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Hunting the Devil: Democracy's Rhetorical Impulse to War

ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of evil, so prominently evident in contemporary presidential public address, articulates a primal motive for the war on terrorism by projecting democracy's shadow onto the external enemy. In this regard, the president's discourse is a manifestation rather than aberration of U.S. political culture, a reflection of the nation's troubled democratic identity. Upon close inspection, it reveals the presence of the mythos of a democratic demon contained within the republic, various ways in which the unconscious projection of this devil figure is rhetorically triggered, and the cultural significance of its lethal entailments. The diabolism of presidential war rhetoric functions as an inducement to evacuate the political content of democracy, leaving a largely empty but virulent signifier in its place that weakens the nation by reproducing a culture of war.