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# FADING THEONOMY?: MASCULINISTS, GUN CULTURE, NEOCONS, AND TED CRUZ

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## *Abstract:*

I adopt a communications approach to examine the effects of ideological commitments and personal branding through the prism of Senator Ted Cruz. I conclude that his most noticeable media stunt was an attempt to attract four broad groups represented in the Republican electorate: masculinists, gun advocates, neoconservatives, and theonomists. While his attempt was brilliant, his campaign and appeal ultimately buckled under his personal brand which sought to unite disparate political ideologies. However, approaching this failure from a corporate communications perspective may reveal a fading theonomistic influence within the republican ranks in terms of resonant messages. I conclude that the populism witnessed in the 2015-2016 presidential campaign season, may indicate that theonomistic appeals only create tensions among neoconservative voters and some segments of the Evangelical voting bloc producing message misalignment from a fractured personal brand.



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## Fading Theonomy?: Masculinists, Gun Culture, Neocons, and Ted Cruz

This essay is an examination of failure. On August 3, 2015 presidential candidate for the Republican Party, Senator Ted Cruz, in an attempt to compete in one of the most hotly contested presidential primaries in a century, taught his public how to cook bacon using a semi-automatic rifle. [The video was released](#)<sup>1</sup> in the wake of other videos depicting the shenanigans of Republican hopefuls: Senator [Lindsay Graham destroying a number of cellphones](#)<sup>2</sup>; [Dr. Ben Carson playing a game of Operation](#)<sup>3</sup>, and Kentucky Senator [offering options to “kill the tax code”](#)<sup>4</sup>. The video sparked [global confusion](#)<sup>5</sup> emanating from [multiple news](#)<sup>6</sup> outlets eager to [comment](#)<sup>7</sup> on Cruz’s latest attempt to compete with the media-adept mogul, Donald J. Trump. Trump’s [initial stunt](#)<sup>8</sup> catalyzed an entire week of viral video one-upmanship [by releasing Senator Graham’s cell phone number to a crowd of jubilant fans](#)<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps most interestingly, all five candidates have expressed discontent with Washington politics thus labeling themselves outsiders as each vied for the adoration of the fractured GOP electorate.

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<sup>1</sup> "How to Making Machine Gun Bacon with Ted Cruz." YouTube. August 04, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://youtu.be/Vt898JHPqro>.

<sup>2</sup> Cbsnewswebextras, "How to Destroy Your Phone, Featuring Sen. Lindsey Graham," YouTube, July 22, 2015, , accessed September 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPAvOaNpoiM>.

<sup>3</sup> DaveRamseyShow. "Dr. Ben Carson Plays The Operation Game." YouTube. August 26, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOiPZZCly1o>.

<sup>4</sup> "How Would You Kill the Tax Code?" YouTube. July 21, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtglptO4v34>.

<sup>5</sup> NewsOnABC. "Meet Republican Candidate Ted Cruz and His Machine-gun Bacon." YouTube. December 22, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yoKO2mPPHI>.

<sup>6</sup> Mikey Smith, "Presidential Hopeful Ted Cruz Cooks Bacon with an Assault Rifle - Mirror Online," Mirror, August 05, 2015, , accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/presidential-hopeful-ted-cruz-cooks-6201155>.

<sup>7</sup> TheYoungTurks. "Ted Cruz Makes." YouTube. August 09, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M8DQkhmLdw>.

<sup>8</sup> "Donald Trump Gives Out Lindsey Graham's Cell Number at South Carolina Rally." YouTube. July 21, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOO\\_9ozy-h0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOO_9ozy-h0).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

The Trump phenomenon cannot be ignored. His near effortless rise to the Republican nomination has sent pollsters, party elites, political and social scientists, YouTube hacks and journalists into a confused tizzy concerning the significance of his success thus far. But this paper is not about his rise or what his brand of populism could mean for the future of politics. Whether Cruz is simply [unlikeable](#)<sup>10</sup>, or was outdone by [Trump's personae, better suited to the spectacular and the distracting](#)<sup>11</sup>, the question remains: to whom was Cruz trying to appeal and what would possess him to make such a video? I suggest that Cruz's video intended to appeal to at least four established groups within the GOP ranks: masculinists, gun advocates, neoconservatives, and theonomists. For those unfamiliar with the term, the theonomist's project is to bring their interpretation of God's law in line with the law of man.

This paper contends that all four groups share similar rationalities supporting an understanding of politics and social life in common. I am not committed to the position that these rationalities necessarily converge or that these groups agree at all times, but a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and values of these rationalities helps explain why Cruz's stunt was more strategic than silly, though he ultimately failed to close the gap between he and Trump. [Both Cruz and Trump were locked in a struggle over a common electorate](#)<sup>12</sup> and, if the Trump phenomenon is so novel, then it is reasonable to conclude that Trump had a message that resonated with more of the same type of voter than Cruz. This paper adopts a communications approach in order to analyze how personal branding affects the mobilization of icons in political messaging. I am acutely interested in how Ted Cruz's failure to capture the nomination may point to a failure in his messaging. Could the Cruz campaign signal the ossification and decay within the Republican electorate of one of the groups he attempted to attract? I contend that the theonomist is ultimately responsible for Cruz's failure because theonomy is not merely a political rationality operating through liberalism, but a distinct political ideology that is antithetical to

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<sup>10</sup> Gass, Nick. "Boehner: Cruz Is 'Lucifer in the Flesh'" POLITICO. April 28, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/04/john-boehner-ted-cruz-lucifer-222570>.

<sup>11</sup> "Is Trump the END of Politics? – 8-Bit Philosophy." YouTube. February 20, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlptgqP\\_PEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlptgqP_PEA).

<sup>12</sup> NewsOnABC. "Meet Republican Candidate Ted Cruz and His Machine-gun Bacon." YouTube. December 22, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yoKO2mPPHI>.

liberal democracy. Theonomy has been integral to the Ted Cruz brand and if theonomy's pull among the Republican electorate is fading, then it may signal the end for an uneasy alliance held between neoconservatives and segments of the Evangelical right.

To be clear: the conditions which surround the message are equally important as the message itself. Ted Cruz was fighting a battle in a fragmented political environment and his attempts to capture key audiences required him to appeal to groups he believed would carry him to the nomination. We are currently seeing the Evangelical right, a faithful voting bloc of the Republican party, [rally behind Donald Trump](#)<sup>13</sup>. This should come as no surprise given the conclusion of hotly contested nomination and the selection of Mike Pence as Trump's Vice Presidential running mate. [Current polls are showing](#)<sup>14</sup> that 45% of white, right-leaning Christians are voting for Trump only in opposition to Hillary Clinton and are mostly dissatisfied with their selection.

### **Masculinists, Gun Culture and the GOP**

Masculinity and its practice can be divided into two similar but distinct categories: dominant masculinity, and hegemonic masculinity. Cunningham, Domke, Coe, Fahey and Van Leuven have used this division to analyze political discourse during the 2004 US presidential election.<sup>15</sup> Their purpose was to understand "how performances of masculinity allow for the accrual of...masculinity capital, a linguistic form of masculinity that seems to become particularly significant during times of threat and crisis in the United States".<sup>16</sup> Their findings indicate the asymmetric use of hegemonic masculinity as a discourse strategy by the Republican

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<sup>13</sup> Bixby, Scott. "Evangelical Christians Rallying behind Donald Trump, Poll Finds." The Guardian. July 13, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/13/evangelical-christians-donald-trump-support-increasing-poll>.

<sup>14</sup> Zylstra, Sarah E. "Pew: Most Evangelicals Will Vote Trump, But Not For Trump." Gleanings. July 13, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/july/pew-most-evangelicals-will-vote-trump-against-clinton.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, S., D. Domke, K. Coe, A. Fahey, and N. V. Leuven. "Accruing Masculinity Capital: Dominant and Hegemonic Masculinities in the 2004 Political Conventions." *Men and Masculinities* 16, no. 5 (2013): 499-516.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 499

Party to frame their opponents.<sup>17</sup> Hegemonic masculinity has been borrowed from R.W. Connell and refers to discursive practices that legitimize male dominance through performances drawn from a set of heteronormative values.<sup>18</sup> This form of masculinity is hegemonic in practice through the global assertion of how a man ought to be. Such performances can include: emasculation tactics to frame others as feminine<sup>19</sup>, sexual practices prizing conquest and slut-shaming,<sup>20</sup> and the use of symbols and objects to bolster both public and self-perceptions of dominant masculinity<sup>21</sup>. Emasculation tactics can be either overt expressions or play on subtext. For example “Whereas Arnold Schwarzenegger’s ‘girlie-men’ phrase is an explicit feminization, most emasculating discourse present in the 2004 conventions, such as Vice President Dick Cheney’s claim that Democrats want to fight a more ‘sensitive war on terror,’ functionally emasculates without overtly being sexist.”<sup>22</sup> The objective of hegemonic masculinity is always to dominate the feminine whether it be “putting women in their place,” dominating feminized men, or reinforcing particular conceptions of masculinity against other cultural conceptions such as white versus black masculinity.

Dominant masculinity refers to ruling conceptions of masculinity and the appropriate self-presentation of conforming to those conceptions. It is the “celebrated and widespread type,” and can include asserting oneself as fit to occupy spheres traditionally considered masculine territory.<sup>23</sup> Dominant masculinity is culturally specific and is in constant flux as social

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<sup>17</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 507

<sup>18</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 502. Currier, D. M. "Strategic Ambiguity: Protecting Emphasized Femininity and Hegemonic Masculinity in the Hookup Culture." *Gender & Society* 27, no. 5 (October 2013): 706. Ferber, A. L. "Racial Warriors and Weekend Warriors: The Construction of Masculinity in Mythopoetic and White Supremacist Discourse." *Men and Masculinities* 3, no. 1 (July 2000), 38. & Stroud, A. "Good Guys with Guns: Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns." *Gender & Society* 26, no. 2 (April 2012): 217

<sup>19</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 502-503

<sup>20</sup> Currier 2013, 711

<sup>21</sup> Stroud 2012, 217-221

<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 511

<sup>23</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013, 502

movements concerning identity challenge notions of masculine and feminine.<sup>24</sup> Masculinity requires femininity in order to remain conceptually significant as an identity construct. The two are intimately related categorically and the meaning of one informs the meaning of the other. Battles concerning the masculine and the feminine are thus fought in terms of self-meaning and identification. It is through these categories that individuals come to partial self-understanding in relation to others. The social struggles concerning masculinity's dominance in society are thus about the orientation of self to others within society. Therefore, definitions of the masculine and the feminine dictate who dominates whom and what traits and performances are to be prized or abhorred. White masculinity in the United States has been in crisis since the 1960s as new social movements challenged dominant notions of gender and racial relationships.<sup>25</sup> Since then, broad swaths of the white male population have been without a solid identity construct through which they socially orient themselves and have felt under attack giving rise to a backlash dynamic against race and femininity.<sup>26</sup> This backlash has included the reassertion of heteronormative values through performances and an articulation of masculinity in essentialist terms as antagonistic to femininity.<sup>27</sup>

Ted Cruz articulates masculinity in his video in at least two ways: his role in his family and, the gun. His antics are a method of projecting himself as both provider and protector through his use of the rifle to cook bacon for, anecdotally, his family in the Texas way. Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the video is knowing that Cruz was trying to be funny while quietly asserting a hegemonic masculinity.

Cruz invokes masculinity through displaying himself as provider for his family. He begins the video "there are few things I enjoy more than cooking breakfast with the family on the weekends." His statement and then performance imply that he is "bringing home the bacon," and this asserts him as provider for his family making no mention of his family's role in the process.

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<sup>24</sup> Ferber 2000, 31

<sup>25</sup> Ferber 2000, 30-31

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 31-32, 36-37

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 37-38

This asserts a dominant understanding of men as the providers of the family - though broader [demographic shifts](#)<sup>28</sup> are indicating a [significant rise](#)<sup>29</sup> of [single-mother families](#)<sup>30</sup> among the [US population](#)<sup>31</sup> – and he articulates his self-worth as a ‘good father’ through this performance. This performance quietly ties masculinity to an economic understanding of the role of men in the family and society as providers for their families who are passive recipients of their charitable affection displayed through the conversion of work into sustenance. Thus, he appeals to those who understand masculinity in terms of traditional gender roles framed in an economic understanding of men as the breadwinners. Therefore, he quietly reasserts a dominant understanding of femininity as dependency in contrast to typical notions of masculine individuality and rugged independence.

The above articulation of masculinity is limited to currency in dominant masculinity capital and, at least analytically, it is difficult to assert that Cruz is performing gender roles cast in terms of hegemonic masculinity. However, the gun changes his message from merely approximating the heteronormative values of dominant masculinity, to an external expression of hegemonic masculinity. He effectively changes his dominant currency into hegemonic capital through the collision of symbolic articulations of masculinity.

Being a “good father” comes part and parcel to Cruz’s display of hegemonic masculinity. In a study conducted by Angela Stroud in which she interviewed 20 men who regularly carry handguns in public she found that, “three primary themes emerged in men’s explanations of why they want to carry a firearm in public: (1) to protect their wives and children from violent crime;

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<sup>28</sup> "Percentage of Single Mother Households in the U.S. 2015, by State | Statista." Statista. 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242302/percentage-of-single-mother-households-in-the-us-by-state/>.

<sup>29</sup> Badger, Emily. "The Unbelievable Rise of Single Motherhood in America over the Last 50 Years." Washington Post. December 18, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/12/18/the-unbelievable-rise-of-single-motherhood-in-america-over-the-last-50-years/>.

<sup>30</sup> Sanchez, Erika L. "OPINION: Single Mothers Need Solutions, Not Shaming." Single Mothers Need Solutions, Not Shaming. August 15, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/single-mothers-need-solutions-not-shaming.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Carbon, June, and Naomi Cahn. "The New Math of the Single Mother." POLITICO Magazine. October 13, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/the-new-math-of-the-single-mother-111842>.

(2) to compensate for lost physical strength; and (3) to make them feel more secure in places they feel vulnerable.”<sup>32</sup> Themes 2 and 3 are interesting in that (2) bears broader implications on the normative structure of how a ‘real man’ interacts with objects and his environment; and (3) carries a racial dimension for the claim of self-defense. However, while they both bear mention regarding Ted Cruz and his rhetoric, the first and second themes are displayed most prominently in Cruz’s video.

Stroud’s findings concerning the gendered desire to appear as a ‘good father’ and the symbolic value of carrying a concealed firearm are bound in the masculine value of man-the-protector. Her findings indicate the contradictory nature of this value leading to a gendered explanation of the practice in terms of masculinity and femininity. While the married men she interviewed recognized that they spend more time away from their families than their wives, the symbolic currency of carrying a firearm was regardless bound in the notion of being a ‘good father’.<sup>33</sup> This currency loses its symbolic value when associated with the feminine gender role in the family. “[M]any of the other married men I interviewed said that they wish their wives would carry a concealed handgun, but in contrast to how they see their role as fathers, they do not see their wives as bad mothers because they are not licensed. Moreover, their wives’ refusal to be armed further emphasizes that it is a father’s job to protect his family.”<sup>34</sup> This notion is hegemonic in that it identifies the woman’s role as dependent on the man for protection thus reinforcing the subordinated role of women within the family. Socially, the notion of a ‘good father’ is used as a heteronormative cudgel to cajole similar behavior from other men. Those who do not comport to this behavior incur emasculation as a ‘bad father’ by definition because this requirement is seen as a necessary but not sufficient part of being a ‘good father’ or husband. Thus the narrative reinforces a hegemonic conception of the man as necessarily containing the ability to dole out lethality while his mate stands behind him as passive participant.

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<sup>32</sup> Angela Stroud. "Good Guys with Guns: Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns." *Gender & Society* 26, no. 2 (April 2012): 224.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 226

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*



Part of hegemonic masculinity is the ability to control, at all times, the objects in one's environment. The 'warrior ethos' is credited with adjusting masculinity to include the body as a site of scrutiny. Quoting Crawly, Foley and Shehan (2008), Stroud writes "The warrior ethos was an extension of the larger cultural shift that linked masculinity to muscularity and physical toughness. The body is central to how this operates because 'to be fully, appropriately masculine, a male person must exhibit physical control of his space and be able to act on objects and bodies in it'."<sup>35</sup> The imposition of one's will over objects is hegemonically masculine as it conditions an understanding of subject and environment construed in terms of domination. The 'real man' must possess the ability to use force to control his environment and cannot be afraid to use it to preserve the masculine order. Preserving the masculine order is about physically maintaining the gender hierarchy between men and women, and men and men. Cast in the social environment, the gun as "the great equalizer" symbolizes the ability for older men to maintain their masculinity against the younger, or for physically weaker men to gain dominance through potential lethality. The gun as a symbol of the masculine is hegemonically masculine because it is a tool to reinforce gender hierarchy through the control of one's physical environment.

Judith Butler asserts that identities are constructed through reiterative performances that reinforce and reassert who we are individually.<sup>36</sup> Performances of hegemonic masculinity need not include actual physical interactions with objects, but can communicate the ability to assert the dominant gendered order. Stroud, borrowing from Messerschmitt and Kimmel, recognizes the role simulation and fantasy play in the performances of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>37</sup> "Yet few men have culturally legitimate occasions to express...violence, making simulated scenarios ideal to engage in violence fantasies."<sup>38</sup> Simply because Cruz is not firing at any individual does not mean that his performance does not serve a reiterative function of hegemonic masculinity. His actions operate in simulation to express his ability to physically dominate another and

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid 218

<sup>36</sup> Butler, J. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993, 2

<sup>37</sup> Stroud 2012, 218

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

communicates his willingness to use lethality to assert his masculine role. Thus, through the use of the gun as the main platform from which he expresses his role as provider, Cruz effectively converts the symbolic objects of bacon and family into hegemonic capital through associating them with violent masculine fantasies.

The composition of Cruz's video is brilliant in terms of cultural resonance. By resonance I mean the receptivity of representations at the affective register of subjectivity. The Republican Party has used hegemonic masculinity to galvanize their electorate, and their discourse is rife with identification strategies that focus on antithesis.<sup>39</sup> If Cruz's object was to draw Republican voters to his camp and away from his opponents, then displays of hegemonic masculinity are almost a sure bet. His appeal is furthered by conforming to standards of gun culture in the United States. Stroud synthesizes numerous studies concerning the effects of the gun lobby on masculinity writing "The gun lobby has been active in producing meanings of masculinity as it works to expand gun rights, even in the face of public outcry over the danger of guns."<sup>40</sup> The brilliance of the gun lobby has been the fusion of their corporate and economic interests with a simulated interest in preserving American identity. As corporate communicators, they have effectively shaped the symbolic meaning of the gun through a strategy of symbolic unification posited as common corporate strategy of identification by George Cheney.<sup>41</sup> A unifying symbol can be a company's trademark, or logo<sup>42</sup> and the strategic management of the symbol plays a significant role in how the organization constrains meaning and interpretation. The gun lobby has been able to capitalize on ambiguous terms such as a "masculinity" and "freedom" in order to index these terms to their economic interests through the iconic object of the gun thus creating a unifying symbol that allows a deeper political and moral interpretation of the gun. Ted Cruz, through deploying the symbol of the gun in performance plumbs not only the meaning of 'masculine', but also gun publics who have used the symbol of the gun to construct individual

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<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, et al. 2013

<sup>40</sup> Stroud 2012, 219

<sup>41</sup> Cheney, George. "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 2 (May 1983): 154-55

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

identities. Therefore, Cruz effectively spans two publics who may not necessarily identify with one other but share the common link of masculinity through which they construct their identities and play a significant role in the Republican electorate.

### **Neocons and Theonomists: An Uneasy Alliance**

Leaving aside symbolic contests through political messaging, this section focuses on the convergence of two distinct worldviews that collide in Ted Cruz himself: neoconservatism and theonomy. I employ the notions of personal branding and identity to analyze how neoconservatism and theonomy are held and projected by Cruz in an effort to attract support by building on scholarship by Wendy Brown, William Connolly, and Erin Runions. I contend that part of Cruz's failure to clinch the nomination is due to the ideological incompatibility of liberalism and theonomy. I make a division analytically between ideology and rationality which allows me to categorize neoconservatism as a rationality that operates through liberal ideology. I argue below, alongside Runions, that theonomy is a distinct ideology because it does not posit 'equality' as an object in its ontology. Liberalism, on the other hand, posits 'equality' as an object and is, at minimum, ontologically committed to upholding it as an object through which rationalities operate.

Wendy Brown discusses the symbiotic relationship held between neoconservatism and neoliberalism.<sup>43</sup> She posits both in terms of rationalities: neoliberalism is a political-economic rationality; and neoconservatism as a political-moral rationality.<sup>44</sup> She defines a political rationality, borrowing from Foucault, as "a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices and citizenship. A political rationality governs the sayable, the intelligible, and the truth criteria of these domains."<sup>45</sup> Brown recognizes both neoliberalism and neoconservatism as political rationalities though they operate in different spheres. Neoliberalism, as a form of normative reason, governs the intersection of politics and

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, W. "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization." *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (December 2006): 690-714

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 691

<sup>45</sup> Ibid 693

economics through “The saturation of the state, political culture, and the social with market rationality,” and has three salient features: (1) the denaturalization of markets and the recognition of “entrepreneurial rationality as achieved and normative;” (2) the recasting of the social and political spheres as dominated by market concerns and organized by market rationality; and (3) the adoption of market language – productivity, profitability, efficiency, and etc.,- in governance.<sup>46</sup> A political rationality is not the same as an ideology as I have defined it. The logic of neoliberalism operates over and through the objects of liberalism: market, state, citizen, and etc. This, I argue is what makes neoliberalism *liberalism* and not a different project entirely. Political rationalities recognize that an object exists, say ‘equality,’ but will disagree over what to do with or how to infer from that object. Political ideologies, however, disagree over what objects exist in their ontologies. In this sense they do not disagree about what to do with ‘equality’ but disagree that ‘equality’ can or should be posited as part of a political ontology.

Neoconservatism is “an emergent political rationality that both draws from and produces a particular political culture and political subject.”<sup>47</sup> As a political-moral rationality it is opportunistic and can ally itself with religious movements that will support its moral mission within the political sphere. It sees the state as a site for moral influence and it “is animated by an overtly avowed power drive, by angst about the declining or crumbling status of morality in the West and its values.”<sup>48</sup> Neoconservatism is deeply nostalgic for a romanticized notion of the past and holds aristocratic sensibilities, values and leadership without positing an aristocracy as an ontological commitment. Though it operates to justify the existence of poverty in moral terms, it does not naturalize social hierarchy in a fixed order. Moral failings can be overcome through moral means and the American dream is still achievable. Brown’s thesis, that these two rationalities work symbiotically and are gradually de-democratizing the political culture of the United States, is enabled because both collide in the political subject.<sup>49</sup> “[N]eoliberal political

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid 694-95

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 696

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 697

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 702

rationality, has inadvertently prepared the ground for profoundly anti-democratic political idea and practice to take root in the culture and the subject.”<sup>50</sup> Religious discourse is a tool for neoconservative dominance but is not explicitly committed to one religious organization “Nor would I concur with those who insist that neoconservatism is relentlessly millenarian or inextricably bound with the ‘rapture Christians’ – there are too many secularists and Jews at the neoconservative helm for such claims to be viable.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, neoconservatism, as a political-moral rationality, does not expressly tie itself to one religious doctrine, but will ally itself with a religious doctrine, when necessary, advance its power.

William Connolly argues that the affinities held between the Evangelical right and the neoliberal economic elite are properly understood as the result of affective resonance.<sup>52</sup> He questions how such an unlikely union would come about because the interests of the ‘cowboy capitalists’ (read: *neoliberals*) seem at odds with the interests of Evangelical Christians.<sup>53</sup> Further, they cannot be united under a common creed or doctrine. He thus moves to the affective register positing an affinity of *resentiment* in order to approach this odd union from the perspective of emotion, representation and the symbolic finding affinities of identity and sensibility bridging their formal doctrines.<sup>54</sup> I do not employ his language but his analysis reveals how political messages can successfully target both groups and pump identities. In other words, it seems that one could be both an Evangelical and a neoliberal and still present a coherent message.

Erin Runions, taking up Connolly’s framework, analyzes a particular group of Evangelical Christians – theologians – and their relationship to neoconservatism.<sup>55</sup> She focuses

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 706

<sup>52</sup> Connolly, W. E. "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine." *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (December 2005): 869-86

<sup>53</sup> Ibid 869

<sup>54</sup> Ibid 871

<sup>55</sup> Runions, Erin. "Theologico-Political Resonance: Carl Schmitt between the Neocons and the Theonomists." *Differences* 18, no. 5 (2007): 43-80.

on the sense of loss and outrage expressed by both groups. “To be sure, loss of (male) authority and agency as well as fear over such loss is something that one can find quite readily in conservative Christian and political right-wing writing.”<sup>56</sup> While her project is to find affinities between these groups (she does in readings of law and authority), she recognizes them as ideologically distinct “the preoccupation to restore lost power and in the resolution of that need through structurally (perhaps even theologically) similar, though ideologically different, conceptions of authority and law.”<sup>57</sup> Theonomy is an Evangelical Christian moral-political project growing out of Christian Reconstructionism.<sup>58</sup> It holds a messianic attitude toward statecraft and claims the Bible as the sole moral authority.<sup>59</sup> It is global in scope and holds that all nations must bring their legislation in line with the Sinai Covenant.<sup>60</sup> The theonomist is committed to realizing these ideals as part of millenarian commitment to the second coming of Christ.<sup>61</sup> The state apparatus is similarly seen as a site of moralization through the rule of law. Both the theonomist and the neocon see the world in terms of good and evil, and both believe the state ought to commit to a decisive stand against evil, preferably through a masculine sovereign.<sup>62</sup> Her analysis reveals that, for the neocon, equality is an impossibility in terms of universality and neutrality and that this is expressed through their understanding of leadership necessary for a world seen in these terms.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, equality is impossible for the theonomist who must battle against evil in order to bring about God’s kingdom.<sup>64</sup> However, they differ in the site of their

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid 44

<sup>57</sup> Ibid 45

<sup>58</sup> Gordon, T. David. "Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy." *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 23.

<sup>59</sup> Chismar, Douglas E., and David A. Rausch. "Regarding Theonomy: An Essay of Concern." *JETS* 27, no. 3 (September 1984): 315. & Gordon, 1994, 29

<sup>60</sup> Gordon 1994, 23, & 25-6

<sup>61</sup> Ibid 27 & 29

<sup>62</sup> Runions 2007, 54

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibid 56

battle and this matters because the scope of equality changes for the theonomist differently than the neocon.

Universal equality is impossible for both the neocon and the theonomist because the world is always a battle against good and evil. These binaries divide the world into unequal parts in moral terms. However, while this precludes *universal* equality, this is merely a disagreement about the distribution of equality and not the ontological object altogether. “Whereas the enemy is outside the nation for neocons, for the theonomists, the enemy is within; it is most often defined by those who violate family values.”<sup>65</sup> While the exaltation of traditional family values is shared between the neocons and theonomists, the neocon does not see the rule of law as necessarily biblical and this prevents him from seeing the immoral as the enemy imminent in his society. For the theonomist, the Bible is what defines the enemy. Therefore, the project of bringing man’s word in line with God’s law is what enables the theonomist to moralize ‘equality’ to the level of interaction within the State itself. For the neocon, the enemy cannot be a fellow countryman because to be a countryman is to be committed to the defense of the nation which posits equality among citizens before the democratically decided rule of law. Therefore, the theonomist is ontologically committed to a world without equality while the neocon recognizes equality among the political category of ‘citizen.’

### **Closing: The Ted Cruz Brand**

Hegemonic masculinity is alive in theonomy and neoconservatism.<sup>66</sup> In both cases male authority is legitimized but society has led to the perversion of this order. This is one current that allows Ted Cruz to tie his message together not simply in his video but in his public presentation. His presentation is an effect of his personal brand. Branding is the “programmatic approach to the selling of a product, service, organization, cause, or person that is fashioned as a proactive response to the emerging desires of a target audience or market... In personal branding, the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid 58

<sup>66</sup> Wendy Brown also analyzes masculinity in neoliberalism in her book, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Zone Books 2015, but I won’t enter that analysis here.

concepts of product development and promotion are used to market persons.”<sup>67</sup> Personal branding as a movement evolved out of the tumultuous labor market of the late 1990’s and “Because branding is so well suited to present images as identity, branding as a strategy has become increasingly important as a flexible response to a crowded communication world.”<sup>68</sup> Cruz’s failure to capture the nomination is, I contend, in part because of his branding. He simply overcommitted in the presentation of his image and united disparate ideologies in an effort to capture audiences from the extreme right during a fractured and crowded Republican communicative environment. He appealed to masculinists and [gun lobby](#)<sup>69</sup> constituents by wrapping firearms in meat. He appealed to neoliberals through his [economic policies](#)<sup>70</sup>. His neoconservatism is evident in his [border](#)<sup>71</sup>, [foreign relations](#)<sup>72</sup> and [foreign interventionism](#)<sup>73</sup> positions. He is a strict [constitutionalist](#)<sup>74</sup> to boot! However, he did not just target [Evangelical Christians](#)<sup>75</sup>. He presented himself as a [theonomist](#)<sup>76</sup> by smuggling it in his masculinist message.

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<sup>67</sup> Lair, Daniel J., Katie Sullivan, and George Cheney. "Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self: The Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding." *Management Communication Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (February 2005): 307-43.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid 312

<sup>69</sup> "Second Amendment Rights | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/second-amendment-rights/>.

<sup>70</sup> "Jobs and Opportunity | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/jobs-and-opportunity/>.

<sup>71</sup> "Secure the Border | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/secure-the-border/>.

<sup>72</sup> "Stand with Israel | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/stand-with-israel/>.

<sup>73</sup> "Defend Our Nation | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/defend-our-nation/>.

<sup>74</sup> "Restore the Constitution | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/restore-the-constitution/>.

<sup>75</sup> "Religious Liberty | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/religious-liberty/>.

<sup>76</sup> "Life, Marriage, and Family | Ted Cruz for Senate." Ted Cruz for Senate. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/life-marriage-and-family/>.



The success of a brand relies on an agent to project an, authentic, coherent, and consistent message and is girded by the values that agent holds.<sup>77</sup> Cheney posits that personal identities are not merely embodied in the 'I' but that the 'I' is an amalgam of corporate 'we's'.<sup>78</sup> Our personal identities are partially constituted by our group memberships and the extent to which we identify with those groups and their stated values. The 'I', thus, is constituted by potentially conflicting 'we's' as the subject negotiates social life and moves in and out of specific groups. Cruz's personal brand collapsed under the weight of his group memberships and their conflicting values. The effects of his ideological commitments are witnessed in how he fought enemies both internal and external to the nation. Equality, a core liberal ontological commitment, cannot be consistently employed by Ted Cruz because he cannot commit to its existence or non-existence in his personal branding and messaging.

Donald Trump made similar appeals to masculinity, gun culture, neoconservatism, and neoliberalism, but he did not overcommit his personal brand by trying to appeal to theonomists. The trouble with Trump is believing that he is expressing an authentic message when he makes appeals to Evangelical Christian political-morality given his [history of marital infidelity](#)<sup>79</sup>, [shifting stances on abortion](#)<sup>80</sup>, and [multiple divorces](#)<sup>81</sup>. Apart from the selection of Mike Pence as VP running mate, Trump's personal brand has not included a theonomistic tenor. That his brand could not appeal to theonomy, and that Ted Cruz did, and failed, may signal the waning influence of theonomistic resonance among the Republican electorate. We will have much to learn about

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<sup>77</sup> Cornelissen, Joep. *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014, 71

<sup>78</sup> Cheney, George. "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 2 (May 1983) 143

<sup>79</sup> Tures, John A. "Who Is the Enabler of Donald Trump's Affairs?" *The Huffington Post*. May 12, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-a-tures/who-is-the-enabler-of-don\\_b\\_9929194.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-a-tures/who-is-the-enabler-of-don_b_9929194.html).

<sup>80</sup> Bump, Philip. "Donald Trump Took 5 Different Positions on Abortion in 3 Days." *Washington Post*. April 3, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/04/03/donald-trumps-ever-shifting-positions-on-abortion/>.

<sup>81</sup> Jordan, Mary. "Trump's Reference to Bill Clinton Affair Underscores His Own History of Infidelity." *Chicagotribune.com*. September 25, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2016. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/ct-trump-gennifer-flowers-women-20160925-story.html>.

the nature of politics in the information age thanks to Donald J. Trump and I believe one avenue of political inquiry should include a corporate communications approach.