MOVEMENT WITHOUT MOTION: THE RHETORIC OF
CONSERVATIVE COUNTER-CLAIMS TO GLOBAL WARMING
THEORY

William Edwards
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/50

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
Movement without Motion: The Rhetoric of Conservative Counter-Claims to Global Warming Theory

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English, Writing and Rhetoric, at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

William J. Edwards Jr.
Bachelor of Arts, English Literature
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
August 1975

Thesis Director: David J. Coogan
Assistant Professor, Department of English

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April 26, 2010
Acknowledgment

I wish to thank my wife, Betsy, and son, Morgan, for their love, support and patience during the past three years, as I have pursued my Master’s degree. I would like to thank my 89-year-old mother, Kathryn, for asking me about my studies every time she has spoken with me. I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of the VCU Department of English – especially David Coogan, for his great confidence in me and his contributions to this work; and other members of the faculty: Greg Donovan, for re-introducing me to the beauty of great writing; David Wojahn, for opening my eyes to poetic genius as it has manifested itself throughout the world; Susann Cokal, for challenging and questioning me until I gained the confidence to challenge and question myself; and Clint McCown, for appreciating the value of my instincts as a writer. I also would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, for their critical wisdom and kindhearted patience. I also thank the VCU English Department’s Thom Didato for his availability and his willingness to work so hard on my behalf.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement Theory in the Rhetorical Realm</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Rhetoric and New Social Movements</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: The Rhetoric of the Global Warming Counter-Claims</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Global Warming Debate</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergence of the Counter-Claims</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Perception</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conservative Movement as a New Social Movement</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading the Conservative Movement’s Rhetoric on Global Warming</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology and Tabulated Results</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the Conservative Arguments</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collective Identity of the Conservative “New Social Movement”</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives for the Future</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Works Cited</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Survey Form</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: List of Documents Analyzed, with URLs</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: The Conservative Movement’s Counter-Claims Regarding Global Warming (McCright/Dunlap 2000 Study) ..................................................................................................................31

Table 2: The Conservative Movement’s Current Position Is Global Warming is Actually Occurring? (2009) ..........................................................................................................................43
Many U.S. conservatives view government mandates to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases as a threat to the economy of the developed world. Conservative think tanks have adopted a common rhetoric to instill doubt about proposed mandates in the minds of elected officials, the media, and the public. Using a survey of the websites of 14 conservative think tanks, this thesis analyzes counter-claims to global warming theory to identify rhetorical artifacts that typically characterize conservative responses to issues, and to show how rhetorical theory can help anticipate the nature of such responses. The research identifies unifying speech codes – such as
ideographs and commonplaces – that provide the conservative movement’s appeal. The conclusion is that conservative counter-claims to global warming theory are an application of longstanding principles in a new and transformative way; and that the conservative movement is actually a “new social movement” as described by rhetorical theorists.
Introduction

Faithful viewers of the conservative talk show, *The Glenn Beck Program*, might have done a double take on July 18, 2007 when Beck admitted on FOX Network television that he believed planet Earth actually could be getting warmer.

“I do believe in global warming. I’m not sure if man is causing it, but I am willing to listen to that side and be convinced of that,” Beck told his audience as he opened a Fox News network interview with noted environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (The Glenn Beck Program).

For years, Beck had been a vocal skeptic of both the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s consensus statement on climate change, which recognized global warming as a manmade problem, and of policy actions outlined in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol as ways to stem anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

In the late 1990s and first several years of this century, Beck and other right-wing commentators were fairly united in their questioning of the evidence for global warming. Conservative think tanks supported their opposition to the Kyoto proposals with arguments that raised doubts about the validity of climate science in general, and about the link of global warming to human causes, according to hundreds of documents posted
on websites of conservative think tanks (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming”).

Did Beck’s seeming change of view on global warming signify a new trend in the views of his fellow members of the conservative movement? Were the same people who had been arguing that climate change science was “junk science” and that evidence of global warming was weak, if not completely wrong, now willing to accept the consensus view and join those who were working to limit the production of greenhouse gases and slow the rate of climate change?

Apparently not. Beck went on to argue that even if he were to be convinced that greenhouse gases generated by human activity are causing climate change, and that climate change could cause serious problems for mankind, he still doubts that the policy changes recommended by the Kyoto Protocol would solve the problem. Instead, he continues to support the conservative view that mandated limits to production of greenhouse gases will wreak havoc on the U.S. economy.

Beck’s revised position on global warming did reflect a change in the rhetoric of conservatives on the issue global warming, however. By the time of Beck’s broadcast in 2007, more conservative analysts were agreeing openly that global climate change was a real phenomenon – many more than had conceded this point a decade earlier. In a study published in 2000 by Washington State University sociologists Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, the researchers reported that they had surveyed more than 275 global warming documents posted on the websites of 14 conservative think tanks between 1990 and 1997, and they outlined three main arguments used to cast doubt on global warming
theory: 1) that the evidence of global warming is weak, if not wrong; 2) that global warming will be beneficial if it does occur; and 3) that proposed actions to limit global warming will do more harm than good (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming” 510. See also, Table 1).

McCright and Dunlap conclude that the emergence of three counter-claims as the dominant, shared arguments against measures to ameliorate anthropogenic global warming constituted a new counter-movement that had emerged just before the turn of the 21st century. Referencing previous work on movement theory within the discipline of sociology (Mottl, Vander Zanden, Zald and Useem, Benford and Snow), they argued that the phenomenon of the development of these three conservative counter-claims fits Mottl’s definition of a countermovement as “a particular kind of protest movement which is a response to a social change advocated by an initial movement” (Mottl 623).

McCright and Dunlap state that previous sociological research on global warming focused on the issue as a social problem, which “produced an inadequate understanding of the global warming controversy” (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming” 501). Instead, viewing the phenomenon of the global warming counter-claims as a movement or a counter-movement enables the two sociologists to see the phenomenon more as part of an interactive process of framing the controversy undertaken by multiple stakeholders – providing “more leverage for understanding the underlying structures of power in which social problems discourse is embedded”, and to “conceptualize the recent global warming controversy in the United States as a framing
This approach to analysis of the global warming controversy provides a revealing image of two powerful forces going head-to-head in a “war of language” with potentially devastating consequences.

On one side of this conflict, the combatants might be said to view “global frame of environmental problems [as] the ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enables us to perceive that for the first time in history, humans are disrupting the global ecosystem in ways that affect, not only ‘environmental quality,’ but also the current and future well-being of our species”; on the other side, opponents might be said to view governmental pursuit of environmental protection “as threatening core elements of conservatism, such as the primacy of individual freedom, private property rights, laissez-faire government, and promotion of free enterprise” (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming” 504).

In the McCright-Dunlap study, the opposition to global warming is ultimately described as part of a conservative environmental counter-movement, and the success of the anti-environmental rhetoric employed in this counter-movement is undeniable. In a follow-up study in 2003, McCright and Dunlap look at the impacts of this rhetoric on the media, public opinion and subsequent attempts to implement measures to limit warming, concluding that “a major reason the United States failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol to ameliorate global warming was the opposition of the American conservative movement, a
key segment of the anti-environmental countermovement” (McCright and Dunlap, “Defeating Kyoto” 349).

This approach is based largely on sociological theory of movements, which practitioners in that discipline say has been advanced mostly in Europe. Social movement theory is distinguished from social problems theory, which has predominated American sociological research. Sociologist Harry Bash, one of the pioneers of movement theory in America, writes that both approaches were developed in response to the Industrial Revolution as ways to explain essentially the same phenomenon: social change resulting from collective action. Bash differentiates the two merely by associating social problems theory more with ahistorical research and social movement theory more with the history of “people engaged in concerted action that is intended to have some sort of impact on the prevailing socio-cultural arrangement.” (Bash 11)

Bash does acknowledge the evolution of movement theory in the sociological, political and rhetorical disciplines when he adds that both views are merely “conceptions of perceptions” that are not themselves “empirically evident” (Bash 9).

[N]either problems nor movements constitute observables per se but, rather, must be recognized as alternative interpretations of observable phenomena … as distinctive social constructions of reality. (Bash 163)

His attitude is that linking the two approaches together is more important than splitting them apart, because what really matters is the analysis of social change. Other sociologists, including Doug McAdam, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, editors of an often-cited 1996 text on social movements, Comparative Perspectives on Social
Movements, expanded this view. In their introduction to this work, the three characterize all movement scholars in sociology as increasingly emphasizing the same three points in their research and in the discussions of their findings (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 2):

1) the structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement;

2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal) available to insurgents; and

3) the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action.

One might argue that any or all of these factors in a social movement – opportunities, constraints, organization, interpretation, attribution and social construction – depend on rhetoric to become real. But surely, interpretation, attribution and social construction are inextricably bound to language, and this is where sociologists, political scientists and rhetoricians admit that the lines separating their disciplines get hazy.

In their study of three social movements in the 20th century, “The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Language, Culture, and Political Change,” political scientists Victoria Hattam and Joseph Lowndes argue that certain linguistic changes, especially changes that establish new social identities for participants in the political process, result in “shifts in meaning that reverberate through political identifications and alliances in the most profound fashion.” Hattam and Lowndes, often-quoted experts on the “Tea Party” movement, assert that in politics, shifts in identity occur long before any shift in political power is apparent.
Interest and identities are not given in advance, with politics relegated to the task of distribution. Rather, who we are, what we want, and how we might satisfy our desires are produced and reproduced discursively over time. If we want to understand political change, we need to attend to discourse, since this is where political identification and social cleavages are made and remade. (Hattam and Lowndes 203-204)

By identifying and outlining the key counter-claims against global warming theory, McCright and Dunlap help isolate the discursive strategies of what they describe as the environmental counter-movement in American politics – as witnessed through the statements of conservative think tanks. But now that many think tanks have abandoned what appeared to be their most crucial argument, that global warming doesn’t exist, what can we learn from this development? Has the environmental counter-movement ceased to exist? Did it ever exist? Or has it evolved into something new and unprecedented?

These questions may be appropriate for further sociological studies based on social movement theory within that discipline, but a useful way to supplement our knowledge of the global warming controversy is to analyze these arguments from a rhetorical perspective – following the lead of Hattam and Lowndes by looking at how the words of the discourse are used and how those words provide new social identities and link together the adherents of the conservative movement.

If the real purpose of the political process is to make wise decisions about issues that will impact our future, then perhaps the better question to ask is: What can the language of the global warming controversy tell us about members of movements on both
sides of the issue, about the political institutions involved, and about how each group is likely to approach decision-making on environmental issues?

In this thesis, I will investigate how one movement’s rhetorical codes may have influenced its members to adopt certain ways of speaking about global warming. But to understand how rhetoric can influence identities, meaning and action, one must first examine how movement theory has developed within the rhetorical discipline – with particular emphasis on the concept of “new social movements” and how that concept has provided methods for analyzing social change agents.

**Movement Theory in the Rhetorical Realm**

Although the term “social movement” is generally acknowledged as originating within the discipline of sociology in the mid-1900s, it wasn’t long after the birth of movement studies in sociology that rhetoricians began to focus on the role of language in the formation of the “collective identities” – as described by sociologist Alberto Melucci – that enable people to act collectively (as movements) against repression (Melucci 132). As early as the 1950s, eminent rhetorical scholars such as Kenneth Burke recognized how a speaker’s interaction with his or her audience often involves more than the mere act of persuading someone else to perform a specific action; that social action can arise from shared identity between speaker and audience.

Through the explanation of his “dramatistic theory,” Burke describes a process that greatly widens the meaning of persuasion “to see behind it the conditions of identification or consubstantiality.” Writing that “the rhetorician may have to change an audience’s opinion in one respect, but he can succeed only insofar as he yields to that
audience’s opinions in other respects,” Burke provided almost inarguable evidence of the essential role of rhetoric in the formation of movements (Burke 54-56). He even foreshadowed the concept of “new social movements,” which underlies the transition of rhetorical movement studies from its traditional focus on the history of social phenomena associated with movement to a focus on rhetoric as the progenitor of meaning and identity in movements.

One of Burke’s contemporaries, Richard McKeon, seems to have been having similar visionary thoughts when, in 1957, he characterized “a society as composed of social actors who are of one mind in the truth, which is constituted discursively, without being of one opinion” (McKeon 90). In other words, one wonders whether McKeon’s word “society” in this sentence could now be replaced with the phrase “new social movement,” which Gerard Hauser and Susan Whalen would in 1997 describe as almost in every way “rhetorically constituted” (Hauser and Whalen 439).

Regardless, by the time Burke published The Rhetoric of Motives in 1950, scholars of rhetoric were beginning to take movement studies quite seriously. Burke’s theory gave almost equal significance to the rhetor’s audience, an idea that began to permeate movement studies immediately and would become well-accepted by the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to the 1950s, rhetorical criticism concentrated mainly on individual speeches and selected groups of speeches, and these rhetorical artifacts were analyzed mostly in a historical context from the perspective of how the words had influenced specific societal changes (Brockriede 291-292).
In April 1952, Leland M. Griffin broke this tradition when he published an article titled, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements.” Griffin outlined a new formula for the rhetorical study of movements. Rather than being statisticians of movements, Griffin wrote, rhetoricians should focus on being “literary historians” who, once they identify the historical movement to target in their research, should endeavor to “isolate the rhetorical movement within the matrix of the historical movement.” (Griffin, “Rhetoric of Historical Movements” 184) Griffin prescribed three steps for success in such endeavors: 1) Identify patterns of discussion; 2) describe the configuration of the discourse taking place; and 3) characterize the physiognomy of persuasion in the rhetorical movement (Griffin, “Rhetoric of Historical Movements” 186).

Griffin put his formula to work, publishing two rhetorical movement studies – one on the anti-masonic movement of the early 1800s, and another on the emergence of the “New Left” – that became models for a new direction in movement studies. Later, Griffin would depart even farther from the historical approach, publishing an article incorporating elements of Burke’s dramatistic theory as a substitute for the traditional historical approach.

During the next three decades, rhetoricians who began to march under the banner of movement studies – and even some critics of the approach – were writing about how the discourse occurring within a social movement was an ongoing process that constructed and reconstructed the reality of the movement for its adherents. If the success of rhetorical persuasion is enhanced by a give-and-take between rhetor and audience, as Burke suggested, then there must be something going on that involves a change of
identity for everyone involved – that a rhetorical situation, at least sometimes, creates something new, and, that this new phenomenon sometimes becomes a “new” movement.

Although rhetoricians and sociologists were making greater distinctions between their approaches during the 1970s and 1980s, movement studies for both disciplines began to evolve slowly along parallel paths.

The Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association) in 1971 published The Prospect of Rhetoric, a collection of essays and articles that had been assembled for the association’s National Development Project on Rhetoric. More than 40 scholars contributed to the project, presenting papers at two conference meetings during 1970, and the association ultimately included 18 presentations in its final report. Although none of the articles focused on movement studies per se, some of the discussions seemed to be setting the stage for new methods of study that would focus more on the role of rhetoric in engaging audiences as agents of change, and emphasizing the role of rhetoric in instilling the sense of belonging and shared values that characterize the collective identity of most social movements.

In his SCA essay titled “The New Rhetoric,” Chaim Perelman proposed that effective rhetoric must focus on the relationship between speakers and listeners; that it must combine basic elements drawn from Aristotle’s Topics, which emphasizes that a particular audience will have generally accepted opinions, and from Rhetoric, which emphasizes the reasoning that must be applied by a speaker who is aware of the opinions of the audience.
The social aspect of rhetoric makes it easier to understand the attitude of all kinds of protesters and contestants who cannot find in the established order adequate means to obtain a hearing … The great speaker knows his audience. He knows the values to which they adhere and to what extent, and the arguments they accept and those they question … In political discourse, recourse is had to commonplaces, to the common beliefs and interests of the audience. Hence the psychology of the listeners, their beliefs, prejudices and passions play an all-important part. (Perelman 120)

Wayne Brockriede, in his SCA essay on trends in rhetoric, noted that the discipline had reached far beyond the traditional concept of a “speaker constructing a persuasive discourse to influence other people.” Although persuasion is still one of the principal purposes of rhetoric, Brockriede opines, viewing it as the only function of rhetoric severely limits the study of interactions of people and ideas. “Some of the other dimensions of rhetoric, to mention a few, are to aim at identification, at alienation, at adaptation, at self-discovery, at interaction, and at the development or maintenance of a group (Brockriede 125).

Foreshadowing another trend in rhetoric studies that would account for a much larger share of research in the 1990s, Samuel L. Becker urged participants in the SCA conference to undertake “more historical and critical studies which provide data on that communication which operates to prevent rather than bring about change … additional studies which provide data on communications which serves an ego-defense function, or
a value-expressive function, or a knowledge function – which serves the needs of individuals to give structure to their universe (Becker 23).

At the same time, Wayne Booth warned those in his discipline about some of the dangers of giving too little attention to the classic, persuasive influence of rhetoric. Although studying the rhetorical artifacts of a particular group of people with common beliefs and goals (sometimes constituting a movement) can provide insight into the nature of the group, it may not tell us much about the potential of the group for influencing the world outside. Too often, Booth argues, “[t]he temptation is to a self-satisfied expose of the opponent’s fallacies and absurdities, without making the slightest effort to ‘move into his circle of assumption’ and argue from there” (Booth. “Prospect of Rhetoric” 97).

Booth says this is true both for people who use rhetoric and for the people who study them.

Booth and Perelman believed rhetoric pervades every level of human experience. They advocated marrying the approaches of all disciplines in rhetorical research, and in the decades since the SCA report, it became clear they meant this broad view method should apply to movement studies. As the 1970s progressed, movement studies continued to gain respect in the sociological and rhetorical disciplines. French sociologist Alain Touraine described movements not as peripheral phenomena, but as “the fabric of society,” a social structure that is key to analysis and understanding of all kinds of other societal structures (Sennett ix).

But Touraine’s idea of structure was not concrete. He wrote that movements are not defined by their objectives, but by the identities they assume, based largely on the
struggles they undertake: “The social movement is the organized collective behavior of a class actor struggling against his class adversary for the social control of historicity in a concrete community” (Touraine 71). Movements produce ideologies, and often, Utopias, both of which become identified with what is at stake in the struggles, and ultimately, with the history of their times. Although Touraine viewed social movements as loosely structured and dynamic, he differentiated them from other forms of group action and from social problems by outlining four conditions that must be met: 1) a movement must undertake its activities in the name of a committed population; 2) a movement’s beliefs must be organized and integrated (not merely opinion); 3) a movement must identify its adversaries; and 3) the conflict must not be specific, but a social problem that affects all of society (Touraine 79).

In some respects, Touraine’s view was both modern and traditional. He saw each movement as having a beginning (usually a spontaneous protest), a middle (in which the movement becomes at least loosely organized), and an end (often a confrontation that leads to a transformation) (Touraine 77). Griffin took a similar view, but defined the stages more from his rhetorical point of view as: inception, rhetorical crisis, and consummation (Griffin “On Studying Movements” 225). Clearly, both sociologists and rhetoricians were emphasizing many of the same aspects in explaining their theories on movements – the importance of collective identity; the importance of language and ideology; and the ability of movements to create meaning.

Robert Cathcart, a rhetorician, acknowledged the contributions of sociology to movement studies, but argued that only rhetorical definition of movements would work
for rhetoricians. Cathcart stressed Burke’s dramatistic theory, writing that movements contain dialectic tension that arises from moral conflict, and that “[i]t is this reciprocity or dialectical enjoinment in the moralist arena which defines movements and distinguishes them from other dramatic forms.” (Cathcart “New Approaches…” 87) In the ensuing decades, the argument over cross-disciplinary study of movement continued, but few deny the influence that the various disciplines have exerted on each other. Movement studies were becoming a significantly larger share of the work done in both disciplines.

In winter 1980, the Central States Speech Journal published an entire issue devoted to the subject, based on the organization’s annual conference, with contributions from leading scholars such as Cathcart, Griffin, McGee, Simons, Lucas and Zarefsky. Lucas’s contribution opened with a challenge:

We have reached the end of the first generation of movement studies by rhetorical scholars. Although few such studies existed prior to 1965, better than two hundred have been published in the last fifteen years. Yet our understanding of the rhetoric of social movements remains essentially epiphanic … we have yet to develop much systematic research or theory-building about how rhetoric functions in the inception, progress, and culmination of social movements. (Lucas 255)

After a decade of study, Griffin remained faithful with his advice to rhetorical scholars, to look for rhetorical movements occurring within historical movements, which he described as an “evolving sequence of discourse” that plays out in a movement. He also praised the members of his discipline for broadening the scope of movement studies to
include such concepts as “innovational movements” (Smith and Windes 142), “establishment movements” (Zarefsky 246), and “mythic analysis” (Solomon 263).

Many authors who presented at the CSSJ conference addressed the challenge of defining rhetorical movements, and in doing so foreshadowed emergence of the term “new social movement,” which would come into common usage more than a decade later. The scholars focused on a problem generated by sociological movement studies, which they say had been too narrowly defined.

Michael McGee described movements not as phenomena, but rather as meanings created by the discourse of the participants, and he predicted that the rhetoric of social movements might become “a distinctive theoretical domain, but only as a theory of human consciousness. (“Social Movement…” 233)” A theory of movement “must determine the identity and meaning of the consciousness which inspires us, as citizens and scholars, to seek and see ‘movement’ when we look at historical and social facts. (“Social Movement…” 242)” He advises scholars that

We will not say a “movement” exists or has occurred until we can demonstrate by a survey of public discourse that descriptions of the environment have changed in common usage in such a way as to make “movement” an arguably acceptable term useful in formulating the chain of facts we believe to have constituted real change. (“Social Movement…” 242)
In short, McGee might say that a political party is an observable phenomenon, but a movement is a set of meanings that can best be studied by analyzing the language used to express those meanings.

Cathcart expresses respect for McGee’s conclusion that meaning is paramount in movement analysis, and agrees with McGee and Griffin that movements are recognized by the rhetorical interactions taking place:

A movement does not “move” in the objective world. It can only be interpreted through bits and pieces of behavior and “created” by the symbolic form and meaning these verbal and non-verbal behaviors to on in relationship to already established symbolic forms and meanings.

(Cathcart “Defining Social Movements…” 268)

But Cathcart’s view is more realistic than McGee’s, in that he recognizes that movements exist in space and time, that they have members, leaders and even a certain level of organization. And he says the material aspects of movements can have symbolic meaning as well. Rhetorically, movements are created when the language of the group seeking change clashes with the language of the established social hierarchy. Although the language changes periodically, it is structured and orderly enough to give members “a sense of place, a sense of belonging, and a direction for the future. (“Defining Social Movements…” 269)”

Cathcart also stresses the importance of whether a group of people seeking change engage in dialectical discourse – which he describes as “rhetorical confrontation” – with the established social order. If not, then the group is not likely to be viewed as a
movement. Likewise, if a group recognized as a social movement cannot maintain confrontation with the establishment, then it may cease to exist. “Movements gain strength and power mainly through their ability to create doubts about the legitimacy and morality of the establishment. They grow not so much by direct recruitment as by the ability to get the public to withhold support for the system. (‘Defining Social Movements…’ 273)”

During the 1960s through the 1980s, rhetorical theorists in movement studies attempted to isolate a class of rhetoric that could be uniquely associated with social movements, but the reviews of those efforts were mixed. In his 1980 essay titled, “A Skeptical View of Movement Studies,” David Zarefsky questions the validity of the prevailing theoretical approaches, concluding that most had failed to produce much of value. Zarefsky advocated returning to a more down-to-earth approach of studying movements from an historical perspective – the approach that most sociologists and some rhetoricians had continued to use. Zarefsky just didn’t see much to gain by isolating movement studies within the disciplines; he wrote that “the reason to study the movement’s rhetoric is not that a distinct class of rhetoric will thereby be identified. Instead, the reason is that the movement had, or failed to have, historical significance, and that our understanding of history will be enhanced by its rhetorical dimension. (Zarefsky 253). At the time of his writing (and perhaps still), Zarefsky saw the rhetorical historian as one whose work complements the work of other scholars who examine the sociological, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of human activities (256).
Another possibility scholars ignored during the CSSJ conference in 1980 was that rhetorical movement analysis might have just been immature at that time, and that the sub-discipline of movement studies could evolve into something that would enable scholars to contribute more to our understanding of history without having to abandon their theories about the uniqueness of the rhetoric of movements. And in fact, by the mid-1990s, new theories did emerge.

**New Rhetoric and New Social Movements**

Scholars in the second half of the 20th century began to recognize that some of the new socio-political activities of the 1960s resembled social movements, but did not quite fit the models that had been devised to explain activities such as the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and even Nazism. Disciples of traditional collective behavior theories often viewed these new social movements, also called liberatory movements, as merely irrational activities. Others, initially from the sociological discipline, responded with a new theory. In Europe, led by Melucci and Touraine, social movement scholars developed a new strand of scholarship that became known as *new social movement studies*. “In mass, they tend[ed] to examine movements that are less inclined to agitate directly for political transformation than to challenge cultural norms and hegemonic practices that influence identity formation.” (Malesh 9)

Melucci himself tended to focus on changes in society that he believed caused a shift in the nature of social movements. He considered new social movements as mainly post-industrial phenomena, and attributed their self-identity focus to the emergence of the information age. Melucci writes that the ability to access and disseminate information so
easily has created an ironic “dual articulation of autonomy and dependence” that works perfectly for movements of this type.

The techno-scientific apparatus, the agencies of information and communication, and the decision-making centers that determine policies, wield their power over their domains. Yet, these are precisely the areas where individuals and groups lay claim to their autonomy, where they conduct their search for identity by transforming them into a space where they reappropriate, self-realize, and construct the meaning of what they are and what they do. (Melucci 105)

Melucci, who is often credited with introducing the term “new social movement” in 1980, argues that the ability to act, or wield power, is no longer based on material resources or on the way a movement is organized, but rather on the movement’s ability to produce information. Not only that, he suggests that rhetoric might be even more important to new social movements because new movements tend to address conflicts in ways that recast language and cultural codes. “In fact, action by a new social movement may consist of nothing more than production of a cultural code,” a system of symbols and meaning that are relevant mainly to insiders (110).

New social movement scholars on both sides of the Atlantic emphasized the importance of identity constructions in social movement framing activities. Identity constructions within movements link individuals and groups ideologically, as well as create, strengthen and maintain identities that are collaborative and conflictual (Hunt 187).
Though [new social movements] may have no clear class or structural base, the movement becomes the focus for the individual’s definition of himself or herself, and action within the movement is a complex mix of the collective and individual confirmations of identity. (Johnson 8)

Naturally, when theories of new social movements entered the realm of rhetorical scholars, they gained more meaning for the purpose of further study in that discipline. Two key proponents of this branch of theory in rhetoric have been Gerard A. Hauser and Susan Whalen, both professors of communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Hauser and Whalen write that they are interested specifically in “rhetorically formed” social movements. “New social movement rhetoric centers on the problem of loss of identity and the need for engagement in the redemptive discourses of self-discovery” (Whalen and Hauser 443).

But although Whalen and Hauser are comfortable with prescribing a new rhetoric for analysis of new social movements, they acknowledge the contributions of sociology, early 20th century rhetorical scholars, and ancient philosophies of rhetoric to this recent invention. The new rhetoric is something of a paradox because it “both shares and disavows ancient insights about the possibilities of rhetoric. From antiquity, the new rhetoric borrows an understanding of rhetoric’s methodological possibilities for creating publicly shared reality” (Hauser and Whalen 120). On the other hand, they continue, the common postmodern conditions of pluralism, rapid technological innovation, social change and a surfeit of information have nearly precluded any consensus based on shared assumptions. Rather, the postmodern rhetoric is one of shared problems or objectives.
Instead of basing the justification for shared action on common presuppositions about being, knowing, or doing, cooperation rests on all parties finding their own justifications for these acceptability of these solutions and the specific configurations they give to a common world (Hauser and Whalen 121).

Scholars of the rhetoric of new social movements often note the pathos of the groups’ arguments, which frequently are emotional appeals to the interests of those who identify with the movement; at the same time, the new rhetoric acknowledges that the audience’s interests are rhetorically constituted, a view that has roots in Cicero’s concept of “actio,” the joint activity that takes place between the speaker and the audience. But modern scholars have taken this idea to new levels that allow them to argue that “by examining the rhetoric of social actors we can gain insight into how they constitute themselves (or are constituted) as subjects and as a culture or society (Whalen and Hauser 439).

The information age, as described by Melucci (105), allows audiences to have a much greater role in this act of creation – so much so that on the Internet, through such media as blogs, list serves and other opportunities for comment, it sometimes is not easy to distinguish speaker and audience. Indeed, referring to Black’s “The Second Persona,” Hauser and Whalen say the new rhetoric assumes that audiences are discursive formations, and that within a new social movement all parties engage in the “articulatory practices which constantly and undeviatingly reassert individual movement members within the context of the movement itself.” (Whalen and Hauser 443)
Many today argue that this need to articulate individual identity, while it is a human quality that has been evidenced throughout the history of our species, has become the dominant desire in modern society – often surpassing our desires for wealth, love, community, and spirituality. If, as Touraine writes, society is drama, then rhetoric is the dialogue of this drama, and, as with all drama, the words of the actors, their actions on the stage, and their interactions, all are rhetorical in nature. The question, then, is whether new social movements truly are formed by their rhetoric, and if so, how will understanding this concept today help us understand and address today’s problems?

**Case Study: The Rhetoric of the Global-Warming Counter-Claims**

From the sociological and historical perspectives, it is useful to look at conservative counter-claims against global warming policy as a social counter-movement, as McCright and Dunlap have done in their studies (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming”). This approach not only analyzes the impact of these claims on public policy, but also recognizes the dramatic power and influence the counter-claimants have exerted on the public, as evidenced in opinion polls, and on the news media, in the increasing presence of counter-claim messages in print and electronic media stories on global warming.

From a rhetorical perspective, however, a more useful approach might be to ask whether these counter-claims appeared spontaneously as a new articulation of rhetoric in response to the findings of global warming science, or arose from some existing group of social actors with an established rhetorical pattern. If the former is true, then we might have the good fortune to be witnessing the birth of a new social movement. If the latter is
true, then we still can ask whether the source of this rhetoric is a new social movement, a movement in the traditional sense, or not a movement at all.

The first possibility, that the conservative counter-claims against global warming have spawned a rhetorically formed new movement, can be dismissed rather easily. Although McCright and Dunlap found a consistency among the counter-claims of the 14 conservative think tanks that they surveyed, their research found no apparent evidence to indicate the emergence of a “collective identity” for the speakers or the audience. One might argue that the counter-claims have led to “social change resulting from collective action” – a delay in decision-making and a change in public opinion – which would satisfy Bash’s early definition of a social movement (Bash 11). One also might posit that viewing the counter-claims as a counter-movement is merely a useful interpretation of observable phenomena, that it could offer clues about how counter-claimants created a common reality in the minds of the public, the media and political decision-makers.

However, as Hattam and Lowndes might say, not all changes in rhetorical content have equal significance:

[S]ome innovations are fleeting, momentary examples of word play, while others enact more durable shifts in meaning that reverberates through political identifications and alliances in the most profound fashion.

Language is critical, but we too want to distinguish between flux and more significant discursive change. (217)”

The main problem with defining global warming counter-claims as a counter-movement arises from the absence of a collective identity that acts as an agent for the discourse. The
three main counter-claims that McCright and Dunlap identify are not being delivered by any group or organization that can be characterized as a movement leader or represented as a unique identity. If, as McKeon suggests, one attempts to locate a group of “actors of one mind in the truth” among counter-claimants in the global warming debate, then the trail leads inexorably to the already existing conservative movement. The same change agents are addressing a new issue in much the same way, rhetorically, that they address all of the issues that they have chosen to debate.

McCright and Dunlap found the data for their study on websites of conservative think tanks, and we can thank them for leading us to the right place to undertake a new analysis of the conservative movement – an examination of rhetorical commonplaces and ideographs that underlie the movement’s position on global warming, and an attempt to answer the question of whether the conservative movement – widely acknowledged as an historical movement – is actually a “new social movement” in the rhetorical sense.

By nearly every measure put forth by scholars of rhetoric, sociology and political science, the conservative movement is a new social movement. The evidence is clear from examining the discussions of global warming issues on the websites of conservative think tanks, and the mission statements and other forms of information – such as “About Us” web pages – that describe the collective identities of these organizations. Earlier, I described one clue that enticed me to undertake such an examination that conservative counter-claimants had been able to almost completely abandon one of their three key arguments in the global warming debate without seeming to give up any ground they had gained on the issue.
A closer examination of the three arguments, including an analysis of the associations of each argument with formative conservative principles, reveals only one of these main arguments can be linked. This essentially left the counter-movement theory with only one leg to stand on – but at the same time, it revealed a brilliant rhetorical strategy. Conservatives had given themselves two fallback positions in the debate. By dropping their first argument – that global warming science was questionable – they could appear to be reasonable and willing to compromise. At some future date, they could even be willing to drop their second argument – that global warming could be beneficial instead of harmful – without harming their position.

The third argument – that governmental measures to reduce global warming will do more harm than good – is a different story, however. Conservatives cannot abandon this argument because it is tied to one of the formative principles of the conservative movement – that an unfettered free market economy will always find the best solutions to any social problem. Through an examination of global warming documents and other environmental documents on conservative think tank websites, this study is an attempt to identify some associations between conservative anti-environmental arguments and these formative principles, which establish the collective identity of the movement. Before I proceed, however, readers may benefit from some background.

**The Global Warming Debate**

The concept of anthropogenic global warming has been discussed in the scientific community since not long after the turn of the 20th century, when Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius began studying increases in what he described as “anthropogenic
carbon emissions.” Scientists generally agree Arrhenius was the first to speculate that changes in the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere could have a significant impact on the Earth’s temperature (Arrhenius).

Some scientists began reporting evidence of global warming in the late 1930s, but the general public, the media and governments appeared to be paying little attention to these ideas at that time. In 1976, however, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences undertook a review of the validity of scientific conclusions being produced by global circulation models (GCMs) – a new research method that climate scientists were using to predict human impacts on global temperatures. The Academy concluded that global warming was indeed a possibility. Congress had begun to conduct hearings and the issue began to attract media attention (Weart 126-127).

Research on climate change continued during the Reagan years, despite growing skepticism among conservatives. Reagan’s first year in office, 1981, was reported to be the warmest year since record-keeping began in the late 1800s (Weart 142). By 1988, a year of record heat and droughts, media coverage of global warming spiked. Also that year, scientific experts on global warming met in Toronto in the first attempt to develop a broad consensus on the findings of the studies. The Toronto Conference issued a report calling for “strict, specific limits on greenhouse gas emissions.”

Responding to public pressure, various groups of environmental scientists in 1988 formed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a group that was designed to refine the consensus view of global warming. During the next two decades, the IPCC
would lead efforts to develop proposed policy actions to stem greenhouse gas emissions, considering both the environmental and economic impacts of such actions (Weart 158).

The IPCC’s first report, issued in 1990, was the result of two years of study and negotiations among more than 170 scientists who were attempting to reduce the science to its lowest common denominator – to publish conclusions that were qualified and cautious, with a great degree of credibility because virtually all of the points of disagreement had been discarded. In its executive summary, the 1990 report concluded that “emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases: CO$_2$, methane, CFCs and nitrous oxide. These increases will enhance the greenhouse effect, resulting on average in an additional warming of the Earth’s surface” (IPCC 1990).

For the next decade or so, further research tended to support the predictions, prompting bipartisan support in Congress for measures to control global warming. In 2003, U.S. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) co-sponsored a bill to place mandatory caps on “greenhouse gas” emissions from utilities and other industries. The proposal was rejected, but McCain and Lieberman told the media they were encouraged by the support from a large share of the delegation.

In August 2004, the Bush administration issued a report that the New York Times described as a striking change in the administration’s portrayal of the science of climate change. Citing new studies that supported the IPCC consensus, the report indicated that “emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases are the only likely
explanation for global warming over the last three decades (United States Climate
Change Science Program).”


Of all papers, 75% fell into the first three categories, either explicitly or implicitly accepting the consensus view; 25% dealt with methods or paleoclimate, taking no position on current anthropogenic climate change.

Remarkably, none of the papers disagreed with the consensus position (Oreskes 1686).

According to Oreskes, the scientific community was all but unanimous in its conclusion that anthropogenic greenhouse gases are speeding up global warming. In 2005, a group consisting of the academies of science of 13 industrial nations – including the United States and China – endorsed a new statement urging increased activity by developed nations to limit greenhouse gas emissions (Joint Science Academies’ Statement).

The Emergence of the Counter-Claims

Despite the shift in its view of global warming research, the Bush administration was not ready to embrace the Kyoto protocol or any action that would reduce fossil fuel use. In
late 2004, the administration challenged a report compiled by 250 scientists from eight countries who contended that the Arctic is warming almost twice as fast as the rest of the planet due to a buildup of heat-trapping gases. Conservatives who had been worried about Bush’s wavering on global warming breathed a sigh of relief when they realized the President was remaining steadfast in his efforts to thwart a cap on emissions.

As early as 1990, media attention had begun to wane. Some of the more threatening mitigation strategies – particularly those advocating reforestation and reductions in the use of fossil fuels – had begun to worry political conservatives, who argued that a strong economy and technology were the best ways to solve problems that might arise from global warming. Conservative think tanks began publishing documents promoting the notion that climate science could be wrong, and that global warming was not a dire threat. Many in the media and general public were receptive to these ideas.

In their 2000 study, McCright and Dunlap noted that scientific consensus on global warming had mobilized many political conservatives who were opposed to the IPCC recommendations. They surveyed more than 275 global warming documents posted on the websites of 14 conservative think tanks, and outlined three main arguments: 1) that the evidence of global warming is weak, if not wrong; 2) that global warming will be beneficial if it does occur; and 3) that proposed actions to limit anthropogenic global warming will do more harm than good.
Table 1 • The Conservative Movement’s Counter-Claims Regarding Global Warming (McCright/Dunlap 2003 Study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Claim One</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The evidentiary basis of global warming is weak and even wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The scientific evidence for global warming is highly uncertain</td>
<td></td>
<td>141</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mainstream climate research is “junk” science</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The IPCC intentionally altered its reports to create a “scientific consensus” on global warming</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Global warming is merely a myth or scare tactics produced and perpetuated by environmentalists and bureaucrats</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Global warming is merely a political tool of the Clinton administration</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Claim Two</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global warming would be beneficial if it were to occur</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Global warming would improve the quality of life</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Global warming would improve our health</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Global warming would improve our agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Claim Three</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global warming policies would do more harm than good</td>
<td></td>
<td>139</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Proposed action would harm the national economy</td>
<td></td>
<td>130</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Proposed action would weaken national security</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Proposed action would threaten national sovereignty</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Proposed action would actually harm the environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used with the authors’ permission.

Compared to the challenge facing those who fear global warming will be catastrophic, which is to convince the world’s citizens to make major changes in their lifestyles, the challenge for dissenters is relatively easy – merely to introduce enough doubt to convince policy makers to delay action. The conservative movement maintained that its positions were based on the only “sound science” available. During the years since publication of the first IPCC report, public opinion polls have indicated that the public view may have been more influenced by the rhetoric than by the science.
The Public Perception

In 1989, 63 percent of the respondents to a Gallup poll indicated that they worried about greenhouse gases or global warming a “fair amount” or “a great deal.” By 2000, after the IPCC report was published, that number jumped to 72 percent (Gallup 1989, 2000). By March 2004, however, after counter-claims had become common in the publications of conservative think tanks, the figure had dropped to 51 percent.

In March 2009, another Gallup survey indicated that an increasing number of Americans were expressing doubt about global warming science. “Although a majority of Americans believe the seriousness of global warming is either correctly portrayed in the news or underestimated, a record-high 41 percent now say it is exaggerated. This represents the highest level of public skepticism about mainstream reporting on global warming seen in more than a decade of Gallup polling on the subject,” the Gallup report stated. (Gallup 2009)

Throughout the history of Gallup polling on the subject, global warming has never ranked higher than eighth in the 10 environmental problems listed. In a survey by the Pew Research Center released in January 2009, Americans ranked global warming 20th on a list of 20 issues. The issue had dropped from 15th place two years earlier (Pew).

During the past three-to-four years, changing public opinion on global warming has been touted extensively on the web pages of U.S. conservative think tanks, which say Americans are realizing that high potential costs of measures to combat global warming might outweigh their uncertain benefits. At the same time, scientists are alarmed at the apathy, seeing the resulting delays as a threat to the progress they have made on the issue.
The Conservative Movement as a New Social Movement

Clearly there is a powerful force controlling anti-environmental rhetoric: the conservative movement itself. But is the conservative movement a new social movement? Based on an analysis of the information found on conservative think tank websites today, and an assessment based on the prevailing theories of “new rhetoric” and “new social movements,” the answer is “Yes.”

Studies of social movements in the United States have identified a number of issue-specific conservative movements that have appeared since the 1970s – including the pro-family movement, the militia movement, the anti-immigration movement, and the pro-life movement. A large share of these studies has focused on how these movements have arisen in response to perceived threats to conservative interests and values. These single-issue movements fit the traditional model of social movements that has dominated European theory throughout recent history – they involve a particular threat, a response, a call to action, and consequences.

Few studies have dealt with the rhetoric of these movements. A 2006 study by three sociologists – Shoon Lio, Scott Melzer and Ellen Reese – focused almost exclusively on rhetoric by examining the framing strategies of the gun rights movement and the English-only movement. They found several key threads in these movements that involved the active construction of threats to the “status, identities, and values of white Americans.”

Conservative and right-wing groups actively construct the past in ways that lament the impending or actual loss of what they believe to be
fundamental American values. These politically right groups frame cultural change as the loss of individual responsibility and freedom, constructing immigrants, gun-control proponents, and others associated with liberal politics as advocates for greater dependence on the federal government. (12)

Lio et al list attributes that they consider important to conservative social movements – such as the notion of a model citizen who has succeeded through hard work, self-discipline and traditional values – which are expressed in the discourse of the movements. Often, conservative movement rhetors use narratives to construct realities that ring true for their members. A common example is the story of the American citizen who has been denied employment either due to competition from an illegal immigrant, or because of an affirmative action hiring decision (Lio, Melzer and Reese 6-7).

In conservative writings about environmental issues, including global warming, a common narrative is the cautionary tale of the small business person who is denied an opportunity to operate in a free market because fuel prices have been artificially elevated by increased taxes, government restraints on production, and emission controls. A nearly universal theme in arguments against limits on greenhouse gases, the principal strategy thus far proposed to limit anthropogenic climate change, is that the policy will give unfair advantages to America’s competitors in global markets – another blow to free markets.

A few scholars in political science have looked at conservatives as a single unified movement. One of the three case studies in the Hattam and Lowndes 2007 article, “The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Language, Culture, and Political Change,” traces the
history of the conservative movement back to the Dixiecrat Revolt of 1948, when right-wing activist Charles Wallace Collins attempted to create a new political party from a coalition of white, racist Democrats in the South and conservative Republicans from the North. The effort failed to meet its original goal of creating a States’ Rights party, but Hattam and Lowndes argue that Collins’ relentless rhetoric – consisting mainly of a plethora of essays and articles – creating a movement that persisted and finally “bore institutional fruit” in 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan. (205-210)

A 1997 book by Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America’s Social Agenda, is the first to recognize the community of conservative think tanks as a principal rhetor in the conservative movement, and perhaps as the most powerful agent of change. They date the emergence of these organizations to the 1960s, when conservative national politicians began raising funds for research to support their positions. Richard Nixon’s election in 1968, when moderate conservatism became fashionable, was a further boost to the conservative movement (3).

Stefancic and Delgado write of a lull in conservative activity until 1978, when a new book titled, A Time for Truth, by William Simon, treasury secretary under Presidents Nixon and Ford, “called for a radical rethinking of conservative principles” and led to a dramatic shift toward radical conservatism. By the mid-1980s, the new conservative movement exploded, embracing such issues as official English, immigration reform, welfare revisions, affirmative action, and women’s procreative rights. By the 1990s, conservatives were on the verge of holding majorities in both houses of Congress.
for the first time in 40 years, and House Speaker Newt Gingrich was promoting his “Contract with America,” which proposed to limit government interference in American’s lives, as a pledge to implement conservative policies at all levels of the federal government (4).

Stefancic and Delgado give great weight to the rhetoric produced by the think tanks during this period of United States history. Their list of factors contributing to the success of the conservative think tanks over their liberal and neutral counterparts includes better narratives, a greater focus on a small number of issues, the ability to pick issues that resonate with their community, and the ability to move easily from one issue to another merely by applying the same principles to each new issue. (141-146)

Not only do conservatives have more money to spend […] the nature of their rhetoric, slogans, metaphors, heroes, myths, rallying cries, and stirring causes is more calculated to rally support among the uncommitted than those the liberals have to offer. (Stefancic and Delgado 147-148)

Conservative think tanks also have been successful in generating terms that the media find attractive, write Stefancic and Delgado, whose list includes “political correctness,” “reverse discrimination,” “innocent white male,” and “immigrant horde” (151).

In their arguments against global warming theory, conservative think tank analysts added to that list the terms, “junk science” and “illegal trade restrictions,” which they apply broadly to the scientific and policy documents their opponents were using to argue in favor of mandated limits on greenhouse gas emissions. By implication, illegal trade restrictions are associated with two other terms – “free market economy” and
“limited government” – that have long been part of the conservative vocabulary. These terms appear almost without exception in prominent locations on the 14 conservative think tank websites surveyed by this writer.

Although Stefancic and Delgado do not employ the terminology of rhetorical studies in their work, their isolation of numerous short phrases as key elements of conservative successes fits rather neatly into Michael McGee’s model of the rhetorical “ideograph,” which he defines as a “high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal (“The Ideograph” 436).”

Because ideographs are ordinary-language terms – such as “liberty,” “freedom of speech,” “property,” “rule of law,” and “right of privacy” – adherents of new social movements like the conservative movement are conditioned to believe the words have obvious meanings, and thus they can accept the actions recommended by movement spokespersons based on allegiance to their personal interpretations of these meanings. Each ideograph, McGee writes, has a separate diachronic meaning that is subject to argument, but together, a set of ideographs can provide a collective meaning for the group. For the movement, this latter, synchronic meaning can warrant the use of power for political means, and can excuse group behavior that might be considered eccentric or antisocial if undertaken by an individual (“The Ideograph” 436).

The research by Stefancic and Delgado clearly places conservative think tanks in a position to be viewed as representatives of the new social movement of conservatism when it stresses the importance of instilling a sense of community among followers and
potential followers. Their emphasis on narrative rather than statistics in conservative “white papers” is emotive and rhetorically effective in creating and maintaining the social identity of the movement. The ideological nature of conservative programs, the threat narrative that “is calculated to manipulate fear and insecurity” among followers, and their refusal to compromise their principles, are all designed to remind people of the larger conservative agenda (148).

Even a cursory perusal of the mission statements, “About Us” web pages and other self-descriptive writings on the think tank websites provide ample evidence to support the “new social movement” definition. The focus on narrative enables the think tanks to construct a vision of the conservative “code hero” who represents the shared values and interests that Hauser and Whalen consider essential for new social movements. (Hauser and Whalen 121) Think tank self-descriptions represent the “identity construction” that is inherent in all new social movement framing activities. (Hunt, Benford and Snow 123), and the act of making such statements would satisfy Melucci, who writes that “action by new social movements may consist of nothing more than the production of a cultural code (171).”

The “About Us” description on the website of the Heartland Institute offers a good example of how ideographs permeate the conservative rhetoric (italics added):

Heartland’s mission is to discover, develop, and promote free market solutions to social and economic problems. Such solutions include parental choice in education, choice and personal responsibility in health care, market-based approaches to environmental protection, privatization
of public services, and *deregulation* in areas where *property rights* and
*markets* do a better job than government bureaucracies.

By establishing these terms and associated commonplaces as principles of the
organization, Heartland has the potential to gain the support of any individual
who accepts a positive personal definition of one or more of these ideographs, and
then may state a position or take action based on collective definitions of the
terms (McGee “The Ideograph” 435).

The wide use of ideographs places the conservative movement squarely in
the realm of new social movements because they represent the rhetorically
constituted interests that Hauser and Whalen establish as a prerequisite for
applying the term (Hauser and Whalen 121). The cooperation that is required for a
new social movement not only to exist, but also to be successful, rests on each
party finding its own justification for the action of the collective, and the abstract
nature of the movement’s ideographs enables a wide variety of interpretation.

Thus, an individual who identifies with the conservative movement’s
principle that free market solutions are always better than government
intervention, can potentially accept any argument on the issue of global warming
that appears to embrace this view. And that precisely describes the third main
counter-claim against global warming theory that McCright and Dunlap identified
in their study – that even if global warming is real, and even if warming is not
beneficial, then the proposed government-mandated solutions will do more harm
than good because of their negative impacts on the *free market* economy.
In their study, McCright and Dunlap subdivided this third counter-claim into four sub-groups (See Exhibit 1). Not only did the conservative think tanks argue that proposed global warming policy would be harmful, they argued that the policy would harm 1) national economy; 2) national security; 3) national sovereignty; and 4) the environment. However, potential harm to the national economy was by far the most dominant concern. Of 139 documents reviewed, 130 focused on the economy (McCright and Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming” 510).

**Reading the Conservative Movement’s Rhetoric on Global Warming**

This thesis examines a selection of the rhetoric of the American conservative movement, a new social movement that has exercised an increasing level of political power on a variety of important issues since the end of World War II. The point of departure for this effort is the McCright/Dunlap study, which examined movement’s counter-claims regarding global warming during an eight-year period from 1990 to 1997 and described three main arguments to delay proposed policy actions to prevent or minimize climate change through reduction of carbon emissions.

Noting some changes in the nature of those arguments since the McCright and Dunlap study, this researcher examined 114 more recent documents circulated by the same 14 conservative think tanks – with one exception. The group, Citizens for a Sound Economy, surveyed by McCright-Dunlap in 2000, split into two groups in 2004. This study includes one of those two groups, Freedom Works, which has tended to focus on
the issues being debated in global warming; whereas, the other splinter group, the Freedom Works Foundation, has focused more on conservative fundraising efforts.

This study utilizes documents found through an Internet search on the official website for each think tank surveyed. This researcher conducted searches of their Internet sites using the keywords “global warming” to identify potential documents for the survey. In all, the searches found 5,593 unique documents containing these keywords. I also reviewed the web pages containing the “collective identity statements” of each think tank, to identify rhetorical artifacts that contained ideographs and other language constructs that were common to a majority of the think tanks.

Many of the global warming documents mentioned this subject only in the course of discussion of other primary subjects, or in lists summarizing the principal issues the organizations had chosen to pursue. Many of the documents listed on the websites were not authored by analysts from the organization, but rather by analysts from other organizations, by journalists, and by blog commenters, resulting in much duplication. Many of the documents, although they addressed the subject of global warming as their central points of discussion, were quite old. It appears that some of the think tanks keep all of their documents posted in their current online libraries, while others eliminate all but the most recent publications.

To narrow the sample to a manageable level, this researcher then undertook a process that
- eliminated all documents that addressed global warming only as a secondary subject in its discussion;
• eliminated all documents authored outside the organization, because the researcher’s purpose was to portray the position of each organization on global warming policy; and

• eliminated all documents published before 1997, because one purpose was to identify changes that occurred after the McCright/Dunlap study.

After those documents were eliminated, the researcher chose to sample the remaining documents based on their currency, reasoning that the most recent documents posted would most accurately reflect the organization’s current position on global warming, and would be the most likely to reveal any recent changes in the organization’s position. This researcher chose in each case to examine the 10 documents most recently published by each think tank on the subject of global warming. If fewer than 10 documents were posted by a single organization, then the researcher used all of the available documents for that website. This narrowed the field to 114 documents.

In the second part of the study, this researcher reviewed the “collective identity statements” to identify discursive links between these statements and the organization’s global warming arguments.

**Methodology and Tabulated Results**

This survey coded the global warming documents into three main categories: 1) those that acknowledged the existence of global warming; 2) those that posited the existence of global warming in order to debate the merits of proposed policies to reduce global warming; and 3) those that either directly or implicitly denied the existence of global warming. Documents that fell into the first two categories were considered to be in
disagreement with the McCright/Dunlap study’s Counter-Claim One, which characterizes the evidence of global warming as either weak or wrong.

**Changes in the Conservative Arguments**

Research of the current views on global warming of 14 conservative think tanks revealed an evident contrast to the findings of McCright and Dunlap, who studied the same 14 organizations. In McCright/Dunlap, counter-claim one – that the evidentiary basis of global warming is weak and even wrong – is by far the most common argument of the conservative analysts. More than 70 percents of the documents they reviewed expressed either a firm belief that the predictions of warming were wrong, or expressed doubt that the predictions were reliable. By the late 2000s, however, this argument had nearly disappeared. In the survey for this paper, 86 percent of the documents reviewed either openly acknowledged the existence of global warming, or presented arguments based on an assumption that warming has occurred.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of conservative think tanks surveyed: 14</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
<th>% of total analyzed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of documents analyzed: 100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openly acknowledge that global warming is occurring</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditionally express a belief in global warming</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either openly acknowledge that global warming is occurring or conditionally express a belief in global warming</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typically, the conservative argument today is that the answer to the problem of global warming lies in allowing the free market to find solutions such as adaptation to climate changes, bioengineering to eliminate or sequester excess carbon dioxide, and finding cleaner ways to burn our remaining fossil fuels – anything but mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions. These arguments often begin with acknowledgement of the phenomenon of global warming, as in a statement issued in June 2009 by the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA):

Global warming is a reality. But whether it is a serious problem – and whether emissions of carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) and other greenhouse gases from human fossil fuel use are the principal cause – is uncertain. The current debate over the U. S. response to climate change centers on greenhouse gas emissions reduction policies, which are likely to impose substantially higher costs to society than global warming might.

This statement contrasts sharply with the statement on global warming that NCPA issued more than a decade earlier, in a May 1997 report:

While ground-level temperature measurements suggest the earth has warmed between 0.3 and 0.6 degrees Celsius since 1850, global satellite data, the most reliable of climate measurements, show no evidence of warming during the past 18 years.

Unfortunately, many of these conservative think tanks have removed earlier documents that were posted on their websites, so an extensive before-and-after contrast of their statements is impossible. However, an examination of their current documents is enough
to show a trend away from their earlier denials of anthropogenic global warming. This change is significant not because conservative think tanks have changed their positions opposing government action (they have not), but rather because it reveals a clue to persuasive strategy of the arguments.

The first two of the three counter-claims identified by McCright and Dunlap are expendable. The first argument, that global warming may not even exist, already has been largely abandoned by the think tanks without any noticeable weakening of their position. The second argument, that global warming might be beneficial, also could be dropped with no ill effects. Neither of the two have any connection to the steadfast, underlying conservative principle that is behind the conservative position, which is, that no government policy should be allowed to limit the ability of the free market economy to operate without constraint. The third argument, that government regulation of greenhouse gas emissions could do more harm than good, is tied directly to the movement’s free market principle and can never be abandoned. That would be blasphemy.

By conceding that global warming might actually be occurring, the conservative movement is practicing the rhetoric of science, which allows the introduction of new data to alter the argument. The think tanks make new statements that appear to have been derived through an application of dialectic principles to reach logical conclusions. By incorporating these conciliatory “gestures” into their discourse, they lend credence to their remaining arguments – they seem to be reasonable people whether they are or not.

The beauty of this approach is that when future issues arise that are as complex as global warming, instead of having to systematically refute the science, or logic, of their
opponents, conservatives merely must cast the issue in terms of its threat to the identifying codes of their movement: Proposals to limit global warming are a threat to free enterprise by putting us at a disadvantage in global trade competition. Proposals to limit global warming are a way that liberals can impose more government control on our lives. Proposals to limit global warming are a way to limit the high standard of living that we have worked so hard to achieve. Proposals to limit global warming are a threat to our way of life, and we must band together to eliminate this threat.

**The Collective Identity of the Conservative “New Social Movement”**

In their introductory essay to the 1994 book, *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, Hank Johnson, Enrique Laraña and Joseph R. Gusfield offer a description of the role of identities that probably should be in the official handbook for new social movements:

> Though [new social movements] may have no clear class or structural base, the movement becomes the focus for the individual’s definition of himself and herself, and action within the movement is a complex mix of the collective and individual confirmations of identity. (8)

Similarly, Hauser and Whalen posit that “new social movement rhetoric centers on the problem of the loss of identity and the need for engagement in the redemptive discourses of self-discovery (Whalen and Hauser 443),” and “by examining the rhetoric of social actors [with a new social movement], we can gain insight into how they constitute themselves (or are constituted) as subjects and as a culture or society. (Whalen and Hauser 439)”
Thus, the bottom line is that within new social movements, the success of the movement depends largely on the success of its articulation of itself, that the primary aim of the movement rhetoric may not be to persuade someone to take a certain position on a certain issue, but rather to create an environment in which the participant feels comfortable, and is amenable to, the positions on issues that the movement takes now and in the future. A person who accepts the collective identity of a “vegan” will be receptive to the position of vegans on certain issues, and a person who considers himself or herself a “conservative” will be amenable to the conservative position on global warming.

Based on the prevailing theories of new social movements, then, each movement will have a common set of principles, beliefs or commonplaces that establish the collective identity of the movement, so that when a person calls himself or herself a “vegan,” for example, then there will be others who know almost instinctively that they share that “vegan” identity, because they are aware of the commonly shared attributes of veganism – the “collective and individual confirmations” of vegan identity.

This researcher’s survey of 14 conservative think tanks reveals consistent requirements for conservative movement “membership,” which can be described by extracting attributes from the “collective identity” documents on the think tank websites. Based on that survey, the common principles, or “commonplaces,” of the conservative movement are

- individual freedom
- unfettered operation of the free market economy
- minimal governmental interference in personal lives and business
• the sanctity of private property
• national security
• the American way of life (material prosperity)

When the subject of global warming is isolated, the list of commonplaces used in arguments against proposed global warming policy action is narrowed to:

• unfettered operation of the free market economy
• minimal governmental interference in personal lives and business
• national security

The single ideograph most associated with these commonplaces is the term, “free market economy.” The commonplace, “unfettered operation of the free market economy,” by definition, implies minimal government interference, and because national security is generally tied in part to the ability to trade freely in global markets, then the national security commonplace is inextricably bound to the free market ideograph.

Consequently, the analysis is dramatically simplified. The most successful arguments against government-mandated solutions for the problem of global warming will be based on the free market ideograph that is a fundamental component of the conservative movement – which is a new social movement that has rhetorically constructed the interests of its adherents. A review of the conservative movement’s global warming arguments presented on the websites of 14 conservative think tanks reveals that most of those either explicitly mention or imply an association with the principles of free markets. Conservative think tanks are opposed to government control of greenhouse gas emissions. Their position on this issue is virtually the same position they
have on all environmental issues. They are generally opposed to mandated solutions, because, by definition, government solutions restrict free trade.

Below are excerpts from the global warming documents posted by 13 of the 14 conservative think tanks surveyed. In each example, this author has italicized words that are either conservative movement ideographs, or commonplace words and phrases associated with a conservative ideograph. The list does not include excerpts from any document or documents from the National Center for Public Policy Research. This organization regularly publishes a blog on the subject, but the blog contents appear to be exclusively critiques designed to ridicule opponents in the debate. There are no clear statements of the organization’s positions on the issue.

**Example 1:** In September 2007 testimony before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, the American Enterprise Institute’s Kenneth Green made it clear how his organization views proposed greenhouse gas controls:

> Now, to the question of the day: do global warming initiatives “create” “new green” jobs? The short answer, I would say, is that they might do so, but only at the expense of other jobs that would otherwise have been produced by the free market. Further, I'd suggest that the end result would be significantly less jobs on net, less overall economic growth on net, and most likely, the loss of existing capital as a by-product.

**Example 2:** The Foundation for Research on Economics & the Environment (FREE) describes its mission as working “with opinion leaders and decision makers to
demonstrate how science and economics can effectively deal with contentious policy issues in ways consistent with a society of free and responsible individuals and America’s founding ideals.” In a paper on global warming, FREE states that current economic hardship has revealed a solution to global warming:

The economic crisis has accomplished something that many nations have been trying, and failing, to do for years – reduce CO2 emissions. This reality highlights the enormous social and technical challenges we face. Is a continuing recession and reduction in prosperity the best way to deal with climate change or any environmental problem? No. Economic growth and the investment it fosters is the only sure path to a cleaner, safer environment.

**Example 3:** The Heritage Foundation’s position on global warming combines concern for economic impacts of proposed greenhouse gas reductions with its concern for national security. In a document discussing the pros and cons of cap-and-trade legislation:

[I]f the Senate really wants to get serious about how global warming affects national security, it should closely examine the rules and regulations under Waxman-Markey and similar government-driven efforts. These rules would stifle economic growth, create energy scarcity, and make fragile states even more fragile. For example, a collapse in U.S. economic growth would result in even more draconian cuts to the defense budget, leaving America with a military much less prepared to deal with future threats. … Likewise, a steep drop in American economic growth
would lengthen and deepen the global recession. That in turn will make other states poorer, undermining their ability to protect themselves and recover from natural disasters.

**Example 4:** The *Reason Institute*’s position on global warming policy makes explicit reference to free market economics and two other conservative commonplaces:

Regardless of whether climate change eventually turns out to be real or not, the libertarian goal ought to be to ensure the protection and advancement of freedom – and all its attendant institutions: *free markets, limited government* and *property rights*.

**Example 5:** In a document posted on November 8, 2007, *Claremont Institute* analysts George A. Pieler and Jens F. Laurson summarize their organization’s position on global warming policy. In this excerpt, they advocate transferring of responsibility for action on global warming from the political arena to a system based on human ingenuity:

Along with recovering the honesty and humility that is essential to science, we need confidence in civilization – enough to know that if warming starts occurring at a precipitous rate, we can deal with it and adapt. Rather than subordinating *economic freedom* to a state-run War on Carbon, *maximizing human wealth* will equip us to manage if that crisis occurs. In the meantime, we might be better advised to engage in a serious debate rather than return scientific inquiry to the Dark Ages.
Example 6: This policy statement comes from **Freedom Works**, the think tank founded in 1984 by conservative U.S. Senator Dick Armey:

Just because global warming is happening and we’re responsible for it doesn’t mean that the *economic benefits* of responding to it outweigh the *economic costs*. Dealing with costs is something that few global-warming policy advocates on the left seem to want to do, despite the fact that it’s the only sensible way to figure out what program, if any, might be necessary to respond to climate change. If energy costs are going to go up for Americans, shouldn’t there be significant environmental benefit and progress towards reversing climate change?

Example 7: This statement from the **Cato Institute** was used earlier, but bears repeating here because it contains clear reference to the free-market ideograph:

To the extent that global warming is a real problem warranting action, it needs to be addressed globally rather than through unilateral efforts. Antagonizing trade partners through probably illegal trade measures will undermine efforts to secure global cooperation on climate change. A *freer, more prosperous economy* is a more auspicious path to ensuring a more rapid spread of environmental technology and the global consensus needed to combat climate change.
Example 8: The National Center for Policy Research acknowledges global warming as a problem, but advocates adaption and economic solutions rather than reduction of greenhouse gases from anthropogenic sources:

Most laws and treaties proposed to prevent, reduce or slow global warming would be expensive and do little to prevent warming or future harms. *For a fraction of the costs, we could prevent much more harm and benefit many more people by adapting to a warmer world.*

Example 9: In his opening remarks to the Third International Conference on Climate Change in June 2009, Heartland Institute President Joseph Bast summarized his organization’s views, by stating, in part:

That’s why all you hear and read about is global warming alarmism. It’s why you never hear from the tens of thousands of scientists who don’t think global warming is a crisis, or the economists who say *cap and trade will ruin the country’s economy.* It’s why Congress is debating new laws and taxes that would cost hundreds of billions of dollars a year and not affect the climate one wit.

Example 10: Likewise, the Competitive Enterprise Institute opposes energy-usage limitations to reduce greenhouse gases because the organization anticipates significant impacts on business operations:

Global warming is happening, and humans are responsible for at least some of it. Yet this fact does not mean that global warming will cause
enough damage to Earth and to humanity to require *drastic cuts in energy use*, a policy that would have damaging consequences of its own.

**Example 11:** The **Hoover Institution**’s rhetoric focuses on the flaws and costs of cap-and-trade legislation, arguing that the approach would create huge economic imbalances that could upset the global marketplace:

The greenhouse gas problem is more broadly recognized today than it was during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations a decade ago. Moreover, the protocol, which was meant to stabilize greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is fatally flawed. The emissions that cause climate change can originate anywhere, so the precondition of success is universal coverage. Yet the emission limits proposed by the protocol imposed *too high an economic price* on some countries and too low a price on others. The carbon cap-and-trade system that was laid out under the protocol would create gigantic *property rights* in some areas and daunting deficits in others, implying a huge transfer of funds among countries.

**Example 12:** In a 2007 document titled “Hysteria’s History: Environmental Alarmism in Context,” **Pacific Research Institute** analysts Amy Kaleita and Gregory R. Forbes argue that government solutions to global warming problems actually preclude the possibility of solutions from the private sector:

*[A]larmist responses to valid problems risk foreclosing potentially useful responses based on *ingenuity and progress*. There are many examples*
from the energy sector where, in the presence of economic, efficiency, or societal demands, *the marketplace has responded by developing better alternatives*. That is not to say that we should blissfully squander our energy resources; on the contrary, we should be careful to utilize them wisely. But energy-resource hysteria should not lead us to circumvent scientific advancement by … favoring one particular replacement technology at the expense of other promising technologies.

**Example 13:** Of the 14 conservative think tanks surveyed, only the **Marshall Institute** seems to have been faithful to a disciplined analytical approach. The institute’s documents are shorn of rhetorical devices compared to documents on other sites. Most of Marshall’s work consists of statistical studies and summaries of the findings of economic theorists. In one study of the potential economic impacts of cap-and-trade, Marshall analysts predict:

> Despite the differences in estimates, our analysis strongly indicates the abatement costs could cause around a 0.8%-1% drop in consumption below the business-as-usual scenario. This is a conservative estimate; many studies project that costs are likely to be even higher. Given these estimates, we can conclude that the costs of mitigation are likely to be huge.

(Note: As noted above on page 51, no data is included for the National Center for Public Policy Research. The NCPRR’s only content on global warming is entries on a blog that
exclusively consists of critiques designed to ridicule opponents in the debate, with no clear NCPRR position statements.)

**Perspectives for the Future**

Even without new social movement theory as a unifying concept to guide an examination of rhetoric on the issue of global warming, the conservative movement’s language clearly reflects a unified collective view of the subject and a unified position. Based on my sample of more than a hundred documents, conservative think tanks – which are the most apparent voices of the conservative ideology ostensibly independent of party affiliations – are speaking together. The principle of free enterprise, expressed in a variety of ways, is the steadfastly underlying element of all conservative arguments against government action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Arguments about the validity of climate science, and arguments about the potential to adapt to, and perhaps even benefit from, climate change come and go, but free market proponents never falter in their contention that the best approach to environmental problems is to sit back and allow market forces to prevail. This is because a belief in free market solutions is part of the collective identity of the movement.

In his 1991 book, *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, which addressed efforts to prevent or delay public policy and government solutions to social problems, economist Albert Hirschman notes that such efforts are successful because they stress the jeopardy of taking action, (we risk losing achievements already gained), the futility of the effort (any action is a waste of time and resources), and the perverse effects that could result (our actions will only make matters worse) (7).
And persistence is virtue when a social actor advocates doing nothing. In a January 2009 posting on Yale University’s blog, Environment 360 (e360.yale.edu), Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, of the “progressive” Breakthrough Institute, argue that Americans are suffering from “apocalypse fatigue” because of dire predictions from some climate scientists, resulting in a declining public belief in global warming:

Having been told that climate science demands that we fundamentally change our way of life, many Americans have, not surprisingly, concluded that the problem is not with their lifestyles but with what they’ve been told about the science. And in this they are not entirely wrong, insofar as some prominent climate advocates, in their zeal to promote action, have made representations about the state of climate science that go well beyond any established scientific consensus on the subject.

Unfortunately, when opponents in a debate fail to share a common objective, then the result usually is stalemate and inaction. This appears to be the case with global warming. Yet, one can hope that the current state is only a necessary part of the process; that closer examination and analysis of the motivations, beliefs and desires of the various parties will eventually reveal a common ground on which to resume the search for answers.

Viewing the global warming debate from a rhetorical perspective – especially on the basis of new social movement theory, which seems to be an especially pertinent approach in today’s arena of identity politics – may be fruitful. Representing one extreme in the debate, the counter-claims of the conservative movement appear to be based on a collective identity that defines conservatism as a new social movement, and by applying
the principles of new movement theory, we can identify key elements of the conservative identity. Likewise, applying the same approach to other players in the global warming debate might reveal key elements of other identities; and, if there are common elements among those identities, then there may be room for action based on compromise.

Arguments on both sides of the global warming issue are rhetorical in the classic sense too, in that they are designed to persuade others, as well as to create identity and meaning for those who are already inclined to believe. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle views arguments as “responsible public discourse,” which implies that in attempting to persuade, the speaker must have a responsibility to promote better understanding of a subject, not merely to achieve his or her rhetorical goals.

In a 1970 article in response to the Wingspread Conference, Wayne Booth warns fellow rhetoricians that concentrating too much on creating rhetoric for those who already believe, a group he calls “the community of the blessed,” turns the rhetorical act into a futile endeavor. Booth writes, “[t]he temptation is to a self-satisfied exposé of the opponent’s fallacies and absurdities, without making the slightest effort to move into his circle of assumptions and argue from there. (“Scope of Rhetoric Today” 87).” Such an approach does nothing to improve understanding, but instead destroys “the public” (and hence, the public good) as a collective, and builds “a variety of hostile publics, more or less sealed off from each other (“Scope of Rhetoric Today” 99), accomplishing nothing.

More than 30 years later, not long before his death in 2005, Booth essentially took a moral stand on rhetoric. Despite their desire to restore the reputation of their discipline, which had suffered for centuries from its association with deception, Booth argued that
rhetoricians must accept the fact that “rhetoric” still is an art not only of “removing misunderstanding,” but also of “producing misunderstanding.” Once one is willing to acknowledge the dark side, then the door is open to consider the speaker’s ethical responsibilities to his or her audience.

It is ethically wrong to pursue or rely on or deliberately produce misunderstanding, while it is right to pursue understanding. To pursue deception creates non-communities in which winner takes all. To pursue mutual understanding creates communities in which everyone needs and deserves attention. (Booth “Rhetoric of Rhetoric” 40)

Booth writes that once opponents in a controversy are willing to pursue understanding, they can listen to each other and find common ground behind the conflict. And as rhetoricians, our study of rhetorical issues is “our best resource for distinguishing the good making from the bad (“Rhetoric of Rhetoric” 16).”

Booth’s faith in the purifying process of rhetoric and rhetorical studies is shared to some extent by another rhetorician, Celeste Michelle Condit, who wrote in 1987 that “public rhetoric can … be viewed as a process in which basic human desires are transformed into shared moral codes (2).” Ideographs, Condit contends, are indications of shared commitments to a moral code, and when an ideograph is widely shared (perhaps across political lines), it may become a mechanism that gives various parties to “take the perspective of the other,” which is a basic requisite of morality (310). And once morality is defined outside the collective, it is harder to change.
Although the collectivity always retains power to modify the (moral) code, it cannot exert unlimited control. As long as the discourse process is relatively open, the nature of the code itself, as well as the broad biological, psychological, and social limitations upon human beings, exerts an important external moral force (Condit 311).

Booth and Condit are optimistic and idealistic. But their views on the importance and power of ethical and moral considerations in public discourse have a practical application. This researcher’s examination of conservative arguments on the global warming issues also revealed a plethora of logical fallacies in those arguments. In the 114 conservative think-tank documents reviewed, there were 186 flaws in logic – ranging from ad hominem attacks on global warming scientists to slippery slope scenarios of dire consequences of adopting the proposed government mandates to limit greenhouses gases. This assessment was based on widely accepted criteria developed by Howard Kahane (Kahane), and Michael LaBossiere (LaBossiere).

This author’s purpose in reviewing the “bad rhetoric” in conservative documents is not to engender the hostility that Booth believed “does nothing to improve understanding,” but rather to search for some of the flaws that might one day be abandoned by the principal participants in the global warming debate, for there are, no doubt, flaws on either side.

Global warming is not only an issue for debate; it is a phenomenon for which there is considerable scientific evidence, an empirical element of our lives that exists independently of the rhetoric, the politics, the collectives, and the opinions of those who
are participating in the war of language that has broken out around the issue. If the world heats up, cools down, or stays the same, it will do so regardless of what we think. At best, human influence may or may not affect the outcome, so that we are left with a choice: Do we face this problem with an attitude of despair, or with an attitude of hope?

This writer chooses the latter. It is my hope that research such as this will help lead us to a shared commitment, or a generally accepted principle, that we should undertake no action to endanger the future, nor delay any action that will improve our lot.
Works Cited


Gallup Polls, Incorporated. “Scientists Deliver Serious Warning About Effects of Global Warming: 4 in 10 Americans worry ‘a great deal’ about this environmental

http://www.gallup.com/search/default.aspx?q=Increased+Number+Think+Global+Warming+Is+%E2%80%9CExaggerated%E2%80%9D+Most+believe+global+warming+is+happening%2C+but&s=&p=1&b=SEARCH (1 Nov. 2009).


McAdam, Doug, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer Zald. Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.


Appendix A – Survey Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of a change in arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of documents accessed with keywords “global warming”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of documents analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of documents that acknowledge global warming as a fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of documents that state a *conditional¹ belief in global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date range of documents (by years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*¹A “conditional” belief in global warming is one that 1) acknowledges global warming as plausible; 2) is willing to accept global warming as real for the sake of argument (Ex. “Even if global warming is happening, it could be beneficial.”); or 3) tacitly acknowledges the phenomenon of global warming as an element of the argument.
Appendix B: List of Documents Analyzed, with URLs
Total Number Analyzed: 114

American Enterprise Institute – www.aei.org
www.aei.org/about
www.aei.org/issue/100016 (12-09-09)
www.aei.org/issue/28202 (06-27-08)
www.aei.org/issue/25661 (02-22-07)
www.aei.org/issue/12922 (06-01-01)

The Cato Institute – www.cato.org
www.cato.org/about.php
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11061
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10638
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10940
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10520
www.cato.org/testimony/ct-pm-20090212.html
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9875
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9831
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9646
www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9562

Claremont Institute – www.claremont.org
www.claremont.org/about/
www.claremont.org/publications/pubid.740/pub_detail.asp

Competitive Enterprise Institute – cei.org
cei.org/about
cei.org/cei_files/fm/active/0/Comment%20on%20Tailoring%20Rule%20Marlo%20Lewi
s%20Competitive%20Enterprise%20Institute%20Final.pdf (12-30-09)
cei.org/cei_files/fm/active/1/StatementofMarloLewis.pdf (10-28-09)
cei.org/cei_files/fm/active/0/Daniel%20Sutter%20-%20Hurricane%20Damage%20and%20Global%20Warming.pdf (06-03-09)
cei.org/node/20961 (07-17-08)
cei.org/cei_files/fm/active/0/EnvironmentalSource_Warming.pdf (07-17-08)
reason.org/news/show/hide-the-decline (12-16-09)
reason.org/news/show/when-science-becomes-a-casualt (12-14-09)
reason.org/news/show/whats-the-best-way-to-handle-f (12-08-09)
reason.org/news/show/is-government-action-worse-tha (09-09-09)
reason.org/news/show/global-warming-keeping-propert (06-12-08)
Vita

William J. Edwards Jr. was born on March 8, 1952, in Craven County, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. He graduated from New Bern High School, New Bern, North Carolina in 1970. He received his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1975.

At the time of the publication of this thesis, Edwards was editorial director for Douglas Murphy Communications, Inc., a Richmond, Virginia firm that publishes association magazines and journals with nationwide distribution (October 2006 to present).

Edwards also has been employed as:
- Owner, ARGOS Communications, which provided copywriting services and project management for business, government and nonprofits (July 2005 to October 2006).
- Marketing Communications Manager, Owens & Minor, Inc., a national medical supply distribution company (November 2000 to July 2005).
- Communications Director, Virginia Department for the Aging (August 1999 to November 2000).
- Freelance writer, marketing and public relations consultant, providing copywriting services and project management (March 1993 to August 1999).
- Reporter and editor, for various daily and weekly newspapers in North Carolina and Virginia (July 1976-August 1984).

At various times throughout his career, Edwards has taught journalism, English, public relations, and writing to undergraduate college students and career professionals.