ABSTRACT

Contemporary High-Level Political Rhetoric Surrounding Climate Change—How Gore, Bush, and Obama Approach the Issue

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Climate change has become a hot button issue spanning the fields of economics, politics, religion, race, ethics, and identity. This thesis provides a rhetorical criticism analyzing how three high-level politicians, namely Al Gore, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, navigate the intense contours of climate change discussions and articulate their own rhetorical understanding of the phenomena. Presidents and major political figures influence and shape the evolution of climate change rhetoric within American politics. One of the ways high-level politicians shape understandings of climate change is by articulating different rhetorical frames of climate change. This thesis analyzes how political leaders employ different frames in the face of political, economic, and rhetorical constraints. This thesis argues that the ways Gore, Bush, and Obama framed climate change, its consequences, and its solutions, hold important implications for the discussions and policy formulations surrounding climate change.

Contemporary High-Level Political Rhetoric Surrounding Climate Change—How Gore, Bush, and Obama Approach the Issue

by

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A Thesis

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my frustrations or offer a nice break from the work. Thank you for being so

understanding throughout this whole process.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The issue of climate change has become a hot-button issue in contemporary

American politics. The controversy is immense in proportion, not only in terms of

geographical scope, but also in terms of the overlap between different zones of social

issues. The debate over climate change is tied up in sciences, economics, politics,

international negotiations, ethics, religion, environmentalism, and culture. Though,

"[t]he scientific consensus is that global warming is rapidly occurring and that human

activity is primarily its cause by emitting greenhouse gases…we are not responding to

these warrants in any significant way."[1] Solutions to climate change have the potential to

be economically burdensome to those that enact them.[2] Short-term economic concerns

are magnified by the uncertainty that surround the potential long-term implications of

climate change. While scientists may have come to a near consensus about the causes of

climate change and its potential consequences, the American public is still undecided.[3]

The uncertainty surrounding whether climate change is real, or even an issue to be

concerned about, makes advocating stark changes with short-term costs that much more

difficult.[4] This thesis will argue that the legitimacy of climate sciences, the importance of

addressing climate change, and the potential to craft solutions to the issue is tied up in the

ways in which those issues are discursively constructed. The different conceptions of

climate change have the capacity to shape how audiences "define problems, attribute

causes, and evaluate solutions" to climate change.[5]

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Justification and Research Questions

This thesis will address two major questions about contemporary political climate change discourses. First, it begins to fill the gaps within the field of environmental communication by providing a clearer picture of the direction and development of climate change rhetoric by analyzing major speeches on climate change dating from the mid 2000's through the beginning of Barack Obama's first term as president. This is not an exhaustive sample of climate change rhetoric over the last decade. The speeches analyzed within the thesis are unique nodes of criticism that begin to shed light on climate change rhetoric's evolution within political speech. The significance of the individual speeches, and the larger trends that they are illustrative of, will be discussed at length throughout the course of this thesis. As part of this process, the study will entail a broader exploration of how high-level figures within American politics have framed and characterized climate change, in other words, how they rhetorically construct climate change, scientifically, politically, economically, and ethically. Similarly, all three figures analyzed within this thesis attempt to construct their own role within the climate change controversy, while simultaneously setting the tone for how their administration, and the country as a whole, views its role in combating anthropogenic climate change.

Though there has been a large amount of literature devoted to presidential rhetoric and environmental rhetoric independently of one another, the literature that combines the two fields has been relatively sparse. As Tarla Rai Peterson notes, "[e]nvironmental issues have assumed an increasingly central role within public discourse. The study of presidential rhetoric, with its roots in public address scholarship, has not attended to this

discourse."[6] The focus on the presidency and high-level political figures is an integral component of a broader understanding of climate change rhetoric for two major reasons.

First, the president's voice in competing disputes over climate change is one of the most visible and important signifiers of contemporary political thought surrounding climate change. As Carcasson argues, "[a] focus on the U.S. presidency is certainly warranted in this case because in the post-cold war world, it plays one of the most important public roles world-wide and speaks with perhaps the world's most influential voice."[7] The importance of exploring presidential rhetoric on climate change is further magnified by the lack of scholarship within the communication field specifically analyzing how presidents discuss climate change. While there is a sizable amount of literature on Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth,* only a few articles have been published which analyze Bush's rhetoric on climate change, and to date scholarly articles that focus on Obama's climate change rhetoric are even more scarce.

Second, the president and major political leaders play a unique role in *agenda setting* for climate issues. As will be discussed more fully in the literature review and analysis section of this chapter, one of the ways in which agenda setting occurs is through "framing" of climate change information. Presidential framings of climate change have a major impact on the ability for environmental concerns to be re-articulated or re-presented in ways that move environmental activism forward. Carcasson argues that "[d]ue to the importance of the president to the agenda-setting process and the framing of policy issues, such a reconceptualization would most likely require the active involvement of the chief executive in order to be widely disseminated."[8] Because the current literature has focused primarily on the scientific disagreements about climate

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change and the way that the media portrays scientific conclusions, it is important that this knowledge be augmented with a further understanding of how those narratives and framings are created and made prevalent in the first place.

The second major research goal of this thesis is to explicate the ways in which high-level political rhetoric situates the individual speakers and the public within the ongoing discussion of climate change and its potential solutions. Analyzing the rhetoric of the speeches will require two major steps. First, an elucidation of context of the speech, and the potential limits or constraints that it places on the rhetor. Climate change is a politically charged and highly contested arena. While a preponderance of scientists believe climate change to be anthropogenic (human induced), the number of Americans who hold that same belief has steadily declined over the past five years. While in 2006 forty-seven percent of Americans held that climate change was anthropogenic, by December of 2011 that number had dropped to thirty-eight percent. Along with the decline in the percentage of Americans who believe climate change is anthropogenic, the percentage of the population that believes that the results of climate change could be a "serious problem" has declined from seventy-nine percent to sixty-five percent.[9] The heated controversy over climate change engenders a rhetorical situation that places institutional, political, and ideological constraints on the ways that presidents and politicians can begin to talk about the issue. This includes the terminology that they use, the policies that they prescribe, and the way that they articulate the administration's ideological stance towards the issue.[10] Therefore, it is important that environmental communication scholars, and this thesis, examine these dynamics to better understand not only *how* political leaders talk about climate change, but also in "what systemic social

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context" the speakers "encounter environmental problems" and the effects it has on their ability to lobby for a new understanding of that situation.[11] Martìn Carcasson agues this contextual understanding is necessary for environmentalists because they need to "strategically consider the constraints, assumptions, and beliefs…of their intended audience. [E]nvironmental activists must take the hard road and seek to discover viable rhetorical strategies that could lead to real progress."[12] Blaming Gore, Bush, or Obama for their rhetorical failures is an unproductive form of scholarship. However, fully explicating the contexts that precipitate shortcomings provides activists the means to understand how to politically reshape contexts in order to make effective policy more likely. This study contributes to that process by developing a deeper understanding of environmental rhetoric by investigating the relationship between the rhetor's desired goals in relation to their unique constraints.

This thesis will engage in a close reading of speech texts to understand how Gore, Bush, and Obama construct a vision of how they, the American public, and the government have a role to play in addressing climate change. Whereas the previous justification focused on how the politicians understand and describe climate change itself, this section is primarily concerned with how the rhetors construct different notions of *prudent responses* to confront climate change. Though the speakers insert their climate change discourse into a situation that constrains and impacts their notion of response, each of the speakers articulates vastly different conceptions of *how* action should be taken, *who* action should be taken by, and *to what ends* action ought to be taken. In the context of the three speeches looked at in this thesis, this can mean the difference between expressing a vision of climate change that requires individual and domestic

action and a vision that call for international and bureaucratic solutions. As the analyses of Gore, Bush, and Obama demonstrate, the immediate goal of the speaker is not always to produce legislative action. For instance, evidence suggests that the primary reason for Bush and Obama's speech was not to spur direct action but to rhetorically shape the perception of their administrations in order to increase the chances of future payoff. What leaders view as the payoff depends on the situation and the speaker. It can vary from electoral gains, legislative success, increases in diplomatic capital, or even the cementing of one's political legacy. In the case of Bush and Obama that meant the ability to shape future climate negotiations.

Each of the chapters will investigate the major purposes which lie behind the speeches in order to provide an accurate judgment of whether their use of rhetoric contributed to meeting those goals. Each rhetor obviously spoke to many different audiences simultaneously. Analyzing the impact on each audience to which the speech was directed is beyond the scope of this thesis. I use contextual evidence, statements by administration officials, and the text itself to determine some of the primary audiences targeted in the speech and analyze the text as it relates to those major audiences. Each different vision invites the audience, whether it is the international community, the United States Congress, or the American public, to view their role in the solution in vastly different ways. This thesis will attempt to more fully explicate how these discourses of agency/solution are constructed *and* the consequences those constructions have on moving the audience towards the desired goal. These research questions are not independent of one another. The means by which politicians frame the exigency of climate change impacts their ability to shape a coherent understanding of audience

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agency. Put simply, the way that Gore, Bush, and Obama rhetorically constructs what is happening to the climate "affects how we deal with it."[13]

Method

For the purposes of this thesis, I will engage in textual analysis of speeches by Gore, Bush, and Obama through a close reading of those speeches. The practice of close reading means that my rhetorical criticism of the text "begins and ends with the object of study."[14] Instead of imposing pre-arrived theoretical constructs onto the texts themselves, the thesis will attempt to gain theoretical meaning from within the text. The process of close reading bridges the gap between focusing primarily on form or content by recognizing how both are interdependent within the texts themselves. The process by which this is undertaken requires an understanding of the context in which the speeches were given. Importantly however, it also requires us to analyze the "textual context" of the speech, "an unfolding sequence of arguments, ideas, images, and figures which interact through the text and gradually binding a structure of meaning."[15] The speeches examined within this thesis clearly enter into unique contexts which influence the ways in which the speeches are read and understood. At the same time, the speeches internally create their own context. The rhetors analyzed within this thesis rhetorically *construct* a political context, an interpretation of climate change, and an audience. As a result, this method emphasizes a view in which "the text is not an autonomous container of meaning, nor is it a failed paradigm of truth. Instead, we can see it as a positioned response set within a constellation of other positioned responses."[16] By looking at how the speeches rhetorically interject themselves within the broader contexts of the climate change discussions it allows us to "'slow down' the action within the text so as to allow…more

precise explication of its rhetorical artistry."[17] This method relies on the belief that context and text are not two independent entities. While context certainly exists and is important to the study of the speeches, it is necessary to evaluate how the speech itself constructs or frames that context. This is a *contextualization of the context* within the speech. The speakers invite the audience to read the status quo through a particular lens which puts in relation to the arguments made by the rhetor. For example, Obama's speech at the Copenhagen summit was constrained by Congressional unwillingness to pass cap-and-trade legislation, calling into question Obama's climate leadership. Confronted with that context, Obama attempts to redefine the issues of cap-and-trade and climate leadership by arguing that other legislation made enactment of cap-and-trade irrelevant to his climate leadership. Whether or not he was successful in redefining the context will be explored within the chapter itself. However, the example is demonstrative of the need for a text-centric view within this thesis. The analysis of context would be incomplete without situating the context within the rhetorical vision rhetors construct through their speech.

As such, I will examine the speeches in order to determine how they situate themselves in the ongoing political and scientific debates they attempt to address, analyze how the speakers construct and define the issue of climate change within the speeches, and explore how the speeches rhetorically construct the concept of the audience and their place within the controversy. While many believe that disagreements over climate science are questions of objective fact-finding, previous close readings have helped to demonstrate that "multiple meanings are embedded in scientific discourse," and that "the hidden polysemy of scientific texts may actually contribute to their effectiveness."[18] The

close reading of these speeches, therefore, should allow my analysis to gain theoretical insights about the rhetorical approach and consequences as they stem from the speeches themselves.[19]

Review of the Literature

While a relatively new area of study, the amount of literature examining environmental communication has increased exponentially of the past two decades. As part of the rise of environmental communication, scholars have begun to lay the foundation for the field by more closely building theories of environmental communication and by looking at particular communicative phenomena related to the environment. The history of environmental communication and its growth are discussed at length in the introductory chapter to Tarla Rai Peterson's *Green Talk in the White House,* and a set of foundational pieces can be found in Craig Waddell's *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and the Environment.*[20] These essays span an immense area of environmental communication, looking at issues from conservation, to environmental movements, to visual representations of environmental harm. This review of the literature will specifically look at the area of environmental rhetoric as it relates to climate change in order to show some of the essential underlying theories and assumptions of the field, as well as potential areas for future research, which I hope to begin to explore with this thesis. Specifically, I find that scholars focusing on the communication of climate change have coalesced around two major areas of inquiry. The first, which for the purposes of this thesis I will call "framing," studies how rhetors characterize, structure, and define their claims. The second area, media studies, examines

the impact of popular news sources and media outlets on audience understanding and knowledge of climate change.

The creation of the journal *Environmental Communication* helped to expand and centralize the publication of environmental communication articles. A 2009 issue of the journal was devoted to the question of climate change. While the issue did not include any articles on political rhetoric about climate change, many of the articles forwarded communicative theories by which scholars could better start to understand the climate change debate. For instance, Felicity Mellor's "The Politics of Accuracy in Judging Global Warming Films" looked at the argumentative structures inherent to both sides of the climate change dispute and contended that a reliance upon the narrative of "accuracy" actually *complicated* the discussion by "narrow[ing] and reduc[ing] the ways in which media texts about science can be evaluated."[21]

While many of the other articles in the issue discuss how the media goes about describing the division between the scientists and "skeptics," an article by Cristina R. Foust and William O'Shannon Murphy provides a useful starting point in the discussion of how temporality and agency are tied together within the context of climate change.[22] Specifically, they argue that the movement in climate change rhetoric to emphasize the global and apocalyptic scale of the crisis "diminishes the range of human agency possible in influencing the inevitable march of global warming."[23] The authors describe how these apocalyptic discourses within "popular press coverage" may affect the publics' understanding of their agency. The article does not explore how apocalyptic discourses might shape understandings of agency within *political speech*, or political speech that also seeks to articulate a vision for the audiences' capacity to act.

Mark Moore's article on the rhetoric of the Union of Concerned Scientists explores the relationship between the Burkean concepts of irony and synecdoche in the case of climate change. He finds that scientific and environmental proponents could make their case more persuasive by emphasizing the scientific consensus and certainty behind their findings. For Moore, climate change is unique in its universality. Because we are all contributors to the particulates which produce climate change, and because climactic variation is occurring worldwide, we are all culpable and effected simultaneously. As a result, global warming is a unique situation that provides speakers and rhetors a unique potential to build audience identification and bridge potential political divisions.[24]

Scholars of climate change rhetoric have also begun to develop theories of "framing" and the effects that those framings have on shaping appropriate responses to climate change. George Lakoff argues that "one cannot avoid framing. The only question is, whose frames are being activated—and hence strengthened—in the brains of the public."[25] While communication functions through framing, the attempt to employ or rely upon particular frames to persuade is often complicated by competing frames. For Lakoff, competing frames helps to explain why scientific understandings of climate change have difficulty shifting public opinion on the issue because "too many people do not have such a system of frames in the conceptual systems in their brains. Such frame systems have to be built up over a period of time. This has not been done."[26] The framing-based understanding of climate change is prevalent within the literature. In an article titled "Tipping Point Forewarnings in Climate Change Communication," Chris Russill argues that the rhetorical constructions of climate change consequences were

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beginning to rely upon epidemiological metaphors to describe climactic tipping points. He argues that those metaphorical depictions not only serve to describe the potential consequences of climate change, but also rest on a set of assumptions that guides how we are to respond to climate change.[27] Moreover this creates a theoretical understanding of climate change, whereby "terminology reconceptualizes the way we perceive and intervene in climate change dangers."[28] The idea that these framings have an effect on shaping our understanding and responses to climate change has led to more contemporary articles exploring the dynamics in particular settings.

Scholarship on framing in climate change span from those discussing the differences between the terms "climate change" and "global warming," to the endangered animals or locations that environmentalists emphasize in hopes of motivating action.[29] Authors have explored how global warming research, specifically the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports are structured, both in terms of the information that is included/excluded as well as the terminology that is used to represent the scientific data.[30] Marlia Elisabeth Banning provides an important continuation of the framing studies in her article titled "When Poststructural Theory and Contemporary Politics Collide—The Vexed Case of Global Warming." Banning argues that the attempt to build audience knowledge about scientific findings on climate change is complicated by pre-framing the argument as being one between scientists and skeptics. She suggests that there are two major consequences to this framing that rhetorical scholars should treat with greater attention. First, the figuration and framing of the issue as a debate between scientist and skeptics implicitly makes the case that there is a healthy, vibrant, and academic discussion occurring between them, even if the majority of scientific thought falls firmly

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on the side of anthropogenic climate change. Second, Banning argues that those framings are not neutral in their creation, dissemination, or reception. Instead, "[e]ven the most rudimentary rhetorical analysis of the public discourse on global warming would reveal that the interlocutors in this debate are not equally positioned in terms of resources, motives, and authority, nor do they abide by a normative set of deliberative standards for public discourse."[31]

Yet, the consolidation of environmental communication scholarship around the question of framing leaves a large gap in the literature. As J. Robert Cox notes "much of the scholarship in this area has focused on the discursive representations, framing, and perceptions…rather than…their strategic or consequential potential within the economic, political, and ideological systems in which energy policy is embedded."[32] Much of the extant work on framing issues has been quite good in explaining the ways in which climate change is described and rhetorically constructed. Banning's work in explaining many of the external constraints and structures that face individuals speaking about climate change and the ability to act to address it is a good starting point for future environmental communication scholarship. As a result, my thesis will pay special attention not only to the framings employed by the three speakers analyzed in it, but also to the context in which they were giving the speech and what the speakers hoped to do with those speeches.

Much of the literature on climate change focuses on the way that the media communicates climate change information to the public. Scholars believe that the media represents an important nexus of research because "the mass-media depend on internal constructions, disciplinary practices that produce the patterned communicative geography

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of the public sphere."[33] Many of the articles within this area of climate change

communication focus on the ideal of reporting balance. Maxwell T. and Jules M.

Boykoff are at the forefront of this area of study, and regularly publish articles which

undertake a quantitative and qualitative analysis of news reporting within the United

States and the United Kingdom. They argue that "what may on the surface be an obvious

journalistic tendency—the proclivity to tell 'both sides of the story'…is actually

problematic in practice when discussing the human contribution to global warming and

resulting calls for action to combat it."[34] Their later works find that additional

journalistic norms, particularly "personalization, dramatization, and novelty" contribute

to the difficulty to convey climate sciences to the public.[35] Some authors have sought to

explain how institutional factors shape the media's content in the first place. Critics have

found, for instance, the type of publication, their political leanings, and the targeted

audience have a strong correlation to the particular framings of climate change data that

they present.[36] Moving beyond questions of journalistic norms in the United States

popular press, recent articles explore how climate negotiations are explained both here in

the United States as well as in foreign news sources.[37] This work has important

implications for the way that climate change communication should be theorized. Of

particular importance to this thesis, the media and its representations of climate change

have a constraining effect on the possibilities afforded to policy makers, and in particular

presidents, when discussing climate change. As Boykoff argues, "[w]hen the process of

media framing – whereby meanings are constructed and reinforced – muddle rather than

clarify scientific understanding of anthropogenic climate change, this can create spaces

for US federal policy actors to defray responsibility and delay action regarding climate

change."[38] While these articles are helpful in understanding the constraints that the

media places on presidential rhetoric, more scholarship needs to be devoted to how

politicians navigate those constraints and rhetorically justify their vision for

environmental policy.

The book *Green Talk in the White House* offers an important starting point in

research on presidential rhetoric on the environment. Spanning the period between

Theodore Roosevelt through Bill Clinton, the chapters in *Green Talk* offer an analysis of

presidential rhetoric on a host of environmental issues. The book looks at how presidents

employ and construct rhetorics of the environment throughout administrations, on the

campaign trail, and through international negotiations.   Of particular importance to this

thesis is a chapter written by Martín Carcasson which analyzes how Presidents George

H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton rhetorically responded to international environmental crises.

Carcasson finds that "both presidents exhibited a clear avoidance of the most difficult

issues of the international crisis and a continuing reliance on both a nationalist and

economic paradigm."[39] Those paradigms, he argues, at times created "constraints to

action" that impacted Bush and Clinton's ability to re-shape domestic and international

policy on the environment and, at other times, were relied upon by Bush and Clinton to

avoid needing to take action on the environment.[40] Methodologically, Carcasson

analyzes the rhetorical and political situation confronting Bush and Clinton, paying

particular attention to how environmental issues had been historically framed and

understood prior to the speeches. He then analyzes how Bush and Clinton developed

their own rhetorical understanding of those controversies. From these two foundations he

is able to more fully understand how the framing and policies employed by Bush and

Clinton, successfully or unsuccessfully moved to reshape the terms of the debate over climate change. Following in many of the same methodological footsteps, this thesis will analyze the context and rhetorical constructions of the leaders that would follow Bush and Clinton.

<div align="center">Structure of Thesis</div>

This thesis is divided into four additional chapters, three analysis chapters, and a concluding chapter. The analysis chapters will involve rhetorical criticisms of three different texts by major political figures, namely Al Gore, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. The chapter on Al Gore will look at the documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). While Al Gore was not a president, like the speakers discussed in the other two chapters, I will argue that *An Inconvenient Truth* is an important text deserving of research both because of its political implications and because of its major impact on the publics' understanding of climate change. Given its immense viewership and political impact, perhaps most clearly shown by Gore's reception of the Nobel Prize, the documentary is a key text in contemporary high-level political climate change discourse. Moreover, the analysis of Gore's documentary provides a theoretical and historical foundation for the rest of the thesis because it helps to explain climate changes' evolution into a global issue imbued with many different contested meanings. The film is also unique because much of its persuasive potential stems from its use of visual imagery. Including an analysis of visual rhetoric provides a more well-rounded look at contemporary climate change discourse because visual understandings of environmental issues, particularly climate change, is a key medium through which concern for the environment is communicated to the public.[41]

The chapter will analyze the ways in which Gore rhetorically constructs a spatial understanding of climate change. The particular spatialized depictions of climate change inherent within *An Inconvenient Truth* shapes and impacts the ways that audiences' interact with the issue. While the film was lauded for its contributions to public knowledge about climate change, I will argue that the spatialized framings of climate change within the film served to complicate the public's agency and potential for activism on the issue of climate change. In the chapter I will argue that the impact of this rhetoric can be seen in the way that political movements to confront climate change are formed. Articulating climate change through the lens of a global spatialization makes individual action lack impact. Gore's rhetoric also aligns with framings of climate change that disembody individual's relationship to the issue, making personal and interventions irrelevant. The chapter will explore how that disembodiment complicates coalition building and grassroots activism.

The next chapter involves a close reading of Bush's speech leading up to the G8 summit in France and its comparisons to his previous rhetoric on climate change. I compare his 2008 G8 summit speech with his previous rhetoric on climate change for two major reasons. First, Bush gave this speech in part to re-position the United States' stance (and with it, his own stance) on climate change in hopes of spurring developments in international climate change negotiations.[42] While Bush had hoped to propose a major shift in his climate change legislation agenda, closed door meetings with Congressional Republicans caused Bush to change course and use the speech as a symbolic shift in the stances of the administration. Therefore, looking at his previous speeches helps illuminate the potential deviations that would could cause this speech to be viewed as a

pronounced change from previous rhetoric. Second, I will argue that throughout the

course of his administration, Bush's climate rhetoric developed and relied upon four

"rhetorical markers" which served to constrain his capacity to rhetorically advocate a

shift in United States climate policy. As will be shown in the chapter, these four markers

once again appear in his 2008 climate speech, and while he hoped that the speech would

rhetorically recast his position on climate change, the reliance upon those markers

undercut that effort. I will therefore provide a careful analysis of how those markers

were employed in the 2008 speech, and how they limited and constrained the speech and

the audiences' reception of it.

The next chapter will involve a close reading of a speech given by Obama to the

Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December of 2009. While Obama spoke

about climate change often, and at length, during his presidential campaign and early

parts of his administration, more recently the frequency has declined substantially.[43] That

decline is in part the result of a shifting focus within the administration in response to the

financial crisis that consumed the majority of Obama's attention.[44] Therefore, this

speech represents a major portion of Obama's rhetoric on the issue of climate change.

Moreover, because the speech was aimed at addressing international audiences, and was

given at international meetings on climate change, it offers a unique potential to explore

the ways in which presidential climate change rhetoric attempts to navigate international

climate politics. In the months leading up to the conference the administration had yet to

decide whether Obama would make a personal appearance. In the end, the White House

decided to attend the summit and statements by political aides further support the

contention that the speech was primarily given in hopes of facilitating a breakthrough in

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the international negotiations.[45] Obama attempted to jumpstart the talks by imploring the

gathered parties to move beyond their history of divisiveness and begin a new era of

compromise. To do this, Obama argued, other countries should emulate the climate

leadership displayed by the Obama administration. I will argue that by doing so, Obama

created a rhetorical burden that he failed to meet. The rhetorical frames and specific

proposals Obama articulated contradicted his rhetorical appeal to view the administration

as above the political fray. Relying on terms, frames, and policies charged with political

meaning, Obamas approach represented a continuation of the problematic approaches to

climate talks rather than a solution to it.

The final chapter begins with a broad evaluation of where major and

contemporary presidential discourse on climate change stands. It will begin to answer the

question of what has changed about those rhetorics as we have shifted between

administrations. Part of that task will include looking at the rhetorical constructs of

climate change that are consistent throughout course of the administrations, as well as the

ways in which those constructs have been shifted, modified, or abandoned altogether.

This will be followed with a discussion of how the evolutions in climate change rhetoric

impact the broader understandings of environmental communications. Finally, the

chapter will conclude with some areas of research that remain unexplored or have come

to light as a result of the analysis done in this thesis.

Notes

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CHAPTER TWO

An Inconvenient Truth and the Rhetorical Construction of Globalized Situatedness

Discussions and representations of climate change are prolific in popular media
and politics. The multitude of different texts surrounding the area of climate change
gives rise to a plethora of understandings, depictions, and political responses. These vary
from the discussion of climate skepticism versus climate sciences, the debate over the
potential effects of climate change, the need for national/international responses to the
crisis, to the way that popular culture like movies and television depict our
understandings of climate change. From movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* to the
International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the way that we as a society 'talk' about
climate change is highly contested and differentiated. Within these broad understandings
of climate change, an important understanding of the 'space' of climate change is being
articulated. The impact of globalization and internationalization of climate politics can
be witnessed in the ways that climate change as a phenomenon described, as well in the
ways that participatory potential to effect change is presented to the readers of these
climate change texts. The construction of space within these texts is fluid— in other
words, they don't simply fit into the traditional global or local categories. The way
climate change is discussed tends to complicate traditional understandings of location by
forwarding an understanding that is both individualized and local while simultaneously
interconnected and global. Even so, rhetorics of climate change tend to push and pull
understandings towards either end of the spectrum, in part because the conceptualization
of climate change as local or as global has pronounced implications for the ways that

audiences interact and interpret them. In particular, the movement towards describing the global nature of the climate change space has coincided and been co-productive with the shift to find more transnational and instrumental solutions to climate change.[1]

In this chapter, I will argue that Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* presented a rhetorical construction of the space of climate change that was in several ways co-productive with the movement towards understanding climate change as necessitating global sciences and global solutions. Gore's film relied partially upon visual images, such as satellite images of earth from space, slideshows of environments from around the globe, and data models showing the rise in *global* climate indicators. These visual images, combined with Gore's articulation of climate change as potentially effecting everyone, and in fact already effecting even some remote parts of the earth, puts the film in line with the greater public shifts to discuss climate change as a global issue. This view is reinforced by Gore's framing of the issue as a problem which resulted from global overconsumption of fossil fuels only reinforced this view. This is not to say that Gore's film was unique in the production of globalized representation of climate change or, inversely, that it was simply a direct continuation of that which was already occurring. Rather, *An Inconvenient Truth* presents us with an important node of criticism for understanding that larger shift. *An Inconvenient Truth* was unique in its ability to span the bridge between popular culture and informative/scholarly reporting on climate science. Box office sales, critical praise, and a Nobel Prize indicate that the documentary was an important player in the fray of the climate change debate. Moreover, the film presented the audience a unique visual context to the climate science that had previously

been left to blockbusters such as *The Day After Tomorrow* or captioned pictures in newspapers.

Spacialization of climate change through texts like the IPCC, news reports, and *An Inconvenient Truth*, presents to the audience a particular vision of their ability to effect change in the field of climate science. In particular, depictions of globalized space and the relatively unabated interconnection of pollutants have the potential to push the audience towards apathy in localized solutions.[2] While *An Inconvenient Truth* attempts to hold out the potential for local/individual action (particularly at the film's end) the rhetorical construction of space and climate change throughout the film cut against that potential by simultaneously emphasizing the need for international and institutional solutions. As has been seen in recent climate change negotiations, those solutions are laden with additional constraints that make it harder to work towards agreement. Specifically, issues of justice and equality, economic competitiveness, and the prospect of countries not fulfilling their obligation provide a space for critics of climate change solutions to articulate reservations to action. As such, the film represents a productive intersection between the global and local discourses of climate change that helps to more clearly elucidate how those constructions are created. Moreover, this site can also reveal how spatialized discourses are articulated as well as the potential consequences that they might have in constructing various audiences' interaction with climate change issues.

Throughout this chapter I articulate some of the ways that *An Inconvenient Truth* falls in line with the larger move to contextualize climate change as global and situating the audience as part of planet-wide community. This includes a discussion of both the visual and scientific rhetorics that Gore presents throughout the course of the film. These

contextualizations are used as the foundation for discussing how rhetorical constructions of space can serve to demarcate the sphere of potential response. Drawing on other scholars who have argued that climate change has trended towards global depictions, I explain that those depictions have shifted the debate towards international bureaucratic solution-making (at the expense of the local). I then argue that *An Inconvenient Truth* provides a particular illustration of those forces and that a closer analysis of the film reveals how a text heralded for its ability to clearly and concisely depict climate sciences can at the same time complicate the audiences' and activists' ability to craft solutions to resolve the crisis.

Imagistic Constructions of Space in An Inconvenient Truth

The construction of space in *An Inconvenient Truth* is the result of both form and argument. As a result, I focus on three major aspects in which those spatial constructions are produced and articulated. First, Gore visually represents the issue of climate change, and does so in a way that elides particular (personal) and local representations of the phenomena in favor of all-encompassing and global representations. Second, the issue of climate change is spatially constructed in terms of the arguments that Gore forwards in defense of climate science. Specifically, the statistical and scientific epistemologies that undergird his claims are connected to, and reproduce a discourse of global interconnection. Finally, the agentic potential of the audience is tied to a complex and universal understanding of climate change, placing rhetorical limits on potential courses of action. These constructions do not act independently of one another. Instead, they interact and amplify the overall impression of a global problem. I begin by observing the

three special constructions individually before more fully examining the ways in which they overlap, reinforce, and ironically, undermine one another.

Because *An Inconvenient Truth* is a documentary it is necessary to not simply look at the statistics and arguments that Gore presents. Images and the background provide a frame to the issues that Gore discusses throughout the film. Gore is not simply talking while images flash behind him, instead pictures, videos, and cut-scenes are heavily relied upon as enthymeme for the arguments that Gore forwards. Each of the images presented in the film represents a choice. Those choices present an understanding of climate change that Gore and Guggenheim, the film's director, ask the audience to situate themselves within when they watch the film. It is therefore necessary to critically analyze those images with an eye towards the themes, focus, and perspective that the producers utilize. This means analyzing which images were included and which were excluded. It also means understanding who was included in the images and who was excluded from the images and therefore excluded from the gaze of the audience.

Throughout the film Gore presents a visual conception of space that is known as *whole-earth* discourse. As the film notes, the start of this discourse was set in motion by the ability for humans to look back from space at the earth. With the rise of the space program came the ability for humans to look from the outside in. NASA took many images of earth from space but two became iconic and central to the "environmental movement." The first picture, known as "Earth Rise," "exploded in the consciousness of human kind. It led to dramatic changes. Within 18 months of this picture the modern environmental movement had begun."[3] The second, taken by the Apollo 17 mission, is the "most commonly published photograph in all of history."[4] After these two pictures,

the film transitions to two additional images. The first, a stop motion video taken by the Galileo satellite, and the second, a set of hundreds of images pieced together to make a complete image of the earth "lit up."

If these images are as iconic and pervasive in the lexicon of environmental activists as Gore claims they are, it is necessary to demonstrate how they were specifically positioned within the text of *An Inconvenient Truth* to provide a rhetorical framing for Gore's argument. The importance of these images to Gore's overall persuasive goal cannot be understated. The centrality of global images were so central to Gore's overall narrative, he used the "Earth Rise" image as part of the cover to an edition of his book, "An Inconvenient Truth."[5] More central to the documentary itself, Gore chooses to begin and end the film with pictures of earth from space. Gore begins the documentary by recognizing the importance of the images to the environmental movement. He ends the film with those same four images, stating that we "have to have a different perspective on this one. It is different than any problem we have faced before."[6] The perspective he proposes is one where we recognize that the world is at stake. Gore's desire for this perspective makes *whole-earth* discourses all the more central to his rhetorical construction of a globally interconnected and universal understanding of climate change.

For Gore, these images provide weight to the claim that individuals have marked effects on the way that the global climate narrative plays out. After first showing the images at the beginning of the film, Gore attempts to respond to people who think that they have no effect on climate change. He claims that by changing our perspective to look at the planet as a whole, we are able to see how small individual actions can affect

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global patterns. While the impact may be small, the outward-in perspective allows the audience to see the interconnection between actions on one side of the planet and the climatic outcomes on the other side of the planet. The use of these visual framings are tied up in the broader environmental move (as Gore himself notes) to look at the earth as a unitary system which is affected by all individuals. As will be discussed in more depth later, this too was tied to the scientific and statistical representations of climate change. Gore's call to read w*hole-earth* discourses as being tied to individual action requires further investigation.

William Bryant argues that the reliance on our current use of the w*hole-earth* image has hampered the environmental movements' ability to bring about local participation because it denies the identity of particular groups. Denis Cosgrove argues:

> Despite this rhetoric of localism, *Whole-earth* readings of the Apollo images have difficulty keeping faith with the local because the photograph's erasure of human sings implies the extension of organic bonds across all humanity and the entire globe."[7]

The result is a universalization of identity that undermines the sense of personal agency in the ability to effect the situation at hand.[8] Susan C. Moser and Lisa Dilling have found that in the context of promoting climate change legislation, a crucial missing factor is the ability to appeal to the feeling of individual stake in the situation.[9] The focus on the global, both in the form of argument and in the use of imagery, conflicts with Gore's call for individuals to make their voices heard. A study done by the World Bank found that one of the major impediments to encouraging people to individually engage in climate change activism was the sense of powerlessness that occurs when envisioning the global scope of climate change.[10] This limits the persuasive potential of *whole-earth* imagery in

An Inconvenient Truth. To draw this conclusion, however, requires a closer look at the interplay between image, space, and identity at play in *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Cosgrove's claim that images of global environments tend to erase the signs of human bonds holds true in many parts of Gore's film. While the film does show many individuals, and many societies, these come during the scenes in the film in which Gore is discussing his personal journey in the saga of the global warming debate. When it comes to depicting the effects of global warming, those human and cultural symbols are excluded. The clips and slide shows that backdrop the film often depict before-and-after (and sometimes cause and effect) shots of changing environments. Still shots of mountains, rivers, deserts, forests, oceans, and glaciers are contrasted to show the "reality" behind climate change. Gore often incorporates the images into his line of discussion. Many times, when describing some of the *causes* of ecological destruction, images of the environment being acted upon (destroyed) by humans will flash in the background. Strangely, the "after" (effect) shots are almost entirely devoid of signs of human interaction. Still shots of cracked deserts, top-down images of forest fires, video of collapsing ice shelves, and loss of ice cover are all displayed without a person or human artifact present.

However, there are two major exceptions to this trend. First, the beginning and middle of the film both feature a segment on Hurricane Katrina. While these begin the process of depicting the effects of climate change through its particular and cultural impacts, this move is elided by the fact that Gore does not use the segment to discuss the science or solutions to climate change. Rather, the Hurricane Katrina segments are tied to Gore's personal and political relationship to the global warming issue. Both segments

end with a discussion of Gore's politics and Gore's relationship to global warming, not the audiences'. The first video of Katrina ends with Gore saying "there are good people in politics of both parties who hold this at arm's length because if they acknowledge it and recognize it then the moral imperative to make big changes is inescapable."[11] The second video segment ends with Gore discussing the need for expedient action, and then snaps to a line of news segments about the 2000 Florida election. This then, does not represent a positioning of the audience, but a positioning of Gore's role in the climate change saga.[12]

The second exception comes when Gore displays an image of desertification happening in Africa. Here an image is displayed that includes a picture of the cracking desert and an individual walking across it while seemingly lost. Yet the focus is not on the individual. The focus of the image is on the foreground, tens of feet away from the blurry and out-of-focus walker. Moreover, the camera pans away from the person in the background to focus instead on the broken up desert. Despite these limited exceptions, the overall force of environmental imagery depersonalizes the experience of climate change.[13]

The depersonalized articulation of climate change within *An Inconvenient Truth* and the global warming movement more broadly has important consequences for the way that the meaning of climate change is negotiated between groups. To view our planet from space and to view it as separable from human interaction obscures the realities that *individuals* confronting climate change deal with in their daily lives. This shortcoming has also been described in terms of "Spaceship Earth" where the focus of environmentalism is on the fragility of the natural environment.[14] Kevin DeLuca and

Anne Demo have argued that the focus on protecting the pristine relies on a "narrow, class- and race- based perspective of what counts as nature," which, "leads the environmental movement to neglect the people and the places that they inhabit, thus isolating the movement from labor and civil rights concerns which make it vulnerable to charges of elitism."[15] The focus on the pristine is evident not only in the planetary imagery, but throughout the film in the ways that Gore broadly defines what is at stake in the crisis. One of the clearest examples is the stream from Gore's childhood, a setting returned to multiple times throughout the film. The scenes involving the stream are some of the very few environmental scenes to involve the use of sounds, including the sound of the rolling stream, the birds, and the cicadas in the background. He describes the picturesque setting as what is fundamentally at risk in the battle over climate change.

This, combined with pictures of receding glaciers from the national parks, the icecaps that are "so majestic, so massive," and the vibrant coral reefs all serve to focus the audience's attention on the sublime and exemplary environments that are threatened. This focus precludes emphasis on the perspectives of the individuals and groups being disproportionately affected by climate change. For instance, while Gore makes reference to the massive desertification already taking place in Africa due to climate change, the focus was placed on a singular picture of a sprawling, cracked desert ground, instead of on the people or bureaucratic structures that precluded attention or response from the international community. The lack of critical reflection is not uncommon in the way that climate change is discussed. Bekah Mandell criticizes the documentary and the larger climate change/environmental movement for failing to take into account the modes of production and urbanization that led to our massive emission levels. Mandell argues that

these discourse function to obscure or cover up the "root causes of climate change," and because of this, "a consensus of inaction has developed to prevent meaningful reductions in emissions."[16] The focus on the global, combined with the focus on the sublime ecosystems at risk, came at the expense of a broader critique of the domestic and international socio-political structure that causes climate change to affect groups in different ways. While *An Inconvenient Truth* was not the first to use these discourses, it calls into question the ability for the film to speak to an audience with diverse perspectives and experiences with climate change.

The construction of a sense of globalism has had a marked effect on international climate change movements by minimizing the voice of those that claim there is a disproportionate burden between countries. Phaedra C. Pezzullo argues the inability for global warming groups to speak to the particular situations of disenfranchised groups has precluded their participation in the movement.[17] The idea that we are all equally part of the global system rhetorically privileges the concept of environmental *equality* over environmental *justice*. Relatedly, Arun Agrawal argues that the one-world focus elides the fact that a disproportionate amount of emissions come from the developed world, yet proposed solutions are equally burdensome on underdeveloped countries.[18] It should be noted that Gore addresses the United States' overwhelming contribution to climate change. Even so, when it comes to the shift in consciousness that Gore finds necessary to catalyze the movements he shifts back to the universalizing "our collective nervous system."[19]

The consequences of this type of framing have not been lost on those following climate negotiations. Michael A. Levi argues that the stumbling block to the most recent

negotiations, the Copenhagen talks, were the result of disagreement over who should shoulder the burden of climate change solutions. He argues that the US framed the issue as universal, requiring equal effort from all parties, while the developing countries called for a greater "cut" in emissions by the United States because it was a greater per capita contributor.[20] By grounding his argument in an ethical claim about what we as *humans* should do, specifically by relying on the interconnectedness of our planet, Gore's rhetoric traffics in and is complicit with rhetorical framings that have stalled international climate change talks.

Scientific Constructions of Space in An Inconvenient Truth

The construction of a global and interconnected space also occurs in the way that it is scientifically and statistically structured in the film. More specifically, Gore argues that advances in modern science give us the capacity to understand how climate changes in one part of the world can have an effect on the other side of the planet. The argumentative legitimacy for these claims comes from the immense amounts of observation and data which corroborate a truly global trend. While this characterization is important and deserves some attention, the far more interesting endeavor involves exploring how those framings demonstrate the core tensions within Gore's film and the international push for bureaucratic solutions to climate change. If the evidence of climactic interaction is as obvious as Gore and the scientific community make it out to be, what accounts for the inability to persuade policy makers of the need for change? Part of the answer may lie in the way that Gore and climate scientists go about describing the data behind the phenomena. The shift from local meteorological descriptors to global climatology-based descriptions brings with it new constraints on what are considered

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acceptable solutions. Through their use of scientific data, climate scientists and Gore himself ask audience to view themselves as globally interconnected environmental and therefore *political* communities. By reconstituting the scope of scientific and political communities, climate scientists placed additional burdens on policy makers and activists to design palatable solutions to climate change. With the increasing use of these framings came a debate over climate change increasingly imbued with debates over geopolitical and economic competitiveness concerns that might explain the difficulty in convincing the public and policy makers to take action regarding climate change.

The scientific/statistical constructions of a globalized version of climate change are relatively clear and apparent. There are two prime examples that are demonstrative of the overall force of the globalized framing within the scientific/statistical aspects of the film. The first example comes in Gore's description of the concepts behind climate readings and climate science. When discussing how CO^2 readings are measured, Gore makes the case for taking *global* CO^2 measurements into account. The data he provides the audience are not the individual readings but the global averages. The results were not displayed on a graph for the documentary, but were instead displayed next to an image of the globe, further promoting the idea that the readings were truly global in scale. These *global* readings were repeated in temperature levels, rain levels, and *predicted* CO^2 levels. Clearly this was not the first time that aggregated statistics where used in explaining climate change. However, despite their near universal use in contemporary climate texts, global understandings are not the only way to conceptualize and describe the phenomena. Instead, the rise in the articulation of climate change as a global phenomenon is the result of a historical and power-laden interaction between the public,

scientists, and policy makers. A broader look at the history of climate change rhetoric demonstrates that we have reached a point where global framings of climate change have become prevalent. Scholars argue that the original International Panel on Climate Change represented a sea change in the way we talk about climate change.[21] Expertise and authority to speak to policy makers was no longer based on meteorology and regional weather authorities. Only those who took a holistic view of global climate were allowed to engage in the discussions.[22] This also affected the way the public interacted with climate change "texts." Concepts of weather and climatology were transformed by new scientific measures. Simple observation about weather and climactic trends were replaced by hyper technical and data heavy study making it increasingly difficult for individuals to speak to the "truth" of climate change.[23]

Building upon that data heavy and statistically broad foundation, Gore refines his articulation of climate changes' global situatedness by presenting a view predicated on a system of predictions and risk assessment. Here, too, the examples of a "systemic" explanation of climate change are numerous. One of the most apparent examples comes with Gore's discussion of global climate patterns. He argues that climate change is likely to have "planetary effects" because of the machine-like structure and interdependence of the climate. Changes in the climate will disrupt the normal flow of the system, causing breakdowns throughout the planet. Ocean currents, weather patterns, and jet streams will shift worldwide, dramatically altering all of the earth's landscape.[24] Other examples include drought/flood dynamics, desertification, deforestation, potential ice ages, and sea-level rises. While scientists have been discussing the potential outcomes of localized climate change for decades, the movement towards, and primacy given to, discussing the

system-wide consequences of climate change can also be traced back to the rise of international panels and forums on climate change. It was in those meetings that the idea that the climate should be viewed as a "model" which would allow for predictive sciences took hold.[25] This transition had important consequences not only for the way climate change was modeled and predicted, but also for the necessary actions needed to resolve the problem. Miller found that this shifted the discourse away from individual countries *mitigating* the consequences of climate change within their own border to reaching international agreements that could stem the tide of the global consequences. In particular:

> [T]he IPCC shifted consideration from what the US national Academy of Sciences report *Changing Climate* termed "local environmental factors…which take their place among the other stresses to which nations and individuals adapt" to what, only four years later, the World Commission on Environmental and Development called "A common concern of humankind."[26]

Therefore, these two articulations of climate change began to reinforce one another, raising the bar for successful action. The technicality of measurement and the global nature of the problem required technical solutions and global action.[27]

It is with this understanding that we can start to take on the tension that Gore himself recognizes in the film. In the middle of the film, Gore discusses his awakening to the issue of climate change. Studying under one of the earliest and leading scholars of climate change, Gore received firsthand experience working with the scientific data which would later found modern global warming theories. He acknowledges that the data was clear, evident, and solid. Working from these experiences, Gore took the message to the political arena:

> When I went to the Congress in the middle 1970's I helped organize the first hearings on global warming and asked my professor come be the leadoff witness and I thought that would have such a big impact we would be on the way to

solving this problem, but it didn't work that way. But I kept having hearings and in 1984 I went to the Senate and really dug deeply into this issue with science round tables and the like. I wrote a book about it, ran for president in 1988 partly to try to gain some visibility for that issue, and in 1992 went to the White House, we passed a version of the carbon tax and some other measures to try and address this. Went to Kyoto in 1997 to help get a treaty that's so controversial, in the U.S. at least. In 2000 my opponent pledged to regulate CO2 and then that was not a pledge was not kept.[28]

What then accounted for the inability to pass legislation or enact change? Gore provides a potential answer to this in the film. He argues that the fear of the economic loss which would accompany emission limiting legislation prevents decision makers from taking action. Specifically, Gore argues that politicians fear losing America's *economic competitiveness* vis-à-vis another country who does not live up to their end of the emission slashing bargain.[29] Ironically, the twin contextualizations of climate change discussed above (observable data and systematic understandings) are part of what rhetorically lends weight to the fear. By constructing climate change as a global system, scientists have constructed a model whereby one country not fulfilling its obligations puts all other nations at risk. This means that international and binding solutions become necessary. While framing is not the *only* contributing factor, the idea that climate change required complete acceptance places rhetorical limits on how lax international environmental agreements may be before they are deemed pointless.[30] By framing the scientific and statistical understanding as globally rooted, the IPCC, climate scientists, and the creators of *An Inconvenient Truth*, rhetorically placed international action and negotiation as part of the climate change discussion.

Conclusion

Certainly, *An Inconvenient Truth* is not the first text to articulate these conceptions of space in the particular context of climate change. However, the text

stands as an exemplar for criticism because it highlights tensions and limitations within the discursive field of climate change. There are two overall forms of space production at play in the film. First, the film asks the audience to understand climate change through the visual form. These images have a set of rhetorical effects in constituting the audiences' relationship to the phenomena of climate change. *Whole-earth* images and views of the "system of nature" act to provide legitimacy to the scientific and statistical constructions of space. Moreover, the imagery itself attempts to navigate the contested meaning of climate change. By contested meaning, I obviously do not mean whether climate change is real or happening. These competing understandings of climate change do not deny that warming *is* occurring as a result of greenhouse gas emissions. What is disputed is the *focus* of the blame and anxiety, and how that focus is produced in part through image. The use of *whole-earth* imagery can elide the unequal burden that is already being felt by different regions of the world. Alternative experiences are "stripped" of cultural meaning when holistic and systematic imagery is privileged as the rallying point for environmental activism.[31] For instance, coastal flooding, water shortages, and food shortages are already reality for many communities as a result of greenhouse gas emissions produced by the major industrial nations. By promoting a *whole-earth* view, texts like *An Inconvenient Truth* can silence those narratives in favor of speculation of what might occur to the whole system and "pristine environments."

As has already been seen in climate negotiations, the idea that the earth is an entirely interdependent entity alters what is expected for a solution. In particular, the conception of space promotes an "equity model" of climate change, where all individuals and nations in the world are culpable and required to sacrifice even if they were a less

heavy contributor. This model of negotiation has been challenged by the "justice model" where the sacrifice required by treaties and legislation is proportional to the amount that the individual country contributed to the problem. The inability to find a compromise between the competing readings of climate change has stalled international talks, in particular the Copenhagen talks of 2009. Put differently, the images presented in texts like *An Inconvenient Truth* may serve as a motivating force for some audiences, but *whole-earth* images can also serve to alienate and shunt aside the very real stories of people who are already facing the effects of climate change.

The film augments the image based articulation of space through rhetorical presentation of climate science. I have argued that there are three major components to this understanding of space which build upon one another. First, a baseline understanding of climate science and aggregate data allows scientists and Gore to understand the reality of global warming at the planetary level. Second, by using advanced models and statistical inference, climate change activists attempt to articulate a "system-earth" model, whereby we can more fully understand the climactic interactions of various parts of the planet. Finally, with a full understanding of the established data and with realistic and predictive models, scientists can articulate potential solutions to the issue of climate change. By moving from the study of climate trends to global climate modeling, the IPCC and later texts like *An Inconvenient Truth* sparked a shift away from policies of climate change mitigation toward climate change control.[32] By universalizing the scientific space of climate change, these depictions control the effects of climate change and necessitate a globally implemented solution. This too rhetorically limits the scope of available options for the audience. First, it closes out the potential for individual

action to create *effective* change. Only bureaucratic and scientifically verifiable steps

would be sufficient enough to take into account all of the different climactic variables.

Second, when nations are confronted with secondary concerns such as economic

competitiveness, the political necessity of crafting bills that are disadvantageous to other

groups cause geopolitical jockeying that can preclude cooperation on climate change.

The scientific and imagistic articulation of space in *An Inconvenient Truth* may

help shed light on the apparent disconnect between "science" and "solution." It may be

that the scientific data proving the existence of anthropogenic climate change is solid, but

the way those findings are framed has the potential to limit the space for action. The

visual and scientific discourses reproduced in *An Inconvenient Truth* may conflict with

the more particular and experiential understandings of climate change. The cultural

relevance of the film, including its substantial uptake by American audiences, warrants

An Inconvenient Truth as an apt demonstration of the competing conceptions of climate

change at play in contemporary environmental discourse. Moreover, the combination of

visual and scientific argumentative forms within one popular text renders *An

Inconvenient Truth* an especially apt site for critique.

Notes

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CHAPTER THREE

Rhetorical Markers in Bush's Climate Talk: The 2008 G8 Summit Speech

George W. Bush's April 16, 2008 speech addressing climate change was given

during a period of overlapping and interrelated debates on the issue. With climate change

on the agenda for the upcoming G8 summit in France, climate debates began to take on

an air of international importance. The G8 summit, which had been posited by Bush as

part of his international strategy to confront climate change, faced an uncertain future.

As the world's top carbon emitters prepared to head to Paris, those following

international climate negotiations worried that disagreements between the United States

and developing countries such as India and China could undermine the potential for

cooperation. The Bush administration realized that the ability to secure cooperation from

India and China hinged on the United States' perceived willingness to move lackluster

policies and formulate serious commitments to combat climate change.[1] In this way, the

G8 Summit presented some unique rhetorical challenges to the Bush administration. The

conversations in Paris were central to the administration's environmental policy, yet the

realities of quick, global change proved an obstacle to productive negotiations. Bush's

2008 speech needed to manage these and other difficult political issues.

At the same time, Congress was gearing up to debate a highly controversial cap-

and-trade bill. The already contentious debate was intensified by the Supreme Court

decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* which had the potential to require executive agencies to

confront climate change regardless of congressional action. Many believed delegating

the task to executive agencies would create a bureaucratic "train wreck" that would

severely hurt American economic interests.[2] With these political and economic

conditions in mind, the Bush administration went to Congress to test the waters with

different legislative solutions. Republican leadership quickly shot down Bush's

proposals as being too radical.[3] After those consultations, the administration still decided

that a public address on climate change was necessary. They maintained that despite a

lack of legislative proposals, Bush could still assure the international community of the

United States' *long run* goals of limiting emissions by rhetorically stressing the

administrations' desire to do so. Moreover, the White House hoped to use the speech to

shift the congressional debate away from *whether* the country should act, by instead

focusing on *how* the country should act. The administration hoped to use this speech to

reposition itself as active in the campaign to manage climate change.[4]

While the administration may have intended to shift and reframe their stance on

climate change, the rhetoric the administration used ultimately failed in its agenda. As

such, through careful analysis, in this chapter I argue that Bush's 2008 speech

unsuccessfully re-employed four rhetorical markers that appear throughout the lineage of

his climate rhetoric. These markers--which I label the balancing frame, climate

uncertainties v. economic realities, internationally binding action or loss of economic

competitiveness, and technological salvation--all cut against the administration's capacity

to reframe their climate stance. Specifically, these markers rhetorically posited economic

concerns as *more important* than environmental concerns, and in so doing undermined

the administration's attempt to transition to a fresh stance on climate change. While each

marker is distinct and has its own implications, together the markers work co-

productively to constrain the audiences understanding' of, and relationship to, climate change.

As I proceed in this essay, I will argue that these markers performed the following rhetorical work. By employing the balancing frame, whereby environmental concerns cannot be evaluated outside of their economic contexts, Bush's speech rhetorically inverts the precautionary principle from a justification for action on behalf of the environment to a call for inaction. Bush's uses anaphora to describe right solutions versus wrong solutions. This tactic is a part of the balancing frame and rhetorically limited the scope of Bush's call for action to *distant goals* instead of immediate action. As such, Bush's speech continues the trend of defining the environmental consequences of climate change as unknowable while articulating the economic costs of acting as absolute. This tension between absolute and unknowable consequences creates an inconsistency between Bush's goals and his depiction of climate change. While he hoped to politically move the debate past *should we act* to *how do we act*, the repetition of the uncertainty v. certainty marker placed a much higher value in maintaining the status quo over adopting a potentially disastrous climate policy. The internationally binding marker creates a rhetorical framework for evaluating "effective" climate solutions which contradicted Bush's desire to spur international agreement on policy. By arguing that *serious* American action could not start without legally binding agreements on the part of India and China, Bush undermined his call to see America as taking serious steps to build goodwill as a *steppingstone* to international action. Bush's adherence to the belief that American ingenuity and technological innovation already had the potential to provide a solution to climate change, what I call the technological salvation marker, undercuts

Bush's ability to characterize his policies as a new direction. This frame emphasizes that status quo technological development, if left unabated, will inevitably find a fix to the climate problem. In this way, new governmental policy only carries the risk of jeopardizing that potential. As a result of the reliance on this marker, Bush was constrained to advocate only piecemeal change, for fear that broader change would upset the trajectory of technological innovation.

This thesis will proceed in five major sections. First, I will look at the domestic and international political debates over climate change that gave rise to and shaped Bush's 2008 speech. The next four sections, focused on each of the rhetorical markers, will specifically look at the historical evolution of each of the markers demonstrating the ways that Bush continued or evolved those markers within the 2008 speech. After tracing the rhetorical lineage of these markers, each of the four sections will more fully develop how these markers shaped the speech and the ways in which the audiences could receive it.

<center>Context</center>

Bush's 2008 speech on climate change came days before an international meeting in Paris on climate change. The meeting was the result of a previous call by Bush for the international community to work toward a new agreement to address the situation. In planning the speech, the administration attempted to navigate a host of different political conditions that, together with Bush's previous stances on climate change, shaped the construction and reception of the speech. In a press briefing on the day before the speech, Dana Perino outlined the reasons for Bush's speech. In particular she cited "three major issues."[5] First, Bush planned the speech as a precursor to the G8 summit hosted in

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Paris. In some ways, Bush's earlier policies on climate change resulted in the G8

summit. The summit called for international partnerships to solve the issue. While

previous G8 summits on climate change had floundered as other countries criticized a

lack of commitment on the part of the United States, commentators maintained that this

speech would include a legislative proposal that would "demonstrate that the U.S. is

making an effort to tackle the issue in the near future" so that international efforts could

be effective in the long-run.[6] By highlighting the good intentions of the United States,

the administration itself hoped that the speech would provide a steppingstone to an

international solution palatable to all parties.[7]

Of central concern to the administration was the status of China and India within

the negotiations.[8] The Bush administration worried that unless breakthroughs were made

in negotiations, China and India would continue to be left out of the countries required to

make reductions. Because China and India had consistently pointed to lack of United

States' action as a justification for their own inaction, the administration hoped that the

speech would cause the United States to be viewed as "doing their part" so that China and

India would be inclined to participate in a reduction scheme.[9] The inclusion of China and

India was not simply aspiration. The administration believed that a failure to convince

India and China would "put U.S. industry at a cost disadvantage and accelerate the flow

of jobs to those countries, while failing to make any significant inroads on world-wide

emissions."[10] Because of these political realities, the desire on the part of the

administration to jumpstart negotiations placed a rhetorical burden on the speech,

requiring it to be seen as a major commitment to make *real* carbon reductions in the short

term.

While the speech was "timed to lay down a marker for the Paris conference. It [was] also intended to lay down a marker for an audience at home, the United States Senate."[11] As Perino noted in the speech's press conference, there were two major issues confronting Congress that necessitated the speech. First, Perino argued that the administration wanted to address the Supreme Court and federal agency decisions which she characterized as a regulatory train wreck.[12] These new regulatory developments, in particular the Supreme Court decision *Massachusetts v. EPA*, had the potential to force the Environmental Protection Agency's hand in combatting climate change.[13] The administration feared that unless the Congress acted quickly to statutorily define the response to climate change, agencies would create a regulatory mess which would undermine business and economic interests. As such, the administration deployed this speech with the desire to rhetorically contain the situation. Bush believed that he could shed the past perception of inaction and "set the boundaries for a debate" before they would "spiral beyond the administration's control."[14] The *New York Daily News* further claimed that Bush "aimed at shaping the debate on global warming in favor of solving the problem while avoiding heavy costs to industry and the economy."[15]

The third goal, as articulated by Perino, was to begin to wade into the congressional debate over climate change which was likely to take place in the months following the speech.[16] The administration understood that some sort of congressional action on climate change was inevitable given the Supreme Court decision and the chances of a pro-climate action presidential candidate being elected. Moreover, many within the administration concluded that the endpoint of the ongoing congressional debates would include the cap-and-trade scheme which the administration did not

support. Bush recognized this, and before even scheduling the speech he met with Republicans to discuss their potential strategies. In these closed-door meetings, Bush floated trial balloons to "gaug[e] the reaction to a possible shift of administration policy."[17] The proposed policies ranged from "simply proposing a set of 'principles' to recommending caps to greenhouse gas emissions from power plants."[18] Those within the meeting claimed that the responses to Bush's proposals were "so negative that the administration may be retreating on the issue," and that "some participants viewed it as 'political appeasement' on global warming."[19]

Despite the fact that Republican leadership backlashed against Bush's *legislative* solutions to climate change, Bush still decided to give the speech. What then did Bush hope to accomplish by giving his speech? It appears, given administration statements and press releases, Bush hoped to rhetorically reposition his administration as *open and willing* to take concrete steps to address climate change. At the most simple level, Bush hoped that the speech would "signal that he is open to lawmakers reigning in pollution from power companies" while showing a "willingness to grapple with the growing legislative debate over global warming."[20] Additionally, the White House expected the speech would allow Bush to push back against the perception that he was dragging his feet on climate change issues.[21] In the context of the upcoming political debates, the administration assumed that he could reposition the Republican Party, moving the parties' climate platform toward the center in order to facilitate action on the issue. As one administration official told the *Washington Times*, the speech would "attempt to move the administration and the party closer to the center on global warming. With these steps, it is hoped that the debate over this is over, and it is time to do something."[22] The

result of this move, Bush hoped, would be to create momentum for future multilateral and legislative action that would forestall an impending bureaucratic nightmare.[23]

The then upcoming G8 summit and the already decided *Massachusetts v. EPA* decision provided impetus for Bush to seek a new strategy toward climate change. While Bush went to the Republican leadership willing to push for more demanding legislative change only to be quickly criticized, the administration still insisted that there was space for change. That change, the White House maintained, could be brought about by a speech that would show a shift in the administration's stance toward climate change. Bush sought to foster an international agreement that would include India and China and hoped to shift the parameters of future legislative debate. Bush's pre-G8 speech attempted to rhetorically situate the administration as firmly committed to addressing climate change in an effort to shift that debate.

The Balancing Frame

Bush begins the 2008 speech by recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental and economic concerns, claiming that these concerns can be "sensibly reconciled" through a "rational, balanced approach." Scholars claim that politicians engage in debates about environmental concerns by employing frames for their discourse.[24] These frames run the gamut from environmental, to political, to economic, to religious. While these frames often compete with one another, both the George H.W. Bush administration and the William J. Clinton administration combined the economic and environmental frame into what rhetorical scholar Martin Carcasson labeled the balancing frame. Under this frame, environmental solutions are couched in relation to economic terms.[25] Simply put, our environmental problems are best addressed by letting

market forces develop new technologies to overcome the problems that were created by those very technological and developmental forces. The 2008 speech by Bush repeatedly employs this frame, by articulating technological innovation driven by economic growth and environmental solutions as two sides of the same coin.

However, this frame was not new to Bush's climate rhetoric in 2008. It played a central role in many of Bush's climate speeches up to that point and tracing its development through the administration shows how the evolution of the frame influenced the way that Bush could situate his politics in the 2008 address. Beginning with his first major climate-related speech in 2001, Bush began tying environmental concerns to economic considerations. Bush's speeches on climate change expressed a framework for how he thought the audience should prioritize the relative importance of differing policy goals when looking at carbon-limiting legislation.

In 2001, Bush articulated that prioritization in reference to the Kyoto Protocols, arguing that the prudent or "sound" way to go about resolving climate change requires us to *first* look at what is an economically neutral way to limit emissions. For Bush, "actions should be measured…[w]e must always act to ensure continued economic growth and prosperity for our citizens."[26] This argument becomes more pronounced and clear by his 2002 speech on the issue. In that speech, known as the Clean Skies speech, Bush avers that not only should economic concerns be the litmus test for solutions, but that economic growth should be the means by which we *achieve* environmental protection. He says, "we must foster economic growth in ways that protect our environment…[L]et's challenge the status quo. But let's always remember, let's do what

is in the interest of the American people…This new approach is based on this common sense idea: that economic growth is key to environmental progress."[27]

By Bush's 2007 statements, the environmental well-being of the planet for future generations is not the only concern; more important is the *economic well-being* of the planet. Bush claimed that the world response to climate change would "help shape the future of the global economy *and* the condition of the environment for future generations [Emphasis Added]."[28] Bush described what he saw as a fundamental limitation to any potential solution. He argued that any change could not slow the rise of growth or prosperity for any nation. For him, it is not simply "good policy" but a responsibility to reduce greenhouse gasses and keep economies growing. This stance comes full circle when Bush described the stakes of G8 climate negotiations. He stated, "years from now, our children are going to look back at the choices we make today, at this deciding moment. It will be a moment when we choose to expand prosperity instead of accepting stagnation."[29] By 2007, Bush had moved from describing prudent decision making as simply taking into account economic factors when addressing climate change to viewing climate change legislation as a means to stimulate growth.

While the roots of this framing were present early in the Bush administration, its specific application in the context of the 2008 speech is a helpful illustration of the way framings create constraints on what policy makers can advocate when they rely upon them. For Bush, climate legislation that would demand codified reductions in GHG emissions would limit the productive capacity of the American economy. This can be seen most clearly in Bush's use of anaphora, the "repetition of a word at the beginning of a series of phrases," to describe "the right solutions" and "the wrong solutions."[30] Wrong

solutions include mandates that would require prompt changes in our economy, taxes that would hurt individual consumers, abandoning the backbone of economic growth including coal and nuclear power, and unilateral actions that would put Americans at an economic disadvantage in relation to other countries. Inversely, the right way includes setting long term *goals* that allow for economic and technological flexibility, innovation that will provide long term growth while protecting the jobs of workers, reliance upon already-existing (coal) power sources in ways that harm the environment less, and binding international action that ensures no economy is able to benefit at the expense of others.

This framing, and with it the anaphora-based appeal to use "the right solutions," produce two constraints. First and most clearly, it creates a constraint on what Bush himself can call for as effective action. By tying environmental and economic concerns, Bush was forced to distance himself from codified and mandatory reductions in GHG emissions. Second, the balanced framing creates the space for those opposed to climate change legislation to constantly challenge and critique solutions to climate change. As Carcasson argues:

> The primary flaw with the balancing frame…is that environmental concerns nonetheless remain conceptualized as low-priority luxury items to be brushed aside when the economy falters. With the numerous uncertain measures of economic performance, it is likely that a politician would always be able to find some distressing sign of economic trouble to justify reducing environmental activism, as the George W. Bush administration has demonstrated.[31]

While Bush and those who employ the balance frame are able to situate themselves as wanting to solve climate change, they are able to consistently reject calls for action as being too burdensome on the American economy.

The economy-first prioritization also rhetorically reconfigures what is known as

the precautionary principle. In the case of environmental activism, the precautionary

principle can be defined as:

> [T]aking preventive action in the face of uncertainty; shifting the burden of proof
> to the proponents of an activity; exploring a wide range of alternatives to possibly
> harmful actions; and increasing public participation in decision making.[32]

Bush's contextualization of climate change reverses the motivation for action as it is

understood within the precautionary principle. While the precautionary principle

maintains that future consequences should be acted upon, Bush argues that, in the case of

climate change, the "knowable" economic consequences of action require that the burden

of proof fall on those wishing to change the status quo. Activists employing the

precautionary principle often times rely on demonstrating that the *potential* long term

consequences are greater than the *known* short term consequence, making Bush's attempt

to obscure long term consequences all the more important. Bush's characterization of the

climate debate changes the impetus for political change. For Bush, the *potential* long

term consequences of economic harm (and with it the ability to use growth to address

climate change) must be outweighed by the *known* consequences of climate change.

Given that Bush and those opposed to climate legislation deny the ability to "know" the

consequences of climate change due to still-contested science, his precautionary principle

serves as a defense of current policy.

Not only was the *solution* to climate change described within the balanced frame,

but the *benchmark for success* also prioritized economic variables. This is a result of

Bush's claim that we should seek to reduce the "intensity" of the United States' GHG

emissions. Bush's employment of the intensity metric is important because it shapes

what constitutes a successful solution and because it furthers the elevation of economic

concerns over environmental concerns. Intensity measurements of GHGs represent the

combination of economic and environmental evaluations to determine how much a

country is emitting. It provides a per capita outlook at emissions by taking into account

the amount of production that occurs in a country. States with larger production are

inherently likely to produce more GHG emissions. Intensity measures whether the

emissions relative to a countries' total production is high or low. Given the massive

production capacity of the United States there is an expectation that emissions are likely

to be large. The importance of this measure for Bush, however, is that it does not require

a reduction in *total* emissions, just an increased efficiency in GHG output. By employing

this measure, Bush can claim progress without action.

Further, with the transition away from a production-based economy, the relative

intensity of US GHG emissions was on a steady decline (it decreased 17% through the

1990s), making it likely that targets would have been met without any legislated change

to the consumptive practices of Americans.[33] From the perspective of other countries

(and a climate activist's perspective), however, this measure is problematic because its

use would likely do nothing to decrease emissions produced by the United States.

Researchers have found that total emissions could rise 39% but because of projected

growth rates for our economy the United States could be viewed as decreasing its GHG

intensity by 18%, which is coincidentally the number advocated by Bush.[34] They argue,

"the emission intensity target set by the Administration will most likely allow near term

emissions to grow, betting on a drastic decrease of net emissions from innovative

technological carbon paths in the long run. Therefore, the Bush Administration climate

policy does not guarantee any meaningful contribution to climate protection."[35] Bush can

use this definitional reconfiguration to promote a conservative stance toward climate

change, claiming that the United States is already making significant efforts to reduce its

relative contribution to climate change. Indeed, Bush has used the intensity model to

argue that making a short term decision is not necessary because the trend toward less

intense emission figures allows time to "wait and see."[36]

Bush's use of the balancing frame was a well-developed trope by the time that

Bush gave his 2008 address. Even so, the 2008 speech highlights how Bush continued to

evolve that framing. Bush describes a form of decision making in which economic

concerns precede environmental concerns, the question of environmental solutions must

be tied to economic growth, and the measurement of environmental variables must be

read through an economic lens. The combination of these forces allows Bush to claim

that he is in favor of making a serious attempt to control the environmental effects of

climate change while changing the terms of the debate such that overt emissions

restrictions are irrelevant because the "market will take care of it." However, the reliance

upon future goals and shifting benchmarks for climate action success meant that Bush did

not put forward the types of demonstrable changes that the international community was

looking for prior to the G8 summit. As one commentator put it, the prioritization of

economics made it such that "Bush's announcement appears to be an effort to throw sand

in the gears, offering a weak goal in place of strong legislation," and that "Bush was

sending the wrong signal to other nations."[37] In conjunction with the effects of the other

rhetorical trademarks often employed by Bush, this represents a climate framing that

creates a precautionary principle *against* mitigating climate change.

Climate Change Uncertainties v. Economic Realities

When Bush entered office in 2001 he stepped into an already contentious debate about the United States' obligation to confront rising emissions. Having run a campaign against a staunch proponent of carbon limiting legislation and having withdrawn support for the Kyoto Protocol shortly after taking office, Bush gave his first major speech on the issue of climate change in the Rose Garden of the White House on June 11, 2001. While there was widespread support for many of the tenets of the Kyoto Protocols the treaty was rejected in a 95-0 vote. Scholars analyzing the rejection of the protocol have isolated a few rhetorical characteristics of climate change that contributed to this voe. Tracing the roots of the movement against climate change legislation, A.M. McCright and R.E. Dunlap found that the opposition had successfully shifted the debate from "[w]hat do we need to do to address warming" to the more simple question, "[i]s global warming really a problem?"[38] For Bush, the push to redefine the central questions of the debate becomes apparent starting in the 2001 address on climate change, and continues throughout the course of Bush's speeches on the subject.

One of the defining marks of Bush's rhetoric on climate change is the continuous push to place his policies and understandings of the issue on the side of established scientific data. At the outset of many of his speeches, Bush goes to some lengths to describe the administration's reliance upon scientific experts and up-to-date reports on new climate revelations. For instance, in his 2001 address Bush states, "[m]y Cabinet-level working group has met regularly for the last 10 weeks to review the most recent, most accurate and most comprehensive science. They have heard from scientists offering a wide spectrum of views.…The working group asked the highly-respected National

Academy of Sciences to provide us the most up-to-date information about what is known and about what is not known on the science of climate change."[39] This began to take the form of a compare and contrast between *known* sciences and *speculative* sciences. While Bush was quick to demonstrate his administration's reliance on the tenets of science, using a "science-based approach," he contrasts this with what the scientists working for the National Academy of Science (NAS) had produced which he characterizes as "suppositions."[40] In the 2002 Clean Skies speech, Bush begins the speech by noting its reliance on the newest climate models produced by the NOAA. Similarly, in a 2007 speech leading up to a U.N. climate meeting, Bush stressed that his policies fell in line with the International Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) scientific understanding of the phenomena. This tactic of rhetorically positioning his understanding of climate change in line with established climate scientists is continued in the 2008 speech. At the beginning of the speech Bush notes, "[c]limate change involves complicated science and generates vigorous debate," but "my administration has taken a rational, balanced approach to these serious challenges."[41] The fact that Bush can position himself on the side of climate science while undermining some of its key findings shows how politicians seek to frame their policies scientifically to gain legitimacy for their claims. In other words, "science" is not simply an objective commodity within political deliberations; it also serves as a resource for state officials to argue their respective cases."[42] In this case, Bush attempts to use the discourse of "good science" to seem sympathetic to the cause while constraining the available options to a select set of policies by describing alternatives as "faulty science."

Moreover, Bush uses his scientific positioning to argue that the already produced science demonstrates that climate change is real, but is still unresolved on the question of whether it has the potential to create consequences warranting major political resolution. To provide evidentiary support to this claim, Bush cites the 2001 published NAS report to argue that we can't know whether the consequences will be problematic. The choice to rely upon the NAS report signals a desire on the part of the administration to actively reframe the knowledge surrounding the climate change debate. While Bush claimed that the report was inconclusive on the prospects for future climate change consequences, the report itself said climate change "could well have serious adverse societal and ecological impacts by the end of this century."[43] Though the report is quick to recognize that these effects will vary based upon local/regional characteristics, it concludes that nation-wide the effects of climate change will be serious. The move to situate climate sciences as contested can be seen as a continuation of previous conservative attempts to undermine climate legislation. As was demonstrated in the debates over the Kyoto Protocol, emphasizing the "unknowns" of climate science can serve as an important defense against the plea to pass legislation in the face of impeding consequences.[44]

The 2002 speech also sought to highlight the uncertainty present in the sciences surrounding climate change. Bush says, "we must address the issue of global climate change. We must also act in a serious and responsible way, given the scientific uncertainties."[45] However, by 2007 the emphasis on unsettled debates over climate change *seemingly* disappeared. No longer were specific references made to fights within the scientific communities or the lack of models that gave accurate predictions of future climate change consequences. Why the change? One major contributing factor comes in

the form of an administrative scandal in 2004. A report commissioned by the Pentagon found that the potential results of climate change were far more serious, especially in terms of geopolitical considerations, than was previously thought. The report represented an embarrassing blow to the administration and its attempt to portray climate change as inconsequential.[46] Perhaps of greater consequence, it was found that the administration had attempted to cover up the report and prevent it from being published for four months, amplifying public concern that Bush was deliberately trying to skew federal science on the environment to comport with his political goals.[47] While Bush's ability to specifically contest the validity of climate predictions was undermined by the controversy, the remnants of this framing remained, as it shifted from a discussion of scientific uncertainty/prudence to a framing of economic prudence.

A closer reading of the 2008 speech helps to elucidate how Bush was able to continue to push the audience to understand climate change consequences as unknowable without explicitly engaging in the scientific arguments. The remnants of these framings are employed in two different ways in the 2008 speech. First, Bush attempts to depict the science behind climate change as undergoing intense debate. He claims that "debate about climate change is intensifying," and that it "involves complicated science and generates vigorous debate."[48] Strategists have attempted to hyperbolize the level of *actual debate* going on between scientists and skeptics in order to make the science seem as unsettled as possible. This results in a sort of echo chamber where the small claims of skeptics are given more air time and relevance because of the "balancing norm" that exists within American media culture.[49] While the sciences behind climate change were relatively settled, and the calls for action to address climate change by scientists were

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near universal, Bush's description of an intense debate elides that fact, making it appear as though there was still much disagreement within the scientific community.

Second, Bush stylistically constructs the argument that climate predictions are inherently unknowable by remaining silent on the consequences of climate change. Bush goes to great lengths to discuss the very specific impacts that climate change legislation might have on the economy. Detailing job loss, regression in growth, and declines in competitiveness, Bush provides the audience with a very specific vision of what a world of "incorrect" climate legislation would look like. By doing this, Bush employed what is known as a diversionary reframing of the climate change debate. These diversionary discourses don't seek to take up the controversy on its own terms, but instead seek to shift or transform the way that the audience views it so that they no longer see it as a problem.[50] By ignoring the potential environmental consequences of climate change (sea level rise, drought, famine, biodiversity loss), Bush only allows one perspective to be voiced on the issue. Some critics have posited that the debate between biological diversity (environmental concerns) and economic concerns can be skewed to promote economic concerns. Particularly, it is far easier for most individuals to understand and internalize the consequences of economic shortfalls. On the other hand, biological futures are hard to grasp because it isn't easy "for most persons, particularly those unfamiliar with rural settings, to imagine the relatively lush world of today…extinguished over the next several decades. Focused on the present or near future, most persons have no basis of comparison when images of the deep biological past are invoked."[51] This rhetorical move then must be read in conjunction with the balance framing. With the balanced framing Bush shifted the political calculus for

determining when to act on climate change. The environmental uncertainty put forward

by Bush elevates that burden, making it more difficult for activists and decision makers,

including Bush, to justify major change to address unknown consequences when it will

necessitate negative effects on the economy.

Internationally Binding Action or Loss of Competitiveness

Tied to this economic prioritization is the demand that any solution encompass a

global agreement whereby no nation benefits at the expense of another. The issue of

international obligation and burden sharing was at the heart of the United States'

reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocols. Climate change is a tragedy of the commons

type of issue – meaning that all countries contribute to the problem but if some countries

took actions to address it they would run the risk of shouldering the cost of reducing the

externality while other countries simply took a pass.[52] This fear plays a prominent role in

much of Bush's climate rhetoric. Beginning in his first speeches, Bush attempts to

rhetorically situate how this difficulty should be weighed when discussing American

obligations to prevent climate change. The importance of this consideration however is

not static in Bush's climate rhetoric. As economic concerns began to supplant

environmental concerns as the fundamental implication to consider when evaluating

climate legislation, the discussion of international obligations began to become more

pronounced and heavily articulated in Bush's speeches. The 2001 speech makes brief

reference to what Bush expects from international countries before domestically

addressing climate change. Surely Bush recognized that the United States carried an

obligation to reduce emissions, but criticized nonetheless those who said that the United

States has the largest reduction to make. This criticism comes in two forms. First, Bush

claims that though the United States produces 20 percent of global carbon emissions, 20 percent does not represent a contribution which would place a unique burden on the United States. Because the United States also "account[s] for about one-quarter of the world's economic output," the relative change in emissions demanded of the United States should be low.[53] In other words the *relative emissions* (determined by "net" greenhouse gas emissions) produced by other countries are far higher than the United States' making their action more urgent. Second, international agreements like Kyoto have magnified that unbalanced burden by exempting countries like India and China. Bush recognizes that including those countries could problematically reduce their rate of growth but leaves the solution to this drawback unresolved.

The Clean Skies speech represents a continuation of constructing internationally binding agreements as a rhetorical prerequisite to American action. Bush transitions from using the "net" measurements of GHGs to the intensity approach described above. The concept of *intensity* was a measurement taken from the Kyoto Protocols but the use by Bush is very different from that employed in the Protocols. Bush argues that countries should be judged by their "improvement" in intensity. This measurement allows Bush to place a larger burden upon other countries while making the need for domestic change less pressing. This makes it easier to assert that other countries have an obligation to act in tandem with United States policy because "the 'absolute level' and the 'improvement ratio,'…are completely different."[54] In the case of the United States, the absolute level is worse compared with other developed countries, although its improvement ratio has historically maintained a high level.[55] By his 2002 speech, Bush had not only rhetorically posited an obligation on the part of other countries to address GHGs but had also relied

upon an indicator of emission reduction success that shifted the burden from the United

States to developing countries. The 2008 speech rhetorically ties domestic cap-and-trade

legislation to the loss in American competitiveness. Because cap-and-trade initiatives do

not require that other countries also take action, it would "limit our economic growth and

shift American jobs to other countries."[56] What is needed prior to domestic action by the

United States then is a major climate agreement in which there is "meaningful

participation of every major economy—and gives none a free ride."[57] Bush articulates an

equity based model of climate reductions, whereby everyone is held to the same

requirements for reducing emissions.

The desire to condition action on other countries' acceptance is demonstrative of

the constraints that Bush's past rhetoric had on the speech. The consistent reliance on

demanding developing countries participation in climate talks, from the rejection of

Kyoto to Bush's climate policy in the first six years of his administration, had made the

debate over developing nations' emissions the focus of international agreements on

climate change. In particular, the reliance on new measures of success like the intensity

standard drove major disagreements in international negotiations. Eckersley argues:

> The problem with the Bush administration's "developing country" argument is
> that while it has been quick to draw attention to China's high aggregate emission
> levels, it has conveniently and persistently downplayed the colossal size of its
> own aggregate emissions, which are more than the emissions of the second
> (China), third (Russian Federation) and fourth (Japan) highest emitters in the
> world combined…The Bush administration's refusal to recognize the
> disproportionately large carbon shadow it has cast over the world has intensified
> anti-Americanism, especially in the developing world where the consequences of
> global warming are expected to be more severe.[58]

Despite this fact, Bush still chose to include the rhetoric of international conditionality in

the speech. Bush ostensibly hoped to foster mutual cooperation to increase the prospects

of an international agreement at the G8 summit. However, his previous insistence on

internationally binding agreements, combined with the prioritization of economic

concerns, made reliance on codified and universal action *necessary*. Viewed from an

environmental or social justice perspective, Bush could have simply recognized the

obligation for the world's largest emitter to regulate GHGs. But when the starting point

is maximizing economic growth, the need to keep pace with competitors makes the

pursuit of internationally binding agreements a requirement. The insistence on the part of

Bush to continue to employ the line of argument on binding negotiations may have

undermined his stated hope of building momentum.[59] Indian Prime Minister Singh

quickly rejected the idea that developing nations like China and India must reduce their

greenhouse emissions and instead insisted that international negotiations would continue

to stall unless developed nations like the United States demonstrated leadership by

making domestically mandated GHG reductions.[60] Though Bush hoped to incentivize

countries like India to participate by showing a willingness to make changes to emissions

policy, the reliance on economic rationale, and in particular the move to understand

climate change as a front for economic competition, Bush rhetorically precluded

solutions that would *actually* be viewed as a good-faith effort to constrain climate

change.

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Technological Salvation

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The final and perhaps most obvious rhetorical theme present in Bush's climate

speeches is the belief that clean technology innovation represents the best way to limit

future GHG emissions. This too is tied to the belief that economic concerns should

dictate environmental policy. Bush's energy policy from the beginning emphasized the

need to avoid market regulation while promoting the benefits of clean technology

incentives. His 2001 policy speech asked Congress to implement legislation that would

"aggressively us[e] these clean energy technologies…[to] reduce our greenhouse gas

emissions by significant amounts in the coming years."[61] While Bush started by simply

arguing for technology as a solution to climate change, he later made the connection

between technology incentives and economic concerns more prominent. In his 2002

speech, Bush argues that the move to solve warming is impossible without the

technologies put forward in his plan. This represents an evolution of his description of

technological innovation. While in 2001 technology simply represented *a* solution, by

2002 innovation represented the *only* solution. For Bush, the intricacies and complexities

of climate change dictate the cutting-edge and ever-evolving nature of technological

innovation.[62] It is here that the rhetorical tying of growth to environmental concerns

becomes primary. As was already discussed, Bush made climate change legislation

beholden to economic concerns from the perspective of prudence. By positing clean

technology as the *only* solution to climate change, Bush also limited the potential for any

action that would undermine growth because it is "growth that provides the resources for

investment in clean technologies."[63] Continued economic growth was already an

independently important consideration when addressing climate change but now became

the *only* consideration because without it a solution was impossible.

    This belief in the saving power of innovative technologies is also employed in the

2008 speech. The reliance on technological solutions becomes apparent from the

beginning of the speech when Bush says, "we believe the only way to achieve these goals

is through continued advances in technology."[64] Bush even goes so far to say he has

"faith in the ingenuity and enterprise of the American people."[65] The use of technology

allows for Bush to shift the timeframe within which climate change must be addressed.

Bush himself states that technological solutions are "long run" solutions that must have

the time to run their course. Because the technology is yet undeveloped and untested at

the macro-level, researchers and scientists must have the time to evaluate the relative

advantages of each particular option. The reliance on that future resolution allows Bush

to position himself as a prudential leader, not quickly rushing into solutions without

critical reflection. As Carcasson argues, "Bush's optimism concerning science as the

savior even improved the rhetorical effect of his call for more research. In the end, Bush

could reject the environmentalists' proposals by appearing proactive and prudent, all the

while protecting American business interests."[66] It is important to note that Bush goes to

great lengths to describe the latent potential of the technologies waiting to be employed

by American economic sector. Funding in clean coal, nuclear power, hydrogen cards,

cellulosic ethanol, and carbon sequestration, are among the list of projects that Bush

explicitly draws attention to as already developing programs. As a result, Bush can be

seen not as avoiding action, but stepping out of the way of action already underway.

This stance, however, undermines Bush's ability to draw urgency to the situation.

Because it requires time and trial-and-error, the appeal for "more" science disallows

immediate action. [67] As a result, "[p]rimacy is given to factors perceived to promote

economic growth. Only voluntary (not mandatory) commitments are required. Allowing

for time and gradualism is deemed essential both to improve climate change science

knowledge and to implement technologies that will be more cost effective."[68] This is

especially true in the context of the 2008 speech where Bush had already tied market

regulating policies to the demise of new forms of climate technology. The problem with

such restrictions is that the immediate nature of the policies create regulatory and business uncertainty that has negative effects on the market much like the bureaucratic "train wreck" Bush was attempting to contain through the speech.[69] The claim to have in-production solutions, combined with the ties to market innovation, allows free-market politicians to characterize environmentalist as "extremists" who end up undermining the momentum to protect the environment.[70] What this discourse elides however is the potential for failure. Bush says that by 2025 his policy will stop the rise in emissions "so long as technology continues to advance."[71] What if that technology doesn't advance? By relying on a long term strategy, Bush is able to shift the blame from the crisis onto another presidency should the policy fail. However, by pointing to short term economic consequences as a reason not to pursue legislation limiting GHG emissions, the Bush administration neglected the fact that future policies will require much more drastic (less phased-in) legislation that will have far larger economic consequences because the cost cannot be spread out over the course of decades if those technologies do not work.[72]

While Bush ostensibly sought to use the G8 speech as a way to simultaneously jumpstart international negotiations and move the domestic political debates along the path toward finding a solution, the reliance on technological innovation undermined that ability. Because Bush claimed that the technology was already present, and market forces were already at work, he was rhetorically limited from advocating new legislative initiatives for fear that it would undermine the economic potential of those technologies. Where India and China claimed they were seeking concrete actions from the United States, Bush merely proffered faith in the future abilities of the world's leading GHG producer to create a technological solution.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Bush had been rebuked in his consultation with Congress, limiting his ability to advocate for an expansive legislative strategy, he delivered his pre-G8 address. Bush likely hoped the speech would represent a fresh take on climate change that might increase the possibility of an effective international agreement addressing global GHG emissions. Though a revolutionarily distinct rhetorical project may have been called for, Bush's 2008 speech merely represented a minor evolution of the policies and rhetoric previously employed throughout his administration. This is not to say that there were not new arguments and proposals in the speech, but the frames and ideological understandings used to shape and characterize the innovations were very much in line with his previous speeches. All four of the rhetorical tendencies in Bush's climate talk coalesce and interact with one another in the 2008 address. While Bush attempted to position himself as taking a tougher stand on climate change, those tendencies demonstrate that scholars must pay attention not only to stated intentions but the way that policymakers justify their actions given those intentions. It would be easy to accept the claim that Bush dramatically changed course by "taking a tougher stand," but a closer analysis reveals that those rhetorical tendencies cut against that belief. Fundamentally, Bush's rhetorical framings reconfigured the precautionary principle from an environmental activists' tool to a defense of maintaining the status quo.

While I have isolated four rhetorical tendencies in this chapter, it should be relatively clear how those tendencies are inherently interdependent and co-productive of one another in ways that bolster the constraints on what Bush can advocate as a potential course of action. The balancing frame sets the groundwork and evaluative yard-stick that

defines Bush's climate rhetoric. Bush may view environmental concerns as important and in need of redress, but only insofar as they relate to economic concerns. The failure to understand climate change and the ecological effects as an independently important crisis led Sigmar Gabriel, the German Environment Minister to label the speech as "Bush's Neanderthal speech."[73] Those economic concerns take precedence over environmental concern, and this is justified through rhetorically constituting climate change consequences as lacking coherent definition and resolution. As a result, economic concerns *definitionally* fall a priori to environmental concerns, disallowing courses of action that might negatively affect short term economic growth. It is from this limitation that the need to reject unilateral limits on emissions stems. The tragedy-of-the-commons nature of climate change means that one country's actions to limit climate change could be used as an economic leg up by another country. While not all countries ascribe to this understanding of climate change politics, the economic prioritization makes it a center piece of Bush's rhetoric. Without the ability to call for domestic limits on GHG emissions, Bush is left with advocating technological innovation to deal with climate change. Because those solutions are already in the works, Bush can present himself as a prudential decision maker. At the same time, the fact that innovation is ever evolving, Bush gives himself the space to say that decisions should be held off until the future. More importantly, technology allows these narratives to come full circle. Because technological innovation is the result of market forces, and technology is the "only" way to address climate change, policies that would negatively affect the economy can be couched as undermining the environmental movements' goal to address climate change.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Obama at Copenhagen—Creating Rhetorical Responsibility and Failing to Meet It

In December of 2009, the United Nations hosted a two week long conference on climate change known as the Copenhagen Summit, or COP15. The Summit was the latest in a long series of meetings that dated back nearly two decades. International observers and environmentalists hoped that the negotiations would provide a breakthrough on previous stalled climate talks and open the door for a binding international agreement to significantly confront climate change.[1] While Obama had not planned on speaking to the convention, a few weeks before the meetings, Obama changed course and announced that he would attend during the final days of the meetings. The announcement generated immense speculation about what policies and promises Obama would offer to the participants because it represented the "first international test" for Obama's stances on climate change.[2]

Prior to arriving at the Copenhagen talks, there was already intense discussion about what Obama would advocate at the meetings. The election of Obama signaled a potential shift which could jumpstart ongoing climate change talks.[3] Climate change negotiations had been sidelined for years by the Bush administration who squandered the credibility and leadership of the United States within the process. From early in his campaign, Obama was seen as a pro-environmental candidate. His platform emphasized the need to combat the rising rate of carbon emissions in order to stave off the worst effects of climate change.[4] Obama was in fact awarded the Nobel Prize, in part because

of his stance emphasizing the urgency of climate change legislation.[5] The economic

crises of 2008 and 2009 pushed that talk of climate legislation to the backburner as

Obama focused on ensuring the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

(the Stimulus Bill) and other measures aimed at restoring the economy.[6] Though the

senate was debating a variation of a cap-and-trade legislation, in the months before

Copenhagen the prospects of the bill looked slim.[7] Obama and his staff began

downplaying the possibility of a ground-breaking agreement being made at Copenhagen.[8]

The talks, which spanned the course of two weeks, were given a new life in the first week

when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publically announced a new plan to provide ten

billion dollars of climate assistance to developing nations.[9] By the second week

however, political stalemates, and old wounds from fights between developed and

developing nations reopened and cast a cloud over negotiations. Even so, Obama made

the trip to Copenhagen and gave an important and influential speech during the last few

days of the negotiations in hopes of spurring a last minute deal.[10]

Many pundits have argued that Obama's presentation to the United Nations in

Copenhagen failed to create a compromise that would successfully tackle the issue of

climate change.[11] Many observers speculated that Obama's address to the participants

was unpersuasive largely because of political constraints that prevented Obama from

advocating new or innovative policies sufficient enough to energize the negotiations.

Though Obama did indeed face a set of constraints, with his audience in Copenhagen and

with the Congressional audience, I will argue that the rhetorical strategies employed in

the speech failed to navigate the constraints in ways that would provide a renewed

momentum to the negotiations. Obama's ill-advised introduction to the speech, in which

he set up criteria by which to gauge American credibility/leadership, was a poor strategic choice given how little he could promise to meet those criteria. In the speech, Obama asks those participating to switch their negotiating tactics, motive for those negotiations, and to move forward in a new era of compromise and responsibility. For Obama, that new era of responsibility is one that overcomes the years of political heel-dragging, divisiveness, and opposition. By describing how his administration has already taken many steps to begin the transition to a new era of climate politics, Obama asks the audience to view his administration as the template that should be followed for future negotiations.

Though Obama attempts to construct himself as the symbol of new climate politics, the rhetorical content of the speech contradicts that construction in three ways. First, the prior argumentative move within the speech, the call to view Obama's administration as asserting climate leadership, was warranted by emission targets that the United States' would seek to reach. To frame leadership within this lens was problematic. The debate over emission targets was already a politically contested and highly divisive issue. The specific targets put forward by Obama were conservative at best, putting the United States behind many other major developed economies.

Second, Obama's vision of a new attitude towards climate negotiations was undermined by his reliance upon economic and security-based understandings of climate change consequences. In the early years of climate change negotiations, countries approached the issue with a focus on the *environmental* consequences of climate change. As the discussions progressed and developed over the course of decades, additional concerns and justifications were added, including economics and security. The inclusion

of economics and security concerns shifted the atmosphere of climate change talks, highlighting divisions in market capabilities and capacities to confront climate change. Obama's relied upon these concerns in his Copenhagen speech. Thus, instead of moving negotiations forward, he rhetorically placed the speech and his politics within the already ongoing confrontation over those issues.

Third, though Obama states that he understands the particular concerns of developing nations, the proposal he forwards and the means by which he goes about describing it demonstrate that Obama was only playing lip services to those concerns while rhetorically aligning himself with the concerns of developed nations. By articulating an understanding of "appropriate" responses to climate change that required *all* nations to take action, and by claiming that prudence necessitates developing nations to demonstrate their seriousness *before* receiving help from the economically advantaged developed countries, Obama failed to enact what he asked the audience to do in the future. Namely, he refused to change his approach to climate change even as he asked the audience to move beyond the past divisions which had led to inaction.

The Construction of American Leadership

The President's Copenhagen address begins with Obama establishing his leadership and credibility to speak on climate change issues. He does so, in part, as an attempt to situate his administration as the guiding force in the negotiations. This section will analyze the means by which Obama rhetorically constructs his leadership within the speech. Three different articulations of leadership provide the foundation for Obama's overall call to read his administration as establishing a new era in American climate politics. First, Obama highlights the ideological shift his administration introduced to

American climate politics by underscoring his belief in the soundness of climate science. Second, he argues that his leadership can be demonstrated by the shift from the negotiating tactics used by George W. Bush. Third, and most important to other parties at the climate talks, Obama argues that he has led America on the path to implementing ambitious emission standards. Yet, Obama's ability to use these shifts as rhetorical justification for his new leadership is hampered by the perceived weakness of the emissions targets set by the administration. As such, this information calls into question Obama's appeal to use the model of the United States to guide climate negotiation processes. Obama's establishment of credibility is central component to the speech because he uses that credibility as an example of how action on climate change ought to be undertaken. This section will therefore attend to these arguments in order to engage Obama's credibility in international negotiations on climate change.

In the opening minutes of the speech, Obama stresses the immense shift his administration initiated in American climate change politics. Specifically, he identifies investment in clean energy technology, implementation of emissions limits, and emission targets as changes the US would reach by 2050. Obama also argues that there was an ideological shift within the administration. Whereas past administrations had downplayed the truth or seriousness of climate change, Obama claims that the "danger is real. This is not fiction, it is science."[12] He marks another important ideological shift by pointing out that America was the second largest emitter of carbon emissions. This move to "confirm the United States' responsibility as one of the biggest polluters was an important symbolic gesture."[13] Moreover, Obama articulates a vision of his leadership and his negotiating style that opposed how the United States had previously approached

climate change negotiations. Climate change talks under the Bush administration were marred by heel dragging and political conditionality, holding out on American promises until other countries had made significant reductions in carbon emissions.[14]

The rhetorical strategy of establishing and negotiating credibility with the international community on climate change was one component of Obama's overall move to persuade negotiators to reformulate their priorities. In short, this can be understood as Obama's push for the Copenhagen meetings to foster "collective action" which seeks "not to talk, but to act."[15] Within the speech, Obama argues that the shift to action is possible if other negotiators follow the example that he establishes in the speech. For Obama, the ability to avoid *mere talking* and disagreement is the litmus test by which the overall talks, and his leadership, should be judged. In the conclusion of the speech he summarizes this sentiment when he proclaims "there has to be movement on all sides to recognize that it is better for us to act than to talk; it is better for us to choose action over inaction; the future over the past."[16]

Moreover, Obama provides an understanding of what *type* of action is required to demonstrate that leadership. It is not enough *just to act*, that action must be "bold," it must meet and accept the "responsibilities" that have been placed on all countries, it must foster cooperation, and it must "avoid delay."[17] Analyzing this construction of action allows scholars to evaluate the rhetorical positioning of Obama and his policies within the speech. As Obama had already articulated in the opening minutes of his speech, leadership is not only defined by the bills and laws that countries enact, but also by the language and posture that parties take towards the issue and other parties within international negotiations.

Obama's agenda seeks to posit his administration as innovating climate change policy and governance. Obama asks the audience to view his administration's changes as an instantiation of leadership that provides the key to a breakthrough in the Copenhagen talks. Obama additionally characterizes the shift towards "climate leadership" in his administration as part of the greater move to foster cooperation rather than conflict in international talks. While America's position had previously been limited by negotiating across "fault lines," the Obama administration proclaims its "responsibili[y]" to work cooperatively towards a deal. As such, Obama articulated this vision of leadership and cooperative action through this speech.

In addition to the new attitude towards negotiations, Obama calls attention to the United States' implementation of new emission standards as an additional example of the administration's climate leadership. Prior to the meetings on climate change, Obama signaled that he would push for both intermediate and long term carbon reductions. These targets would return the US to 1990 levels of carbon emissions by 2020 and cut eighty percent of emissions by 2050. For environmental experts, the gap between the interim levels and the long term goals raised concerns "that the United States may put off major changes needed for the long term, leaving the more difficult political choices to a future Administration that may or may not be serious about avoiding climate change."[18] As some scholars notes, Obama used Copenhagen as an opportunity to modify this approach by defining a more structured reduction process. As such, he agreed to "additional interim commitments for 2030 or 2040 that bind it to make progress along the way to 2050."[19]

Obama used the Copenhagen talks to bolster his political maneuverings both domestically and abroad. While Congress debated cap-and-trade legislation at the time of the talks, the chances for a credible bill that would put the US in-line with what the international community desired seemed unlikely.[20] This political situation afforded Obama an opportunity to set the terms of the debates in both international negotiations and in domestic debates over cap-and-trade. If Obama were to push for an international agreement that required deeper cuts from the United States, it could put political pressure on Congress mirror that agreement to avoid circumventing US reliability. As one pundit put it, "the Administration's…negotiating position can be used to send a signal of seriousness both internationally to other parties and domestically to the U.S. Congress."[21] In other words, if Obama domestically framed the Copenhagen talks by arguing that the United States could not get diplomatic leverage without deeper cuts, or at least without agreeing to medium-term goals, it had the potential to incentivize congressional action to meet the demands of the talks.

The international community closely followed Obama's other speeches on climate in order to parse out just how serious the United States was about combating climate change. In this address, Obama could potentially set the tone for the rest of the negotiations. Given the immense intransigence by former administrations, the perception that the United States was willing to set the goals for major emissions cuts would cause other countries to band-wagon with the effort. However, Obama did not articulate this vision within his speeches. Instead he offered modest goals that would require less cuts than the Kyoto protocols which the United States had already rejected.

In the speech, Obama claimed that the United States would move to cut "emissions in the range of 17 percent by 2020, and by more than 80 percent by 2050."[22] Those emission standards however, did not represent a drastic shift in the way the United States addresses carbon emissions. In fact "[c]ompared to the 1990 benchmark used by almost every other country, the U.S. target only amounts to something like a four-percent reduction."[23] The modest goals put forward by Obama within the speech were called into further question by the lack of specificity surrounding the announcement. Many believed that Obama's targets were derived from ongoing congressional discussions of *voluntary* carbon emission reductions. The inability to articulate a policy that would seek *mandated* reductions framed Obama's promises as hollow. Many speculators and experts at the negotiations argued that to achieve the goal of 17 percent, reductions would require mandates and the belief that voluntary reductions could achieve those targets was a false hope.[24] The failure to promise stricter emissions reductions internally undermined Obama's call to view him as climate leader and, as a result, "it was inevitable that other developed countries would all gravitate to this lowest common denominator" of emission standards.[25]

While at the outset Obama's call for minimal emissions standards can be read as a result of the political constraints placed upon Obama, his *rhetorical* articulation of leadership within the speech exacerbated those constraints to undermine the perception of Obama's leadership. His rhetorical construction of leadership was made more troublesome by his repetition of the word "responsibility." He used such repetition to illustrate the burden the US faced as a result of being the second largest carbon emitter in the world. The use of the term responsibility is important for two major reasons. First,

"responsibility" reflects Obama's ideological orientation toward the issue of climate change, both in terms of America's obligation to address the issue, and in terms of what obligation is placed upon other countries. As Jack M. Balkin argues, "[r]esponsibility is a concept understood through contrast and relation," and the way those relational forces are constructed such that "[i]deology…is reflected by how people choose characterizations of responsibility in different social settings."[26] Obama's articulation of responsibility comes with recognition of America's fault in climate change, and its capacity to deal with it. Specifically, Obama stated, "as the world's largest economy and the world's second largest emitter. America bears our responsibility to address climate change and we intend to meet that responsibility."[27] While such a statement was an important milestone in American climate politics, it created a rhetorical burden upon the speaker, namely the need to uphold or, in this case, "meet" that responsibility. Yet, the rhetorical choices made throughout the course of the speech reified historical divisions that helped to stall previous climate change negotiations and called into Obama's capacity to meet those responsibilities. Though Obama was politically constrained in terms of the types of policies that he could advocate, Obama also rhetorically constructed his vision of the Copenhagen talks and its purposes in ways that cut against his call to reevaluate American leadership on climate change and to put differences aside and come to the negotiating table. It is this failure that I address in the subsequent sections.

The Path Forward

Obama also articulated a vision of how the conference as a whole should approach the negotiating table in order to find a workable solution for all parties. This claim in the speech is the transition point from Obama's discussion of the United States'

responsibility in climate change negotiations to a discussion of what Obama thinks the tenor and tone of the negotiation process should be. This section of the chapter explores the ways in which Obama's rhetoric within the speech contradicted and dampened the strength of his appeal to find common ground within the negotiations. While political pressures precluded Obama and Congress from pursuing legislation would meet international demands, the rhetorical constraints created by the policies and ideologies *emphasized* by Obama in the speech drew attention to those political pressures and complicated the ability for the speech to serve as the foundation for a new attitude towards climate negotiations. Three major components of Obama's climate rhetoric undermined the call for cooperation: framing the climate as an economic and geopolitical question, employing a modified interpretation of common but differentiated responsibility, and conditioning United States' assistance on developing nations acting first. These tactics all highlight how vast the differences between negotiating parties truly were, and it demonstrates how the speech played into the same negotiation fissures that caused breakdowns in the past.

Economic and Geo-Political Concerns

In the decades leading up to the Copenhagen talks, negotiations over climate change evolved from discussing climate change as primarily an environmental issue, to more complex conversations about climate change. In addition to environmental concerns, negotiators addressed the political, economic, ethical, geopolitical aspects of climate change. In particular, the economic and geopolitical dimensions took center stage in international climate change negotiations. Law professor Cinnamon Carlarne contends that these "two dominant themes emerged as central to the agendas of key state

players" and "increasingly provided the foundations for the development of climate policy worldwide."[28] Obama's Copenhagen speech continued this trend by framing climate change as a major economic issue. Two aspects of his rhetoric in the Copenhagen speech demonstrate that continuation. First, when describing the consequences of climate change, Obama repeatedly situates the potential economic outcomes as more important than the environmental outcomes. Second, Obama's understanding of an effective and prudent climate accord is tied to concerns of competitiveness and economic growth. Focusing on economics and competitiveness further played into divisions between developed and developing and problematized Obama's desire to be seen as a major shift in American climate politics.

Throughout the speech at Copenhagen Obama constructs a vision of climate change that is intimately tied to those economic and security concerns. In the first paragraph of the speech, when discussing what is at stake in the future of climate change, Obama lists three issues that should be of paramount concern. Notably, for Obama, the primary concerns are "our security" and "our economies," followed by "our planet."[29] This is not an isolated trend, while economy, security and competitiveness are terms are littered throughout the speech, the only reference to the environmental impacts of climate change are in the first and last paragraph where he argues that we must act for the "future of our planet." Following the trend of President Bush's climate rhetoric (analyzed in the previous chapter), Obama leaves the environmental consequences of climate change vague while outlining the ways in which it intertwines with economic concerns. For Obama climate change is an issue of "economic futures," competitiveness, and industrial innovation and prosperity. Obama's concern for climate change does come from a desire

"simply to meet global responsibilities" but he is also "convinced…that changing the way

we produce and use energy is essential to America's economic future."[30] This statement

provides an important signal for what Obama the climate negotiator finds as the

important stakes for climate negotiations. From Obama's perspective, America seeks to

find a climate agreement that is environmentally sound, and an agreement that offers the

potential to power the American economy while maintaining economic competitiveness.

Obama's call to respect competitiveness concerns failed to move beyond the

discourse of previous administrations. In this way, Obama's concern for economic

competitiveness remained trapped within the "fault lines…we've been imprisoned

by…for years."[31] Even before the Copenhagen talks, international actors expressed

concerns that previous actions undertaken by the Obama administration laid the

foundation for competitiveness concerns. These concerns could stall the next round of

climate talks. In particular, observers feared that the "Buy American" provisions of the

stimulus package passed in 2009 signaled that the American government would sideline

climate talks for economic concerns.[32] Obama's invitation to pay special attention to

those concerns, therefore, did nothing to ease those fears or move beyond the stumbling

block. This rhetorical appeal situated Obama as a negotiator cut from the same cloth as

his predecessor George W. Bush, whose stance towards international climate negotiations

was characterized by his use of competitiveness concerns to forestall and limit

international action.[33] Angel Gurrìa, the OECD Secretary-General, argued shortly after

the Copenhagen talks that negotiations were hampered by a "preoccupation" with "the

possible impact of policy commitments on competitiveness" and that "competitiveness

concerns clearly have political ramifications on climate policy."[34] Competitiveness and

security claims may have been of major importance to the Obama administration, but by rhetorically including and highlighting those concerns within the speech, Obama added another layer of distress to be resolved at the Copenhagen meetings.

Common but Differentiated Responsibility

The framework by which countries determine responsibility to confront climate change has undergone major transitions in recent years. Specifically, developed countries have more consistently argued that developing nations are also burdened with that responsibility. That transition engendered backlash from developed nations who hold that the original framework still holds true. As such, the concept of responsibility has become a highly politicized domain for international climate negotiations. In his speech, Obama urges the parties present at the Copenhagen talks to move beyond those divisions by recognizing that both sides have legitimate concerns. However, Obama employs rhetoric and proposes action that contravenes his own advocacy. In order to demonstrate how Obama's speech internally counteracts his appeal, this section will explain the historical shifts in the concepts of climate change responsibility, the effect that disagreements over responsibility produced in Copenhagen, and specific means through which Obama politically and rhetorically played into those contested understandings of responsibility.

Historically, climate change negotiations centered around the question of what level of reductions *developed* nations would implement. The Copenhagen talks shifted the focus to international actors—a change that started with the Bush administration's objections to the Kyoto Protocols.[35] That swing held important consequences for the likelihood that a global deal could be reached. As international, environmental law

expert Daniel Bodansky argues, "Although the U.S.-EU negotiations were always difficult—even during the Clinton administration when one might have thought the policy differences would be less significant—the split between the United States and the European Union pales in comparison to the gulf between developed and developing countries."[36]

Within this dispute, developing nations have consistently maintained that the obligation to enact economy-limiting emission reductions should fall upon already developed nations for two major reasons. First, the effects of climate change will have a more pronounced impact upon their populations. Because developing nations face a whole host of issues—they often fall closer to the equator, are often along coastal regions, and because they have underdeveloped health and resource management systems, changing weather patterns, rising sea levels, and shifted agricultural dynamics— climate change will likely impact developing nations sooner with more pronounced consequences. Second, developing nations claim that the cause of climate change, excessive levels of greenhouse gas emissions, is the result of the economic practices of the developed nations. Concerns of fairness and justice are paramount as developing countries argue that their economies should have the same opportunities to progress towards modern-industrial practices, unimpeded by emission restrictions, much like their developed counterparts were able to do in the 20th century. Developing nations have therefore pushed for climate agreements which require short term and mandatory reductions for developed nations, along with longer term and voluntary programs to be implemented by developing nations with economic assistance from already developed countries.

Inducing developing nations to agree to international measures to address climate change was the crowning success of the previous set of climate talks, the Bali session.[37] That breakthrough was largely brought about by developed nations agreeing to a *flexible* approach that could be implemented by developing nations, so that they would not be unduly burdened by climate action.[38] The need to maintain that flexibility entering the Copenhagen talks was paramount. In part, the talks hinged on the ability to get the largest of the developing nations, India, China, and Brazil, to come to a broader agreement with already developed nations. Analysts believed that the dispute between developed and developing nations would once again be the make or break issue for the talks.[39] Navigating the disagreements between developed and developing nations required both *political* and *rhetorical* action. For Obama to win the support of developing nations he needed to broker a deal that could be sold to domestic constituencies. Tied to that was the ability to bring to the table "leadership and skillful negotiation," so that Obama could persuade developing countries that the deal was just and in their interests.[40] A failure to do so would mean that "no climate deal will be effective."[41]

These considerations changed Obama's strategy at the Copenhagen meetings. His speech heavily addressed the split between the developed and developing nations as the litmus test for productive negotiations. He begins and ends the speech by noting the effect that the rift has already had on climate change negotiations. In the introduction, he argues that "our ability to take collective action is in doubt right now, and it hangs in the balance."[42] In the conclusion, Obama claims, "we can choose delay, falling back into the same divisions that have stood in the way of action for years. And we will be back

having the same stale arguments month after month, year after year, perhaps decade after decade."[43] From these statements it is relatively clear that Obama, in part, urges negotiators at the meetings to resolve their differences and come to an agreement, imperfect as it may be.

Within the speech, Obama produced a vision for how that resolve could be enacted: by acknowledging both sides' criticisms and by promoting a mutual agreement. At the same time, Obama notes that both developed and developing nations lodge legitimate complaints:

> There are those developing countries that want aid with no strings attached, and no obligations with respect to transparency. They think that the most advanced nations should pay a higher price; I understand that. There are those advanced nations who think that developing countries either cannot absorb this assistance, or that will not be held accountable effectively, and that the world's fastest-growing emitters should bear a greater share of the burden.[44]

Obama asks those gathered in Copenhagen to move beyond those traditional divides and "embrace this accord, take a substantial step forward, continue to refine it and build upon its foundations."[45]

A closer look at the rhetoric used by Obama to describe the *tenets* of the accord, demonstrates that Obama paid lip-service to developing nation's complaints while reemploying many of the arguments that developed countries had used throughout recent climate negotiations to downplay their concerns. This is demonstrated in the two ways Obama characterizes what is needed through the accord: emission limits agreed to by *all* nations and the conditioning of climate assistance on developing countries first agreeing to major emission cuts. In this way, Obama undercut the US's claim to responsibility by placing conditional burdens on developing nations. Moreover, this tactic weakened the persuasive appeal of Obama's call to move past previous divisions.

Analysts of the Copenhagen talks argue that the negotiations represented the final transition away from the original articulations of developing nation's obligations in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to a new understanding of a "reciprocity-based regime."[46] Under the old framework of climate change action, known as "burden-sharing," "developed countries have an obligation to reduce emissions, mitigation actions are voluntary and conditional for developing countries, whose overriding priority of economic and social development and poverty eradication is explicitly recognized in UNFCCC Article 4(7)."[47] The new framework, employed by Obama in the speech, promotes a focus upon "maintaining a level playing field, market access and IPR protection became the main agenda of multilateral negotiations."[48] Obama's advocacy aligns with the shift towards a modified interpretation of what is commonly called common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR). At its most basic level CBDR implies:

> national mitigation efforts may take into account each State's respective capabilities and different social and economic conditions. This principle has two elements: (1) it entitles all concerned states to participate in international response measures to combat climate change effects, and (2) it requires different commitments from the signatories, taking into account each state's historical contribution to the effects of climate change, mitigation capabilities, social and economical circumstances, and future development needs.[49]

While the concept of CBDR has been under contestation since its inception, it had been employed within negotiations as the "overall principle guiding the future development of the climate regime."[50] The United States, however, began to articulate differing interpretations of the principle. At more recent climate change talks, the United States had shifted its meaning to be in direct opposition to the Chinese and G77 (developing nations) understanding, arguing that CBDR still "expect[ed] meaningful participation by

developing countries."[51] The United States' divergent views of CBDR became starker

and pronounced in Copenhagen as the United States "pushed more aggressively than ever

for meaningful, transparent, and verifiable action on the part of the rapidly developing

economies."[52] Obama's speech, with its emphasis on universal obligation and the

conditioning of climate aid is illustrative of that trend.

Obama lays out what he desires to see in the content of the Copenhagen accord,

claiming that after all of the negotiations, meetings, and talks, the "pieces of that accord

should now be clear."[53] For Obama, the first component of the accord should dictate that

"*all* major economies must put forward decisive national actions that will reduce their

emissions, and being to turn the corner on climate change (emphasis added)."[54] There are

two important considerations to take from this statement. First, Obama's understanding

of an appropriate accord is universal in its application. While Obama argued that the

pieces of the accord should already be clear, the idea that it should be incumbent upon all

parties to engage significant action was not clear, rather it was highly contested and

debated, particularly by developing nations. By constructing the need for universality,

Obama put developing nations on the same plane as developed nations. In so doing, he

restricted his own ability to tailor climate change action to the needs and capabilities of

different countries. By making the distinction between developed and developing, and by

arguing for the emissions cap targets as the preferred approach, Obama gave up the

ability to advocate other policies that had the potential to win the favor of developing

nations and move beyond political stalemate. Law professor David Hunter argues that

three different approaches had the potential to "find favor with developing countries,"

namely, "sector-specific targets requirements…action targets…or intensity targets."[55] To

advocate those approaches however, would have required Obama to not only attend to the diverse concerns of developed and developing countries, it would have also required him to formulate an ideology of climate change action that would *address* those concerns.

Second, Obama contends that the United States had already met its obligations under this component of the accord, pointing to the emission standards that his administration had already put in place. When discussing the need to have a universal attempt to limit emissions Obama states, "I'm pleased that many of us have already done so…I'm confident that America will fulfill the commitments that we have made."[56] Yet, as discussed above, those emissions targets were not seen by all parties as a significant effort to address climate change insofar as these standards illustrated how other developed nations outpaced US restrictions. The need for universal action and American leadership therefore became rhetorically tied. Because the United States had already demonstrated its leadership on the issue of climate change, its credibility and standing on climate change warranted Obama's vision of universal accord. As a result, Obama's call for universal applicability fed into two contested arenas of climate change: the role that CBDR should play in crafting a climate accord and whether Obama's record on climate change is sufficient enough to warrant his advocacy of a universally binding agreement.

Obama's use of divisive claims, including the call for CBDR, continues in the third component of the accord levied for by Obama. The third component centers around "climate assistance," aid given to developing countries to help them ease their way into introducing new climate change policies. In the speech, Obama recognizes the need to provide aid to "the least developed and most vulnerable…to climate change."[57] This statement lined up well with early understandings of CBDR. When discussing how the

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United States will support this endeavor, however, Obama once again rhetorically redraws the lines between developed and developing countries. Obama announces that the United States will make available $100 billion dollars in funds by the year 2020, "*if – and only if* – it is part of a broader accord (emphasis added)."[58] By this statement, he implies that aid is conditioned on developing countries' emission standard protocols. Much like the debate over CBDR, the issue of conditionality in climate assistance was highly contentious. Climate change expert Liane Schalatek argues that, "the provision of finances from industrialized countries to poorer countries is a matter of restitution for a climate debt and thus would reject any conditionalities placed on such a payment as a matter of principle."[59] Climate assistance, particularly the kind proposed in Obama's speech is geared towards *climate adaptation*, meaning helping countries minimize and control the consequences of the already-occurring effects of climate change. Included within this are programs to bolster health sectors, funding to deal with climate refugees, and public works programs to protect communities situated alongside coastlines.[60]

Given the stakes for adaptation assistance, and given that developing nations maintain that the blame for climate change lies firmly on developed nations, the attempt to condition adaptation assistance is often met with fierce opposition.[61] Within the speech, Obama recognizes that the United States and developed countries are largely at fault for the conditions that made adaptation assistance a necessity, but nevertheless affirms that developing countries should only receive that assistance if they went along with the components of the accord that he advocates. In the speech, Obama argues that "[n]o country would get everything it wanted." Yet, Obama also highlights competitiveness and the divisions between developed and developing nations. As such,

he articulats that developing nations would only get what they *need* if they went along

with the *desires* of developed nations. The speech was not a movement beyond past

fault-lines, but a re-articulation of those fault lines while hollowly recognizing the

concerns of developed countries.

Conclusion

Obama entered the climate change talks in Copenhagen and attempted to persuade

multiple audiences that his administration represented a change.[62] For his electoral base,

Obama was trying to assure environmental voters he was still a staunch advocate of

emission limiting legislation. For Congress, he was trying to demonstrate that he didn't

believe that efforts to combat climate change must fall disproportionately on Americans.

For the foreign actors, the speech attempted to position the administration as a change in

US domestic climate politics, and it sought to advocate change for the way that the

international community would approach future climate negotiations. Other countries

were ready and willing to listen, hoping that the United States had turned the corner and

begun a new era of cooperative climate change policy. If Obama came to Copenhagen

and put forward a "transformative" plan, "[t]he EU, Japan, China and India had all

indicated that they were willing to increase their levels of commitment, but only if the US

took the lead."[63] The situation confronting Obama was not an easy one. Faced with a

Congress unwilling to implement legislation that would concretely demonstrate

America's commitment, Obama attempted to find other means to influence the

negotiations. Obama also entered into the discussion in the middle of decade's worth of

disagreement between developed and developing nations over the obligations that

different countries had to confront climate change. The speech sought to shift the terms

of the debate, moving from the fault lines that had "imprisoned them for years" to the "nations and the people of the world com[ing] together behind a common purpose."[64] Signaling his desire to foster a collective and cooperative attitude, Obama centered his address on the potential agreements between countries and how to settle previous disagreements. Obama constructed a means by which the audience can begin to achieve a cooperative approach, namely by following Obama's example in his administrative policies and *approach* to the talks.

Obama's speech created an internal framework that imposed additional rhetorical constraints. Knowing that he would not be able to showcase legislative successes as exemplars of his administration's commitment to climate change, he staked his speech on the symbolic leadership created by approaching the talks with a different tone and urgency. His desire for the audience to see the speech as a new approach was undermined by the way he framed the content of the speech. The prisms through which Obama articulated his understanding of an effective accord cannot be isolated from the political context in which they were voiced.[65] More generally, the frames employed when discussing climate change are imbued with historical and political significance that independently create meaning. This is particularly important for the analysis of Obama's Copenhagen speech. Even though Obama declared that he was sympathetic to the concerns of developing countries, the frames he employed, most prominently his economic frame, were not politically neutral. The contested understandings of those frames cut against Obama's stated goal for the Copenhagen talks.

This chapter's analysis of Obama's Copenhagen speech thus demonstrates how the use of framing should be understood as both shaping how one understands the science

and implications of climate change, but also serves as a potential limitation on the options available for those who advocate potential solutions. For example, framing climate change as a responsibility is at its most basic level a means to understand the historical levels of GHG emissions. At the same time, it creates a burden on rhetors such as Obama to offer a solution that would remedy the historical disparity of aggregate emissions between developed and developing countries.

The specific proposals endorsed, the past polices used as examples of already desirable action, and the ideological approach taken toward climate change within the speech undermined his success. In effect, the audience likely viewed Obama's climate change policies as an extension of previous administrations. Obama's rhetorical approach to the speech contained two major flaws. First, as he established his credibility as a climate change leader, Obama focused on the emissions standards promised by the United States. Those emission standards, while more stringent than standards under the Bush administration, were far less strict and verifiable than measures taken by other developed nations. This fact was not lost on those watching the negotiations. Many participants claimed that the emissions standards outlined by Obama were not demonstrative of leadership but were hollow words that created a "palpable sense of disappointment."[66]

Second, Obama did not enact his own advice; he failed to move beyond past divisions. Instead, his speech relied upon those divisions. At a fundamental level, the division between developed and developing nations stems from framing the climate change issue as an economic issue. Viewed from the lens of environmentalism, the need for developed or highly industrialized countries to bear the costs of enacting climate

change legislation is obvious. When tied up in concerns of geopolitics, economics, and competitiveness, the debate over who is responsible for what action becomes murkier. The difficulty in dissecting and establishing relative responsibility to act had long been *the* major stumbling block at climate talks. Obama's Copenhagen address did not redress those economic concerns but played into them by placing economic and geopolitical concerns as the central concern for decision makers. Obama exacerbated distinctions between developed and developing by further eroding the principle of CBDR. He demanded universal reductions, undertaken by all countries regardless of their economic situation. In so doing, Obama violated the longstanding position taken by developing nations: that rich, industrialized countries need to demonstrate a *true* commitment to combat climate change before less economically fortunate countries follow suit. Developing nation's perceptions of the speech underscored its divisiveness. As Tim Jones, spokesperson for the World Development Movement argues, "[t]he president said he came to act, but showed little evidence of doing so. He showed no awareness of the inequality and injustice of climate change…[I]t is a choice that condemns hundreds of millions of people to climate change disaster."[67] Disagreement between the developed and developing countries was well documented before Copenhagen. It had been responsible for derailing other major climate meetings and served as a major source of contention before Obama arrived in Denmark. Counter to Obama's hopes, the speech did not offer a way through the gridlock, but ideological, politically, and rhetorically added to the congestion by undercutting the hope that the new administration would usher in a new era of climate leadership with the capacity to significantly combat climate change.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This thesis sought to provide a rhetorical analysis of the climate change rhetoric employed by three major, contemporary political figures. Paying close attention to the political situations, the historical evolutions of the concepts, and looking at the internal construction of the issue of climate change provided this thesis with a deeper understanding of the context navigated through and created by the rhetors. The analysis and contextualization done in this thesis was important to providing a better understanding of how political framings of climate change are articulated, understood, and put into relation with one another. The study also attended to a gap within the literature of environmental communication by focusing on addresses that have yet to be analyzed at length by the field. This chapter will summarize the major findings of the individual sections and then will discuss the how the overlap and progression of climate change rhetoric between the speakers is important to the fields overall understanding of framing and environmental rhetoric. Within this discussion the chapter will discuss how the methodological approach applied in this thesis helped to more clearly reveal these trends. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the potential for future research that would help build upon the work of this thesis.

Al Gore's an *Inconvenient Truth* is a major component of contemporary climate change. The documentary was viewed by millions of people throughout the globe and was one of the most public and forceful defenses of the science behind climate change. Additionally, analyzing the film is important to the study of political rhetoric on climate

change because it provides a snapshot of how political discourses employ and construct understandings of climate change through visual images.

The chapter on the documentary focused on how both scientific and visual rhetorics of climate change effect public understandings of, and relationships to, climate change. Gore's rhetoric is demonstrative of a larger shift in the way that climate change is understood as a global phenomenon. At its inception, the study of climate change was really a study of meteorology. Changes in weather patterns induced by GHG effects were investigated for the impacts that they would have on local environments. As the science developed, it expanded through the use of computer modeling and data sampling to take on a global scale. The models showed how GHG emissions aggregately affected planet-wide shifts in climate. In this way, the moves between the local and global became a mainstay of climate change scientific exploration. Gore's documentary is a significant and contemporary example of how the science that undergirds the study of climate change shifts between global and local conceptualizations. The climate data presented in *An Inconvenient Truth* relies upon and privileges the global understanding of climate change as an exigence.

The way that scientists and rhetors depict climate change influences the ways in which individuals understand their interaction with the environment. This is perhaps becomes most apparent in the way that Gore's use of visual imagery impacts his broader rhetorical understanding of climate change. In the chapter, I argued that the use of *whole-earth* imagery in the film is a discursive disembodiment of climate change.[1] While global models removed community and cultural understandings of climate change from the discussion, Gore's use of *whole-earth* images and pictures visually disembodied

humans from this discourse because they entirely excluded the impact of climate change on humans.[2] The consequence of this disembodiment is that it disallowed understandings of climate change that stress the human impacts. In particular, it elides race and class based variables of climate change, which other scholars have argued are important aspects of the discussion insofar as they centralize the socio-political and consumptive practices that drive climate change in the first place.[3]

This rhetorical displacement of the effects of climate change on the individual or local away from climate change as a planet-wide problem shifts the discussion to an international and bureaucratic forum. The situation of climate change as global meant that it became an international tragedy of the commons—not that which could be acted upon in the local. The global logic of climate change discourse placed emphasis on competition: one countries' emissions drove environmental changes in another country, and one country failing to meet its obligations to reduce emissions put other countries environments at risk. The result necessitated international *solutions* to climate change. Individual action or unilateral action becomes irrelevant because it does not have a significant impact on aggregate levels of GHG emissions. Emission reduction policies inherently impact economic growth and as a result, unilateral action to address climate change becomes politically infeasible because they "would impose significant costs and by themselves produce no significant benefits."[4] The rise of global conceptualization of climate change, much like it was articulated in *An Inconvenient Truth*, paved the way for economic concerns to influence the way actors sought solutions to climate change.

The chapter on George W. Bush's G8 summit speech provides a contemporary reference point which demonstrates how those economic concerns play into discussions

of climate change. Analysis of Bush's four rhetorical markers shows how economic

concerns can politically prefigure our understandings of climate change. In the speech,

Bush frames climate change as primarily an economic issue. Bush's balancing frame

demonstrates how the tragedy of commons dilemma impacts how politicians approach

the issue. For Bush, "the right" solutions only confront climate change if those solutions

don't unduly burden the American economy. In fact, economic concerns take precedence

over environmental concerns.[5] This prioritization is bolstered by Bush's rhetorical

framing of climate change consequences as contested and unknowable. While in

previous speeches this was explicitly articulated by statements highlighting the "scientific

uncertainties," by the 2008 G8 speech Bush maintained that climate change was still up

for "vigorous debate."[6]

The analysis provided in this thesis therefore offers a broader understanding of

framing. Specifically, analyzing the rhetorical frames present in Bush's speech recognize

that framers do not function independently of one another. Frames have the potential to

draw ideas and play off of one another, much like the framing of climate change as global

and the framing of climate change as economic. At the same time, frames can conflict

with one another. In this instance, Bush constructed a vision of climate change that

deliberately undermined the persuasive power of contesting frames. Bush's uncertainty

frame directly called into question the major persuasive force of environmental views that

highlighted the potential magnitude of climate change consequences. Bush's uncertainty

frame doesn't deny the *magnitude* of those consequences but the *likelihood* of those

consequences. This frame rhetorically bolstered the persuasive nature of Bush's

understanding of climate change vis-à-vis environmental frames. The certainty of

moderate economic loss became a more important consideration when the large environmental consequences of inaction were called into question.

Much like the transition to global, scientific understandings of climate change shifted and constrained appropriate action to address climate change, the chapter on Bush demonstrates how rhetorics of competitiveness and economic concerns also limit available options. In the context of the Bush G8 speech, his application of the four rhetorical markers made reliance on codified and universal action a necessity. The transition between Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and Bush's G8 speech is demonstrative of a larger evolution in climate change discourse. Gore's rhetoric aligns with the transition within the scientific community's to understand climate change as a global commons issue. Bush's speech shows how the transition in scientific understanding was taken up by political actors and transformed from a scientific/environmental issue into an economic and highly political debate.

The chapter on Bush's climate rhetoric also demonstrates the value of approaching the texts through a methodology of close reading. In particular, it illustrates the importance of explicating the speech's textual context. The G8 speech was given in response to a host of different political factors. When announcing the decision to present the speech, Bush's Press Secretary Dana Perino isolated three major reasons: the upcoming G8 summit, a then recent decision by the Supreme Court about climate change, and ongoing Congressional debates. That context influenced the speech in important ways. Simply analyzing the speech based on whether Bush meets those constraints is too simplistic and leaves out a vital area of analysis. Bush creates a context and audience understanding within the speech itself. As Michael Leff argues, "[m]eaning and effect

are produced, not by the text as a static entity, but by the progressive interaction of the audience with…elements in the discourse."[7] In other words, within the speech Bush offers the audience a particular way to read those contexts and a particular way of relating his policies to the context. This is done a number of ways, including the framing of the exigency of climate change and the argumentative development of his solutions. Bush's arguments in the speech build on and support one another as the speech unfolds. Attending to that progression broader understanding of how the text created internal opportunity and internal constraint. That understanding would not have been possible by simply analyzing the speech as one overarching response to the constraints presented by the political contexts.

Bush's 2008 G8 was an essential text to analyze because it represented the culmination of eight years of development in Bush's climate rhetoric. That development and evolution is important--it shows the fluidity of the debate over environmental issues which are often thought to be static and rooted in the objective sciences. The chapter adds to the understanding of the evolution of Bush's climate rhetoric by expanding its scope beyond the 2008 speech itself. Much like close reading analyzes developments within a speech as they temporally unfold, the chapter analyzes the progression of Bush's climate metaphors over the course of his administration.

More generally, the chapters on Obama and Bush's speech reveal that high-level political actors speaking on climate change develop those speeches for a whole host of different reasons, and those reasons are integral to the way that environmental scholars approach the text. Bush and his speechwriters originally considered a more far-reaching speech then the one that he ended up giving.[8] Backlash from Republican Congress

members who indicated that they were unwilling to agree to any legislative-based changes required Bush to shift the content and aims of the speech. Instead of proposing and lobbying for a new piece of legislation, Bush sought to *reposition* his standing on the issue of climate change in hopes of catalyzing new international agreements and to shift the terms of congressional debate on the issue.

Obama faced a very similar situation. Going into the Copenhagen speech, Obama knew that legislative action from the US was unlikely. Those legislative realities forced Obama to modify his strategy, causing him to construct a different understanding of climate leadership by which he would be judged. As such, this thesis represents an important contribution not only to scholarly understanding of *how* these presidents talked about climate change, but also to the political and rhetorical contexts that explain *why* Bush and Obama addressed climate change as they did. As the quotation from J. Robert Cox in the review of the literature noted, the major shortcoming to scholarship on framings of climate change discourse is that it lacks attention to "their strategic or consequential potential within the economic, political, and ideological systems in which energy policy is embedded."[9] The findings of this thesis begin to fill this gap by specifically attending to the way those frames are utilized by high-level politicians.

The way that all three rhetors analyzed within this thesis approach climate change holds important consequences for the way that scholars understand the use and impact of climate framings. The speeches examined in this thesis demonstrate that climate framings are not equal in their capacity to persuade. The chapter on Obama provides a clear picture of this argument. Obama approached the negotiations with the hopes of persuading the international community to move forward in implementing an

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international climate accord by framing his administration as exhibiting leadership that should be modeled by other countries. Additionally, he framed contemporary climate debates as a choice between inaction and the need to cooperate and move forward. However, those framings came into conflict with two other frames within the speech, economic/geopolitical understandings of climate change and the frame of environmental responsibility/justice. The economic and justice-based articulations of climate change evoked historical divisions between developed and developing nations. When combined with the political proposals forwarded by Obama in the speech, Obama's attempt to rhetorically position himself as moving beyond those divisions fell flat. This shows how frames are not a simple system in which the speaker employs them and the audience receives them according the speaker's desire. Rather, this analysis shows that frames engender a set of relational understandings, where the persuasiveness of one particular frame over another is dependent upon contextual factors such as the current political climate, the ideology of the audience, the perceived credibility of the speaker, the internal consistency of the frame, and the credibility of competing frames.

Presidents, and high-level figures such as Gore have a unique capacity to shape public understanding of climate change.[10] Though Gore came close, he was never a president. As a result, the constraints faced by Gore were markedly different than the institutional and political limits confronted by Bush and Obama. Even so, this study would not have been complete without analyzing the rhetoric employed by Gore. *An Inconvenient Truth* strongly shaped public opinion about climate change. In this sense, Gore's documentary became the foundation for the rhetorics employed by Bush and Obama. Though Gore's film was not the first discourse to employ global understandings

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of climate and the sciences that lie behind it, the documentary was viewed by millions and was politically important enough to warrant a Nobel Prize. Given that few scholars have engaged Bush's and Obama's climate change rhetoric, this thesis illustrates how their public address similarly shaped national and international opinions on the appropriate solutions to climate change. While this thesis is by no means an exhaustive investigation into the climate rhetoric of these three politicians, it provides an important starting point in the attempt to analyze their climate rhetoric.

I believe that future research on this issue could expand upon this knowledge base in two important ways. First, a deeper investigation into Obama and Bush's climate rhetoric is needed. This thesis focused on two of the most visible speeches but does not address other less-known but still very important texts. Chapter three, for example, referenced scientific climate reports which had been edited and reworded by the Bush administration prior to their dissemination. The edits made to those documents provide an excellent text to explore because it is a clear representation of how the administration sought to reshape and modify the production and uptake of climate knowledge. Moreover, scholarship could attend to how these Presidents approached climate discourses whose primary audience was the United States Congress. Criticism of those speeches would help bring about a more well-rounded understanding of how President Bush and President Obama approach their own *domestic* legislation on climate change. Second, studies in high-level climate rhetoric would be served by exploring other styles of climate discourse. While this thesis focused on two Presidents and one almost president, future research could analyze more closely Supreme Court decisions (for

instance the *Massachusetts v. EPA* decision), Congressional testimony and debate,

executive agency memoranda, and campaign rhetoric.

Notes

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