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THE DEFENSE OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: PRESIDENT TRUMP'S

COVID-19 RHETORIC

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses grounded theory and content analysis to examine the political rhetoric President Donald Trump used in the Coronavirus Task Force press briefings during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. I collected 44 transcripts of these press briefings from when they began on February 26, 2020 until April 27, 2020. This time frame marks the period during which the press briefings happened with consistency and when Trump spoke at all of them. Through my research, I established that United States presidents have employed rhetorical tropes of American exceptionalism, including Trump. Trump invoked American exceptionalism in a three-pronged rhetorical approach. First, he clearly stated that America is the best in four specific ways. Second, after asserting the ways in which America is exceptional, he then declared that this exceptionalism needed defending. To do so, he: 1) rhetorically created a wartime situation, and framed healthcare workers as warriors while insisting the U.S. would be a victorious nation; 2) made China, the virus, and immigrants into un-American enemies; 3) promoted borders as the defensive solution; and 4) attempted to foster national unity. Finally, he framed himself as the key to maintaining American exceptionalism. To demonstrate this, I collected and analyzed the textual content of the 44 total transcripts of the President's Coronavirus Task Force press briefings. These transcripts were analyzed and coded to represent 18 total rhetorical frames used by then President Trump across 1,263 total incidents of these codes embedded in his speeches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

On April 1 of 2020, then President Donald J. Trump addressed the nation during one of the White House's Coronavirus pandemic briefings. Trump's message to the nation focused on American unity and on national victory over the virus.

> As I said yesterday, difficult days are ahead for our nation. We're going to have a couple of weeks, starting pretty much now, but especially a few days from now, that are going to be horrific. But even in the most challenging of times, Americans do not despair. We do not give in to fear. We pull together, we persevere, and we overcome, and we win.

These rhetorical themes were a frequent occurrence during these press briefings. In addition, they fit into a broader pattern in American political rhetoric.

In order to better understand the rhetorical frames that President Trump created about the COVID-19 pandemic through his rhetoric during press briefings, I examined the rhetoric used by the then president. To discover what themes Trump used, I conducted thematic content analysis on his political rhetoric during the COVID-19 pandemic press briefings. My research goal was to examine the rhetorical frames that then President Trump used during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, from the end of February to the end of April. There were many frames that became evident in the course of my research, but one emergent and dominant theme found throughout this process was Trump's use of rhetorical frames invoking American exceptionalism – the idea that the United States is a special and unique nation – in a particular way. American exceptionalism has different forms, and Trump employed some common themes.

Many outside observers have pointed to certain aspects of Trump's rhetoric that appeared unusual and out of character for a president; contending that he broke traditional presidential norms (Montgomery, 2020) and that Trump often employed

falsehoods in his communications (Timm, 2021). Others have drawn similarities between Trump's rhetoric and demagoguery (McDonough, 2018; Mercieca, 2021; Nacos et al., 2020). Stuckey (2020) described one of Trump's divergences as being a lack of decorum; while all presidents make poor decisions, they do so with political decorum that is appropriate behavior for a politician – Trump broke from this tradition. Despite the differences between Trump and past presidents, I will argue that his three-pronged rhetorical approach was consistent with a long historical tradition in American politics. However, his centering of himself as being key to maintaining American exceptionalism was somewhat unique.

In this thesis I will argue that Trump used the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to invoke American exceptionalism. His rhetoric followed a predictable presidential pattern when invoking American exceptionalism, and did so in a number of ways. Specifically, in order to convey this exceptionalism, he invoked a cache of rhetorical frames that developed this central frame. First, he stated that America is the best in four ways: 1) the best economy/industry, 2) the best people/brightest minds, 3) the best science/technology, and 4) the best state/nation. Then, he asserted that this exceptionalism needed defending. To do so, he: 1) created a wartime situation, and framed healthcare workers as warriors while insisting the U.S. would be a victorious nation; 2) made China, the virus, and immigrants into un-American enemies; 3) promoted borders as the defensive solution; and 4) attempted to foster national unity. These frames are common to American exceptionalism. I will show how Trump followed these steps during the coronavirus press briefings by connecting American exceptionalism to the

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pandemic, and then how he seemed to diverge from this pattern by inserting himself as necessary for America's greatness.

Scholars have analyzed American exceptionalism in presidential rhetoric before. They have investigated Trump's styles of rhetoric, and his COVID-19 response and rhetoric have also attracted the attention of researchers. Thus, there is a fairly large body of literature that relates to this thesis. However, I aim to add to these existing areas of literature by tying the different topics of American exceptionalism, presidential rhetoric, public health, and Trump's rhetoric together and by contributing an example of Trump's American exceptionalism in action, as applied to the coronavirus pandemic. My thesis will demonstrate how Trump's American exceptionalism rhetoric, that was accomplished by deploying a cache of frames animating the idea of American exceptionalism, was part of his administration's pandemic response.

The next section of this thesis will provide a background of the coronavirus pandemic, its spread in America, and related events in 2020. A brief overview of Trump's COVID-19 response approval ratings will also be provided. Then, I will review the existing literature about the importance of presidential rhetoric, rhetoric and public health, American exceptionalism rhetoric, and Trump specific rhetoric.

The methodology for this research, including the data collection and analysis, will follow the literature review. Then, I will summarize and explain my findings. Next, there will be a discussion of these findings and how they relate to the existing literature and examples of American exceptionalism, as well as how the findings build on the extant body of knowledge about American exceptionalism. To conclude, I will provide ideas for future research, and present the larger picture to which this thesis relates to.

BACKGROUND

To provide necessary context for this thesis, it is important to look at the timeline and significant events of the COVID-19 pandemic. This section lays out a brief outline of the timeline, events, and various approval ratings of Trump's handling of the coronavirus outbreak from the end of December, 2019 to the end of April, 2020. The timeline of the press briefings can be found in Appendix A: Table 1.

The very beginning of the timeline starts when it was first reported that China was investigating a mysterious illness on December 31, 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2020). However, very little was known at this point, so no actions were taken by the U.S. or by most others. Because of this, there were no surveys dedicated to Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, as it was too early in the timeline for such questions.

Early in January 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued warnings about this illness (Al Jazeera, 2020), and the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the emergence of a coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan (AJMC, 2020). On January 16, the U.S. decided to screen people arriving from Wuhan (Al Jazeera, 2020). However, on January 21, the first official U.S. case was reported (AMJC, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2020; Muccari et al., 2021), and shortly thereafter on the 29th, the U.S. Coronavirus Task Force was created (Al Jazeera, 2020). On January 31, the WHO issued a global health emergency (AJMC, 2020), and Trump blocked travel from China (Al Jazeera, 2020; Muccari et al., 2021; Taylor, 2020).

On February 3, the U.S. also declared a public health emergency, and on February 25 the CDC said the Coronavirus situation was heading towards pandemic status (AJMC, 2020). At the very end of February, on the 29th, the U.S. reported the first COVID-19

death (Muccari et al., 2021; Taylor, 2020). Trump began the press briefings just prior to this, on February 26.

In the beginning of March on the 6th, Trump signed an $8.3 billion emergency spending package, while just two days later the confirmed cases in the U.S. reached 500 (Muccari et al., 2021). At this point, a survey run by SSRS and sponsored by CNN from March 4 to March 7 asked if people approved or disapproved of the way Trump was handling the coronavirus pandemic. It showed that 41% of the sample approved, while 48% disapproved, and 11% had no opinion (CNN, 2020). On March 11, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic (AJMC, 2020; Muccari et al., 2021; Thebault et al., 2021). On this same day, Trump instituted a travel ban from Europe, not including U.S. citizens or anyone from the U.K. or Ireland (Al Jazeera, 2020; Muccari et al., 2021). Two days later, Trump declared a national emergency (AJMC, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2020; Thebault et al., 2021) which had the potential to free up $50 billion for pandemic resources (Muccari et al., 2021). Then, on March 17, the Trump administration asked Congress to send U.S. citizens relief directly (AJMC, 2020).

On March 18, Canada and the U.S. agreed to close borders for travel deemed nonessential; then on the 20th the U.S. announced plans to close the Mexican border to nonessential travel as well, while Chad Wolf, the acting Secretary of Homeland Security, stated that all immigrants without proper entry documentation would be turned away (Muccari et al., 2021). On the 24th, Trump stated he wanted the country open by April 12 (Al Jazeera, 2020). The very same day, COVID-19 cases in the U.S. topped 50,000, and the WHO warned that the U.S. could become the epicenter of the pandemic in the world (Muccari et al., 2021).

Following this, on March 26, the U.S. led the world in confirmed cases with at least 81,321 and more than 1,000 deaths (Taylor, 2020), while on the 27th the global cases reached more than 500,000, with a death toll up to 24,082 (Muccari et al., 2021). At the end of March, on the 28th, the U.S. death toll passed 2,000 (Muccari et al., 2021). A study run from March 26 to the 29 by the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research asked whether people approved or disapproved of the way Trump was handling the coronavirus outbreak; only 44% approved, while 55% disapproved (AP-NORC Center, 2020).

At the very beginning of April, the U.S. had 5,000 deaths with 232,837 confirmed cases (Muccari et al., 2021). On April 3, the White House and the CDC recommended Americans wear face coverings (Muccari et al., 2021). On April 10, the world death toll passed 100,000, while the next day deaths in the U.S. passed 20,000 (Muccari et al., 2021). However, Trump and the CDC issued guidelines to reopen businesses and local economies on the 16th (Al Jazeera, 2020). Also as of April 16, 22 million Americans had filed for unemployment (Thebault et al., 2021), prompting Trump on April 20 to temporarily suspend immigration into the U.S., saying his intention was to protect American jobs (Muccari et al., 2021).

By the end of April, the global total deaths passed 200,000 (Taylor, 2020) and the global total cases passed 3 million (Muccari et al., 2021). Moreover, the U.S. saw unemployment numbers of 30 million (Muccari et al., 2021). The Monmouth University Polling Institute conducted a survey from April 30 to May 4, and asked specifically about Trump's press briefings and whether people felt he had been largely consistent or largely inconsistent from day to day; 9% did not know, and only 36% said largely consistent,

while 55% said largely inconsistent (Monmouth University Polling Institute, 2020). An Ipsos run and ABC News sponsored survey at the very end of April asked whether people approved or disapproved of the way Trump was handling the coronavirus pandemic, and by this time 42% of the sample approved while 57% disapproved (ABC News, 2020). The end of April, specifically the 27, is when I collected the last press briefing transcript.

These polls show that approval of Trump's handling of the coronavirus outbreak never broke 50%. However, the disapproval rates appeared to climb as the pandemic stretched on and the number of cases and deaths increased. Regardless, the disapproval rates were always higher than approval. Even if disapproval did not correlate with death or case numbers in particular, many U.S. citizens had a poor opinion of Trump's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Along party lines, however, approval was different. As of March, 83% of Republicans believed Trump had done a good or excellent job with the COVID-19 crisis, while 81% of Democrats said he had done only a fair or poor job with 56% of them giving a poor rating (Pew Research Center, 2020). It appears as though Trump's largest support during the early coronavirus outbreak response came from Republicans.

These events laid out throughout the early phases of the pandemic align with the press briefing transcripts I collected as data, and should provide for relevant background information necessary to better understand the context of my data. Also of importance for understanding the data and results is the existing literature about rhetoric, the power of the presidency, public health, American exceptionalism, and Trump's rhetoric. The literature will provide a necessary background that will demonstrate how these topics are

related, and will be applicable to the COVID-19 crisis and Trump's Coronavirus Task

Force press briefings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Presidential Rhetoric

A large scholarly literature has sought to understand the importance of presidential rhetoric, with some interest in the president's influence on public opinion. While they are just one person, presidents have more power than just one individual. Stuckey (2020) stated that it is important to analyze presidents as a carrier of discourse, or mode of communication between the government and the public, and that they can influence national political culture. Presidents can have an effect on an institutional level because they are part of a "complex communicative system" (Stuckey, 2020, p. 367). She suggested that the rhetoric presidents use has power beyond the individual level as they are institutional actors (Stuckey, 2020).

Neumann and Coe (2011) noted that presidential rhetoric is important in the construction and reinforcement of America's image. Zarefsky believed "a key function of presidential rhetoric is to define social reality" (2004, p. 607). He asserted that because of the position and access to communication a president holds, they can define a situation and even potentially shape how these situations are viewed by the public. Zarefsky carried out eight case studies of the presidential use of power of definition that showed that rhetoric can be used by a president to alter the public's understanding of politics (Zarefsky, 2004).

One of the studies, looking at Andrew Jackson's influence, demonstrates how he vetoed a bill and then asked voters to "sustain his actions in the coming presidential election" (Zarefsky, 2004, p. 614). After Jackson was reelected, he defined his win as the people supporting his decision to veto the bill; from this moment forward, new presidents

frequently interpreted their elections as the people sustaining specific actions. James

Polk's election was deemed a mandate for the annexation of Texas by John Tyler,

Abraham Lincoln's election was defined as justification for his decisions over the

secession crisis, Grover Cleveland's election supported the abandonment of silver for the

gold standard, and many others who followed them defined their elections in similar

ways (Zarefsky, 2004).

Presidential rhetoric is also a determinant in public approval of the president

(Druckman & Holmes, 2004). This can be altered through *priming*, or capitalizing on

issues that media attention has caused people to see as especially weighty (Druckman &

Holmes, 2004). How a president does on these particular issues is reflected in public

opinion (Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Edwards (2020) noted that it is certainly not

uncommon for presidents to identify problems that face the nation and propose their

solutions. However, presidents can also make a bigger deal of things than necessary and

can mislead the public about issues (Edwards, 2020).

A large body of literature has found that at the beginning of the twentieth century

there was a shift away from a traditional presidency and to a rhetorical presidency (Lim,

2002). Neumann and Coe (2011) confirmed that some scholars note the modern

presidency as a rhetorical presidency; this means that scholars acknowledge the central

function of the office to be speaking to the public. Modern presidents have become more

likely to depict themselves as both protectors and defenders of the American people, and

utilize different rhetorical devices than their predecessors, including anti-intellectual,

abstract, assertive, democratic, and conversational rhetoric (Lim, 2002).

Clearly, presidential rhetoric has power. Among other arenas, rhetoric holds power in public health; both presidential and non-presidential rhetors alike can have important influence.

<div align="center">Rhetoric and Public Health</div>

Given its impact on life and death, as well as sickness and health, the public health sphere is of incredible importance to a nation, and certainly in light of COVID-19 this is worth examining further. Researchers have thus analyzed the role that rhetoric plays in this arena.

Hatcher & Vick (2018) proposed that an important aspect of U.S. presidential campaigns is the communication of health issues. Because presidential candidates receive a lot of high-profile attention, their communication of public health problems can have tangible impacts on policy and public health. They asserted that the U.S. president has a big influence on public health communication, and that if the president or candidates are not discussing public health, the issues are less likely to be addressed by policy (Hatcher & Vick, 2018).

Malley and colleagues (2009) stated the importance of transparency in communication during public health crises. As an example, they looked at the SARS 2003 outbreak; authorities were hesitant and slow in their communication, which allowed for the virus to spread (Malley et al., 2009). This led the WHO to announce that information given to the public needs to be "'transparent, accurate and timely'" (Malley et al., 2009, p. 614).

Similarly, Sivaramakrishnan (2011) used the example of the plague outbreak in Surat in 1994, and the WHO's non-conclusive responses, to show that public health

crises should not be broken into international, national, and local spheres. Public health

crises must be seen as a global priority and addressed in a meaningful and comprehensive

way (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011).

One study looked at the usage of TV advertisements during the AIDS crisis, and

the importance and role of mass media during public health issues (Bush & Boller, 1991).

The researchers used rhetorical analysis to study federal AIDS TV campaigns to

determine how these are used during pandemics (Bush & Boller, 1991). The researchers

determined that advertising played three roles over the course of three years (1987-89). In

the first year it was used to build awareness of the facts (Bush & Boller, 1991). In the

second year, it built worry and fear. Finally, it provided a coping response (Bush &

Boller, 1991). Bush and Boller (1991) sought to "promote immediate and pragmatic

thought regarding the future role of advertising during health crises" (p. 36). This source

can be used as a starting place for thinking about the role of the media and television at

Trump's press briefings during the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be discussed later.

<div align="center">American Exceptionalism</div>

In this section I will show some of the common themes of American

exceptionalism, to later demonstrate the ways in which Trump was similar in his

invocation of American exceptionalism. The term American exceptionalism can have

different meanings, depending on the user (Ceaser, 2012). Generally, when used by social

scientists, it refers to something *different* about America. Otherwise, its use tends to

imply that there is something *special* about America (Ceaser, 2012). Many scholars agree

that John Winthrop and Puritan ideology, as well as thinker Alexis de Tocqueville are

early influencers in the founding of the idea of American exceptionalism (Edwards, 2018; Edwards & Weiss, 2011; Knopf, 2011; Neumann & Coe, 2011; Walker, 2011).

Winthrop's form of exceptionalism began the tradition of America as a model for the rest of the world to emulate, or a "beacon of hope" (Edwards, 2018, p. 177). This led to exemplarist exceptionalism which believed the U.S. to be a chosen nation because of its special destiny, difference from the Old World, and because of its future potential for greatness (Edwards, 2018). Tocqueville "declared the United States to be truly exceptional and exhorted all democratic nations to emulate the example it had set" (Edwards & Weiss, 2011, p. 2). He felt this way after spending time in the U.S. to describe social and political life in America, during which time he came to view the U.S. as "a considerable outlier from other nation states" (Neumann & Coe, 2011), and saw unique qualities in America and its people (Knopf, 2011). These thinkers and the traditions that followed them show that there are different forms that American exceptionalism takes and different invocations of it.

Other scholars noted the connection between American exceptionalism and American identity. Restad (2012) defined "American identity as the widespread and deep belief in American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism itself entails the belief in the special and unique role the United States is meant to play in world history" (p. 54). Survey evidence has shown that up to 80% of Americans agree with the United States as being better than other nations (Ceaser, 2012). Restad (2012) asserted that American exceptionalism "functions as a unifying American identity" (p. 70). American exceptionalism is an ideology more than a statement of fact or truth, and Restad

contended that America will be exceptional for as long as Americans believe that it is exceptional.

Presidents and American Exceptionalism

It has been established that presidential rhetoric is powerful. This makes it important to determine how presidents employ American exceptionalism and what the combination of presidential rhetoric and American exceptionalism might be able to accomplish.

Beasley (2004) argued that U.S. presidents are one way through which the shared beliefs of Americans are promoted, and that presidents encourage their citizens to feel unified: "…presidents have been able to offer their diverse constituents ways of viewing themselves as a united group while also suggesting that their individual differences are largely insignificant relative to their larger calling" (Beasley, 2004, p. 63). American exceptionalism is considered an American identity by many scholars (Restad, 2012). This suggests that including American exceptionalism rhetoric in presidential speech can function to unite citizens.

Ceaser (2012) found that views of exceptionalism often fall in place with political views; liberals tend to be anti-exceptionalism, while conservatives support the ideas of exceptionalism. Because this idea is linked to political party, it can be important for a politician's support base and therefore their success. Ceaser stated that "[u]sing a term because of which party benefits or loses is an important consideration for partisans" (2012, p. 5). Gilmore and Rowling (2019) applied issue ownership theory to American exceptionalism, and asserted that throughout the end of World War II through Trump's first year as president, Republicans and Democrats fought to exercise ownership over

American exceptionalism. Republicans have generally held ownership over it, but Democrats more recently have tried to claim it (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019). Due to the partisan nature of American exceptionalism, it could be in a president's best interests to make use of it, especially Republican presidents attempting to unite their supporters.

Americans expect the president to tout American exceptionalism, thus making a president's ability to do so politically important (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019). Gilmore and Rowling (2019) noted that the invocation of American exceptionalism is most common during campaigning, and this is the timeframe most research analyzes. They hypothesized, however, that it would be in a president's best interests to continue this rhetoric even after taking office to make their party look better and heighten chances of reelection (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019).

There are different ways that presidents might invoke American exceptionalism, and most presidents do so in some capacity. Neumann and Coe (2011) found that American exceptionalism is very common in presidential rhetoric, in which presidents often refer to the nation as *America*, mention America with far more frequency than other nations, and portray America as an exemplary model for other countries to follow. The researchers determined that using the term "America" is a way of invoking exceptionalism, more so than any other way of addressing the United States. Further, a large ratio between the mentions of America and other nations may signal a more America-first view (Neumann & Coe, 2011).

Another way to purport exceptionalism is to paint America as a good nation, and other nations as bad. It thus becomes a good versus evil situation, which is noted as common in exceptionalism rhetoric (Neumann & Coe, 2011). The way that presidents

portray America as compared to other nations is also a form of exceptionalism: one way to do so is to present the U.S. as a leader, teacher, or helper, from which other nations should model (Neumann & Coe, 2011).

Gilmore and Rowling (2019) found three categories of American exceptionalism in politicians' speeches; these are explicit, implicit, and mutual themes of exceptionalism. Explicit exceptionalism refers to very clear references to the idea that America is exceptional, and includes the subthemes of America being a singular country in the world, a superior country in the world, and the God-favored or chosen country. The subtheme of superiority often makes mention of American people being amazing, of American economy being great, and of American values being the best (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019).

Implicit themes are not direct mentions of American exceptionalism, but still hint at it. These include portraying America as a model for the rest of the world, and purporting America as a leader for the globe (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019). Finally, the theme of mutual exceptionalism refers to when presidents assert American exceptionalism by pairing it with another country that is also deemed exceptional in some way (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019). These are some of the basic ways in which presidents invoke American exceptionalism.

<u>War and Sacrifice</u>

Many scholars have studied the importance of American exceptionalism in justifying war (Edwards & Weiss, 2011). American exceptionalism rhetoric is common in times of change or instability, such as wartime; during these times, presidents can use American exceptionalism rhetoric to insist on America as the leader of a stable world,

which in turn can boost the nation's confidence and national pride (Neumann & Coe, 2011). During wartime, presidents call upon Americans to preserve their way of life (Knopf, 2011). War is a unifying ritual tied to presidency and rhetoric (Knopf, 2011). A nation cannot be reduced to warfare as the most important aspect, but warfare can "strengthen and reinforce group identities" (Hutchinson, 2007, p. 45).

The foundation of nations often relies on war (Hutchinson, 2007). Many nations were formed, created by, or were defined through war (Hutchinson, 2007). War was important in the foundation of American identity (Drake, 2011). Violence, bloodshed, and sacrifice have become important components of American exceptionalism (Hutchinson, 2007; Knopf, 2011). War creates heroes (Knopf, 2011), who are then held up as an inspiration to others during wartime (Hutchinson, 2007).

In times of war, a "we vs. they" situation is created (Hutchinson, 2007). This war may even be rhetorical and brought on by a presidential call to arms (Knopf, 2011). Even when rhetorical, it reinforces American exceptionalism: "Nowhere is this new American exceptionalism of privileged entitlement more apparent than in the ritual and rhetoric of warfare – a vital element of American consensus, unity, and identity, and a common place for the language of American exceptionalism" (Knopf, 2011, p. 176). In the U.S., as a "victor" nation, warfare is seen as proving the people to be heroic and enduring (Hutchinson, 2007). Thus, warfare, even in rhetorical form only, is significant in American exceptionalism.

<u>Un-American and Evil Enemies</u>

In war, leaders tend to insist that the homeland is threatened in some way and this can be effective when the war is a defensive one (Hutchinson, 2007). Similarly,

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American exceptionalism rhetoric to unite Americans "desperately needs a specific type of opposition in order to survive" (Beasley, 2004, p. 66). According to Beasley, it is necessary for presidents to create enemies that are un-American to contrast the superior ideals of Americans. Identifying threats can garner attention and foster emotional responses, affect people's policy views, cause the public to be more tolerant toward policy changes, and can strengthen in-group connection (Edwards, 2020). In his research to determine frames used in the War on Terror, Rojecki (2008) searched for the subject matter of "condemnation of evil enemies" (p. 73) to capture the theme of American exceptionalism. This demonstrates the common use of the making of evil enemies in American exceptionalism.

Presidents from Cleveland to Bush utilized this tactic of making enemies; they made threats to the nation out of both foreign nations and foreign ideologies (Beasley, 2004). Things typically viewed as un-American, or foreign, make for threats to exceptionalism: "a foreign state of mind is ultimately more debilitating than sheer newness itself, presumably because it threatens the preeminence of Americans' shared beliefs" (Beasley, 2004, p. 76).

Reagan was another president who created enemies to give U.S. citizens a dangerous threat, or "Other", to unite around (Beasley, 2004). However, Beasley claimed that when Clinton became president, Americans had no enemy around which to unite, and thus were less confident in their shared identity. Then, Rojecki (2008) asserted that the Bush administration made a threat to the U.S. out of Iraq. The Bush administration "judged that enemies abroad posed a security threat to the United States" which "set in motion a dynamic that obliged the nation to act…to counter a 'grave, imminent threat'"

(Rojecki, 2008, p. 82). These examples show a tendency for presidents to employ the creation of enemies or threats to America in their exceptionalism rhetoric.

Presidents do have go-to enemies. Beasley found that presidents will frequently engage in exclusionary discourse against immigrants, regardless of the fact that Americans are descended from immigrants. This is potentially because the American people share a general anti-immigrant belief, and thus presidents can use this for unification (Beasley, 2004). The rhetoric revolves around the "foreign" aspect of immigrants, which means they do not understand American ideals and are thus a threat to America itself (Beasley, 2004). Presidents such as Cleveland, Harrison, and McKinley were all against immigrants because they viewed immigrants as having foreign, or un-American, minds (Beasley, 2004). Immigrants are typically cast as enemies because they are seen un-America, foreign, and are especially threatening to the border.

Land and Borders

Borders are important to American exceptionalism beliefs and sentiments because of the importance of the land itself, and because of American identity; both of these areas of exceptionalism rely on borders to protect from un-American enemies.

Walker (2011) argued that a characteristic of American exceptionalism is "providential land and a chosen people" (p. 31). Thus, Americans are bound together by geography as well as their character (Walker, 2011). Walker stated that "[t]he physical defense of America and the sanctity of its borders, which privileges land as the protectorate of ideal, is a representative case" (p. 35).

These ideas that Walker mentioned were crucial to the founding of the U.S. itself. Drake (2011) noted the importance of land to American identity and national pride,

detailing how "[c]olonists came to see their rights as every bit as natural as their community's presumed boundaries" (p. 12). American Revolutionaries even believed that secure borders were one of their rights (Drake, 2011).

Rhetoric during wartime fueled the ideas that colonists were on special land, "rich" and "capable", and that the continent had natural boundaries that would protect them (Drake, 2011). Victories in colonial wars were seen as bestowing the promised land of North America, viewed as naturally better than anywhere else in the world, upon the colonists (Drake, 2011). When facing the threat from the British Parliament, an external and distant foe, colonists viewed the continent's geography as being protective from tyranny and thus saw North America as a special land (Drake, 2011). John Jay described an advantage of America as being that it was a connected country with "'navigable waters [that] form a kind of chain round its borders, as if to bind it together'" (Drake, 2011, p. 295). These early colonial ideas demonstrate how the United States was formed on a land deemed remarkable, and how natural borders contributed to unity and the reliance on borders overall.

Trumpian Rhetoric

Scholars have studied Trump's presidential rhetoric, his usage of American exceptionalism prior to COVID-19, and his actions in the public health arena both outside of and during the pandemic.

Public Health

Two researchers used the texts of campaign speeches in 2016 collected from the American Presidency Project site, and developed a coding scheme to determine how the candidates communicated public health related topics (Hatcher & Vick, 2018). Overall,

both candidates examined – Clinton and Trump – focused very little on public health, revealing the lack of attention given to public health issues. They argued that when presidential candidates do not take a stance on public health issues, then the ability of public health as a field to better community health is impeded (Hatcher & Vick, 2018).

In his time in office, Trump's actions were harmful for public health. Woolhandler and colleagues (2021) documented that he made decisions that undermined health coverage and undermined global cooperation for health. This, coupled with other policies that indirectly hurt the health of the nation, and the poor public health policies the U.S. already endures, all paved the way for the pandemic to be especially detrimental (Woolhandler et al., 2021).

Yamey and Gonsalves (2020) demonstrated the importance of the presidency to public health. They claimed that Trump's response to the pandemic included denial and blame, coupled with false reassurances and slow reaction time (Yamey & Gonsalves, 2020). His discrediting of science in general and encouragement of blatant disregard for mandates and orders that were intended to protect public health were also factors that worsened the pandemic (Yamey & Gonsalves, 2020).

<u>Exceptionalism</u>

Trump had applied aspects of American exceptionalism rhetoric since his first presidential campaign. Mercieca (2021) documented how American exceptionalism had been a part of Trump's rhetorical arsenal since his campaign announcement speech in 2015. She noted several unifying strategies used by Trump, and her work confirmed that American exceptionalism is employed. Obviously, his campaign slogan of "Make America Great Again" was linked to American greatness and thus American

exceptionalism (Mercieca, 2021). Mercieca (2021) described how this slogan and ideal of exceptionalism functioned as a way to unite supporters, and McMillan (2017) deemed it a call to his supporters to mobilize. Stuckey (2020) similarly argued that Trump relied heavily on "othering" to unite the small, exclusive group of people deemed worthy to be American: "It requires us to see national belonging as a finite and limited resource rather than as an expansive and welcoming ideal" (p. 382).

McDonough (2018) discussed how Trump used scapegoating during his campaign; he created and bolstered an in-group and excluded everyone else as part of the out-group. Trump's rhetoric also ranged from painting opponents as caricatures of idiots, as in Burkean burlesque, to the factional tragedy category of "scathing assaults on a villain" (Appel, 2018, p. 164). This demonstrates that Trump had never shied away from creating evil enemies out of others through his rhetoric. He also transitioned from scapegoating of opponents with burlesque rhetoric to the far more intense calls for violence and death to the enemy of factional tragedy rhetoric (Appel, 2018).

Trump often used categorical modifiers such as "totally" or "absolutely" when asserting that there were global forces threatening America (Appel, 2018). It is widely recognized that Trump created enemies, and that these enemies were often immigrants, refugees, Muslims, Mexicans, the entire country of China, and most minorities in general (Appel, 2018; Boylan et al., 2020; Edwards, 2020; McMillan, 2017; Mercieca, 2021; Restad, 2020, Nacos et al., 2020). Santis (2020) conducted a form of content analysis – summative – on Trump's media events just prior to and during the beginning of the pandemic. He found that Trump made enemies out of China, COVID-19, and the press.

These are the people who made up the out-group, or the frequent enemies that Trump created during his campaign and time as president.

Trump often specified people who are not from America as an out-group, and emphasized the importance of borders to keep out people from other countries who he depicted as threatening America's safety (McDonough, 2018). For Trump, borders became very important as a way to oppose America's enemies. He painted threats as un-American and as something that would invade or infest America (Edwards, 2020). Mercieca (2021) also mentioned Trump's use of the narrative that enemies were invading America, and he even claimed it could be a potential Trojan Horse situation, essentially creating the image that these people could be entering through the border into the U.S. under false pretenses with the intent to harm Americans. The caravans were a particular threat to the border, as these people were trying to invade America through the southern border, according to Trump (Edwards, 2020).

Trump's solutions to some of the threats to America, namely immigrants and Muslims, were to reduce immigration, deport those he deemed illegal, ban Muslims from entering America, and build a wall on the border (McMillan, 2017). Throughout his campaign, Trump constructed immigration as a massive issue that he would fix (Edwards, 2018). He has been a proponent of a strong border to keep immigrants out (Boylan et al., 2020) and has gone so far as to propose banning Muslim immigrants from the U.S. (Mercieca, 2021; Restad, 2020). Edwards (2020) called the border wall a symbol of Trump's anti-immigration stance. Trump had crafted the border to be an issue of keeping enemies out and protecting American exceptionalism.

Trump's rhetoric communicated a threat of crisis to his target audience and promoted himself as the solution, while attempting to create an image of what the American identity looks like (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021). Trump's campaign slogan to "Make America Great Again" can be argued to be a break from typical American exceptionalism, as he suggested that America was currently in need of his help to *return* to exceptionalism (Edwards, 2018). However, Edwards (2018) discussed the idea that exceptionalism can also be found in the form of potential for and future exceptionalism. While it may not be perfect at the moment – though it is still considered great – it has the potential to be amazing. He noted that the goal to always chase a "more perfect union" means exceptionalism is never entirely achieved and is something Americans must always strive for (Edwards, 2018).

Trump positioned himself, during his first campaign, in a way to appear as though he was the solution to restoring American greatness, or exceptionalism (McMillan, 2017). He purported himself as the savior of the nation during his campaign (McDonough, 2018). Trump used "self-interest" and "perfect ending" – burlesque and factional tragedy in Burkean terms – rhetoric to insist that with him in charge, everything would be far better (Appel, 2018, p. 167). He employed polarizing and first-person language to discuss how problems will be solved: "His rhetorical positioning as the savior is strengthened by his immediate dismissal of anyone else being able to do what he can and will" (McDonough, 2018, p. 148).

Edwards (2020) stated that "Trump certainly assures the public that his policies will solve the problems he identifies" (p. 296). Trump's campaign strategy was to assert that he could make America great again; this entailed making immigrants and the border

to be dangerous challenges to America (Edwards, 2018). Mercieca (2021) even claimed that Trump was framing himself as the personification of American exceptionalism. Thus, the answer to America's problems, as well as the key to achieving America's potential for greatness, was Trump himself.

These tactics of American exceptionalism Trump used in the past suggest that he, like other presidents before him, employed American exceptionalism in an attempt to unify Americans to help his campaign and presidency. He did so in his first campaign, and did so again during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the coronavirus outbreak, he stated ways in which America was great, and then claimed American greatness needed defending through frames that are common to America exceptionalism, such as war, enemies, borders, and unity. However, he was somewhat unique in that he purported himself as the key to maintaining American greatness. Next, I will describe my methodology and then demonstrate how Trump also used American exceptionalism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Data

This thesis uses grounded theory and content analysis to examine the rhetoric President Donald Trump used in the Coronavirus Task Force press briefings during the early phases of the pandemic. My unit of analysis are the transcripts of the Coronavirus Task Force press briefings, conducted at the White House and intended to focus on COVID-19. I collected 44 transcripts total, either from the official White House.gov site or from the president's public online calendar and thus triangulated across primary data sources. My systematic sampling strategy was guided by important events in the timeline of the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. The first transcript I collected was on February 26, 2020, and the last transcript I collected was on April 27, 2020.

I used this time frame because these were the press briefings dedicated to COVID-19, run by the Coronavirus Task Force at the White House, at which Trump spoke; February 26 is when this type of press briefing began, and April 27 marks the end of Trump consistently speaking at this specific type of briefing. Originally, I collected transcripts from February 26 until the beginning of June, but later narrowed my data to exclude what I deemed "special transcripts". These special transcripts were often from press conferences not focused on COVID-19, not at the White House and featuring the Coronavirus Task Force, not an event at which Trump spoke, or were meetings or media events and not press briefings. This criterion is for consistency, due to the very broad range of transcripts available. I then downloaded all of the selected transcripts as PDFs from each of these sites.

To analyze the data, I uploaded the reformatted the PDF transcripts to a computer program called Dedoose. This is an app used specifically for conducting data analysis on qualitative data. With this program, I was able to use quasi-grounded theory to perform content analysis on my data. According to Charmaz (2006), "grounded theory methods consist of systemic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded in the data themselves'" (p. 2). Using quasi-grounded theory – meaning that I had some general ideas of potential codes that might emerge, instead of going into the process with absolutely no idea what I may find – I conducted content analysis on the transcripts: "Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data… researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts" (Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, 2019).

These methods required that I create codes to establish these themes within the transcripts. According to Charmaz (2006), "[c]oding means that we attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about" (p. 3). Coding is a way to organize data to allow for making connections with other parts of the data (Charmaz, 2006). I built a coding scheme of the emergent themes I noticed related to Trump's presidential rhetoric on COVID-19.

This coding scheme was built through an iterative approach, in which I read through each transcript and assigned a code to each theme I noticed. This process is known as "abstraction", defined as "the stage during which concepts are created" (Elo et al., 2014, p. 1). I began with "downward abstraction" – meaning that I broke each

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transcript down to these smaller contextual semantic pieces (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Then, using "upward abstraction", I grouped certain codes together and sorted these themes until a larger story emerged (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). These groupings resulted in the codes I will discuss, also seen in Appendix B: Table 2, and Appendix C: Figure 1. These codes take the shape of a tree; codes that are broad and not in a subordinate position are called "root codes" in Dedoose, as they make up the base of the tree. "Parent codes" are any codes that are broken down into smaller, subordinate codes beneath them, known as "child codes". After this process, I had created a total of 18 codes that occurred across 1,263 excerpts.

When I had a clearer picture of the emergent themes in the transcripts, I theorized based on the extant literature. This process is how I came to the realization that the codes I was focused on were all related to American exceptionalism. Next, I will discuss the construction of the coding tree that I created and provide excerpts as examples of my findings. Finally, I will show how my codes and associated rhetorical excerpts connect to the literature I reviewed.

RESULTS

This section will present the findings of my research and discuss their meaning. I will describe the codes and frames that I found, and show their incidence across the 44 speeches. The codes that I was focused on are shown in Appendix B, Table 2; I will discuss the "Four Bests" codes, as well as the codes "War", "Enemies" and its child codes, "Unity", and the "Key to Success" code.

Four Bests

The first code I will cover is the "Four Bests" code and its more specific child codes. The "Four Bests" code is the root parent code that contains all of the ways in which Trump asserted America was the best. This covers the first prong in Trump's approach to invoke American exceptionalism: he clearly stated the ways in which American is exceptional. There are 321 excerpts contained in this code, which are broken down into the child codes "Best Economy/Industry", "Best People/Brightest Minds", "Best Science/Technology", and "Best State/Nation".

Best Economy/Industry

The first of the "Four Bests" is "Best Economy/Industry", which has 82 excerpts. This code is one of the particular ways that Trump often invoked American exceptionalism: asserting that America has the best economy and industry in the world. Some of these are basic claims of this greatness, like his statements *"We have a great country. There's no country like it in the world, and there's no economy like it in the world"* (March 23, 2020) as well as *"And we have a great economy, we have a very strong economy"* (March 9, 2020).

Other contentions were that this greatest economy was a recent development: *"And, you know, so I say I built the greatest economy – with all of the people that helped me and all of the people in this country, we built the greatest economy the world has ever seen* (April 27, 2020). Similarly, he stated that *"I, and everybody else that works with me, and 300 and — close to 350 million people built the greatest economy in the history of the world"* (April 20, 2020). In both cases, whether he simply claimed America's economy as the best, or whether he argued it was built during his time in office, he was invoking American exceptionalism.

Best People/Brightest Minds

The second way he invoked this exceptionalism was by asserting that America has the best people as well as the brightest minds; often, this was linked to the experts working on the COVID-19 crisis, and occasionally it was to declare American citizens as the best. There were 51 instances in which he used this form of exceptionalism. Not long after the Coronavirus Task Force started holding these press conferences, he assured U.S. citizens of their greatness: *"And my next thing is really getting the best people. We have the best people in the world. They're standing behind me. These people are so talented"* (February 29, 2020). He often claimed that the U.S. had the best experts in many fields, saying *"I want every citizen in our country to take heart and confidence in the fact that we have the best medical minds in the world tackling this disease"* (March 29, 2020) and *"We have the best doctors, the best military leaders, and the best logistics professionals anywhere in the world"* (April 5, 2020).

Although the experts were those frequently mentioned as the best, Trump also included citizens in this: *"We live in the company of the greatest heroes and the most*

inspiring citizens anywhere in the world" (March 13, 2020). This combination of the best

experts and the best citizens is what he said makes America exceptional:

> Because of the sacrifices of our great doctors and nurses and healthcare
> professionals, the brilliance of our scientists and researchers, and the goodness
> and generosity of our people, I know that we will achieve victory and quickly
> return to the path of exceptional health, safety, and prosperity for all of our
> citizens. (March 26, 2020)

The best and brightest minds were what would solve the COVID-19 crisis and save

American exceptionalism.

Best Science/Technology

The third form of American exceptionalism came from the superior science and

technology of the U.S. This code was applied 84 times. It frequently involved the use of

assuring the might of America's science and technology, and connecting this science and

technology to the ability of the U.S. to produce the best and carry out the most tests. The

pandemic could be ended by using *"the full might and resources of American science and*

technology" (April 23, 2020). This science and technology was a tool to fight the

coronavirus: *"America is bravely battling this pandemic through cutting-edge science,*

medical innovation, and rational, deliberate, and determined vigilance" (March 27,

2020).

The superior testing science of the U.S. was an important aspect of American

exceptionalism: *"We have done more tests, by far, than any country in the world, by far.*

Our testing is also better than any country in the world" (March 30, 2020). In fact, the

greatness of U.S. testing made the country a model for others, according to Trump:

> Because we are doing an incredible job of testing. We are doing a better job than
> anybody in the world right now on testing. There's nobody close. And other
> nations admit this. Other nations have admitted it very strongly. Other nations are
> calling us, wanting to know about our testing. (April 6, 2020)

The might of America's science and technology was the reason for this greatness in testing, and was just another form of America's exceptionalism.

Best State/Nation

The final of the "Four Bests" Trump used to invoke American exceptionalism is the assertion of America as the best nation. This rhetorical tactic was employed 104 times. Generally, it was statements about the greatness of America: *"We have an incredible country"* (April 4, 2020), *"This country is great"* (April 4, 2020), *"We've got the greatest country in the world"* (April 20, 2020), and *"The country is a great place, and it's going to be greater than ever before"* (April 24, 2020) were all declarations of Trump's belief in America as exceptional.

At the first Coronavirus Task Force press briefing, Trump announced the preparedness of the U.S. for COVID-19: *"The Johns Hopkins, I guess – is a highly respected, great place – they did a study, comprehensive: 'The Countries Best and Worst Prepared for an Epidemic.' And the United States is now – we're rated number one"* (February 26, 2020). Later, he repeated that sentiment, stating *"No nation is more prepared or more equipped to face down this crisis"* (March 13, 2020). The general greatness of America, as well as the asserted ability to handle the pandemic, made the U.S. a leader of other nations: *"The whole world is watching us. You have 184 countries out there that have been hit, and now it's probably higher than that, but they are all watching us"* (April 24, 2020).

<div align="center">Defense</div>

The "Defense" code is the root code that outlines Trump's second step in his invocation of American exceptionalism. It is the parent code of "War", "Enemies",

<div align="center">32</div>

"Borders", and "Unity", and contains 785 total excerpts. It houses these codes because Trump's second step was to assert that American exceptionalism needed defending, through the use of themes common to American exceptionalism such as war, enemies, borders, and unity.

War

During the press briefings, COVID-19 was often talked about as a war. The "War" code was created to capture these instances, and its child codes reveal patterns that emerged when broken down. The parent code contains 279 excerpts, demonstrating the frequency of the likening of the pandemic crisis to a wartime situation. Of these excerpts, 167 were blatant comparisons of the circumstances to war, while the rest of the excerpts were sorted into the patterns represented by the child codes. Many of these excerpts were the very clear assertion of the U.S. being at war with the virus: *"This is a war. This is a war. A different kind of war than we've ever had"* (March 22, 2020), *"a number of people have said it, but – and I feel it, actually: I'm a wartime president"* (March 22, 2020), *"We're at war with a deadly virus"* (March 31, 2020), and *"Sustaining this war effort is – and that's what it is; this is a war effort"* (April 4, 2020).

It was also common for Trump to describe the ways in which the war was being waged on the virus and the steps being taken: *"We are waging war on this virus using every financial, scientific, medical, pharmaceutical, and military resource to halt its spread and protect our citizens"* (March 26, 2020) and *"My administration is actively planning the next phase in an all-out war against this horrible virus"* (March 27, 2020). U.S. citizens and recommended guidelines even became weaponry: *"We've marshaled*

every instrument of American power, and we've unleashed our most potent weapon of all:

the courage of the American people" (April 16, 2020) and

> [C]itizens will continue to be called upon to use all of their weapons in this war: vigorous hygiene, teleworking when possible, staying at home if you feel sick, maintaining social distance, sanitizing commonly used surfaces, and being highly conscious of their surroundings. Those are our weapons, and they're very powerful weapons indeed. (April 16, 2020)

With this rhetoric, Trump made the COVID-19 crisis into a war.

Warriors. The child code "Warriors" captures another way that Trump pushed the war narrative; healthcare workers became the equivalent of warriors in this situation. This code only contained 17 excerpts, but I believe it to be an important detail in the crafting of the pandemic as a war. These excerpts of Trump's rhetoric liken healthcare workers to warriors and soldiers: *"I'm telling you, the nearest thing I can think of is soldiers in battle and soldiers going right into battle, because that's what they're doing. It's really – in many ways, it's the same thing"* (April 6, 2020) and *"They're warriors – these doctors and nurses. They're running into buildings, and they're literally putting it on as the doors are opening. They're putting all their stuff and running inside. And they're running inside to tremendous danger. Tremendous danger"* (April 5, 2020).

Trump even deemed healthcare workers equal to those actually in the military: *"This is a – a tribute to them, to our warriors. Because they are equal warriors to those incredible pilots and all of the fighters that we have for the more traditional fights that we win"* (April 22, 2020). These healthcare workers were made to be warriors and inspirational to other U.S. citizens: *"They're almost like – and I think I can take the word "almost" out. They're like warriors. They're going in. People are cheering. Where there's a building across the street, the people are screaming, they're clapping, they're – they're*

like heroes" (April 1, 2020). Trump created a situation in which the U.S. was at war with the coronavirus, and healthcare workers became the warriors.

Victory. The "Victory" code contains 95 excerpts, which are Trump's reassurances that the U.S. will emerge triumphant in the war, either "winning" in general, or "beating" or "defeating" the virus. This victory over the virus was frequently the way for America to become even greater than it already was: *"America will triumph and America will rise higher than ever before"* (March 20, 2020). Victory became the common goal for Americans to unite around: *"But, right now, in the midst of this great national trial, Americans must remain united in purpose and focused on victory"* (March 23, 2020). Trump claimed that *"The daring and determination of our people in this crisis reminds us that no matter how hard it gets, no matter what obstacles we must overcome, Americans will keep on fighting to victory"* (April 8, 2020), thus making the people a large part of the nation's success against the virus. The press briefings became a place for Trump's assurance that the U.S. would beat the virus.

Enemies

The "Enemies" parent code houses the three specific enemies that Trump crafted, including China, the virus, and immigrants. In total, these three enemies are captured in 257 excerpts.

China. The "China" code is the parent code of "Ban on China" and "From China". It contains the two child codes, for a total of 131 excerpts that are some way in which China is mentioned in a negative way. These negative references to China were broken down into the child codes to show the two common ways that Trump made an enemy out of China: China, whether as an entity itself or the Chinese people themselves, needed to

be kept out of America due to their threatening nature; and the virus itself also became a threat from China, linked to the country and its people.

The "Ban on China" code covers instances in which the literal ban on China, or disallowance of travel from China into the U.S., is talked about. I applied this code to 83 excerpts. These excerpts include Trump's discussion of this ban, his assertions that it was done very early, and that the pandemic would have been far worse if not for this decision. He commonly called it a great action on his part, saying *"Something we did very well is, when we stopped the inflow from China at a very early level, that was a good thing to do, a great thing to do"* (March 29, 2020) and *"But if you take a look, I was the first one to say to China – and I have great respect for China, I will tell you that. But I was the first one, when they had the problem, to say, 'You can't come in.'"* (March 27, 2020).

He claimed this great action of his saved the country from becoming infected like China, insisting things like, *"By the way, it would have happened here a lot sooner had we not kept those people out – the Chinese people coming over to the country – had we not kept them out"* (March 27, 2020) and *"if we didn't close our country to China, we would have been so infected, like nobody's ever seen"* (April 22, 2020). Trump made it clear that the early decision to ban travel from China was a good and crucial moment for the U.S.

The other child code, "From China", is applied to 48 excerpts. These excerpts are moments when Trump stated that the virus is from China, or called it by a name clearly linking it to China. He said *"It came from China. It got out of control. Some people are upset"* (March 20, 2020) and *"All I can say is, wherever it came from – it came from China – in whatever form, 184 countries now are suffering because of it"* (April 17,

2020); these statements connected the coronavirus with China and even placed blame on the country. He also referred to it in ways that reinforced this idea, saying *"I talk about the Chinese virus and – and I mean it. That's where it came from"* (March 26, 2020) and *"At that time, we called it the 'Wuhan virus,' right? Wuhan"* (April 13, 2020). This rhetoric all functioned to tie the virus to China.

Viral Enemy. Another created enemy in the war was the virus itself; the code "Viral Enemy" documents 81 instances in which the coronavirus is referred to as some form of enemy. Trump described the virus as such: *"We have an invisible, as opposed to a visible, enemy. I think, in many ways, the invisible enemy is much more dangerous, is much tougher"* (April 16, 2020). In fact, the virus became almost worse than any other kind of enemy: *"Sometimes a hidden enemy is a lot tougher than somebody that stares you in the face, right?"* (March 26, 2020). Trump asserted that *"This invisible enemy is tough and it's smart and it's vicious"* (April 17, 2020), and thus was a great threat to the U.S.

Immigrants. The child code "Immigrants" is for instances in which Trump talked about immigration both generally and with relation to the virus. This code is applied to 44 excerpts. Most importantly, though, is how he made it an issue of the pandemic: *"In normal times, these massive flows place a vast burden on our healthcare system, but during a global pandemic, they threaten to create a perfect storm that would spread the infection to our border agents, migrants, and to the public at large"* (March 20, 2020).

The pandemic created an opportunity for Trump to demonstrate the significance of this issue: *"And we've had this problem for decades. For decades. You know the story. But now it's – with the national emergencies and all of the other things that we've*

declared, we can actually do something about it” (March 20, 2020). After enacting a

pause on immigration, he explained that this would give Americans better access to

medical supplies and healthcare, as well as provide them with much needed jobs given

the virus-related unemployment (April 21, 2020). The pandemic thus became tied to the

issue of immigration.

Borders

The "Borders" code holds 144 excerpts that are instances where the border is

discussed in general and when the border wall is mentioned. This parent code shows how

Trump commented on the border both separately from and in relation to the COVID-19

pandemic.

Trump often stated that he believed borders are vital to the identity of a nation and

its greatness, asserting that *“We learned something about borders. We need borders. A

country needs borders to be a great country”* (April 10, 2020), *“Having borders is very,

very important”* (March 30, 2020), and *“Without borders, you don't have a nation”*

(March 24, 2020).

These are statements about the general importance of borders, but Trump also

made it clear that he believed the border was especially important during the pandemic,

saying that *“Border control is fundamental to virus control”* (April 14, 2020), *“This

crisis has underscored just how critical it is to have strong borders”* (March 24, 2020)

and *“Border control, travel restrictions, and other limitations on entry are more

important than ever to keep the virus in check and allow Americans to get back to work”*

(April 16, 2020).

He also explained that *"Our nation's top healthcare officials are extremely concerned about the grave public health consequences of mass uncontrolled cross-border movement"* (March 20, 2020) and because of this threat, *"the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has decided to exercise its authority under the Title 42 of the U.S. Code to give Customs and Border Protection the tools it needs to prevent the transmission of the virus coming through both the northern and the southern border"* (March 20, 2020). With this rhetoric, Trump placed great significance on the border.

Unity

The "Unity" code is especially important to American exceptionalism, as American exceptionalism is often used as a way to unite people. There were 105 clear and explicit unity-related excerpts. Trump used the press briefings to claim this unity of American citizens: *"As our citizens persevere through this present challenge, we're renewing American unity and we're replenishing American will and we are witnessing new American valor each and every day"* (April 8, 2020). Further, he declared this unity as a source of power: *"As citizens, we're linked together by the shared bonds of national love, loyalty, and affection. There's no earthly force more powerful than the patriotic pride that stirs in our hearts"* (April 2, 2020).

Finally, he directly linked this unity to the COVID-19 pandemic and to American greatness: *"As we've seen throughout our proud history, America is never greater than when our people are working in unison toward a common goal. That's what's happening right now"* (April 15, 2020). These quotes show how Trump asserted unity amongst the American people, and related it to the coronavirus pandemic through the idea that this

was a crisis for the people to unify around. This unity, according to Trump, makes America great.

<center>Trump is Key</center>

The "Trump is Key" root code contains 157 excerpts of instances in which Trump insisted that he, and sometimes his administration, were doing an amazing job with the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as with running the country. This represents his third step in the approach to invoke American exceptionalism, and is somewhat unique to his employment of American exceptionalism.

Generally, Trump claimed that he was handling the pandemic well, using aggressive action: *"Since the early stages of the foreign outbreak, my administration has taken the most aggressive action in modern history to confront the spread of this disease"* (February 29, 2020) and *"These trends demonstrate that our aggressive strategy to battle the virus is working"* (April 22, 2020). He also made general statements about running the country well: *"I will have done, I think, a great job, because I don't think anyone has done as much in three and a half years as I've done, I don't think – and the administration"* (March 19, 2020), and *"I don't think any administration has done anywhere near what we've done in three and a half years"* (April 15, 2020).

Common patterns in these excerpts were Trump's adamant assertions that prior to his administration, the "testing system" in case of the need for large-scale testing, was broken, and that he fixed it: *"We literally rebuilt tests. We – we rebuilt a whole industry because we inherited nothing. What we inherited from the previous administration was totally broken, which somebody should eventually say. Not only were the cupboards bare, as I say, but we inherited broken testing. Now we have great testing"* (April 13, 2020).

Similarly, he argued that he rebuilt the military system: *"Hey, I inherited – we, this administration – we inherited a broken system, both militarily, but we've rebuilt our military where we now have so much ammunition, whereas you remember a very important general said, 'Sir, we have no ammunition.'"* (April 6, 2020).

He also tied his success to topics like the economy, war, China, immigration, and the border. Not only did America have the best economy, according to Trump, but he was central to that: *"I mean, I was presiding over the most successful economy in the history of the world"* (March 27, 2020). In the war on the virus, he stated that *"For those worried and afraid, please know: As long as I am your President, you can feel confident that you have a leader who will always fight for you, and I will not stop until we win"* (March 22, 2020). He claimed that no one treated China more strongly than he had (April 10, 2020), and let U.S. citizens know that *"Fortunately, I was not convinced and suspended travel from China, saving untold numbers of lives"* (April 14, 2020). Finally, because of his strong borders, immigration was a problem being solved: *"And you remember when I first took over, they had all of the caravans coming up with 10,000, 15,000 people in the caravans. They were marching through Mexico. That's not happening anymore"* (April 1, 2020). According to Trump, he and his administration were solving problems facing the U.S.

These root codes of "Four Bests", "Defense", and "Trump is Key", represent the three-pronged approach Trump took to invoke American exceptionalism. They, as well as their child codes, show the frames that emerged in Trump's rhetoric during the COVID-19 press briefings. These frames come together to reveal the patterns of this larger rhetorical theme being employed: American exceptionalism.

DISCUSSION

Now I will discuss how these findings connect to American exceptionalism. As learned in the literature review, presidential rhetoric holds power and rhetoric is important to public health. Further, presidents often invoke American exceptionalism in their speeches, frequently using the themes of war, enemies, and borders as devices to do so. Here, I will argue that my results show that Trump, using the COVID-19 pandemic and public health crisis, as well as the power of his presidential rhetoric, invoked American exceptionalism in similar patterns to his predecessors, and then suggested that this exceptionalism needed defending, before purporting himself as the key to upholding this exceptionalism.

Four Bests

First, the "Four Bests" root parent code demonstrates how Trump asserted American exceptionalism. This code represents the first prong in his three-step approach to invoke American exceptionalism. In his purporting of the greatness of America, he suggested that there was something special about America, which was Ceaser's (2012) definition of American exceptionalism. The "Best Economy/Industry" code contains examples of what Gilmore and Rowling (2019) called the explicit exceptionalism subtheme of superiority. They explained that this form of exceptionalism often makes mention of the greatness of the American economy, which Trump did by quite literally calling the American economy the greatest in the world during the press briefings.

Similarly, the subtheme of superiority can be applied to the "Best People/Brightest Minds" code, in which Trump proclaimed that America has the best people; both experts and citizens were touted as superior to the people of other nations.

Gilmore and Rowling (2019) included the mentioning of American people as amazing as an example of this subtheme of superiority. Therefore, by labelling American people as the best, Trump invoked American exceptionalism by suggesting there is something special about American people and by declaring their superiority.

The "Best Science/Technology" code provides examples of what Gilmore and Rowling (2019) called implicit exceptionalism – indirect hints at exceptionalism often through portraying America as a model and leader – and which Neumann and Coe (2011) found to be a common way for presidents to invoke exceptionalism. Trump boasted that America's science, particularly the COVID-19 testing, was far better than any other nation and that other nations were inquiring about this superior testing, thus invoking implicit exceptionalism.

The "Best State/Nation" code also invoked this implicit exceptionalism and presidential tactic, as Trump often claimed that other nations were looking to America as a leader and a model. Further, the straightforward claims of America being a great country and the best nation, were ways of invoking explicit American exceptionalism. The "Four Bests" are examples of common ways that American exceptionalism is invoked, and how Trump did so during the pandemic.

<div align="center">Defense</div>

The "Defense" code represents the second step in Trump's invocation of American exceptionalism. In this second step, he used themes key to American exceptionalism to declare that this exceptionalism needed defending, including the frames of war, enemies, borders, and unity.

The "War" code contains examples of Trump creating a rhetorical war, which

Knopf (2011) noted is used to reinforce exceptionalism and create American consensus.

As both Hutchinson (2007) and Knopf (2011) argued, violence, bloodshed, and sacrifice

are important parts of American exceptionalism; through the creation of the COVID-19

pandemic as a war, Trump invoked exceptionalism. The "Warriors" code, in which

Trump described the dangers that healthcare workers face and the sacrifices they and the

American people make, align with the violence and sacrifice of war. The healthcare

workers also become heroes, as Knopf (2011) noted can happen, and they are held up as

an inspiration to the rest of the American people as Hutchinson (2007) explained may

happen during wartime.

War also leads to a "we vs. they" situation (Hutchinson, 2007), and this is where

the un-American and evil enemies become important. As Beasley (2004) said, opposition

is necessary, and presidents must craft enemies that are a threat to American ideals. These

threats are often foreign, such as foreign nations or immigrants (Beasley, 2004).

Trump provided these un-American and evil enemies necessary for the "we vs.

they" situation. My results support Santis' (2020) findings that Trump turned both the

virus and China into enemies. However, I expand on this, as here I will connect these

enemies to American exceptionalism and thus a larger pattern with a function. The "Viral

Enemy" child code demonstrates Trump's usage of the term "enemy" when talking about

the virus, thus creating one enemy of America.

China also became an enemy, as the nation Trump blamed for spreading the virus;

the "China" parent code and its child codes "Ban on China" and "From China" show how

Trump made the virus the fault of China, while also making the virus un-American with

its ties to China. Immigrants, too, were made to be enemies and are considered un-American. The "Immigrants" child code shows how Trump claimed that immigrants would bring infection, take healthcare and medical resources from Americans, and replace jobless Americans, which pitted immigrants against Americans and tied them to COVID-19.

All of these enemies are un-American; Trump called the coronavirus a "foreign outbreak" (February 29, 2020) and a "cruel virus from a distant land" (April 16, 2020), called foreign travel dangerous (April 16, 2020) and threatening to the health of Americans (April 1, 2020), and talked about banning "foreign nationals" (March 13, 2020). Trump's rhetoric functions to make these enemies – the virus, China, and immigrants – as un-American as possible.

As covered in the literature review, before the emergence of the pandemic Trump made people not from America into an out-group in the past (McDonough, 2018). The border became his solution to keep these un-American threats out of America. As borders are tied to the very foundation of America as a nation (Drake, 2011) and these borders are also crucial to its defense (Walker, 2011), they become important for American exceptionalism. The "Borders" code evidences Trump's insistence on a country needing borders to be great, and to keep out the virus. If China is banned and immigrants cannot get in, then Americans are safe from the un-American viral enemy in Trump's logic. Thus, the border is necessary in protecting American exceptionalism from the un-American threats facing the nation.

American exceptionalism is used to unite citizens (Beasley, 2004). The "Unity" code reveals how Trump often made the claim that the pandemic was uniting Americans

in a way like never before, and that now they had a shared goal and would emerge from this challenge victorious and greater than ever. This theme of unity is often linked with and underlies the other frames of war, enemies, and borders, and is an important part of American exceptionalism.

The insistence on American exceptionalism, the narrative of a wartime situation, the creation of un-American enemies, the border as protection from threats to the nation, and the assertion of a united nation are all ways in which past presidents have invoked American exceptionalism. Trump invoked American exceptionalism through the specific "Four Bests", and then proclaimed that this exceptionalism needed defending by incorporating these themes of war, enemies, borders, and unity. Trump tied each of these themes to COVID-19 specifically, taking a public health crisis and using it to invoke American exceptionalism.

Scholars believe Trump used American exceptionalism to unite his supporters in the past (Mercieca, 2021), to call on these supporters to mobilize (McMillan, 2017), and to create a united and exclusive group (Stuckey, 2020). Given this employment of American exceptionalism in the past, both by Trump and other presidents, and the functions that scholars have attributed to it, it can be used to rally Americans and to try to win support from them. American exceptionalism is directly related to American identity (Restad, 2012). Americans agree that the United States is better than other nations (Ceaser, 2012) and they expect the president to tout this exceptionalism (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019). Trump has espoused American exceptionalism since he first began his campaign (Mercieca, 2021) and he used COVID-19 to continue this.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a crisis in which the application of American exceptionalism could have a function. The press briefings themselves, which were media events, also presented an opportunity. As Bush and Boller (1991) established, during the AIDS crisis the TV campaigns had the power to build awareness of facts, build worry and fear, or provide a coping response. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the usage of media to share information, it is worth considering how the power of rhetoric, the power of presidential rhetoric, and the connection between rhetoric and public health all interact and what influence the media might have. Perhaps the media was the perfect mechanism for conveying COVID-19 information, as well as sharing the message of American exceptionalism and broadcasting unity.

Trump's second step of the approach he used to invoke American exceptionalism was to proclaim that American exceptionalism needed defending. He did so by employing common themes of American exceptionalism, such as war, enemies, borders, and unity. This second step fits the general usage and pattern of American exceptionalism. However, he seemingly took this a step further than previous presidents when he centered himself and claimed to be the key necessary to maintaining American exceptionalism.

<u>Trump is Key</u>

The aforementioned codes as discussed can all be related back to common themes of American exceptionalism, as utilized by past presidents. The ways in which Trump claimed America is great, and his assertion that this exceptionalism needed defending by linking it to war, enemies, borders, and national unity, are all frames that have been used

in American exceptionalism in some form before. However, Trump appeared to have broken the mold slightly, in his centering of himself.

As Appel (2018), Edwards (2018), Edwards (2020), Lacatus and Meibauer (2021), McDonough (2018), McMillan (2017), and Mercieca (2021) all noted in some way, Trump made himself out to be a solution to America's problems, and the key to maintaining American exceptionalism. My findings show that he did the same during the COVID-19 pandemic. The "Trump is Key" code shows how Trump claimed credit for making the economy, the testing system, the border situation, and the military great, while making it clear that he would be the one to lead the U.S. to victory over the virus with his administration's handling of the coronavirus outbreak. The areas that he declared he had fixed, rebuilt, or led to greatness all show that not only was he the necessary component for America's general greatness, but for defending American exceptionalism and winning the war against the virus.

CONCLUSION

After conducting content analysis on Trump's COVID-19 press briefings, I found that he invoked American exceptionalism and tied it to the pandemic. The patterns he followed, including purporting this exceptionalism, creating a rhetorical war, making un-American enemies, supporting borders as a solution, and asserting national unity are all common themes found in some forms of American exceptionalism and have been employed by presidents before him.

In the first step of his approach, he stated the ways in which America was exceptional very clearly: the U.S. economy, citizens, science, and the nation itself are all the best. Then, he made it clear that it was necessary for this exceptionalism to be defended: by turning the pandemic into a war, by crafting enemies, by promoting the border as a solution, and by asserting national unity, Trump used other common themes of American exceptionalism to prove the need for defense. This invocation of American exceptionalism could give the nation something to unite around; this tactic was used by other presidents before him. However, in his third step, Trump also situated himself as a necessity in upholding this American exceptionalism, thus becoming a somewhat unique employer of American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism rhetoric is common in times of change or instability (Neumann & Coe, 2011). Given the public health crisis occurring, the American public's belief in this exceptionalism and expectation of the president to tout it, and that scholars have suggested it can at times promote unity and be helpful for one's political party and personal political success, the invocation of American exceptionalism may have seemed a

reasonable approach. However, it does not appear that this rhetoric alone was enough to help Trump's presidency in any way, regardless of his motives.

Trump's handling of the pandemic approval ratings in the polls this thesis analyzed never broke 50%, while the disapproval rates were frequently above 50%. The partisan split also showed that Democrats largely disapproved of Trump's action during the pandemic. The numbers and loss of the 2020 election suggest that Trump's COVID-19 response and usage of American exceptionalism was not enough to bring him any success.

Perhaps this rhetoric would have had a different outcome if not applied to a public health crisis or if his actions and other words were different. As Malley and colleagues (2009) stated, rapid and transparent factual information is what the public needs during a health crisis. While American exceptionalism has some function and can be useful for a president, it is worth considering that this function may not be relevant or helpful on its own during a global pandemic.

Trump may have relied too heavily on American exceptionalism; this rhetoric alone is not enough to win an election, nor is it a useful response to a pandemic. Trump's motives cannot be proven, and Stuckey (2020) noted that it is not always important what the individual president hopes to accomplish, if anything at all; in fact, there might not be a "conscious motivation" for their rhetoric at all (p. 368). It is worth considering that this is just an ingrained rhetorical instinct for presidents and that the first two prongs of Trump's approach, which fit patterns common to American exceptionalism, were just that: an unconscious rhetorical pattern.

Future research on this topic could take a few different directions, but one interest I have is in determining the exact extent to which Trump followed and deviated from the American exceptionalism pattern. Preliminary findings from my data, as found in the "Trump is Key" code, suggest that a potentially unique feature of Trump's American exceptionalism was how he made himself out to be the savior of American exceptionalism, which was under attack from the coronavirus and other threats tied to the pandemic.

With the McGillicuddy Humanities Center Fellowship, I may expand on this research by further analyzing how Trump asserted himself as the only one who could completely restore American exceptionalism, using the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to demonstrate the threats to American exceptionalism as found by this thesis, while also suggesting that he was responsible for the greatness occurring during the pandemic. In this extension, I could then compare and contrast Trump's American exceptionalism rhetoric with that of some other presidents to determine whether other presidents have utilized some form of the savior of exceptionalism trope, and thus just how typical or divergent was Trump.

Many people believe Trump to have been an anomaly, unlike any U.S. president before him. However, Stuckey (2020) argued that Trump was "a symptom and promoter rather than a cause of what is happening in our national politics" (p. 368). This suggests that enough citizens were open to Trump's ideas to allow for them to have success (Stuckey, 2020). Citizens related to his campaign – including the use of American exceptionalism – enough in the past to elect him as president. Thus, the ideals that Trump

ran his first campaign on, which also reflect the themes found in American exceptionalism, reached a receptive public.

These themes, as established in this thesis, are the idea that America is special, a victorious nation in times of war, with unique people, and a remarkable land under attack from un-American enemies that only a strong border can protect from. War and violence are tied to imperialism, while the creation of un-American enemies and strong borders are connected to xenophobia, racism, and nationalism. It can be argued that American exceptionalism is inseparable from, and built on, these harmful systems. Presidents participate in perpetuating these harmful patterns, and Trump did so as well. He invoked American exceptionalism themes throughout his campaigning and time as president, and tied this American exceptionalism to the COVID-19 pandemic. With these rhetorical frames, Trump turned the coronavirus crisis into the issue of a threat to American exceptionalism, rather than the public health crisis that it truly is.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Transcript Names and Dates

Transcript Title	Transcript Date	Transcript Source
Press Conference: Donald Trump Provides an Update on the Coronavirus Outbreak	February 26th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Delivers an Update on the Coronavirus	February 29th, 2020	Public Calendar
Remarks: Donald Trump Delivers a Coronavirus Briefing	March 9th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds a Press Conference on the Coronavirus Pandemic	March 13th, 2020	Public Calendar
Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force	March 14th, 2020	White House Page
Remarks: Donald Trump Delivers a Statement at the Daily Coronavirus Briefing	March 15th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 16th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 17th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 18th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 19th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 20th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 21st, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 22nd, 2020	Public Calendar

Appendix A, Table 1, cont.

Transcript Title	Transcript Date	Transcript Source
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 23rd, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 24th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 25th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 26th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 27th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 29th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Joins the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 30th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	March 31st, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 1st, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 2nd, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 3rd, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 4th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 5th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 6th, 2020	Public Calendar

Appendix A, Table 1, cont.

Transcript Title	Transcript Date	Transcript Source
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 7th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 8th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 9th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 10th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 13th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 14th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 15th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 16th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 17th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 18th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 19th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 20th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 21st, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 22nd, 2020	Public Calendar

Appendix A, Table 1, cont.

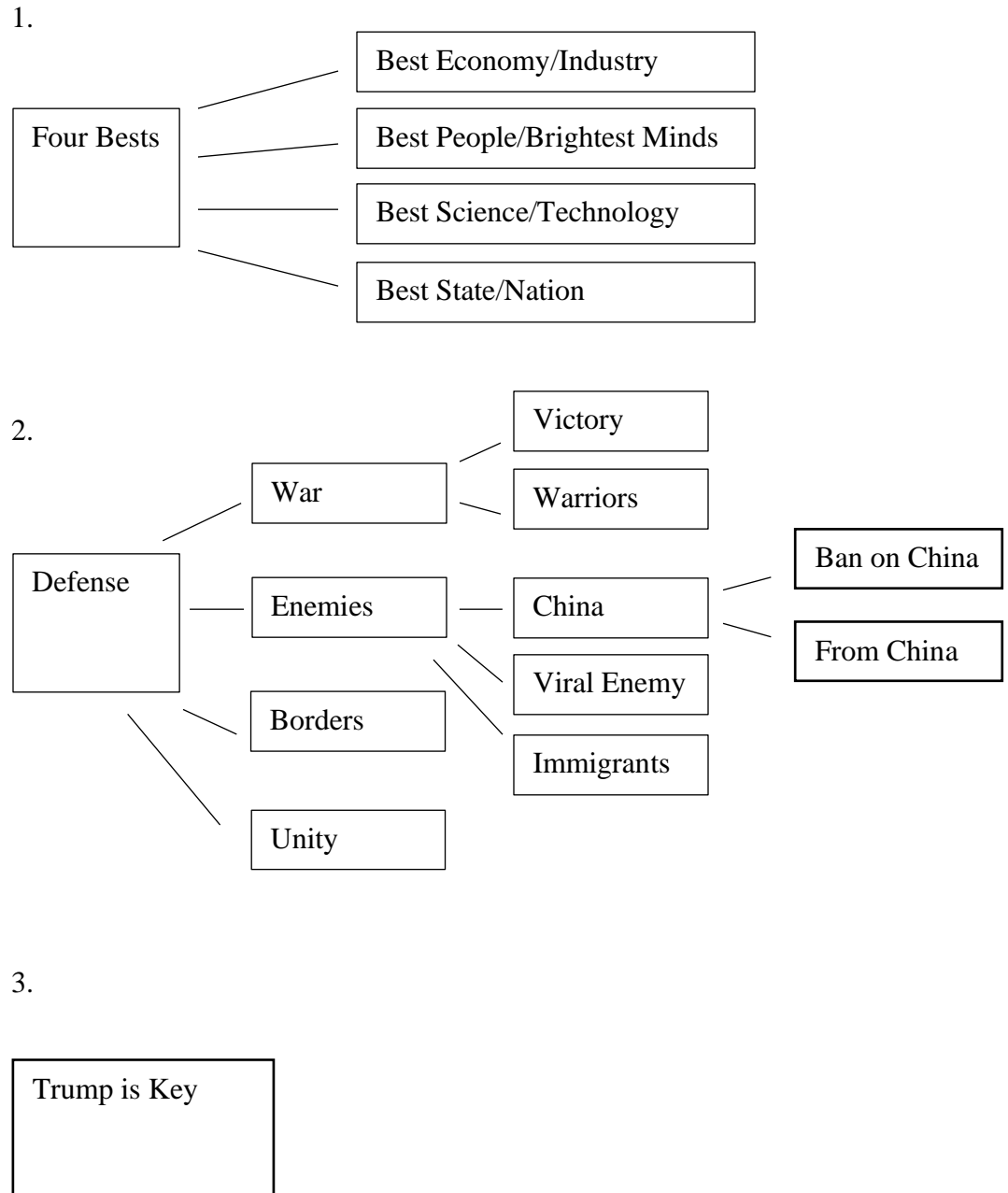| Transcript Title	Transcript Date	Transcript Source
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 23rd, 2020	Public Calendar
Remarks: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 24th, 2020	Public Calendar
Press Conference: Donald Trump Holds the Daily Coronavirus Pandemic Briefing	April 27th, 2020	Public Calendar
Total Transcripts (N) = 44		

Table 2. Code Names and Excerpts

Strategies to Invoke American Exceptionalism in Presidential Rhetoric (Table)

Code Name	Code Excerpts
1. Four Bests	**321**
Best Economy/Industry	82
Best People/Brightest Minds	51
Best Science/Technology	84
Best State/Nation	104
2. Defense	**785**
War	279
Victory	95
Warriors	17
Enemies	257
China	131
Ban on China	83
From China	48
Viral Enemy	81
Immigrants	45
Borders	144
Unity	105
3. Trump is Key	**157**
Total Codes (N) = 18	**Total Excerpts = 1,263**

Figure 1. Code Tree

Strategies to Invoke American Exceptionalism in Presidential Rhetoric (Image)

1.

Four Bests

- Best Economy/Industry
- Best People/Brightest Minds
- Best Science/Technology
- Best State/Nation

2.

Defense
- War
  - Victory
  - Warriors
- Enemies
  - China
    - Ban on China
    - From China
  - Viral Enemy
  - Immigrants
- Borders
- Unity

3.

Trump is Key

AUTHOR'S BIO

Sabrina Paetow grew up in Topsham, Maine. As a dual-degree triple major, she will graduate with a degree in sociology, and a degree in anthropology and psychology. Upon graduation, Sabrina plans to pursue a PhD in sociology.