

2016

# Charlton Heston's Rhetoric on Political Correctness, Use of Ideographs, and Construction of Ethos in "Winning the Cultural War"

Marissa J. Thompson

Western Oregon University, [marissa.thompson.j@gmail.com](mailto:marissa.thompson.j@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure>



Part of the [Rhetoric Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Thompson, Marissa J. (2016) "Charlton Heston's Rhetoric on Political Correctness, Use of Ideographs, and Construction of Ethos in "Winning the Cultural War"," *PURE Insights*: Vol. 5 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure/vol5/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in PURE Insights by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@wou.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@wou.edu).

---

# Charlton Heston's Rhetoric on Political Correctness, Use of Ideographs, and Construction of Ethos in "Winning the Cultural War"

## **Abstract**

This paper examines a speech, "Winning the Cultural War," that Charlton Heston gave to the Harvard University Law Forum in February 1999. Several years into the Democratic policies and gun control measures of the Clinton administration, Heston's Right-leaning speech critiqued the limitation of personal freedom and the national obsession with political correctness.

While on the surface Heston's speech reads (and probably sounded) inspirational and well-structured, it lacks the depth and clarity to spur long-lasting and specific change. Heston uses his image as an actor and as president of the NRA, as well as anecdotes and attempts at humor, to paint himself as a down-to-earth fatherly or professorial figure. He seems to hope and ask for a specific change, but his speech leaves a lot of room for (mis)interpretation.

## **Keywords**

Charlton Heston, rhetoric, political correctness, cultural war, ideographs, ethos, persona, Winning the Cultural War, Harvard University Law Forum, NRA, gun rights, gun control, First Amendment, Second Amendment, freedom of thought, Right-wing, Clinton administration, speech, Chuck Heston

## Charlton Heston's Rhetoric on Political Correctness, Use of Ideographs, and Construction of Ethos in "Winning the Cultural War"

Marissa Thompson, Department Communication Studies, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Emily Plec

This paper examines a speech, "Winning the Cultural War," that Charlton Heston gave to the Harvard University Law Forum in February 1999. Several years into the Democratic policies and gun control measures of the Clinton administration, Heston's Right-leaning speech critiqued the limitation of personal freedom and the national obsession with political correctness.

While on the surface Heston's speech reads (and probably sounded) inspirational and well-structured, it lacks the depth and clarity to spur long-lasting and specific change. Heston uses his image as an actor and as president of the NRA, as well as anecdotes and attempts at humor, to paint himself as a down-to-earth fatherly or professorial figure. He seems to hope and ask for a specific change, but his speech leaves a lot of room for (mis)interpretation.

*Keywords:* Charlton Heston, rhetoric, political correctness, cultural war, ideographs, ethos, persona, Winning the Cultural War, Harvard University Law Forum, NRA, gun rights, gun control, First Amendment, Second Amendment, freedom of thought, Right-wing, Clinton administration, speech, Chuck Heston

In February 16, 1999, several years into the Democratic policies and gun control measures of the Clinton administration, Charlton Heston, a well-known actor with a well-known face and well-known right-wing tendencies, gave a speech to the Harvard University Law Forum critiquing the limitation of personal freedom and describing a national obsession with political correctness. While on the surface Heston's speech, called "Winning the Cultural War," reads (and probably sounded) inspirational and well-structured, it lacks the depth and clarity to spur long-lasting and specific change. Heston uses his image as an actor and as president of the NRA, as well as anecdotes and attempts at humor, to paint himself as a down-to-earth fatherly or professorial figure. He seems to hope and ask for a specific change, but his speech leaves a lot of room for (mis)interpretation.

Charlton Heston was born on October 4, 1923 in Illinois as John Charles Carter. He later assumed his stepfather's surname, Heston, to create his screen name (*The Biography Channel Website*). Heston decided to become an actor after trying out for a high school play, and his involvement in the theater department earned him a scholarship to Northwestern University. He moved to New York City in 1946 and made his Broadway debut the following year in *Antony and Cleopatra* (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). He went on to play Moses in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), arguably his best-known role, and starred in Orson

Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958) and William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959). Heston's role in *Ben-Hur* won him an Academy Award and "secured his position as the premiere historical character actor in Hollywood" (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Heston played Mark Antony in both *Julius Caesar* (1970) and in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1973), the latter of which he also directed. Other notable films, outside of the epic and historical genres, include the western *Will Penny* (1968) and the science fiction films *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *The Omega Man* (1971), and *Soylent Green* (1973).

In many of his films, Heston developed a "persona of an unflinching hero with a piercing blue-eyed stare and unbending, self-righteous Middle American ethics. Heston's heroes could be violent and cruel, but only when absolutely necessary" (Brennan). The characters he plays in films like *The Ten Commandments*, *Planet of the Apes*, and *Soylent Green* make unwavering distinctions between right and wrong: Moses, Taylor, and Thorn aren't afraid to disobey or challenge authority figures enforcing laws they believe to be morally wrong.

In the late 1950s, Heston had led two of the most famous scenes in cinema history: parting the Red Sea in *The Ten Commandments* and winning a chariot race in *Ben-Hur*. Emilie Raymond (2006) wrote that these films "constructed a public image for the actor that embodied responsibility, individualism, and conservative masculinity, values that Heston himself embraced" (p. 4). Heston was known to accept roles that embodied these

qualities and reject scripts that did not (Raymond, 2006, p. 4). As such, over time, Charlton Heston's public image could not be separated from his film roles—though whether it was because there was no difference or because people couldn't see it is uncertain. Heston himself may have been unable to distinguish some of his personal beliefs from those of the characters he played:

“I think it would be pompous of me to say I played Moses and found God. However, playing the two religious characters I have done, John the Baptist and Moses, two pretty good characters, has definitely marked my life. So has Richelieu; so has playing McCloud in Detective Story [...] Yes, it would be fair to say that the experience of exploring these guys has been a profound influence on my life.” (Stoddard & SerVaas, 1984, p. 103, p. 110)

Additionally, Heston's “deep voice and noble physique” (*The Biography Channel website*), which had made him a popular choice for epic films, added to an image that probably boosted his ethos during his years as an activist. The persona that Heston constructed in his films was useful in his political career, and this link between fiction and reality exemplified the rise of image politics in America. As defined by Steven J. Ross (2011), image politics is the phenomenon of a celebrity's screen image being “so widely venerated that large numbers of Americans pay close attention to his or her political pronouncements” (p. 272). In this case, Heston had become so popular that more Americans were becoming interested in his political opinions and activities. Unlike other actors who have shifted out of their film roles to speak for important causes, Heston's persona was one and the same:

When Charlie Chaplin shifted from visual politics to issue-oriented politics he did not assume the role of the Tramp; he spoke as himself. But for Heston, the image and the man merged into one: he was always Moses, always the savior, lawgiver, and patriarch. (Ross, 2011, p. 272)

Outside of the Broadway and Hollywood spheres, Heston continued to adopt this persona and attitude toward injustice in his work as an activist for civil and gun rights. Heston participated in the March on Washington with Martin Luther King, Jr. and in speeches often referred to King's policy of civil disobedience. He later became the president of the U.S. National Rifle Association (1998–2003) and a spokesperson for gun rights. Heston was known in later years as a conservative Republican and worked with President

Ronald Reagan on the Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities (Brennan).

Heston's political career changed somewhat over the years, however, before settling into a decidedly right-wing position. Raymond (2006) separates his career into four stages. From 1955 to 1961, Heston began to lend his voice and celebrity status to national issues, publicly identifying with anticommunism and personal freedom. During this period, his activism was principally limited to national political campaigns (p. 5). Between 1961 and 1972, Heston lent his support to presidential candidates Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, Hubert Humphrey in 1968, and Richard Nixon in 1972. He was associated during this time with Democratic Party, though he was not overzealous, and teamed with other celebrities to support LBJ's gun control measures and the Vietnam War. He also began a longstanding affiliation with the Screen Actors Guild (p. 5).

The third stage of Charlton Heston's political career, beginning in 1972, marked a period of partisan activity:

Even though his political beliefs remained largely unchanged, he worked almost solely with the Republican Party, and he began to see Democrats as a threat to American stability and superiority. [...] Heston's close friendship with President Ronald Reagan deepened his partisanship, while his increasing involvement with special interest groups emboldened his newly dogmatic approach. (Raymond, 2006, p. 6)

It was Reagan who first got Heston interested in “motion picture politics,” and who, after taking office, appointed him to the Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities as Chairman for the Arts (Munn, 1986, p. 195). Heston continued to lend his support to Reagan throughout his presidency, and after the Democratic Party adopted affirmative action, Heston began to lean toward the right. He said in an interview with Donald Chase (1983) that, though he had initially supported causes associated with the Democratic Party, he had never belonged to either party (p. 44). Heston later clarified, when he registered as a Republican in 1987, “the Democratic Party moved, I didn't” (Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 215).

In Charlton Heston's final stage of activism, beginning in 1995, he joined the board of the National Rifle Association, and delivered speeches that examined and often attacked the changes to American culture and society that had occurred since the 1960s (Raymond, 2006, p. 6). He also wrote several books on the subject. According to Raymond (2006), he targeted the media

and university systems in his speeches about the American culture war; “in true neoconservative fashion, he blamed the media and academe for imposing political correctness and multiculturalism on the citizenry and encouraged Americans to return to traditional moral values” (p. 7). Heston believed that Americans had gotten out of touch with its core values, as evidenced by the shifting tenets of political parties, and that they had to take a stand to maintain core American ideals.

Heston was known to speak on many controversial issues, including homosexuality, feminism, and gun rights, as well as racism and white supremacy (Hornblower). He was unafraid to voice stark opinions, and his refusal to shy away from moderate or politically correct views has made him somewhat of an infamous political figure. Heston’s publicist, Michael Levine, worried that his outspokenness would and already had damaged his career, saying that it’s “far better in Hollywood to admit you’re a drug addict than a conservative” (Hornblower).

When Heston was elected president of the NRA in 1998, the organization’s “aura of invincibility [had] evaporated with the 1993 passage of the Brady Bill, requiring a five-day waiting period to purchase handguns, and, later, a Clinton-backed ban on manufacturing and importing assault weapons” (Hornblower). As president, it was Heston’s goal to sell the previously demonized organization to the public and boost its image. In a speech delivered at the 129th NRA convention in May 2000, Charlton Heston criticized Al Gore and Democratic gun-control campaigns, and rallied together over 2000 listening NRA members with his provocative rhetoric:

For the next six months, Al Gore is going to smear you as the enemy. He will slander you as gun-toting, knuckle-dragging, bloodthirsty maniacs who stand in the way of a safer America. Will you remain silent? I will not remain silent. If we are going to stop this, then it is vital to every law-abiding gun owner in America to register to vote and show up at the polls on Election Day. (Dao)

In 2002 Heston revealed that he had symptoms consistent with Alzheimer’s disease, and in 2003 began to withdraw from public life, though he still videotaped his final comments on the gun control issue for the NRA convention in April 2003. Heston passed away in his home on April 6, 2008 (Ross, 2011, p. 312).

The exigence that Charlton Heston addresses in his speech to the Harvard University Law Forum, “Winning the Cultural War,” is a lack and limitation of personal

freedom. Heston believes that the values of freedom and liberty upon which this country is founded are inherently deserved by every human being; however, these rights have been stifled by government and individual cowardice. He best expresses this in his introduction:

I want to [...] reconnect you with your own sense of liberty, your own freedom of thought, your own compass for what is right.

Dedicating the memorial at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln said of America, “We are now engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.”

Those words are true again. I believe that we are again engaged in a great civil war, a cultural war that’s about to hijack your birthright to think and say what lives in your heart. I’m sure you no longer trust the pulsing lifeblood of liberty inside you, the stuff that made this country rise from wilderness into the miracle that it is. (1999, p. 357)

Heston goes on to say that this “persecution” does not stop at Second Amendment rights, but that, “with Orwellian fervor, certain acceptable thoughts and speech are mandated” (1999, p. 357) across the country. He disparages the concept of political correctness and points to the backlash he received when saying that “white pride is just as valid as black pride or red pride or anyone else’s pride” and that “gay rights should extend no further than your rights or my rights” (1999, p. 357). Heston believes that not only are different groups not receiving equal rights, but that people aren’t allowed to address these differences openly without being attacked. He takes the position that the acknowledgment of discrimination is not necessarily an endorsement of discrimination, saying he points out differences in treatment in the hopes of offsetting them.

In his speech, Heston addresses gun control policies of the time and, as president of the NRA, he represented a significant and influential voice against gun control. In 1999 the U.S. was under the Clinton administration; Clinton had begun his Democratic presidential campaign in 1992 by emphasizing that crime was on the rise in the U.S., particularly in inner-city areas, and “the party promised to restore government as the upholder of basic law and order for these and all crime-ravaged communities” (Marion, 1997, p. 69). Though Clinton’s agenda for crime control was initially much more conservative than one might expect from a liberal candidate—promising to put more officers on the street and displaying a resistance to restrict gun use for

legitimate sporting or hunting purposes—he eventually placed more emphasis on gun control during his presidency (Marion, 1997). In 1993 Clinton signed the Brady Bill, later known as the Brady Handgun Violence Protection Act, which instituted a five-day waiting period for the purchase of a handgun and established a nationwide computerized background check system (Mario, 1997, pp. 78-79). According to Marion (1997), in 1994 "Clinton called for legislation banning assault weapons and handgun ownership by minors while at the same time allowing hunters and law-abiding citizens to own guns" (p. 82). These two pieces of legislation represented important strides in the area of gun control, and were only a few years old when Charlton Heston gave his speech to Harvard University Law Forum. To Heston, who valued First and Second Amendment freedoms perhaps above all others, this legislation represented a massive attack on liberty.

Charlton Heston addressed his speech to Harvard Law School Forum, a student organization described on the website of Harvard Law School (a professional graduate school of Harvard University) as "a non-partisan organization dedicated to bringing open discussion to a campus on a wide range of legal, social, and political issues." The organization has hosted many historically important figures, such as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, Justice Thurgood Marshall, Fidel Castro, and Henry Kissinger. According to the Harvard Law School Forum website, its mission is "to facilitate timely discussion on important topics, allowing students to interact with the people that help shape the world they live in." This group presumably invited Heston to speak and had an interest in what he had to say, and he chose this speech to aim at this particular group (graduate law students from Harvard):

Why did political correctness originate on America's campuses? And why do you continue to tolerate it?

Why do you, who're supposed to debate ideas, surrender to their suppression? [...]

You are the best and the brightest. You, here in the fertile cradle of American academia, here in the castle of learning on the Charles River, you are the cream. But I submit that you, and your counterparts across the land, are the most socially conformed and politically silenced generation since Concord Bridge. And as long as you validate that ... and abide it ... you are—by your grandfathers' standards—cowards. [...]

Who will guard the raw material of unfettered

ideas, if not you? Democracy is dialogue! (1999, p. 358)

Heston addresses his speech directly to the audience before him, rather than appealing generally to Americans or to the public. He tells Harvard Law School Forum directly: in order to "prevail against such pervasive social subjugation" (1999, p. 358), simply disobey: "I am asking you to disavow cultural correctness with massive disobedience of rogue authority, social directives and onerous laws that weaken personal freedom" (1999, p. 358). In Heston's mind, America's youth are being censored, forced to fit their opinions into the oppressive mold of political correctness. This exigence is what Heston asks his audience to address, by standing up to "the Man" and saying what they believe to be right, even if it costs them their pride, their jobs, or even their lives—"Dr. King stood on lots of balconies," Heston points out (1999, p.358). The students of Harvard Law School Forum have the power to address the exigence if they would only stop being afraid, Heston argues.

Charlton Heston's biggest advantage in reaching his audience is his stardom. Heston was a well-known actor who played grand and heroic roles, such as Moses, Ben-Hur, George Taylor in *Planet of the Apes*, and Col. Robert Neville in *The Omega Man*. It may be difficult to separate a celebrity like this from his roles, and he thus may have had a stronger influence over his audience than if he were known for different kinds of roles. Conversely, it is also possible that his role as an actor, particularly one from an age gone by (in the eyes of university students), may have made him somewhat of an antiquated or outdated figure. His anecdotes and list of the roles that he had played may have held little relevancy for a younger audience, or he may have been perceived as a mere actor with no business in politics.

Other aspects of his reputation may have posed somewhat of a disadvantage for Heston in giving this speech, particularly as president of the N.R.A. and an advocate for gun rights. Though Heston represented an educated and authoritative voice on gun rights and personal freedoms, he also represented a minority opinion under the Democratic Clinton administration, and his views on Second Amendment rights may have been looked down upon. He actually addresses further constraints in his speech, pointing out that he has been called racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic for previous public statements he has made. Heston attempts, however, to disprove these accusations and validate his speech—"If you talk about race, it does not make you a racist. If you see distinctions between the genders, it does not make you sexist," etc. (1999, p.

358).

Heston's speech to the Harvard University Law Forum, "Winning the Cultural War," begs the question: What is Heston's purpose in speaking to this audience and with this speech? He states at the beginning, "I want to [...] reconnect you with your own sense of liberty ... your own freedom of thought ... your own compass for what is right," (1999, p. 357) and he emphasizes throughout the speech his desire to help his audience get in touch with their roots. However, the specificity of the speech's message doesn't extend far beyond this. Heston repeatedly encourages his audience to "disobey" authorities that seek to curb their personal freedoms and to withstand the "superstition of political correctness [that] rules the halls of reason" (1999, p. 358).

What is political correctness, though? Which kind is bad and which is good? Heston, after pointing out that his audience's generation is "the most socially conformed and politically silenced generation since Concord Bridge" (1999, p. 358) and calling them cowards for allowing that, he attacks Ice-T for releasing a CD "celebrating ambushing and murdering police officers" (1999, p. 358). He describes a Time/Warner stockholders' meeting that he attended to read aloud the full lyrics of "Cop Killer," one of the songs from the CD, and stun the stockholders. Though Heston claims to believe that everyone has a "birthright to think and say what lives in your heart," (1999, p. 357) Ice-T apparently did not have this right; Heston's attendance at the meeting resulted in Time/Warner's termination of the artist's contract. Ice-T's music, which outraged people around the country, could have, by Heston's standards, been characterized as disobedience and resistance of political correctness. Heston warns of a cultural war "in which, with Orwellian fervor, certain acceptable thoughts and speech are mandated," but it seems that Heston himself admits to mandating acceptable speech.

In his speech, Heston describes several cases exemplifying the failures of the education system, though in a couple cases it is unclear at whom his incredulity is aimed:

At William and Mary, students tried to change the name of the school team "The Tribe" because it was supposedly insulting to local Indians, only to learn that authentic Virginia chiefs truly like the name.

In San Francisco, city fathers passed an ordinance protecting the rights of transvestites to cross-dress on the job, and for transsexuals to have separate toilet facilities while undergoing sex change surgery. (1999, pp. 357-358)

Heston follows up these stories with an interpretation: "It means that telling us what to think has evolved into telling us what to say, so telling us what to do can't be far behind" (1999, p. 358). If Heston's point is, then, that people shouldn't be told what to say or do, does he agree with the William and Mary students or the Virginia chiefs? Does he side with the city fathers and the rights of transvestites and transsexuals, or is he criticizing their decision to make exceptions? Furthermore, his condemnation of Ice-T doesn't seem to correspond with his warning of Orwellian dictation of speech and thought; perhaps he believed that he was protecting a wider public from being told what to do by telling Ice-T and Time/Warner what to do.

According to Barbara O'Keefe (1992), critics of political correctness are often highly selective in the cases they choose to highlight as examples of PC's atrocities. She quotes Calvin Mackenzie, who wrote:

The critics who coined the term political correctness see it as a set of invidious trends in which fad brushes aside tradition. The problem is that save in exceptional and transitory cases, the picture that critics paint bears little resemblance to life on contemporary college campuses. (p. 123)

It may be, then, that Charlton Heston views political correctness as a subversion of *tradition*, and values tradition more than freedom of speech. Ice-T's lyrics presumably defied a tradition of respect—as well as a tradition of avoiding obscenities, profanities, or vulgarities—that Heston believed was his duty to restore. He was not the only one upset by the lyrics; police around the country were upset by "Cop Killer," "but Time/Warner was stonewalling because the CD was a cash cow for them, and the media were tiptoeing around it because the rapper was black" (Heston, 1999, p. 358). This attitude goes along with Heston's policy on affirmative action and discrimination; he believed that minorities shouldn't be given preferential treatment in order to avoid accusations of racism, as that would be a form of reverse discrimination. Heston acknowledges in his speech that he has been criticized for such opinions, and that his discussions of racism, sexism, and other prejudices have earned him accusations of being the very thing he despises:

I marched for civil rights with Dr. King in 1963—long before Hollywood found it fashionable. But when I told an audience last year that white pride is just as valid as black pride or red pride or anyone else's pride, they called me a racist. [...]

Everyone I know, knows I would never raise a closed fist against my country. (1999, p. 357)

Charlton Heston was known to touch on sensitive subjects, and often a mere acknowledgement of difference can agitate audiences. As such, Heston blamed a new trend of political correctness for the backlash he received. O'Keefe (1992), however, trivializes the issue of political correctness, writing that it is not as pervasive and inclusive of an issue as it often made out to be:

To the extent that PC enters our academic lives, it does so either because someone with right-wing politics needs a windmill at which to tilt, or because some petty bureaucrat decides that it is important to know what the university is doing to be politically correct. (p. 125)

O'Keefe adds that political correctness is often blamed for a wide range of independent issues in the university system, including selection of curriculum, disciplinary policies and procedures, and how the university deals with discrimination and intolerance among students. According to O'Keefe (1992), "the very general terms in which the PC debate is conducted do not connect well to the detailed and practical issues involved in articulating a coherent vision of general education and its implementation in a curriculum" (p. 126). Heston says little about the specific workings of the university system, but covers it with a blanket of political correctness.

Charlton Heston does a good job of employing ideographs and god terms in "Winning the Cultural War," though the extent to which he uses them is potentially excessive, obscuring his message. Heston frequently mentions "liberty" and quotes Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, in perhaps the most emotionally charged segment of "Winning the Cultural War":

"We are now engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure." Those words are true again.

I believe that are we again engaged in a great civil war, a cultural war that's about to hijack your birthright to think and say what lives in your heart.

I fear you no longer trust the pulsing lifeblood of liberty inside you ... the stuff that made this country rise from wilderness into the miracle that it is. (1999, p. 357)

Heston continues to name-drop throughout the

speech, beginning with his list of the historically influential characters he has played and which have influenced him in turn, and ending with the statement, "If Dr. King were here, I think he would agree" (1999, p. 359). He cites Dr. King in urging his listeners to disobey, saying that every "great man who led those in the right against those with the might" (including Gandhi, Thoreau, and Jesus) practiced disobedience. Heston mentions these names to make his audience believe that they can aspire to be as influential as these leaders, and uses name-dropping to construct ethos as a rhetor. He relies heavily on his role as an actor and as president of the NRA to present an authoritative persona to his audience. He speaks as a fatherly or professorial figure giving advice to his children or students: "Don't let America's universities continue to serve as incubators for this rampant epidemic of new McCarthyism," (1999, p. 358) and the characters whose morals he has made his own certainly support this image. At the end of his speech, he places the responsibility on the shoulders of his listeners, as if he trusts them to carry on his essential, if somewhat ambiguous, mission:

So that this nation may long endure, I urge you to follow in the hallowed footsteps of the great disobediences of history that freed exiles, founded religions, defeated tyrants, and yes, in the hands of aroused rabble in arms and a few great men, by God's grace, built this country. (1999, p. 359)

These seemingly casual mentions of key figures and events in America's history are meant to incite a primal patriotism in his audience—and perhaps distract from the fact that his message doesn't go much deeper than these ideographs. An attempt to read further into his speech reveals an uncharacteristic lack of depth; compared to previous speeches Heston had made, "Winning the Cultural War" relies too heavily on ambiguous ideals.

Despite this rhetorical deterioration in later years, Charlton Heston was an important figure in the rhetoric surrounding gun control policy, and effectively constructed a credible persona from characters with high moral standing. His audiences believed he really was a man, like his film characters, who would do everything he could to fix a world gone wrong (whether it be parting the Red Sea, blowing up a post-apocalyptic Earth overtaken by apes, or exposing the truth about a dystopian food supply). Heston may have even convinced himself—"there always seems to be a lot of different fellows up here and I'm never entirely certain which one of them gets to talk" (Heston, 1999, p. 357). Having played so many historical and Biblical figures in



movies, it seems natural for him to hold himself up alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Jesus. In this way, Heston positions himself as a credible and respectable rhetor for the audience of the Harvard Law School Forum, but he fails to deliver a relevant and clear-cut directive. In the end, his audience is left only with the instruction to disobey, but whether that disobedience should be directed at the press, offensive rappers, or state legislature—or for that matter, maybe even at Heston himself—is left unsaid.

---

Asante, M. K. (1992). The escape into hyperbole: communication and political correctness. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 141–147.

Burgoon, M., & Bailey, W. (1992). PC at last! PC at last! Thank God almighty, we are PC at last!. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 95–104.

Brennan, S. (2014). Charlton Heston. *AllMovie*, [www.allmovie.com](http://www.allmovie.com).

Carey, J. W. (1992). Political correctness and cultural studies. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 56–72.

“Charlton Heston”. (2014, a). *The Biography Channel website*, [www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com).

“Charlton Heston”. (2014, b). *Encyclopædia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

Chase, D. (1983). Between scenes with Charlton Heston. *Saturday Evening Post* 225(8), 42–45. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

Dao, J. (2000, May 21). N.R.A. leaders cast Gore as archenemy. *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

Demerath, N. J. (2005). The battle over a U.S. culture war: a note on inflated rhetoric versus inflamed politics. *The Forum*, 3(2), 1–11.

Dennis, E. E. (1992). Freedom of expression, the university, and the media. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 73–83.

Dombrink, J. (2012). After the culture war?: shifts and continuities in American conservatism. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 42(3), 301–321.

Fitzpatrick, J. (2009). Heston, Charlton. In Jackson, K.T., Markoe K., & Markoe, A. (Eds.), *The Scribner encyclopedia of American lives* (Vol. 8) (pp. 213–216). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Harvard Law School Forum. “1L Welcome.” The

Harvard Law School Forum, HLSOrgs. Retrieved from <http://www3.law.harvard.edu/orgs/hlsforum/>.

Heston, C., & Alpert, H. (1978). *The actor's life: Journals, 1956–1976*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton.

Heston, C. (1995). *In the arena: An autobiography*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Heston, C. (1999). Winning the cultural war. *Vital Speeches of the Day* 65(12), 357–359. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

Hollywood roundtable: Civil rights, 1963. (2008). *Films on Demand*. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.wou.edu:2120/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=14402&xtid=48826>.

Hornblower, M. (1998). Have gun, will travel: But can Heston's celebrity and rhetoric revive the N.R.A.? *Time* 151(26), 44. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

Jbranstetter04. (2008, April 26). Charlton Heston; From My Cold Dead Hands. Long Version [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ju4Gla2odw>.

Kotlowski, D. J. (2007). From my cold, dead hands: Charlton Heston and American politics [Review]. *Pacific Historical Review* 76(4), 660–662. Retrieved from *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost.

Losey, K. M., & Kurthen, J. (1995). The rhetoric of ‘political correctness’ in the U.S. media. *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 40(2), 227–245.

Marion, N. E. (1997). Symbolic policies in Clinton's crime control agenda. *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 1(1), 67–108. Retrieved from University of California Press, JSTOR.

Moore, M. (Director). (2003). *Bowling for Columbine* [Motion picture]. United States: MGM Home Entertainment.

Munn, M. (1986). *Charlton Heston*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

O'Keefe, B. J. (1992). Sense and sensitivity. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 123–130.

Palczewski, C. H., Ice, R., & Fritch, J. (2012). *Rhetoric in civic life*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing.

Raymond, E. (2005). The agony and the ecstasy: Charlton Heston and the Screen Actors Guild. *Journal of Policy History* 17(2), 217–223. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

Raymond, E. (2006). *From my cold, dead hands: Charlton Heston and American politics*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Ross, S. J. (2011). *Moses and the red tide: Charlton Heston*. In *Hollywood left and right: How movie stars shaped American politics* (pp. 271–313). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Shelton, M. W. (1996). The role of the right—a focus on the ‘political’ in ‘political correctness’. *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*, (3), 215–218.

Smant, K. J. (2007). *From my cold, dead hands: Charlton Heston and American politics* [Review]. *Journal of American History* 94(1), 349–350. Retrieved from America: History & Life, EBSCOhost.

Stoddard, M., & SerVaas, C. (1984). Charlton Heston: He’d rather pretend than be president. *Saturday Evening Post* 256(6), 42–110. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

VPC.org - Violence Prevention Campaign. (2002). *From the gun war to the culture war: How the NRA has become the pillar of the right*. Violence Policy Center, Retrieved from <http://www.vpc.org/studyndx.htm>.