

LEADING TO WAR

SEE WHERE THE TRUTH LIES

a film and website that chronicle the path to war in Iraq

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How did the U.S. government lead its people to war?

Rhetoric and Spin

An 'Either/Or' World

The Bush administration projected a world view of extremes, where there is no middle ground or compromise. The language they used posed "either/or" choices – oversimplifying complex issues. Divisive language discouraged balanced and in-depth reasoning, leading Americans and others to choose between artificially polarized options.

For example, this black and white rhetoric did not allow room for those who value freedom and cherish their country, yet did not support an invasion of Iraq. If you didn't support Bush administration policy, you were portrayed as unpatriotic.

Here are three examples of this rhetoric at work:

- "You're with us or against us"
- Action vs. Inaction
- Good vs. Evil

"You're with us or against us"

Bush officials would state that "you're either with us or with the enemy." This "us vs. them" dichotomy created an atmosphere where people – including many journalists and elected officials – were reluctant to challenge the administration's arguments for war, for fear of being seen as unpatriotic.

Video: WITH US OR AGAINST US

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BUSH: You know, I laid out a doctrine. You just got to know it still stands. It says, "Either you're with us, either you love freedom, and with nations which embrace freedom, or you're with the enemy." There's no in-between, and that doctrine still

stands.

Even French's Mustard was worried about possible political backlash against their brand; to stem a potential boycott, it issued a press release to reaffirm its patriotism and explain that "French" was a family name with no relation to the nation.

Action vs. Inaction

Bush officials often repeated the themes that "the only path to safety is the path of action," and that "the one option that we do not have is to do nothing." No one in America or in the international community was advocating inaction; there were other routes to take, such as weapons inspections, containment, and diplomacy. However, the Bush administration's logic implicitly characterized opposition to their policy as "inaction."

Ultimately, they contended there was only one viable option: the use of military force.

Here is one illustration of the absurd results of this "you're with us or against us" thinking: because France strongly opposed military action against Iraq, Congressman Robert Ney (R-Ohio) ordered all House restaurant and snack bar menus to rename french fries as "freedom fries" and french toast as "freedom toast." A statement from Ney read, "This action today is a small, but symbolic, effort to show the strong displeasure many on Capitol Hill have with our so-called ally, France." French embassy spokeswoman, Nathalie Loiseau, responded, "We are at a very serious moment dealing with very serious issues and we are not focusing on the name you give to potatoes."

Video: ACTION VS. INACTION

RICE: ...It simply makes no sense to wait any longer to do something about the threat that is posed here. As the President has said, the **one option that we do not have is to do nothing.**

RUMSFELD: ...The **one choice we don't have is to do nothing.**

POWELL: ...**Doing nothing is no longer an option.**

BUSH: I've calculated the **cost of inaction** versus the cost of action, and I'm firmly convinced if we have to, we will act.

BUSH: **Failure to act** would embolden other tyrants, allow terrorists access to new weapons and new resources...

BUSH: The **price of indifference** would be catastrophic.

BUSH: In the world we have entered, the **only path to safety is the path of action**, and this nation will act.

By "action," Bush doesn't mean weapons inspections, containment or diplomacy – he means military action.

Good vs. Evil

Bush and his administration spoke of world affairs in terms of the polar opposites of good vs. evil.

Bush officials posited that you're either with their administration on the side of good, or with the enemy on the side of evil – leaving no room for debate or healthy dissent.

Video: GOOD AND EVIL

CHENEY: As the President has said, this is a fight to save the civilized world. This is a **struggle against evil**, against an enemy that rejoices in the murder of innocent, unsuspecting human beings.

BUSH: If we stay strong when we need to be strong, speak clearly about **good and evil...**

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