

# FRAMING TERROR

## THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE UNDERLYING THE CHARACTERIZATION OF TERRORISM

*Adam Hodges*  
*University of Colorado*

Crossroads 2004  
Fifth International Conference of the Association for Cultural Studies  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
June 25-28, 2004

The social process that underlies the discursive characterization of terrorism is of immediate interest in light of the Bush administration's ongoing "war on terror." The discourses used to *frame* issues of terrorism code particular ideological perspectives on how to *deal* with terrorism. The discourse of George W. Bush since the events of September 11, 2001 has conveyed a framework for viewing terrorism as "war," accompanied by the policy such an ideological perspective entails. The current dominance of the "war on terror" terminology and *framework of understanding* in popular discourse is the result of an underlying ideological struggle over how to treat terrorism. In this paper, I look at the discursive construction of the "war on terror" in light of the sociopolitical power dynamics of American society, and contrast the discourse of Bush with his predecessor, Bill Clinton. These two discourses represent opposing ideological perspectives--one that views appropriate response to terrorism in line with a "crime" framework, in that terrorist acts and threats should be dealt with from within a system of criminal justice and foreign policy that adheres to domestic and international law, and the other within the framework of traditional military engagement, where terrorists are treated as cohesive enemies of a military power and fought in theaters of "war." I examine the discursive shift toward the current dominance of the "war on terror" terminology, which has become naturalized in popular discourse as a means for talking about terrorism and opaque to the underlying ideology it represents.