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UW20: Conspiracy Theory

Professor Drown

## Holes in the Global Warming Theory Fertilize Climate Change

### Skepticism



Growing up in the 90's with environmental heroes such as Captain Planet, who vowed to "bring pollution down to zero" and having the "Three R Motto" of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle drilled into my head ever since I can remember, the idea of actively saving the earth has become second nature. In our homes we have been taught to recycle plastic, paper, cans, and bottles all for the good of Mother Nature. As Stephen Gould puts it, "The 90's, they tell us, is the decade of the environment. And I think that is probably correct."<sup>1</sup> And even more so now with the emphasis on alternative fuel and power sources such as ethanol, solar power, hydro power, wind power, movies such as *An Inconvenient Truth* winning an Oscar, seeing the devastations of El Niño and Katrina; it seems silly and even unethical to not believe in Global Warming.

Over the past few decades, the science world has with very few exceptions, come to a consensus that the earth is warming up. Even skeptics agree. The skeptic argument however is that though the earth may be warming up, it is not due to human impact and may not even be a bad thing at all. Certainly we are all thankful the Ice Age warmed up. Yet that is not where the debate gets heated; there has always been testing, questioning, and refuting with science because after all, as skeptics argue, all science is based on theory. The debate heats up with regards to politicians taking on global warming agendas to use "Green scare tactics" in persuading voters to align themselves with leaders looking to ride the global warming band wagon and see climate change as a problem that should be fixed by government regulation. This is suspect as a block to the free market system and a way to monopolize on alternative energy markets. Global warming skeptic fear lies in the idea that environmentalists have a quest for power as Alston Chase states, "when

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Jay Gould: cited in "What They Said. In 1990 The Yearbook of World Opinion pg.115 Copyright 1991 By Monitor Book Company

the search for truth is confused with political advocacy, the pursuit of knowledge is reduced to the quest for power”(Chase, State of Fear excerpt)<sup>2</sup> This leads me to my study of global warming skepticism, which offers insight to the conspiracy theorists fear of mixing politics and economics with science.

The surge of global warming warnings came during the 1990’s with the hottest year recorded in 1998. However, the temperature wasn’t the only atmosphere heating up during this time and perhaps the social and political attitudes during the 90’s contributes more to global warming skepticism than anything else. The close of the Cold War is here, Democrats are in power, people are using computers and the internet at home, and the baby boomers are beginning to feel out of touch with the most technological society they have ever seen. With Clinton and Gore in office, Republicans are shouting liberal media bias and with liberals (specifically Gore) taking on the climate change issue, conservatives are a bit more skeptical of ulterior motives especially with IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) ties to politicians.

When looking at global warming skepticism, the conspiracy becomes more complicated when factoring in the time period of the 1990’s and time period in which skeptics have come from; mainly, the baby boom generation. These baby boomer skeptics are usually right of center politically and have been through World War II, Vietnam, and the Cold War in which the ideals of freedom have been cherished and the thought of government involvement, especially in economics is seen as a “Eco-Socialism”<sup>3</sup> as coined by Fred Smith, President of the global warming skeptic group, The

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Michael Crichton’s Why Politicized Science is Dangerous (Excerpted from State of Fear) December 7,2004 [http://www.crichton-official.com/fear/fear\\_main.shtml](http://www.crichton-official.com/fear/fear_main.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Eco-Socialism Threat to Liberty Around the World by Fred Smith Jr September 20,2003 <http://www.cei.org/pdf/3238.pdf>

Competitive Enterprise Institute, is seen as a threat to capitalism and most of all, liberty. As Richard Darman Director of Federal Office of Management and Budget during 1990 stated, “Americans did not fight and win the wars of the twentieth century to make the world safe for green vegetables...Because so many people are self proclaimed ‘environmentalists’, the label is no longer a meaningful characteristic. It is a green mask under which different faces of politico-economic ideology can hide.”<sup>4</sup> As Melley asserts, “the importance of agency panic lies in the way it attempts to conserve a long standing model of personhood-a view of the individual as a rational, motivated agent with a protected interior core of beliefs, desires, and memories”(Melley pg 64)<sup>5</sup> and having spent most of their lives fighting against fascism, socialism, and communism, it is understandable how such skeptics would view such an environmental movement that would even go so far as to interrupt capitalism as “global elitists”<sup>6</sup>

William O’Keefe, CEO of The George Marshall Institute, a think tank for global warming skepticism argues that “scientific credentials of many global warming proponents are used as political credentials which benefit from each other through the environmental movement, the IPCC, the media, and money.”<sup>7</sup> O’Keefe’s argument here is that scientists are not politicians and politicians are definitely not scientists and therefore cannot be given power in fields they do not belong to, especially if it means persuading public opinion or economic referendums. A topic of debate which came on the scene during 1990 was whether to put a carbon tax on industries that emitted a

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<sup>4</sup> Richard G. Darman. Director Federal Office of Management and Budget May 1,1990  
 . “What They Said. In 1990 The Yearbook of World Opinion pg.113 Copyright 1991 By Monitor Book Company

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Melley Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy pg 64

<sup>6</sup> World Net Daily: HYSTERIA Whistleblower Magazine March 1, 2007  
[http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=54483](http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=54483)

<sup>7</sup> Group Think Masquerading As Consensus. William O’Keefe. Sept. 2006

specific level of carbon emissions. Fortney H Stark, democratic U.S representative for California stated “Environmental taxes can raise billions of dollars; they punish the polluters, change consumption patterns, and benefit the environment and the economy”.<sup>8</sup> With the carbon tax, people who use fossil fuels would now be punished for using such energy sources. An article in Whistleblower Magazine explains how after just three weeks after the U.N. formed international fears over global warming; a panel of 18 scientists from 11 countries wished to put a global tax on companies that emit greenhouse gasses.<sup>9</sup> This type of government involvement with science and economics is a scary combination to the baby-boomer generation. Not so ironically I find, that is exactly what happened during the Cold War as science became an institutional field of inquiry driven by government funds with the hopes of beating the Communist world in the race for science and technology. The threat of carbon taxes are seen as a clear intrusion on free commerce, with industries being taxed, skeptics fear workers will be laid off in order to compensate loss for emphasis on alternative energy industries and economic punishments for fossil fuel industries. They fear industries will be shut down all together causing alternative energy sources to gain a monopoly in power supply, which would only serve as a closer tie between government and the economy.

What makes the climate change theory different from other conspiracies is its global nature. Other conspiracies are aimed at a specific group, (Jews, Blacks, the wealthy, the government) but global warming affects everyone, everywhere and the global nature of the climate change threat is something very scary to a generation who

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<sup>8</sup> Fortney H. Stark. “What They Said. In 1990 The Yearbook of World Opinion pg.120 Copyright 1991 By Monitor Book Company

<sup>9</sup> World Net Daily: HYSTERIA Whistleblower Magazine March 1, 2007  
[http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=54483](http://wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=54483)

fought against western world domination. The idea of environmentalism as a global norm is a threat to skeptics who envision commercial market dominance in the hands of people such as Al Gore and other politicians/scientists who seek to advance environmentalism measures.

A complication to the global warming skeptic theory is the idea of needing an enemy after the Cold War. Considering that the generation of skeptics has always fought against a common enemy (Nazis, Communists), it makes sense that skeptics may find comfort in sharing an enemy in the form of unnecessary environmentalism. Interestingly, the same argument for a need of an enemy after the cold war is what skeptics claim global warming is all about, an enemy in the form of CO<sub>2</sub>. Why do both sides of this issue have the same argument? Perhaps there is some truth to it for both sides. Baby boomer scientists may have a need to be united with the threat of technology leaving them in the dust and more contemporary scientists may have a need to feel united against a common enemy to feel as if they are making contributions to the field that have not already been found by “the greatest generation”. Either way, both sides have created an enemy (real or imagined) and the same threat is the same; global power. In the Cold War, it was the global power of Democracy vs. Communism and now it is the global power of CO<sub>2</sub> vs. Life as global warming proponents would suggest or Green Earth vs. Green Money as global warming skeptics would suggest.

Those on the fringes of the theory go as far to compare it with new world order theories. In *State of Fear*, *Jurassic Park* author Michael Crichton goes so far as to compare the hoax of global warming with the hoax of eugenics during the Holocaust.

In light of conspiracy theory, my research of global warming skeptics has led me to believe that the present work of these skeptics reveals just as much about their predictions on future climate change as it does about their memories and nostalgic attitudes of their baby boom generation. The skeptics at surface level seem to be concerned with economic, political, and scientific freedom without government interference. Yet when taking a closer look at skeptic scientists such as Bill Gray, Fred Smith, and Robert Lindzen, they all share a common generation and a generally conservative political ideology. What is even more revealing is that year 1990, when global warming skepticism starting growing legs, the older baby boom generation scientists started to lose government funds to new computer models. After losing much government funding under the Clinton administration to new computer nodules, Gray attributes his loss in grants to his known skepticism of climate change which likely explains his hostile attitudes toward computer projected environments. Gray figures he has put in \$100,000 of his own money over the years, including a \$45,000 stopgap payment a couple of years ago and has been turned down repeatedly in his quest for research funds.<sup>10</sup> Lindzen, a professor of meteorology at MIT and a well respected skeptic, even among global warming proponents made the argument that “Scientists who dissent from the alarmism have seen their grant funds disappear, their work derided, and themselves libeled as industry stooges, scientific hacks, or worse”<sup>11</sup> And such accredited meteorologists such as Gray became less desirable in the field as their outdated techniques became obsolete. Therefore, perhaps the skeptic theory serves to give

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<sup>10</sup> The Skeptic by Alan Prendergast June 29,2006 <http://www.westword.com/2006-06-29/news/the-skeptic/full>

<sup>11</sup> Climate of Fear: Global-warming alarmists intimidate dissenting scientists into silence by Prof. Richard Lindzen Opinion Journal, Wall Street Journal - 2006-04-12

credibility back to observational methods that were used during the 1950's to prove that skeptics are not out of touch with present technology, and that their methods may even work better than crystal ball computer predictions.

This brings me to Timothy Melley's idea of *agency panic* which is the intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self control-the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else, that has been 'constructed' by powerful external agents" (Melley 62)<sup>12</sup>. Baby boomer global warming skeptics who are now out of touch with technological meteorology feel that their knowledge and skill are being swept under the carpet to make room for computer modules funded by liberal politicians, which they have no control over (especially without the funding to do so). Related to Melley's understanding of loss of autonomy, Gordon S. Wood's voice on the loss of autonomy helps to further explain the world of conspiracy. As Wood states, "a world of autonomous, freely acting individuals who are capable of directly and deliberately bringing about events through their decisions and actions can thereby be held morally responsible for what happens". For skeptics, the loss of credibility to computer analysis is the loss of autonomy and the marketing of go green campaigns and government referendum in regards to fossil fuels serves as an external agent. Without control over scientific funding or a voice in the political scene, they face no control over what they feel the free market economy should morally be. Though the idea of agency panic is related to the anxiety faced by the baby boomer scientists in the face of the technological era, I'd like to take Melley's idea a step further to discuss what I call the *machismo reaction*.

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<sup>12</sup> Timothy Melley Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy pg.62

By machismo reaction, I mean the defensive attitude tactic skeptics use to justify why their beliefs or methods are better than others; especially new technological methods to predict climate change. Hurricane expert and skeptic Bill Gray, expresses this attitude in his statement, “Nearly all of my colleagues who have been around 40 or 50 years are skeptical as hell about this whole global warming thing”.<sup>13</sup> Gray seems to believe that his climate predictions are more accurate than computer modules and newer meteorologists’ predictions because he has the hands on experience that was needed during his time of weather prediction. Gray states of scientists, “Good talkers. But that doesn’t mean they know how the atmosphere ticks. They haven’t been down in the trenches. They can’t hold their own with me”.<sup>14</sup> This machismo attitude illustrated by Gray, implying that the physical observations of storms and weather is a far better method than taking the easy way out and having a computer do all the work. Being able to say that he has put himself into physical contact with storms and has done more hands on and dangerous research than any computer could do makes Gray feels like he still has a chance in the global warming debate. With this experience, he feels that he has something that no global warming proponent could compare. I believe the idea is something like the story my grandfather tells about climbing uphill both ways in the snow just to go to school, and somehow justify that it was better that way- character building perhaps, which may make skeptics in general feel more credible in their beliefs. After all, we have seen many conspiracy theorists go into the Machismo mode such as Ted Kaczynski and members of the Militia of Montana who chose the backwoods over mainstream society. Perhaps the

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<sup>13</sup> Discover Dialogue: Meteorologist William Gray by Kathy A. Svitil 9/9/2005  
<http://discovermagazine.com/2005/sep/discover-dialouge/>

<sup>14</sup> The Skeptic by Alan Prendergast June 29,2006 pg.3

survival instinct all people have is a driving force for skeptics to challenge opponents on a more primal, macho level to prove their credibility in a field they are losing credibility.

Although I concede that these skeptics have a machismo reaction to the current global warming models, John Horgan, scientific journalist and author of *The End of Science* suggests that though skeptic scientists are known for their haughtiness, it is not their desire to be proven right that drives them, but the desire to find truth. “Scientists who harbor this belief are often accused of arrogance. Some are arrogant, supremely so. But many others, I have found, are less arrogant than anxious. These are trying times for truth seekers. The scientific enterprise is threatened by technophobes, animal-rights activists, religious fundamentalists, and, most important, stingy politicians. Social, political, and economic constraints will make it more difficult to practice science, and pure science in particular, in the future” (Horgan, excerpt).

With the loss of credibility, skeptics feel like outsiders in a global world, or worse, feel as if the market and political measures to stop global warming are taking over the world that they know and fought for. Jodi Dean states “Enabled by technology we become aliens, connected outside the state. Just as often, we’re abducted by this same technology. To think of ourselves as cyborgs ignores our inability to program, format, evaluate, and contextualize information” (Dean 180)<sup>15</sup>. Maybe by technology such as computer modules, skeptics would feel like drones to the technological system, not being able to physically enter storms or make observation from personal evaluations and actually format, evaluate, or contextualize their own climate predictions, instead of a computer’s predictions. Perhaps what they fear with computer models is the sense of

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<sup>15</sup> Jodi Dean *Aliens in America, The Familiarity of Strangeness* 1998 Cornell Press pg.180

“selling out” to easier methods, or recognizing the loss of human observation to computer prediction, surely a defeat for the observational scientists of meteorology.

Dean argument suggests that these skeptic scientists may fear the loss of individual scientific accomplishment to computers but John Horgan offers a different perspective. Horgan states, “Scientists are rarely so human, I have found, so at the mercy of their fears and desires, as when they are confronting the limits of knowledge. The greatest scientists want, above all, to discover truths about nature (in addition to acquiring glory, grants, and tenure and improving the lot of humankind); they want to *know*”. Horgan suggests that though scientists’ need for grants and desire for scientific acclaim, what they really want is just to learn about the world in which we live in. For global warming skeptics, though they seek grants and hope for a following, Horgan suggests that the main reason for perusing skepticism is just to discover what could *really* be the reason behind climate change, they are simply looking for answers by questioning those handed to them.

On the topic of global environmentalism, Alasadar Spark writes, “The view that globalization is actually about connections and networks-economic, political, informational, military, government-has been extensive voice by many, and it is now common to define globalizations as not just space but time”(Spark 57)<sup>16</sup>. Extending Spark’s idea to science as well, an extensive voice against global environmentalism was seen in 1997, when the Kyoto treaty to limit greenhouse gasses globally was put in effect. 17,000 scientists signed the Oregon Petition stating that “Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial

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<sup>16</sup> Alasadar Spark Conjuring order The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and Human Sciences pg 57.

effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth.”<sup>17</sup> Lyndon LaRouche, <sup>18</sup>presidential runner for the past 20 years, and global warming skeptic states, “the Kyoto Treaty on reduction of greenhouse gases was based on scientific fraud which *violates the laws of the universe*”, which I suppose would be some hefty laws to break. This idea is also expressed in a recent add for the Competitive Enterprise Institute called “Life” illustrating the advantages to CO<sub>2</sub> in which a young girl blows bubbles, a soccer mom takes her kids to practice, and a feeble woman doing back breaking labor which would be so simply avoided thanks to machinery which pump Co<sub>2</sub>.<sup>19</sup> The commercial is supposed to “bring a tear to your eye” says CEO of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, Fred Smith, as you see how Co<sub>2</sub> makes our lives as we know it manageable and beautiful. Spark’s notion of globalization representing time is an interesting parallel as proponents of the global warming theory seek to stop the process of climate change seen by skeptics as an attempt to stop time, since global warming is a natural process that will happen over time anyway.

Stephen Gould validates skepticism by calling a claim to be tested, much like the global warming skeptics call for hard proof of human influence on global warming. I believe he would consider the work of global warming skeptics to be “internalist” as they focus on “the internal workings of science independent of its larger cultural context: the development of ideas, hypotheses, theories, laws, and the internal logic between them” (Gould pg.29). I believe that Gould would place the internalist aspects of the global warming skeptics in dialogue with global warming proponents to simply test each

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.oism.org/pproject/> Petition Project

<sup>18</sup> The Fraud of Global Warming True CO<sub>2</sub> Record Buried Under Gore by Laurence Hecht. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science and Technology February 15,2007

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sGKvDNdJNA>

hypothesis against each other. However, I believe he would consider my analysis of global warming skeptics as “externalist” as I placed the skeptical theory in context of its moment in time which revealed it’s social, political, and economic ties and the influence this time had and continues to have on skeptics. Also, Gould’s explanation of progressive science helps to further explain the skeptic view that no one wants to listen a global warming skeptic because a skeptic won’t talk in computer jargon or fit in with the current ideology; “Scientific progress is the cumulative growth of a system of knowledge over time, in which useful features are retained and non-useful features are abandoned, based on the rejection or confirmation of testable knowledge” (Gould pg30)<sup>20</sup>. This offers explanation to skeptics such as Grey whose federal funding was cut when new modules appeared and offered new and advanced tools for climatic research.

As federal funding was cut from older metrological scientists and funds were given to newer computer models and upcoming scientists, the older scientists started to become a bit cynical towards new models and methods. As Peter Knight puts it, “recent conspiracy culture is marked by a routinized air of cynicism, as people are prepared to believe the worst about the world they live in” (Knight pg2)<sup>21</sup>. The cynicism Knight speaks about is certainly expressed by such scientists and skeptics such as Gray, Smith, and Lindzen however in contrast to the cynicism towards not receiving federal funds, global warming skeptics are actually optimistic. They see humans as being a part of the planet to use and live on. Skeptics won’t be the first ones to join a rally to save the next endangered species, but they do see resources available to us, as resources to take

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Jay Gould Why People Believe Weird Things pg.30 A.W.H. Freeman/ Owl Book Henry Holt and Company New York 2002

<sup>21</sup> Peter Knight Conspiracy Culture From the Kennedy Assassination to The X-Files pg 2 Routledge Taylor and Francis Group London and New York 2000

advantage of. Unlike extreme global warming proponents, the skeptics are not expecting the apocalyptic end of the earth, which comes up in many conspiracy theories, and they do not expect to die of green house gas emissions. Skeptics intend to live life the most comfortable and enjoyable way possible, even if it means cutting down a few trees.

Global warming skeptics claim that policies to retard global warming will have more harmful effects on the economy than actual climate change will. The argument lays in the battle for free trade and commerce without government regulation or referendum. The defense for free trade is associated with the generally conservative ideology of global warming skeptics. Looking beneath the market worries of global warming skeptics, it is necessary to explore the baby boom generation in which they all come from and the needs they feel to assert themselves in the technological era.

My work contributes to the field of conspiracy theory studies by showing how contemporary conspiracy theories reveal just as much about the present as they do about the past. In my research, the impact of the Cold War on the baby boomer generation is seen to leave once highly regarded scientists in the dust. For their own conspiracy theory followers are replaced by computer models and a return to what they fear as eco-socialism which portrays the feelings of still being at ends with an enemy as in the Cold War up until the 90's. Limitations of my study are that we are still a year away from seeing a more liberal federal government and as temperatures continue to rise, many more strands of the skeptic view will arise, especially with the democratic Presidential Candidates using environmentalism as a push for votes.

In conducting my research, I have found the conspiracy theory can serve to lend a familiar voice to those who feel out of place, especially in the scientific field. It also

functions to give a voice to scholars who may have lost following, funding, or credibility for their ideas and with a voice of new or different opinion on global warming may bring acclaim as Held, Lindzen's apprentice states, "There are always people in the fringes. They are attracted to the fringe...It may be as simple as, how do you prove you're smarter than everyone else? You don't do that by consensus".<sup>22</sup> What skeptics want is hard facts of global warming due to human activity and Co2 emissions even though they themselves use unclear modules of climate observation, it is quite clear that no one or no machine can truly predict how much an effect it will actually have on our planet but nothing is certain, especially in science. But until, these scientists regain their funds and acclaim, they will continue to try and prove the lack of human influence within global warming and their machismo reaction will do little to earn respect among more current meteorologists and politicians.

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<sup>22</sup> Joel Achenbach The Tempest The Washington Post May 28, 2006 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/23>

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