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ABSTRACT (English)

Reviewing former President Clinton’s speech in commemoration of the victims of UAF 93, held in Shanksville on September 10th, 2011, this paper examines the use of descriptions of the Battle of Thermopylae as a propaganda tool in times of national crisis and war. Reading the speech in the context of the 9/11 memorial tradition and its reception of president Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Thucydides’ account of Pericles’ Funeral Oration, as well as popular representations of the Spartans’ last stance, it discusses how these manipulations of history are used to propagate certain ideas of citizenship and democratic freedom and silences others. A comparison with Hermann Göring’s use of the myth of Thermopylae in a speech directed at soldiers in Stalingrad (1943) bears this out.

ABSTRACT (German)

Anhand einer Untersuchung der Rede von Alt-Präsident Clinton zum Gedenken an die Opfer von Flug UAF 93, gehalten in Shanksville am 10. September 2011, wird in diesem Artikel die Verwendung von Beschreibungen der Schlacht bei den Thermopylen als Propagandawerkzeug in Zeiten nationaler Krisen und Krieg untersucht. Indem die Rede im Zusammenhang mit der Tradition des Gedenkens an 9/11 sowie der Rezeption der Gettysburg-Rede Präsident Lincolns und der Gefallenenrede des Perikles bei Thukydides, wie auch populärer Beschreibungen des letzten Kampfes an den Thermopylen, gelesen wird, lässt sich aufzeigen, wie diese Manipulationen von Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung verwendet werden, um bestimmte Ideen über Bürgergesellschaft und demokratische Freiheit zu propagieren, während andere zum Schweigen gebracht werden. Ein Vergleich mit Hermann Görings Verwendung des Mythos von der Schlacht an den Thermopylen in seiner Stalingrad-Rede (1943) hebt dies hervor.



“And they did it as citizens”: President Clinton on Thermopylae and United Airlines Flight 93

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‘There has always been a special place in the common memory for people who deliberately, knowingly, certainly, lay down their lives for other people to live.’ Thus began former President Clinton his speech in commemoration of the victims of the United Airlines Flight 93 on September 10th 2011, at Shanksville. His brief oration compared the brave passengers of that flight, who gave their lives in obstruction of the hijackers’ plan to fly the plane into, as Clinton put it, ‘the center of American government’, with the 300 Spartans defending the pass of Thermopylae against a Persian invasion in 480 BC.¹

The analogy does not work on all fronts, most obviously so since the passengers on the plane knew they were about to die regardless of their actions, whereas the Spartans *chose* to defend the pass of Thermopylae at the cost of their lives.² Perhaps more significantly, Clinton manipulates the story of the battle to bring a message about the US as a free, tolerant, welcoming country which protects the value of individual human life. These are no doubt all very admirable qualities, but not ones that Sparta is most famous for.

In comparison, Hermann Göring’s radiobroadcast on the eve of the German defeat at Stalingrad, on January 30th 1943, probably stayed closer to Spartan ideals. The Greek city-state’s military tradition and reputation for discipline must have appealed to the *Reichsmarschall* as he expanded on the Spartans’ heroic self-sacrifice in an, in many ways failed, attempt to inspire his soldiers to do their duty and die in a blaze of glory. The most famous words of his speech, his

1 Clinton’s speech is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0IGCTdBVuc> [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016]. A transcript has been provided in the Appendix.

2 This has been picked up by the social media. A good example is the response of *Ibraton* on the neo-conservative website *The American Conservative*. He concludes that it may be more appropriate to compare the terrorists with the Spartans at Thermopylae: <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/bill-clintons-great-shanksville-speech/> [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

adaptation of Simonides' epitaph to the Spartans, bears this out: *'Kommst du nach Deutschland, so berichte, du habest uns in Stalingrad liegen gesehen, wie das Gesetz, das heißt, das Gesetz der Sicherheit unseres Volkes, es befohlen hat.'*³

This paper will compare Clinton's and Göring's use of the Spartans' example and show how each employed it to advertise different concepts of citizenship. Citizenship is indeed crucial for interpreting the two speeches as both Clinton and Göring appealed to their audience's sense of citizenship. Through concentrating on this aspect of their speeches we will also be able to question the effectiveness and desirability of these classical allusions as tools of propaganda and coping strategies in times of crisis. How does the use of such narratives and people's response to them affect ideas of citizenship? Without intending to blacken Clinton's undoubtedly well-meaning intention to comfort the loved ones of those who lost their lives on 9/11, the uncomfortable similarities between his and Göring's use of the Thermopylae myth demonstrates the potentially dangerous impact of such uses of history to justify modern policies.⁴

We will therefore begin this chapter by discussing ancient ideals of courage and citizenship as referred to in Herodotus' original account of the Spartans' stand at Thermopylae, questioning the extent to which Clinton's analogy fits both the classical narrative and modern expectations. Naturally, the latter have also been determined by popular reception of the ancient example. Of particular interest are the recent 2007 and 2014 *300!*-movies, and the Sparta mania resulting from these productions.⁵ Of importance are also the 1960 movie *The Alamo*, directed by John Wayne, a 2004 film with the same title, and the 1962 *The 300 Spartans*, directed by Rudolf Maté. Such modern, popular representations of the Battles of the Alamo and of Thermopylae have no doubt impacted more on Clinton's audience than their classical reading. He was, moreover, whether appropriately or inappropriately, by no means the first to use Sparta as a prism to understand the political and military position of post 9/11

3 The speech has been conveniently published by Boedtger (2009) 106–107. Roche (2013a) 23 provides an English translation.

4 Cf. Steuter/Wills (2008) 19.

5 On the popularity of Sparta in American military culture, see Rood (2010) 11–12.

USA. Many reviews of the *300!* movies show an awareness of the extent to which these movies were coloured by contemporary events.⁶

As we shall see in the second part of this article on the context in which he gave his speech, Bill Clinton not only chose a popular image of Sparta to commemorate the 9/11 victims, but also stepped into a rhetorical and memorial tradition that harks back to Thucydides' account of Pericles' Funeral Oration from 431 BC, via Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Pericles, as depicted by Thucydides, and Lincoln used these moments not just to remember the dead, but to encourage the living in a particular ideal of citizenship. The rereading of Lincoln's speech during the first anniversary of 9/11 in New York has been sharply criticized by those who argued that it was used to silence critics of Bush's War against Terror. As we shall note in Clinton's speech, but also in the speeches of George W. Bush and Joe Biden at the same event, Lincoln's use of Pericles' eulogy was transformed by the use of his speech in 9/11 commemorations, to celebrate the sacrifice of the passengers of UAF 93.

Worryingly, the use of these classical examples to affect an idea of self-sacrificing citizenship calls to mind Göring's use of the Thermopylae narrative to inspire the soldiers in Stalingrad. As noted above, Clinton and Göring used the myth to advertise different concepts of citizenship, and against a different background. Clinton's references to Sparta may be best interpreted through the Periclean lens of the 9/11 commemorative tradition, mingling the stereotype of the Spartan warrior with ideas about Athenian democracy and imperialism. In contrast, Göring's remarks connected mainly to a well-known image of Spartan discipline and self-denial. Helen Roche recently pointed out that Nazi officials popularized Spartan history well before Göring's 1943 speech. In fact, their interest in Sparta as an example for youth in the Third Reich may well have been influenced by their own reception of Spartan history during the first quarter of the 20th century. Nazi images of Sparta were not just convenient propaganda used to send German soldiers to their death on the Russian front, but constituted a culmination of a long tradition of German classicism dating back to the 18th century.⁷ Tracing such cross-references we will be able to see the long

6 Most tellingly Stevens (2007); Von Tunzelmann (2014).

7 Roche (2013a); Roche (2013b).

and varied impact of Herodotus' narrative as well as the social and political implications of its use as a propaganda tool in times of crisis.

Courage and Citizenship

Clinton in fact begins his brief speech with a remark that is spot on. 'Knowingly' and 'deliberately' are words that define the Greeks' understanding of courage as well as his. Herodotus, in his account of the Battle of Thermopylae, emphasises the Spartans' knowledge and understanding of their situation, and their willingness to make the final sacrifice. Just as in the philosophical treatises of Plato and Aristotle courage is described as a virtue possessed by people who face danger 'knowingly and deliberately', the Spartans *stand* in full recognitions of the consequences.⁸

It is especially significant that the three authors we rely on the most to reconstruct Thermopylae, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch in addition to Herodotus, all describe Leonidas as being convinced by the Oracle of Delphi that his death was necessary to save Sparta. Herodotus disparages any interpretation of the Spartans' action as *Realpolitik* with his insistence that Leonidas deliberately chose death and κλέος:

I, however, tend to believe that when Leonidas perceived that the allies were dispirited and unwilling to run all risks with him, he told them to depart. For himself, however, it was not good (οὐ καλῶς) to leave; if he remained, he would leave a name of great fame (κλέος μέγα), and the prosperity of Sparta (ἡ Σπάρτης εὐδαιμονίη) would not be blotted out.⁹

8 See especially Plato, *Laches* and Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1228a26–1230a7. Of interest is also Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 3,82,4 (on the perversion of these virtues during the *stasis* at Corcyra). Essential secondary readings include Schmid (1992); Rosen/Sluiter (2003); Roisman (2005).

9 Herodotus 7,220: Ταύτη καὶ μᾶλλον τὴν γνώμην πλεῖστός εἰμι· Λεωνίδην, ἐπεὶτε ἦσθετο τοὺς συμμάχους ἐόντας ἀπροθύμους καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλοντας συνδιακινδυνεύειν, κελεύσαι σφραγᾶς ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι, αὐτῷ δὲ ἀπέναί οὐ καλῶς ἔχειν· μένοντι δὲ αὐτοῦ κλέος μέγα ἐλείπετο, καὶ ἡ

This resolution to die, on the part of not only Leonidas but also of his Spartan and Thespian troops and enforced on the helots and the Thebans, colours Herodotus' narrative right from the start and overshadows the fact that Themistocles' strategy required the pass to be held and, if this was not possible, to withdraw with the remaining army.¹⁰ Diodorus goes even further when he depicts Leonidas as refusing to take more than 1000 men with him, saying:

(...) though ostensibly I am leading them to the defence of the passes, in reality I am leading them to die for the freedom of all, and so if a thousand set forth, Sparta will be the more renowned when they have died, but if the whole body of the Lacedaemonians take the field, Lacedaemon will be utterly destroyed.¹¹

Had it not been for Leonidas' special knowledge of the necessity of his death, his behaviour at Thermopylae might have been construed as brave and daring, but foolish. His pursuit of κλέος moreover makes him rather like Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. Leonidas *knows certainly* that songs will be sung of his heroic death and he dies *deliberately* to achieve this.¹²

So far, Clinton's comparison holds at least to this extent that Leonidas and the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 laid down their lives 'knowingly' and 'certainly'. Whether it was also 'deliberately' in both cases depends on one's perspective. Even though none of the passengers had chosen to be in their situation, Clinton has a point in that they deliberately hastened their deaths.

Σπάρτης εὐδαιμονίη οὐκ ἐξηλείφεται. All translations are taken from the Loeb Classical Library, with minor adaptations.

10 Especially at Herodotus 7,206; 7,208–209; 7,219,1; 7,223,2–4. The emphasis on the Spartans' preparedness to die is also clear in the famous epitaph at 7,228,2 (ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλειν Λακεδαιμονίους ὅτι τῆδε / κειμεθα, τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι. – 'Foreigner, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their commands') and the stories of Aristodemos the Trembler and Pantites at 7,229–7,232.

11 Diodorus 11,4,1–11,6 (11,4,4): ἀπεκριθῆ δὲ ὅτι τῷ λόγῳ μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν φυλακὴν ἄγει τῶν παρόδων, τῷ δ' ἔργῳ περὶ τῆς κοινῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀποθανουμένους· ὥστε εἴαν μὲν οἱ χίλιοι πορευθῶσιν, ἐπιφανεστέραν ἔσεσθαι τὴν Σπάρτην τούτων τελευτησάντων, εἴαν δὲ πανδημεὶ στρατεύσωσι Λακεδαιμόνιοι, παντελῶς ἀπολεισθαι τὴν Λακεδαίμονα.

12 Note, along with Baragwanath (2008) 70, that this appears to be Leonidas' primary concern at Herodotus 7,220,2.

Despite their knowledge that they would meet their death soon enough anyway, their act was still contra-intuitive and it is indeed a mark of their courage, in the Greek sense, that they held their heads together during this terrible ordeal, made a reasoned deliberation of the right course of action and carried it through.

Evaluating the situation in which the flight passengers found themselves, it may be more appropriate to compare them with the non-Spartan Greeks who also died at Thermopylae, but who have always received less attention in ancient and modern representations, a fact mentioned in some online responses to Clinton's speech.¹³ Herodotus mentions that Leonidas stayed behind with 300 Spartans, 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans, but it appears likely that a large number of helots were also counted amongst the 4000 celebrated by Simonides.¹⁴

As helots, they hardly merited mention in Herodotus' account, except from one brief cameo in 7,229, but he confirms their presence in a later passage in book 8, describing an example of Persian war tourism:

After this proclamation, there was nothing so hard to get as a boat, so many were they who would see the sight. They crossed over and went about viewing the dead; and all of them supposed that the fallen Greeks were all Lacedaemonians and Thespians, though there were the helots also for them to see.¹⁵

Herodotus' mention of the helots uncovers a chilling silencing of history¹⁶ that matches a similar reticence to acknowledge the role Tejanos played during the battle of the Alamo. They were written out of the story as surely as Davy

13 Notably Tbraton, comment on website *The American Conservative*, available at <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/bill-clintons-great-shanksville-speech/>, in addition to the string of comments below the YouTube video.

14 Herodotus 7,228. On this silencing of history, see Vannicelli (2007).

15 Herodotus 8,25: Ταῦτα ἐπαγγελιαμένου, μετὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲν ἐγένετο πλοίων σπανιώτερον· οὕτω πολλοὶ ἤθελον θεήσασθαι. Διαπεραιωθέντες δὲ ἐθηεῦντο διεξιόντες τοὺς νεκρούς· πάντες δὲ ἠπιστέατο τοὺς κειμένους εἶναι πάντας Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Θεσπιάας, ὄρῶντες καὶ τοὺς εἴλωτας.

16 Vannicelli (2007) suggests that this uncovering of the helots' participation in the defence of Thermopylae is deliberate.

Crockett's last stance was written into it. Increasingly, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the ethnic tensions arising from the formation of an American Texan identity in the context of a lost Civil War made sure that despite their historical role in the birth of Texas they could not belong to its foundation myth.¹⁷ This strategic moulding of official history to fit a sense of heroic identity may also be mirrored by the on-going creation of a history of all the events that happened on the 11th of September, 2001.¹⁸ Clinton's comparison is only one instance of a story told about that day in which the victims are transformed into heroes. We will come back to the implications of this transformation when we discuss the political and ideological reasons behind the memorial tradition of 9/11.

For Clinton it is the outstanding aspect of the passengers of Flight 93 that they performed their heroic sacrifice 'as citizens', as he remarks on the difference between them and the 300 Spartans as well as the soldiers fighting the Battle of the Alamo during the Texas Revolution. "This is something different. For at the Alamo and at Thermopylae they were soldiers. They knew what they had to do. "Your loved ones just happened to be on a plane", as Mr. Pinsky said. With almost no time to decide they gave the entire country an incalculable gift.' The implication seems to be that neither the Spartans nor the Texans fighting at the Alamo were 'citizens' or indeed had any meaningful civilian life. It is frankly a strange mistake to make for someone like Bill Clinton, who may not be a classical scholar, but is sufficiently interested in the classical world to be well aware that to fight as a hoplite was an integral part of citizenship in all Greek poleis, and especially in Sparta.¹⁹

17 Tjerina (2007); Crisp (2005) 145–149, 164 and *passim*. Note also Beachley Brear (1995) 2, 105–106 on the Alamo as an 'archetype of America's mythological "regeneration through violence"' from which the Tejanos are deliberately excluded, with reference to Rosenbaum (1981).

18 Note, for instance, this grade 3–5 lesson plan developed by the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, which starts with a brainstorm session about the meaning of courage: https://www.911memorial.org/sites/all/files/Anniversary%20Lesson_ES.pdf [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

19 Honan (1992) published a list Clinton's favourite reads, listing Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* and Seamus Heane, *The cure at Troy. A version of Sophocles' Philoctetes*. Clinton also sparked a

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The false distinction between Spartan and Texan soldiers and American citizens, however, served to ingratiate himself with his audience, the bereaved relatives and friends.²⁰ They might after all not appreciate the comparison with Spartan hoplites or even Texan troopers if such a comparison compelled them to think of their loved-ones in the questionable light of military heroism. Clinton was as likely to admit that the Spartans stood their ground at Thermopylae because they were obliged to as citizens as he was to admit that the Texans at the Alamo deliberately contravened the laws that they as citizens were bound to respect. Hence, he needed to set the UAF 93 passengers apart from these soldiers. We will come back to this later, but for now I want to suggest that Clinton also had in mind a certain ideal of citizenship that is more Athenian than Spartan and appears to be inspired by readings of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. We need to remember here that the Gettysburg Address has been widely recognized as modelled to a significant extent on Thucydides' account of Pericles' speech.²¹

To die for Freedom: Clinton's Pericles

This comparison with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Pericles' Funeral Oration is not only invited by Clinton's actual speech, but also by the context in which he held it. The memorial tradition of 9/11 invoked Pericles and Lincoln from the very start through the use of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address during the first anniversary of the attacks in New York City, and other speeches during the UAF 93 commemoration at Shanksville, notably those by George W. Bush and Joe Biden, echo Pericles'. The 2002 rereading of the speech has been widely

minor row when, during a visit to the Parthenon in 1999 he opined that the Elgin Marbles should be returned to Greece: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/529850.stm> [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

- 20 The criticism that Clinton was a master in using story-telling as part of his oratory, but neglected the 'architecture' of his speeches may be of relevance here too: Barber (2001) 109–110. If indeed it was a slip of the tongue, however, it was a significant one.
- 21 Goodman (1965); Wills (1992). Note also the remarks by Norton (2004) 134–135 on the two speeches being taught together as part of the Common Core.

criticized for its unoriginality and for its inappropriateness,²² but I would like to concentrate on the suggestion by Simon Stow that the rereading of the Gettysburg Address reconfigured the way it referred to 'Thucydides' representation of Pericles' oration.²³ This configuration has important implications for understanding the meaning of citizenship and empire in fifth century Athens, the USA in the first decade of this millennium, as well as the Western world more generally after the recent terrorist attacks.

Pericles, as seen through 'Thucydides' eyes, used the occasion to celebrate Athenian imperialism and inculcate its citizens with a patriotic desire to emulate the deceased in their service to the state. The audience, Pericles argues, needs to:

daily fix your gaze upon the power of Athens and become lovers of her (*καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς*), and when the vision of her greatness has inspired you, reflect that all this has been acquired by men of courage (*τολμῶντες*) who knew their duty and in the hour of conflict were moved by a high sense of honour, who, if ever they failed in any enterprise, were resolved that at least their country should not find herself deserted by their valour (*ἀρετῆς*), but freely sacrificed to her the fairest offering it was in their power to give.²⁴

Pericles' use of the word *ἐραστὰς*, derived from *ἔρω*, instead of *φιλία* to describe the love that Athens needed to inspire in its citizens is remarkable.²⁵ Taken at face value, and assuming that the historical Pericles actually used it, we might interpret the passage to mean that Pericles wants the Athenians to develop the same passionate, physical love for Athens that exists in the

22 Kakutani (2002); Sontag (2002); Canfield/Leavenworth (2002); Polner (2002); Holzer (2002).

23 Stow (2007).

24 Thucydides 2,43: τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς, καὶ ὅταν ὑμῖν μεγάλη δόξη εἶναι, ἐνθυμουμένους ὅτι τολμῶντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις αἰσχυρόμενοι ἄνδρες αὐτὰ ἐκτήσαντο, καὶ ὅποτε καὶ πείρα του σφαλεῖεν, οὐκ οὖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν γε τῆς σφετέρας ἀρετῆς ἀξιοῦντες στερίσκουσιν, κάλλιστον δὲ ἔρανον αὐτῇ προῖέμενοι.

25 There is a wealth of scholarship on this. See most recently Taylor (2010) 64–74, 133–134 with further references.

relationship between an ἐραστής and an ἐρώμενος, rather than the more rational and virtuous φιλία that is normally used to describe a citizen's love for his community. This is problematic, however. Ἐρως does not just inspire self-sacrifice, but can also, due to its irrational, passionate nature, lead the lover astray. This is the kind of love that blinds. I would like to propose that Thucydides chose these words for Pericles deliberately, in order to hint towards the dangers of such patriotic desires. This fits with a recent interpretation by Edith Foster that Thucydides problematizes the Periclean ideology that defines freedom as 'not being ruled by others'. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* shows, she argues, that this ideology causes a destructive combination of imperialism and over-confidence.²⁶ The use of τόλμη throughout the speech strengthens this argumentation, as τόλμη is a problematic kind of daring when unaccompanied by proper understanding and may easily result in overreaching.²⁷

This contextual reading of Pericles' Funeral Oration is relevant as Stow argued in his 'Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero' that to repeat the Gettysburg Address at Ground Zero is similar to reading Pericles' Oration without Thucydides' critical approach towards it. It glosses over the highly contentious and political nature of Lincoln's original speech. In the context of the Ground Zero anniversary, however, 'the Address could only ever be a reminder of something already believed to be true'. One result is that patriotism is accepted as non-political and harmless in the face of the huge tragedy that has befallen the US. But this acceptance has led, according to Stow, to a falsifying of history when questions were asked about the communication problems that contributed to the death of approximately 200 fire-fighters trapped in the North Tower. It is credible that they never received the general evacuation order.

26 Foster's theory (2010) is in agreement with older interpretations that combine Thucydides' account of Pericles' Funeral Speech with his account of the Plague following directly after. See especially Connor (1984) 64–75 and Cogan (1981) 39–44, who, however, both interpret Thucydides' representation of Pericles as positive in the sense that he dared to go against the public mood. Note, in contrast Gomme (1956) 129, who argues that the speech must have been written after 404 with the bitter experiences of the end of the Peloponnesian War and the oligarchic tyranny in mind.

27 Interestingly, Gomme (1956) 130, though he does not comment on the use of τόλμη, remarks that 'Pericles' words would suit Alexander better, and, still better, Rome (...)'.

Nevertheless, the 9/11 Commission, questioning this fatal lack of communication, was rebuked by Giuliani and Bloomberg among others for challenging the fire-fighters' heroism.²⁸

It is quite clear that Clinton must have been influenced by the repeat of the Gettysburg Address. Most obviously, he paraphrases Lincoln's statement that 'those who here gave their lives that the nation might live'²⁹ a number of times. In addition, however, through his choice of the Thermopylae myth as a parallel, he also, like Lincoln, seems to hark back to an ancient Greek tradition of oratory. Similar sentiments can also be found in the speeches by Joe Biden and George W. Bush at the same event. The latter for instance talks about the example set by the passengers of UAF 93 and comments that 'at the moment American democracy was under attack our citizens defied their captors by holding a vote'. Biden also remarks that 'they acted as citizen patriots have acted since the beginning of our country. They stood up and they stood their ground'. Like Pericles, he addresses the family of the victims directly, reminding them of their patriotic duty: 'You, in a sense, are as courageous as your family members were. And we owe you all for being here today, just the act of being here'.³⁰

There are further reasons to believe that Clinton may have modelled his speech in part on Pericles' Funeral Oration. To begin with, Clinton like Pericles starts with a reference to ancestors whose valour contributed to the expansion of the American Empire, enabling its present citizens to live a life of freedom. His choice to zoom in on the Battle of the Alamo here is in fact not very surprising, since the analogy between the Alamo and Thermopylae is a popular one and dates back to 1836. Thomas Jefferson Green featured as the Texans' Simonides by inserting into General Edward Burleson's 1841/2 speech a phrase that not much later would adorn the first official Alamo monument:

28 Stow (2007) 201–206. Note in particular his analysis (p. 205) of the effects of this embracement of patriotism on the response to questions raised by the 9/11 Commission investigating the emergency response in 2004. See also Steuter/Wills (2014) 9–14 on how critics of the War against Terror were being vilified as traitors.

29 Lincoln (1989 [original delivery 1863]) 536.

30 Bush: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3-y7PanX94> [last accessed: 9th of January, 2017]; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_NjC9Ii-aM. [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

‘Thermopylae had her messenger of defeat, but the Alamo had none’. The monument furthermore expressed the hope that the fallen may ‘be enrolled with Leonidas in the host of the mighty dead’ and calls, like Simonides’ epitaph, on any passers-by to remember them: ‘Blood of Heroes hath stained me; let the stones of the Alamo speak that their immolation be not forgotten’.³¹ It is doubly ironic then that neither monument has withstood time.

In addition, Clinton’s comparison with the Alamo serves to underline a Periclean message about freedom and imperialism. The idea that the defenders of the Alamo were patriots fighting for liberty suggests, at the very least, that the acquisition of Texas was a justifiable means of protecting the American way of life. As such it presents imperialism as a legitimate and defensive course of action. Pericles, according to Thucydides, did something quite similar in the Funeral Oration when he juxtaposed Athenian liberty, openness, democracy and prosperity with Spartan discipline, secrecy, oligarchy and harshness.³² Athenian citizens, Pericles argued, bravely and successfully acquired their empire because they were happy to fight for these ideals and that would give them the upper hand against Spartan hoplites who may have been well-trained, but lack that basic freedom. Bush’s many remarks on the USA leading the cause of freedom echoes this Periclean message of Athens as ‘the School of Hellas’.

History, however, was to prove Pericles wrong. Following Stow’s dichotomy between Pericles’ Oration within and without context we might argue here that Clinton, as well as Biden and Bush, behaves like Pericles as ‘in the *History*’. What is missing is a critical perspective on American patriotism and imperialism. In comparison with Bush’s rather extreme comment that ‘the Flight 93 heroes led the first counter attack in the War on Terror’, Clinton’s emphasis that ‘they did it as citizens’ is a lot milder, but the implications are the same. Extreme times demands extreme courage from ordinary men and legitimates extreme measures. Biden makes this explicit: ‘and it definitely lives on in a new generation of warriors – the 9/11 Generation, inspired by what happened here, 2.8 million young Americans since 9/11, that 9/11 generation, have joined the United States Armed Forces – thousands giving their lives and tens of thousands being

31 Raines (1903) 305, 309.

32 Thucydides 2,39.

wounded to finish the war that began right here.³³ Today, however, the cost of that war was a major theme in the recent presidential campaign, and not in a positive way. Reading Pericles within context we might have predicted this outcome.

From Stalingrad to the Alamo

Having traced the extent to which Clinton's speech refers to classical and contemporary ideas on citizenship and courage, we have seen that he is certainly not a typical demagogue warmonger, but the implications of remembering the deaths of the UAF 93 passengers as a heroic sacrifice enabling the continuity of American freedom are nevertheless worrying. To make matters even worse, Clinton's use of the battles of Thermopylae and the Alamo as commendable scenes of heroic self-sacrifice may also invoke the Nazi reception of Leonidas and his 300 Spartan warriors. It should be clear that this cannot have been his intention, nor would his audience have been reminded of Göring's speech, if they even knew it in the first place. Yet, the bleak context in which Göring used the Spartan example demonstrates far better the inherent dangers of such abuses of history. Indeed, people's relative ignorance of the impact of the Spartan analogy on Nazi Germany increases its potential as a propagandistic tool in today's world. Both the similarities and the differences of Clinton's and Göring's use of the Thermopylae myth come out clearly when we look at the tradition of German classicism which Göring and Goebbels converted into national-socialist propaganda.

Hermann Göring had been educated in a long-standing tradition of 'Spartan' pedagogy that aimed at inspiring its charges with the ideals of nobility, strength and courage. The Spartan example was first used in the Prussian Cadet Force in the 19th century as a coping strategy for the youngest cadets to help them endure the brutality and cruelty of the older boys. They had to become 'hard as a Spartan'. As these cadets were molded into army officers, the narrative of

33 Bush: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3-y7PanX94> [last accessed: 9th of January, 2017]; Biden: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_NjC9Ii-aM [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

Thermopylae in particular became an increasingly important tool to install in them the ideal of anti-individualistic self-sacrifice for the good of the community.³⁴

Especially popular was Schiller's translation of Simonides' epitaph:

Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta, verkündige dorten du habest
uns hier liegen gesehn wie das Gesetz es befahl.³⁵

The impact of this schooling can be gleaned from an inscription at Langemarck cemetery in Flanders, which honours the thousands of young German soldiers who found their death there in November 1914.³⁶ The text of the inscription, as we have already seen, was paraphrased by Göring in his Stalingrad speech.

Wanderer, kommst du nach Deutschland, verkündige dorten Du
habest uns hier liegen gesehen, wie das Gesetz es befahl.³⁷

More than 3,000 ill-prepared student and youth volunteers of the 22nd up to and including the 27th Reserve Corps were slaughtered at Langemarck. According to legend they were singing the *Deutschlandlied* until the very end.³⁸ We can easily recognize the appeal of this so-called *Kindermord*, and its connection to Thermopylae, for the Nazi ideologists.³⁹ The Weimar criticism on Spartan pedagogy was swiftly cast aside and Leonidas was back as chief educator of German youth. Helen Roche has found in her interviews with former students of the Napola's (National Political Institutes of Education) that almost all of them could still recite Schiller's Simonides. Many of them in fact continued with a recitation of the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus, and all this a good 70 years later.⁴⁰

34 Roche (2013a) chapter 5.

35 Friedrich Schiller, *Der Spaziergang* (1795) l. 97–98.

36 Rebenich (2002) 328. Langemarck was not the only WW I cemetery where an adaptation of Simonides was adopted, see Albertz (2006) 277–292 and Abb. 31–34 for other examples.

37 Rebenich (2002) 328.

38 Mosse (1990) 72–73. See further on Hitler's use of the myth of Langemarck Schmolders (2005) 19. The singing of the *Deutschlandlied* was introduced into the myth as part of Hitler's own constructed memory of his time at the front, see Huppauf (1993) 54–55.

39 On Langemarck as example, see Albertz (2006) 277–292, Huppauf (1993).

40 Roche (2013a) 323.

It is easy and comfortable in this context to emphasize the differences in the American and German reception of Sparta, by thinking about German-Spartan pedagogy in the long and strong tradition of anti-individualism in German culture as compared to the individualistic traits of American society. Nevertheless, as we shall also see in the last section of this article, civil liberties have regularly been under pressure in the US, the 2002 Patriot Act being only one example. Nor, as we shall see below, should we underestimate the importance of individual freedom as a value in German culture, even during the worst days of the Third Reich. The use of Thermopylae by Nazi ideologists is therefore not just a lesson in German history, but also in the power of classicizing propaganda more generally.

The usefulness of the Thermopylae myth only increased during World War II as the defeat of the Germans became ever more inevitable. The story of Leonidas and his band of brothers fitted Hitler's *Strategie des grandiosen Untergangs* perfectly.⁴¹ The megalomania that contributed to this destructive idea is manifest in Göring's speech as he reminded the soldiers that they had the destiny of Europe in their hands; that they were being sacrificed on the altar of German freedom, culture and future, in a manner painfully foreshadowing Bush's hammering on the idea of America as leading the cause of freedom.⁴² Of course, the Nazi concept of freedom is similar to that of Pericles as represented by Thucydides: it is the type of freedom that requires *Lebensraum*. Compare Pericles at Thucydides 2,63,1–2:

(...) nor must you think that you are fighting for the simple issue of slavery (δουλείας ἀντ' ἐλευθερίας); on the contrary, loss of

41 Losemann (1977) 20 cites Hitler: 'Ein verzweifelter Kampf behält seinen ewigen Wert als Beispiel. Man denke an Leonidas und seine dreihundert Spartaner. Es paßt auf jeden Fall nicht zu unserem Stil, uns wie Schafe schlachten zu lassen. Man mag uns vielleicht ausrotten, aber man wird uns nicht zur Schlachtbank führen können.'

42 Göring, cited by Boedtger (2009) 106. Compare also Biden: '(...) and I hope you take comfort in knowing that a grateful nation understands that your loved ones gave their lives in pursuit of earthly goals, defending their country, defending their families, sacrificing their lives so we could live ours.' Bush: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3-y7PanX94> [last accessed: 9th of January, 2017]; Biden: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_NJC9Ii-aM [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].

empire (ἀρχῆς) is also involved and danger from the hatred incurred in your sway. From this empire, however, it is too late for you even to withdraw, if any one at the present crisis, through fear and shrinking from action does indeed seek thus to play the honest man; for by this time the empire you hold is a tyranny (τυραννίδα), which it may seem wrong to have assumed, but which certainly it is dangerous to let go.⁴³

As we have seen in the previous section, Thucydides included Pericles' speeches to illustrate not just the greatness of Athens, but also how the *polis* was brought low through the arrogance it inspired. Similar to Thucydides' questioning of Athenian imperialism in this section, questions were also raised regarding the ethics of American imperialism.⁴⁴ The commemorative speeches discussed in this article clearly attempt to counter these by appealing to patriotic citizenship, a tactic, moreover, used also by president Hollande in the aftermath of the Paris attacks.

Likewise, Göring's appeal was not just intended for soldiers either. Like in ancient Sparta, or so he assumed, it was incumbent on the whole people to die for this ideal. Addressing the listeners to his radio broadcast he ended, echoing Lincoln: 'Das Gesetz befahl auch ihnen, zu sterben, damit die Rasse weiter siegen und leben konnte'.⁴⁵ The call on the civilian population to follow their soldiers' example pre-empted Joseph Goebbels' speech at the Berliner Sportpalast on February 18th 1943: 'Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?' Goebbels concluded in the speech that:

43 Thucydides 2,63,1–2: μηδὲ νομίσεια περὶ ἑνὸς μόνου, δουλείας ἀντ' ἐλευθερίας, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχῆς στέρησεως καὶ κινδύνου ὧν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ἀπήχθεσθε. ἥς οὐδ' ἐκστῆναι ἔτι ὑμῖν ἔστιν, εἴ τις καὶ τόδε ἐν τῷ παρόντι δεδιῶς ἀπραγμοσύνη ἀνδραγαθίζεται· ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἣν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφεῖναι δὲ ἐπικίνδυνον.

44 Maier (2006) 2.

45 Göring, cited by Boedtger (2009) 106 and Lincoln (1989) 536.

Das Deutsche Volk will eine Spartanische Lebensführung für alle,
für hoch und niedrig und arm und reich.⁴⁶

It turned out, however, that this was mostly wishful thinking. SS-officers charged with assessing the mood of the German people, reported that this speech was the moment that many definitely gave up hope. Similarly, in January 1943, Göring's speech did not succeed in encouraging the German soldiers at Stalingrad. They could not help but notice that there was no Leonidas amongst them who joined them in their heroic sacrifice and cynically concluded from the speech that the regime had given them up.⁴⁷

This is not to say that Goebbels' and Göring's propaganda was without effect entirely. Its appeal remained strong among the right-wing political elite and those who had grown up with the Spartan example at school. Goebbels and Göring did, however, overestimate the reach of the Thermopylae myth. While Nazi educational policy was explicitly aimed at rearing new Spartans, it had also concentrated on creating Spartan leaders from boys of a particular racial, political and social background. The average soldier fighting at Stalingrad was much less acquainted with Spartan history. It was a mistake to expect from them the same willingness to sacrifice themselves in exalted emulation of Leonidas.⁴⁸

Similarly, as we shall see in more detail in the next section, the popularity of Sparta in the Western world today also has its limits. For one thing, although Biden correctly pointed out that recruitment went up after 9/11, president Obama was elected in 2008 on the promise to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sparta-mania may be widespread among military men,⁴⁹ some of whom may well aspire to become 'hard as Spartans', but for the majority of people enjoying Sparta in popular culture it is nothing more than pure entertainment.

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- 46 Joseph Goebbels, 'Rede im Berliner Sportpalast, 18. Februar 1943', *The Internet Archive*: http://archive.org/stream/WolltIhrDenTotalenKrieg/GoebbelsJoseph-Rede-WolltIhrDenTotalenKrieg194315S_djvu.txt [last accessed: 28th of December, 2016].
- 47 Boberach (1984) 4732–4735. Note also Watt (1985) 874–875, discussing Theodor Plievier's novel *Stalingrad* (1945).
- 48 Albertz (2006) 227, 323–324, and Roche (2013b) 103, quoting Minister of Education Bernhard Rust on rearing Spartans.
- 49 Rood (2010) 11–12.

We see then that the story of the Spartans' heroic defeat at Thermopylae is naturally most powerful in situations of crisis, but that there are limits to its appeal, especially among those who had not spent their childhoods following the Spartans' example. Clinton seems to realize these limitations much better than Göring ever did, or indeed Bush and Biden, by not once taking the words of Simonides into his mouth. Rather, he stresses that the passengers of Flight 93 voluntarily gave their lives, even if it is logically obvious that there was nothing voluntary about them being hijacked and fated to die. Of course, his emphasis on free will in contrast to Göring's appeal to the law also relate to different concepts of citizenship, but it is striking that Göring's attempt to inspire the German people to, as he saw it, do their duty, failed.

The comparison with the Alamo underlines this aspect of Clinton's rhetoric. He follows the narrative of this battle that was popularized in the fifties and sixties through the Disney series *Davy Crockett at the Alamo* and the 1960 movie *The Alamo* produced by John Wayne.⁵⁰ Emphasizing that every child in his generation was raised on this 'defining story of Texas', and slyly referring to Bush's Texan heritage, he makes the pedagogical impact of this story crystal clear. It is a story about people 'who knew they were going to die, but the time they bought and the casualties they inflicted in the cause of freedom allowed the whole idea of Texas to survive and those who live there now to enjoy the life they do.'

That one sentence can be unpicked endlessly, questioning the certainty of these people that they were going to die, their cause of freedom, the idea of Texas and the connection between the Alamo and the people who live there now, but enough scholars have investigated these issues already.⁵¹ What we should note in comparison with the German reception of Thermopylae is that the legend of the Alamo was not canonized until the late 19th century. Richard Flores in his *Remembering the Alamo* and James Crisp's *Sleuthing the Alamo* both point out that in the context of the Reconstruction, the Alamo became a

50 *Davy Crockett (TV Miniseries)* (1954–1955); *The Alamo* (1960).

51 McLemore (2007) recounts the historiography that gave rise to the myth of the Alamo. Tijerina (2007) and Flores (2002) attempt to reconstruct Tejano memories. Hardin (1994) chapter 7 presents a good attempt at rescuing the history of the battle from the debates on the manipulation of the myth.

glorious alternative for the more painful and embarrassing memories of the Civil War. It was between 1880 and 1920 that Texas really became defined by the Alamo. Not only was this a story to be proud of rather than embarrassed by, it was also a story that demonstrated how the memory of defeat can empower a nation.⁵²

Thermopylae and the Alamo during the Cold War and beyond

The comparison between Göring's use of the story of Thermopylae and Clinton's references to Thermopylae as well as the Alamo clearly shows that both stories gain importance in situations of national crisis. Moreover, the reception of the Battle of the Alamo has been influenced by its analogy to Thermopylae from its very start, conveying the message that although this was a military defeat, it was a moral victory and a turning point in the Texas Revolution. Clinton, in his speech commemorating UAF 93, was stepping into a long tradition.

This rhetorical meaning of the narratives of the two battles provides a good context to explain Clinton's use of the Disney and Wayne representations of the Alamo, and, as I will suggest below, Rudolf Maté's movie *The 300 Spartans*. It is, in the context of the Cold War and the long-standing tradition of the Alamo/Thermopylae analogy, not coincidental that the 1960 John Wayne production was followed in 1962 by Maté's film, and that both movies are strikingly similar in how they represent their heroes fighting against a tyrannical foe to save 'freedom'.⁵³ Clinton dug out two stories that he, and a large section of the public, had grown up with as inspiring examples of fights for freedom. But these are also stories that demand their audience live up to the ideal of self-sacrifice and discipline displayed by their heroes. As such, they can be profitably employed whenever people are requested to give up some of their liberties in order to save their country. This is true for the democratic and open USA as well as Nazi Germany. The oath sworn by the Spartans in *The 300 Spartans* makes this explicit:

52 Flores (2002); Crisp (2005). See also Cantrell (2007).

53 *The 300 Spartans* (1962). Discussed by Clough (2004); Redonet (2008); Levene (2007).

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You must treasure freedom above life. Shun pleasure for the sake of virtue. Endure pain and hardship in silence. Obey orders implicitly. Seek the enemies of Greece wherever they may be, and fight them fearlessly, until victory or death.⁵⁴

The use of ‘Greece’ instead of ‘Sparta’ reflects the filmmakers’ unease with some of the more unpalatable aspects of Spartan society, as Leonidas is converted into a Pan-Hellenic rather than a Spartan hero, thus glossing over the uncomfortable truth that Sparta was not a democracy. Nevertheless, it is clear that the movie glorifies Sparta’s military virtue through a focus on obedience, endurance and sacrifice.⁵⁵

The psychological effect of such narratives during the Cold War can be compared to the lessons learned by the *Spartanerjünglinge*, one of whom just happened to be Göring, as researched by Helen Roche.⁵⁶ The Spartan example helped the cadets cope with enduring their hardships as they could hold on to the thought that such endurance is both possible and necessary. Similarly, Redonet in his discussion of *The 300 Spartans* cites essay writing contests inspired by the film on questions like ‘how America’s domestic problems might be solved by adopting more Spartan customs’. Further examples of anti-communist propaganda show that the idea of Sparta was repeatedly used to legitimate the sacrifice of freedom in order to save it.⁵⁷ This is in fact not so different from Göring’s appeal to the soldiers in Stalingrad to, by their sacrifice, safeguard German (and European) freedom and culture against ‘der bolschewistischen Vernichtung’.⁵⁸

Clinton’s indebtedness to *The 300 Spartans* shows up especially through his repeated emphasis on the idea that the soldiers fighting to death at the Alamo, and at Thermopylae, fought to allow their descendants to live. His words

54 Cited by Redonet (2008) 125.

55 Redonet (2008) *passim*. Note also Levene’s comments (2007) 386 on the analysis of the movie’s historical consultant Roger Beck. Compare Rood (2010) 117 on the misconception of Sparta as a democracy in the popular imagination.

56 Roche (2013a).

57 Redonet (2008) 121 n. 3; Levene (2007) 383–385.

58 Göring, cited by Boedtger (2009) 106.

strongly resemble the last scene of the movie, in which the laconic response to Xerxes' final appeal to the remaining Spartans to give up Leonidas' body in return for their safety and his warning that they will all die if they do not submit, is that 'Greece will live'.⁵⁹ The scene fades out with the image of Persian arrows streaming down on the Spartans, an image that may very well have inspired Clinton to retell Plutarch's saying of Leonidas: 'When someone said, "Because of the arrows of the barbarians it is impossible to see the sun," he said, "Won't it be nice, then, if we shall have shade in which to fight them?"'⁶⁰

Both films openly acknowledge their relation to more recent events. The Pressbook accompanying *The 300 Spartans*, for example, compared the Battle of Thermopylae with D-day and the epilogue of the film remarks how 'it was a stirring example to free people throughout the world of what a few brave men can accomplish once they refuse to submit to tyranny'.⁶¹ The Cold War climate of the late fifties and early sixties desperately needed such stirring examples.

Could it be that Clinton felt that the dramatic events of 9/11 and its impact on US military and intelligence policies demanded a return to these encouraging narratives? Certainly, Bush 'War on Terror' inspired a resurgence of the popularity of the myths of Thermopylae as well as the Alamo. While the 2004 movie *The Alamo* flopped, and plans to bring Steven Pressfield's novel *The Gates of Fire* to screen never materialized, the post 9/11 decade did bring the extravaganza of *300!* and *Meet the Spartans*.⁶² The Persian Wars in general, and the battle at Thermopylae in particular, were definitely 'in vogue' as a prism through which to perceive the US' interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the losses of human lives and personal as well as civil liberties these entailed.⁶³ Nevertheless, the mixed reception of these epic and satirical representations of the two battles, also give us important clues as to the narrative context in which Clinton's comments have been received.

59 Clough (2004) 377.

60 Plutarch, *Sayings of the Spartans, Leonidas* 6 (= mor. 225B6): Λέγοντος δὲ τινος ἄπὸ τῶν ὀπιστευμάτων τῶν βαρβάρων οὐδὲ τὸν ἥλιον ἰδεῖν ἔστιν, 'οὐκοῦν' ἔφη 'χάριεν, εἰ ὑπὸ σκιᾶν αὐτοῖς μαχεσόμεθα.' The saying was attributed to Dieneceas by Herodotus 7,226.

61 Redonet (2008) 120. Also mentioned by Clough (2004) 377.

62 *The Alamo* (2004); *300!* (2006); *Meet the Spartans* (2008).

63 Bridges/Hall/Rhodes (2007a) 3, 21–23.

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The problem with *The Alamo*, commentators agree, is that it tries to do too much justice to the actual history. As a result, younger viewers perceive the movie as dull, whereas those from the Clinton generation object to it as it does not fit their collective memory of the Alamo. One commentator even explained the failure of the movie through pointing out that its depiction of key characters as ‘stricken with doubt’ all too painfully resembled the debate on Bush’s moral justification of the war on Iraq: ‘It’s a movie that ultimately can’t convincingly get behind the idea of sacrifice – the very idea that transformed the story of the Alamo from history to myth in the first place.’⁶⁴ Another review deplored the movie’s exchange for the myth of the Alamo with the history of the Alamo through insisting that: ‘Myths often tell more truth than facts do.’⁶⁵ In other words, a politically and historically correct representation of the Alamo does not sufficiently allow the audience to engage with the ‘American values’ they expected to have seen confirmed.

The Gates of Fire, had it actually been produced as a film, might for these reasons have gone down a lot better. The book does an admirable job at recreating the psychology of warfare and is for that reason justly popular among recruits of the US Marine Corps, whose training practices in turn were used by Pressfield as a model for his representation of the Spartans’ training.⁶⁶ But there is a downside. Significantly, in comparison with Göring’s message to the soldiers at Stalingrad, both Pressfield and Clinton emphasize that the Spartans knew from the very beginning that their mission was to die. The negative effects, and limited appeal, of such heroization of the Spartans as a suicide-unit we have already explored in the context of the propagandistic use of Thermopylae by Nazi leaders. In addition, and in the context of the US’ campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it may be worth pointing out that such a focus on soldiers’ endurance and self-sacrifice can be used to distract from their poor equipment and lack of reinforcements. As we have discussed above, Simon Stow noted how Giuliani and Bloomberg used a similar strategy against critical inquiries into the communication problems causing the unnecessary deaths of about 200 fire-

64 Pevere (2004), cited by Graham (2007) 258.

65 Woolley (2004), cited by Campbell (2007) 277.

66 Pressfield (1998), Pressfield (official website). See also the discussion in Bridges (2007).

fighters.⁶⁷ Similarly, in many popular accounts of the Alamo, the Texans' resolution to fight to the death overshadows their repeated and unheeded calls for extra troops.⁶⁸

Finally, the social and political consequences of such manipulations of history are still relevant today. Infamously, Victor Davis Hanson used the example of the Persian Wars to argue in favour of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Responding to *300!*, he commented 'If we fight to preserve freedom like the Greeks at Thermopylae and the GI's at Normandy Beach, then war is the right and indeed the only thing we can do.'⁶⁹ His may be an extreme example of using historical analogy to reduce complex questions to a black and white choice between good and evil. But it is easy to recognize similar mechanisms at work today. Comparing for instance the two speeches François Hollande gave after the attack against Charlie Hebdo (7th of January 2015) and the more recent attacks in Paris (13th of November 2015) it is clear how the security clampdown in the wake of those attacks have affected civil liberties. In a world where an 8 year old can be arrested for making offensive remarks,⁷⁰ it is important to be precise about the history and meaning of freedom and democracy, or indeed about the difference between terrorism and war.

Given the dangers of such epic celebrations of self-sacrifice, it is therefore actually reassuring that the extravaganza of *300!* and *Meet the Spartans!* have been so successful. These successes suggest that despite the 9/11 shock, the 21st century moviegoer is inclined to consider the grandiose exploits of heroes such as Leonidas and Davy Crockett rather grotesque. This may give us hope for the future. Clinton's uncritical approach to Thermopylae and the Alamo may have resulted in a speech uncomfortably like Göring's in its celebration of the values of courage and self-sacrifice in imperialistic pursuits and for the sake of 'freedom', but, like Göring, he also appears to have overreached. It is in this light that we should see Clinton's remark: 'and they did it as citizens'. Not a slip of the tongue, but fitting an American society that no longer demands military

67 Stow (2007) 201–206.

68 Hardin (1994) chapter 7.

69 Cited in Jenkins (2015) 114. See also Hanson (2001) interpreting landmark battles in world history in the context of an orientalising East-West dichotomy.

70 De la Baume/Bilefsky (2015).

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service and sacrifice from all its citizens, yet still relies on the heroic sacrifice of some.

Appendix: Bill Clinton at Shanksville, September 10th 2011

“There has always been a special place in the common memory for people who deliberately, knowingly, certainly laid down their lives for other people to live.

President Bush is from Texas. I sometimes think that since I grew up in Arkansas that is a more important difference between us than our partisan differences. But every child I grew up with was raised on the memory of the Alamo; the defining story of Texas. Why? Because those people knew they were going to die. But the time they bought and the casualties they inflicted in the cause of freedom allowed the whole idea of Texas to survive and those who live there now to enjoy the life they do.

The first such great story I have been able to find that reminds me of all your loved ones, however, occurred almost 2500 years ago, when the Greek king of Sparta facing a massive, massive Persian army took 300 of his finest soldiers to a narrow pass called Thermopylae. There were thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people and they all knew they were going to die. He told them that when they went. And the enemy said: “We are going to fill the air with so many arrows that it will be dark.” And the Spartans said: “Fine, we will fight in the shade.” And they all died. But the casualties they took and the time they bought saved the people they loved.

This is something different. For at the Alamo and Thermopylae they were soldiers. They knew what they had to do. Your loved ones just happened to be on a plane, as Mr. Pinsky said. With almost no time to decide, they gave the entire country an incalculable gift. They saved the capital from attack, they saved God knows how many lives. They saved the terrorists from claiming the symbolic victory of smashing the center of American government. And they did it as citizens. They allowed us to survive as a country that could fight terrorists and still maintain liberty and still welcome people from all over the world from every religion and race and culture as long as they shared our values. Because ordinary people given no time at all to decide did the right thing.

And 2500 years from now I hope and pray to God that people will still remember this.’

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