

You Know Where I Stand: Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign.

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Abstract

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conservative morality. Although John Kerry successfully questioned the validity of Bush's policy framing of the Iraq war as part of the war on terror, he continued to reason within the orthodox moral frame created by Bush in the wake of September 11, 2001. Consequently, Kerry did not critique the conservative moral foundations upon which Bush's policy frame rested nor did he affix an alternative liberal moral worldview to his own discourse on Iraq.

“YOU KNOW WHERE I STAND”: MORAL FRAMING OF THE WAR ON TERRORISM AND THE IRAQ WAR IN THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

CHRISTIAN SPIELVOGEL

Many pundits assumed that an allegiance to “moral values” associated with social issues such as same-sex marriage enabled George W. Bush to narrowly defeat John F. Kerry in the 2004 presidential election campaign. In this essay, I argue that both candidates produced surprisingly little explicit discourse on the moral issues in and of themselves, but rather, in distinct ways, relied upon the moral framing of the “war on terrorism” and the situation in Iraq as a battle between “good and evil” in their day-to-day political discourse. I argue that Bush employed this rhetorical frame to politically and morally cloak the war in Iraq under a larger war on terror and, in this way, produced a hegemonic expression, test, and affirmation of conservative morality. Although John Kerry successfully questioned the validity of Bush’s policy framing of the Iraq war as part of the war on terror, he continued to reason within the orthodox moral frame created by Bush in the wake of September 11, 2001. Consequently, Kerry did not critique the conservative moral foundations upon which Bush’s policy frame rested nor did he affix an alternative liberal moral worldview to his own discourse on Iraq.

Citing a national exit poll conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International in which 22 percent of voters in the 2004 presidential election identified “moral values” as their top issue, many journalists, pundits, consultants, and politicians declared in the days and weeks following the election that morality was the decisive “issue” that helped George W. Bush narrowly defeat Senator John F. Kerry and win reelection.¹ Polling data appeared, on the surface, to support claims by those who said that Bush was the beneficiary of the moral values vote. Eighty percent of those who cited moral values as their top issue in the poll conducted by Edison/Mitofsky voted for Bush, and white evangelical Christians voted four to one to reelect the

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