letters and Other Writings*, *My Life*, and *Decision Points* are effectively similar in their employment of rhetorical language in the pursuit of portraying a favorable image of their presidencies, exemplifying an archetypal model of the presidential self, using American values to further their agenda in creating their self images, and justifying American power that is concentrated in the presidency. This similarity reveals a tradition of presidential life writing, along with similarities with previous American presidents' autobiographical works.

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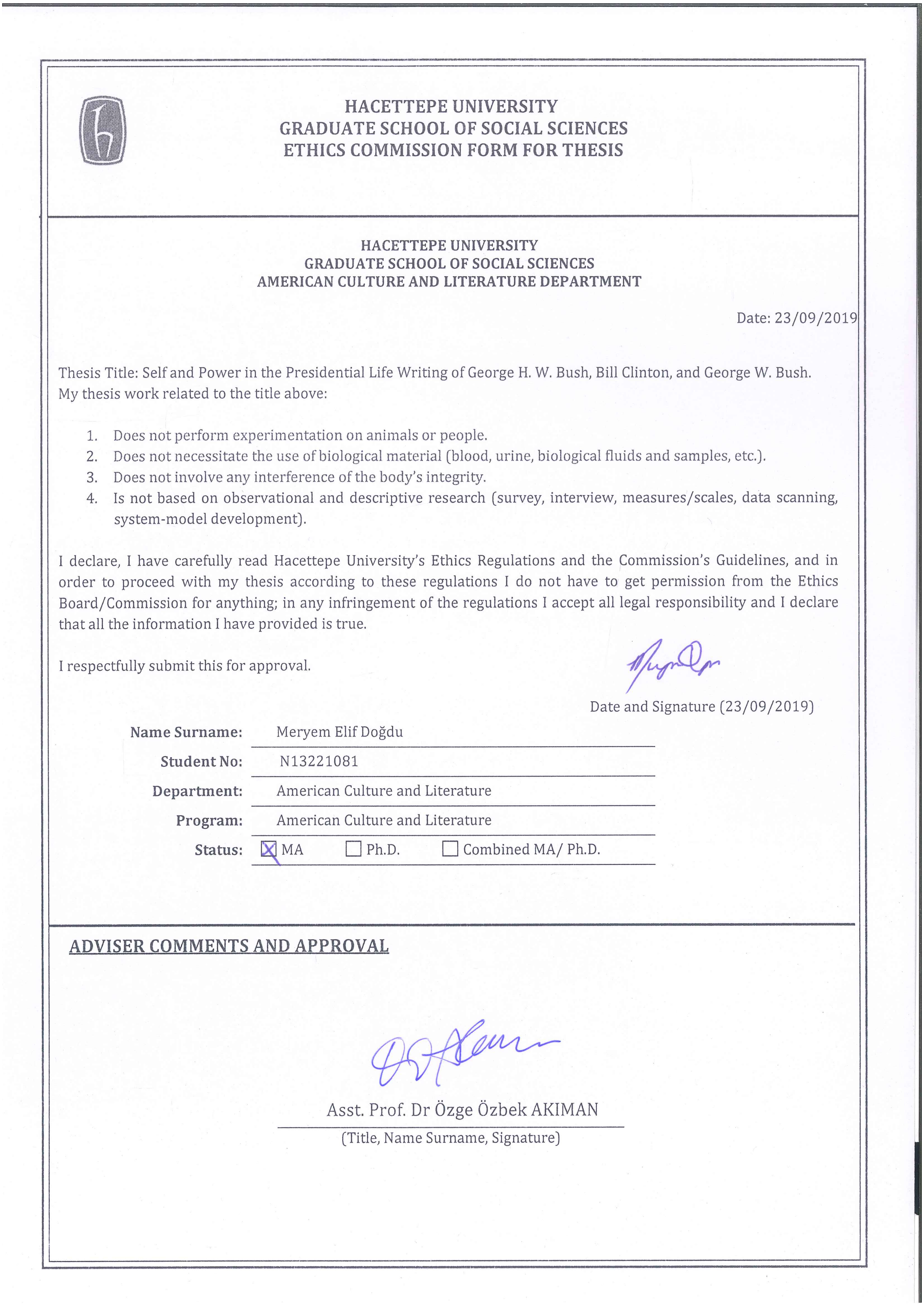
APPENDIX 1. Ethics Board Waiver Form



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Thesis Title: Self and Power in the Presidential Life Writing of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush.
My thesis work related to the title above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
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I declare, I have carefully read Hacettepe University's Ethics Regulations and the Commission's Guidelines, and in order to proceed with my thesis according to these regulations I do not have to get permission from the Ethics Board/Commission for anything; in any infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility and I declare that all the information I have provided is true.

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Name Surname:	Meryem Elif Doğdu
Student No:	N13221081
Department:	American Culture and Literature
Program:	American Culture and Literature
Status:	☒ MA ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Combined MA/ Ph.D.

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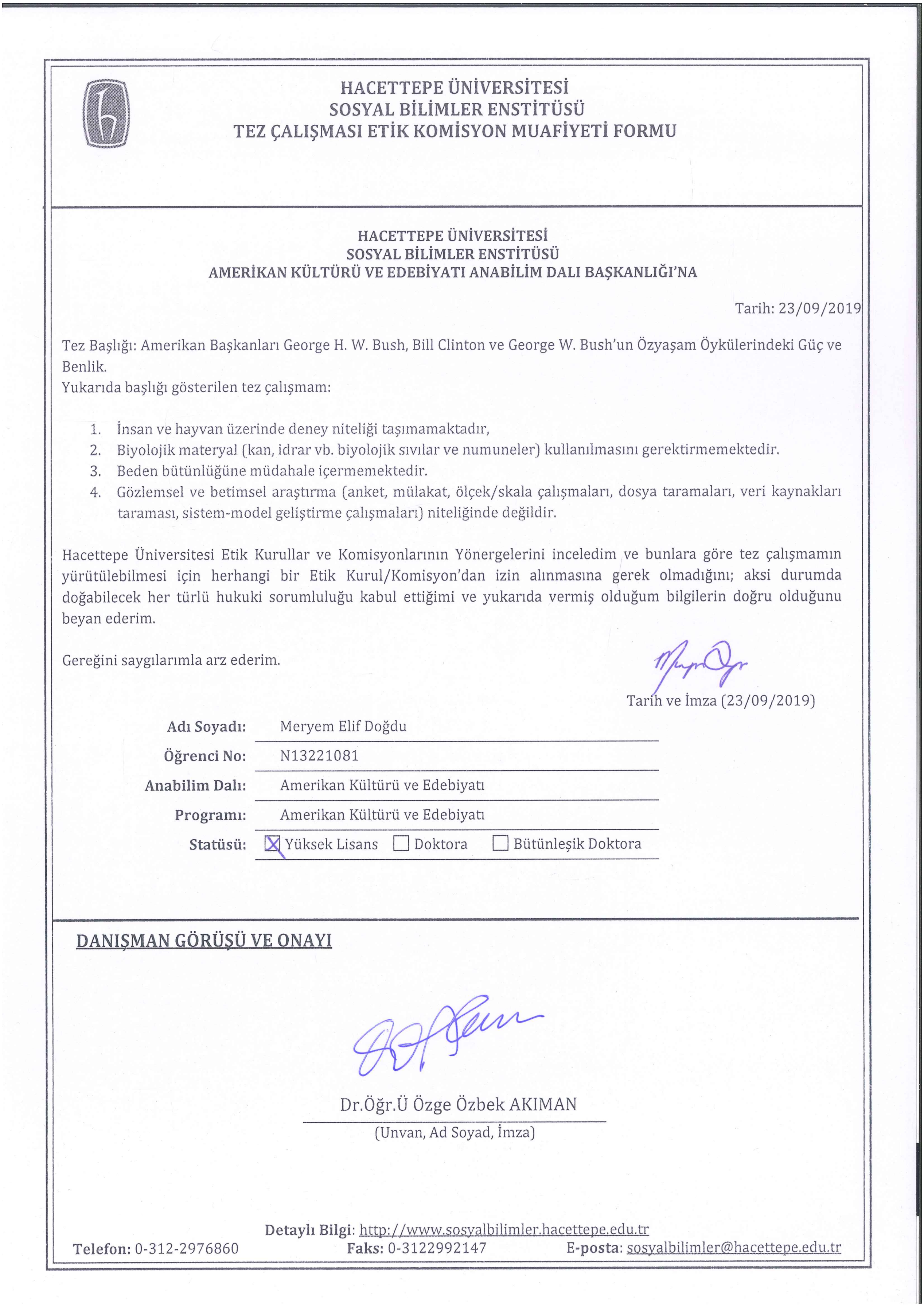
Asst. Prof. Dr Özge Özbek AKIMAN
(Title, Name Surname, Signature)



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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 23/09/2019

Tez Başlığı: Amerikan Başkanları George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un Özyaşam Öykülerindeki Güç ve Benlik.
Yukarıda başlığı gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
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Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Tarih ve İmza (23/09/2019)

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Statüsü: ☒ Yüksek Lisans ☐ Doktora ☐ Bütünleşik Doktora

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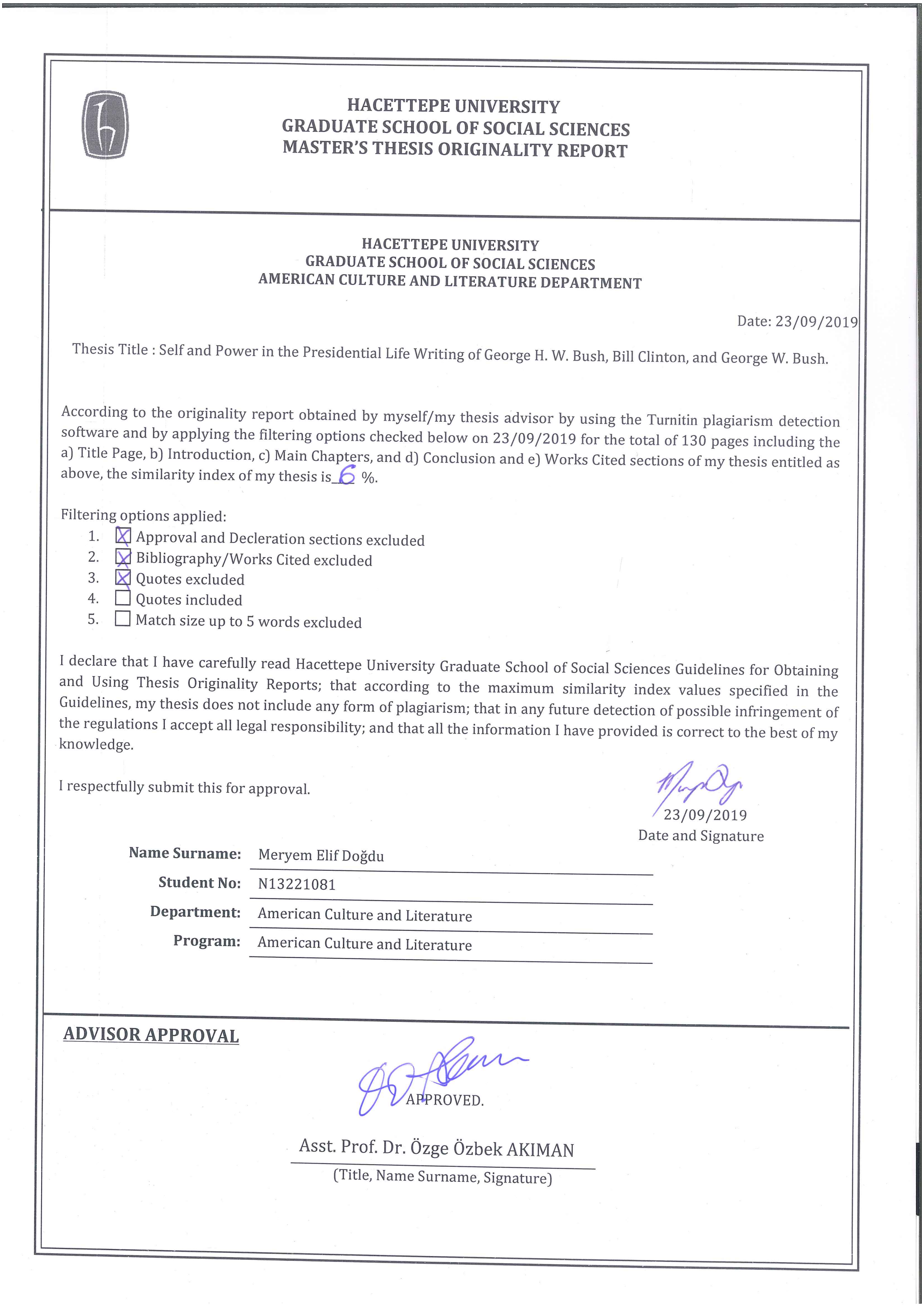

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MASTER'S THESIS ORIGINALITY REPORT

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Name Surname: Meryem Elif Doğdu
Student No: N13221081
Department: American Culture and Literature
Program: American Culture and Literature

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APPROVED.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Özge Özbek AKIMAN
(Title, Name Surname, Signature)

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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORİJİNALLİK RAPORU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 23/09/2019

Tez Başlığı : Amerikan Başkanları George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un Özyaşam Öykülerindeki Güç ve Benlik.

Yukarıda başlığı gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç ve e) Kaynakça kısımlarından oluşan toplam 130 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 23/09/2019 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 6 'dır.

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Tarih ve İmza

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Öğrenci No: N13221081
Anabilim Dalı: Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı
Programı: Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı

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Dr.Öğr.Ü. Özge Özbek AKIMAN
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