

## **Michael Blain: Power, Discourse and Victimage Ritual in the War on Terror**

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Michael Blain brings the perspective of a sociologist to bear on a sustained critique of the discourse of the war on terror. He draws primarily on Kenneth Burke's conception of the victimage ritual combined with Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics to examine the tactics of a discourse placed in the service of liberal democratic Empire. Both Burke and Foucault, Blain argues, consider rhetoric to be a material practice with power effects. Blain focuses on how this discourse mobilizes the masses in a very calculated and perverse way to serve the interests of U.S. power elites. "The war on terror," he writes, "is a strategy for dealing with a world that is resistant to Empire and U.S. domination" (8).

By means of the victimage ritual, Empire represents the Islamic terrorist as the perfect scapegoat—an international devil—in a Manichean struggle of good against evil. All guilt and responsibility for the events of 9/11 are attributed to this convenient caricature, civilization's archetypical savage enemy. This is a recurring melodramatic "passive-aggressive pattern" with its own "move, counter-move, and counter counter-move logic" embedded in a long history of condemning Indians, Anarchists, Communists, and others who have resisted U.S. moves to extend and defend Empire (45). Osama bin Laden became Geronimo. A global war on the evil savagery of terrorism, instead of a more limited response, served to justify the worldwide projection of U.S. power. Accordingly, the discourse of the victimage ritual, which mystifies political violence, is subjected by Blain to genealogical analysis to identify its tactical shifts in constituting the enemies of Empire.

Blain's discourse analysis combines quantitative and qualitative measures to show how the rhetorical appropriation of terrorism has increased significantly from World War II to the present. He discusses the ways in which it has been aimed variously at

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