NAMES, Vol. 56 No. 4, December, 2008, 206–220

Nicknames, Interpellation, and Dubya's Theory of the State

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George W. Bush freely assigns nicknames to political aides, cabinet secretaries, legislators, reporters, and others who cross his presidential path. Nicknaming seems an innocuous, playful social behavior, but it is a more complex onomastic maneuvre than it seems, and more significant: it is a species of Althusserian interpellation, a means of 'hailing' actors within the state and converting them into subjects of state ideology, which, on one construction (the one operating here), collapses state authority and the executive power of the American presidency. Nicknaming, then, is evidence of a theory of state and an instrument of its institution.

Since his early days on the presidential campaign trail, George W. Bush has been the target of pundits and homespun prescriptive linguists because he so often (supposedly) misspeaks. You know the sort of misspeakment about which I am talking about, from the pronunciation of *nuclear*, to the introduction of lexical items like *misunderestimated*, to botched grammar, to what sounds like nonsense. 'I've got a record, a record that is conservative and a record that is compassionated' (*New York Times*, 2 March 2000); 'I don't see many shades of gray in the war and terror. Either you're with us or you're against us. And it's a struggle between good and a struggle between evil' (Cattle Industry Annual Convention, 8 February 2002); 'The federal government puts about 6% of the money up. They put about 60% of the strings, where you go to fill out paperwork. . . . [A teacher] has to be a paperwork-filler-outer' (St. Louis, 17 October 2000); 'I'm sure you can imagine it's an unimaginable honor to live here' (The White House, 18 June 2001; all of the above are taken from Brown, 2003: 60, 69, 93, and 65).

As is often the case with prescriptive commentary on the speech of others (one is welcome to prescribe for oneself, of course), the criticisms are not always as unimpeachable as they seem to language mavens: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2005) registers the Bush pronunciation of *nuclear*, and, in a usage note, attributes it to many educated people, including some of the current President Bush's predecessor presidents. You might consider the criticized form an instance of metathesis, although the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*

 DOI 10.1179/175622708X381442

(2000) suspects that it is prompted by analogy with *circular*, *molecular*, etc. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* (2005) suggests that the Bush pronunciation is generally judged incorrect. In any event, it's probably not worth worrying about.

In contrast, one might celebrate, rather than criticize, *misunderestimated*: it's actually a wonderfully flexible blend, one that simultaneously captures a range of meanings — misestimated, misunderstood, and underestimated. Bush's lexical innovation, like so much innovation, isn't new: you'll find several forms like *contwisticated* in the *Dictionary of American English* (*DAE*), in quotations from pure-blooded frontier Americans like Davy Crockett. Bush's *misunderestimated* places him in a long line of Americans unimpressed by prep school English and confident enough to make up their own — a very American lexical attitude, that positions Bush above any misunderestimation of him by the language police.

I have gone into these examples of alleged misspeaking at some length in order to argue that they distract us from President Bush's seriously problematic language habit, which is an onomastic one. President Bush freely assigns nicknames to political aides, cabinet secretaries, legislators, reporters, and others who cross his presidential path. Nicknaming is often an exercise of power and authority: one has the authority to make up a name for someone else and the power to make it stick. However, President Bush's exuberant naming practices are perhaps also unusually aggressive, and this is politically important, in the American context, because they assert a presidential right to put people into their places, as subjects under presidential authority. At the presidential level, nicknaming becomes political because of the office, because a president's authority is executive, not personal. Although as a case study Bush's nicknaming is very narrow, nearly unique in the twenty-first-century Western world, it nonetheless vividly illustrates the intersection of onomastics and political power.

By all accounts, the frequency of Bush's original nicknaming is astonishing, and so is the range of its formative strategies and pragmatic effects. Political advisor Karl Rove is called either *Boy Genius* or *Turd Blossom* (sometimes just *Turd* — see Andersen 2002: 175), depending on his performance; Communications Director Dan Bartlett is called *Danny* or *Barty*; former White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card is called *Tangent Man*; and Counselor (ultimately Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy) Karen Hughes is called *The High Prophet*, supposedly 'a cunning play on her height (six feet) and her maiden name, Parfitt' (Andersen, 2002: 175), as well as *The Enforcer* and *Hurricane Karen*. Alberto Gonzales was called *Fredo*, Stephen Hadley *Hads*, George Tenet *Brother George*, and Colin Powell *Balloonfoot*, which, history suggests, tells us a lot about power relations in the White House during Bush's first term. The President refers to Condoleeza Rice, who decided long ago that she preferred the nickname *Condi* (Bumiller, 2007: 10), as *Guru*. Vice-President Cheney occupies a liminal area, somewhere between organizational chart subordination and independent power, whether exercised properly or im-, and it's difficult to know what to make of his presidential nicknames, *Big Time* and *Veep*. Some nicknames are clearly friendlier than others, so the names parcel out presidential attitudes; however, all names come from the source of all executive power, he who might have announced of himself, 'I am the Namer.'

This sort of uninvited nicknaming is not reserved for subordinates: former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was called *Landslide* — approvingly, one imagines, since

President Bush was far from ever achieving one; Jean Chrétien, former Prime Minister of Canada, was called *Dino*, from *dinosaur* — thus not a moniker of approval; and Saudi Arabian Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan, to filmmaker Michael Moore's delight, is called *Bandar Bush* (Moore comments on the relationship between the Bush family and the Saudi royal family in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, 2004). Senator Barbara Boxer is called *Ali*; Dianne Feinstein is called *Frazier*; Senator Susan Collins is called *Sweet Susan*; Senator John Cornyn is called *Corndog*; former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist was called *Fristy*; his successor, Mitch McConnell, is called *Mitchie*; former Speaker of the House of Representatives Dennis Hastert was called just *Speak* (he was called *Denny* familiarly by everyone but the President, which suggests something about Bush's tendency to single himself out). The list goes on, comprising more than six dozen reported nicknames.[1] *New York Times* editorialist Maureen Dowd (no friend of President Bush) wrote humorously of her discovery that she, too, had been granted the dubious distinction of a nickname, in a column entitled 'I Have a Nickname!' (29 April 2001). Many others renamed by the President may have wondered, as she did, 'I wasn't sure if that was an insult or a sign of respect' (Dowd, 2004: 125). The nickname in question: *Cobra*.

Nicknaming seems an innocuous, playful social behavior. It may not be fair to judge President Bush's nicknaming practices without due consideration of his onomastic background. President Bush is said to have practiced nicknaming within his family, at prep school, and in public and secret fraternities at Yale University until it became second nature to him. According to Christopher Andersen, in *George and Laura: Portrait of an American Marriage* (2002), George W. Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush, was called *Pops*, and George H. W. Bush is called *Poppy*, apparently a diminutive of his father's nickname (Andersen, 2002: 20). George W. Bush's uncle William is called *Bucky*. His mother's well known nickname, *Bar*, is not, it turns out, a shortening of *Barbara*: apparently, Prescott Jr. 'liked to tease his little brother's girlfriend by calling her "Barsil," the name of one of the family's draft horses. Soon all the Bushes were calling Barbara "Bar"' (Andersen, 2002: 21). As a child, George W. was known within the family as *Georgie*, his brother Jeb as *Jebby*, and his sister Dorothy as *Doro*. At Phillips Andover, Bush's roommate was John *Moondoggie* Kidde. In the Bush family and the Bush circle, everyone had a nickname; some of them were routine on the terms described above, and some, like *Bar*, were not. *Bar* and similar nicknames planted the seed of indirection as a name-formative strategy in George Bush's imagination; indirection, whether metaphorical or associative, is certainly responsible for a bushel of current presidential nicknames.

For instance, another Andover friend, a fellow Texan named Clay Johnson III, accompanied Bush to Yale, served as his chief of staff when he became Governor of Texas, and led the Bush/Cheney transition into the White House, after which he served as assistant to the President for personnel. As Ronald Kessler explains in *A Matter of Character* (2004: 19): 'According to Bush, after Johnson took the job, he acquired the nicknames "Icebox" and "the Refrigerator" because no one could cozy up to him and convince him to lay aside his standards.' Sources aren't clear on the point, but I think we can assume that Bush endowed him with these names and more: Bush also calls Johnson *Big Man* (Kessler, 2004: 127), which makes Johnson, perhaps by virtue of his long association with Bush, one of the most nicknamed members of

the Bush team. Significantly, such names aren't derivatives: they are metaphorical substitutes for which the rationale is private, even when the name becomes public; they are quite different from *Bucky* or *Pops*, not merely because they are formed differently, but because they are formed on a different strategy, one reflected in the social and political effects of the naming.

At Andover, Bush was neither a brain nor a jock, but a sort of jock wannabe. One of his claims to fame was to organize Andover stickball: as one stickball enthusiast recalled, 'Stickball was the thing, and Bush was stickball' (Andersen, 2002: 29). Bush

> picked the team names based on what would get a laugh. One team was the Nads, and their cheer was 'Go Nads!' then there were the Beavers, the Stimson Steamers (a cheeky reference to Andover alumnus Henry Stimson and what happens to dog droppings on a crisp spring morning), and the Crotch Rots. Players emblazoned their own colorful nicknames on their white jerseys, Vermin, Root, Zitney [Peter Pfeifle, quoted on Bush and stickball above], and McScuz were among the stickball stars. (Andersen, 2002: 29)

It's not clear whether Bush did the personal naming, too. This sort of naming, from *Bar* to *Zitney*, is all in good fun, but not only in good fun. Some of the nicknames are affectionate family or friendship names, but not all of them: the laughs about stickball nicknames established Bush's power within their social group at the expense of the named. As in the case of *Bar*, Bush nicknames clarified social relations of power and authority — who was being included on terms devised by those doing the including.

Bush was subject to nicknames just like everyone else he knew and remains so to this day. While his family tended to call him *Georgie*, neighbors in Texas called him *Junior* (as opposed to his father, *Senior*) and *Bushtail* (Andersen, 2002: 32, 35) before he left for school in Massachusetts. While at Andover, he became known as *The Lip*: the President has always been a talker and a little cocky. Others suffer Bush's habit of diminishing them with nicknames, and Bush suffers diminishment by the final private authority over him. Laura Bush often calls her husband *Bushie*: 'When President Bush said Osama bin Laden was wanted dead or alive, Laura Bush said, "Whoa Bushie!"' (Kessler, 2004: photo caption, 146–147). And she has been known to suggest, 'Rein it in, Bubba' (Andersen, 2002: 197).

Bush's experience of nicknaming has been unusually dense and varied. Besides family and school, the most potent influence on Bush's original nicknaming may have been baseball. As Christopher Andersen explains,

> No single pastime was a more important part of Georgie's life than baseball [...] Although smaller than his contemporaries, Georgie was an indefatigable player [...] 'All George ever wanted to be was a major league baseball player,' [his boyhood friend, Terry] Throckmorton said. 'That's all he ever talked about.' [...] Even off the field, Georgie managed to indulge his love of the game, committing volumes of baseball statistics to memory. He was also a canny trader of baseball cards. (2002: 41)

Bush indulged this passion as an adult, too. In 1989, he formed an investment group to buy the Texas Rangers, of which he was then managing general partner until 1994, finally selling his stake in the team in 1998. A lot of money was involved in the sale,

and it is easy to be cynical about the mixture of business and baseball, but Bush's love of the game is genuine: 'Eschewing seats in the air-conditioned owner's box, he sat next to the dugout at virtually every game' (Andersen, 2002: 161). Recruited to run for Governor of Texas in the early 1990s, Bush ran in the end for lack of anything better to do:

> Trouble was, George did not want to be governor—or at least not as much as he wanted to be commissioner of baseball. When longtime Bush family ally Fay Vincent was deposed as commissioner in the autumn of 1992, W. told Laura that the job would constitute nothing less than the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. (Andersen, 2002: 171)

If you are immersed in baseball, you know all about players' nicknames — it's an essential part of baseball lore. So, an avid fan and card collector would encounter Ellis *Old Folks* Kinder, so called because his career spanned his thirties and forties; Charles *Boots* Day, who had big feet; Richard *Dirt* Tidrow, who would soil his uniform before games while playing flip with his teammates; and Myron *The Snake Man* Drabowski, called *Moe* in conversation, who played practical jokes on teammates with snakes (Skipper, 1992: 151, 66, 279, 74). Of course, the most famous nicknames belong to George Herman *Babe* Ruth, the *Sultan of Swat*. Except for Ruth, those named here all played during Bush's baseball watching lifetime, from the 1950s to the 1970s. In all, Skipper (1992) records 3999 nicknames for major league baseball players, coaches, managers, umpires, and announcers from 1870 to 1979. Nicknaming in baseball peaked in the first half of the twentieth century and declined steadily to insignificance from 1950 to the present (Skipper, 1992: xxi), but nicknaming is certainly part of Bush's baseball: he was a child when nicknames suffused baseball culture. Players nicknamed other players, fans bestowed nicknames on heroes and villains of the game, 'phony, romanticized nicknames were coined by sportswriters', and everyone, on the model of Leo Durocher, legendary infielder for the Yankees and Cardinals and later manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, practiced 'the art of imaginative name-calling' (Voigt, 1970: 220).

The strategies underlying baseball nicknames underlie Bush's more elaborate, clever nicknames as well. Bush has mastered the craft of nicknaming on the basis of association, as when Vice President Cheney became *Big Time* because he was caught on tape responding to Bush's evaluation of reporter Adam Clymer, 'There's Adam Clymer — major league asshole — from the *New York Times*,' with 'Yeah, big time' (Tapper, 2000), or when Senator John McCain, once a prisoner of war, became *Hogan*, after television's favorite POW. Similarly, Leroy Paige, legendary pitcher in both the Negro Leagues and the American League, was nicknamed *Satchel* because, while working at the train depot in Mobile, Alabama, as Paige put it,

> I got me a pole and some ropes. That let me sling two, three, four satchels together and carry them [...] The other kids laughed at me and one of them said, 'You look like a walking satchel tree.' They all started yelling it. Soon everybody was calling me that, you know how it is with kids and nicknames. That's when Leroy Paige became no more and Satchel Paige took over. (Skipper, 1992: 212–213)

The American League batting champion Charlie Gehringer's nickname, *Mechanical Man*, resembles Bush's choice of the somewhat more metaphorical nicknames *Tangent Man* and *Adding Machine*. And Bush may have borrowed some of his

nicknames from baseball history: David Parker was called *The Cobra*, because of his 'coiled batting stance and quick striking swing' (Skipper, 1992: 213). Bush ultimately proved adept at what Robert Kennedy and Tania Zamuner (2006: 388–389) distinguish as 'hypocoristic' and 'Homeric' sports nicknames: a hypocoristic nickname is 'usable as a form of both reference and address, containing exactly one stressed syllable', like *Babe*, *Satchel*, *Cobra*, and *Big Time*, whereas a Homeric nickname is 'a semantically contentful nickname used in print and broadcast journalism, usually two or more words and/or containing more than one stressed syllable', such as *Sultan of Swat*, *Mechanical Man*, *Tangent Man*, and *Adding Machine*. In President Bush's nicknaming, the two categories may not be mutually exclusive — some Homeric names may be terms of address, President to subordinate, whereas some hypocorisms (*Pootie Poot,* Bush's nickname for Vladimir Putin, comes to mind) may be terms of reference only.

President Bush has a tendency to nickname himself; when he does so, he's not *Georgie*, *Junior*, or *Bubba*. He sees himself as an epic figure who deserves a Homeric nickname. When he organized the intramural stickball league at Andover, he called himself the *High Commissioner*.

> As absurd as it was, the stickball league both underscored his political talents and bolstered his confidence. Now Georgie knew without a doubt, said his friend Randall Roden, 'that he could get people to do things.' The High Commissioner went so far as to bestow yet another nickname on himself. He insisted on being called 'Tweeds' Bush, after the notoriously corrupt Tammany Hall kingpin Boss Tweed. (Andersen, 2002: 58–59)

Tweeds is a hypocoristic name, but not a diminutive or familiar one.

Clearly, Junior was tired of being cast by others in diminutive roles: he had a healthy respect for himself and his self-naming acted it out. I wish I could say that I think the self-respect has always been warranted. On 6 March 2007, speaking to the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Washington DC, President Bush remarked, 'You know, not far from the White House, there's a statue of the great liberator, Simón Bolívar. He's often compared to George Washington—Jorge W.' No transcript records the characteristic presidential snicker that followed his joke, but it's contextually important: *Jorge W.* is effectively a nickname for George W., as well as George Washington or Simón Bolívar — all of them, in Bush's rising self-estimation, 'great liberators' worthy of Homeric nicknames. Bush's most recent Homeric nickname for himself is merely the Spanish rendering of his own name, but in using it he attempts to place himself in relation to New World history, whereas his nicknaming of others puts them in their places in relation to him.

Self-aggrandizement is an interesting (and familiar) reason for the use of self-bestowed nicknames, certainly psychologically revealing and also potentially political. Can the President really raise himself in anyone else's estimation simply by comparing himself to Boss Tweed or George Washington? Arguably, it depends on the audience: self-fashioning depends on a certain social responsiveness, and while some will not be impressed by Bush's self-conscious Spanish and may be put off when he chuckles at his own onomastic joke, others will see it all as cleverness and an attractive exercise of power. Arrogance is often compelling. Generally, though, the political content is in the nicknames Bush gives to others. These, too, are clever and their use demonstrates authority. Indeed, as the preceding examples of nicknames

given to political figures and operatives illustrate, the President's nicknaming runs the gamut of metaphorical and other onomastic processes, and one can see how adept he is at imagining subordinate places for people and putting them in those places by means of a name.

They also suggest that Ms. Dowd has a point. Of course, calling Barney Frank, a Massachusetts Democrat and outspoken critic of the Bush administration, *Sabertooth* is meant to be insulting: it's a *Flintstones* reference and may well refer to Frank's sexual orientation, given Barney Rubble's oddly intimate relationship with Fred Flintstone (potentially a slashed relationship), but, until you realize that it frames him as a cartoon character, it sounds like a compliment about his ferocity. Indeed, it may convey both compliment and insult — the very pragmatic duality that confuses Dowd and so many others about their own Bush-bestowed nicknames. Dowd is called *Cobra*: the metaphor represents her as elegant, sinuous, hypnotic, and deadly; it also represents her as a snake, hence the pragmatic confusion. Congressman Dennis Kucinich is called *Mayor*, which, after all, is what he was — a long time ago — but it is paradoxically an honorific name that demotes him from national relevance. *Turd Blossom* and *Corndog* are locutionary insults the illocutionary force of which is difficult to determine, although Senator Cornyn is a Bush supporter and Rove is Bush's loyal and trusted friend. We assume there is something affectionate about the apparently critical name *Tangent Man*, just as we assume that Robert Zoellick, former US Trade Representative and now President of the World Bank, doesn't mind being reduced to *The Adding Machine*. *Sweet Susan* is ostensibly affectionate, but, for a United States senator, of whichever party, diminutive and diminishing.

There is an onomastic parallel here to categories devised by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, who note, in their book on the subject (1991), that euphemism and dysphemism do not account for the subtler pragmatics of what they call 'euphemistic dysphemism' and 'dysphemistic euphemism'. Of course, Bush probably didn't call Jean Chrétien *Dino* to his face, or Russian President Vladimir Putin *Pootie Poo*, notwithstanding the President's once soulful relationship with his Russian counterpart. The President of the United States does not always have the power to be impolite and must keep some locutions and illocutions more or less to himself, in order to avoid perlocutionary incidents requiring that diplomats negotiate those subtler pragmatics on behalf of their principals. (How different the straightforward domestic political scene, in which the President of the Senate can say to a senior senator on the Senate floor, 'Go fuck yourself.')

Bush is especially given to familiar diminishment or diminishing familiarity: although familiarity stops short of contempt, but it doesn't readily admit the equality of namer and named. Like the rest of us, Bush resorts to one of the oldest onomastic tricks in English, the diminutive suffix -/i/, usually written *–ie*. Sometimes this diminutive suffix is affectionate, say within a family or close circle of friends; however, it is often imposed on the named without his or her agreement by someone who thereby asserts a right to name and, in the course of naming, to diminish the subject. So, Fred Barnes, currently editor of *The Weekly Standard*, is *Barney*; Max Baucus, Democratic Senator from Montana, is *Maxie*; the infamous Michael D. Brown is *Brownie*; Bill Frist is *Fristy*; Mitch McConnell is *Mitchie*; the late Kenneth Lay of Enron was *Kenny Boy* (diminished enough to put in the President's pocket,

rather than the other way around, as some assumed); and Ben Nelson, Democratic Senator from Nebraska, is sometimes *Benator*, sometimes *Benny*, and at still other times the feminized *Nellie*. White House Chef Walter Scheib suffers triple diminution, reduced to his position or function (like Kucinich and Zoellick), but demystified, and then suffixed as *Cookie*.

It's difficult to know the extent to which President Bush's experience of nicknames resembles that of average Americans: many of us are called many things throughout our lives and do some reciprocal calling, too. However, there seems to have been a surfeit of nicknaming in Bush's life: nicknames serve their ordinary purposes, signalling affection and familiarity, of course, but also help to construct social privilege and power. From an early age, Bush was clearly aware that nicknames usefully put others in their places and could also support a program of self-fashioning. The issue is not whether nicknames can be powerful, but rather the nature and gravity of the power they carry. In John Le Carré's novel *The Night Manager* (1993), Dicky Roper, the aristocratic, multi-millionaire villain, is an inveterate nicknamer: his lieutenant, Major Corcoran, is *Corky* and his girlfriend, Jemima, is *Jeds*, which recalls *Hads*, President Bush's nickname for National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. Jonathan Pine is the hotel night manager who penetrates Roper's arms and drug dealing operations. Burr, the intelligence officer who serves as Pine's confessor and control, inquires, '"She was there too, then—his girl—Jemima? Jed?" Pine replies, "I think he called her *Jeds*. Plural." "He's got names for everyone. It's his way of buying them,"' explains Burr (Le Carré, 1993: 64). Nicknames can be deeds of ownership, then, mechanisms of personal authority and control.

From the mouth of the President of the United States, nicknaming is a more than usually complex onomastic maneuvre and more significant. Arguably, in extreme cases it is a type of harassment or abuse of a kind formerly accepted in business and government, where executives would flex their authority by putting people down in order to demonstrate that those so put had no effective recourse: nicknaming can expose the 'power gap' between executive and subordinate. The President's ability to call someone who works for him *The Adding Machine* and a woman who doesn't *Sweet Susan*, or in the case of Maine Senator Olympia Snow *The Big O*, demonstrates the President's immunity from reprisal, his power. Like German Chancellor Angela Merkel receiving an unsolicited backrub, these women may flinch, but they don't publicly question the President's authority to name, which is a metaphor for other sorts of executive authority. Am I making too much of this? I don't think so, since I would put myself at professional risk were I to go around nicknaming students in presidential fashion. The socio-onomastic rules that apply to many of us, perhaps all of us minus one, don't apply to that remaining one.

Arguably, too, presidential nicknaming is a species of Althusserian interpellation, a means of 'hailing' actors within the state and converting them into subjects of state ideology. On one construction, interpellative nicknaming collapses state authority and the American presidency into a unitary executive power.[2] As Althusser wrote in 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus',

> Whereas the unity of the (Repressive) State Apparatus is secured by its unified and centralized organization under the leadership of the representatives of the classes in power executing the politics of the class struggle of the classes in power, the unity of the

> different Ideological State Apparatuses is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class. (2001, 100)

The power to name and to name so as to diminish, to frame the named as subordinate to the executive and thus to the state, is not a self-sufficient power, but is one among many potentially useful instruments of power exercised from a unitary position. As Althusser succinctly puts it, 'Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects' (2001: 115). Americans like to think of themselves as independent political agents. The extent of such independence is a matter of dispute, but surely presidential nicknaming interferes with it: however autonomous the political agent, that autonomy is called into question if the president chooses to hail him or her as subject to state ideology and the state apparatus that supports it. In the context of speech act theory, as an illocutionary act interpellation is a type of declaration: as with passing a judicial sentence, it brings about the state of affairs to which it refers. If the president hails you as *The Cobra*, the name is attached to you by virtue of the naming; there's no effective way to resist interpellation, except also to resist state ideology, state apparatus, and state power.

Interpellative nicknaming suggests intersections of goals and means among many varieties of authoritarian politics and government. Marxist critiques of the state argue that

> The State apparatus, which defines the State as a force of repressive execution and intervention 'in the interests of the ruling classes' in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is quite certainly the State, and quite certainly defines its basic 'function'. (Althusser 2001: 92)

They also argue that 'State power and State apparatus must be distinguished,' and that the Marxist historical process is not complete until 'the end of State power, the end of every State apparatus,' when, inevitably, 'the proletariat must seize State power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois State apparatus and, in a first phase, replace it with a quite different, proletarian State apparatus' (Althusser, 2001: 95). Where there's a state apparatus, interpellation is one of its instruments — *Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose*.

One doesn't need to be a Marxist to recognize the intersection of state power and nicknaming in the American political context. Of course, one might insist that American politics differentiates ideology, state, and power in ways that even a dissenting Marxist like Althusser won't admit. President Bush's nicknaming might reflect a political attitude, or it might reflect a political ideology which, for structural (that is, constitutional) reasons, can't be identical to state power or reflected throughout the state apparatus, although the proposed unitary executive power is an attempt to focus ideology, apparatus, and power. Even if presidential interpellation is restricted, it is neither shared nor reciprocal: all of us are expected to hail the president as *Mr. President*, whatever we may call him in private. The president's prerogative to hail you as he sees you, or wants to see you, impedes any personal, public attempt at self-definition or self-fashioning by self-naming: it redistributes power from any person the president feels the need to hail to the president and, in his person, to the state. In this peculiar instance, then, nicknaming is evidence of a theory of the state and an instrument of its operation.

Obviously, nicknaming is not the exclusive province of President Bush: we all do it, naming others and, if not naming ourselves, at least acceding to the names others give us. Presidents are people, too, and presidents before George W. Bush have nicknamed and joined in use of nicknames for family, friends, colleagues, and subordinates. They use nicknames like the rest of us, more or less for the same social and pragmatic reasons. Nicknames enact familiarity: James Earl Carter is *Jimmy*, William Jefferson Clinton is *Bill*, and Ronald Reagan was called *Dutch* by family and friends, a shortening of his father's familiar name for him, *the Dutchman*.[3] Reagan's father, John Edward Reagan, was called *Jack* and his brother, Neil, was called *Moon*, after the eponymous character in the *Moon Mullins* comic strip.[4] His own children and step-children by various marriages are the fully named Maureen and the nicknamed Mike, Ron, and Patti. Nancy Reagan called her husband *Ronnie*; he, in turn, infamously called his wife *Mommy*. Besides that, Reagan's most adventurous nicknaming strategy was inversion: as teenagers, he and Moon began to call their parents not by familiar names and terms of endearment, like *Mommy* and *Daddy*, but by their 'public' names *Nelle* and *Jack*. President Carter's family frequently resorted to conventional nicknames (*Jimmy*, *Billy*), so his sons, John William, James Earl, and Donnel Jeffrey, are called *Jack*, *Chip* (off the old block, one suspects, since he shares his father's name), and *Jeff*, respectively. More colorfully, President Clinton called his paternal grandparents *Mama* and *Poppy Al*, and his maternal grandparents *Papaw* and *Mammaw* (Clinton, 2004: 31).

Reagan's friends and mentors were frequently known by nicknames: at Eureka College, Reagan's football coach was Ralph *Mac* McKinzie; his fraternity brother and gridiron comrade was Bud Cole; and he served under General Henry Harley *Hap* Arnold during the Second World War. He mentions all of these people by nickname in his memoir, *An American Life* (1990), as well as Caspar *Cap* Weinberger and Thomas P. *Tip* O'Neill.[5] Other presidential nicknaming is similarly unremarkable. President Clinton worked with Rick Stearns, Duke Watts, and Mandy Grunwald, among others, and especially Al Gore, whose wife is called *Tipper*; his lifetime friend and advisor was Thomas F. *Mack* McLarty. Reflecting on the year he spent as assistant clerk to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (1966–1967) while in college, he refers to Eugene McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy as *Gene* and *Bobby* (Clinton, 2004: 118, 119); although personally unfamiliar with them and unlikely to have addressed either by his nickname, he is not out of step with Americans of his generation when he uses their nicknames as stylistic elements of political or historical reminiscence.

Carter's memoir, *Keeping Faith* (1982), reveals some surprising nicknames. Who knew that Secretary of State Charles Schulze was called *Charlie* (Carter, 1982: 576)? From the following, Carter was clearly comfortably informal with his cabinet and staff — at least, his free use of nicknames leaves that impression:

> Several times a week, I arranged a breakfast meeting with the leaders of Congress or other visitors, and on Friday mornings at 7:30 a.m., there was a regular foreign-affairs breakfast. At first I invited only three people — Fritz [Walter Mondale, Vice President], Cy [Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State], and Zbig [Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor] — but I soon added Harold Brown [Secretary of Defense] to the list [. . .] Jody [Joseph Lester Powell, Press Secretary], Zbig, and Ham [Hamilton Jordan, Chief of Staff] were my most frequent unscheduled visitors to the Oval Office. (1982: 55–56)

Fritz and *Cy* had been nicknames for Mondale and Vance long before Carter knew to call them such, and *Jody* was Powell's only public name. Generally, it appears that Carter used nicknames that bearers approved: *Ham* and *Zbig* are commonly used for Jordan and Brzezinski far and away from Carter's use; notice that Harold Brown is not called *Harry* or *Hal*, suggesting that Carter respected name bearers' naming preferences.[6]

Reagan took authority over his own nickname, *Dutch*: 'I never thought "Ronald" was rugged enough for a young red-blooded American boy and as soon as I could, I asked people to call me "Dutch." That was a nickname that grew out of my father's calling me "the Dutchman" whenever he referred to me' (Reagan, 1990: 21). Interestingly, the ruggedness Reagan heard in the name is independent of either of the origins Reagan proposes for it (see Note 3). Clinton, too, is conscious of the self-fashioning power of nicknames and nicknaming, in childhood insisting on *Billy* for himself (Clinton, 2004: 18), and later noticing that in 1966, the Arkansas segregationist politician 'Jim Johnson — or "Justice Jim," as he liked to be called — was riding the tide and making big, ugly moves' (Clinton, 2004: 87). Implicit in this is an understanding that people ought to have control over what they're called familiarly, although their choices serve as a basis for social judgment.

This summary underscores the commonplace character of most recent presidential nicknaming. The names in question aren't particularly clever or formed in unusual ways: by and large, they are familiar names of long standing (*Mommy*), shortenings (*Cy*, *Ham*, *Jeff*, *Mac*, *Zbig*), reanalyses (*Cap*, *Tip*), or both (*Mack*), hypocorisms (*Mandy*), or popular, highly conventional nicknames (*Bud*, *Chip*, *Duke*). Clinton uses nicknames, especially conventional shortenings, frequently in his memoir *My Life* (2004) — breezy familiarity is part of Clinton's style, informality part of his appeal. By and large, Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Clinton nicknamed, were nicknamed, and generally participated in the social life of nicknames about as much as the average American. Like most of us, too, they were thoughtful about what others preferred to be called, extending the courtesy of observing that preference to subordinates, rather than nicknaming to assert presidential prerogatives. President George W. Bush's nicknaming differs profoundly from such onomastic routine. Of course, it may be unfair to contrast Bush's real life nicknaming with the habits other presidents convey in their published memoirs; we'll just have to wait and see how much of Bush's nicknaming ends up in his inevitable contribution to the genre.

In fact, even President Bush's signature strategy of indirection is far from unique to his nicknaming. As Antonio Lillo argues, English slang worldwide includes names developed from puns and puns developed from names: for instance, *Robert Money*, from *Robert Dinero* (from Spanish *dinero* 'money') from *Robert De Niro*, closely resembles in formative strategy *High Prophet* partially from *Parfitt*, a nickname for Karen Hughes (see Lillo, 2007: 438). And right wing radio wing nut Rush Limbaugh is arguably as talented at nicknaming as President Bush, and at least as self-congratulating about it. Here is a classic example, from his broadcast on 5 January 2005:

> As for turning over documents, Leahy, we have him on tape coming up, Senator Depends. By the way, his nickname is leaky [*sic*] because Senator Leahy was thrown off of the Senate intelligence committee back in the 80s for leaking information about a planned

> attack on Libya, I believe it was. So he was thrown off the committee. He dares now sit in judgment of people like Alberto Gonzales. But anyway, since he leaked that his nickname on this program is 'Leaky,' and of course if you are leaky, you need Depends [a brand of adult diaper]. Just want to make sure you understand this.

This is not an isolated instance: Senator John Edwards, famous now for his expensive hair care, is called *Breck Girl* (see, for instance, the transcript of Limbaugh's 8 March 2007 broadcast), and Senator Lindsey Graham, supporter of comprehensive immigration reform, is nicknamed *Grahamnesty* (similarly, the 28 June 2007 broadcast). If one didn't know that Limbaugh had coined these nicknames, one could easily imagine them as entries in President Bush's onomasticon.

President Bush's nicknaming is significant, not so much for its method or the character of its results, but for extra-linguistic reasons. It comprises a dense and coherent set of names concentrated in the practice of one person, rather than, as in the case of Lillo's examples, a bunch of names scattered across the lexicographical record. Given the comparison with Limbaugh, one might conclude that nicknaming is a socio-onomastic strategy of the political right, and it may be, to the extent that, as George Lakoff (2006) and Geoffrey Nunberg (2004) have argued in recent books, the right more successfully frames political discourse; name-calling, then, is an appeal to deeply entrenched attitudes and establishes latte-drinking, Volvo-driving liberal guilt by association. But the distinction between Limbaugh's nicknaming and Bush's is sharp and clear: Limbaugh is a commentator and satirist, a comedian whose power is earned in the media market and maintained in the face of competition, both conservative and liberal. His power, unlike Bush's, is not presidential, executive, institutional, legal, or in any way representative of the state. Presidential nicknaming need not enact a theory of the state and the president's position in it, but insofar as it can and Bush's does, it is unique.

Fortunately, we live in a democratic republic with constitutionally guaranteed speech rights; we may not be able to resist President Bush's nicknaming if, as the embodiment of a unitary executive power, he finds it necessary to hail us, nor can we address him as we like in the corridors of power, but we are free to call him whatever we like in the privacy of our own homes or in the public square. Dubya may have onomastic inclinations, and they may be unusually compatible with and supportive of his political agenda. They may illustrate particularly well the effects of early and continued exposure to nicknames on later nicknaming behavior, not to mention an individual genius for linguistic indirection and the adept application of it in the exercise of executive power. Nevertheless, an American president's interpellative authority is far from absolute. Given the Twenty-Second Amendment, it is necessarily temporary.

Notes

1. The world wide web is littered with references to nicknames Bush has given (or is claimed to have given) his associates, subordinates, and other national and international figures. To this point in the article, I have mentioned many names without sourcing all of them; readers can turn to the web to confirm their existence and authenticity, and to observe them in use, presidential and otherwise. However, those browsing the web must be cautious. Many sites simply cut and paste or repeat material from other sites, especially from the entry 'Dubya Nickname' at Notable Names Database

(http://www.nndb.com/group/750/ 000091477/). Generally, the NNDB entry seems reliable, as does a list of the President's nicknames in *New York Magazine* (23 August 2004). In this article, however, I only have used names supported by reference to one or more (usually more) newspapers of record or other print publications. I have not included a number of provocative nicknames, for instance from an article by Norman Ornstein and Al Franken in the *Los Angeles Times* (8 February 2001), although they certainly support the current argument, if they are authentically Bush's nicknames — but I have not been able to confirm that many of them are. It is difficult to separate reportage from satire in this and many blogospheric contexts, and to police commentary on Bush's nicknames, real or imagined, would require that I write a long and boring article — not this one.

2. I take the claims that the Bush administration has pursued 'unitary executive power' and attempted to construct (or reconstruct) an 'imperial presidency', ascendant over the other branches of federal government, as uncontroversial. That is, no one from right to left disagrees that these have been the administration's aims, but only whether the aims are politically, historically, or morally right, appropriate, or justifiable — concerns beyond the scope of this article. As a result, I mention these developments without citing any of the abundant literature about them.
3. In *An American Life* (1990), Reagan tells more than one story about how he got the nickname *Dutch*. 'According to family legend,' he writes, 'when my father ran up the stairs and looked at his newborn son, he quipped: "He looks like a fat little Dutchman. But who knows, he might grow up to be president some day"' (1990: 21). Later, in a photo caption, he suggests a different origin: 'My "Dutch boy" haircut encouraged my father to call me "the Dutchman." I later shortened it to "Dutch"' (1990: 224). The two explanations are not mutually exclusive, of course — naming is a complicated, sometimes ongoing process.
4. Frank Willard introduced the popular comic strip *Moon Mullins* in 1923, through the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate; Willard's assistant, Ferd Johnson, who had increasingly assumed responsibility for the strip, signed it from Willard's death, in 1958, until its demise in 1991. Interestingly, *Moon* is a nickname, clipped from Mullins's given name, *Moonshine*, which itself has the character of a metaphorical nickname of association, since Mullins is a sot (see Goulart, 1990: 264–265, 386–387).
5. Interestingly, Weinberger, like President Reagan, was nicknamed by his father, also after a fictional character:

   > I was named Caspar, after a great friend of my mother's from Denver, Mrs. Stanley Caspar, who became my godmother. It was my father who first called me Cap. There was a novel about San Francisco shipping life at that time called *Cappy Rix*. The Cappy Rix character in the book was a skipper of one of the ships, and for some reason, my father started calling me Cappy, and then Cap. Later, in grammar school, I was often teased about my unusual name. I told my tormentors they were just jealous because they did not have a unique name, but that did not seem to deter them. Finally a small fight settled the matter. Maybe this was the beginning of a feeling that occasionally confrontation is better than compromise. (Weinberger, 2001: 12)

   Being called *Cap* by the President of the United States must have been something of a vindication for Secretary Weinberger.
6. Reference to Walter Frederick Mondale as *Fritz* is ubiquitous and iconic: Melody Gilbert's documentary about Mondale's career is titled *Fritz: The Walter Mondale Story* (2008). In his memoir, *Power and Principle* (1983: 33), Brzezinski affirms that *Fritz* was the name by which friends called Mondale. Similarly, we can be sure that Carter did not initiate Vance's nickname, *Cy*: on 13 December 1976, *Time* reported that just 31 days after his election, Carter named Vance to his cabinet, and quoted a British diplomat as saying, 'Cy Vance is well known and widely respected here' (Vance and Lance). The case for *Ham* as predating Jordan's role in Carter's administration is harder to make, although *People* (6 August 1979) headlined an article 'Born Again as White House Chief of Staff, Ham Jordan Leads the Carter Revival' (Clifford and Leviton). If Jordan's own report of his daily conversations with Carter during the Iran hostage crisis is accurate, the President called him nothing but *Ham*, not only in private but in all White House contexts (Jordan, 1982). In any case, *Ham* was used by many in the White House, not just Carter, for instance by Brzezinski (1983: 68); Brzezinski refers to Vance as *Cy* and *Vance* alternately throughout his memoir. *Zbig*, in turn, was clearly the name by which Carter called Brzezinski before the latter joined the former's administration (1983: 4), and the name by which Rosalynn Carter called him (1983: 32); Vance refers to Brzezinski as *Zbig* throughout his memoir, *Hard Choices* (1983).

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the opportunity I had to present a version of this article at the annual meeting of the American Name Society in Chicago, 3–6 January 2008. I received many helpful comments about the paper during that meeting and subsequently. I would especially like to thank Frank Abate for reminding me that President Bush's experience of nicknaming included his love of baseball and connection to the baseball industry; Ben Zimmer for explaining the circumstances of Vice-President Cheney's nickname, *Big Time*; and Wayne Glowka for alerting me to Rush Limbaugh's nicknaming proclivities which, I admit, I would otherwise have overlooked.

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