

AL GORE, “AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH” AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE IN THE
PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT

Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*, released in 2006, created a lot of publicity about environmentalism and global warming. Gore won an Oscar and, along with the IPCC, a Nobel Peace Prize for the work. It reinvigorated the environmental movement, which had long gotten anemic and inconsistent attention from the public sphere, and brought environmentalism into mainstream acceptance where before it had been seen as a fringe movement.

This study intends to determine what made *An Inconvenient Truth* so powerful. Through a rhetorical criticism and news media analysis, I will show how Gore’s film transformed the environmentalist movement into one that changed attitudes and enabled collective action. Previous environmental works had focused too much on scientific uncertainty, specific events not related to a broader environmentalist theme, and hard, complex data. An analysis of the film’s rhetorical techniques and arguments will indicate how the work differed from previous environmental coverage, showing that the use of a narrative to connect isolated image events to the larger scope of global warming moved audiences and united environmental discourse in a way that had not

previously been seen. To reinforce its influence on the public sphere, I analyzed news media coverage of these rhetorical devices before and after the film's release to determine the extent to which global warming became a top agenda for the news media and the public sphere as a whole.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“I’m Al Gore. I used to be the next president of the United States.” Laughter and applause erupt from the audience as Gore stands on a platform before them, smiling wryly. The film cuts to the different highways Gore’s traveled, the different audiences he’s spoken with around the world. Old footage is shown of Gore stepping off planes, waving to crowds, giving speeches. He says, “I’ve been trying to tell this story for a long time, and I feel as if I’ve failed to get the message across.” Footage of glaciers, dead trees, running water under ice, drought-ridden desert, factory smokestacks, forest fires. “I was in politics for a long time. I’m proud of my service.” Shots of Hurricane Katrina. “There are good people, who are in politics in 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.”

From its first few minutes, *An Inconvenient Truth* sets up the environmental message that rippled through American discourse. Gore is immediately established as an authority figure, a person with a sense of humor, and a person with long experience in attempting to bring global warming into the forefront of political agendas. The film stands as the fourth best-selling documentary in film history, and the accompanying book reached number one on the New York Times bestseller list in July of 2006. *An Inconvenient Truth* won two Oscars, helped Gore and the IPCC win a Nobel Peace

Prize, and generated a flurry of press and public discussion as well as sustained, renewed interest in global warming and the environmental movement.

An Inconvenient Truth is a meticulous, simply presented documentary of why we can no longer ignore the global warming phenomenon. The film begins with Gore's personal journey. He reminisces about his childhood on a farm in Tennessee and his time at Harvard, studying under famed ecologist Roger Revelle, who first measured increasing CO₂ levels in the air above Hawaii. Copious charts and graphs that reveal alarming trends are interspersed with stark quotations, personal anecdotes, and accounts of trips to the Arctic Circle and other areas already seriously affected by global warming. Especially alarming are the depictions of melting snows and glaciers disappearing all over the globe. Gore's purpose for the film was to present global warming as a present danger rather than as a distant threat. He stresses the importance of immediate action when it comes to changing our consumption habits because we will soon be suffering from the results of non-sustainable industrialization. The accompanying book, which had been published the same year, closely followed the slide show presentation seen in the movie. It reiterated Gore's story of the specific nature and history of global warming, and how ordinary citizens can help mitigate the potentially disastrous effects of increased carbon in the atmosphere and rising sea levels.

Even though similar works calling for real change in environmental practices had been released before, including *Earth in the Balance*, a book written in 1992 by Gore himself, it was *An Inconvenient Truth* that helped bring the environmental movement into the public consciousness. The public, after this film was released, appealed to lawmakers with renewed vigor and began seriously considering the effects of their current consumption habits. This paper will explain how and why *An Inconvenient Truth* succeeded in generating real concern about the environment where previous works failed. Hundreds of works have been published on the dangers of global warming in the interim between *Silent Spring* and *An Inconvenient Truth*, but even those related directly to environmental disasters failed to capture the public attention. Like other momentous works in nonfiction, such as *The Jungle*, *Silent Spring* and others, *An Inconvenient Truth* has created change in the mindset of an entire generation. What is the new rhetoric of the environment? How did Gore's work establish this rhetoric, which resonated with so many people? What was taking place externally in order to allow *An Inconvenient Truth* to steer the public discourse on environmentalism and global warming? I define the stylistic elements employed by Gore and to what effect, and then identify the external events that provided the right context or window for this work to emerge. I also analyze the effectiveness of Gore's narrative, both as a literary tack that resonates deeply in the public sphere and as a way to make a complicated topic more accessible. While I show that movements elsewhere,

together with related events in American public affairs, had been priming Gore's campaign for some time, it was also Gore's particular work, together with his celebrity, that took advantage of these conditions to promote a message that the public would hear.

The topic is an important one not only within the realm of the environmental movement, but in terms of media mainstreaming as a whole. In order for a particular political cause to take hold in the easily bored, over-stimulated atmosphere of mainstream media and the public eye, the message must be precise, well-timed and credible. The synthesis of Gore's celebrity, language and style of his film, and external events led to a powerful reawakening of the environmental movement. Global warming can no longer be written off as a fringe conspiracy theory or junk science by the press and public; it must be faced as a reality. Because the state of the environment is one that affects us all, the manner in which one work became powerful enough to have a lasting impact on the public consciousness should be studied. *An Inconvenient Truth* joins a relatively short and prestigious list of social nonfiction works that had a lasting effect on the public sphere. If the stylistic elements used by Gore and his predecessors can be isolated and analyzed, then perhaps other activists will also be able to apply them to their own causes.

This study is largely indebted to previous research on discourse analysis and the concept of the public sphere, as well as research on media effects and the environmental movement. I build on previous research on environmental news coverage and policy discourse as well as *Silent Spring* and other works of social nonfiction. The concepts discussed in these and other works will be adapted to the analysis of *An Inconvenient Truth* as another source of climate change framing, another momentous event in the history of environmental media coverage.

History of the environmental movement

In 1962, a marine biologist named Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, a book on the danger of reckless use of pesticides in agriculture. She had previously published several books on marine life, including *The Sea Around Us*, which had won several prizes and established her as a credible nature writer. While she was firmly rooted within the scientific tradition, the book began with a narrative, a story describing the delicate balance of the natural world before the widespread use of agricultural pesticides. Carson explained the detrimental effects of pesticides in painstaking detail, showing how the toxins are attributable to the deaths of thousands of birds and to brain defects in humans. Carson's book went on to caution against the current practices of irresponsible pesticide use. The book was widely read and stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for several weeks.

The Natural Resources Defense Council compares Carson's book to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and said that *Silent Spring* "eloquently questioned humanity's faith in technological progress and helped set the stage for the environmental movement." (1997). *Discover Magazine* lists the book as one of the top 25 science books of all time, noting that the book was considered "hysterical" and "extremist" at the time of its publication (2006). Despite much criticism of her science, ideology, and even gender, *Silent Spring* took hold in the public. The book caused widespread concern about the use of pesticides, and in 1972 the use of DDT was banned in the United States. Al Gore, in his introduction to the 1992 edition of *Silent Spring*, said that "*Silent Spring* had a profound impact...Indeed, Rachel Carson was one of the reasons that I became so conscious of the environment" (Carson, 1992; PBS, "Silent Spring Revisited," 2007).

After *Silent Spring*, the public embraced the environmental movement. The Sierra Club, which was founded in 1952, became the United States' most prominent environmental agency during this time, publishing ads in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* protesting a 1966 plan for a dam that would flood the Grand Canyon. The dam was cancelled in 1968. That same year, 1968, also saw the publication of Garrett Hardin's essay "Tragedy of the Commons." "Tragedy of the Commons" quickly became a staple for environmental policymakers and was widely referenced in

resource economics (Dryzek 1997; Gordon 1954). This was largely due to the fact that, like Carson and later Gore, Hardin used language that made his analysis accessible to the public. "Unlike the economists, Hardin had the good sense to give the analysis a catchy name, publish it in the large-circulation journal *Science*, refrain from using graphs and algebra, and put it out just as the widespread perception of environmental crisis hit for the first time throughout the developed world" (Dryzek, 1997, p. 25).

Hardin used the metaphor of a medieval village's commons as a metaphor for various finite resources, creating an opposition between private interest and the public good. The concept of the Earth's resources as not only finite but drastically deteriorating due to overpopulation and poor use were paralleled in the public sphere with the picture of the Earth taken from space in 1968. The concept of Earth as a small, self-contained sphere, "spaceship Earth" as some called it, brought immediacy to Carson and Hardin's warnings about the disruption of the delicate balance of nature. Al Gore mentions this picture in his slideshow as being a seminal moment for the budding environmental movement. "The Clear Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Natural Environmental Policy Act, and the first Earth Day all came about within a few years of this picture being seen for the first time" (2006, p. 14).

In response to increased public concern of the environment, many policies and standards were enacted on the state and federal level to reduce emissions, raise gas efficiency standards for cars, and encourage recycling. President Johnson signed the National Wilderness Act in 1964 in order to “secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness” (88th Congress, S.4, 194). The bill established 9.1 million acres of federally protected wilderness in national forests, prohibiting public use of the land. In 1970, President Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency, whose mission is to protect human health and safeguarding the natural environment. The Clean Air Extension Act of that same year, which expanded on the Clean Air Act of 1963, required the new EPA to enforce regulations of pollutants, and enabled citizens to file suit if that enforcement did not occur. In 1972 and 1973 the Water Pollution and Endangered Species Acts were passed, respectively (the former over Nixon’s veto), and became powerful tools for enforcing environmental standards (ectopia.org, 2005).

Since this heyday the environmental movement has for the most part been relegated to the fringes. Occasionally concern for the environment will resurface in the mainstream media when a related event occurs, such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 or the debate over the Kyoto Protocol in the early ‘90s. In the 1970s, scientists Mario Molina and Sherwood Roland discovered the harmful effects of

chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), chemicals found in aerosol sprays and refrigerators, on the ozone layer. “The issue was dramatized in the form of an ‘ozone hole’ appearing over Antarctica in the Austral winter, identified and named in 1985” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 39). Twenty-four nations signed the Montreal Protocol two years later, which froze use of CFCs in developed nations and later, in 1995, demanded that CFC use be banned entirely. Other nations were directed to reduce their CFC use over a longer period of time, and were promised aid from developed nations for economic loss caused by this action. Dryzek notes, however, that this was a relatively easy action for the world to agree upon. “[T]he stakes were comparatively small: CFCs are useful chemicals, but substitutes for them can be developed and have been developed. The stakes are much larger when it comes to dealing with issues such as greenhouse gases, notably carbon dioxide, where the whole basis of the industrial economy in fossil fuels is at issue” (1997, p. 39).

For the most part current environmental movements like that headed by Greenpeace and Earth First! are now often thought to have radical, anti-capitalist underpinnings and have been shunned by the public at large. Doyle and McEachern found that “where radical change has been voiced there has been a heavy emphasis on direct, sometimes militant, piecemeal actions” (1998, p. 69). *Silent Spring* is still an important work, particularly in the realm of social nonfiction, but outside of the

environmental movement has been largely forgotten in the public sphere. Although many subsequent books and documentaries on environmentalism have been written by academicians and policymakers, their veracity is often under suspicion. This uncertainty is encouraged by industry lobbyists, who publish work questioning the danger of global warming and whose studies are picked up by the media as an opposing viewpoint to current science. Jerry Williams, for example, noted that "powerful social actors like those mentioned earlier might attempt to reframe the consequences of environmental problems as beneficial, unimportant, or amenable to remediation at a future time when technology is more advanced and better able to deal with the problem. The efforts of industry-sponsored environmental groups, like the Western Fuels Association (1997), to frame increasing levels of carbon dioxide as beneficial to humans and all living things provides evidence of this process" (2001, p. 25). Scientists all over the globe, meanwhile, have all but unanimously agreed that global warming is a concern, and that current industry practices need to be changed. While environmentalist groups were successful in enacting initial change in the 1960s, concern over oil spills and endangered rain forests have proven to be ephemeral.

Global warming coverage in mainstream media

Most media scholars that focus on environmental coverage agree that the scientific community alone is not capable of bringing global warming into the public sphere, let alone present it as cause for action. As early as World War II, scientists had

voiced concern about the influence of human activities on the climate. But “influences by human beings were considered insignificant when compared with greater natural forces...western society’s attention was fixed on World War II and scientific enterprise was overwhelmingly fixed on wartime issues” (Corfee-Morlot, Maslin & Burgess, 2007). Today studies on global warming, such as that released by the IPCC, have to compete with issues like the war on terrorism, the economy, and healthcare concerns.

Scientists, most notably those from the IPCC, have nonetheless been moderately successful at bringing the global warming problem to policymakers and inter-governmental organizations. Dr. R. K. Pachauri, chairman of the IPCC, has given many speeches to U.N. entities and the World Meteorological Organization, among others. In 2005, during a conference of the WMO, Dr. Pachauri noted, “The severity of the adverse impacts will be larger for greater cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases and associated changes in climate. There are many opportunities, including technological options, to reduce near-term emissions...Greater and more rapid climate change would pose greater challenges for adaptation and carry with it greater risks of damages than would lesser levels and slower rates of change” (IPCC). This is a message very similar to that of *An Inconvenient Truth*, but the audience and presentation remained within academia, remote to the public.

Because global warming is a complex, hard-science topic, journalists often couch scientific information on global warming in a narrative, using symbols or

powerful concurrent events to emphasize the importance of the issue. “The media apply a number of standard principles, procedures and routines, both to the initial selection of events that will become ‘news’ and to ‘encode the source material...the producers have a strong sense of their putative audience, and how the story should be told” (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). Television stories on the environment are often coupled with footage of traffic jams, factories belching smoke, or oil-sticky seabirds. But these symbols and narratives do little to connect the issue with the public. Even the powerful symbol of Earth’s image, a fragile blue ball floating alone in a void, was not enough to capture the immediacy of the problem of global warming:

Problems like ozone depletion or indeed the greenhouse effect seem to lack a material reality. We do not experience them; they are pointed out to us by experts that use high-tech devices such as colorful computer graphics to facilitate our understanding of these global threats. Their message is apocalyptic and their call is for major social change. The latest images of the planet leave little choice: it is choose or lose. (Hajer, 1995, p. 11)

Journalists rarely do anything to bridge this disconnect. “[W]hile scientific understanding of global warming often provides the basis for media claims, there is no clear connection between ‘objective’ scientific reports about global warming and the ability of global warming to compete for media attention”(Williams, 2001). The phenomenon of global warming research in the academic realm has been well

established, and yet it only significantly enters the public sphere when it aligns with common observations about the world around them. Williams also notes that “scientific interpretations of environmental-social problems such as global warming are quite different from common sense interpretations because each is based upon different systems of relevance and stocks of knowledge” (2001). Because the data collected by the scientific community is often complex, due in part to their stocks of knowledge, non-scientists are often confused by the technical terms and methodology. “[I]t is a limited group of experts who define the key problems, who assess the urgency of one problem vis-à-vis other possible problems, and who implicitly often conceptualize the solutions to the problems they put forward. The layman, depending on sensory perception and everyday experience, is totally disqualified” (Hajer, 1995, p. 10).

Corporate and political influences

The cause of journalism’s historical indifference to environmental issues is another matter of debate. Some researchers maintain that it is due to the consolidation of the media into large corporate amalgams that dictate information on the environment according to their private interests. The majority of U.S. media outlets -- including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, books and movies -- are controlled by less than 20 huge corporations (Beder, 2002, p. 222). Carvalho and Burgess (2005) found that global warming would and has been subjected to filters placed upon the

press by its corporate owners: “Our critical discourse analysis reveals that political actors have played by far the most powerful and effective role in shaping climate change in the public sphere over the last 20 years, but their framings have always been mediated through each newspaper’s preferred ideological view.”

Carvalho and Burgess also note Boykoff and Boykoff’s (2004) findings of news analysis, which indicated “the distortion of scientific knowledge in the U.S prestige press [was] due to the journalistic norm of ‘balance.’” That is, global warming in the news has historically been seen as an opinion, a view, rather than factual information. As a result, counter-studies that attempt to disprove global warming have fought to obtain equal play in the press, even though many of them are funded by corporations who thrive on environmentally unsafe practices. Many journalists who seem objective report global warming as more of an opinion or agenda rather than as a scientific fact; they juxtapose scientists’ studies with those sponsored by pro-industry institutions, and bolster this with non-objective commentary from experts they employ to support their stance. “The U.S. EPA is sometimes used as an environmental source in one story and as an anti-environmentalist source in another...Balance does not guarantee neutrality even when sources are treated fairly, since the choice of balancing sources can be distorted” (Beder, 2002, p. 203).

In addition, many scholars argue the ideal public sphere has been marred by the presses’ abuse of its power. “The power of the media is not just through its editorial

line but also in covering some issues rather than others, some views but not others” (Beder, 2002, p. 223). Cultural industries such as those of film and television, as well as the rise of state capitalism and powerful corporations, have marred the political discourse of the public sphere and muddied the creation of independent public opinion (Habermas, 1962; Kellner, 2006). Habermas argues that a “refeudalization” of the public sphere began in the 19th century, “as powerful corporations came to control and manipulate the media and the state...As the public sphere declined, citizens became consumers, dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and private concerns than to the common good and democratic participation” (Kellner, 2006).

This refeudalization has been recognized, to some extent, by the people themselves. Public opinion surveys, year after year, indicate that trust in the media is perennially low (Harris, 2005; Gallup, 2008). Moreover, scholars like Robert Putnam, whose seminal work *Bowling Alone* lamented the decline of “social capital,” have little faith in the public’s ability to sustain a democratic society. The arenas that first appeared in the 18th century – salons, coffee houses, town hall meetings – have become far less popular, and generators of social capital and trust, like mass-membership organizations and leisure groups, have a small fraction of the deep participation so integral to a healthy public sphere (Putnam, 1995). These factors contribute to a lack of sustained effort by the public to change their habits.

Other researchers indicate that political actors have a large influence on news coverage of the environment. "As Hilgartner and Bosk point out in their discussion of the public arenas model of social problems, to be discussed later on in detail, competition for social problem status in the limited space provided by the media is central in the process of constructing a social problem. In other words, social problem claims must compete for attention with other social problem claims. Because powerful actors can assert control over media sources either directly or financially, this field of competition can often become unbalanced in favor of claims made by powerful actors" (1988, p. 23). These powerful actors are often both tied with industry and policy, and have considerable effect on environmental discourse because of their interest in maintaining current practices.

For example, the green movement has usually been associated with anti-capitalist, "liberal" political movements. Organizations like Greenpeace perpetuate this belief with their anti-industrial practices, particularly the sinking of oil tankers and perennial endorsement of liberal political leaders. Obfuscation of the dangers of global warming, moreover, while often published by far more pro-capitalist sources, are posed in opposition to the environmentalists. This discourse, therefore, was that of a dichotomy: the public either had to be for capitalism or for the environment (Williams, 2001). Sharon Beder's view on the subject is that politicians, faced with this dichotomy, became reluctant to relegate the media in the public interest; mindful of the

media's power on their candidacies, they allowed environmental coverage to continue in its current state (2002).

To further complicate matters, the public sphere as centered around the issue of global warming is not in consensus with itself when presented with this information. "Social research in the US also suggests the existence of different 'interpretive' communities. These communities have implications for the debate about how severe and immediate the problem of climate change is and what should be done about it (Leiserowitz, 2005, 2006b). Interpretive communities range from 'naysayers' to 'alarmists' but even for those people who believe climate change is real, its risks are largely perceived as distant in both space and time" (Corfee-Morlot, Maslin & Burgess, 2007). The stocks of knowledge for each community in the debate inform the immediacy of the problem, but until *An Inconvenient Truth* it was not compelling enough to spur significant action. Williams concluded that "we must distinguish between two very different ways of understanding global warming: scientific understanding and common sense understanding as held in everyday life" (2001, p. 1). John Porritt noted that "what people feel about the environment, however ill-informed, ambivalent or inconsistent it may be, is very often a 'crystallization' of much deeper feelings of the kind of society they find themselves living in" (1997, p. 63). The inundation of information, paired with the anxieties of living in a modern post-

industrial society, helped create a restless atmosphere, tired of being passive consumers of conflicting information.

Gore, with *An Inconvenient Truth*, is creating his own frames and meanings by publishing it in a book rather than using print or television media. Gore consciously chose to bypass the news media in the production of his message, having learned firsthand how the news industry filters its information. He was able to transcend the gap between scientific and common knowledge by effectively communicating global warming data while at the same time using language that made sense to the average reader. According to Corfee-Merlot, Maslin and Burgess, “several authors now argue that to understand and better advance responses to global environmental change problems, it is necessary to find a middle ground that combines interpretive, constructivist views with the power of scientific discovery” (2007). This is no small task: “Hard decision-making on global environmental problems requires an almost unprecedented degree of trust in experts and in our political elites at the same time as this trust is continually undermined by scientific controversies and political indecision” (Hajer, 1995, p. 11). The significance of *An Inconvenient Truth* had been, in other words, to allow the public to reconstruct the former meaning of global warming as a distant threat, presented by the inconsistent news media, into an immediate cause. Gore’s experience, expertise and credibility had already been established in the public

sphere to the point where his presentation on global warming surmounted opposing arguments.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Global warming as an inconvenient truth

Global warming is a phenomenon also known as climate change (the rhetorical differences in these two terms will be discussed in the analysis). It is the increased global temperature that results from carbon emissions into the Earth's atmosphere. "The problem that we now face is that the atmosphere is being filled by huge quantities of human-caused carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. This traps a lot of the infrared radiation that would otherwise escape" (Gore, 2006). While some carbon emissions naturally occur, the drastic increase in carbon levels is all but certainly a result of current human consumption practices. This includes current industry practices of creating toxic waste, the use of aerosols and other ozone-depleting chemicals, and the burning of fossil fuels for vehicles and other commercial uses (Gore 2006, IPCC 2006).

While some controversy remains over whether global warming will present a problem, the vast majority of the scientific community agrees that it exists and could be potentially harmful. "Most scientists concur that global warming is linked to human activity and that it will present potential problems for the planet and all living things" (Brown, 1999, p. 1440; Harper, 1995, p. 118; IPCC, 1995). The International Panel on Climate Change, an independent organization commissioned to monitor the phenomenon, concluded in 2007 that it was at least 90 percent certain that human

emissions of greenhouse gases rather than natural variations are warming the planet's surface (Black, 2007). *An Inconvenient Truth* painstakingly details most of the major conclusive studies on the subject, from Roger Revelle's measurements of CO₂ in Hawaii to Lonnie Thompson's studies on receding glaciers. Dr. Thompson and Michael Mann's graph of CO₂ and temperatures, the famous "hockey stick" graph, is presented, juxtaposed with pictures of melting mountain snows and disappearing pieces of Antarctica. According to Gore, "there is not a single part of this graph – no fact, date, or number – that is controversial to anyone in any way or in dispute by anybody" (2006, p. 67).

Scientists had long hoped to get their warnings about global warming out to the "mainstream" American community, but for the last few decades, up until the publication of *An Inconvenient Truth*, they had managed to convince only a few groups of people that global warming was a major issue. Even though the problem had been taken seriously internationally, particularly in the U.K. and other European countries, the United States public at large was not consistently concerned with global warming. This particular community, the United States public at large, will be referred to as the public sphere. The language used by Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* will be analyzed in depth further on, but to what effect rhetorical devices are being used needs to be discussed. Gore's work was published to a space already crowded by hundreds of

articles, books, debates and other manifestations of discourse on global warming, a space that has existed in its modern form for over 30 years.

The media, of which *An Inconvenient Truth* is a part, are the primary informers of the public sphere. The media refers to not only traditional press and television news but also to non-news television shows, films, radio talk shows, Internet forums and blogs, and other sources of information. How the media interact with the public sphere is crucial to this investigation, as this interaction is thought to generate discourse around a specific issue such as global warming. How the public reacts to news, and how this news is disseminated and consumed in the public sphere, is a matter of debate but again, relevant theories will be discussed.

Finally, the intersection of politics, the media and science will be presented as a matter of interest. After all, Al Gore was a veteran politician when he created his slideshow. While he had always been passionate about the environmental cause, and had even published a previous book on the topic in 1992, Gore was most famous at the time for losing the 2000 presidential election to George W. Bush in a narrowly decided Supreme Court decision. Even though he had been painted in the media as a disconnected, wonkish bore, his post-election persona became decidedly more favorable. He used this public favor and established credibility to edify the public on global warming, his pet cause. The release of *An Inconvenient Truth* established global warming as a scientific fact, not an opinion – a status environmental scientists had been

trying to reach for decades. To this end, this section will explore news as spectacle and discourse, and the disconnect between the scientific community and the public.

What is the public sphere?

The concept of the public sphere is crucial in examining the success of *An Inconvenient Truth*. It was not only in the media that *An Inconvenient Truth* became influential, after all; its real power lies in the grassroots organizations, public opinion, and attitudes it helped form. In its modern form, the public sphere was defined by Jurgen Habermas as a conceptual space where the public (but in effect, to Habermas, an intellectual, masculine elite portion of the public) generated discourse and opinion on the politics of its nation. While this definition has been widely critiqued, most notably by Habermas himself in 1992, the generalized concept of the public sphere as the source of public discourse and information is useful for the purposes of this paper. Gerard Hauser's alternate definition of the public sphere, however, is far more relevant and will be heavily relied upon.

Jurgen Habermas is widely credited for creating and exploring the concept of the public sphere. He defined the public sphere as a conceptual, virtual community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space. In its ideal form, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (1962, p.176). In his 1962 work on the subject, Habermas traces the history of the public sphere, beginning with the Enlightenment era

of the 17th and 18th centuries. Previously, Western peoples were ruled by a monarch, and public opinion and discourse were, according to Habermas, of little consequence to politics. The sphere was limited to the court, and subjects had very little say in national politics. It was only in the 18th century, a period of revolution and major advances in science and Western exploration, that the public sphere enlarged. According to Habermas, the ideal public sphere would be limited to serious, academic topics that would properly inform the people and dictate opinions and attitudes. This space is a necessary component of a functioning democracy, as the discourse generated in the public sphere serves to aid the true representation of the people's needs and interests.

Critics have pointed out that this bourgeois conception of the public sphere, which Habermas effectively restricted to the intellectual elite, is too limiting to serve as the impetus for true democracy. McKee (2005) argues that spectacle and "pop" culture are just as important to the public sphere as academic, serious work. Even during the Enlightenment, considered by Habermas to be the apex of the public sphere, "lower" forms of media such as plays, pulp novels and pamphlets flourished and were widely available. Because spectacle and popular culture are so integral to public life, McKee argues, they should be also be considered as indications of public opinion and attitudes. Even though Habermas stresses the importance of connecting a person's immediate social environment ("lifeworld") with the public sphere, he refuses to acknowledge the

popular culture of this social environment as part of it (1992). This, paradoxically, creates the very disconnect between the people and the larger political system Habermas wished to avoid.

Taking cues from numerous postmodern critiques of Habermas, Gerard Hauser's research on the public sphere is far more relevant to this paper. In *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*, Hauser argues that a public sphere is stimulated when common voices coalesce around a certain cause (1999). It is "a nested domain of particularized arenas or multiple spheres populated by participants who, by adherence to standards of reasonableness reflected in the vernacular language of conversational communication, discover their interests, where they converge or differ, and how their differences might be accommodated" (Hauser, 1999, p. 56). Because a major critique of the traditional public sphere was that it was not truly inclusive of all people, Hauser proposed that instead many spheres were generated when dialogue was centered around a particular issue. This includes "street rhetoric," the vernacular used to describe the cause, as well as more formal rhetorical acts. "The voices featured are those of leaders who present formal public arguments. Publics, however, also make their concerns known through rhetorical engagements among their members, as witnessed in the Habermas-Michnik exchange. Because portions of these exchanges and the language employed are frequently disseminated by

mass media, knowledgeable participation transcends local boundaries" (Hauser, 1999, p.36).

These spheres often interlap, and are enlarged and diminished by many competing factors, but can include (or exclude) any sect of the public at once. Maarten Hajer, moreover, concurs with the general thrust of Hauser's theory but narrows the scope: "[Environmental discourse] is a struggle between various unconventional political coalitions...these so-called discourse coalitions somehow develop and sustain a particular discourse, a particular way of talking and thinking about environmental politics" (1995, p. 13). The external events and current rhetoric on the topic of global warming, coupled with Al Gore as the claims-maker, the center of this new political coalition, resonated with a particularly large public sphere because *An Inconvenient Truth* was an accessible work with a global message. Therefore the public sphere, comprised of many interlocking, messy Venn diagrams, will specifically focus on those that are concerned about global warming. This audience is, by nature, amorphous, and comprised of people who care about the issue to varying degrees. What will be studied is the effect *An Inconvenient Truth* had on this sphere: how and why it enlarged, how portions of it coalesced to take action on the subject, and how it generated discourse that resulted in political action.

Media and the public sphere

The media, as previously defined, are the information source of the public sphere. The media is how the public obtains information about the world around them, and consequently shapes their attitudes and opinions. While the Internet has certainly provided a text-based, interactive outlet for the public to debate and even disprove information, many media theorists still believe traditional media forms still have a stronghold on informational sources and information synthesis and thus the interaction between media and the public sphere is still largely top-down. The media dispenses the information, and the public sphere uses it to shape discourse and opinion. As Hauser notes, "Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and now the Internet substitute for reflective deliberation in which average people play a part. Often these substitutions are staged political exchanges that displace traditional rhetorical processes for forming public opinion and instilling a sense of community" (1999, p. 26).

Habermas emphasized the importance of the media in disseminating information and generating discourse within the public sphere. Media, in the Habermasian sense, is primarily composed of the press, although it can be adjusted to fit other modern media sources as well. But the public sphere itself was generated primarily through dialogue, acts of speech, debate and discussion in public areas and grassroots movements (1962; Knowles, 2008). Somewhat contrary to his Marxist,

“strong democracy” influences, Habermas favors a press whose owner displays strong bias. “When owners use newspapers to express their personal viewpoints, then they have real 'conviction'” (Habermas, 1989, p. 183). Habermas thinks that when the media fail to present the viewpoints of their owners there is a less vibrant public sphere: the media tend to become more homogenous, ending up at a middle ground that audiences are generally happy with, and fewer points of view are given public coverage.” (McKee, 2005, p.79) Overt manipulation of the public with the power, however, can limit argument. Propaganda and other abuses of power reduce arguments to “symbols to which again one cannot respond by arguing but only identifying with them” (Habermas, 1962, p. 178; Knowles, 2008).

Habermas’ views, although still the basis for much scholarship in media studies, once again favor a more passive view of media consumers. Carvalho and Burgess reject this school of thought in favor of a “circuit of culture” model, expanding upon the cultural-political perspective of the media, which maintains that

Traditional print and broadcast media, embracing new information and communication technologies, play a central cultural role in modernity through the *selective* provision of social knowledge, including that of science and technology; attempts to forge *consensus* about the natural order of events and actions, including risk, through continual redefinitions of reality; and a continuing *struggle for legitimacy* between differentially empowered groups

through discursive means (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; see also Hall, 1977, 1980)

This theory is closely related to that of semoticians like Foucault, who argued that meanings were generated and regenerated in different frames to enhance layers of understanding in a frame, phrase, or symbol. In analyzing British newspaper articles on global warming from 1985 to 2003, Carvalho and Burgess found that “there is evidence of social learning as actors build on their experiences in relation to climate change and policy making” (2005).

Because Gore’s already unconventional book began as a slideshow, a popular form not typically of the traditional press, the Habermasian view of the media, again, does not quite fit. McKee’s arguments that popular culture is an integral part of the public sphere indicate a more appropriate form of the media as it pertains to the public sphere. While the press and academia are obviously still crucial components of public media, film, not-news television programs, radio, and Internet forums are to be equally considered. Moreover, even though *An Inconvenient Truth* was based in academia it was disseminated in pop culture. As an award-winning documentary and widely available book, *An Inconvenient Truth* transcended its scientific origins and became accessible to the public sphere. This, as will be shown later on, is a large part of its success.

News cycles and the environment

In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore relies on familiar terms and past discourse generated, in large part, by previous news cycles in which the environment was a prominent issue. This began in recent memory with the first image of the planet Earth in 1968, which Gore says was the impetus for the modern environmental movement. Other cycles were centered on the phenomenon of acid rain, discovery of holes in the ozone layer, and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. While global warming has certainly had varying coverage in the media over the last 50 years, when and why these cycles occur is a matter of debate.

Anthony Downs, in 1972, proposed the "natural decline" model to explain the nature of news cycles. "[T]he model suggests that social problems move through a five-stage cycle: the pre-problem stage, the alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm stage, a realization of the cost of progress stage, a gradual decline in public interest stage, and a post-problem stage where the problem is replaced as the center of public concern by a new problem (Dunlap 1992, p. 90). John Corbitt and others, who analyzed news cycles of environmental coverage in the British press, argue that the length of the cycles is stretched, and can last longer than originally thought. "The first thing to be said is that it is astonishing that the environment movement has weathered the last eighteen years so well. [It has] moved out of the fringes to somewhere near the centre of the political stage...both nationally and internationally, the environment

movement has made real and sustained progress in an ideologically hostile context” (1997, p. 62). But most natural history model theorists agree that cycles do occur in the news, and that these cycles do not normally have a sustained, long-lasting impact on the public sphere.

Perhaps the social arenas model, or Downs’ “natural decline” model (1972), could be applied to this particular era. It is possible that the stir Gore caused with his work is in natural decline, as occurred with previous environmental awareness campaigns. Two years after its publication in 2006, the book is still in the public mind as a seminal and influential work. Already declining media interest in the environment indicates that this, too, will pass. But Downs’ model, as well as other natural history models, has been criticized as solely portraying the public as a consumer with a short attention span, a passive recipient of news; the public as co-shapers of meaning in information consumption is ignored. Hansen argues that this model “gloss[es] over the interactive nature of meaning construction among and between institutions in society” (1991, p. 447; see also Williams, 2001).

Williams (2001), in *The Rise and Decline of Public Interest in Global Warming*, argues that the prominence of global warming in the media is often concurrent with external events that support its existence. He cites Hilgartner and Bosk’s (1988) concept of public arenas as a model of social problems; social problems, according to this model, are collective definitions recognized as such through acts of

social construction (p. 37). The public arenas model "[In the public arenas model's] application to global warming other competitive factors should be considered because global warming is an immensely complex social-environmental problem. These additional factors include: real world events such as climactic extremes, the economic cost of remediation, the complexity of the issue, and the viability of proposed solutions" (Williams, 2001, p. 37). Hilgartner and Bosk's model synthesizes the aspects of the public arena as they pertain to the publishing of *An Inconvenient Truth*. The dramatic potential of global warming was seen in Gore's alarming graphics and charts of sea levels that would put Manhattan and Miami under water, as well as turn farmland into dust, within 50 years is certainly a dramatic consequence of current environmental attitudes. And yet, the warnings of global warming were nothing new, as they had emerged in previous cycles for decades.

Overlapping with Hauser's issue-based public spheres theory, Williams' discussion of the public arenas model suggests that the discourse and rhetoric surrounding a particular issue are influenced by public dialogue as much as the messages generated by the mass media. This dialogue, moreover, is not wholly generated by the media:

All social problems are first articulated by 'claims-makers,' who attempt to define reality in a particular way in relation to others who are attempting to do the same. Competition is, therefore, central to the public arenas model and

begins in this first stage when definitions of the problem are selected...All social problems in the public arenas compete according to five 'principles of selection': dramatic potential of the potential problem, preexisting culture themes or preoccupations, political biases, carrying capacity of the public arena, and the institutional rhythm of the specific arena in question (Williams, 2001, p. 37)

This is, in effect, an articulation of the “perfect storm” that enabled *An Inconvenient Truth* to have such a strong impact on the public sphere. Like Hauser’s public sphere theory, Williams’ arguments on the public arenas model suggest that a series of discourse-generating events occur around a specific issue at once. The convergence of all these events create an opportunity for a work like *An Inconvenient Truth*, which coalesced the discourse created around events like Hurricane Katrina and previous environmental crises into a work that resonated with the public.

Environmental discourse and social movements

The modern environmental discourse has been shaped by and viewed within the context of several schools of thought, all which have some effect on the public sphere’s reaction to and action upon global warming. These discursive movements are all seen within the American public sphere, and all had an effect on the language that was chosen in *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore seemed to take lessons from the aspects of each previous environmental movement that made it less effective to broad audiences. The

discourse Gore helped alter, moreover, is shaped by the rhetoric he uses in the film, which will be critiqued in the analysis. It is important to note that rhetoric “with a notion of discourse” is not limited to words but consist rather “image events” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 17). Image events are rhetorical entities that consist both of words and images placed together strategically in order to promote a message. “Image events are the central mode of public discourse both for conventional electoral politics and for alternative grassroots politics in an era dominated by a commercial televisual electronic public sphere” (DeLuca, 1999).

These image events, and the broader concept of environmental discourse, are important because they help shape the attitudes, opinions, and ultimately actions taken by the public toward a particular issue.

Discursive strategies matter. Today’s environmental issues are discursively created. A leaking oil tanker, for example, is of course a physical event in itself, but then so is an unreported chemical spillage. Calamities only become a political issue if they are constituted as such in environmental discourse, if story-lines are created around them that indicate the significance of the physical events (Hajer, 1995, p. 21).

The way in which a particular environmental crisis is framed, in other words, helps determine its fate in the public sphere. The framing of global warming in *An Inconvenient Truth* is being studied because it helped reshape the discourse and

provided new or powerful image event connections that resulted in more substantial reactions by the public and the press.

But Gore's rhetoric did not enter a vacuum. The environmental public sphere contains a spectrum of varying discursive attitudes towards the natural world. John Dryzek identifies four major strains of environmental discourse that evolved in the 20th century, three of which have substantial following in the United States: environmental problem solving, survivalism, and sustainability. All of these discourses have evolved over the last few decades, and all have shaped public opinion of environmentalism. While different factions still operate within the framework of all of these discourses, not all have been successful in enacting meaningful change. Gore recognized the value of each discourse, and the language each used, and adapted them for a new century, improved ecology studies, and imminent consequences.

The first, environmental problem solving, is perhaps the most successful discourse in the United States. Environmental problem solving takes the current political-economic system as a given entity, but "in need of adjustment to cope with environmental problems, especially via public policy" (Dryzek, 1997, p. 13). It accepts the free market paradigm, but argues that more regulation is needed within industry to be more environmentally responsible. The problem with this discourse, as it is played out, is that the free market approach is adamant about constant loosening of governmental regulations rather than the imposing of them. Because its solutions

consist mainly of governmental regulation, a political environment hostile to regulation would render its solutions moot. Nonetheless, environmental problem solving is still popular because it does not pose a serious threat to capitalist interests. After all, “environmental discourse begins in industrial society, and so has to position itself in the context of the long-dominant discourse of industrial society, which we can call industrialism” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 12).

The discourse most commonly associated with the environmental movement is survivalism. Survivalism was popularized in the 1970s and has its roots in radical political and social groups. It “seeks a wholesale redistribution of power within the industrial political economy, and a wholesale reorientation away from perpetual economic growth” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 14). Survivalists tend to take a gloomy view of the future of the planet, warning that we must learn to adapt to a radically different lifestyle than the one we live today. Offshoots of traditional survivalist discourse involve that of leftist green movements like Greenpeace. But unlike its contemporary social movements, which relied on both images and powerful words, “radical environmental groups rely almost solely on image events to create social movement” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 18). The gripping images of slaughtered animals or oil spills put forth by PETA or Greenpeace, for example, are far more well-known in the public sphere than speeches made by the groups’ leaders and tend to shape the public’s view of environmentalism as a whole. “Radical environmental groups are operating in what

can be described as a postmodern social field. The characteristics of such a field offer significant advantages to radical environmental groups, not the least of which is the distrust of grand narratives like progress and the valorization of the local” (Deluca, 1999, p. 53). These Marxist undertones of overthrowing oppressive capitalist entities in favor of social justice and the state also contribute to a generally negative view of environmentalists within the American public sphere (Doyle & McEachern, 1998).

In opposition to survivalism is the Promethean or industrialist approach, which still has a strong hold on particularly the American conservative rhetoric of today. Prometheans tend to view the environment as an unlimited resource (Dryzek, 1997; Buell, 1996). This discourse is optimistic, confident that the ingenuity of humankind, coupled with the demand and supply structure of the free market, will find new technologies and resources when current supplies seem limited. “[Economist Julian] Simon claims that virtually all responsible scientific analysts now agree that population and economic growth will not cause resource depletion. Therefore, unfettered markets, expanding to fill the needs created, pose no environmental threat” (Buell, 1996). The aim of neoclassicists is “to turn the environment into a commodity which can be analyzed just like other commodities” (Jacobs, in Redclift & Benton, 1994, p. 69). The problem with this is that, unlike other commodities, the environment is usually used free of charge and is thus degraded and overused. This discrepancy is not often recognized by the neoclassicists, because “if environment is not like other commodities

and cannot be analyzed in the same way, economists will clearly have a much smaller role in advising decision-makers on economic policy” (Jacobs, p. 70). The Promethean myth, moreover, as a fundamentally optimistic worldview, does not concern itself with clear approaches to environmental problems; it does not “provide a way out of the dilemmas they imperfectly illuminate. [It has] little clear sense of the public’s role and give[s] little guidance as to what to do in the world of existing corporate giants locked in competition for success and survival” (Buell & DeLuca, 1996, p. 25).

Agency to change the environmental status quo in the three discourses remains problematic. Within the environmental problem solving discourse there tends to be an over-reliance on “the experts” to solve potential problems with a scientific consensus. In the survivalist discourse it is “elites who have agency, the capacity to act... ‘populations,’ be they national, global, or class-specific, have no agency; they are only acted upon, as aggregates to be monitored through statistics and controlled by government policy” (Dryzek, 1997). The masses, as consuming resources and causing overpopulation, are problems to be controlled. In Promethean discourse, agency is for everyone: “not as political actors but as economic actors. People going about their ordinary business, pursuing their selfish interests, will together ensure a bright environmental future” (Dryzek, 1997, p. 51). The masses are celebrated, but resources are seen as unlimited; production, then, is the activity through which they achieve agency; it echoes Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” of the market and American

exceptionalism. Dryzek, importantly, says that while “Promethean discourse resonates with the interests of both capitalist market zealots and Christian conservatives, not to mention miners, loggers, and ranchers accustomed to subsidized access to resources...it is noteworthy that large corporations that might be expected to benefit from broad dissemination of a Promethean view tend to prefer discourses with at least a veneer of environmental concern” (1999, p. 57).

Starting in the 1980s, some groups within the environmental public sphere started shifting towards sustainability movements, in which ordinary citizens and elites could work together to make current industrialist practices more Earth-friendly. As a pushback to this shift, business interests and politicians began calling for certainty in the scientific community. Although an overwhelming majority of scientists in the '80s and '90s agreed that global warming was an extant, human-caused phenomenon, the small percentage of scientists in doubt were enough for these interests to uphold the status quo. “The insistence on certainty and proof for situations characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, multiple time lags and out-of-sync timeframes is central to much of the political complacency about environmental problems: nothing is done until the connection is proved. More research, rather than action, tends to be the response from business and politicians” (Adam, 1994, p. 101).

This insistence on absolute scientific consensus, as I will show, was used as a counterargument to *An Inconvenient Truth* with some success. The film was not

powerful enough on its own to inspire action from all corners, and met with some resistance. But the response from industry and certain politicians that was incurred as a result of the film's release speaks to its rhetorical power within the environmental public sphere. Gore borrowed from the survivalists with much of his language, saying that the Earth could indeed face dire consequences if we did not take immediate action. But agency, Gore stressed, was not in the hands of the elites or experts, as survivalism indicates, but with the people – a more optimistic, appealing, and Promethean concept. The scientific consensus, he stressed, was there. The way Gore changed the environmental discourse was to merge the competing discursive arguments into one that promoted collective change and American exceptionalism.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Rhetorical criticism

Discourse, as was shown, is how social movements like environmentalism are sustained or abandoned within the public sphere. “Discourses enable stories to be told...the impact of a discourse can often be felt in the policies of governments or intergovernmental bodies, and in institutional structure” (Dryzek, 1997). For example, the first wave of environmentalism in the late 1960s and 1970s reflected the environmental problem solving discourse, which maintained that all industry needed was more government regulation to make it more environmentally responsible. The so-called “deregulation” era, in which policymakers loosened environmental standards and governmental oversight of industries, began with the Carter administration and continued on through the second Bush administration. Three decades of pro-industry legislation have made the environmental problem solving discourse increasingly unpalatable to policymakers. Pro-industrialist politicians, as well as industry leaders and the media outlets they own, modified the environmental discourse so that people who warned of global warming and other causes became radical leftists in the eyes of the public, drawing upon the survivalist discourse of the 1970s.

Hauser defines rhetoric as “the management of symbols in order to coordinate social action...[It] is discourse by design” (1986, p. 23). Rhetoric is used in communication in order to tell us what reality is. “Reality is not fixed but changes

according to the symbols we use to talk about it. What we count as real or as knowledge about the world depends on how we choose to label and talk about things” (Foss, 2004). In the instance of environmentalism, rhetors have described global warming as a crisis, propaganda by the liberal media, a moral imperative, or an unconfirmed phenomenon. The rhetoric used by these actors is what generates communication and therefore discourse about a particular topic.

Hauser also notes that rhetoric often “evokes a self,” with the arguments presented in such a way that “force the individual to re-examine assumptions and the self they define... Critical inspection of issues, in other words, can be so profound in its consequences that it leads the person to discover a self” (1997, 52). As an example of this, Hauser recalls the rhetoric of the ‘60s and ‘70s, in which activist groups inspired women, African Americans, and environmentally unaware people to change their attitudes and improve living conditions for their fellow citizens. *An Inconvenient Truth*, in that vein, is designed to force its audience to question the nature of global warming as spoken about by policymakers, and to change the self into an actor rather than as a passive element.

In order to determine the elements of *An Inconvenient Truth* that had an effect on the public sphere, I will study the work using rhetorical criticism. This method is designed to show how language is used to persuade or convince an audience to change an opinion or act on an issue. Kenneth Burke defines rhetoric as “the use of words by

human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (Foss, 2004, p. 69). Foss specifies this definition, saying that “rhetoric involves symbols created and used by humans... Every symbolic choice we make results in seeing the world in one way rather than another” (2004, p. 5). *An Inconvenient Truth* is indisputably a rhetorical work, as Gore uses language and symbols to convince his audience that global warming is manmade, getting worse, and requires lifestyle change. The rhetorical criticism approach, then, studies the ways in which Gore’s rhetoric changed the environmental discourse.

Narrative rhetorical criticism

Rhetorical criticism as a method is quite broad, and for the purposes of this study it is necessary to focus the analysis within narrative rhetorical criticism, a subset of the general method. As a film with a discernible plot, *An Inconvenient Truth* contains a narrative, a story about global warming. This is not incidental. “Narratives organize the stimuli of our experience so that we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions of our lives” (Foss, 2004, p. 33). “A narrative is scripted. It tells a particular tale in which the world is represented in one way rather than another” (Hauser, 1986). The narrative construct transmits a particular framework to the audience, with plausible storylines and a way of representing the world. In oral traditions, “narratives told stories that depicted good an evil in conflict, exemplified a challenge to virtue, or illustrated a common problem. Through the resolution of these

issues, narrative established paradigms for acting” (Hauser, 1986, p. 16). While Hauser was referring to the ancient Grecian tradition, this is certainly still true today. In Gore’s documentary there is a conflict, the common problem of global warming set up within a framework that challenges the audience to act.

Beyond having a basic organizing structure, a narrative must also include a time order and causal relationships, so that events earlier in the story somehow cause events later on. *An Inconvenient Truth*, as a documentary, is focused on one particular causal relationship – global warming is human-caused – and actually involves several time orders within its main framework. The thrust of Gore’s argument forms the main causal relationship in the film, but the temporal orders seen in the film are used very effectively, and will be discussed at length during the analysis.

“Narratives also play a critical role in decision making and policy making in our institutional lives...Narratives induce us to make certain decisions in the context of these institutions and also help us justify those decisions” (Foss, 2004, p. 333). In this sense, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a narrative that compels the audience to decide whether or not they think global warming should be at the forefront of policymaking, and provides numerous examples of why they should find the problem pressing. It is clear, then, that *An Inconvenient Truth* is an artifact with a narrative, and so narrative rhetorical criticism is an appropriate tool for analysis.

The focus of narrative rhetorical criticism, as opposed to other forms of the method, is to analyze ways in which the artifact tells a story in order to persuade its audience. My analysis is twofold, with the structure of the analysis closely following Sonya Foss's framework for narrative rhetorical criticism. It begins with an in-depth description of the narrative elements of the film and then delves into Aristotle's rhetorical elements of ethos, logos and pathos. The narrative elements will pay particular attention to Gore as the narrator and the temporal threads that are intertwined throughout the movie, as these elements are used in a way that is especially effective. It then goes into an analysis of ethos, logos, and pathos within the film's narrative. Throughout this critical analysis I will mention the specific symbols and metaphors used throughout the film to show how Gore's work follows the definition of rhetoric. I will then modify Foss slightly by adding several other rhetorical dimensions that I find particularly pertinent when studying the efficacy of Gore's film.

The audience

The target of this rhetoric is known as the audience. The audience is not always intended by the rhetor to be anyone who will listen; on the contrary, there is often a specific target, such as politicians, the media, or environmental groups, to which the language is tailored. "[R]hetoric is addressed communication, [that] seeks a specifiable response from the audience...[Bitzer] says, 'properly speaking, a rhetorical audience

consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Hauser, 1986). This goes back to the concept of the public sphere, which consists of overlapping circles of people who, together, generate discourse around a certain topic.

There are several intended audiences for *An Inconvenient Truth*. The ostensible audience consists of those people who watched the slideshow presentation or who are watching the film itself; that is, anyone who was interested in Gore’s message about global warming. Within this ostensible audience is the intended audience, of people who are both convinced of the global warming crisis either before or after the film, and who have the means to enact change. These included concerned higher-SES citizens (who tend to have networks of people active in their community), journalists, policymakers, and those in business or advocacy groups. These different groups of people comprise what Hajer calls the “discourse coalition,” and are responsible for absorbing the language and message of Gore’s film and disseminating it elsewhere. For purposes of simplicity, I will use just the term “audience” when the rhetoric used is for both the intended and ostensible audiences, but will specify when the message is specifically geared toward a subset of that audience.

The analysis will indicate that the intended audience is not necessarily people of all backgrounds and political persuasions. The media analysis will in fact show that, to the contrary, many people were not persuaded by what Gore’s presentation. But

their negative reactions also show that Gore's film had an impact on all aspects of the public sphere, and forced even the biggest skeptics to re-evaluate their beliefs and think about the language and metaphor Gore used for the environmentalist cause. *An Inconvenient Truth* was not seen by all as an egalitarian film, despite Gore's best efforts; and as some recent reports indicate, the people who will suffer the most because of global warming remain those for whom basic needs and economic concerns are far more important. The intended audience, then, are those people who can enable change so that all are benefitted.

Ethos, logos and pathos

Aristotle divided the means of persuasion into three main appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos is appeal based on the authority or character of the speaker; logos is appeal based upon logic and reasoning, and pathos is based on emotion. "As the method of communication used by common people to deal collectively with their common problems, rhetorical theory takes into account that in addition to reason, humans are swayed by their emotions, their ethics, their values, their interests, their levels of trust (or distrust)" (Hauser, 1986). Gore's film uses all three rhetorical elements in his narrative for an argument that allowed for broad receptivity from his audience. These three elements will be analyzed to demonstrate how each is presented in such a way that puts the audience in power, makes it in effect a character that is capable of action instead of being merely a passive element watching the seas rise.

Al Gore, as a longtime politician, has long been seen as an authority figure. But unlike some politicians, he did not generate a reputation for excessive corruption, heavy-handed bullying tactics, or fear-mongering. Instead, his image was a wonkish one, erudite and kind of boring but ultimately well-meaning. Gore uses this noncontroversial past to his advantage, and presents his slideshow with a humanity that makes him more accessible to the common people. This image creation and appeal to authority, studied in greater detail later on, form the ethos-based arguments of the film. Ethos, as authority, is described by sociologist Richard Sennett as “a social construct. It exists as an event in social time and space, the product of an interaction” (Hauser, 1986). Throughout *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore’s ethos is established through use of interactive language, appeals of credibility on several dimensions, and anecdotes that establish his extensive knowledge on the topic.

Logos is a simpler rhetorical term. It is the substance of the argument itself. An effective logos-based argument has believable causal relationships supported by credible evidence. Most environmental literature previous to *An Inconvenient Truth* relied primarily on logos to make their case, stuffing their research briefs with complex scientific data and logical conclusions mitigated by errors of margin. The featured artifact also features logos prominently; after all, the problem of global warming is one based in science, and one that needs to be argued effectively as it was not widely agreed upon in the public or the media. What makes *An Inconvenient Truth* successful

where traditional scientific studies were not was the incorporation of pathos into an argument already infused with ethos and logos.

Pathos, the emotional appeal within an argument, is not widely trusted in the Western tradition, even though it has often proved effective. “For many, the fact that a speaker can whip an audience into an emotional frenzy has been a reason for condemning rhetoric” (Hauser, 1986, p. 108). The key, therefore, to an effective use of pathos, especially within a science-based argument, is to base the emotional response on the logic of the argument. “Rather than viewing the emotions as things or as passively received states, a rhetorical perspective view them as interpretations or judgments” (Hauser, 1986). The emotions felt by the audience when they see a stranded polar bear or New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina are appropriate because they are based upon interpretations of the scene as destructive, wasteful, and problematic, not just because it generates an emotional response.

While these three appeals do not directly relate to narrative rhetorical criticism, they are important basic elements to the study of rhetoric as a whole. More importantly, the use of ethos, logos, and pathos are intertwined in Gore’s narrative to make his argument more effective. The problem with much of the environmental discourse and literature he draws upon is that, all too often, they do not incorporate all three elements. *An Inconvenient Truth* does, however, and so it is necessary to study excerpts of the film that use these appeals and make the film an important work.

Chapter 4. Analysis: Rhetorical Criticism

Units of analysis

Adhering to Foss's explanation of narrative rhetorical criticism, which begins by identifying the dimensions of the narrative, I begin by detailing the settings, characters, events, causal relations and other aspects of *An Inconvenient Truth*. The detailed presentation of the film, broken down into these aspects, demonstrate how consciously each aspect of the film was chosen to resonate with the audience and with past environmental literature. From there, I then go into particular rhetorical aspects of the film, such as instances of ethos, logos and pathos and the use of bipartisan rhetoric, that make Gore's argument especially effective.

Within the narrative analysis, I will pay special attention to the presentation of time in *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore incorporates three major timeframes into the film, and uses these to emphasize the immediate need to become more environmentally conscious. Part of what is lacking in previous environmental literature is a sense of concrete time; indefinite, cautious language is used to little effect and less action. Gore and his film producers carefully create an air of urgency throughout the movie while at the same time couching the crisis in the wider scope of human history. In this way, the film expands the problem of global warming beyond politics and petty partisanship, and makes it a crisis for the ages.

But the documentary is complex, and is consciously designed to empower the

intended audience beyond these traditional aspects. I will also analyze the script for the use of framing the global warming issue with bipartisan rhetoric. As Lakoff notes, “framing raises the issue of moral worldviews and overall values and principles, and they in turn raise the question of what values lie behind policy prescriptions” (2006). Because Gore is a well-known Democrat, he has to choose his script carefully to refute audiences that might see him as another liberal pontificating about saving the planet. The fact that the environmental movement is also seen as a “liberal” cause because it calls for business regulation and would have potential economic effects is also seen in the film as an obstacle to getting the urgency of global warming across to the audience, and so Gore spends extra time on the economic argument. Lakoff claims that a progressive worldview, rather than a “liberal” worldview, is one that people resonate with:

What is a progressive worldview? It's simple: You have empathy for others, and you act responsibly on that empathy, being both responsible for yourself and socially responsible as well. Progressives say, "We're all in this together" while conservatives say, " You're on your own." It was running on those progressive values that won the election for the Democrats (2006).

While Gore is actually more moderate than he is portrayed, he uses the positive aspects of the progressive platform – which echo the optimism of the Prometheans – to further a goal that might be seen negatively as “liberal.”

A rhetorical criticism approach, like other methodological tools, has its shortcomings. Because it is focusing solely on one artifact, the analysis does not take into consideration other films, books, current events, or speeches that might also have had an effect on environmental discourse. This is mitigated somewhat by the media analysis that follows the rhetorical criticism, but does not significantly consider other ways in which the discourse might have changed. Furthermore, one could argue that in fact the discourse hasn't changed, that the United States remained within its discursive status quo. I contend these points later on and argue that while the old discourse movements still exist, they were altered somewhat because of *An Inconvenient Truth* and reinvigorated and coalesced the environmental movement.

Analysis: dimensions of the narrative

In order to properly analyze the finer rhetorical aspects of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the basic narrative elements of the film must be looked at. Foss identifies eight narrative elements: setting, characters, narrator, events, temporal relations, causal relations, audience, and theme. All of these aspects are important to my criticism, and so will be described accordingly, but there are two particular aspects, narrator and temporal relations, that I expand upon. These two elements, which also incorporate ethos and logos, are two rhetorical tools used by Gore to establish his authority within the broader global realm, and then to place the audience within the scope of history. These dimensions have not been widely seen in environmental artifacts since *Silent*

Spring, and so they require more attention.

Setting

The primary setting in *An Inconvenient Truth* is the auditorium where Gore is presenting his slideshow. The features of the auditorium vary, depending on where he is, and the audience watching his presentation changes with the venue. But the auditorium becomes very interactive during the course of the movie. This is where he conveyed his message, where he refined it, and where he interacts with the audience. It is also where he tells of his various trips around the globe, particularly at the poles, to see the already evident effects of global warming.

The secondary settings in the film are the hotel rooms, offices, cars and airplanes where Gore created the slideshow. While these scenes do not occur with great frequency and are actually a variety of different places, these various settings are designed to show a more personal side to Gore. It is during these scenes that Gore's personal voice enters; he is talking not to the people in the auditorium, but to the film audience. The first of these scenes, for example, is in Gore's office, where he's on his laptop editing the slideshow. "I've been trying to tell this story for a long time and I feel as if I've failed to get the message across," his voiceover says. Even though the actual location of these secondary settings is rarely the same, the scenes serve a cohesive purpose. Like the auditorium, these travel scenes are not meant to be static;

they are meant to convey the dissemination of a message to a wide variety of places.

Characters

Gore can be seen as both the main character and the narrator in *An Inconvenient Truth*. A major angle of the movie is Gore's personal journey, both physically around the world giving his slideshow and the biographical events that led him to make global warming a primary cause in his life. Gore is a round character in this film. He becomes more than a politician or person of influence; he is seen more as a human being. He is a student, a father, a brother, a son. Events like his son almost getting killed in a car accident or his sister dying of lung cancer could happen to anybody, and so Gore as a character is more like an everyman than one of the elites. This, of course, makes spreading the message of global warming something that anyone, not just Gore, is able to do if given the right information.

This everyman/authority duality exhibited by Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* also gives him the authority to be the narrator. He demonstrates throughout the film how he learned from people more knowledgeable than he about earth science and global warming, and partners this with his political and personal experience to become a reliable, relatable authority figure to a wide variety of audiences. Like the audience, Gore was once the student. "I want to tell you a story about two teachers I had," he says in the beginning of the film, "one that I did not like that much, the other who was

a real hero to me.” The first teacher was an illustration of those who refuse to question conventional wisdom in the face of overwhelming evidence; the other teacher was the first of many experts that made Gore an authority on global warming.

To some extent, one could even view the Earth or the environment itself as a main character; it is certainly the obvious subject of the film. In its long history, the Earth does go through changes and now faces a problem that did not exist before, but it is a passive if central character. The only way its problem within the narrative can be solved is through the audience, by way of Gore. It is not a proper character in the traditional sense of the term, but documentaries tend to focus on a particular topic to the extent that the topic itself takes on character-like aspects.

As is usual for a documentary, most secondary characters are often featured to support an argument. Characters like Gore’s family, scientist Roger Revelle, or Senator James Inhofe are seen only briefly as people who either helped Gore become an advocate for environmentalism, or part of the group opposing change. The audience is an entity rather than a composite of distinct characters; we see them only as listeners and providers of feedback. But because they are not distinct, and because we see audiences from all over the globe, the film audience in effect becomes a “character.” We become a part of the audience and as such, we become an entity that can incur and be affected by change, like any character in a film. This, then, makes the effects of global warming as presented in the slideshow all the more immediate in scope.

This characterization of the film audience is established from the very beginning of the film. *An Inconvenient Truth* begins with a shot of a river in Tennessee. There are no people present, just trees and water and the sounds of nature. Gore begins speaking over this scene in the second person:

You look at that river gently flowing by. You notice the leaves rustling with the wind...It's quiet, peaceful. And all of a sudden it's a gear shift inside you. And it's like taking a deep breath and going, oh yeah. I forgot about this.

Gore, here, is starting his movie with an indirect screen. Instead of beginning with charts and graphs, or even mention of global warming, he establishes the natural world as the center of his argument. He is reminding his audience that, beyond science and beyond politics, what global warming really comes down to is enjoyment of nature. With the use of the second person, Gore is from the onset placing the power and the action with the audience. Although much of the film focuses on the learning experiences Gore had in his own lifetime, the initial establishment of "you" in the first scene indicates that Gore wants you, the audience, to be the real main character.

Events

The idyllic river scene fades into a picture of Gore's laptop, the source of his message, overlaid with a picture of the Earth, which we see becomes the first slide in Gore's slideshow. This next scene embodies the major event in the documentary, which is the slideshow Gore presents on global warming. While Gore describes many auxiliary events during the course of the film such as Hurricane Katrina, his sister's

death from lung cancer, and the breakup of the Antarctic ice shelf, these are all framed within the slideshow presentation. The auxiliary events, the “slides” of the presentation, serve to support his argument that global warming is occurring, it is human caused, and that humans still have the power to reverse it. This is typical of documentaries, where a series of interconnected events become evidence for a central event or occurrence, rather than seeing one event follow another as in a typical film.

Themes

The central theme of the movie is that global warming is a human-caused phenomenon. Extensive proof of this is provided by Gore in the slideshow. The most striking and direct evidence Gore provides in the slideshow is when he shows the increase in global temperature over the last 650,000 years, contrasted to the stark rise in global temperature over the last 50 years. “Look how far above the natural cycle this is, and we’ve done that,” Gore said when presenting this graph. Scientific data such as this graph is juxtaposed with footage of smoke-belching factories and cars stuck in traffic, visually implying that our current habits are contributing to this event.

What arises from this theme is that combating global warming is a “moral imperative.” Gore demonstrates this again and again throughout the course of the film. He mentions the phrase “moral imperative” several times, quoting Winston Churchill as saying a “period of consequences” is imminent. This refers to the period of

consequences England faced by ignoring the rising threat of Hitler, and is easily understood by the audience as an analogy to the rising threat of human-caused global warming. After showing the global temperature and CO₂ level graphs he says, “ultimately, this is really not a political issue so much as a moral issue. If we allow that to happen, it is deeply unethical.” More indirectly, Gore presents the moral implications of ignoring global warming when he talks about the choice his family made to stop growing tobacco after his sister died from smoking.

In order to present these thematic elements in a way that would resonate with the audience, Gore needed to both draw on his long experience as environmental advocate and dispel suspicion of a political agenda due to his Democratic Party affiliation. He does this by making several ethos-based appeals during the film.

Ethos: Gore as politician; Gore as human

Before the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the last time Gore was a central figure in the media was during the 2000 election, where he famously won the popular vote but lost the presidency to George W. Bush. During the presidential campaign, he was portrayed as a wonkish bore out of touch with the American people. Because the outcome of that election left the public with a negative image of Gore as not only an unapproachable candidate but a sore loser, Gore felt the need to remind the public of his long tenure as a politician, during which he consistently made the environment a

priority. “I was in politics for a long time. I’m proud of my service,” Gore says at the beginning of the film. Later on in the film, there’s a segment that features old clips of Gore stepping off planes, waving to crowds, speaking at campaign rallies, and interrogating environmental experts at congressional hearings. The footage is designed to remind the audience of Gore’s long political experience before winning the vice presidency in 1992, when he held congressional hearings and pushed legislation on the environment.

But the somewhat cursory mention of his political service, in which the video clips contain no voiceover and the mention of his 2000 presidential loss as “a big blow,” with little in the way of specifics, suggests that this is not the only or indeed the primary way in which Gore wishes to be seen in the film. In the temporal thread that details Gore’s lifetime over the past 50 years, what is emphasized most is his experience as a student and as a human being. His political service seems to be an extension of his experiences as a father, son, and brother; instead of the power that being a politician can bring, he instead frames it as a civic duty.

The opening scene, in which he describes the beauty of nature, shows that Gore is first and foremost a lover of the natural world, and reminds the audience of a part of their lives they often take for granted. The use of the second person, “you,” forces the audience to think of the last time they appreciated the natural world. Gore then shows the image of the Earth, a symbol that had a profound effect on the environmental

movement in the late 1960s, as previously mentioned. “This is the image that started me in my interest in this issue,” he notes, implying to older viewers that he too was swayed by the now-mundane image of the planet from outer space.

I saw it when I was a college student because I had a professor named Roger Revelle who was the first person to have the idea to measure the amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere... He showed our class the results of these measurements after only a few years. It was startling to me. Now, he was startled and he made it clear to our class what he felt the significance of it was, and I just soaked it up like a sponge. He drew the connection between the larger changes in our civilization and this pattern that was now visible in the atmosphere of the entire planet. And then he projected into the future where this was headed unless we made some adjustments, and it was as clear as day.

This anecdote is designed to remind Baby Boomers of their reactions when they saw this image, and establishes a connection with them. In this stage of the presentation he is not a senator or vice president; he is merely a college student. Moreover, Gore says that it was Roger Revelle who first taught him about global warming. This further connects Gore to the audience because he is not establishing himself as an authority figure; he is telling the audience about the environmental experts he learned from throughout his life. Instead of presenting a series of a priori “facts,” Gore is drawing upon the knowledge of scientists who have studied global warming for longer and in more depth than he has. Gore, in effect, went through a learning experience very similar to the one his audience is going through for the duration of his presentation.

Later on in the film, Gore refers to previous life experiences in which he is centrally a father, a brother, and a son, positions that are far more accessible than senator or vice president or Harvard graduate. There is a de-emphasis on the elitist

positions (and therefore his former portrayal as an inaccessible egghead) he held and a stress upon his more universal human characteristics. Gore, as he is detailing his efforts to change environmental policy as a senator in the '80s and later as vice president, with the jagged CO₂ graph serving as a timeline to this political experience, shows that he has long been an authority on the topic and also that one person, one politician, is not powerful enough to create sustained change. It takes the effort of many people working together. He therefore needs to provide a sound logical basis to unite people in his cause and refute the skepticism of those still on the fence about global warming.

Logos: mountains of evidence

The logos of *An Inconvenient Truth* is presented in such a way that makes the crisis of global warming seem like an obvious problem to the audience. Even though the audience is being educated on the topic, Gore presents the information in a way that relies heavily upon common knowledge and causal relationships between generally known and unknown information. Complicated scientific studies and measurements are shown to be explanations for changes the audience already experiences in the environment or reads about in the news. This intuitive way of presenting information makes the lessons Gore is teaching easy to swallow and absorb. Gore makes the information more palatable by relying more heavily on the information presented by experts rather than on his own authority; because he often refers to himself as a student, the audience feels they are on equal intellectual footing.

In order to do this, Gore glosses over the hard science behind the graphs and charts he shows in the slideshow, preferring instead to rely on his previously established ethos to assure the audience that “none of these facts are disputed in any way.” As will later be shown in the second part of the analysis, this led to more than a few articles questioning the veracity of Gore’s graphs; a circuit court judge later ruled that several scientific relationships presented as fact by Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* were dubious enough that the book was not allowed to be used in certain public schools. While this is perhaps a weakness of the film, the glossing over of hard data was done to make a complex hard science topic accessible to the public. Because this hard science was presented with simple graphs that showed strong relationships, the audience was able to clearly see how global warming was a human-caused phenomenon, thereby becoming authorities capable of creating change and educating others.

The first use of logos in the film was Gore’s story of two teachers. He told first of one teacher in elementary school that ridiculed a student when he asked whether Africa and South America ever fit together. Forty years ago, when this conversation took place, the concept of Pangaea was not widely agreed upon by the scientific community, let alone taught to students by elementary school teachers:

But you know, the teacher was actually reflecting the conclusion of the scientific establishment at that time: "Continents are so big that obviously they don't move." But actually as we now know they did move. They moved apart from one another, but at one time they did in fact fit together.

As Gore says, the concept of Pangaea, the continents once fitting together, is now a given, something that is regularly taught in elementary schools. As Gore was once a student, now the audience are students; as this knowledge was once in dispute, so now is global warming in dispute. And like the obvious fitting together of Africa and South America, which was observed by a schoolchild, the evidence of global warming is clear to those who study it. This sets up the opposition between the teacher, emblematic of conventional wisdom and refusing to acknowledge reality, and the audience, who are students but who know enough to see that global warming is evident. This binary pits the audience and the global community at-large against the policymakers and industry leaders, who represent the old way of thinking, the status quo. Instead of the traditional environmentalism vs. capitalism binary, Gore is instead pitting those who know global warming is a problem (the environmentalists) and wish to do something about it versus the status quo, the establishment, the people in denial. Because to some extent many people feel disconnected with politicians and global leaders anyway, this positioning resonates with the audience as they become people of power themselves, capable of making a difference despite rather than through policymakers.

After the story of the first teacher, Gore says that this old conventional assumption was “a problem. It reflected the well known wisdom: "What gets us into

trouble is not what you don't know, but what you think you know that just ain't so."

This quotation is from Mark Twain, well-known to many Westerners as a credible writer with broad appeal. His books are a staple of high school classrooms. This saying is an appeal to common sense. He is discrediting the status quo refusal to acknowledge the crisis implied by climate change as refusing to acknowledge what becomes increasingly obvious to the audience:

This is actually an important point, believe it or not because there is another such assumption that a lot of people have in their minds right now about global warming that just ain't so. The assumption goes like this: "The world is so big that we can't possibly have any lasting, harmful impact on the earth's environment. And maybe that was true at one time, but it is not true any more."

Many of the slides show graphs and charts of scientific studies that indicate rising CO₂ levels are caused by human activity, and that these rising levels are contributing to global warming. It is already known that the last fifty years have shown a substantial increase in the population, as well as a substantial increase in industrialization and consumption levels. Gore reminds the audience of this, but then also overlays the graphs to show an obvious correlation between common knowledge and the scientific studies. In one such instance, Gore displays a graph of temperature in the Northern Hemisphere:

I show this for a couple of reasons. Number one, the so-called skeptics will sometimes say "Oh, this whole thing, this is a cyclical phenomenon. There was a medieval warming period after all." Well yeah, there was. There it is right there, and there are two others. But compared to what is going on now, there is just no comparison. So if you look at a thousand years worth of temperature and compare it to a thousand years of CO₂ you can see how closely they fit together.

The mocking tone he used when talking about the skeptics, as well as the graphs that

clearly show a correlation between CO2 levels and global temperature, make it seem like anyone who still disagrees that global warming is human caused is seriously in denial. This refusal to even acknowledge the legitimacy of counterarguments to the issue further emphasizes the audience vs. status quo duality he set up with the story of the two teachers.

Indeed, during the slideshow presentation Gore often adopts the tone of a teacher. By using short, declarative sentences and carefully presenting scientific support for his argument, even asking rhetorical questions, he is perhaps evoking the second teacher in his introductory story:

Now you might say, "Why is that a problem? How could the Arctic ice cap actually melt so quickly?" When the sun's rays hit the ice, more than 90 percent of it bounces off right back into space like a mirror. But when it hits the open ocean more than 90 percent is absorbed. And so as the surrounding water gets warmer, it speeds up the melting of the ice.

The setup of this passage, with its simple logical deduction accompanied by graphics, is easy for even someone with a limited knowledge of the environment to understand. This particular excerpt, moreover, explains a finer point of Gore's slideshow. He has already demonstrated that ice melts when the sea temperatures rise; it is an intuitive point. The problem, he is saying, is how quickly this occurs. The Larsen B ice shelf broke in about a month; Greenland and the Arctic ice cap are disappearing faster than originally expected. This not only presents a logical explanation but also makes the problem more urgent.

There is a similar corollary setup later on in the film, accompanied by yet another chart showing the ascending variability of ocean temperatures:

This is the natural range of variability for temperature in the ocean. You know people say, "Aw, it just naturally go up and down, so don't worry about it." This is the range that would be expected over the last 60 years. But the scientists that specialize in global warming have computer models that long ago predicted this range of temperature increase.

Again, he begins by anticipating the audience's reaction to the graph, positing what some people would say when presented the data with no context. He then answers this with a surprising overlay of more drastic change in ocean temperatures. This anticipation makes the audience's unlearned reaction seem logical; they don't change their attitude not because they aren't intelligent, but because they do not yet have the information they need to change. Gore then presents the unexpected data of actual ocean temperatures, giving the audience the necessary information.

Gore uses extensive examples to make the logic of his argument stick with the audience. At one point in the slideshow presentation, he shows eight different mountains as they were at the beginning of the 20th century and as they are today. This is meant to counter the perfectly logical argument that might arise if presented with fewer examples, which is that even though temperatures might be rising in an isolated incidence (the Arctic Circle, for example) it is not necessarily a worldwide phenomenon. Repetitive examples are seen again later on:

In 1992, they measured this amount of melting in Greenland. 10 years later this is what happened. And here is the melting from 2005. Tony Blair's scientific advisor has said that because of what is happening in Greenland right now, the maps of the world will

have to be redrawn.

If Greenland broke up and melted, or if half of Greenland and half of West Antarctica broke up and melted, this is what would happen to the sea level in Florida. This is what would happen in the San Francisco Bay. A lot of people live in these areas.

The Netherlands, one of the low-countries: absolutely devastating.

The area around Beijing that's home to tens of millions of people. Even worse, in the area around Shanghai, there are 40 million people.

Worse still, Calcutta and to the east, Bangladesh, the area covered includes 60 million people.

Think of the impact of a couple hundred thousand refugees when they are displaced by an environmental event and then imagine the impact of a hundred million or more.

This excerpt is accompanied by a map image of what the mentioned areas would look like if the oceans rose by 20 feet. These are modified satellite images, not pictures of drowning people or flooded cities; this is a hypothetical, a logical consequence of current practices. The situation of the oceans rising, made plausible by the previous excerpt on quickly melting ice caps, is now reinforced by the consequences of such an occurrence, played out in five different areas around the world.

After presenting the audience with an argument that makes the connection between humans and global warming obvious, Gore lets the audience in on his private opinion:

It is extremely frustrating to me to communicate over and over again as clearly as I can, and we are still by far the worst contributor to the problem. I look around and look for really meaningful signs that we are about to really change. I don't see it right now. [Cuts to clip of Reagan: "one factor of air pollution is oxides of nitrogen from decaying vegetation"; clip of Bush I: "up to our neck in owls and out of work for every American"; and Sen. Inhofe: "Even if humans were causing global warming and we're not, this could be perhaps the greatest hoax that has ever been perpetuated on the American people."]

Just as it was frustrating for the student in the beginning of the film to be told that South America and Africa did not fit together by someone who had an obsolete worldview, so too is Gore frustrated with the archaic views held by people in authority positions. However, after what the audience has learned during the course of the slideshow, these politicians are now seen as stubbornly resistant to the evidence rather than as acting in the best interests of their constituents. Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and James Inhofe are all Republicans, but instead of highlighting their conservative platforms Gore is showing them as being illogical politicians. Blaming pollution on dying trees or being up to one's neck in owls become absurd statements after seeing melting glaciers, drastically rising CO₂ levels, and footage of Hurricane Katrina. After the reasoning for global warming is presented, ridiculing its existence then seems crazy.

Gore, once again, anticipates the audience's reaction to the old politicians' statements when introducing his last two logic-based arguments:

Separating the truth from the fiction and the accurate connection from the misunderstandings is part of what you learn here. But when the warnings are accurate and based on sound science, then we as human beings, whatever country we live in, have to find a way to make sure that the warnings are heard and responded to.

Gore refers to his arguments as "truth," an "accurate connection," and says that the skeptics are adhering to "fiction" and "misunderstandings." This further underlines the binary Gore is setting up between the audience and those in power, while also

reminding the audience that they are empowered – “we have to” listen to the warnings we see around the world. He uses the word “misunderstandings” to stress the need for everyone to learn. It is important that those who have beliefs similar to Reagan, Bush or Inhofe are educated so that everyone can work together to stop global warming. But it is up to the audience, who now possess this reasoning, to empower others.

Gore then continues:

And that brings me to the second factor that has transformed the relationship between us and the Earth. The scientific and technological revolution is a great blessing in that it has given us tremendous benefit in medicine and communications. But this new power that we have also brings a responsibility to think about its consequences.

Instead of eschewing technology and the implicit industrialism, as traditional environmentalists are seen to do, Gore acknowledges the advantages of living in a capitalist society. The last sentence in this passage evokes common-knowledge phrases like “with great power comes great responsibility,” most recently attributed to the Spiderman film series. This implicit reference to pop culture may seem trivial, but it is part of Gore’s goal of using simple language and common knowledge to appeal to the reasoning of a broad audience.

Gore’s last logical entreaty to the audience is another corollary. Here, he is summarizing the film’s implicit goal of changing people’s habits:

Here's a formula to think about. Old habits plus old technology have predictable consequences. Old habits that are hard to change plus new technology can have dramatically altered consequences. Warfare with spears and bows and arrows and rifles and machine guns, that's one thing. But then a new technology came. [Atomic bomb blast.]

We have to think differently about war because the new technologies so completely transformed the consequences of that old habit that we can't just mindlessly continue the patterns of the past.

The analogy of war technology, and of the adaptations that came with it, is another historical example that is easily accessible to the audience. The message of the previous passage was to encourage the use of power responsibly. Here, he is reinforcing this message of responsibility by implicitly reminding people of how the rules of combat changed to accommodate advances in military capability, like nuclear power. As a result of the atomic bomb, political and combat tactics dramatically altered; the concept of a cold war had never entered intergovernmental relations previous to nuclear capabilities. Gore is urging the audience to adapt their living habits just as drastically, but the war technology metaphor implies that this can be done.

Gore's contribution to environmental discourse was to add relatable analogies and corollaries to the extant scientific evidence, making the logos of the global warming argument more accessible to a general public. Because the complicated formulas that comprise temperature changes and rising CO₂ levels are not easily comprehensible to the average American, well-known examples from history and common knowledge must be incorporated. This logos was made all the more effective by intertwining personal, emotional stories into the more remote scientific arguments. By combining his authority with nonpartisan scientific evidence and personal experience, Gore uses all facets of rhetoric to make the global warming cause

multidimensional and immediate.

Pathos: personal tragedy and a moral imperative

Effective arguments appeal to the audience on several levels. “A responsible rhetoric does not separate our thoughts from our feelings; it unites them by addressing the whole person in terms of that person’s experiences and the judgments they support” (Hauser, 1986, p.119). Most environmental works previous to *An Inconvenient Truth* employed extensive use of ethos and logos. Scientists used their authority as experts in the field, for example, to present logical analyses and conclusions about global warming. But in *An Inconvenient Truth*, these rhetorical tactics are enhanced by emotional appeals to the audience.

The most often used emotional appeal seen in the film is the connection between environmental responsibility and morality. The explicitness of this connection is new to the current environmental discourse. Previously, environmental pathos would involve disappearing forests or animals without homes. The broader connection to the effects it would have on our children and grandchildren, if it was made at all, was abstract and remote; imaginable consequences of ignoring global warming were not readily given to the audience.

Gore, from the very beginning, establishes the environmentalism-morality connection:

There are good people who are in politics in 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.

Here, he is anticipating the argument that the environmentalist cause is a political one and acknowledges that the blame lies on both sides of the aisle, not just the Republicans. He is portraying all politicians as being out of touch or in denial, and so the moral imperative here lies with the people.

This moral imperative setup is reinforced by several personal tragedies Gore retells during the presentation. The first story he tells takes place in 1989, when the then-senator's son almost died in a car accident.

The struggles, the victories that aren't really victories, the defeats that aren't really defeats; they can serve to magnify the significance of some trivial step forward and exaggerate the seeming importance of some massive setback.

April 3, 1989. My son pulled loose from my hand and chased his friend across the street. He was six years old. The machine was breathing for him. We were possibly going to lose him. He finally took a breath.

We stayed in the hospital for a month. It was almost as if you could look at that calendar and just go "whoosh" and everything just flew off; it was trivial and insignificant.

He was so brave. He was such a – he was such a brave guy. Just turned my whole world upside down and then shook it until everything fell out. My way of being in the world had just changed for me. How should I spend my time on this Earth?

This story is accompanied by pictures of Gore with his son in the hospital. The retelling of his son's near-death, he is saying, goes beyond political bickering. When one survives tragedy and adversity, it often makes one question the purpose of his life. This happened to Gore, as his child was near death. If a loved one is close to being lost,

what does re-election matter? The implicit analogy here is that when faced with impending tragedy, one needs to seriously re-examine the way he lives. For Gore, this meant taking the environmentalist message as a cause, fighting for a purpose bigger than himself, in order to make his life more meaningful.

The other personal story Gore shares in the film is the death of his sister. In the first story, Gore tells of how his family had grown tobacco on their farm until his sister's death. When she started smoking, he says, the tobacco industry had successfully made the link between smoking and cancer ambiguous. By the time she died, this knowledge had become common; there was no controversy about cigarettes' carcinogenic properties at all. As a result, his father stopped growing tobacco.

The idea that we had been part of that economic pattern that produced the cigarettes that produced the cancer, it was so painful at so many levels. My father, he had grown tobacco all his life; he stopped. Whatever explanation that seemed to make sense in the past just didn't cut it anymore. He stopped it.

Likewise, Gore is hoping to overcome the ambiguity about global warming, whose science has been obfuscated by the oil industry and the think tanks they sponsor. The misconception about the causes of global warming as being in dispute, he notes, is promoted in the press by these interests. Tied with the story of his sister, this passage is designed to incite anger and frustration at having been duped, just as the public was with the dangers of smoking.

These tragedies Gore shares are common. Many Americans know people that died of lung cancer, and car accidents are ubiquitous. The stories resonate with many

people in the audience in ways graphs and charts cannot do on their own, and the sense of impending crisis is magnified later on when Gore refers to Hurricane Katrina:

And of course the consequences were so horrendous, there are no words to describe it.

[footage of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, the Astrodome]

Voice: Mayor we are getting reports and calls that are breaking my heart from people saying, I've been in my attic, I can't take it anymore. The water is up to my neck, I don't think I can hold out. And that's happening as we speak. We told everybody the importance of the 17th Canal issue. We said please, please take care of this; we don't care what you do, but figure it out – [fade out]

[cut to Gore alone, looking out a window. Inner monologue]

GORE: Some knew, for America. But how in God's name could that happen here?

The image event of Hurricane Katrina is especially important because it brings the destruction of the storm to the front and center of the audience's collective consciousness. The storm had subsided seven months before the release of the film, and media coverage of post-Katrina New Orleans had also waned. But by reminding the audience of the severity of the storm, Gore is also reminding people of the emotional response they had to the Katrina crisis. When Gore says, "how in God's name could that happen here?" he is echoing the disbelief many Americans felt when seeing footage of a great city reduced to third-world conditions.

The depravity many New Orleans residents were reduced to after the storm was also seen as a direct result of governmental ineptitude, and the shock of Americans after Katrina was due in part to the government's failure to adequately respond to the

storm or prepare for it. As a result, there was a huge grassroots response that came from people who felt it was their duty to help out the people of New Orleans however they could. Organizations like the Red Cross, as well as many religious groups, were still sending people and supplies to the city by the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*. The connection Gore makes during this scene, in which he ties the severity of the storm to rising sea temperatures, again underlines the global warming cause as a moral imperative, and makes this imperative one that the people must take on because the government is not acting quickly enough.

The nature imagery seen in the beginning of the film is given to remind the audience of how they benefit from the environment, and this is paralleled later on when Gore is describing the effects global warming will have on the ecosystems of the planet. Besides experiencing unpleasant side-effects like more disease-carrying insects, some species will die out altogether. One example given is the Arctic polar bear.

A new scientific study shows that for the first time they're finding polar bears that have actually drowned, swimming long distances up to 60 miles to find the ice, and they did not find that before. What does it mean to us to look at vast expanse of open water at the top of our world that used to be covered by ice? We ought to care a lot because it has planetary effects.

Beyond the scientific and visual evidence that the ice caps are, in fact, melting, Gore is providing concrete examples of how that can affect organisms that had no part in causing global warming. Because of our habits, he is suggesting, we are causing harm and suffering far beyond our immediate scope. The world is a tiny place in which

everyone is connected in ways past understanding; our irresponsible habits are having ripple effects in ways we are just beginning to understand.

This planetary interconnectedness is shown more clearly near the end of the film, when Gore reminds people of the powerful symbol of Earth seen at the start of the presentation.

You remember that home movie of the earth spinning in space. One of those spacecraft continuing on out into the universe, when it got 4 billion miles out in space, Carl Sagan said, "Let's take another picture of the earth." You see that pale blue dot? That's us. Everything that has ever happened in all of human history has happened on that pixel. All the triumphs and all the tragedies, all the wars, all the famines, all the major advances; it's our only home. And that is what is at stake: our ability to live on planet Earth, to have a future as a civilization.

Again, Gore is bringing the global warming cause beyond politics and partisanship, beyond capitalism and consumption. While this might not seem emotional on the surface, this imagery really brings to light the absurdity of saying that environmentalism is nothing but politics. If the tiny dot we live on, the only place we have, is in danger, what does politics matter? As with Gore's personal tragedies, everything else becomes insignificant when faced with a true crisis.

At the end of the film, Gore reiterates the environmentalism-morality connection:

I believe this is a moral issue. It is your time to seize this issue. It is our time to rise again to secure our future.

There's nothing that unusual about what I'm doing with this. What is unusual is that I had the privilege to be shown it as a young man.

[cut to Gore walking down hallway to stage, where he will give presentation; frozen shot of Gore in front of slide of hurricane]

It is almost as if a window was opened through which the future was very clearly visible. See that? That is the future in which you are going to live your life.

[footage of glaciers from previously in film; footage of river from beginning of film]

Future generations may well have occasion to ask themselves. "What were our parents thinking? Why didn't they wake up when they had a chance?"

We have to hear that question from them now.

Gore's last words to the audience are an especially powerful emotional appeal. Gore "believes" global warming is a "moral issue," indicating that he is not going so far as to "know" it is an issue, but that his personal sense of morality indicates that global warming should be a top priority. Environmentalism, he is implying, is not just an intellectual issue, it is one that encompasses morality, ethics, and spirituality. The "window" to the future Gore saw also has elements of spirituality to it; because of his personal life circumstances, he re-examined his life and felt his personal cause was to advance environmentalism.

The common pathos appeal to think of future generations is also present here. Because Gore has just imparted knowledge of human-caused global warming to the audience, they are now equipped to change their habits before it is too late. Just as the harmful effects of smoking only became knowledge gradually, so too is the global warming message one that needs to be absorbed soon, before more people suffer. And unlike much of the "think of the children" rhetoric, which stays in an indefinite future sense, Gore says that the audience has to think of the children immediately: "Why

didn't they wake up when they had a chance? We have to hear that question from them now." With this ending, the temporal threads seen throughout the film align: the end of the presentation, the wider scope of the Earth in crisis, and the lifetime of many in the audience coalesce into a single, emotional appeal to the audience to change their habits in order to avert suffering for their children and the children of others.

This last appeal is one used often by politicians of both parties for different ends. Gore, throughout the film, used pathos in order to place the film beyond mere partisanship. The "moral imperative" term, for example is one often used by more conservative politicians to push pro-life or faith-based issues on a national platform. But other aspects of his rhetoric were tailored to the bipartisan audience as well. This is an important aspect of his film, because it was created specifically to quell the concerns of the intended audience of policymakers, journalists, and conservative citizens who watch the documentary skeptically. Moreover, Gore, as a Democratic politician, would have to overcome critics who would say that his film was nothing but partisan shilling for environmentalism.

Bipartisan rhetoric: faith and gold bars

The emphasis on global warming as a moral issue seems peculiar, at first. Gore is talking about a highly complex, scientific issue that seems to be completely within the scientific and political realms. The moral dimension of global warming did not

immediately enter the general public consciousness when conceptualizing global warming. But, over and over again, Gore tries to demonstrate that this is a nonpartisan problem, one that every politician needs to recognize the importance of despite their platforms. He dismisses the traditional environmentalism vs. capitalism binary in favor of a more generic we vs. they, in which “we” are the people who recognize the problem and “they” are those who refuse to change their ways. The way in which he uses pronouns like “we” and “you,” contrasted with “they,” the first teacher, the person of an era gone by, sets up this new juxtaposition.

In order to convince people who are still stuck in the old binary, he uses the traditionally conservative frame of morality in politics. In the film, stopping global warming is important because it is a moral issue. This frame is set up early on, during one of Gore’s inner-monologue scenes:

There are good people who are in politics in 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.

Even though he presents plenty of studies and corollaries to connect global warming and change, he does not explicitly say that the choice to prioritize the environment is due to a logical or collective imperative. This seems to speak for itself. Gore attacks not the intelligence but the character of those who refuse to change: If you don't help the environment, you are morally reprehensible. Even though these are fundamentally “good people,” not people we should dislike, the politicians are seen as

“they,” the other, and not people with whom we should relate.

Gore, here, is seen as someone who came from politics but has been disillusioned by politicians. He is discouraged by politicians’ refusal to seriously address global warming, too cowed by competing interests and opinion polls:

I have such faith in our democratic system, our self-government, I actually thought and believed that the story would be compelling enough to cause a real sea change in the way that Congress reacted to that issue. I thought they would be startled too, and they weren't.

Having “faith” in the democratic system is one of the core values of the American way of life. It goes back to the concepts of originalism and American exceptionalism, that the founding fathers created a democracy that would survive the test of time and personal interests, that the United States is a shining example of a democratic republic. Although Gore also has knowledge of and authority within the democratic system, his faith in the system appeals not only to those who believe in the democratic value but also to the common person, a person who votes because she believes that her vote will elect representatives who act in her best interest. This rhetorical appeal was designed for policymakers who often hold up democratic values as the motivation for their legislation, and the fact that Gore was disappointed by their inability to represent the people’s best interest signals a failure in the democratic system.

It is also important to note that Gore said “democratic system,” “self-government,” and “Congress,” instead of “the federal government” or a similar term.

Traditionally, the Democratic Party is seen as embracing “big government,” and so if Gore said he had faith in the federal system of government there would be implications of partisanship. Faith in democracy and “self-government,” particularly, supports more generic, non-partisan values like freedom and self-rule, and do not raise suspicion. Moreover, he blames Congress as a whole for not reacting the way they should and so both parties are to blame. The footage of him holding hearings as a senator were from the 1980s, when Democrats held the majority in Congress; later on, as vice president, the speeches he made from 1994 onward were made to a Republican-majority Congress.

The next instance of bipartisanship comes when he is describing the destruction of the 2005 hurricane season. Natural disasters are a universal phenomena, and Gore is careful to remind the skeptics in his audience that it has effects beyond what immediately come to mind:

The summer of 2005 is one for the books. The first one was Emily that socked into Yucatan. Then Hurricane Dennis came along and it did a lot of damage, including to the oil industry. This is the largest oil platform in the world after Dennis went through. This one was driven into the bridge at Mobile.

Gore is not mentioning the oil platform on a whim. This is a conscious attempt by Gore to remind skeptics that global warming has effects for everyone, and goes beyond partisanship. Even the oil industry, which has traditionally supported Republican politicians with a pro-business, anti-environmentalist stance, suffers because of the very crisis they helped create. While large oil companies like

ExxonMobil easily recoup the damages sustained in a hurricane, the ruined oil platform shows that no one is invincible, and that increasingly dangerous storms could cause potentially monumental losses.

Similarly brief references are tossed into larger segments of the presentation to signal Gore's knowledge and acceptance of the values held by conservative subsets of the audience. He tells stories of his family's farm in southeastern America, a salt-of-the-earth existence in a conservative stronghold. There are also several references to faith and God, and one instance where he mentions the bible:

Europe has just had a year very similar to the one we've had where they say nature has been going crazy, all kinds of unusual catastrophes like a nature hike through the Book of Revelations.

The Book of Revelations, which is the last book in the New Testament, is comprised of apocalyptic visions for the second coming of Christ. It is a part of the bible very much focused upon in evangelical religions, and the brief simile in which it is seen is meant as a quick reference point for those who are familiar with the book, as well as a demonstration of Gore's knowledge of the bible. Nevertheless, it is not expanded upon because too many references to faith and the bible might turn off people who are more inclined to be swayed by the science or ethics-based arguments rather than those of faith.

Another example of bipartisanship is the reference Gore makes to 9/11, perhaps the last date in recent memory where people of all political persuasions united as a

country. The topic arises when he is showing what the world would look like if the sea levels rose 20 feet:

Here is Manhattan. This is the World Trade Center Memorial Site. After the horrible events of 9/11 we said never again. But this is what would happen to Manhattan.

They can measure this precisely, just as the scientists could predict precisely how much water would breach the levy in New Orleans. The area where the World Trade Center Memorial is to be located would be underwater.

Is it possible that we should prepare against other threats besides terrorists? Maybe we should be concerned about other problems as well.

The extreme close-up image of Manhattan under 20 feet of water accompanies this passage. None of the other cities mentioned were focused upon in this much detail, but again this is done intentionally. The image of Manhattan, with the implicit reminder that hundreds of thousands of people live on the affected parts of that island, is meant to show that global warming-induced sea level rise would cause billions of dollars in damage and potentially kill many more people than 9/11 did. While, presumably, more people would suffer in China and Bangladesh, the image of New York serves as an example of destruction immediate to an American audience in particular.

The mention of New Orleans during the close-up shot of Manhattan and especially the site of the World Trade Center Memorial was done to bring the two tragedies together in the audience's collective conscious. The two tragedies that had such a profound effect on Americans everywhere and caused so much pain and suffering would pale in comparison to what would happen if the coasts of the entire country were submerged under 20 feet of water. And like 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina,

politicians have the means to lessen the potential damage. They ignored the warnings before 9/11; they refused to fix the levies or strengthen the post-hurricane response after Katrina, but they can redeem themselves by paying attention to the looming crisis of global warming. While Gore does not say this explicitly or make as heavy-handed a connection between the two, this segment is designed to bring the memories of the two tragedies to mind and therefore to incite bipartisan action.

A major bipartisan appeal Gore makes in the film is when he addresses the economics of environmentalist measures. He has seen that the most common resistance to environmental regulation comes from those who are concerned that such legislation will decrease profits and damage the economy. He dismisses these concerns as trivial and ridiculous when compared with the potential consequences of business-as-usual:

The second misconception: Do we have to choose between the economy and the environment? This is a big one. A lot of people say we do. I was trying to convince a previous administration, the first Bush administration to go to the Earth Summit. They organized a big White House conference to say, "We're on top of this." One of these viewgraphs caught my attention and I want to talk about it for a minute.

Now, here is the choice we have to make according to this group. We have here a scale that balances two different things. On one side, we have gold bars. Mmmmm. Don't they look good! I'd just like to have some of those gold bars. Mm. On the other side of the scales, um, the entire planet! [Laughter from audience] Hmmm. [Gore pretends to think; applause]

I think this is a false choice for two reasons. Number one, if we don't have a planet...The other reason is that if we do the right thing, then we are going to create a lot of wealth and we are going to create a lot of jobs, because doing the right thing moves us forward.

The economic argument, in other words, becomes irrelevant if the planet's well-being is in the balance. Concerns about profit margins are turned into selfish, myopic

whining when potential consequences of the status quo involve the suffering of millions of people.

Secondly, Gore is reassuring skeptics in the audience that creating new green industries will be beneficial for the economy. Again, unlike the stereotypical image of an environmentalist, Gore is not anti-industry or anti-capitalism. The United States is good at creating opportunity in business, he is saying, and environmentally friendly businesses will leave room for that opportunity. It is a familiar model he is implying, as new technology has supplanted old technology since the beginning of the industrial era; when the more efficient automobile was created, the horse-carriage industry became obsolete. At the same time, creating these new business opportunities will be “doing the right thing.” This, again, goes back to the values held by religious conservatives, and places difficult but achievable industrial changes as a matter of morality and ethics.

The concept of “doing the right thing” is further enhanced when Gore positions the current audience as inheritors of a great American legacy:

So what about the rest of us? Ultimately this question comes down to this: Are we as Americans capable of doing great things even though they are difficult? Are we capable of rising above ourselves and above history?

Well, the record indicates that we do have that capacity. We formed a nation. We fought a revolution and brought something new to this Earth, a free nation guaranteeing individual liberty. America made a moral decision that slavery was wrong and that we could not be half free and half slave. We, as Americans, decided that of course women should have the right to vote. We defeated totalitarianism and won a war in the Pacific and the Atlantic simultaneously. We desegregated our schools and we cured fearsome diseases like polio. We landed on the moon, the very example of

what's possible when we are at our best. We worked together in a completely bipartisan way to bring down communism.

While the audience themselves did not actually accomplish these goals, the use of “we,” “America,” and “Americans” gives the illusion of being a part of something greater than the individual. Together we can create history, Gore is saying; he cannot combat global warming on his own. Working together “in a completely bipartisan way” is the key, just as it was necessary to achieve all the other great moments in American history. The intended audience here is specifically for skeptical policymakers because they are part of the power-holding class, those whose predecessors did actually vote for desegregation and anti-communist policies. Global warming is a new obstacle for the United States to overcome, just as tyranny, slavery, racism, totalitarianism, women’s suffrage, desegregation and communism were also overcome with a united effort. The democratic values established early on in the film are here tied with patriotic pride in the United States, and what Americans can do if they work together for a just cause.

These past allusions to great moments in American history might do a lot to overcome partisan skepticism, but they still keep the timeframe of action in abstract terms. Likewise, the other rhetorical tactics do a lot to convince both ostensible and intended audiences that global warming is a human-caused problem that humans have the power to solve, but when this action should occur is just as important. Legislators, for example, act within their election cycles. They tend to focus on immediate

problems, or problems that their constituents see as pressing, and ignore larger, more complex issues like the environment. Gore needed to put the crisis firmly within the present, and dispel those who would think we as a planet can wait any longer to act. As a result, the last major rhetorical dimension discussed in this analysis is the temporality of the film.

“We are facing a period of consequences”

Not only is global warming seen as something which the intended audience has the power to change, but it is portrayed as something to which the audience must react if they do not want to become passive receptors of environmental disaster. One of the most effective rhetorical tacks in *An Inconvenient Truth* is the presentation of global warming as a crisis that must be resolved immediately. The inefficacy of scientific studies was in part due to the use of ambiguous phrases like “may cause” or “70 percent possibility,” which do not inspire change in the majority of people (Adam, 1995, p. 101). Gore, as a politician, knows that the public (and by extension policymakers) need a problem described in absolute terms in order to begin taking action. Former rhetoric was focused on it being a possible problem in the future; Gore says that action is needed now.

When he is describing the changes in climate that will occur from global warming, he says that

In the Himalayas there is a particular problem because 40% of all the people in the

world get their drinking water from rivers and spring systems that are fed, more than half, by the meltwater coming off the glaciers. And within this next half century those 40% of the people on earth are going to face a very serious shortage because of this melting.

Gore, here, is presenting the audience with a unequivocal picture of the future if the global warming trend isn't reversed. The effects are not vague or probable but definite, according to Gore. Forty percent of the people on Earth is a huge number, and the severity of the crisis can easily be imagined by the audience. The use of "are going to" instead of "may" or "will possibly" reinforces the immediacy of this problem.

This worldwide crisis is further illustrated by the section of the slideshow that describes the ice cores. He first of all uses the phrase "canary in the coalmine" to describe the warnings presented by melting glaciers on the poles. Canaries were used in coalmines to determine if there was enough oxygen in the mine for the miners to survive; if the canary stopped singing, the oxygen level was too low and the miners had to turn back. This metaphor suggests that we are approaching a point where survival will become difficult, and we also have no choice to return to where we were before. He provides as evidence not only melting ice shelves but, over and over again, disappearing snows and glaciers on mountains all over the world. In this segment there is not one or two but seven mountains and parks described as having receding snow and ice levels, from Argentina to the Italian Alps.

Gore provides the hurricane season of 2005 as a recent lesson we should learn from, in addition to learning from the ice core CO₂ levels in the past:

There had been warnings that hurricanes would get stronger. There were warnings that this hurricane, days before it hit, would breach the levies and would cause the kind of damage that it ultimately did cause. And one question that we, as a people, need to decide is how we react when we hear warnings from the leading scientists in the world.

This section on the hurricanes, which features shots of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, comes after the slides on the scientific aspects of global warming, in which the audience was edified on the topic. He notes that scientists had warned about stronger hurricanes and even the weak levees of New Orleans, but no one listened and so they had to face the consequences. Likewise, he is suggesting that if the audience refuses to listen to his warnings about global warming, disasters incurred by melting Himalayan snows and changing climate patterns will be far, far worse.

Because devastating hurricanes have happened before, and because the hurricane-global warming link is not particularly convincing even in the slideshow, Gore invokes Hitler and World War II, a historical example readily accessible to Western audiences:

There was another storm in the 1930s of a different kind, a horrible unprecedented storm in continental Europe. Winston Churchill warned the people of England that it was different from anything that had ever happened before, and they had to get ready for it. A lot of people did not want to believe it and he got real impatient with all the dithering. He said this: "The era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing, and baffling expedience of delays is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences."

This is another complex parallel because, unlike Hurricane Katrina, it was a political rather than an environmental crisis. But the installation of ghettos and Hitler's disturbing rhetoric had been known to Western Europeans for years before anyone

took action against him. Churchill, looking back, was not especially prescient; he just admitted Hitler was a real threat before anyone else did. Despite the best efforts of Churchill and his allies in the United States and France, however, Hitler still managed to occupy most of Europe and begin the Holocaust, one of the worst humanitarian crises in human history. Here, Gore is implicitly comparing himself to Churchill. Like him, he is a politician in an unusual circumstance to see obvious signs of a major threat to humanity.

Gore continues this parallel by implying that, in some ways, current audiences are like the Allied forces. He tells the audience, “making mistakes in generations and centuries past would have consequences that we could overcome. We don't have that luxury anymore. We didn't ask for it, but here it is.” Like the sacrifices made by Americans and the British 65 years ago for the good of humankind, people now must make sacrifices in their daily lives to ensure that major crises around the world don't occur again. This is particularly effective since World War II is the last American war that had broad support, won the respect of the global community, and was fought for what most saw as a just cause.

Near the end of the film, after making more bipartisan references to great moments in American history, Gore brings together the timeframes of the Earth and of a human lifespan together to accentuate the immediacy of the global warming crisis:

The places where people live were chosen because of the climate pattern that had

been pretty much the same on Earth since the end of the last ice age 11,000 years ago. Here on this farm, patterns are changing. And it seems gradual in the course of a human lifetime but in the course of time as defined by this river, it's happening very, very quickly.

This passage summarizes the previous references to time as seen by one lifespan relative to the timeframe of the Earth. While one person cannot provide an adequate frame of reference to accurately observe global warming, the accumulation of data that spans thousands of years is sufficient to know that changes in the natural world are occurring faster than anyone can imagine, and this in itself is not because of naturally caused climate fluctuations. Nature has become more unpredictable than normal, and so measures must be taken to ensure that climate patterns are stabilized and do not disrupt in ways that cause harm.

How did Gore change the discourse?

This rhetorical criticism was designed to determine how Gore used *An Inconvenient Truth* to alter the current discourse surrounding environmentalism in the United States. The analysis indicates this was done by putting agency and responsibility back in the hands of the audience; by connecting environmentalism to familiar image events and appeals; by repositioning environmentalism as a nonpartisan issue; and by altering the scope beyond the narrow present while also reinforcing the immediate need for action.

American values such as those contained within American exceptionalism and Prometheanism hold up the power of the individual, and Gore used this familiar concept throughout his rhetoric. His ethos-based appeal as ordinary person with access to knowledge framed the audience as equals, also capable of change, but he also positions himself as the teacher imparting knowledge with his logos-based appeals. Therefore, the audience is given the responsibility to become teachers themselves. The analogy of the two teachers, the anti-environmentalist claims made by politicians and the lack of government oversight after Katrina reinforce the current authority figures as being out-of-touch and in denial. The audience, therefore, must take action, just as collective action fostered change in previous events in American history. This strays from the survivalist discourse in which elites are expected to make change, but since an intended audience are the elites themselves it is also supposed to make them feel like they need to catch up with the realities of global warming.

Previous to the film, the public sphere had embraced environmentalism only within the context of a specific image event, such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill or Three Mile Island. Interest in saving the planet faded when the immediate environmental crisis passed. In *An Inconvenient Truth*, the image events and crises are all finally connected into one larger problem. Hurricane Katrina, melting glaciers, record high temperatures, and disappearing coral reefs had all been blamed on global warming before, but no larger connection had ever been made in any significant way.

Gore connects all of these image events to one problem, human-caused global warming, and ties in other events to emphasize the impending danger of the consequences should we refuse to act. The impending disaster of World War II is evoked; 9/11 is shown as a pale comparison to the loss of human life should sea levels rise.

These image events also had the effect of uniting the country. Gore is attempting here to position global warming as another crisis that goes beyond politics and partisanship. Like World War II, global warming has the potential to cause major destruction, but like that war and other historical achievements, we as Americans can work together to prevent loss of life and valuable resources. Because so many lives are at risk, combating global warming is seen as a moral imperative. The media analysis will show that the connection between global warming and morality is borrowed from conservative religious groups; it is not new, but Gore is using the connection to create a broader consensus within the public sphere. Gore's affiliation with the Democratic Party presents an initial obstacle to this rhetoric, and distrust among Republicans does not disappear after the film's release. But the morality-environmentalism connection, the binary of we vs. them instead of liberal vs. conservative, the economic argument and the future generations argument are designed to convince the intended audience: those on the fence, the moderates, and those capable of change.

This change, Gore stresses, must occur now. In previous environmental discourse, urgency had been mitigated by inconclusive scientific data and unspecified time frames. Promethean discourse, furthermore, ignores the survivalists' urgency and maintains current habits can continue indefinitely. But survivalists, in addition to leaving power in the hands of elites, have a generally negative view of the future and speak in terms of despair and resignation. *An Inconvenient Truth* takes the survivalists' urgency and marries it to the Prometheans' optimism and individual agency, saying that change begins with the people and must begin with the people now, before it is too late.

I have analyzed the rhetoric of *An Inconvenient Truth*, and shown how it differs from the environmental rhetoric of the past. But this study is meant to show how the film had an effect on the public sphere. To this end, a secondary analysis of changes in mainstream media and the attitudes of the public was conducted. If this rhetoric was effective, then we should see its resonance in the media, in grassroots events, and among public figures. Together, these two analyses demonstrate how the film changed the discourse of environmentalism in the public sphere.

Chapter 5. Media Analysis

Maxwell McCombs and Amy Reynolds, among other media effects theorists, argue that the news media have an agenda-setting role. “Although many issues compete for public attention, only a few are successful in reaching the public agenda...The news media can set the agenda for public thought and discussion” (2002, p. 1). Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw concur, concluding that “the notion of the agenda-setting function of the mass media is a relational concept specifying a strong positive relationship between the emphases of mass communication and the salience of these topics to the individuals in the audience” (1972, in Graber, 1990, p. 79). In this spirit, the salience of global warming in the news media should be analyzed before and after *An Inconvenient Truth* to see how the environmentalist agenda became a hot-button issue.

Reporter Paul Farhi, of the *Washington Post*, calculated in an October 2007 article that about 6 million people had seen *An Inconvenient Truth* since its release in May of 2006.

Such numbers, though, grossly understate its impact. The film's release and subject matter were the pegs for thousands of print and broadcast news stories. "An Inconvenient Truth" became the rallying point for countless environmental groups -- and the flash point for opponents who attacked Gore's science and his conclusion that the burning of fossil fuels is pushing the Earth toward an environmental disaster. The debate got a second life in February, when the film won the Academy Award for Best Documentary.

From countless articles to extensive uses of the phrase “An Inconvenient Truth” to

concrete action taken by various community factions, it is clear that Gore's film had a significant impact. The secondary part of my study will be an analysis of mainstream media coverage on global warming after the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*. This analysis argues that Gore's film changed the rhetoric of environmentalism and had a lasting effect on the public sphere, and so it is necessary to see exactly how this manifested itself. As the rhetorical analysis indicates, the documentary contained powerful, complex rhetoric designed to resonate with the American people as a whole. Here, I will add to my argument that *An Inconvenient Truth* was a significant piece of rhetoric by showing how its language and message became absorbed in the public sphere.

This analysis centers on American mainstream media coverage of global warming and the effects of *An Inconvenient Truth* after it entered the public realm, although it will also touch upon public opinion and grassroots events that occurred after the film's release. There are, interestingly, indications that the film had more of an effect abroad, particularly in Europe and Australia, countries which in many respects are more receptive to environmental change and have actively enabled legislation to curb global warming. American media coverage focuses on the connection between Hurricane Katrina and global warming, the morality-environmentalism connection, and attempts made by certain think tanks to portray the film as having a liberal bias or misleading science. To some extent, the media coverage

suggests that much of this renewed environmental enthusiasm occurred because of Hurricane Katrina, but the extensive and varying coverage of environmental movements and policy changes as well as the language used by public figures suggests that it was Gore's film that gave a voice to this reinvigoration.

This media analysis is meant to be preliminary. Like many important discursive works, the ripple effects *An Inconvenient Truth* has or had on the public sphere can be far-reaching and indirect. By using widely read American publications, I provide a picture of the ways in which Gore's presentation on global warming was received by different factions of the public. I reduced my sample to only American media because, as Gore implies, it is Americans who need to change their habits and attitudes the most. The United States has the most per-capita CO₂ emissions of any country, and Americans, as a whole, still work within the industrialist, status quo discourse view of the environment, which is skeptical of environmentalists' political agenda and the science that supports it. Not all of these skeptics are won over by the film, as many of the articles will show. But certain factions of the public sphere are shown to start at least using discursive elements seen in *An Inconvenient Truth*, which signifies a change in the discourse. In several sub-factions of the public sphere, this discourse is effective enough to generate local and state- or organization-based environmental movements. Articles highlighting these movements focus on one specific aspect of Gore's rhetoric that has taken hold, such as the moral imperative or the economic argument, or the ties

between Hurricane Katrina and global warming.

Not all reactions to *An Inconvenient Truth* in the public sphere were positive. The Bush administration, for example, remains adamantly opposed to substantial reformation of environmental policy. The landmark 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* was at first a huge victory for those concerned about global warming. In the case, “the court told the Environmental Protection Agency that the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide is a pollutant that can be regulated under the Clean Air Act” (Living on Earth, “Court’s Climate Ruling,” 2008). Since that ruling, however, the EPA has done little to regulate CO₂ levels. The article notes that since the ruling, “the Bush administration has missed its self-imposed deadlines to respond to the ruling. And a regulation on CO₂ now seems unlikely before the end of the president’s term. Last May, President Bush told the EPA to write a regulation to control greenhouse gases from cars and trucks.” But the administration’s acknowledgement of the problem, however reluctant, is an important first step, and studies and reports of action are still emerging. It cannot, after all, be expected that one film can change everything. As Gore said, “it is up to us.”

Film reviews of “An Inconvenient Truth”

Immediate reactions to *An Inconvenient Truth* after its widespread release on

May 24, 2006 were largely positive. The movie review aggregate site Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) collects star-ratings given by reviewers and averages them in order to get its approval rating score. For *An Inconvenient Truth*, Rotten Tomatoes aggregated 152 of its selected critics, 33 of the top critics (of which there is some overlap with the selected critics), and 784 user critics. According to the site, the movie averaged a 93 percent favorable rating among their selected critics, a 94 percent approval rating among major newspaper critics, and an 84 percent approval rating among regular users of the Rotten Tomatoes website. The Rotten Tomatoes consensus of the movie is that “while global warming is a hotly-debated subject, what everyone on both sides can agree upon is that, if real, it’s a very bad thing...As much about the man as about greenhouse gases, this candid, powerful and informative documentary illuminates some of the myths surrounding both of its subjects equally well” (2006). Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* magazine, who is both a selected and top critic of the site, said, “Gore keeps us riveted by being charming, literate and profoundly persuasive on a topic that’s scarier than anything in a dozen Japanese horror flicks. Vote Gore on this one” (5/24/06).

The *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Tom Avril said that AIT "does a mostly good job explaining their complicated research for a mass audience," with Gore "accurately convey[ing] the consensus view that man-made pollution is steadily warming the planet." Despite this, Avril says that Gore's assertions linking hurricane frequency and

global warming may be a bit premature, citing several scientists who disagree with the arguments, but ultimately cites experts that say uncertain outcomes are "no reason to discredit the film...Carbon dioxide lasts for decades in the atmosphere, and if we wait to see whether the worst projections come true, it will be too late, [said Robert McKinstry Jr., a Pennsylvania State University ecologist]" (2006).

The *Washington Post* review, written by Desson Thomson, was typical of many press reviews of the film, saying that the movie was more than "just hot air":

[T]here's more to "An Inconvenient Truth" than impressive auditorium visuals. Guggenheim intersperses the film with revealing interviews and moments away from that lectern. While Gore's onstage presentation tells us nothing new, it has a renewed - call it recycled -- potency, in light of a growing scientific consensus about changing weather patterns...[F]or viewers of any stripe, there's something perhaps even more fascinating here. Between the lines, "An Inconvenient Truth" is a quintessentially American story of reinvention. ("Truth," 6/02/06)

The film reviewer, first of all, addresses potential moviegoers' skepticism about the compelling features of a documentary on a slideshow narrated by Al Gore, a common reaction to the nontraditional style of the film. Even six years later, it is hard for Gore to overcome the media image given him in the 2000 presidential election. The reviewer comments on Gore's likeability in the film, suggesting that if anything, Gore's image as a public figure is starting to change. But more significantly, the reviewer is especially captivated by the film's narrative, calling it an "American story of reinvention." The American hero imagery that ended the documentary clearly had a gripping effect. It was not just the overwhelming data, it was the narrative that shaped

the issue of global warming.

One of the negative reviews featured on Rotten Tomatoes, from the independent website Three Movie Buffs, said, “The Inconvenient Truth of this movie is that because of its biased tone and shameless promotion of Al Gore it is simply preaching to the converted” (11/25/06). The second reviewer on the site, who identified himself as a conservative Republican, added, “I would have taken his lecture more seriously had he left the politics out...Several times he said that this is a moral issues [sic] but then he immediately makes a political statement or negative comment on the Bush administration. Had he taken the moral high ground and made this just a factual disclosure on Earth’s changing environment he would have scored more points” (5/25/06). Lisa Rose of the *Newark Star-Ledger* and Kyle Smith of the *New York Post* were two critics from major newspapers to also give the film a negative rating. Rose says that the movie “preaches to the choir rather than winning over new converts” (5/24/06). Smith gives a harsher view, saying that “much of what Gore says in this slide show he gives to people whose minds are not yet fully formed (undergraduates, actors) is absurd, and his assertions often contradict one another” (5/24/06).

The rating among regular users of Rotten Tomatoes was much lower, on average, than the ratings given by professional critics, at just 84 percent. One user said the movie used “completely wrong” scientific data:

After hearing him preach to us endlessly about how the planet is “warming” at an

“alarming rate” and hearing him tell us how we should ride a bike to work while he flies around the world in his jet, and MANY HIGHLY respected scientists tried to tell him he was dead wrong...the OFFICIAL global temperature monitoring data has come in from ALL 4 major global temperature tracking outlets. Not only does it show that for the last year the global temperature was actually DROPPING, but it was dropping at 100 TIMES THE RATE that it had warmed over the last century!

The user comment, posted in February of 2008, links to a Fox News story on Brit Hume’s “Political Grapevine.” In the brief article, Hume says, “Tuesday we told you about several areas around the planet experiencing record cold and snowpack – in the face of all the predictions of global warming...California meteorologist Anthony Watts says the amount of cooling ranges from 65-hundredths of a degree Centigrade to 75-hundreds of a degree” (“Evidence of Global Cooling,” 2/28/08). Watts is a meteorologist for a Fox News radio affiliate in Chico, California, who is a vocal skeptic of global warming and leads an all-volunteer effort, Weather Stations, to monitor meteorology centers across the country. Brit Hume’s report did not mention the names of the “four major weather outlets” that concurred with the global cooling phenomenon.

Human-induced global warming

The main argument of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the thesis of Gore’s presentation, was that global warming was a human-caused phenomenon. Polls showed more people believed global warming was human-induced after the film was released. A March 2007 Global Power Report article compiled several Gallup polls taken between 2000 and 2006.

The number of Americans who are highly concerned about global warming has jumped by five percentage points in the last year to 41%, polling company Gallup said last week. In its latest survey on the issue, Gallup found that the latest increase, from 36% last March to 41% this year, built on a 10-point increase from 2004 to 2006. "The percentage now worried a great deal about global warming is essentially tied with the 40% seen in April 2000 for the highest level of recorded concern on this measure," Gallup said.

As a caveat, though, the report noted that the poll found no straightforward connection between *An Inconvenient Truth* and the increase in environmental awareness – Hurricane Katrina was again cited as a catalyst – but did note that “public familiarity with global warming grew six points during Gore's crusade, from 70 percent describing themselves very or fairly familiar with it in March 2005 to 76 percent in March 2007. The percentage saying the effects of global warming have already begun also increased from 54 percent to 59 percent" (2007).

A LexisNexis search for “global warming AND human caused AND carbon dioxide emissions” in U.S. papers before the Sundance release of *An Inconvenient Truth* resulted in 78 articles, going back to 1989. A 2004 article in *The New York Times* describes a report given to Congress from the U.S. Climate Change Service Program, in which human-caused “smokestack and tailpipe discharges of heat-trapping gases were the most likely cause of global warming.” However, “President Bush distanced himself from it, saying it was something “put out by the bureaucracy” even though similar reports had been given to the administration since 2001 (Revkin, 2004). The 2001 report referenced in that article got some coverage from the Associated

Press, but that same year Bush dismissed the Kyoto Protocol (Heilprin, 2001; Karliner, 2001). Another 2004 article from *United Press International* says that “based on the latest research, global warming over the past 50 years now can be attributed to human-caused greenhouse gases ‘with a high degree of statistical confidence,’ said Gabriele Hegerl, a research professor at Duke University in Durham, N.C.” (Whipple, 2004). Similar articles on global warming reports are data-heavy and do not express absolute certainty or suggestions for action (Heilprin, 2001).

A similar search conducted on LexisNexis resulted in 68 articles published in the two years since the film’s release. A June 1, 2007 article in *The New York Times* reported that

President Bush, fending off international accusations that he was ignoring climate change, proposed for the first time on Thursday to set "a long-term global goal" for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and he called on other high-polluting nations to join the United States in negotiations aimed at reaching an agreement by the end of next year.

If carried through, such an agreement would be the first in which the United States, the world's biggest source of the emissions that scientists say are warming the planet, has committed itself to a specific target for cutting them (Stolberg, 2007).

As the article notes, this is a marked change from his brusque attitudes towards environmentalists three years previous. While this could be more of a public relations stunt than a concerted effort towards change, the fact that the attitudes of those in power changed speaks to a change in environmental discourse.

Despite a drastic change in attitudes from elites, many public groups remained

skeptical on the global warming issue. Not only were the aforementioned movie reviews by some of the more populist or independent reviewers critical of *An Inconvenient Truth*, but many asserted after the film's release that global warming was not occurring at all. In a 2007 issue of *The Tri-City Herald* (Washington), the paper asked for letters on global warming opinions. Four letters asserted that either the Earth was cooling, that global warming was not human-caused, or that current cold temperatures disproved the warming trend. The other four letters published agreed that global warming was human-caused, and contained phrases like "there are simple changes we can make in our own lives to conserve energy" and "I'd like my children to have a safe and healthy environment" (p. A12).

Global warming as a "moral imperative"

The phrase "moral imperative" was used by Gore in connection with the global warming crisis. Two LexisNexis searches were conducted to determine if this rhetorical device took hold in the public. The first collected articles in U.S. newspapers and wires before the release of the film at the Sundance Film Festival in January of 2006; the second collected articles after January of 2006. The search terms "global warming OR climate change AND moral imperative" were used to look through the major U.S. newspapers and wires, and articles that contained both terms but not in relation to one another were discarded as irrelevant among the search results.

Morality and global warming before AIT

Previous to the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the first search found 82 articles that contained all terms but 48 of which did not say that global warming was a moral imperative, leaving 34 articles before the film's release that said combating global warming was a moral imperative. There were some articles, such as one from the PR Newswire, that mentioned a Fast to Slow Global Warming event held in Washington, D.C., which coincided with the 2005 G8 summit on poverty and climate change (2005). Oregon governor Ted Kulongoski, according to an *Oregonian* article, has "sounded warnings about global warming since he took office in 2003 [and] said in an interview that he feels a 'moral imperative' to address the human impact on climate change" (2005). Several opinion articles and letters to the editor in 2005, also around the time of the G8 summit, also connected global warming and morality (*New York Times*, 2005, p. A28; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2005, p. 14A).

Several of the older articles, particularly those from the 1990s, quoted President Bill Clinton saying global warming was a moral imperative; this is not surprising, as Gore pushed environmental issues consistently during his vice presidency (*The Washington Post*, 1999; Hunt, 1996). But as far back as 2001, religious groups had sent messages to President Bush saying that he needed to acknowledge the moral imperative of setting responsible environmental policy. This, it appears, did not seem to gain much traction in the public sphere, as indicated by its scant coverage in the U.S.

media. A 2001 article in the *Minnesota Star Tribune* was one of the few that wrote about religious concerns about environmentalism, featuring a letter to the editor written by Lutheran pastor Rev. Dennis Ormseth:

While even a skeptic such as President Bush accepts the scientific reality that we're fouling our nest, the president still opposes steps that many consider crucial – reducing power-plant emissions of carbon dioxide and researching alternative energy. "As national policy," Ormseth wrote, "this is an agenda of a selfish people, engaging in wishful thinking."

Of course, some people consider faith nothing more than wishful thinking. That's part of what's intriguing about the growing role of religion in the issue of climate change. When I called Ormseth to find out more, he said that scientists are finding that not all church leaders are the illogical creationists one might imagine. There's a greater bond than either side expected, bound by a common notion of ecology.

These sentiments were echoed by Catholic bishops, Protestant and Orthodox Christian leaders in 2001, according to an article in the *Boston Globe*:

The nation's Catholic bishops declared yesterday that acting to stop global warming is a moral imperative...

Earlier this month in New York, a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox Christian leaders released a letter saying that "by depleting energy sources, causing global warming, fouling the air with pollution, and poisoning the land with radioactive waste, a policy of increased reliance on fossil fuels and nuclear power jeopardizes health and well-being for life on Earth."

Mahony said he hoped the bishops' statement would prompt discussion of an issue that has not generated much public interest. But the issue did not seem to stir much interest among the bishops, either, provoking no debate or discussion before being approved.

And the earliest article found in the search, a 1990 piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, did not feature an American-made global warming-morality connection. Rather, it detailed a UN report that warned "the Earth is staggering under the triple threats of global warming, ozone depletion and the rapid loss of biological

diversity...[According to] Mustafa Tolba [executive director of UNEP], “it is the moral imperative of each generation that they protect and improve the prospects of future generations.”

The article findings previous to *An Inconvenient Truth* indicate that the morality of global warming was not a new idea, but it was limited to certain sects of the public sphere. The morality of environmentalism, it seems, was first seen in non-American communities and religious groups, most of which also have an international presence. Gore and Clinton, as well as select communities in Oregon and California, also seemed to promote the concept, but mainstream media coverage of these groups was light throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Global warming and morality, post AIT

The second LexisNexis search of global warming-morality articles after January 25, 2006 resulted in 261 articles. Of these, 31 had both terms but not in correlation with one another, resulting in 231 articles that featured the concept of global warming as a moral imperative. While many of the articles previous to the film’s release were small briefs on events or profiles of religious movements, the articles after the film’s release brought the global warming-morality concept to the front pages.

Gore's call for global warming to be treated as a moral issue, combined with the

devastation of Hurricane Katrina, led to what the *Philadelphia Inquirer* dubbed "faith-based climate care." In an October 2006 editorial, the *Inquirer* said that regardless of the conclusions of historians and scientists, "the lesson is clear: Natural disaster hurts most those least able to cope with it":

Global warming isn't just an environmental debate. It's also about social and racial justice. That's why faith communities can no longer look away. Their prophets call on them to care for the Earth and the least among us...

Eighty-six conservative evangelicals have issued a 'call to action' demanding government restrictions in emissions that contribute to warming...In this region, at least four rabbis broached global warming during Yom Kippur services. A northwest Philadelphia mosque and dozens of Pennsylvania places of worship are showing Al Gore's global warming documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. An interfaith forum, "Sacred Seasons, Sacred Earth," at Arch Street Friends Meeting House recently examined the "crisis of global scorching." Religious communities, working together, could inspire smarter energy and environmental decisions to protect the planet and its people. It just takes faith" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2006).

Even though Katrina again seems to be a focal catalyst for the faith-based environmental movement, the connection between Katrina and global warming was one made in *An Inconvenient Truth*. The strength and intensity of the hurricane, Gore argues, was unusually ferocious because of warming sea waters caused by global warming, which in turn was caused by humans. It was Gore's film that gave renewed strength to the faith-based environmentalism, as seen by these traditionally conservative groups using *An Inconvenient Truth* to educate other people.

Two years later, a March 2008 NPR article on "All Things Considered" reported on how some Christians are giving up carbon for Lent, instead of more traditional vices like chocolate or alcohol. Reverend Bullet-Jonas, of Grace Episcopal

Church in Massachusetts, said:

“I think Lent sometimes has been really a very self-focused period of time, which I think is actually a distortion of the original intention of Lent. The intention is to think about what am I doing that gets in the way of the love of God, and letting that love be expressed fully in creation.”

Members of the congregation hang up clothes instead of putting them in the dryer, become more conscious of turning of lights, carpooling, buying local, and trading energy-saving tips in community groups (NPR, “Environmentalists Give Up,” 2008). Many of the church members, according to the article, plan to continue their Lent-inspired carbon reductions after the Easter season is over.

Around the same time, several newspapers covered the emerging Southern Baptist interest in the environment. The *New York Times* reported on March 11 of 2008 that 44 Southern Baptist leaders decided to sign a declaration calling for more action on climate change, “signaling a significant departure from the Southern Baptist Convention’s official stance on global warming”:

The largest denomination in the United States after the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, with more than 16 million members, is politically and theologically conservative...

"We believe our current denominational engagement with these issues has often been too timid, failing to produce a unified moral voice," the church leaders wrote in their new declaration.

A 2007 resolution passed by the convention hewed to a more skeptical view of global warming.

In contrast, the new declaration, which will be released Monday, states, "Our cautious response to these issues in the face of mounting evidence may be seen by the world as uncaring, reckless and ill-informed"...

The Southern Baptist signatories join a growing community of evangelicals pushing for more action among believers, industry and politicians. Experts on the Southern Baptist Convention noted the initiative marked the growing influence of younger leaders on the discussions in the Southern Baptist Convention...

The declaration says in fact that lack of scientific unanimity should not preclude "prudent action," which includes changing individual habits and giving "serious consideration to responsible policies that effectively address" global warming (Banerjee, 2008).

Even though the initial reaction of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2007 was to be skeptical of global warming, there is much to draw from its sudden change. Southern Baptists have traditionally been very conservative and industrialist in their views, generally supporting Republican platforms. The article suggests that the younger faction of Southern Baptists was partially responsible for this change in policy, and another article on the event by the *Christian Science Monitor* indicates this policy stance signals a rift in the Baptist congregation as a whole:

The initial spark for the action came from a young seminary student, Jonathan Merritt, son of a former SBC president, who pressed his case among a range of leaders. Frank Page, the current SBC president, and some former presidents are among those signing. Other prominent leaders did not, including Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the SBC's public-policy arm.

The commission's role is to promote official SBC positions, Dr. Land said in a statement, and it did not agree with the declaration's language that Southern Baptists have been "too timid." The SBC could have taken a similar environmental stand last June, he said, but "voted 60 to 40 percent" to remove language from its resolution that would have encouraged government initiatives.

Some evangelical leaders strongly criticize the growing involvement in "creation care," saying it diverts attention from the foremost issues of abortion and gay marriage. The split has been so bitter that a conservative group sought, unsuccessfully, to remove a vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals from his post due to his environmental advocacy. (Lampman, 2008)

Even the previous year's resolution, in other words, had 40 percent of the convention supporting stronger environmental policy initiatives. Previously, the Southern Baptist faction has been instrumental in propelling socially conservative politicians to Congress, most notably President George W. Bush, who did not support environmentalism. But now, even one of the most conservative religious groups in the country is recognizing the moral imperative of being environmentally conscious, calling it "creation care." This new stance, taken two years after *An Inconvenient Truth* was released, begins to rearrange groups on either side of the global warming argument. It starts to shift the binary towards that of people who recognize the problem versus people who don't, regardless of other political and social beliefs.

A March 10, 2008 article in the *Boston Globe* reported that the Vatican announced new "deadly sins," among which included pollution. "On the environment, both Pope Benedict XVI and the late Pope John Paul II frequently expressed concern about the fate of the Earth," with the current pope going so far as to have some Holy See buildings use solar energy (D'Emilio, 2008). Pope Benedict and the Vatican wield considerable influence on Roman Catholics in the United States and worldwide; Roman Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination in the country, with 76.9 million residents professing the faith (United States Census, 2000). In conjunction with the other religious leaders becoming more vocal on the environment, the Vatican's

position on the environment has a powerful effect on environmental discourse, particularly in the United States, one of the most religious nations in the world.

Counterarguments in the public sphere

Certain industries and journalists continued to perpetuate the uncertainty of environmental science and global warming. A February 28, 2008 editorial in *The Toronto Sun* cited a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) study assessing hurricane activity in the U.S. from 1900 to 2005. The study concluded that "economic damages from hurricanes have increased in the U.S. over time due to greater population, infrastructure and wealth on the U.S. coastlines, and not due to any spike in the number and intensity of hurricanes." The editorialist claimed that this proved there was no link between increasingly severe hurricanes and global warming, saying the findings "run contrary to fear-mongering by Gore and Co.," even though she admits in the end other studies contradict that put out by NOAA. "But that's the point," she says. "The reality is there are many credible scientists who disagree with each and much that we don't know."

Indeed, after the less-dramatic hurricane seasons of 2006 and 2007, many expressed skepticism on the danger of global warming-empowered storms. Gore had pressed for immediate change in *An Inconvenient Truth* but the media, always focused

on the present, were skeptical that another Katrina would necessitate anything drastic. In his presentation, Gore had said Katrina was "the first taste of a bitter cup that will be proffered to us over and over again." Several journalists used this quotation mockingly when making their case. The *Financial Times* used the unimpressive hurricane season of 2006 to reiterate the scientific debate on the severity of global warming. "The subject has divided the scientific community," wrote Fiona Harvey of the London-based paper. "One of the problems that bedevils scientists in this field is deciphering storm data gathered in previous decades to discern patterns...This year's hurricane season, which began in June, has been quiet in the Atlantic so far, with only four tropical storms and no hurricanes" (*Financial Times*, 2006).

The *Washington Post* took note of the debate during the 2006 season, observing the increase in published studies either supporting or debunking the global warming-hurricane linkage argument.

Inevitably, the scientific debate has spilled into the policy arena. Former vice president Al Gore took up the issue in his recent film 'An Inconvenient Truth,' suggesting that Katrina and other severe storms reflect a broader trend clearly traceable to global warming...

On the other side, Myron Ebell, energy and global warming policy director at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, said these pronouncements amount to political opportunism... 'I don't think that says much one way or the other about whether global warming causes hurricanes,' said Ebell, whose group receives funding from the fossil-fuel industry" ("Scientists Disagree," *Washington Post*, 2007).

The article also considers NOAA's natural cycle tendencies, but then goes on to note that the Pacific experience a severe but less-publicized storm season that year.

"Typhoon Saomai, the strongest to hit China in half a century, crashed into the country's southeast coast and flattened tens of thousands of homes. It killed more than 300 people and prompted the evacuation of more than 1.5 million." Author Juliet Eilperin of the *Post* also interviewed Judith A. Curry, of Georgia Tech's School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, who observed that "the hurricane question has focused Americans on global warming far more than other climate-related developments, such as melting glaciers in Greenland. 'Katrina was sort of the /11 of global warming,' she said in an interview. 'It was a lot more real and immediate. It had more of a real socioeconomic impact in the way the melting of glaciers doesn't" (2006).

At the end of that season, director of the Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute Dan Gainor wrote in a special *Washington Times* commentary, "This year, the media warned everyone would need shelter in facing another devastating hurricane season...No one did, [and] the chorus of media hype about another deadly seasons of storms turned into so much hot air." Instead of blaming the meteorologists, Gainor claimed it was "the media and the left":

Mr. Gore used images of Hurricane Katrina in his film and claims climate change is causing 'more powerful hurricanes.' Where are the reporters asking Mr. Gore if he intends to change his tune now that we had an almost no hurricane season?

A letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* echoed this skepticism:

[I]n the past three weeks alone, The Post has run no fewer than six articles about global warming, five of them on the front page...I'm still waiting, however, for The Post

to run just one article explaining why, despite all of this alarmism, we had no hurricanes above Category 3 during the 2006 Atlantic hurricane season and why none of any size hit the United States. If we are to believe Al Gore's claim in 'An Inconvenient Truth' that hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005 were the products of global warming, how does he explain away the 2006 hurricane season? ("At the Least," WP 1/13/07).

Again, the environmental movement in these articles was equated with “bunk science” and lying politicians, while the alternative was to stick with the status quo and, ultimately, the fossil fuels industry.

Several schools were banned from showing *An Inconvenient Truth* to their students due to parents protesting its lack of balance. In Federal Way, Washington, parent Frosty Hardiman wrote a letter to the Federal Way, Washington school board protesting its incorporation into the school curriculum (“Gore Film,” 2006):

"No you will not teach or show that propagandist Al Gore's video to my child, blaming our nation -- the greatest nation ever to exist on this planet -- for global warming," Hardiman wrote in an e-mail to the Federal Way School Board. The 43-year-old computer consultant is an evangelical Christian who says he believes that a warming planet is "one of the signs" of Jesus Christ's imminent return for Judgment Day.

His angry e-mail (along with complaints from a few other parents) stopped the film from being shown to Hardiman's daughter.

In this particular instance, the school board opted for balance in schools, which meant that teachers who wished to show the film had to find an alternative viewpoint. The Washington Post journalist who wrote the article pointed out that the best alternate source was 37 years old, and current science shows that human activity actually is causing global warming.

What the school board had really intended to do, Larson and school board members insisted, was not to stop schools from teaching the science of global warming, but merely to follow long-standing school board rules that require students to be exposed to "other perspectives" when they view a film like "An Inconvenient Truth."

"We do not need to lose balance in order to save the Earth," Larson said.

Exactly what "balance" might amount to, however, was not spelled out.

The National Academy of Sciences, together with nearly all of the world's leading climate experts, have agreed that there is conclusive evidence that human activity is causing the Earth to warm and that there is an urgent need to reduce the amount of carbon being released into the air.

In public comments at the board meeting, several riled-up Federal Way residents argued that "An Inconvenient Truth" was, indeed, scientifically true and that saying otherwise is "deliberate obfuscation."

These residents derisively compared the search for "balance" in the global-warming issue to decades of phony claims by cigarette companies about the lack of "proof" that smoking is harmful to human health.

The analogy used by the protesting residents of Federal Way, where they compare balance in global warming to the balance promoted by cigarette companies about smoking, is one of the analogies used in *An Inconvenient Truth*. The debate, which occurred in several other communities as well, also shows the visceral response many people had to the film; it also shows the new search for "balance" those opposed to environmentalism had to undertake in order to counter Gore's rhetoric. But it also shows the power of those who infuse discourse with associations to liberalism, scientific uncertainty, and ultimately inaction.

The *New York Times* resolved at the beginning of 2007 that a middle stance had emerged in the global warming debate. "The discourse over the issue has been feverish

since Hurricane Katrina," it notes, posing Gore and other scientists against conservative politicians and a few scientists, "many with ties to energy companies."

A third stance is now emerging, espoused by many experts who challenge both poles of the debate. agree that accumulating carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping smokestack and tailpipe gases probably pose a momentous environmental challenge, but say the appropriate response is more akin to buying fire insurance and installing sprinklers and new wiring in an old, irreplaceable house (the home planet) than to fighting a fire already raging...Many in this camp seek a policy of reducing vulnerability to all climate extremes while building public support for a sustained shift to nonpolluting energy sources. ("Middle Stance Emerges," Revkin, 2007)

The article also cites Mike Hulme, the director of the Tyndall Center for Climate Change Research in Britain, who "said that shrill voices crying doom could paralyze instead of inspire":

I have found myself increasingly chastised by climate change campaigners when my public statements and lectures on climate change have not satisfied their thirst for environmental drama," he wrote. "I believe climate change is real, must be faced and action taken. But the discourse of catastrophe is in danger of tipping society onto a negative, depressive and reactionary trajectory...Climate change is not a problem waiting for a solution (least of all a solution delivered and packaged by science), but a powerful idea that will transform the way we develop," he said in an e-mail message" (Revkin, 2007).

Revkin uses this to highlight what some see as the extreme stance taken by Gore and his supporters, but he also fails to seriously criticize the conservative politicians and scientists with ties to energy companies. While they are certainly on one end of the debate, their credibility as scientists and policymakers is never taken to task. This appears to be a wider trend in the mainstream media. Moreover, this "middle stance" taken by Hulme and his colleagues is the same viewpoint taken by Gore in AIT; humans are in fact causing global warming and they need to engage now. The

difference is one of urgency. Revkin notes that "these experts see a clear need for the public to engage now, but not to panic. They worry that portrayals of the issue like that in "An Inconvenient Truth," the documentary focused on the views of Mr. Gore, may push too hard."

Taking action

The film's website, www.aninconvenienttruth.org, encouraged people to meet together and take action. Leonardo DiCaprio, inspired by Al Gore, released *The Twelfth Hour*, a documentary about Arctic glacier melting. There was a surge in environmental nonfiction books after AIT was released; books like *The Omnivore's Dilemma* were eagerly purchased by people wanting to learn more about impending environmental *Storm World*, which explored global warming as a scientific and political issue. Several articles reported on the three presidential candidates' positive reception to global warming on the campaign trail (State News Service, 2008; University Wire, 2008). The PR Newswire reported in March of 2008 that the children's television channel Nickelodeon was launching The Big Green Help, a "multi-platform campaign designed to educate and empower kids to take action on environmental issues;" the article notes the campaign was started in part because "more than half of U.S. kids [said] that they are concerned about the environment" ("Nickelodeon Launches," 2008).

A LexisNexis search for "grassroots AND global warming AND action" after

the film's release resulted in 314 articles. Many of these articles detailed debate on environmental policy change, but others reported of independent initiatives such as that launched by Nickelodeon and the Energy Action Coalition, which held "Fossil Fools Day '08:

The "Foolies" are one way young people are taking action to build a more clean and just energy future this Fossil Fools Day. From North Dakota to New Zealand, youth are planning actions to disrupt dirty energy as usual and promote clean energy solutions (PR Newswire, 2008).

There were also reports of initiatives to support Al Gore as a write-in candidate in the New Hampshire primaries (U.S. Newswire, 2007), profiles on "Generation Wired" and its sense of agency in environmental issues (Arthur, 2007), and press releases for a new "Green" podcast series, featuring lead environmentalists (Business Wire, 2007).

The New York Times observed the green adjustments New Yorkers were making to their lives as a result of *An Inconvenient Truth*. It cites a study from the Center for Climate Systems Research at Columbia University, which estimates a rise in sea level of about 12 inches by 2050, far less than Gore's prediction of 20 feet. This rise in sea level has caused many in New York to be concerned about property damage should another Katrina-like storm occur in the Northeast:

Most urban planning and environmental groups have just begun grappling with how to protect the city's property from climate change.

Last fall, Mayor Michael Bloomberg created the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability. As part of the new office's mandate to address housing, transportation and other infrastructure needs over the next 25 years, it will coordinate the development of a climate adaptation strategy.

Drawing on other city agencies, including the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Buildings, the new long-term planning office has also met with more than 100 advocacy organizations, conducted community meetings in each borough and digested thousands of individual e-mail messages collected through its Web site, nyc.gov/planyc2030.

The early fruit of these efforts will be a plan or at least a framework for one, to be announced by the mayor in early April to tailor the city to its future 25 years hence.

While again Hurricane Katrina seems to have played a major part in this change, it was perhaps the image of Manhattan under 20 feet of water that also inspired the collective action of municipal agencies, grassroots organizations and city officials.

More action from the real estate community was noted in a March 2008 *Wall Street Journal* article (Banjo).

Across the country, thousands of communities are trying to fight urban sprawl and global warming from the ground up.

Instead of adding eco-friendly touches to existing neighborhoods, developers are building whole new communities designed along green principles. Some of these developments offer very basic solutions to environmental concerns, such as street layouts that promote walking and discourage driving.

Others go much further, incorporating environmentalist ideas into every aspect of community life. Some, for instance, use eco-friendly building design and set aside a portion of the neighborhood property as preserved land.

A specific community, Houston, Texas, was marked out by the *Houston Chronicle* as one such place that encouraged greener house design. This is perhaps an unlikely location for such a trend, as Houston is often considered a place of conspicuous consumption, with extensive urban sprawl and SUV drivers, but the fact that even Houston homebuyers are considering the effects of their actions on the

environment suggests a definite change in their discourse:

Luke and Nicki Prettol spent four months looking for their first house, narrowing it down to three before finally settling on a three-bedroom one-story in Spring.

The selling point? The home was built to help them save on energy costs.

"When all else is equal, it's one of those things in the back of your head where you go, 'It should be better for the environment,' " Luke Prettol said.

Local builders for years have touted the energy efficiency of their homes, such as better insulation and power-saving appliances, but some are taking it to a new level.

One company, for example, is creating an entire community where all the houses will have solar power. Another builder claims its new green homes will cut up to 50 percent in heating and cooling usage. ("Homebuyers," 2008)

The article goes on to say that the demand for green housing is caused mainly by rising energy costs; it notes that a green house can offset about 15 percent of electric usage in a 4,000 square-foot home. Certainly, saving money in a depressed economy with rising fuel prices is a prime consideration of many people considering the purchase of a home. But the featured homebuyer in the article, Luke Prettol, did not mention the economics of his energy-efficient house. Instead, he said "it should be better for the environment." While this is an admittedly small example, it is yet another way in which the reasoning for environmentalism has changed.

Significantly, even those most opposed to the environmentalist movement admitted that global warming was a problem, as reported in *The Denver Post*:

Two years ago, energy giant Exxon Mobil Corp. funded organizations to raise doubt about global warming. This month, Exxon's vice president for public affairs, Ken

Cohen, told a group of bloggers that "action should be taken" to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions.

Colorado's largest electricity supplier, Xcel Energy Inc., now supports a proposal to force the company to make 20 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2020. In 2004, Xcel opposed a voter initiative mandating 10 percent from renewables by 2015. That initiative passed...

"The public consciousness about climate change is high, and the litigation in the U.S. is starting to pick up," said Holland and Hart attorney Jim Holtcamp, leader of the new group.

Last week, Holtcamp and his colleagues hosted a private climate change workshop for Western energy industry leaders to discuss possible future regulations and ongoing lawsuits involving climate change.

"Most people think it's going to be three years max - and I think it'll be sooner - that we'll have a nationwide mandatory program" to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, Holtcamp said. (Human, 2007)

While this passage echoes Dryzek's remarks about industry leaders wanting to maintain a veneer of environmental responsibility, the sustained efforts taken by the largest oil company in the United States shows a marked change from the past.

A *USA Today* article, also in March of 2008, discussed the current green movement.

"The missing ingredient is the force of public opinion."

That's the line Cathy Zoi recalls from former vice president Al Gore when he urged her to become CEO of the Alliance for Climate Protection.

Americans are aware of global warming, "but they don't get the urgency of it and that this is solvable," says Zoi, who took the job last year (Elias, 2008).

The article, which features a sidebar that shows ways in which people can become "greener," says that people will only make a concerted effort if they see other people

changing their habits, they get positive feedback, and they are given specific, concrete steps to take.

Fact-jammed books — appeals often used by global warming activists — and terrifying threats about the future that don't offer solutions won't motivate many people and may even backfire, says Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale University Project on Climate Change. The more people are inundated with facts and figures, the more emotionally turned off many become, "and you have to have an emotional response — bad or good — to put a high priority on doing something."

That's not to say dire threats work better. If not paired with positive, doable actions, fear tactics can make people feel overwhelmed and powerless, Leiserowitz says (Elias, 2008).

Fear tactics, in other words, do not necessarily inspire change, according to the article.

This underscores the need for the rhetorical techniques used by Gore in *An*

Inconvenient Truth, which stress the need for urgency but provides the audience with positive imagery and concrete steps to change behavior (seen in the film during the credits). The film was successful in part because it generated an "emotional response," as the expert quoted in the article emphasized. The environmental movement has to be holistic and positive. Despite this concern about concrete action, it appeared that grassroots movements sprang up all over the country since January of 2006.

The future of the movement

Within the 314 articles that contained the terms “global warming,” “grassroots,” and “action,” 33 also contained the term “youth.” The resulting articles indicate a growing trend among younger generations to express concern about the environment and begin activist movements. One student from the University of Michigan wrote:

On Aug. 16, former Vice President Al Gore was quoted in Nicholas Kristof's New York Times column as saying, "I can't understand why there aren't rings of young people blocking bulldozers ... and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants." He was right in asking, "Where are the young people?" but he missed the mark in defining our role in bringing about climate justice.

As an advocate for climate justice, I've heard mutterings over the past year of a brewing movement among the youth. Last weekend, 38 University of Michigan students traveled to Washington, D.C., for Power Shift 2007 -- the first-ever conference on climate change organized for youth, by youth.

Six thousand students converged on the nation's capitol for Power Shift 2007, not to chain ourselves to trees or blockade dirty coal plants but to lobby every member of Congress for an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, for the creation of 5 million new green-collar jobs and for a moratorium on all new coal plants.

While this possible trend might not take the form of protesting known to Vietnam-era activists, the “Wired Generation” is enacting change via social networking, new media, and collective petition-writing to politicians.

Grassroots organizations like those mentioned continue to spring up and be reported on, even after the two-year mark of *An Inconvenient Truth*'s release. On March 31, 2008, Al Gore announced a new three-year campaign to inspire more action,

not just concern, within the public around global warming and reducing carbon

footprints:

'We can solve the climate crisis, but it will require a major shift in public opinion and engagement,' Gore said in a statement. 'The technologies exist, but our elected leaders don't yet have the political will to take the bold actions required. When politicians hear the American people calling loud and clear for change, they'll listen,' he said.

But generating that loud and clear vox populi requires a new approach, environmentalists say. As reported in USA Today:

'We've come up against a brick wall with Americans,' says Lee Bodner, executive director of ecoAmerica, an environmental group based in Washington, D.C. Despite Americans' widespread familiarity with global warming, 'only a small group are changing their behavior.'

And as public anxiety grows about other domestic issues - the economy, the housing market, the cost of healthcare - this concern among activists (including Gore) that the issue is not getting the attention it deserves may be well founded...

Public opinion and the willingness - or unwillingness - to take personal steps to reduce one's "carbon footprint" are at the core of Gore's new effort. Most Americans are aware of and concerned about global warming.

But so far, it seems, there is not a critical mass willing to make major (or even relatively simple) lifestyle changes (Knickerbocker, 2008).

The changes in discourse set in place by *An Inconvenient Truth*, if Gore's new initiative is successful, will not only be reinforced but will translate into meaningful policy and lifestyle changes in the United States. As the leaders of the We movement state, it is an uphill battle to transform changes in framing and rhetoric into a concrete, sustained movement to reverse current global warming trends. But changing the discourse was a significant first step.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The most indicative results of the media analysis show that, previous to *An Inconvenient Truth*, environmental mass media coverage focused more on opinions and research; after the film, environmental coverage focused on events, policy changes, and debate. The media analysis, therefore, suggests *An Inconvenient Truth* had a substantial effect on the public sphere and environmental discourse. Hurricane Katrina was also a profound image event, but it was *An Inconvenient Truth* and Gore's presentations around the country that connected Katrina to the larger crisis of global warming. The public opinion polls and coverage on scientific reports suggest that the concept of global warming as a human-caused phenomenon was not widely known or accepted until 2006 in the United States, but after the film a much larger percentage of people recognized the connection. Until that point, it had been acknowledged within the scientific community but largely ignored by policymakers.

The analysis also shows that Gore's connection between environmentalism and morality was not new. Religious leaders had made the connection years before *An Inconvenient Truth*, and had called on politicians to enact more environmentally friendly legislation. Gore used this rhetoric in his film to appeal to these religious groups, getting the attention of politicians who had previously garnered the groups' support by being socially conservative. The environmental cause then united groups of people who had been supportive, but who had not been connected because of other

political differences. This morality-environmentalist connection even got the attention of President Bush, who had previously ignored religious leaders' pleas, and industry leaders, who at least attempted to placate the public with announcements of increased environmental responsibility.

Not all of the public sphere was convinced by the film; many groups denounced it as “junk science” or “liberal propaganda.” But these arguments, as well as the editorials published after the hurricane season of 2006, were forced. Previously, anti-environmentalists never had to examine why their beliefs were correct; environmentalist groups were generally seen as radical fringe organizations. After *An Inconvenient Truth*, however, which starred a moderate former vice president, critics had to find reasons to sustain their skepticism. These criticisms – the cold temperatures of the 2007 winter season, the quiet 2006 hurricane season, the not-absolute scientific consensus on global warming – focused on present-day details, the immediate scope of the global warming crisis. Gore himself showed temperature fluctuations in the graph, anomalies in an overall trend of temperature increase. The reasons to disbelieve Gore and his film, it seems, are ones that ignore the overall message that's being promoted and continue to focus on slight inconsistencies and denunciations of political motives. Ironically, most of these counterarguments were anticipated and answered by Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth*, if not remembered.

The destruction of Hurricane Katrina, as implied in the film, was also caused by government ineptitude. Global warming heightened the power of the storm, yes, but the failure to repair the levees and adequately shelter the people of New Orleans is one of federal and state agencies. It is therefore up to the people, to individuals working together, to enable change. This is a major rhetorical argument put forth in *An Inconvenient Truth*, and transfers agency from experts or politicians to the people. Many people organized themselves after Hurricane Katrina to provide food, money, labor, and building materials to the people of New Orleans; this empowerment is one that should resonate within the environmental public sphere. The media analysis indicates that increased awareness and action did occur from 2006 onward, with many groups using *An Inconvenient Truth* as a learning tool. Others used the cigarette company analogy and future generations appeal to further their causes. The future generations themselves, particularly those on college campuses, started movements to turn their campuses “greener.”

Ultimately, the changes in discourse brought about by *An Inconvenient Truth* do not fill in gaps of existing literature so much as continue the environmental discourse process. It also connected current existing literature on global warming with the growing religious environmental movement and the larger public sphere, as well as advance an amalgamate discourse from existing and formerly competing discourses surrounding the environment. Like *Silent Spring* and other works concerned with

social issues, it had discernible effects on the public sphere, causing attitude changes in policymakers and collective action towards sustainable environmental change in the people.

The power of *An Inconvenient Truth*, as the analyses indicate, is its narrative. Like *Silent Spring* 30 years ago, *An Inconvenient Truth* is a powerful artifact that brought together image events from the news, historical events in American history, and moving imagery and emotion under a rhetorical narrative. Scientific data and personal tragedies alone are not persuasive; it is Gore's storyline that made a dull and remote issue an immediate and impending crisis for the front pages of newspapers all over the country. Gore's new initiative intends to make use of the traction gained by his film, and those who newly embraced the environmental movement, as well as those who were always convinced, now know they have the power and the responsibility to mitigate the impending period of consequences.

Suggestions for future research

While conducting the LexisNexis searches, I discovered that the film had garnered a lot of attention from international papers. For purposes of brevity, and because the United States remains one of the least environmentally conscious developed nations, I decided to leave the international papers out of the research. The discourse in Europe, for example, has long embraced the need for sustainable resource consumption and emissions reductions. As Gore noted in the film, their car emissions

standards are far ahead of the United States. An analysis into the international environmental discourse, and its effects (or non-effects) on the eventual change in American opinion, might be worth examination.

A side effect of the increased environmental awareness in American media is the resurgence of the term “green” to describe the movement. Previously, “green” had been a somewhat disdainful term; the Green Party, for example, was seen to embrace anti-establishment, radical beliefs that had no place in the American mainstream. While the term was not mentioned in *An Inconvenient Truth*, “green” has been used to describe both Gore’s efforts and that of other environmentalists. If given the time or resources, a rhetorical study of the word “green,” and the change towards more positive connotations, would enhance an understanding of the current environmental discourse.

I mentioned that the intended audience for *An Inconvenient Truth* tended to be people who had the power to influence policymakers; these people tend to be those with higher income and education levels, even though it is the poorest people who will feel the effects of global warming first. Poorer people are more concerned with immediate problems, like the job market and the cost of goods. Further research into economic public spheres of the environment, and the racist or classist implications of environmental rhetoric, might yield ways in which environmentalism can be feasible even for the poorest classes.

Lastly, I would not presume to say that *An Inconvenient Truth* is the only work that created this new environmentalism, although I would say it is the most significant and rhetorically powerful. Research into other environmentalist works within the social literature or journalism fields would provide a more comprehensive look at the discourse as a whole.

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