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POLITICAL CULTURE: AN UNEXPLORED FACTOR IN CLIMATE CHANGE

DIPLOMACY

by

Alexander Suen

PhD Global Governance, Balsillie School of International Affairs, 2022

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the Doctor of Philosophy in Global Governance

Wilfrid Laurier University

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## **Author's declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this dissertation. This is a true copy of the dissertation, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my dissertation may be made electronically available to the public.

I acknowledge that this dissertation was written in part on the land of the Neutral, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples, on whose traditional land the Balsillie School of International Affairs and Wilfrid Laurier University are located.

It sits on the Haldimand Tract, which consists of six miles on either side of the Grand River, and which was promised to the Six Nations.

This dissertation was also written largely in my current home in the district of North York, a part of the City of Toronto. It is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. I also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

## **Abstract**

As climate change continues to ravage the world, mitigation efforts continue to be insufficient to rise to the challenge. Inaction on climate change has been traditionally explained by economic incentives, but some of the variability in climate policies cannot be explained by economics alone. Some variations could be accounted for by the deeply rooted national political culture of Anglo-settler colonies. This political culture may inhibit the willingness of such states to cooperate on climate change. In this dissertation, I describe the political philosophy of the Anglo-settler colony, and the histories of domination of its white settlers over the indigenous peoples of the territories they conquered. I trace the process of settler colonialism of three countries: The United States, Canada, and Australia. The political culture of settler colonialism could intersect with the governmental structure and ideology of liberal democracies, that inhibits the national desire to cooperate on climate change internationally and implement effective policies domestically. To analyze this connection, I employ discourse analysis on a selection of opinion articles from newspapers of record between 2009-2016 for the three countries. I propose that these articles serve as a system of social reinforcement, wherein elite demands to limit mitigation efforts are recirculated, normalized, and entrench the hegemony of settler colonialism vis-à-vis climate change policy and diplomacy. Understanding these histories and processes could have important implications for the future of climate change.

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## List of abbreviations

ABC: Argentina, Brazil, and Chile

ALP: Australian Labor Party

AR4: Fourth Assessment Report [of the IPCC]

AR5: Fifth Assessment Report [of the IPCC]

BAU: Business-as-usual

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

COP: Conference of the Parties [part of the UNFCCC]

CPC: Conservative Party of Canada

CRU: Climatic Research Unit [of the University of East Anglia]

DP: Displaced Persons [European refugees displaced during World War II]

ETS: Emissions Trading Scheme [Australia]

EU: European Union

FAR: First Assessment Report [of the IPCC]

GAM: *The Globe and Mail* [Canada]

GFC: Global Financial Crisis [2007-2009]

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LPA: Liberal Party of Australia

NP: *National Post* [Canada]

NSDAP: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [Nazi Party]

NYT: *The New York Times* [US]

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OOO: Object-oriented ontology

SAR: Second Assessment Report [of the IPCC]

SCC: Social Cost of Carbon

SMH: *The Sydney Morning Herald* [Australia]

TAR: Third Assessment Report [of the IPCC]

TRC: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

TS: *The Toronto Star* [Canada]

UNCHR: United Nations Convention on Human Rights

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UNEP: United Nations Environmental Programme

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WG1: Working Group I: The Physical Science Basis [IPCC]

WMO: World Meteorological Organization

WP: *The Washington Post* [US]

WSJ: *The Wall Street Journal* [US]

For over sixty years, political scientists and political communication scholars have consistently found that citizens know and often care little about politics. Citizens have little in the way of developed ideological frameworks for understanding politics or consistent policy preferences. ... citizens do not rationally weigh policy information in the course of an election. They vote based on their social identities, or how they perceive themselves and others, their partisan identities, and their sense of the groups they believe the two political parties represent. ... Citizens come to perceive themselves in relation to these groups as they grow into their own social identities and partisan affiliations, especially through their family lives, and it largely shapes their lifelong political identities and ultimately vote choices.

Politics, then, is primarily an identity-based phenomenon. One way of thinking about it is akin to sports fandom, albeit with much higher stakes—citizens want their partisan and social group teams to be “winners” and the other teams to be “losers.” The political ideologies or policies at stake are largely unimportant for most Americans compared with the success of the teams they affiliate with ... When citizens tune in at all, the role of media is to provide a running account of a political, and often moral, contest, whether it is candidates vying on the campaign trail or the president battling adversaries in Congress. Citizens interpret and evaluate these contests and the media that provides stories about them through the lens of their own identities, and they especially understand politics in partisan terms, which at our contemporary moment accords with other social cleavages such as race and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup>

The cosmos today determines the style of life *not* only of those directly engaged in economically productive activity, but of all born into this grinding mechanism. It does so with overwhelming force and perhaps it will continue to do so until the last ton of fossil fuel has burnt to ashes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Kreiss, “The Media Are about Identity, Not Information,” in *Trump and the Media*, ed. Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 96.

<sup>2</sup> “This grinding mechanism” refers to Weber’s concept of “the calling” of “ascetic Protestantism.” Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The Revised 1920 Edition*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 177.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the publication of the Special Report from the IPCC has found that the world is headed for global warming beyond two degrees Celsius by the end of the century.<sup>3</sup> What's more, the research on climate change has become something of a disaster film cliché, with each new article and press release describing ever-worsening impacts in the present day, and worsening projections for the future.<sup>4</sup> Two years later, year wildfires unprecedented in size burned throughout Brazil, Australia, the United States, and beyond. There are only a few short years before immediate and dramatic mitigation efforts must be implemented before the world is locked into a future of irreversible and potentially catastrophic climate change.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the pledges delivered by signatories of the Paris Agreement would still result in warming of more than 2°C. It is not clear at all that

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<sup>3</sup> IPCC, "Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change," (Geneva, 2018), [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/10/SR15\\_SPM\\_version\\_stand\\_alone\\_LR.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/10/SR15_SPM_version_stand_alone_LR.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> William R. Freudenburg and Violetta Muselli, "Global Warming Estimates, Media Expectations, and the Asymmetry of Scientific Challenge," *Global Environmental Change* 20, no. 3 (August 2010): 483–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.04.003>; Stefan Rahmstorf et al., "Recent Climate Observations Compared to Projections," *Science* 316, no. 5825 (May 4, 2007): 709, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1136843>; Stefan Rahmstorf, Grant Foster, and Anny Cazenave, "Comparing Climate Projections to Observations up to 2011," *Environmental Research Letters* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 044035, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/7/4/044035>.

<sup>5</sup> Will Steffen et al., "Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 33 (August 14, 2018): 8252–59, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1810141115>.

member states will manage to meet these targets.<sup>6</sup> Pessimism has gripped much of the environmentalist community. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, the world is being ravaged by a global pandemic crisis, seeing millions dead and tens of millions infected by COVID-19. Despite warnings that such a pandemic was inevitable, governments were woefully underprepared. The administration of then-US President Donald Trump ignored prior planning to combat pandemics in general, and early warnings about COVID-19 from Asia and Europe specifically, ensuring a chaotic and inadequate response.<sup>7</sup> The patterns of denial, distrust of experts, and of woefully inadequate policy measures, resemble an accelerated version of the global (non-)response to climate change thus far.<sup>8</sup>

How did we get here? The traditional explanation has centred on the immense scale of the economic challenge, the dependency of global civilization on fossil fuel infrastructure, and the “wickedness” of the moral quandaries involved with climate change.<sup>9</sup> While these are all compelling explanations, each with some merit, they do not account for the entire variation in national

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Anderson, “Duality in Climate Science,” *Nature Geoscience* 8, no. 12 (October 12, 2015): 898–900, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo2559>.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Lipton et al., “He Could Have Seen What Was Coming: Behind Trump’s Failure on the Virus,” *The New York Times*, April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Gilad Edelman, “The Analogy Between Covid-19 and Climate Change Is Eerily Precise,” *Wired*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/the-analogy-between-covid-19-and-climate-change-is-eerily-precise/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ian H. Rowlands, “Explaining National Climate Change Policies,” *Global Environmental Change* 5, no. 3 (1995): 235–249, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780\(95\)00047-R](https://doi.org/10.1016/0959-3780(95)00047-R); Stephen M Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm:

responses to climate change mitigation. Nordic states whose economies rely more on fossil fuels than the US have more ambitious climate targets and government programs, while poorer states in South America have the same climate targets as the US. Australia repealed its national carbon tax with the election of the right-leaning Liberal government under Tony Abbot in 2015.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, according to the Auditor General's report, Canada is expected to fall short of the Copenhagen 2020 target by 20%.<sup>11</sup> It appears that relative to their wealth, these three countries have consistently underperformed and failed to meet even their own climate targets. According to the Climate Change Performance Index, Australia, Canada, and the United States rank consistently near the bottom out of 61 countries, both in terms of their ability to meet their climate targets, and in ranking near the top in greenhouse gas emissions per capita. In the 2017 report, the US ranked in 43<sup>rd</sup> place, Canada ranked in 55<sup>th</sup> place, and Australia ranked in 57<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>12</sup> In the latest 2020 report, the US

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Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption," *Environmental Values* 15, no. 2006 (2006): 397–413; Kelly Levin et al., "Overcoming the Tragedy of Super Wicked Problems: Constraining Our Future Selves to Ameliorate Global Climate Change," *Policy Sciences* 45, no. 2 (June 23, 2012): 123–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-012-9151-0>.

<sup>10</sup> Preston Teeter and Jörgen Sandberg, "Constraining or Enabling Green Capability Development? How Policy Uncertainty Affects Organizational Responses to Flexible Environmental Regulations," *British Journal of Management* 28, no. 4 (October 2017): 649–65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12188>.

<sup>11</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Perspectives on Climate Change Action in Canada—A Collaborative Report from Auditors General—March 2018" (Ottawa, ON, 2018), [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_otp\\_201803\\_e\\_42883.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_otp_201803_e_42883.html).

<sup>12</sup> Jan Burck, Franziska Marten, and Christoph Bals, "Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2017" (Bonn, 2016), 12–13, [https://www.climate-change-performance-index.org/sites/default/files/documents/the\\_climate\\_change\\_performance\\_index\\_results\\_2017.pdf](https://www.climate-change-performance-index.org/sites/default/files/documents/the_climate_change_performance_index_results_2017.pdf).

dropped to the 61<sup>st</sup> and last place, Canada ranked 55<sup>th</sup> again, and Australia ranked 56<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>13</sup> However, of the ABC countries, Brazil ranks in the middle of the CCPI, while Argentina and Chile ranks among the best, despite all three of these countries being significantly smaller economies in both absolute GDP and per capita figures than the Anglo-settler colonies.<sup>14</sup> What can account for their relatively poor performance on climate change in the latter group? Usually, economic factors are used as an explanation for why states underperform in their climate change policies, but this does not account for the entire variation. What other factors could be explored to explain the gap?

The most important question raised by this problem is whether some countries have a particular political culture that is inimical to both a willingness to implement climate policies at home, and to cooperate effectively on transnational climate regimes. Through the process of the dissemination of this political culture, which I refer to as the Anglo-settler colony, strong action on large-scale environmental challenges like climate change are disincentivized, or even thought to be repulsive. The development of the Anglo-settler colony is rooted in the historically contingent features of their national origin. For this study, I have isolated three countries which share the

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Burck et al., “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2020” (Bonn, 2019), 9, [https://www.climate-change-performance-index.org/sites/default/files/documents/ccpi-2020-results-the\\_climate\\_change\\_performance\\_index.pdf](https://www.climate-change-performance-index.org/sites/default/files/documents/ccpi-2020-results-the_climate_change_performance_index.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Burck, Marten, and Bals, “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2017”; Burck et al., “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2020.”



important feature of being Anglo-settler colonies: The United States, English Canada, and Australia.<sup>15</sup> Much work has been done on examining the national features of these countries, but there has not yet been a systematic attempt at assessing these common features and how they interact with climate policy and diplomacy. Considering the outsized influence of the US on the world system and global economy, understanding these settler-colonial political cultures could provide important insights for understanding and communicating climate science and policy to English-speaking lay audiences. Specifically, I examine how the political culture of the settler colony is performed through the dissemination and reinforcement of elite political opinion, through the editorial pages of newspapers of record. In addition to the positive claim that papers of record act to reinforce elite preferences, I also suggest that the *absence* of critical information and context can reproduce ignorance that can further constrain policy action.

### ***Case selection and periodization***

My study will employ a discourse analysis on the editorial pages of three newspapers of record for the US, Canada, and Australia. The periodization will begin with January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, and end with December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. Within this period, the dataset will capture elite discourse leading up to the Copenhagen Accord, and the discourse leading up to the Paris Agreement. It also covers the transition between a change of national government for the US, between the neoliberal, centrist

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<sup>15</sup> The Province of Quebec, and French Canada more specifically, lies outside the scope of this study.

Democratic presidency of Barack Obama and the populist, authoritarian Republican presidency of Donald Trump. More on the theory and methodology supporting this periodization will be explained in the next chapter.

## **Brief Outline**

In the remainder of this introduction, I will lay out some key definitions of important terms, most importantly ‘political culture,’ and then describe my approach to the literature review. I will then use the next chapter to describe the methodology and research design I employed for the case studies.

The third chapter will contain the three case studies, which analyze the settler-colonial political culture of the United States, English Canada, and Australia. The main source of data behind the case studies are in the ‘newspapers of record’ for each country, assumed to represent elite opinion across a spectrum of political ideologies. My explanation of the case selection is further elaborated in Chapter 2, “Methodology and Research Design.” The case studies themselves are described in Chapters 3. Here, I aim to establish that elite opinion expressed in papers of record create boundaries of possibility which are inimical to effective climate change policy and diplomacy.

I will then investigate the political philosophy of settler colonialism, climate change, and the settler-colonial policy response to climate change. I will discuss a broad array of writings that are salient to the study of Anglo-settler colonies, including a discourse analysis on the aesthetic of *terra nullius* that is part and parcel of the political culture of the settler colony. After establishing

these theoretical foundations, I will then discuss the historiographical literature on the formation and development of the settler colonies, and an overview of the politics of climate change skepticism. I draw upon insights from an array of academic fields, including critical security studies, geography, history, political science, and social psychology. I also summarize literature from non-academic sources, including journalistic investigative reports. A separate chapter is used to summarize the historiography of climate change skepticism and its impact on the political landscape of climate policy. Finally, I will conclude the study with a discussion of the results and avenues for future research.

## **Definitions**

Before moving on with the rest of this study, we must first establish the definitions of some terms that will be commonly used.

### ***Political culture***

One critical concept to this dissertation is *political culture*, which I define as the national culture of a particular state, and for multinational states, the dominant nation within a state. The terminology is, unfortunately, fraught with difficulties in interpretation. In the broadest sense, a general definition was provided by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anthropologist Franz Boas: “Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by

these habits.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, culture is both acted upon and is itself a kind of actor, both subject and object in a system of social behaviour. These social systems are also dynamic and shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic forces.<sup>17</sup> However, the term has fallen out of favour in the field of comparative politics, receiving little significant attention over the past few decades. Furthermore, debate on the precise definition of culture continues within the anthropology community. It is therefore worth exploring this term and the history of its usage at some length.

One important treatment of political culture is found in Chilcote’s book, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Reconsidered*. Chilcote described the concept of political culture as having its origins in the theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx’s argument described “beliefs and symbols of culture in capitalist society as part of a superstructure of ideology and false consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> He believed that culture was a static force, until it was acted upon by changes in the material base, resulting in a “transformation in the mode of production and in class relations.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, it is the material factors that are the independent variable, and culture that is the dependent variable. Weber was also an important figure in the early days of

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<sup>16</sup> Franz Boas, “Anthropology,” in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 2*, ed. E.A. Seligman and A. Johnson (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1930), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Augustín Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths about Human Nature* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 35–36.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald H. Chilcote, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Reconsidered*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 177.

<sup>19</sup> Chilcote, 177.

sociology, contributing his own analysis to the notion of political culture. He claimed that culture was an “autonomous” collection of “individual orientations of rational self-interest,” and thus capable of “shaping the political, social, and economic setting” of the overall society.<sup>20</sup> However, the notion of *political* culture was first described in the field of anthropology. E. B. Taylor was among the first, writing in 1871 that culture could be defined as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of society.”<sup>21</sup>

But between 1871 and 1952, 160 definitions of ‘culture’ had been provided by social scientists, including the Boas’s elucidation which ended up resembling Taylor’s to a striking degree.<sup>22</sup> Consensus on the definition eluded scholars, with several candidates being too vague or imprecise to be usable, or repetitions of prior elucidations, or both. As Thomas Kuhn argued in his seminal work on paradigms and intellectual revolutions, the lack of scholarly consensus made it difficult for social scientists to work on “normal science” based on agreed-upon definitions.<sup>23</sup> Then, in 1963, Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba published their work on political culture, where they aimed to create synthesis that could be generally useful across all social sciences. They preferred

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<sup>20</sup> Chilcote, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Chilcote, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Chilcote, 178.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2012).

the term “political culture” over the then in-vogue “national character,” because it allowed them to bring in related concepts from an array of social scientific fields.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there continued to be criticisms of the concept of political culture, centred on four general areas. Chilcote identified these areas as “reductionism, bias, explanatory value, and autonomy.”<sup>25</sup> Since most social sciences referred to culture as an important concept, addressing these criticisms were of utmost importance. But nonetheless, the concept of culture generally and of political culture specifically fell out of the vogue by the 1980s and ceased to be a popular concept in the social sciences. Afterwards, occasional oblique references to culture by political scientists, such as Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations,” (with his classification of “civilizations” as “cultural entities”<sup>26</sup>) sometimes achieved widespread popularity outside of the academy and in policymaking circles but were roundly criticized by academics.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Chilcote, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Reconsidered*, 178–79.

<sup>25</sup> Chilcote, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 40.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Bruce M. Russett, John R. Oneal, and Michaelene Cox, “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 5 (September 24, 2000): 583–608, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343300037005003>; Jonathan Fox, “Paradigm Lost: Huntington’s Unfulfilled Clash of Civilizations Prediction into the 21st Century,” *International Politics* 42, no. 4 (December 21, 2005): 428–57, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800116>.

Almond and Verba have argued that political culture itself is *not* a theory, but instead “relates to variables used in the positing of a theory.”<sup>28</sup> This is how I will treat political culture here. Almond and Verba do not treat the individual as an atomized, rational actor, but rather, individuals are instead shaped by the actions of elite classes. They described how “elite responsiveness” acts “not because citizens are actively making demands, but in order to keep them from becoming active.”<sup>29</sup> This process of elite responsiveness could be important for the “management of affect,” an important component of my discourse analysis as presented in a later chapter.<sup>30</sup>

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the term ‘culture’ to refer to a broad array of social phenomena for groups of people, but here we wish to focus on the interface between culture and its impacts on policy and diplomacy. Thus, I am referring to *political* culture specifically. Indeed, as we have seen, it is important to place constraints on such a nebulous term, to avoid the kinds of pitfalls that plagued earlier social scientists.<sup>31</sup> Interests, values, and communities are defined through the exercise of political power, and thus culture can be said to be inherently political.

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<sup>28</sup> Chilcote, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Reconsidered*, 184.

<sup>29</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 487.

<sup>30</sup> Almond and Verba, 487; Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?,” *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 2 (January 1979): 127, <https://doi.org/10.2307/421752>.

Political culture is therefore a natural extension of culture in general, as a “cultural construct [where] ideas, ideologies, and systems of meaning ... pervade societies.”<sup>32</sup> Aspects of culture can be wielded by power to reinforce its own legitimacy, such as the normalization of the power of settler colonial culture over indigenous culture, or of the US military and State Department as the ultimate arbiter of hegemonic power in the world system.<sup>33</sup> This power, I argue, goes beyond economic domination or military might. It relies on the culture to assist in power’s legitimation and in the hegemonizing process.

Discussing national political culture necessitates an understanding of *nationalism*, to which I mainly draw upon Benedict Anderson’s conception of the ‘imagined community.’ Nationalism is, unfortunately, another imprecise term like political culture. Nonetheless, the scale of the national community must be defined for the purposes of this study. A nation can be defined as a large group of people who have a shared sense of connection tied to language and territoriality, the perception of shared history, and sometimes ethnicity. Importantly, a shared religion, a divine ruling class, or *actual* shared history is not necessary to establish a nation. It is, after all, an “imagined community”

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<sup>32</sup> Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths about Human Nature*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (June 1981): 126–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501>; Robert W. Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method,” *Millennium* 12, no. 2 (June 1983): 162–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298830120020701>.



and a relatively new construction in world history.<sup>34</sup> The mature form of contemporary nationalism is arguably a development of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the roots of settler colonial political culture would predate this periodization. At a higher scale, global political culture can be conceived of, in terms of liberal environmentalism, which is rooted in the global hegemony of neoliberal economics. This worldview undoubtedly extends beyond the level of national cultures, and there will be some discussion of that concept. But a full examination of that level is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

By itself, the conceptualization of the nation as imagined community is insufficient. It could also potentially be confused or made synonymous with other terms such as worldview. Political culture overlaps with, but is distinct from, worldviews, norms, and ideologies. A worldview does not necessarily include a significant political component, although the notion of the worldview is perhaps the closest to what I describe as political culture. “Norms” are too narrow and are usually studied in isolation from deep historical context. Lastly, political ideology usually takes conscious

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<sup>34</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991).

development from an established tradition of written texts from political theorists and philosophers. However, political culture is a process that develops from historical contingency and path dependency.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore more of a ‘ground-up’ process for the mixing and evolution of ideas.

### *Climate change/global warming*

For the purposes of this study, I will refer to phenomena of the heating of the Earth’s surface because of anthropogenic intervention almost exclusively as *climate change*, with variations (like “global warming”) being used only rarely. Since the late 2010s, some newspapers have begun to use terms like “climate disruption,” “climate crisis,” and “climate emergency” to express a greater sense of implied urgency or danger, and is perhaps more appropriate given the increasingly obvious severity of climate change impacts.<sup>36</sup> I recognize the responsibility of academics to use language with care, but I will continue to consistently refer to the recent anthropogenic warming of the Earth as “climate change,” if only to avoid confusing the reader and maintain stylistic consistency with the vast majority of my literature review sources. Furthermore, I have decided to use *climate change skepticism* to refer to a broad (but inconsistent) set of rhetoric and arguments used to cast doubt on the scientific consensus on the physical aspects of climate change, as well as the

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, “Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence,” *Political Analysis* 14, no. 3 (June 14, 2006): 250–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpj020>.

<sup>36</sup> Damian Carrington, “Why the Guardian Is Changing the Language It Uses about the Environment,” *The Guardian*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/17/why-the-guardian-is-changing-the-language-it-uses-about-the-environment>.

general policy conclusion that GHG emissions must be reduced to avert disaster. In other works, this has been referred to as “denialism,” invoking the spectre of Holocaust deniers.<sup>37</sup> While some of these arguments are compelling in some contexts, there is an opposing view that terming these people “deniers” or “denialists” reads with pejorative intent. Alternative terms like “contrarian” or “contrarianism” have a chance of confusing readers who are unfamiliar with the popular discourse on climate change and may also assume a degree of emotionally charged disparagement that I do not intend. However, my usage of “climate change skepticism” does not imply that the skeptics are, in any sense, correct in their arguments, or that they have grounded their skepticism in a good-faith description and understanding of the consensus of expert opinion. I follow the tendency of climate scientists and other authors of the IPCC, on the basic assumptions that climate change: 1) is indisputably occurring; 2) is being caused by chiefly by human activity; and 3) its impacts must be ameliorated through the application of concerted policies to prevent or mitigate negative impacts on human life and other living things on the planet. I will refer always refer to the first and second points when I use terms like “consensus” or “scientific consensus,” although in general I am also referring to the third point as well.

### *States*

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<sup>37</sup> Pascal Diethelm and Martin McKee, “Denialism: What Is It and How Should Scientists Respond?,” *European Journal of Public Health* 19, no. 1 (January 2009): 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckn139>.

Another definition I must clarify is my use of the term *states*. States here is used in the classic international relations fashion, referring to the Westphalian conception of territorially bounded entities where a national government has exclusive and autonomous monopoly of legitimate violence within those borders.<sup>38</sup> However, when referring to American subnational units, I capitalize the first letter: “States.” If I am referring to both American States and along with national states, to reduce confusion I will switch to “country” instead when referring to the latter. However, it is important to note that this definition is necessarily limited by the arbitrary nature of how political entities are recognized as states, or not.

### ***Settler colony***

The most important term that appears throughout this study is the “frontier settler colony,” also referred to as the “Anglo-settler colony,” or simply *settler colony*. The settler colonies I will examine in this dissertation are the countries that gained independence from British colonial rule, and whose populations are majority white. These countries replaced their indigenous populations through a combination of genocidal policy and the (mostly) unintentional spread of ‘virgin soil’

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<sup>38</sup> Anthony McGrew, “Globalization and World Politics,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis and Steve Smith, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29–30.

epidemic disease. Based on these parameters, the settler colonies that I analyze are (English) Canada, the United States, and Australia.<sup>39</sup> Thus, this study is chiefly concerned with the political culture of the Anglo-settler colony, and how it impedes some states' willingness to cooperate on substantive climate policies, not just domestically, but also at the international level.

### ***Hegemony***

Finally, an examination of “hegemony” would be useful in the analysis of the case studies. My use of the word is based on Robert Cox’s elucidation, which can be traced back to Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Letters*.<sup>40</sup> Hegemony is conventionally defined as a locus of intense political power, which is not only able to bring enormous physical forces to bear on lesser powers (e.g. through military or economic domination), but can also affect the ideological landscape to which all other actors operate. An intuitive example of how hegemony operates is through the spread of Euro-American ideals, cultures, and patterns of behaviour throughout the entire world. These include economic policy based on the recommendations of Euro-American economists, films being shot in the Euro-American way, schools and offices are structured in the Euro-American fashion, both formalwear and casual clothes are Euro-American-styled, English is the *lingua franca* of international diplomacy, and so on. A core part of the hegemonic culture within the US has been described as

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<sup>39</sup> New Zealand qualifies under this definition. However, due to limits in scope, there will not be a case study or historical summary for New Zealand in this dissertation.

<sup>40</sup> Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method.”

“white supremacy.”<sup>41</sup> The spread of white supremacy does not directly require threat or use of force; instead, actors at all scales ‘willingly’ or ‘unconsciously’ adopt all these norms and behaviours. Moreover, alternatives to hegemony have become unthinkable at socially significant scales and in the halls of power. Hegemonic practises and ideas can form powerful constraints around possible behaviours, and policies that fight against them can run into roadblocks that are not easily identified or quantified. In fact, recognizing features of political culture which are hegemonic, is to understand them as being “mundane.”<sup>42</sup> On a metatextual level, lacking self-awareness of one’s standpoint means that hegemony can become invisible and difficult to explicate as a researcher.

At the international level, hegemony consists of the adoption of certain normative ideals, such as the liberal democracy being the ideal form of socio-political-economic organization of a state. Free trade, Westphalian sovereignty, the non-aggression principle, and other norms form a kind of foundation on which all international law, diplomacy, trade, and warfare is built on. Note that this does not mean that powerful actors *cannot* behave contrary to hegemony. Indeed, the hegemon in the form of the United States, is ‘permitted’ to violate these norms (though it weakens some of the

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew W. Hughey, “The (Dis)Similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of ‘Hegemonic Whiteness,’” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 8 (September 3, 2010): 1289–1309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903125069>.

<sup>42</sup> Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy,” *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (June 25, 2003): 169–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350463032000101542>.

‘consensual’ aspects of its hegemony). In practise, what this means is that the world’s largest cumulative emitter of greenhouse gasses is exempt from participating in global efforts to mitigate climate change, as well as incentivizing other countries against engaging in useful collective behaviours. Furthermore, Anglo-settler colonies tend to export scientific skepticism on climate change and other complex scientific policy challenges. Except during periods of intense disruption, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden transformation of democratic governments into authoritarian regimes, the hegemony is normally extremely difficult to influence. The threat of death is insufficient to motivate enough political willpower to implement the advice of scientists and other subject matter experts. As we will see, editorials in newspapers of record can and have been utilized *by* hegemony and can perpetuate the political culture of the settler colony. This has important implications for the ability of the global community to coordinate major multilateral policy action, that could be necessary to ameliorate dangerous levels of climate change.

## **Literature selection**

The study of how settler-colonial political culture inhibits climate action requires an in-depth review of a broad array of literature. Some of the fields I have examined include works in political science, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and critical studies of the media and communications. Furthermore, I have included some works of non-academic nature where they seem relevant, though there are risks to this approach. Some popular works cannot have their reliability or validity

established according to the prevailing standard in social science, but nonetheless I have found some of them useful.

A major challenge to this study is the societal interactions with the biogeochemical processes of climate change. It is, according to philosopher Timothy Morton, a “hyperobject”: an object which, for the contemporary human mind, transcends intuitively comprehensible scales of time and space.<sup>43</sup> Conventional political science and economics methods are ill-equipped to deal with the strangeness and grandiosity of climate change. Nonetheless, I aim to provide a useful summary for the reader. A truly comprehensive literature review encompassing everything salient to the study of the problem would encompass several volumes of an encyclopedia. The previous chapter covered the theoretical groundwork of the works I have deemed most important for this study. In this chapter, my overview of the non-theoretical literature will be separated into two major sections: an early history of the three Anglo-settler colonies, and an analysis of climate change skepticism and the concerted political efforts to undermine both public understanding of the physical sciences and the execution of substantive mitigation policy. The works are selected based on their salience towards the national histories of the countries in the case studies, the development of

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).



climate science, and the subsequent international effort towards the dream of a legally binding international treaty that is both legitimate and effective.

We now turn to the methodology and research design of this dissertation, beginning with a brief discussion on the ontological and epistemological approach to the research.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Ontological and epistemological approaches**

One of the greatest challenges in conceptualizing the epistemology and ontology of the settler colony and its relationship with climate change, is finding the most appropriate framework for understanding that relationship. This is due to the highly interdisciplinary nature of the hypothesis and the likely sources and literature that I have relied on for this research. Rather than working from a narrow academic field, I aimed to have a broader and more holistic understanding of the issues at hand. But this creates further problems, especially in keeping the scope within reasonable boundaries and synthesizing a broad array of academic perspectives in a coherent fashion. I aimed to provide a comprehensive survey of the salient fields without omitting critical sources and studies. However, some gaps will regrettably remain, given the limitations inherent to this study.

A key component of my literature review is examining the histories of the settler colonies. The historical approach I take is influenced by the concept of path dependency in political science. Path dependency creates a boundary in which likely behaviours can occur in complex systems like human societies. Path dependency constrains outcomes for some social phenomena, which precludes the possibility of alternative outcomes—or, at least, makes it difficult to exercise agency

and substantially affect different outcomes.<sup>44</sup> A systematic quantitative approach could be employed to identify and analyze the salient features of this process of historical lock-in. However, traditional historiography assumes that the contingent nature of most historical events precludes analysis through modelling or statistical analyses. Climate change and its interface with human society constitutes a system which involves so many different scales and sub- and supersystems that it demonstrates complexity beyond the traditional human intuition on how time and space works. In other words, it is not constrained by ‘common sense,’ and necessitates the use of unconventional methodologies in social science. Novel conceptual approaches are required to understand the problem. One of these approaches is the ontological concept of the “hyperobject,” a kind of object which transgresses intuitive comprehension due to their temporal and spatial scales being far outside what is normal for human senses.<sup>45</sup> This inability to comprehend a hyperobject, such as climate change, within human-centric perception could perhaps explain some of the psychological responses to climate change, especially that of general inaction or insufficient action.

Critical security studies have produced an important research question on the ontology of security, ‘what is a security threat?’ Securitization assumes that an object is securitized because it holds value. The question then becomes: ‘Does the securitized object possess extrinsic or intrinsic

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 251–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586011>.

<sup>45</sup> Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.

value?’<sup>46</sup> Philosophically, the question is interesting, but for the purposes of this dissertation, the stability of the global climate is assumed to have a variety of extrinsic values. ‘Security’ also implies the existence of an emergency; or a potential or actual state of affairs which represents enhanced danger to the subject (whether that be the international states system, an individual state, an individual person, the biosphere, or whatever). But since climate change as hyperobject challenges human perceptions, it creates the sense of inadmissibility of emergency status. After all, an ‘emergency’ is assumed to be a short-term crisis, bounded in scale to small region or location, and the situation ends when the emergency has been ‘dealt with’ (i.e., by armed forces, paramedics, firefighters, and so on). How can one speak of an ‘emergency’ that lasts hundreds, or thousands of years? Thus, the traditional notion of securitization is held in tension between the conceptual process of securitizing a referent object (RO) and the traditional policy response to threats to the RO (raising an emergency response), and the actual hyperobject nature of the climate crisis. Even *The Guardian’s* proposed change of language from “climate change” to “climate crisis” is suggestive of the short-term emergency; the need for urgent action is emphasized, but the consequences of climate change continue for millennia. This tension between ontological status as ‘emergency’ or ‘crisis’ was exposed in the language of securitization used by the government of Australian Prime

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<sup>46</sup> M. Bernstein, “Intrinsic Value,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 102, no. 3 (2001): 329–43.

Minister Kevin Rudd. This language failed to impress upon the ostensibly agreed-upon notion that climate change was indeed a kind of crisis.<sup>47</sup> Once the Labour government was replaced by the conservative LPA, even the rhetorical turn towards securitization had evaporated.<sup>48</sup>

Regardless of the question of the appropriateness or usefulness of the language of securitization, it is worth thinking about how the practical implications of the securitization of climate change affect policy. Supposing that climate change may be securitized, and the tension between securitization and the hyperobject nature of climate change can be adequately resolved or ignored, the practical act of securitization is still rife with incongruity. With the end of the Cold War and the increased prominence of environmental challenges, there has been a shift in security studies from largely focusing on inter-state conflict, to research on civil conflicts and sources of danger outside of conventional high diplomacy and military threats. Part of this evolving debate is centred on the referent object (RO) that is to be secured, and lays the foundation for a potential shift in policy priorities.<sup>49</sup> The earliest significant mention of environmental security was in 1989, but this has since been extended to linkages between modern anthropogenic climate change and recent

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<sup>47</sup> Matt McDonald, "The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (December 7, 2012): 579–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2012.731487>.

<sup>48</sup> Matt McDonald, "Climate Security and Economic Security: The Limits to Climate Change Action in Australia?," *International Politics* 52, no. 4 (July 20, 2015): 484–501, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2015.5>.

<sup>49</sup> Simon Dalby, *Environmental Security* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

conflicts in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>50</sup> Even relatively small changes in regional climate have been suggested as possible drivers of civil strife, interstate war, and the collapse of great empires throughout history.<sup>51</sup> As such, the integrity of the hyperobject of ‘a stable global climate’ is the subject of securitization under this critical framework. However, this understanding of the global climate and of climate politics has been criticized from the assessment of the instrumental value of environmental securitization.<sup>52</sup> For specific research areas, such as the suggested relationship between climate and civil conflict in Africa, historians and scholars of peace and conflict have objected to these kinds of causal links. Critics generally argue that political, military, and social factors are by far the most important factors in determining whether a conflict occurs and what form it takes.<sup>53</sup> Other studies have found that resource scarcity and environmental issues in general

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<sup>50</sup> Jessica Tuchman Mathews, “Redefining Security,” *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 2 (1989): 162–77; Marshall B Burke et al., “Warming Increases the Risk of Civil War in Africa,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 49 (December 8, 2009): 20670–74, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0907998106>; Colin P. Kelley et al., “Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 11 (March 17, 2015): 3241–46, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1421533112>.

<sup>51</sup> D. D. Zhang et al., “The Causality Analysis of Climate Change and Large-Scale Human Crisis,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 42 (October 18, 2011): 17296–301, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1104268108>; Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> Daniel Deudney, “The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 19, no. 3 (December 1, 1990): 461–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298900190031001>.

<sup>53</sup> Halvard Buhaug, “Climate Not to Blame for African Civil Wars,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, no. 38 (September 21, 2010): 16477–82, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1005739107>.

are unlikely to cause interstate conflict except in a specific formulation of riverine geography, though it may create stressors in terms of civil unrest and humanitarian disasters.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, some writers and scholars have suggested that future conflicts, including interstate warfare, could be driven by climate change, and have even gone so far as to suggest that the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be dominated by ‘climate wars.’<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, assuming that relatively small ‘natural’ changes to regional climate can create outsized impacts on human social orders and systems is plausible, climate change presents a serious threat to the integrity of global human civilization. Despite the epistemic challenge hyperobject nature poses to the conundrum of climate securitization, at least, climate change colloquially has been commonly defined as an emergency, which is reflected in the 2019 shift in language from the neutral-sounding “climate change” to the more alarmist “global heating” or “climate emergency” in the left-leaning UK newspaper, *The Guardian*.<sup>56</sup>

My assessment of climate change notionally means that both domestic climate policy and international climate diplomacy are grappling with potentially critical threats that could pose an extreme level of danger, justifying the emergency status in securitization. If that is the case, however,

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Gwynne Dyer, *Climate Wars* (Toronto, ON: Random House of Canada, 2008); Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars: Why People Will Be Killed in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Carrington, “Why the Guardian Is Changing the Language It Uses about the Environment.”

there is a serious and potentially fatal disconnect between the sober, neutral-toned discourse on climate change in the popular press, prestigious international reports (such as the IPCC), and much of academic writing on the subject, especially when compared to the leviathan-like scale of the hyperobject-level threat. This creates further questions: what systems are at play that cloud human perception and prevents it from grasping the threat? How does the conduits of political power suppress the ability of the wider system to react to the threat? What do the state and international security apparatuses protect from the designated threats? To answer these questions, I draw upon a broad array of literature, including insights from history, political theory, social psychology, and human geography. I also examine literature on critical studies of race, media, and colonialism.

The exercise of power is *constructed* through systems of manufactured consent and constrained by path dependency. One way in which the challenge of climate change can be ignored or subsumed by other priorities, is through the expression of elite opinion. In the past century, this was done mainly through the technology of newspapers, and the decisions taken by the editorial boards of the “newspapers of record.”<sup>57</sup> In the most recent decades, this has begun to shift, as physical newsprint has been replaced by articles published online. However, the conduits of official power

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<sup>57</sup> Barbie Zelizer, David Park, and David Gudelunas, “How Bias Shapes the News,” *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 3, no. 3 (December 29, 2002): 283–307, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490200300305>; Christopher L. Erickson and Daniel J.B. Mitchell, “Information on Strikes and Union Settlements: Patterns of Coverage in a ‘Newspaper of Record,’” *ILR Review* 49, no. 3 (April 25, 1996): 395–407, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979399604900301>.



are still expressed through the same organizations and the same underlying power structures. I therefore decided to analyze newspaper editorials as that conduit which represents and distributes elite desires and enforces their power. This process of manufactured consent can have disproportionate impact on the politics and behaviours of society.<sup>58</sup> This includes the power to actively prevent the amelioration of climate change, or otherwise manufacture ignorance of it.<sup>59</sup> Thus, manufactured consent is a mechanism that can be employed in the process of building and sustaining hegemony. However, the explanation of manufactured consent as *only* a method in which capital defends its own capacity to self-perpetuate, ascribes too much agency to an object which is acted upon by thousands or millions of agents. To the extent that capital protects itself through the triumph of neoliberal economics, it cannot account for the entire range of national responses to climate change. Economics clearly matter in petrostates, but even here there are variations between petrostates and their performance on climate change. Some petrostates have enacted stronger policies than even their peers whose economies are less reliant on fossil fuel extraction by percentage of total GDP. For example, this divergence can be seen in the CCPI of Saudi Arabia and Norway,

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<sup>58</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>59</sup> Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, “Challenging Knowledge: How Climate Science Became a Victim of the Cold War,” in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 55–89.

or for that matter, the Anglo settler-colonies and Norway.<sup>60</sup> Despite the general influence of protected capital, there remains too much variation for the political economy of fossil-fuelled capitalism to explain the full variation in responses to climate change.

I propose that political culture provides the missing piece which has heretofore been relatively unexplored in the political science and sociology of climate change. Capitalist modes of production, and specifically the contemporary world system built on hegemony of neoliberal economics, explains the general global unwillingness to seriously grapple with climate change. But to understand why some states perform better than others, aspects of political culture far older than neoliberalism, rooted in historical processes that date to before the modern form of capitalism, could help explain this variation. When it comes to the Anglo-settler colonies, this political culture is rooted in the unique histories of their national origin. In the past, other political scientists have examined contemporary political developments in Italy that had roots in Medieval times.<sup>61</sup> In a similar fashion, I propose that contemporary political phenomena may not be mere historical accident or the product of recent government decisions. Rather, the origins of Anglo-settler colonies, rooted four centuries ago, may still have far-reaching impacts to the present day.

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<sup>60</sup> Burck, Marten, and Bals, “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2017”; Burck et al., “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2020.”

<sup>61</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

## Case study selection and analysis

Newspapers of record can be used as a gauge of an important segment of public opinion. In part they represent the broader public discourse, but also the interests of elite classes. The countries that will be examined in detailed case studies are the US, Canada, and Australia. I follow the definition of case studies as:

Analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates.<sup>62</sup>

The object I am analyzing here is the institution of the newspaper, which continues to be relevant through its online publications and dissemination through social media. Specifically, I point my lens towards “newspapers of record” which are thought to be reputationally authoritative in their country of publication.<sup>63</sup> Thus questions involving politics and power would be inextricably tied with how a political hegemony comes to be established. This necessarily also requires an understanding of the national political culture, to provide the context in which to interpret their discourses.

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<sup>62</sup> Gary Thomas, “A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 17, no. 6 (July 17, 2011): 511–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409884>.

<sup>63</sup> Chloë Salles, “Media Coverage of the Internet: An Acculturation Strategy for Press of Record?,” *Innovation Journalism* 7, no. 1 (2010): 1–15, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1373/56e82a34f18301a6d4944b93f340eb287167.pdf>.

In my case selection, the object of analysis will be the English-language newspapers of record for each country, representing a spread of elite interest groups across the conventional left-right political spectrum. These newspapers are therefore selected from a purposive, non-random sample.<sup>64</sup> Newspaper editorials and writers invited to provide opinion articles can be said to represent the judgment of the editorial board of what opinions are ‘newsworthy.’ They are then examined qualitatively, with close readings of each sampled article on whether they have a consensus, ambiguous, or skeptical position on climate change. Microsoft Office Excel is used to organize the dataset and to generate graphics.

The newspapers of record for the US are *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. The papers of record for Canada are *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *National Post*. The papers of record for Australia are *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Australian*. While two of the papers of each country are of a centrist or left-leaning orientation, the third paper is always right-leaning. That is to say, the *The Wall Street Journal*, *National Post*, and *The Australian* tend to represent the centre-right faction in their respective countries. Some papers, such as *National Post*, have anomalously low readership, but are thought to represent a specific segment of elite opinion, without substantially overlapping with the editorial stance of

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<sup>64</sup> Michael P. Battaglia, “Purposive Sample,” in *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, ed. Paul J. Lavrakas (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 645, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947.n419>.

other papers, and therefore count towards my analysis.<sup>65</sup> Newspaper editorials were collected using the Factiva database, via the subscriptions available through the Tri-Library system, which includes Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Guelph. I applied the following search terms filters according to the table below.

**Table 1 - Factiva Search Summary**

Text	"climate chang*" or "climatic chang*" or "changing climate*" or "global warming"
Date	20090101 to 20161231
Source	The New York Times Or The Washington Post Or The Wall Street Journal Or The Toronto Star Or The Globe and Mail (Canada) Or National Post (Canada) Or The Age (Melbourne, Australia) Or The Sydney Morning Herald Or The Australian
Subject	Editorials Not Letters
Language	English
Results Found	359

The results were collected in an Excel file, and each article was coded with a rating based on whether it was framed as “in agreement with consensus” (1), “ambiguous/ambivalent towards consensus” (2), or “skeptical of consensus” (3). As such, higher numerical ratings demonstrate a higher level of skepticism. In meta-studies of the physical science publications on climate change,

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<sup>65</sup> Alliance for Audited Media, “CANADIAN NEWSPAPER - SEARCH RESULTS,” September 30, 2012, <https://archive.is/20130407174857/http://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/newstitlesearchcan.asp>.

“consensus” has been interpreted to mean agreement that climate change has occurred, which is manifested through anthropogenic forcing that increases the Earth’s global average surface temperature.

A basic summary was generated through an Excel analysis to determine the editorial bias of each paper through the period between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. This periodization was selected based on historically contingent events, being bounded by the year in which the Copenhagen Accord was signed, and the year after the signing of the Paris Agreement. Therefore, the editorial lines leading up to the Copenhagen Conference, and the discourse and politics of the Paris Agreement, are both captured. Climate change discussion relating to the electoral campaign and subsequent victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election is also captured. In historiography, analysis of events less than twenty or thirty years ago is usually discouraged. This ultra-recent periodization contains the risk of failing to capture the events, peoples, speeches, and writings in their proper context. Nonetheless climate change as hyperobject bursts through the very notion of periodization, with events stretching far into the past and future in ways that confound historiographical methods alone. Climate change is also a *transnational* type of policy challenge and there necessitates a multi-scalar and interdisciplinary approach to social research. Globalization studies have pointed out the need to approach trans-scalar social phenomena with the explicit

recognition of transnationalism underpinning the contemporary world-system.<sup>66</sup> Globalization has alternatively been defined by “space-time compression,” which is also a feature of the Anthropocene that collapses distinctions between past, present, and future.<sup>67</sup> Climate change both reaches far into the past and far into the future. Depending on the criteria, it could be as old as a few decades, but possibly as old as hundreds or thousands of years.<sup>68</sup> Actions taken on conventional policy timescales will have consequences for thousands or hundreds of thousands of years.<sup>69</sup> The scale of climate change is evidently enormous in scale, both in space, time, and the quantity of energy and materials involved. So too does climate change affect the lives of virtually everyone on Earth, now and in the future.

After the dataset was collected, I analyzed the opinion articles through the lens of critical studies and discourse analysis.<sup>70</sup> Discourse analysis will form the basis of the case studies, which are

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<sup>66</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, “Defining the Anthropocene,” *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (March 12, 2015): 171–80, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14258>; Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* (London: Pelican Books, 2018); W. F. Ruddiman, J. E. Kutzbach, and S. J. Vavrus, “Can Natural or Anthropogenic Explanations of Late-Holocene CO<sub>2</sub> and CH<sub>4</sub> Increases Be Falsified?,” *The Holocene* 21, no. 5 (February 8, 2011): 865–8879, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959683610387172>.

<sup>69</sup> Nathan P. Gillett et al., “Ongoing Climate Change Following a Complete Cessation of Carbon Dioxide Emissions,” *Nature Geoscience* 4, no. 2 (February 9, 2011): 83–87, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ngeo1047>.

<sup>70</sup> Mark B. Salter, “Introduction,” in *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu (New York, NY, 2013), 1–23; Timothy J. McKeown, “Case Studies and the Statistical

found in separate chapters for each of the three countries' political cultures. Some of this discourse analysis uses Sara Ahmed's research into the cultural politics of emotion as a model. Ahmed described how emotions performed the work of political argument, by incurring visceral reactions in people's bodies. Ahmed herself relies on discourse analysis based on "psychoanalysis and Marxism," though surveys of those two theoretical schools are omitted here due to limitations in scope.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, the emotional core of cultural politics and its visceral nature must be recognized as a critical descriptive element of an analysis of the Anglo-settler state. Collectively, emotions can even be assigned to an entire nation, such as "national shame"<sup>72</sup> Thus, the emotional content of newspaper editorials could provide useful discourse information that is traditionally ignored in conventional social science studies. More on this approach is discussed in the next chapter.

## Supplementary data

I will also briefly examine a limited set of visual art and photography, selected non-randomly and purposively, to illustrate some of the points of the texts found in the literature review and the case

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Worldview: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba's *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*," *International Organization* 53, no. 01 (August 12, 2003): 161–90, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081899550841>; Simon Dalby, "Canadian Geopolitical Culture: Climate Change and Sustainability," *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien* 63, no. 1 (March 2019): 100–111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12472>.

<sup>71</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed, 107–13.



studies. This brief ‘visual discourse’ analysis is informed by the aesthetic criticism from Marxist scholars, particularly modelled after John Berger and the Frankfurt School of cultural Marxists. Berger wrote that fine art in western capitalist societies were reflective of material and social relations, and in particular visual symbols of wealth as expressing membership in the propertied class, the feeling of ownership over women’s bodies, and the transformation of land into private property.<sup>73</sup> The preeminent figures of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, described a relationship between art and how its revolutionary potential for transforming political systems was dampened, co-opted, and rendered harmless by capitalism.<sup>74</sup> The next chapter on theory will explain in greater detail the choice of discourse analysis for the core of my case studies. Overall, my case study approach will be primarily exploratory and descriptive, rather than quantified in modelling.

## **Critical methodologies**

In analyzing the political culture of settler colonies, critical methodologies may help illuminate areas that have remained relatively unexplored. The analysis of culture requires careful employment of methods to avoid essentialism and adoption of hidden biases. In contrast with the popular

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<sup>73</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

<sup>74</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

misconception of critical studies as divorced from real-world salience, they can also play a practical role in approaching social problems. Even critical theory, to say nothing of critical methodology, can open unexpected avenues of research as it “allows for a normative choice in favour of a social and political order different from the prevailing order.”<sup>75</sup> Examples of these include Marxist analysis, standpoint methodology, and discourse analysis.

In social research, Marxism is the school of thought which examines society from the lens of class conflict. To briefly summarize, it is the analysis of society through its modes and relations of production. Those who control the mode of production have power over labourers, and this type of social organization is called capitalism. Marxism generally adheres to historical materialism, which argues that social formations are the product of physical phenomena. More recent forms of research are called neo-Marxism, including the work of scholars like David Harvey. Harvey’s work on the history of neoliberalism offers an important critique to the modern hegemonic organization of global society and economy. He describes the process of neoliberalism obtaining hegemony in global society through the “construction of consent,” a political process that transformed a minority of Chicago School economic thought into the mainstream and common-

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<sup>75</sup> Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” 130.

sense.<sup>76</sup> This process is reinforced through reproduction in mass media, a concept which has referred to by Noam Chomsky as “manufactured consent.”<sup>77</sup> Following from such studies, I examine political culture as operating in parallel with wilful action by elite powerbrokers in elected politics, private business, and beyond. The analysis of newspaper opinions as elite representation could have important implications for the diffusion of ideas inhibitive of effective climate policy.

Standpoint methodology is used to describe the awareness of power dynamics, usually in the context of ethnographic research. It calls for the researcher to be aware of positionality (in class, gender, or culture) and self-reflexivity. Since the researcher cannot be separated from the research, it is a co-creation between our selves, the research subject, and the wider social setting.<sup>78</sup> “Insider” and “outsider” dualisms calls for us to recognize that we may inhabit both positions simultaneously. Standpoint methodology also requires us to recognize that our perspective as researchers can shift over time, and therefore we must make space for fluidity and constantly revisit and critique our past findings. As a Canadian citizen immersed in American popular culture, I aim to be cognizant of internal biases which are at play. Some of the thinking I bring to the table in this study

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<sup>76</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39–63.

<sup>77</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*.

<sup>78</sup> Nancy A. Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

is informed by direct experience. Although it is necessarily anecdotal, the perspective and standpoint of the researcher must be recognized as influencing the trajectory of any social research.

Discourse analysis is also an important methodological component. Any analysis of newspaper editorials necessitates a close reading of discourses that are created and recirculated through the elite opinion expressed by ‘newspapers of record.’ Related studies on climate change skepticism often employ discourse analysis in their methods.<sup>79</sup> More on these methodologies will be explained in the next chapter, and in the summary of my research results presented in the next chapter.

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<sup>79</sup> Elaine McKewon, “Duelling Realities: Conspiracy Theories vs Climate Science in Regional Newspaper Coverage of Ian Plimer’s Book, *Heaven and Earth*,” *Rural Society* 21, no. 2 (February 18, 2012): 99–115, <https://doi.org/10.5172/rsj.2012.21.2.99>; Nathan Young, “Working the Fringes: The Role of Letters to the Editor in Advancing Non-Standard Media Narratives about Climate Change,” *Public Understanding of Science* 22, no. 4 (May 2013): 443–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662511414983>; Andrew J. Hoffman, “The Culture and Discourse of Climate Skepticism,” *Strategic Organization* 9, no. 1 (2011): 77–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127010395065>.

### 3. CASE STUDIES

#### Summary of findings

My search of the Factiva database included 359 results.<sup>80</sup> Some results were letters to the editor erroneously misclassified as editorials, while others were articles which only mentioned climate change in passing or had a clearly different subject of focus. In total, I analyzed 277 editorials, which is a small number given the length of time (seven years) and number of publications (nine newspapers) under analysis. Some of these could be due to errors in the database, while it is also possible that I have made errors in categorization or interpretation. I have made every effort to increase the accuracy of the dataset, and what errors remain should approximate randomness and not bias my results.

One interesting feature of this period is scarcity of editorials over the period of analysis. For Canada and Australia, there were long periods where no editorials or invited opinion articles captured in the search results, lasting up to six years. Most of these articles (69%) are written in American newspapers, while there are about the same percentage of articles published in Canadian (16%) and Australian (15%) newspapers.

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<sup>80</sup> See Table 1 for a detailed description of the search results.

**Table 2: Sum of totals**

	<b>US</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Australia</b>
<b>2009</b>	45	17	9
<b>2010</b>	26	4	4
<b>2011</b>	13	1	4
<b>2012</b>	18	1	2
<b>2013</b>	26	7	6
<b>2014</b>	29	9	5
<b>2015</b>	14	3	8
<b>2016</b>	19	3	4
<b>Totals:</b>	190 (69%)	45 (16%)	42 (15%)
<b>Grand total:</b>	277 (100%)		

The number of articles captured by the database search were too low to conduct a meaningful statistical analysis, but nonetheless I have rated each editorial qualitatively by their agreement with the consensus position, as defined in the introduction: agreement that climate change is occurring, agreement that current and future climate change is mainly driven by human activity, and agreement that climate change presents an overall negative impact on society and requires a substantial policy response in *both* mitigation and adaptation efforts. I rated each article out of the three ordinal points. A rating of 1.00 represents total agreement with consensus; 2.00 represents an ambiguous or conflicted agreement with the consensus; and 3.00 represents either overt skepticism, or a strong implication of skepticism with the use of subtext and memetic signifiers of skepticism.

**Table 3: Summary of findings**

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
<i>Australia</i>									
The Age	1.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
The Australian	1.00								1.00
The Sydney Morning Herald	1.00	1.25	1.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.04
<b>Australia Total</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.02</b>
<i>Canada</i>									
National Post	2.20	3.00	3.00	1.00	2.71	2.17	3.00		2.41
The Globe and Mail	1.00					1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
The Toronto Star	1.00	1.00				1.00			1.00
<b>Canada Total</b>	<b>1.35</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>2.71</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.69</b>
<i>US</i>									
The New York Times	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00		1.00	1.00
The Wall Street Journal	2.08	2.57	2.33	2.50	2.50	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.39
The Washington Post	1.00	1.00		1.00	1.17	1.15	1.15	1.00	1.11
<b>US Total</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>1.33</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1.28</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>1.34</b>

Except for Australia, where the database search failed to find any climate change-related articles from *The Australian* outside of the year 2009, skeptical articles were far more prolific in Canada and the US. Unsurprisingly, this is especially commonplace for the right-wing newspapers for those two countries. Both the *Wall Street Journal* and *National Post* are more skeptical than in agreement with the consensus, scoring 2.39 and 2.41 respectively. Ratings remained relatively stable over time, varying less than 1.00 point in all papers and all years. Apparently, there is no correlation between the injection of scandal in the scientific community and skepticism levels in editorial articles, nor does the publication of the IPCC AR5 report come with decreased skepticism.

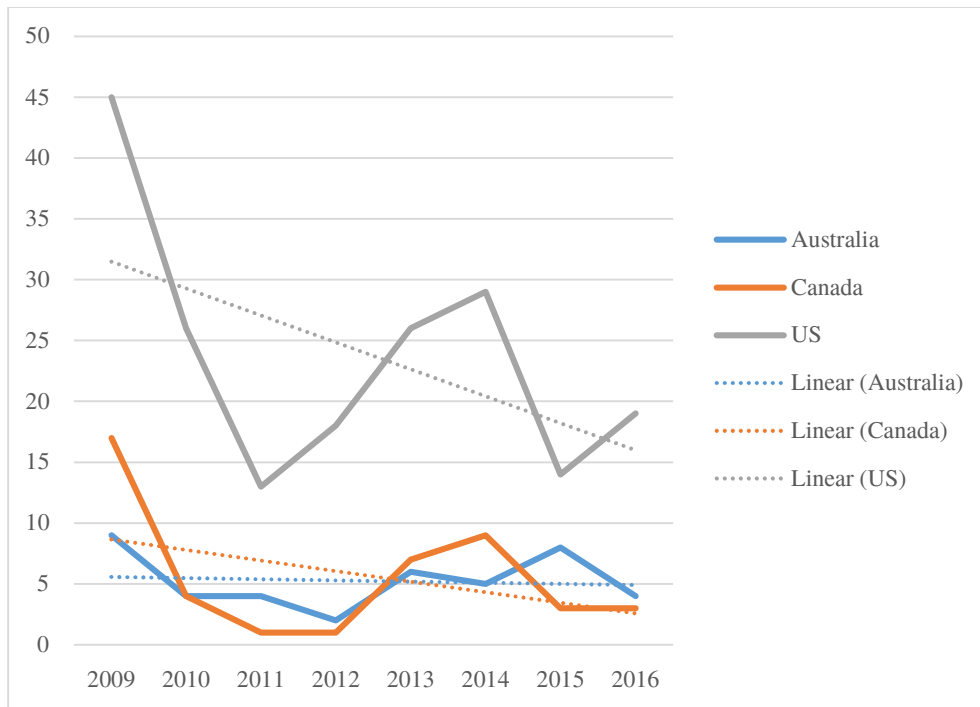
The numbers of articles published over time also demonstrate an interesting trend. Despite the increasingly dire projections over the years, the attention paid to climate change in the editorial spaces decreased dramatically, with smaller spikes occurring in 2014 in anticipation of the IPCC AR5 WGI report, and in 2016 with the ramifications of the Paris Agreement and anxiety over the US Presidential election. The highest number of articles published in 2009 suggests that there was greater interest in climate change as a result of the much-anticipated Copenhagen Conference, which came near the end of a decade of significant media interest. Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), and the Roland Emmerich-directed disaster flick *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), were among some of the English-language films that generated public interest in climate change and may have contributed to the relatively high attention paid to climate change in the run-up to COP15. However, it seems clear that this interest was not sustained over time. Arguably, in the post-2009 editorial pages of newspapers of record, some of the lack of concern on climate change is because of certain media biases inherent in standard journalistic practise in covering controversial public issues, such a reporting 'both sides' of every policy debate as equally valid.<sup>81</sup> This has the pernicious impact of consistently underreporting worse-than-expected climate news, perhaps by a factor of twenty.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Maxwell T. Boykoff and Jules M. Boykoff, "Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the US Prestige Press," *Global Environmental Change* 14, no. 2 (July 2004): 125–36, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2003.10.001>.

<sup>82</sup> Freudenburg and Muselli, "Global Warming Estimates, Media Expectations, and the Asymmetry of Scientific Challenge."





**Figure 1 - Opinion articles published over time.**

The downward trend only holds mainly for the US, with the number of editorial articles being published from Canada and Australia remaining basically stable over time, with a substantial drop in the number of articles published by all three nations centred on the year 2011. This coincides with a lull in global warming, which led to media speculation about a “pause” or “hiatus” in global warming, and emboldened rhetoric on how scientists have exaggerated climate change.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, some newspapers published nearly zero editorials or invited opinion articles for years on end, seen

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<sup>83</sup> Stephan Lewandowsky, James S. Risbey, and Naomi Oreskes, “On the Definition and Identifiability of the Alleged ‘Hiatus’ in Global Warming,” *Scientific Reports* 5, no. 1 (December 24, 2015): 16784, <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep16784>; Stephan Lewandowsky, James S. Risbey, and Naomi Oreskes, “The ‘Pause’ in Global Warming: Turning a Routine Fluctuation into a Problem for Science,” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 97, no. 5 (May 2016): 723–33, <https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-14-00106.1>.

in the examples of *The Globe and Mail*, *The Australian*, and *The Toronto Star*. This could be the result simply of smaller average newspaper sizes, and a result of my decision to exclude letters to the editor as a part of the dataset. Nonetheless, it appears to be the case that the greater coverage of climate change in 2009 was not matched in any later year, by any country, or in any newspaper. This could be suggestive of a trend towards minimizing the importance of climate change overall, despite the increasingly visible and severe climate change impacts occurring throughout this period.

How does elite opinion, as expressed in the editorial pages of newspapers of record, connect with the systems of power that affect climate change? They have a pathway to power that create a discursive environment that reinforces hegemonic ideas and inhibits radical alternatives to conventional neoliberal and institutionalist policies. Throughout the period under analysis, editorials stay far from mentioning the intersection between climate change and any aspect of social justice, except when briefly discussing civil disobedience in anti-pipeline protests. The vast majority of editorials are published by the editorial board of each of the newspapers, but named authors are white men almost without exception. By absencing subaltern voices (and especially indigenous) from the newspapers of record, elite power structures in government and business continue to reinforce the ossification of the existing hegemony. These editorials are also inexorably incorporated into a social positive feedback loop, as policymakers and business leaders read elite opinion reflected back to them to assure them that climate change can *only* be dealt with through neoliberalist market mechanisms, divorced from all other socioeconomic tools and policy alternatives.

Furthermore, editorials of newspapers are published as articles online, are spread on social media, and achieve widespread exposure that is out of proportion compared to dwindling print and online subscriptions. The vast majority of readers are not the elites of their societies, but higher newspaper readership has been correlated with increased voter turnout in US Presidential elections.<sup>84</sup> The uncritical perpetuation of conventional politics thus helps produced “manufactured consent,” even if the content of non-right-wing editorials preclude the visibility of alternative politics.<sup>85</sup> A prominent example of this process is the role of the newspaper of record, and how even newspapers with a left-wing stereotype have legitimized civil rights abuses and foreign adventurism in the context of the War on Terror. *The New York Times* has been known for shaping US foreign policy in the middle east, which ultimately culminated in the disastrous Iraq War and continued strife in the region.<sup>86</sup> More straightforwardly, prominent newspapers with a right-wing political position are more likely to overtly cast doubt on consensus positions on climate change, as well as discourage all forms of ameliorative policies. They are also particularly and viscerally

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<sup>84</sup> James Simon, “Media Use and Voter Turnout in a Presidential Election,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 17, no. 1–2 (January 1996): 25–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073953299601700104>.

<sup>85</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*.

<sup>86</sup> Barbie Zelizer, David Park, and David Gudelunas, “How Bias Shapes the News: Challenging The New York Times’ Status as a Newspaper of Record on the Middle East,” *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 3, no. 3 (December 29, 2002): 283–307, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490200300305>.

offended at notions of redistributive justice, which are a core part of basic climate ethics.<sup>87</sup> Newspapers also often serve as a conduit for political influence on policy discussions through the publication and mainstreaming of invited authors associated with partisan think tanks and other organizations, especially those with conservative political affiliations.<sup>88</sup> These networks of influence are also often connected with funding and amplification from wealthy donors with an ideological connection with right-wing politics or personal self-interest in having connections to the fossil fuel industry.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, an economic interest in fossil fuel industries, or other industries with a stake in preventing substantial climate change policies from being enacted. An ideological framework, underpinned by an extant body politic, is required to inhibit action. More often than not, even individuals with wealth and an interest in preventing climate action are convinced of an ideological framework which venerates property rights.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks, “A ‘Shared Vision’? Why Inequality Should Worry Us,” in *Climate Change, Ethics and Human Security*, ed. Karen O’Brien, Asunción Lera St. Clair, and Berit Kristoffersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65–82; Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption.”

<sup>88</sup> Shaun W. Elsasser and Riley E. Dunlap, “Leading Voices in the Denier Choir: Conservative Columnists’ Dismissal of Global Warming and Denigration of Climate Science,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 6 (December 28, 2012): 754–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212469800>.

<sup>89</sup> Robert J. Brulle, “Institutionalizing Delay: Foundation Funding and the Creation of U.S. Climate Change Counter-Movement Organizations,” *Climatic Change* 122, no. 4 (February 21, 2014): 681–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-013-1018-7>; Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2010); Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*.

Climate change skeptics are also known to justify their politics through the framing of climate politics as an extension of the Cold War; in other words, climate change is a cultural battleground to fight a mirage of renewed ‘green’ communism. Related research has often focused on the role of political conservatism, especially in the US, but I will go further and employ discourse analysis in identifying a broader political culture which could support inhibition of action. As we will see in the case studies, while conservatism plays a role in fuelling overt skepticism, mainstream neo-liberal politics also reinforce the perception of a non-emergency situation, in which existing structures must be maintained regardless of the scale of the threat. The de-emphasis of danger, and the focus on market liberal policy solutions, continues the trend of toothless climate agreements, grid-locked COP meetings, and a stagnant UNFCCC process.

Public opinion polling demonstrates that at no point in time does the national assessment of climate change match that of scientific understanding. A 2012 study found that in 26% of Americans and 16% of Canadians did not even think global warming was occurring, while more than a third of Canadians and nearly half of Americans believed that scientists were overstating their conclusions for personal gain.<sup>91</sup> Regardless of motivation, the belief that conclusions have been

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<sup>91</sup> Christopher P. Borick, Erick Lachapelle, and Barry G. Rabe, “Climate Compared: Public Opinion on Climate Change in the United States and Canada,” *Issues in Governance Studies* (Washington, DC, 2011), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/04\\_climate\\_change\\_opinion.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/04_climate_change_opinion.pdf).

exaggerated were in fact an inversion of reality.<sup>92</sup> In Australia, skepticism of basic science is also elevated compared to the scientific consensus.<sup>93</sup> With this in mind, it may be possible that elevated levels of skepticism are evidence for a mechanism to reproduce ignorance of the settler-colonial past. Climate change as hyperobject demands a scale of response that is apparently not being served by the hegemony of the international states system, the forces of capitalism, or the standard institutionalist framework for approaching transnational and global threats. In particular, elite opinion in Anglo-settler colonies frequently express that it is *offensive* and *disgusting* that money might need to be transferred from the rich to the poor, or that historical responsibility is rooted in the privilege of early industrialization. The action of these emotions is especially evident in conservative-leaning newspapers, while other newspapers simply omit discussions of non-market alternatives in their editorial pages.

With the summary of my overall findings now completed, we now turn to the individual case studies.

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<sup>92</sup> Freudenburg and Muselli, “Global Warming Estimates, Media Expectations, and the Asymmetry of Scientific Challenge”; Rahmstorf, Foster, and Cazenave, “Comparing Climate Projections to Observations up to 2011.”

<sup>93</sup> Ipsos and EDF, “Climate Change and Public Opinions International Observatory—Mobilization, Concern or Indifference: How Do the Citizens of 30 Countries Feel about Climate Change?,” Obs’COP 2019, 2019, [https://www.edf.fr/sites/default/files/contrib/groupe-edf/obs-climat/obs-cop2019\\_resultatscomplets\\_en.pdf](https://www.edf.fr/sites/default/files/contrib/groupe-edf/obs-climat/obs-cop2019_resultatscomplets_en.pdf).

## Case study: United States

The US is the preeminent superpower of the contemporary era and has held the predominance of relative power since at least the end of the Second World War. This coincides with the beginning of the Great Acceleration, or under the formulation by the Anthropocene Working Group, the beginning of the Anthropocene.<sup>94</sup> In many ways, the US is a kind of new Rome of the Anthropocene world, possessing hegemony in many areas: in economics, in diplomacy, in its unassailable military force, and the reach and ubiquity of its culture. This hegemony extends to matters of global environmental governance, usually in a “spoiler” role in international institutions.<sup>95</sup> Examining the political culture of its elites is therefore a critical part of understanding how climate change (is not) dealt with.

Arguably, the US is not a single culture to begin with, in a much more divided way than Canada or Australia. There may be many different Americas, separated according to various typologies. Ronald Wright speaks of a distinction between a “Backwoods America” and an “Enlightenment

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<sup>94</sup> John R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014); Anthropocene Working Group, “Media Note: Anthropocene Working Group (AWG),” University of Leicester Press Office, August 29, 2016, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2016/august/media-note-anthropocene-working-group-awg>; Colin N. Waters et al., “The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene,” *Science* 351, no. 6269 (January 8, 2016): aad2622–aad2622, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aad2622>.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Falkner, “American Hegemony and the Global Environment,” *International Studies Review* 7, no. 4 (December 2005): 585–99, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2005.00534.x>.

America,” roughly corresponding to rural areas and urban and coastal areas respectively.<sup>96</sup> These two categories also correspond with the centre-left Democratic Party and the right-wing Republican party. However, the shifting of these two parties have resulted in a Democratic Party that has remained mainly stable over the past thirty years, while the Republican party has become increasingly extremist.<sup>97</sup> In a western European context, the Democrats would be considered centrist, while the Republicans would probably be equivalent to a right-wing extremist party.<sup>98</sup> Complicating the analysis, the binary classification of American political culture may be insufficiently detailed the grasp the nuances. In looking at North America north of Mexico, Collin Woodard extends the number of nations to eleven, in order of oldest to newest society: The First Nation, New France, El Norte, New Netherland, Yankeedom, The Midlands, Tidewater, Greater Appalachia, the Deep South, The Far West, and the Left Coast.<sup>99</sup> For the purposes of this study, some

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<sup>96</sup> Ronald Wright, *What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order* (Toronto, ON: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2008).

<sup>97</sup> Perry Bacon Jr., “The Republican Party Has Changed Dramatically Since George H.W. Bush Ran It,” *FiveThirtyEight*, December 1, 2018, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-republican-party-has-changed-dramatically-since-george-h-w-bush-ran-it/>.

<sup>98</sup> Holger Döring and Sven Regel, “Party Facts: A Database of Political Parties Worldwide,” *Party Politics* 25, no. 2 (March 7, 2019): 97–109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068818820671>; Sahil Chinoy, “What Happened to America’s Political Center of Gravity?,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/06/26/opinion/sunday/republican-platform-far-right.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012).



oversimplification is unavoidable. Many important social divisions are not captured by Woodard's typology, such as the significance of the social divisions between White and Black Americans. For the purposes of this study, I will unfortunately be limited to treating settler and indigenous peoples as the most important social division. I will therefore treat the US as having a shared political culture which transcends geographical or racial divisions.

Evidence of some level of unity can be perceived from the existence of a very coherent American civil religion, which is a pseudo-religion which mixes American Protestantism with parts of US political culture into a codified and revered form. This pseudo-religion manifests in the use of symbols in public life, and in mythmaking. Examples of these include ubiquitous appearances of the national anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance taken in schools, the American flag, veneration of the Founding Fathers, and various other forms of iconography. It echoes Abraham Lincoln's words and expresses them into a nation composed of "God's chosen people."<sup>100</sup> Despite ostensible separation between Church and state, this religious exaltation of the American nation is apparent in art, education, law, politics, and other aspects of society. American civic religion is therefore an important element of American political culture, which finds expression in powerful symbols of settler colonialism. One particularly notable example is the painting of the secular 'goddess'

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<sup>100</sup> Anthony Squiers, *The Politics of the Sacred in America: The Role of Civil Religion in Political Practice* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

Columbia, who is seen as literally advancing the cause of Manifest Destiny, and apparently chasing away indigenous peoples away as white settlers pour into their lands.



Figure 2 - John Gast. *American Progress*, 1872, oil on canvas. Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, CA.

However, the features of American civil religion are not an inherently conservative movement, as it was invoked in lending aid to the Civil Rights Movement. In contrast with her depiction as an enemy of indigenous peoples, the goddess Columbia was also frequently depicted as a friend and protector of immigrants, and of a universal cosmopolitan worldview. The twinning of veneration of the idea of democracy and freedom, meant that objections to democracy had originally

meant an explicit objection to American civil religion by the John Birch Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the alt-right movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The newspapers of record of the US examined in this dissertation include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Compared to the Australian and Canadian newspapers, they published more editorials on climate change, constituting 69% of the total number published. *The Wall Street Journal* was largely responsible for the higher skepticism rating for the entire country, while *The Washington Post* had a very small deviation from total agreement with the consensus *The New York Times* had a skepticism rating of 1.00, meaning that it did not publish a single skeptical editorial in the period between the start-of-2009 and end-of-2016. In terms of overt skepticism, the majority of skeptical editorials were divided along politically partisan lines. It is important to note, however, that the search method used with the Factiva database did not capture every editorial that the newspapers had published in the specified period.

Newspapers in the US have earned a reputation for compromising accuracy in favour of balancing opposing sides, especially in their coverage of climate change. The overall impact of this was to create the impression that the scientific agreement on the causes of climate change is never as consistent or approached the level of consensus.<sup>101</sup> The overriding concern of editorials in all

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<sup>101</sup> Boykoff and Boykoff, “Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the US Prestige Press.”

American papers of record is narrowly focused on economics. Scientific matters are scarcely mentioned, except in when Senators and Representatives in Congress were hostile to climate scientists and attempted to use forms of legal intimidation to suppress their work. The impressions of the scientists themselves, captured in their memoirs, largely found the political hearings to be intentionally vexatious and in service of fossil fuel interests.<sup>102</sup> However, the opinions of scientists were frequently ‘balanced’ by an opposing view, that entertained the opinion that climate scientists had engaged in academic malpractice, fraud, or else some other form of corruption or wrongdoing. This type of accusation was especially prolific in late 2009 and early 2010, when the so-called ‘Climategate’ controversy emerged. That incident created confusion and launched several investigations into the scientists’ misconduct. But outside of the discussions related to Climategate, on occasion some editorials cast aspersion on scientists or on commonly accepted scientific conclusions.

One way in which skepticism can be reinforced, with or without overtly denying the consensus positions, is to present two sides as equally plausible, with the framing that the editorial board or the author is simply ‘asking questions.’ This rhetorical technique is commonly used in providing

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<sup>102</sup> James E. Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Michael E. Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012); Raymond S. Bradley, *Global Warming and Political Intimidation: How Politicians Cracked Down on Scientists as the Earth Heated Up* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

plausible deniability for other positions that criticize power, one example being Holocaust denial. Therefore, some scholars of climate change skepticism prefer to use “denial” or “denialism” instead of “skepticism.”<sup>103</sup> In any case, the false balance was apparent in many editorials that employed skeptical framing.

Another type of rhetoric commonly employed in skeptical editorials is the suggestion that climate policies almost invariably are either assumed to cause a catastrophic impact on the economy, or else they are thought to be motivated by some sort of socialist political project. These accusations occur even when only market mechanisms, intended to perpetuate liberal-capitalist modes of organizing the American economy, are implemented by left-leaning governments. In support of conventional market-based policy, one NYT editorial offered their agreement with then-President Obama’s position: “President Obama, Ms. Jackson (*and this page*) [emphasis my own] would much prefer a broad, market-based legislative solution carrying the imprimatur of Congress.”<sup>104</sup> Opposing this position, another editorial from the WSJ states that if Americans understood how much national cap-and-trade policy would cost them in income and employment losses, the “dreams” of cap-and-trade proponents “of having government command a huge new chunk of the

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<sup>103</sup> Diethelm and McKee, “Denialism: What Is It and How Should Scientists Respond?”

<sup>104</sup> Editorial Board, “One Way or Another,” *The New York Times*, October 2, 2009.

economy might collapse.”<sup>105</sup> The emotion of disgust is at play in this editorial, inciting the reader at a kind of injustice: the unfairness of potentially having one’s property rights violated subsumes all other concerns.

A second major category of rhetorical techniques is based on casting doubt on either the scientific consensus directly, or by suggesting that all impact assessments are exaggerated. Mainstream economists and IPCC authors are “global warming alarmists,” and the *Journal’s* editorial board sarcastically claimed to be “worried about the blood pressure of readers who are climate-change true believers.”<sup>106</sup> The editorial board confidently expressed their invisible ignorance, while at the same time expressing mockery at and disgust in the presumed ignorance of others. These emotions are conveyed and reproduced using the skeptical trope of foolish scientists and bureaucrats who do not understand their own areas of expertise or intend to use their expert status to deceive others. For what purpose? This editorial from June 6, 2009, does not ascribe or suggest a motivation, but multiple logical fallacies are employed simultaneously to misdirect the reader. The author asks, “Are targeted campaigns using proven methods to spare the world three million AIDS and malaria deaths a year a better use of scarce resources than a multitrillion-dollar attempt to re-engineer the global economy?”<sup>107</sup> The author is suggesting spending money on public health

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<sup>105</sup> Editorial Board, “Who Pays for Cap and Trade?,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Editorial Board, “Worse Than Fiction,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Editorial Board.

crises in poorer countries would be a better use of money, but in other editorials the *Journal* and its conservative Canadian counterpart, *National Post*, express disgust and anger with the notion that poorer countries would trick richer ones into funding their climate programs. The action of the rhetoric does not to encourage an increase foreign aid expenditures for global public health, but rather it signifies the editorial board's disgust at the presumed stupidity, hypocrisy and credulity of UN bureaucrats, mainstream economists, climate scientists, and the like. It also directs the hostility of the reader towards the presumed shiftlessness and unworthiness of recipients of foreign aid (with the subtext of such recipients being 'others,' i.e., non-white). However, even in the case of an apparently scientific framing of doubt, the unfairness of upsetting the 'natural order' of the global economic hierarchy is hinted at too. The editorial board correctly surmises that a global cooperation on an effective mitigation policy would involve a reorientation of the global economic system, which is conveyed by the writer through both fear and disgust, the latter emotion which Ahmed calls "sticks" to the object of the 'underserving' recipients of foreign aid.<sup>108</sup> It is also a speech act which engages in "performativity," signalling to others (in this case, readers of such editorials) whose lives are more deserving.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92.

<sup>109</sup> Ahmed, 93–94.

The perpetuation of the status quo in the global economic system is therefore an object of intrinsic value to some of these authors, an object from which all practical approaches to politics are derived. Hence the threat to the economic system is thought to be a greater threat than increasing severity of tropical storms, rising sea levels, melting permafrost, or any number of climate change impacts. Another emotion, *fear*, is expressed throughout these skeptical editorials. Fear is engaged in defense of the intrinsically valuable hierarchical/traditional economic status quo, while disgust operates to diminish the ‘enemies’ of that status quo and force them into a subservient position. The writer and the reader are therefore unified in purpose: we must protect our valuable economy, against the disgusting people who seek to destroy it. To put it another way, the fear some of these editorials is expressed in terms of the terror felt towards the potential disruption of the social order, particularly the hierarchies of race and class. The usual policy proscriptions, including foreign aid in service of adaptation investments and technology transfers in service of mitigation, are therefore *terrifying* to editorial authors and readers who are deeply committed to the maintenance of the stable hierarchy of the settler colony.

These sentiments can be easily understood in *The Wall Street Journal's* editorials on Copenhagen and especially those discussing Climategate. Other American newspapers reported on Climategate with uncritical credulity but did not use the scandal to cast doubt on basic science. However, skeptical arguments in the *Journal* flatly denied basic science, with statements like “the public is entitled to wonder how exactly ... that temperatures have never been higher, or that they



are sure to rise in the coming decade, to say nothing of the rest of the century.”<sup>110</sup> Renewable energy firms, with the partnership of the villainous Al Gore, are “that part of the political class congenitally eager to redistribute taxpayer monies also wants to dispense "carbon credits" [quotation marks in original] to friends and political donors.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, somehow the connection is made between a handful of scientists in the CRU at the University of East Anglia, with the diplomats and politicians at Copenhagen, tied with the renewable energy businesses. This type of unfounded conspiracy theory appears to be unserious, since the actual generosity of governments in doling out fossil fuel subsidies remains unmentioned. But the function is not to inform the readership of the existence of an actual conspiracy, but instead to reinforce the twinned emotions of fear and disgust, in service of a venerated economic system. Once again, a villain or a group of villains are required to *feel disgusted at*, while a treasured market liberal economic structure is to be *afraid of losing*. Marxist scholars have said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.<sup>112</sup> In this way, the protection of the economic structure against forces that might alter it is akin to a threat to one’s life; it would mean the ‘end of the world.’ Additionally,

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<sup>110</sup> Editorial Board, “The Copenhagen Concoction,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Editorial Board.

<sup>112</sup> Attributed to Fredric Jameson in Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2009), 1.

the rhetoric that places the “taxpayer” as the protagonist in any policy debate generally centres the role of white men the to exclusion of all others, engendering both race and class division.<sup>113</sup>

However, this threat to end the world is not only felt by conservative Americans or *The Wall Street Journal*. The market-based solution is pervasive in all policy recommendations, and no alternatives are presented by the editorials in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*. Indeed, the radical solutions to which *Journal* editorials are so fearful of, are merely expressions of conventional economic orthodoxy, with a heavy reliance on market mechanisms. A single editorial, penned by veteran environmental activist Bill McKibben, referenced the politics of protest and of civil disobedience in the dataset.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, a radical, non-market-based solution is not proposed in this editorial. A different *Post* editorial declared that anti-Keystone XL protestors were “fighting the wrong battle ... activists have trumped up a relatively mundane infrastructure issue into the premier environmental fight of this decade, leading to big marches and acts of civil disobedience to advance a cause that is worthy of neither.”<sup>115</sup> The idea of a government agency imposing carbon emissions limits on regulatory fiat is considered anathema to every editorial that

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<sup>113</sup> Camille Walsh, “‘Taxpayer Dollars’: The Origins of Austerity’s Racist Catchphrase,” *Mother Jones*, April 8, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/04/taxpayer-dollars-the-origins-of-austeritys-racist-catchphrase/>.

<sup>114</sup> Bill McKibben, “The Carbon Addicts on Capitol Hill,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2009.

<sup>115</sup> Editorial Board, “The Wrong Fight,” *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2013.

touches on the subject from the *Journal*. But even when the regulatory approach is praised elsewhere, it is considered a mere inducement to legislate a market-based carbon pricing policy. On the controversy regarding the EPA endangerment finding in 2009, *the New York Times* wrote that “Congress will eventually have to take command of the issue by making big investments and putting a price on carbon.”<sup>116</sup> Overall, the non-skeptical American editorials are overwhelmingly concerned with market-based mechanisms and completely ignore the possibility of radical policies, such as mass civil disobedience or nationalization of industries.

In the editorials in the US newspapers of record, the search results failed to find any indigenous authors. Within the search results, there was a single non-white author, Fareed Zakaria, and a single woman author, Naomi Oreskes, both published in *The Washington Post*.<sup>117</sup> There was no discussion of indigenous issues, or their relation to climate change in any US article captured by the search results. There were no results for “Standing Rock,” or anything related to the #NoDAPL movement. Overall, it appears evident that American papers of record took a market liberal or institutionalist approach to political economy, and radical political alternatives or even non-hegemonic perspectives were absent from the search results. In other words, radical solutions, or specific mentions of climate justice towards the world’s poor and towards vulnerable indigenous

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<sup>116</sup> Editorial Board, “Ms. Jackson Makes a Change,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 2009.

<sup>117</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “The Pope’s Call to Action,” *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2015; Naomi Oreskes, “A Climate Manhattan Project,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2013.

populations, remains peripheral to the concerns of elite opinion. This lack of concern, if not outright hostility in the case of the WSJ, serves to reinforce settler colonialism and draw attention away from the magnitude of the challenges presented by climate change.

## **Case study: Canada**

Canada had some prominence in the past as the site of international environmental agreements, such as for the Montreal Protocol. Prominent Canadians like Maurice Strong have played an important role in the institutionalist architecture of global environmental governance.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, Canada is not merely an example of a settler colony, but sometimes a major player in global environmental politics in its own right.

The newspapers of record for Canada are *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. In terms of readership and subscription figures, the *Star* and the *Globe* are the number one and number two English language papers in Canada, respectively.<sup>119</sup> The inclusion of *National Post* therefore requires some justification. The *National Post* occupies a niche similar to *The Wall Street Journal*, in terms of representing centre-right opinion. However, the NP lags far behind rankings of readership compared to the other two newspapers analyzed in this case study. Indeed,

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<sup>118</sup> Jennifer Clapp and Peter Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Alliance for Audited Media, “CANADIAN NEWSPAPER - SEARCH RESULTS.”

of all Canadian newspapers, the French language Quebec papers such as *Le Devoir* have a higher number of subscriptions at the time of writing.<sup>120</sup> Notably, there are some qualitative differences between French and English Canadian reporting on climate change. This is seen chiefly in that French-language newspapers tended to publish articles which were more thematically linked to issues of culture, politics, and the economy. By contrast, English-language articles were more oriented towards narrow and compartmentalized reporting.<sup>121</sup> Young and Dugas also found that over a period of two decades, the *Post* and the *Globe* wrote less complex and nuanced articles over a period of twenty years, between 1988 and 2008.<sup>122</sup> Another study by Young found that letters to the editor tended to favour skeptical opinions, which appeared even in politically centrist and left-leaning papers like the *Star* or the *Globe*.<sup>123</sup>

As with the newspapers of the US, Canada's papers of record were overwhelmingly concerned with economics. Similarly, Canadian papers also were split between nearly universal lack of cli-

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<sup>120</sup> Alliance for Audited Media.

<sup>121</sup> Nathan Young and Eric Dugas, "Comparing Climate Change Coverage in Canadian English and French-Language Print Media: Environmental Values, Media Cultures, and the Narration of Global Warming," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2012): 25–54.

<sup>122</sup> Nathan Young and Eric Dugas, "Representations of Climate Change in Canadian National Print Media: The Banalization of Global Warming," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 48, no. 1 (February 7, 2011): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2011.01247.x>.

<sup>123</sup> Young, "Working the Fringes: The Role of Letters to the Editor in Advancing Non-Standard Media Narratives about Climate Change."

mate change skepticism in the most left-leaning newspaper (*The Toronto Star*), and heavy skepticism in the right-leaning paper (*National Post*). However, what is interesting is that the analogue to *The Washington Post*, the *Globe*, published very few editorials on climate change. Thus, the elite moderates of Canada, at least as seen in the decisions of the *Globe's* editorial board, were apparently unconcerned with providing frequent editorial coverage on the subject. This seems to be a glaring omission that deserves further explanation. One possibility is that *The Globe and Mail* may have considered climate change basically uncontroversial, and therefore the editorial board was simply uninterested in providing an editorial opinion on a 'solved problem.' Alternatively, omission could be interpreted as a conscious decision or unintentional bias towards preserving fossil fuel interests, or else striving for the appearance of political neutrality that produced the same result.

By contrast, the editorials of the *National Post* were extremely concerned with climate change and more frequently invited guest authors than the other two newspapers. Nearly all these guest authors were skeptical of climate change, and in often in rather extreme ways. Multiple types of skeptical rhetoric were employed throughout the entire period analyzed in this study. One 2009 editorial flatly argued that climate change impacts "cannot be used to justify any form of remedial

action.”<sup>124</sup> Proposed “transfer-payment schemes from rich countries to poor ones” were not a legitimate attempt at redressing the climate change inequalities, but instead they were pejoratively described as “socialism with a Gaian face,” invoking a distorted version of James Lovelock’s hypothesis.<sup>125</sup> However, it is not clear if the authors knew of Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, or was instead delegitimizing climate equity by equating transfer payments to political ideologies that are intended to be subject to derision by readers. In the latter interpretation, the emotion of disgust is conveyed to the reader, which is reproduced as apparent consensus of delegitimization. It resembles Corey Robin’s description of conservatism, as mainly concerned with groups occupying ‘their proper station’ in social hierarchies. At other times, the rhetoric of disgust and anger were significantly focused on specific targets, such as in *Post* editorials where personal insults were directed towards individuals who asked for transfer payments from wealthy countries to poorer countries in an official diplomatic capacity. Commenting on COP15, the editorial board wrote that Sudanese diplomat Lumunba Stanislaus Dia-Ping was “graceless and ungrateful” for requesting financial assistance, and judged him to be amongst typical “cynical Third Worlders” who ask for things they

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<sup>124</sup> Editorial Board, “Jim Prentice Gets It Right: Canada Is Calling the Bluff of Big Green and Its Army of Unquestioning Acolytes,” *National Post*, November 28, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Editorial Board.

do not deserve to receive.<sup>126</sup> That Sudan and other states in Sahelian Africa are especially vulnerable to climate change went unmentioned, with the implication that there is no justifiable reason to ask for aid.<sup>127</sup> The editorial confidently framed Copenhagen as incapable of delivering any emissions reductions, and that in contravention with conventional economics, that there was “absolutely no way of determining whether it [carbon pricing policy] has any impact on rising global temperatures.”<sup>128</sup> The *Post* therefore created a double-movement: first, to reproduce disgust in the reader, to delegitimize or even to create and amplify hatred against racialized villains (“Third Worlders”); and secondly, to reproduce overt skepticism of basic science. This denial of the basic scientific consensus on the human causes of climate change were also prominent in late 2009 and early 2010, with expressions of credulous belief in the conspiracy theories regarding purported fraud perpetrated by mainstream climate scientists. Ominously, another NP article mocks a study that found that skeptical climate films could spread misinformation, and further argued that this could even negatively impact public health outcomes. Writing in 2013, the columnist Peter Foster declared that “the study reaches absurd conclusions, including the notion that watching a climate skeptic movie “could diminish the practice of preventive health behaviors.” One minute young

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<sup>126</sup> Editorial Board, “The Copenhagen PR Scam,” *National Post*, December 17, 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Petra Tschakert, “Views from the Vulnerable: Understanding Climatic and Other Stressors in the Sahel,” *Global Environmental Change* 17, no. 3–4 (August 2007): 381–96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2006.11.008>.

<sup>128</sup> Editorial Board, “The Copenhagen PR Scam.”



people are watching *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, the next they're throwing away the condoms and engaging in *Reefer Madness*.”<sup>129</sup>

As was the case with American newspapers, the *National Post* published several skeptical editorials in wake of the Climategate scandal. Climategate had cast doubt on “the validity of the global-warming *scare* [emphasis my own],” implying that the basic science was politicized, and the political aims suspect.<sup>130</sup> In addition, a misunderstanding of the WGII of the AR4 led to the uncritical claim that “many skeptics believe that recent revelations about the IPCC's methods have called into question the very idea that dangerous warming is even happening.”<sup>131</sup> Even in editorials published as late as 2015, at the time a record-breaking year in global average surface temperature spelling the end of the warming ‘hiatus,’ several NP editorials claimed that the link between climate change and human activity was still unproven or uncertain, after the publication of the Summary for Policymakers report in the IPCC AR5 WG1 and the confirmation of scientific consensus regarding anthropogenic climate change.<sup>132</sup> An invited article written by Paul C. Knappenberger,

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Foster, “Scary Climate Movies,” *National Post*, September 20, 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Editorial Board, “Honk If You Hate Global Warming,” *National Post*, December 8, 2009.

<sup>131</sup> Editorial Board, “The IPCC Needs a Makeover,” *National Post*, February 1, 2010.

<sup>132</sup> IPCC, “Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers” (Geneva, 2014), [https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5\\_SYR\\_FINAL\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf); John Cook et al., “Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature,” *Environmental Research Letters* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 024024, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/8/2/024024>.

an assistant director to a science unit at the right-wing Cato Institute, made the puzzling claim that “there is little actual scientific research” supporting a link between climate change and extreme weather.<sup>133</sup> Through the double-movement of creating disgust and throwing basic science into doubt, the *Post* editorial board had worked towards the overall delegitimization of the UNFCCC process and national and local policies in Canada alike.

*The Globe and Mail* published only ten editorials on climate change that were captured by the database search. This is contrasted with the equivalent US newspaper, *The Washington Post*, which published 90 editorials in the same period. The writing style of the *Globe* is more sober and less emotionally charged than the NP. Overt climate skepticism, even in its softer form, was totally absent from the search results. *National Post* editorials praised then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper for acting as a spoiler to COP15 negotiations, but the *Globe* was critical. One editorial referred to Harper’s diplomacy as an “obstacle” to progress on the Accord and declared that “Canada's unwillingness to do any work whatsoever was on full display at Copenhagen ... Canada's passivity must end.”<sup>134</sup> No criticism is made of developing countries in asking for transfers of funding. How-

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<sup>133</sup> Paul C. Knappenberger, “Don’t Give in on EPA Regulations,” *National Post*, February 12, 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Editorial Board, “Copenhagen Accord: The Work Must Continue,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 19, 2009.

ever, the *Globe* curiously did not strongly criticize the Accord itself for falling well short of meeting its original goals. The acrimony which pervaded COP15 is only hinted at, rather than highlighted (as was seen in the other two Canadian newspapers).

Like the *Globe*, *The Toronto Star* produced relatively few editorials on climate change, and the editorials captured in the database search also did not publish a single overtly skeptical editorial. The difference between centrist and left-leaning papers, and right-wing newspapers like the *Post*, appears to reflect the differences between the LPC and the CPC at the level of national politics.<sup>135</sup> However, the *Star* also failed to mention radical or non-market solutions for climate change. It *does* frame Canadian foreign policy on climate change as a matter of national pride, as the *Star* wrote on Harper's withdrawal from multilateralism: "Harper still struggles to get our views across in Washington's corridors of power. As [former LPC MP and party leader] Ignatieff noted, Canada once commanded more attention ... We have catching up to do."<sup>136</sup>

Among the editorials in Canadian newspapers of record, no indigenous, women, or non-white authors were identified in the database search results. There was only a one-line mention of indigenous issues relating to climate change, which occurred in a brief tangent in an editorial on Canada's national Arctic sovereignty in 2009: "Meanwhile, the health and livelihoods of the northern

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<sup>135</sup> Dalby, "Canadian Geopolitical Culture: Climate Change and Sustainability."

<sup>136</sup> Editorial Board, "Mr. Harper Goes to Washington," *The Toronto Star*, December 15, 2009.

indigenous people are at increasing risk as they try to cope with the massive changes wrought by warming temperatures.”<sup>137</sup> As with the American papers of record, Canadian papers were also predominantly framing climate change from market liberal or institutionalist political economies, and the articles captured by the search results left out radical and marginalized voices entirely. The near-total absence of indigenous voices in the sampled articles stands in stark contrast with the purported aims of Canadian reconciliation expressed by the national government. What is more, any policy solutions outside of market mechanisms are nearly completely absent. The near-silence on alternative policies, even regulation by government fiat, causes non-liberal economic solutions to evaporate from the slate of ‘serious’ policy proposals.

## **Case study: Australia**

The papers of record in Australia are *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Australian*. As of 2019, the *Age* and the *Herald* have been purchased by a single media conglomerate and no longer have clear divisions in editorial bias. This presents a problem for future research, as the dataset would be discontinuous beyond 2018. Nonetheless, for the periodization I have used here, the left-centre-right typology of political parties remains useful for near-contemporary analysis.

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<sup>137</sup> Editorial Board, “Bring Urgency to Arctic Plans,” *The Toronto Star*, August 1, 2009.

Overall, Australian newspapers have developed a reputation for skeptical coverage of climate change issues. According to a report from the Australian Centre for Investigative Journalism, an analysis of newspapers published between February and July in 2011 found that 77% of editorials were opposed or indifferent to climate policy in general.<sup>138</sup> When it comes to acceptance of the scientific consensus, another report by the same author found that Australian papers rejected or cast doubt on the science 32% of the time.<sup>139</sup> However, these rather extreme findings were not reflected by the articles captured by my search terms used with the Factiva database. I therefore have included supplemental articles from *The Australian*, which were obtained from a non-systematic search of the Lexis-Nexis Academic database.<sup>140</sup>

For the editorial articles *were* captured in the database search, they differ substantially in content from American or Canadian papers of record. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are almost entirely oriented towards discussing the legislative action in the Parliament and controversies surrounding politicians, while scientists and business leaders are rarely the subject of editorials. One way in which settler colonialism is reinforced, and the neoliberal capitalist economic

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<sup>138</sup> Wendy Bacon, “A Sceptical Climate: Media Coverage of Climate Change in Australia—Part 1: Climate Change Policy” (Sydney, 2011), 53, <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/sceptical-climate-part1.pdf>.

<sup>139</sup> Wendy Bacon, “Sceptical Climate Part 2: Climate Science in Australian Newspapers” (Sydney, 2013), 78, <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Sceptical-Climate-Part-2-Climate-Science-in-Australian-Newspapers.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> These were not included in the basic analysis in the summary, so as not to bias the ratings compared to other newspapers.

system is defended, is in praise given to and in defense of then-Governor David de Kretser, who recommended individual action in reducing emissions during his Earth Hour speech in 2009. Responding to the controversy surrounding these statements, “these are not politically motivated judgements of partisan nature, but, rather, the thoughts of a deeply concerned and knowledgeable man,” according to the editorial board of *The Age*.<sup>141</sup> Watered-down policy is even further weakened, through the process of encouraging policy change through fragmented, individual efforts. However, that these statements could be considered controversial in the first place demonstrates that, even in defenses of individualization, these mere suggestions are thought to be excessive. According to Maniates, individualization is intentionally ineffective, as it transfers responsibility from governments and corporations to individuals.<sup>142</sup> Otherwise, *The Age* was generally supportive of the Copenhagen Accord to a degree not seen amongst the other Australian newspapers. Some editorials in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, on the other hand, adopted the western-centric view that the Chinese diplomats were entirely to blame for the failure at Copenhagen. The *Herald* had framed China’s actions at the summit as “a farce of anti-Western, anti-capitalist rhetoric, with the Group of 77 developing nations, which China directed and manipulated from start to finish.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Editorial Board, “The Governor Has the Right to Speak His Mind,” *The Age*, April 3, 2009.

<sup>142</sup> Michael F. Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?,” *Global Environmental Politics* 1, no. 3 (August 2001): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.1162/152638001316881395>.

<sup>143</sup> Editorial Board, “China Changes Global Climate,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 22, 2009.

The editorial argues that concerns relating to sovereignty or equity are actually motivated by national self-interest, and that the G77 lacked the power to actually influence the outcome of COP15. This interpretation contains an element of truth on the face of it, but it also ignored the crucial role that the US played in locking out the process to subaltern countries.<sup>144</sup>

The authors direct their disgust at foreigners, but compared to conservative editorials in all three countries, there is no overt statement or inference that the multilateral UNFCCC process is inherently suspect, demonstrating a leaning towards institutionalist ideology in political economy. *The Age* also explicitly criticized the claims and proponents of climate change skepticism, something which was relatively rare in American editorials examined in this study. In 2011, *The Age* wrote that the failure of COP17 at Durban was the result of “[not just] global power politics, it is also the result of insistent attacks on the science of climate change.”<sup>145</sup> The editorial then went further, claiming that “for the first time since the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, in Western countries scientific rationality has itself come under sustained political attack from those who should know better—or worse, who act at the behest of powerful interests.”<sup>146</sup> Now the political emotion of

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<sup>144</sup> Radoslav S. Dimitrov, “Inside UN Climate Change Negotiations: The Copenhagen Conference,” *Review of Policy Research* 27, no. 6 (November 20, 2010): 795–821, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.2010.00472.x>; Radoslav S. Dimitrov, “Inside Copenhagen: The State of Climate Governance,” *Global Environmental Politics* 10, no. 2 (May 2010): 18–24, <https://doi.org/10.1162/glep.2010.10.2.18>.

<sup>145</sup> Editorial Board, “Time Is Running out for a New Climate Accord,” *The Age*, December 6, 2011.

<sup>146</sup> Editorial Board.

disgust is used in defence of liberalism, with reference to the protection of purported Enlightenment values. Here, the RO is framed in arguably bioenvironmentalist terms, but the suggested policy solution remains market-based, with references only to the Australian carbon tax law and an emissions trading scheme.

My search of the Lexis-Nexis Academic database located additional articles from *The Australian*. Commentary articles tend to include false balance and equivocation, portraying a consensus-based opinion as equally worthy to a fallacious skeptical opinion.<sup>147</sup> One issue with analyzing *The Australian* is that its news and feature articles express polemical opinion, making it difficult to separate editorial intent with the actual content of the articles. One feature article is written from the first-person perspective and described a columnist's personal opinion changing over time from believing in the consensus to a skeptical position. This change in opinion was credited to Ian Plimer's skeptical popular book, *Heaven and Earth—Global Warming: The Missing Science*.<sup>148</sup> Other discourse analyses have found that newspaper coverage of Plimer's book may have contributed to the failure of the Australian ETS law in 2009.<sup>149</sup> Sheehan writes of the Plimer, "Heaven

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<sup>147</sup> Editorial Board, "So Who's in Denial Now about What the Science Is Saying about Global Warming?," *The Australian*, October 8, 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Paul Sheehan, Will Hutton, and Helen Middleton, "Passion for Global Warming Cools in the Face of Evidence," *The Australian*, April 14, 2009.

<sup>149</sup> McKewon, "Duelling Realities: Conspiracy Theories vs Climate Science in Regional Newspaper Coverage of Ian Plimer's Book, *Heaven and Earth*."



and Earth is an evidence-based attack on conformity and orthodoxy, including my own, and a reminder to respect informed dissent and beware of ideology subverting evidence.”<sup>150</sup> This uncritical reading employs the skeptical rhetorical technique of suggesting a conspiracy to suppress dissenting views, a belief which has been spread across multiple newspapers throughout the Anglo-settler colonies. Referring to the AR5 projections for economic damages, another commentary article argues that the future damages are so low that mitigation policy of any kind is unnecessary: “... the report (estimates) climate change will shave between 0.2 and 2 per cent of global income ... it opens up the question ... why bother to cut greenhouse gas emissions at all?”<sup>151</sup> The title of the article itself, “How Bad Is Global Warming? So Bad There’ll Be Lousy Coffee and an Increase in Golf,” adopts a tone of mockery and both expresses and reproduces the emotion of disgust presented by the editorial board, transferring and recirculating disgust in its readers. At the same time, it minimizes the gravity of climate change by focusing on positive impacts and trivially negative impacts. It also employed a classic skeptic trope of a single snowstorm casting mainstream scientific conclusions on climate change into doubt, again relying on a tone of mockery.<sup>152</sup> The selection of the topics is cherry-picked, another common skeptical rhetorical technique, to only

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<sup>150</sup> Sheehan, Hutton, and Middleton, “Passion for Global Warming Cools in the Face of Evidence.”

<sup>151</sup> Editorial Board, “How Bad Is Global Warming? So Bad There’ll Be Lousy Coffee and an Increase in Golf,” *The Australian*, April 1, 2014.

<sup>152</sup> Anonymous, “Blizzards Mock Global Warming as Both Sides of Emissions Debate Try Snow Jobs,” *The Australian*, February 13, 2010.

display trivial climate change impacts to shield the reader from contemplating the possibility of serious impacts. The tone of mockery, which is consistent across all skeptical articles published by *The Australian*, express not only the emotion of disgust, but serve to suppress the desire to consider climate change as a possible threat or challenge at the level of both policy, and individual decisions. This is accomplished via the use of thought-terminating clichés, which creates a sense of finality on how the reader is expected to feel about the subject.

*The Australian* is also notable in its more overt use tabloid-like tone and rhetorical style compared to its right-leaning counterparts in *National Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The mocking tone can be seen again in an article later that year, with columnist Maurice Newman declaring that “the wheels are starting to fall off the anthropogenic global warming bandwagon ... [opposition to climate policy by Stephen Harper and Tony Abbot] prompted consternation and panic among *global warmists* [emphasis my own].”<sup>153</sup> The presentation of basic science is totally inverted, and the language used equated fundamental physics with a religion or a cult. Again, the purpose of this skepticism is manufactured ignorance, and the perpetuation of a thought-terminating cliché.

Despite increasingly severe and widespread wildfire damage, attempts at securitizing climate change in Australia had failed to gain political traction.<sup>154</sup> Conservative newspapers’ role in these

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<sup>153</sup> Maurice Newman, “Australia in Danger of Being Left Out in Cold Over Global Warming,” *The Australian*, June 23, 2014.

<sup>154</sup> McDonald, “The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia.”

failures could be in that they had employed the reproduction of invisibility, and to use mockery to render the serious and the real into the laughable and the false. In other words, it was in service of a political culture that mocked the idea of climate change as a serious policy discussion; a thought-terminating cliché which absolves both writer and reader from critical thinking. If hegemonic interests in Australia are synonymous with coal exporters and the government support of those industries, these are not merely economic interests, but a desire to preserve a special political culture in which climate change policy is in fact *unthinkable*. This is perhaps the clearest evidence that hegemony is not merely neoliberalism, as it is not the alignment of all elite interests in the same direction. Climate policies damage some industries more than others, but the conservative part of Australian politics have sought to primarily aid one specific industry. The extractive process overrides the economic needs of others.

However, capitalism is not a monolith, and some elite groups are favoured over others. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly demonstrated than with the dichotomy between mainstream academic economics and conservative politicians who are at least nominally prioritizing economy over the environment. General polling which identifies a significant plurality or majority approval for some form of climate change mitigation policy, does not translate into durable actual policies, even with powerful corporate interests such as information technology and reinsurance.

As with all the newspapers of record from Canada and the vast majority of papers from the US, there are no indigenous, women, or non-white authors identified in the database search results for Australian newspaper editorials. There is no discussion of indigenous issues, or their relation

to climate change in any article captured by the search results. Nor do they receive any mention in the supplemental search conducted on *The Australian*. Once again, there is also the near-total absence of non-market-based climate change policies, and the primacy of the market is expressed and reproduced amongst readers of Australian papers of record. In skeptical newspapers, even market-oriented solutions are presented as foolish, or else nefarious attacks on the sanctity of capitalism and cherished freedoms. It is the circulation and reproduction of disgust and hatred of ‘the other side,’ which seeks to ‘do something about climate change.’ This becomes the apparent objective of right-leaning Australian editorials. The absence of indigenous voices or even mention of their political activities also serves to reinforce the settler colonial pattern of severing the connection between settler and native. *Terra nullius* thus continues to persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a concept which will explore fully in the coming chapters.

With descriptive case studies now completed, we turn to the analysis of the results and a discussion of the wider implications of the discourse engendered by elite political opinion.

## 4. THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE SETTLER

### COLONIES

#### Survey of theoretical groundwork

Climate change pushes the boundaries of academic disciplines, and this is no less true of specific research questions like that of national political cultures. One important concept from critical studies is the notion of the kyriarchy: the oppression imposed by hegemonic forces, including patriarchy, ableism, racism, anti-indigeneity. Power can be defined as the ability of one actor to enforce its will over another actor that would otherwise act differently. This is done either through “coercion,” the assertion of power which compels behaviour; or through “consensus,” which make alternatives unthinkable.<sup>155</sup> Following from Parsons’ notion of “consensus,” the concept has been extended into “hegemony,” which is a system in which power becomes unchallengeable and invisible.<sup>156</sup> The strength of hegemony is that its power structures do not rely on coercion or the application of force. Instead, hegemony aids in the “propagation of common culture,” which is the mechanism by which actions are freely taken in service of the hegemonic power.<sup>157</sup> This exertion

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<sup>155</sup> Talcott Parsons, “On the Concept of Political Power,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 3 (1963): 232–62.

<sup>156</sup> Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method.”

<sup>157</sup> Cox, 168.

of power by political agents would therefore extend beyond states, trans- or international governance regimes, sub-state bodies, or ‘Great Men.’ It would in fact cover systems and agents that are not technically conscious or sapient beings, but what we would usually consider inanimate objects, such as steam engines or computers. It even extends to non-physical entities that are purely speech acts, such as stock markets or capitalism. These speech acts translate the world of ideas into the social structures, which ultimately has the potential to permeate into physical reality.<sup>158</sup> Examining these Anthropogenic objects could reveal important insights into the nature of the Anthropocene world, of which climate change is only one system. This analysis could also provide insight into the social psychology of climate change denial. Rumours of its demise have been exaggerated, and there are still frequent positive mentions of climate change denialism in English-language social media.<sup>159</sup> However, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the true scale of the impact climate change denialism has on public opinion and on policy. Evidence from social media and elsewhere on the

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<sup>158</sup> Barry Smith, “John Searle: From Speech Acts to Social Reality,” in *John Searle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613999.001>.

<sup>159</sup> Ashley A. Anderson, “Effects of Social Media Use on Climate Change Opinion, Knowledge, and Behavior,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.369>.

mass media of the internet have largely remained unexamined in this dissertation, due to methodological challenges. “Bots,” consisting of either automated AI-generated spam or human workers, are apparently a large and significant driver of activity in social media.<sup>160</sup>

## **Ethics and political economy**

As policy, the problem of climate change is fundamentally a question of distribution of the costs of impacts, weighed against the costs of mitigation and adaptation. Thus, it is a question of political economy, wherein there will be winners and losers in relative terms. Broadly speaking, there are four frameworks of political economy from which environmental governance problems can be approached. According to Jennifer Clapp and Peter Dauvergne, these are “market liberals,” “institutionalists,” “bioenvironmentalists,” and “social greens.”<sup>161</sup> These perspectives often overlap with one another, but market liberalism and social green approaches to environmental problems are in opposition to each other.

Market liberals are exemplified by those who believe that environmental challenges such as climate change would fundamentally resolve themselves through unrestricted operation of businesses and consumers. They believe that once environmental problems become damaging enough,

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<sup>160</sup> Mariam Orabi et al., “Detection of Bots in Social Media: A Systematic Review,” *Information Processing & Management* 57, no. 4 (July 2020): 102250, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2020.102250>.

<sup>161</sup> Clapp and Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*.

research into technical solutions will be in demand, and government intervention will either be totally unnecessary or kept at minimal levels. Market liberals also believe that environmental problems, regardless of type or actual danger, are almost always exaggerated, and very rarely worth government intervention and regulation to ameliorate the damage.<sup>162</sup> Institutionalists believe that while markets can be very useful, the involvement of multilateral agreements and transnational institutions are needed to guide policy outcomes. They are substantially motivated to mitigate or otherwise deal with environmental problems to a much greater extent than market liberals. An example of institutionalists would be the authors of the UNEP *Global Environmental Outlook* series of reports.<sup>163</sup>

By contrast, bioenvironmentalists are usually physical scientists, who believe that strong government interventions are necessary to avert disaster. They tend to believe that many environmental problems are more dangerous than presented by mainstream liberal analysis. Of these groups, bioenvironmentalists (and to a lesser extent, institutionalists) believe that human overpopulation and overconsumption are major policy concerns of global environmental governance.<sup>164</sup> Finally, social greens are primarily concerned with equity, justice, and fairness. Like bioenvironmentalists,

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<sup>162</sup> Examples of prominent market liberals would include Bjørn Lomborg, Julian Simon, and nearly all climate change skeptics.

<sup>163</sup> Clapp and Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*, 27.

<sup>164</sup> Clapp and Dauvergne, 44.



they tend to accept more alarming prognostications about the future of climate change, but they emphasize overconsumption and socioeconomic inequalities as the main driver of global environmental damages. Social greens also believe that the main source of environmental challenges come from socioeconomic inequality which disproportionately hurts marginalized peoples; while deemphasizing the purported role of overpopulation stressed by bioenvironmentalists.<sup>165</sup> Policymaker and policy-adjacent academic discussions of global environmental governance tend to be dominated by market liberals and institutionalists. However, since multilateralism has been declining, the situation perhaps more approximates an anarchic world system that is more to the tune of market liberals.<sup>166</sup> Steven Bernstein's conception of liberal environmentalism could be said to be a mixture of market liberalism and institutionalism in the realm of global environmental politics.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, this perspective is incomplete on its own, as some critical scholars have pointed out. For example, within social greens there are groups which believe that economic class conflict is the main driver of global environmental challenges and have based their analysis along class

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<sup>165</sup> Clapp and Dauvergne, 44–45.

<sup>166</sup> Steven Bernstein, "Rio+20: Sustainable Development in a Time of Multilateral Decline," *Global Environmental Politics* 13, no. 4 (November 2013): 12–21, [https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP\\_e\\_00195](https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_e_00195).

<sup>167</sup> Steven Bernstein, "Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance," *Global Environmental Politics* 2, no. 3 (August 2002): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1162/152638002320310509>.

lines.<sup>168</sup> It ignores the broader role of inequalities not just in economic class, but divisions and race and gender as well.<sup>169</sup> As such, the four political economies suggested by Clapp and Dauvergne may overgeneralize and strip nuance away from perspectives within each of the four. Evidently, there can be important distinctions within the ‘social green’ typology in this instance.

Climate change poses an exceptional challenge to the normal framework of ethical operation in day-to-day life. To choose just one moral dilemma arising as a result of climate change, the “non-identity problem” is the logical conundrum of valuing the lives of nonexistent (that is, future) human beings.<sup>170</sup> Ethicist Stephen Gardiner explains:

This is that its complexity may turn out to be perfectly convenient for us, the current generation, and indeed for each successor generation as it comes to occupy our position. For one thing, it provides each generation with the cover under which it can seem to be taking the issue seriously ... when really it is simply exploiting its temporal position. For another, all of this can occur without the exploitative generation actually having to acknowledge that this is what it is doing. By avoiding overtly selfish behaviour, earlier generations can take advantage of the future without the unpleasantness of admitting it – either to others, or, perhaps more importantly, to itself.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, “Climate Leviathan,” *Antipode* 45, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01018.x>.

<sup>169</sup> Kiran Asher, “The Brilliant, Monochromatic Red of Climate Leviathan,” *Rethinking Marxism* 32, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 442–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2020.1807236>.

<sup>170</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 378.

<sup>171</sup> Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption,” 408–9.

This unpleasantness is rooted in the logical conundrums climate change poses when applied to the traditional notion of human beings as atomistic, rational, self-interested actors. The literature on the political economy of climate change has been shaped in large part due to the logic of self-interest from Derek Parfit. Parfit's explanation of the prisoner's dilemma is a core part of mainstream thinking on why climate change represents a kind of expanded prisoners' dilemma, at every scale of governance.<sup>172</sup> But another source of ethical quandary in climate ethics is in equity between the past and the present. This is reflected in a practical way in the negotiation of multilateral environmental treaties, which in the recent past was thought to place poorer countries in the role of spoiler, as their concerns for equity overrode the goal of efficient outcomes.<sup>173</sup>

Marxist political theorists such as Timothy Mitchell have argued that democracy itself is only possible because of the existence of fossil fuels. He claimed that democracies can only deliver standards of living expected by the majority of a country's people through the cheap energy provided by fossil fuels.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, there is a fundamental incompatibility with democracy and mitigation of climate change. Democracies industrialized first, and at each step of industrialization a

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<sup>172</sup> Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 56–66.

<sup>173</sup> Adil Najam, "Developing Countries and Global Environmental Governance: From Contestation to Participation to Engagement," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 5, no. 3 (September 2005): 303–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-005-3807-6>.

<sup>174</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, Paperback (London: Verso Books, 2013).

fossil fuel-based technology permitted the revolutionary leap. In the UK, energy from coal provided in the 1840s would have required twice the total land area of the country to provide the equivalent energy from timber to burn wood.<sup>175</sup> Without this energy, the British Navy could not have been ascendant in the First World War. Access to oil was also a major reason why the Allies were so successful in the Second World War. In war, logistics is everything.<sup>176</sup> Western democracies also relied on the availability of energy to support the consumer society necessary to fuel the advanced welfare state, securing votes and stabilizing the government. ‘Infinite growth’ couldn’t be provided by the energy of whale oil or firewood, but it could be achieved through the combustion of fossil fuels.<sup>177</sup> As such, fossil fuel energy became the lynchpin of the other half of democratic power: the economic engine of growth. While Mitchell’s argument is compelling, its analysis ignores or deemphasizes the possibility of non-western modes of democracy, such as in the indigenous societies of America, Canada, and Australia (or even ancient types such as Athenian democracy or Roman republicanism).

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<sup>175</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Carbon Democracy,” *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (August 2009): 399–432, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140903020598>.

<sup>176</sup> Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>177</sup> Vaclav Smil, *Energy and Civilization: A History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

While this dissertation is backward-looking in terms of explaining how the present situation came to be, climate change as hyperobject breaks through the easily comprehensible scale of human politics. In the hegemonic conception of Anthropocentric politics, it becomes difficult for people to imagine the gravity and the scales involved. When it comes to climate change, looking at the past necessitates the discussion of the future. In that area, speculations about the future can help illuminate our understanding of the past and present. The literature of Marxists and critical theorists have been especially useful in this regard. Mann and Wainwright examined the possible future of the political economy using a two-factor typology: whether the world becomes oriented towards “planetary sovereignty,” and whether or not it becomes oriented towards “capitalism.” This produces four possible outcomes: Climate Leviathan, Climate Behemoth, Climate Mao, or Climate X. Each of these political economic ‘futures’ have important implications for how political ideology translates to both biogeochemical outcomes and the structure of the future political economy.

**Table 4 - Four Potential Social Formations<sup>178</sup>**

	Planetary sovereignty	Anti-planetary sovereignty
Capitalist	Climate Leviathan	Climate Behemoth
Non-capitalist	Climate Mao	Climate X

<sup>178</sup> Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright, *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future* (London: Verso, 2018), 29.

The capitalist social formation refers to the current system of the primacy of state power and private property, while the non-capitalist social formation includes revolutionary or socialist types. While parts of this typology are self-explanatory, the concept of planetary sovereignty requires further explanation. Sovereignty as it is usually described, is the notion of statehood bounded by territoriality. In other words, countries are defined by the existence of stable borders, and usually also the monopoly of legitimate (violent) force within those borders. Planetary sovereignty, then, is the existence of a truly global hegemon, a single power that possesses the scepter of sovereignty over the entire Earth's surface and near-Earth orbit. It has been suggested by social constructivists that to prevent catastrophe, humanity must unite into this world state, particularly when it comes to the prevention of nuclear war.<sup>179</sup> A soft version of this would be at least the implementation of a strong version of the UNFCCC, with legally-binding powers to impose costs, distribute benefits, and dole out punishments and rewards.

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<sup>179</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State Is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (December 21, 2003): 491–542, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135406610394001>. For a critique of this view, see Vaughn P. Shannon, "Wendt's Violation of the Constructivist Project: Agency and Why a World State Is Not Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 4 (December 25, 2005): 581–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105057903>.

Climate Leviathan is described as the likely outcome of the continuation of the UN-based multilateral process, underpinned by neoliberal economics and an institutions-based approach to problem-solving. Climate Behemoth is a nightmare scenario in which organized responses to climate change become impossible, as state governments retreat into enormous fortresses, and human rights fall away as unnecessary hindrances to survival and profit.<sup>180</sup> Such a future has twin nightmares: both the end of the dream of universalism, and the physical ravages of near-totally unmitigated climate change. Climate Mao, another nightmare scenario, is the envelopment of the globe by a single authoritarian government. This authoritarian government becomes the planetary sovereign and possesses the overwhelming power that allows climate change mitigation and adaptation to be implemented through a top-down system. However, the authors believe that such a staggering concentration of power into a single global state would become tyrannical and the idea of human rights becomes a thing of the past.

Mann and Wainwright point to Climate X as the most desirable outcome. It is a disconnection from neoliberalist globalization but preserves rights and dignity of the people. Perhaps such a system would be similar to the “zero-growth” economy, in which global society shakes off neoliberalism and capitalism permanently and directs societies towards non-market social goods. These

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<sup>180</sup> For a historical interpretation of the fragility of human rights, see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010).

include health, education, and happiness, rather than maximizing GDP growth.<sup>181</sup> The zero-growth economy has roots in the 1960s' and '70s, starting with Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report. While the idea remains politically marginal, research continues on whether constrained economic growth is desirable, and how it may be achieved.<sup>182</sup> One potential drawback to a zero-growth system is the potential for the system to assume infinite wealth inequality. Or to put it another way, a GINI Coefficient approaching 1.0, as inherited wealth would become increasingly concentrated in a single individual or a very small group of individuals.<sup>183</sup> Thus, as with fossil fuels providing the engine for growth, perhaps it was growth itself that created the necessary conditions for democracy. On the ground at the multilateral conferences of the UNFCCC, early recognition of these swirling dilemmas was seen in closed door meetings, wherein diplomats understood themselves to be deciding the future of structure of the global economic system, and not *only* crafting an agreement on environmental policy.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* (London: Earthscan, 2009).

<sup>182</sup> Brian Czech and Herman E. Daly, "The Steady State Economy as the Sustainable Alternative to Economic Growth," in *Peak Oil, Economic Growth, and Wildlife Conservation*, ed. J. Edward Gates, David L. Trauger, and Brian Czech (New York, NY: Springer, 2014), 119–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-1954-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-1954-3_6); Jeroen C. J. M. van den Bergh, "A Third Option for Climate Policy within Potential Limits to Growth," *Nature Climate Change* 7, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 107–12, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate3113>.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>184</sup> Radoslav S. Dimitrov, "A Climate of Change," in *What Is Climate Change, and What Should We Do about It?* (Waterloo: Balsillie School of International Affairs, 2013).



Presently, the established (though not hegemonic) conception of the political economy of climate change can be summarized thusly: climate change is a problem of market failure. Specifically, it refers to the failure of the markets to provide for a pure public good in the form of a stable climate for human lives and the economy. The consensus of mainstream economists contributes to the idea that climate change imposes costs to the global economy higher than the cost of significant amelioration through mitigation and adaptation policies. The best way to mitigate climate change is through the pricing of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, thus creating a market mechanism that captures the formerly unpriced negative externality. Radical political solutions have been proposed through bioenvironmentalist and social green frameworks, but these are largely not captured in electoral national politics or in multilateral processes such as the UNFCCC. This conventional economic position remains politically contentious, and total inaction is sometimes preferred by political elites regardless of cost. Several examples could be seen from the dataset. For instance, one of the editorials from the case studies put forth the position that even ineffective individual actions were declared to be excessive and even offensive.<sup>185</sup> Another editorial criticized a relatively modest cap-and-trade system by assuming that it would be an economic disaster. It derided its opponents as naïve fools, or worse, wilful advocates for wasteful government overreach: “What really drives cap-and-trade idolaters like Messrs. Burtraw and Sweeney to

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<sup>185</sup> Editorial Board, “The Governor Has the Right to Speak His Mind.”

schoolboy taunts is their fear that the American people might figure this out. Then their dreams of having government command a huge new chunk of the economy might collapse.”<sup>186</sup>

## **Ideology and worldview**

One approach to analyzing climate politics is through the philosophy of political ideologies, especially those of conservatism, authoritarianism, and fascism. Liberalism, with its associated epistemological assumptions of scientism and rationalism, is generally considered hegemonic within the current international system.<sup>187</sup> Something as extreme as fascism is normally not considered a part of climate or environmental political theory, but recent developments in domestic politics across the world have seen the rise of pseudo-democratic authoritarian governments. Despite the end of the Trump administration and Republican control of the House and Senate, the rise of autocratic government remains a plausible near-term outcome in the US.<sup>188</sup> I argue that fascism is

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<sup>186</sup> Editorial Board, “Who Pays for Cap and Trade?”

<sup>187</sup> Steven Bernstein, *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>188</sup> Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, 2018); Sarah Kendzior, *Hiding In Plain Sight: The Invention of Donald Trump and the Erosion of America* (New York, NY: Flatiron Books, 2020).

not merely an alarmist diversion from my argument, but a genuinely plausible outcome of contemporary political trajectories. As such, understanding these ideologies and its implications for the future of climate change are highly salient.

Conservatism has an origin traditionally attributed to Edmund Burke and his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Conservatism is popularly defined as a “generic term” for the “right-wing viewpoint occupying the political spectrum between liberalism and fascism.”<sup>189</sup> There is significant scholarly debate on what conservatism is, even to the point of whether it is an ideology at all, or a “non-ideology” that defies categorization.<sup>190</sup> One interpretation of conservatism is that it can be sorted into three types: “status quo” conservatism that seeks to preserve existing social structures; “laissez faire” conservatism which aims for freer markets and limitations of government interventions in the economy; and “social conservatism” or “authoritarianism.”<sup>191</sup>

Other interpretations treat conservatism as more unitary. For example, American political theorist Corey Robin has argued that conservatism does have coherence. He argues conservatism, despite its internal variation, is a consistent thread of thought that runs back to Revolutionary

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<sup>189</sup> Andy Hamilton, “Conservatism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, October 29, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conservatism/>.

<sup>190</sup> Hamilton.

<sup>191</sup> Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of ‘Conservatism,’” *Psychological Inquiry* 20, no. 2–3 (August 25, 2009): 142–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400903028615>.

France: “I treat the right as a unity, as a coherent body of theory and practice that transcends the divisions so often emphasized by scholars and pundits.”<sup>192</sup> Conservatism in the ‘western world’ consists of a coherent worldview in which social hierarchy is exalted. Attempts to equalize society are seen as an assault on the cherished natural order with its pyramidal social structure and glaring inequalities. However, unlike the absolutist monarchism or aristocracies of the past, conservatism allows people who ‘earn’ their ‘rightful positions’ to supplant existing elites who grew stagnant and careless. This was previously thought to be accomplished through military and political success.<sup>193</sup> But as capitalism became entrenched in liberal democracy, battling it out through the markets and businesses also became an accepted way to move up the social hierarchy. Robin goes on to argue that there are three missing ingredients in conventional academic research on conservatism: “[L]ack of comparative perspective” between European and American forms of conservatism, which is a “misapprehension” of the two geographic loci being somehow disunified.<sup>194</sup> Secondly, the lack of “historical perspective ... writers and scholars ... cling to the assumption that contemporary conservatism is fundamentally different from earlier iterations.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 28–29.

<sup>193</sup> Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*.

<sup>194</sup> Robin, 30–31.

<sup>195</sup> Robin, 32.

Finally, “the further back analysts trace the origins of contemporary conservatism, the less inclined they are to believe that it is a politics of reaction or backlash.”<sup>196</sup> As elitism made sacrosanct, conservatism maintains its power through cultivating support from the masses of ordinary people. There are two ways it could be done: By having them see themselves reflected in the upper classes, a kind of “upside-down populism”; and “democratic feudalism”, in which a “faux aristocracy” has husband lording over wife, boss over worker, or whites over blacks.<sup>197</sup> Within the mediaval Great Chain of Being, rather than hierarchy and stratification being a feature of societies, it is instead sanctified and made into a goal of politics to maintain the social positioning of units.

Conservatism also denies the fundamental equality between human beings thought to underpin free democracies and is therefore inherently inimical to the ideological conception of the liberal democracy. Finally, as hinted at earlier, conservatism does not actually seek to restore an actual previous order, and thus does not ‘conserve’ anything. In being the philosophy and politics of counterrevolution and reaction, it must be itself a revolution against existing order. The image of a nostalgic past is therefore always a fiction. In this way, conservatism in the sense of exalting capitalism and hierarchy, is not fundamentally at odds with the neoliberal conception of the rationalist global economic system.

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<sup>196</sup> Robin, 33.

<sup>197</sup> Robin, 30.

How does conservatism lead to authoritarianism, and then to increasingly extreme formations like fascism? The connective tissue between the conservative ideology, such that it exists coherently at all, is the veneration of aesthetics and the hegemony of the hierarchy in the conservative worldview. The good in a Benthamian sense, of the utilitarianism of maximizing the happiness of human beings, or the more universal sense of the common good dictated by some form of the Golden Rule, is alien to the conservative ideologue. Social and material outcomes of policy are not for the sake of providing the greatest good for the greatest number, but instead exists for the service of upholding an idealized hierarchical social structure, and of the aesthetics necessary to preserve that hierarchy. The addition, the central role played by spite, and the willingness to use flagrantly illegitimate acts of violence, distinguishes the conservative from the fascist. However, both conservatism and fascism nonetheless carry within the embers that can be fanned into flames of violence. The affective mechanism through which ‘normal’ conservatism makes the fascist turn is fear. Particularly, it is “the fear of degeneration, decline, and disintegration as mechanisms for preserving ‘what is.’”<sup>198</sup> To the fascist, the fear of degeneration and decline of society becomes more real than a car accident—or biophysical realities like climate change.<sup>199</sup> On a practical level, fascist movements are only able to gain power through the consent, if not active support, of elderly

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<sup>198</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 78.

<sup>199</sup> Note the predilection of alt-right social media stars, such Stefan Molyneux, to venerate a cartoon version of ancient Rome—and to obsess over the reasons for its downfall.

conservative leaders, according to Robert Paxton. Thus, while many conservatives make the fascist turn, their actual rise to power demands the cooption or even the active cooperation of traditional conservative elites, as centre-right and far-right form alliance against the presumably lethal threat of leftist government.<sup>200</sup>

But the fear of degeneration is not reflected by material realities, if we are looking at just the aims of governing and the ideology that supports those aims. What is truly frightening to conservatives, is not a threat to one's health, wealth, or life. Instead, it calls to an idealized aesthetic form, something fundamentally ahistorical and non-factual. The idealized past is specifically a hierarchical sorting of the worthy from the unworthy; the former elevated to the top of the social pyramid and the latter shunted to the bottom. If the unworthy people achieve positions higher than they deserve, then it produces both visceral fear and visceral disgust; the unworthy being the politically marginalized people of western societies.<sup>201</sup> The disgust is in part instilled by feelings of unfairness, of an upset at the injustice done to the natural order of things, wherein people (or merely inhuman entities that *appear* to have the shape of people) have usurped the rightful pyramidal position of the politically-dominant race and class. In the United States, this is the white people

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<sup>200</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004).

<sup>201</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 82–83.

who live in rural areas, who view themselves as the ‘true Americans.’<sup>202</sup> It follows, then, that non-white peoples, indigenous peoples, sexual and gender minorities, and “Coastal elites” are *not* ‘true Americans.’ This kind of black-and-white, ingroup/outgroup distinction leads to the kind of thinking that fertilizes the soil and plants the seed from which fascism can grow. The core emotion at work here is *disgust*, which Ahmed identified as an important type of performative political emotion which ‘sticks’ to ‘objects,’ such as human beings. Disgust operates by stripping away the power of marginalized groups using speech acts that render the groups as “disgusting.”<sup>203</sup> But on a more mundane level, strong emotions such as disgust can facilitate and enhance the preservation of the status quo, such as in the less extreme ideology of conservatism. This has been empirically confirmed in the American context, with respect to disgust towards abortion and gay marriage.<sup>204</sup> In the context of the settler colony, it also reinforces the dominant position of the settler vis-à-vis the colonized peoples. Political oppression of indigenous peoples is therefore tied to the feeling

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<sup>202</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2016).

<sup>203</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92–100.

<sup>204</sup> Yoel Inbar, David A. Pizarro, and Paul Bloom, “Conservatives Are More Easily Disgusted than Liberals,” *Cognition & Emotion* 23, no. 4 (June 2009): 714–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930802110007>.



that they are viscerally disgusting to the settler, though that idea that is held in contradictory tension with the notion of the ‘noble savage.’<sup>205</sup>

Fascism is typically exemplified by the history of Nazi Germany. The regime of Hitler and the NSDAP produced a uniquely horrific genocide, widely considered to be the first ‘industrial genocide’ in the world. It claimed six million Jewish lives, and perhaps ten or eleven million victims in total, excluding all other war deaths both civilian and military. The horror of the Holocaust created the impetus for the Frankfurt School, and other philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Hannah Arendt, to grapple with a theodicy where God had apparently abandoned humanity. In place of God, according to Arendt, western countries had instead the hegemony of rationalist liberal democracies. Hannah Arendt famously wrote of the “banality of evil,” which was later confirmed by the Polish trials against Major Trapp and other members of the Reserve Police Battalion 101. This Wehrmacht unit participated in various atrocities and mass shootings, in the years before the death camps were made ready. They did so, even though they hailed from a city with socialist leanings, were middle-aged by the beginning of the Nazi regime (and generally not swayed by

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<sup>205</sup> Christina Welch, “Savagery on Show: The Popular Visual Representation of Native American Peoples and Their Lifeways at the World’s Fairs (1851–1904) and in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (1884–1904),” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 9, no. 4 (November 2011): 337–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460654.2011.621314>.

propaganda), and they could freely excuse themselves from murdering civilians. Yet, the vast majority of the Police Battalion shot anyway.<sup>206</sup>

The Holocaust would ignite the spark of the idea of human rights which was enshrined in the UNHCR and a new era of hope. But arguably, this too was a mistaken conception: the notion of universal human rights, as we presently understand it, might not have even existed in 1945. It was only after decolonization that the ‘universal human’ could mean that people beyond white Europeans could be considered human beings.<sup>207</sup> Perhaps a blind spot in Browning’s work is that he believed that Police Battalion 101 and other *genocidaires* were indeed ordinary. But according to Sartre, the logic of their violent desire extended far beyond the ordinary:

Never believe that anti-Semites are completely unaware of the absurdity of their replies. They know that their remarks are frivolous, open to challenge. But they are amusing themselves, for it is their adversary who is obliged to use words responsibly, since he believes in words. The anti-Semites have the *right* [italics in original] to play. They even like to play with discourse for, by giving ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutors. They delight in acting in bad faith, since they seek not to persuade by sound argument but to intimidate and disconcert. If you press them too closely, they will abruptly fall silent, loftily indicating by some phrase that the time for argument is past. It is not that they are afraid of being convinced. They fear only to appear ridiculous or to prejudice by their embarrassment their hope of winning over some third party to their side.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

<sup>207</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*.

<sup>208</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1948), 20.

By use of this non-logic, “thought-terminating clichés” could be employed to avert the understanding of observable reality.<sup>209</sup> It can even create the idea of a human being that lacks personhood. This was made especially clear during the Displaced Persons (DP) crisis which emerged in the wake of the Second World War and the Holocaust. These refugees, by being rendered stateless, risked becoming: “The whole question of human rights ... [was] the question of national sovereignty; ... As mankind, since the French Revolution, was conceived in the image of a family of nations ... the people, not the individual, was the image of man.”<sup>210</sup> The historian Samuel Moyn later argued that human rights were so novel, that they did not date back to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Despite its early roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human rights only achieved its modern form in the 1970s during the process of decolonization, when finally all human beings could be *conceived* as equal.<sup>211</sup> But without the guarantor of the rights of the person in the form of a nation, with the power of the state apparatus backing it, what basis is there for the personhood of the stateless individual?

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<sup>209</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 429.

<sup>210</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1966), 291.

<sup>211</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*.

Rather than the human person, such refugees were instead reclassified as mere garbage. According to Arendt, the victims of the Holocaust, and other DPs across Europe, were “human debris” and rendered “superfluous”:

Older than the superfluous wealth [of the owner class] was another by-product of capitalist production: the human debris that every crisis, following invariably upon each period of industrial growth, eliminated permanently from producing society. Men who had become permanently idle were as superfluous to the community as the owners of superfluous wealth. That they were an actual menace to society had been recognized throughout the nineteenth century and their export had helped to populate the dominions of Canada and Australia as well as the United States. The new fact in the imperialist era is that these two superfluous forces, the superfluous capital and the superfluous working power, joined hands and left the country together. The concept of expansion, the export of government power and annexation of every territory in which nationals had invested either their wealth or their work, seemed the only alternative to increasing losses in wealth and population. Imperialism and its idea of unlimited expansion seemed to offer a permanent remedy for a permanent evil.<sup>212</sup>

Arendt suggests in this passage that the white settlers of Canada, Australia, and the US are among the original human trash of empire. But regardless of the status of some of these individuals, by the time Arendt wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the white settlers were clearly human beings of equal status to their European mother countries. What does it mean if indigenous people were not human beings? Statelessness was, after all, originally enshrined in the Catholic “Doctrine of Discovery” which provided religious justification for the subjugation of the indigenous peoples of

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<sup>212</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 150.

the New World.<sup>213</sup> And a stable climate, or nature itself, could certainly not be human either. The doctrine of *terra nullius* guarantees that human and nature must have all their relations be mediated under a purely capitalist, non-rational rationalism.

In the Australian context, settlers tied *terra nullius* to the removal of property rights from indigenous peoples, requiring a material/technical condition and a political/regulative condition to be conferred. In the process of settlers “improving” the land, they came to possess the land as private property, facilitating the turn towards land-as-capital.<sup>214</sup> And, as Arendt suggests, this inexorable march of capitalist imperialism goes hand-in-hand with the dehumanization of the native peoples. Dehumanization is the ‘solution’ to the inherent contradictions to the system. And contrary to what Robin defined as conservatism, there are elements of both conservative and fascist approaches to the social statuses of human beings in a hierarchy that are subsumed into the liberal democratic system. Rather than being emancipatory, liberalism reinforces the continual redefinition, oppression, and swapping of groups within the position of the overall social hierarchy. Like the other ideologies, liberalism reinforces the irrational blindness towards nature, reproducing op-

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<sup>213</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company, 2015), 46.

<sup>214</sup> Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Casell, 1999), 26.

pression and disaster on an ever-grander scale as it pursues unlimited accumulation. The universalism of liberalism, in the context of the globalized world, merely makes the oppressiveness of the human social system extend to all corners of the Earth, from the bottom of the abyssal plain to the top of the Ionosphere.<sup>215</sup> What liberalism accomplished, in terms of flattening the social relations between some human beings, merely increased the relative size of the privileged races and genders and classes. Ultimately, for liberalism to succeed as it has so far, marginalized peoples must continue to occupy the lower rungs on the social hierarchy. The looming shadow of the Anthropocene covers the world and overwhelms human comprehension. Or at least, the collective human response to the global challenges of hyperobjects like climate change.

The philosophical implications of the Anthropocene have not yet been satisfactorily comprehended and continues to be the subject of intense scholarly debate in the physical sciences and beyond.<sup>216</sup> Political power blinds itself with obsessions rooted in realm of norms, discourses and emotions, and leaves the world of molecules and energy flows outside the realm of practical politics. For those of us who see material interests as important, the practical ignorance of nature and its novel formations spells disaster. The Anthropocene represents not just a hyperobject, but a

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<sup>215</sup> If some members of the ultra-wealthy have their way, the dominion of liberal capitalism would extend even beyond the Earth's atmosphere.

<sup>216</sup> Clive Hamilton and Christophe Bonneuil, eds., *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Christophe Bonneuil, "The Geological Turn: Narratives of the Anthropocene," in *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, ed. Christophe Bonneuil and Clive Hamilton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 17–31.

*collection* of hyperobjects. The task of analyzing such an enormous and all-encompassing hyperobject produces a social construction that defies conventional methodologies, but the task remains necessary.

Given the envelopment of the entire world in the Anthropocene, this could be a serious blind spot. It constitutes a veritable chasm in human perception—assuming we are all indeed humans by consensus. How, then, is the human defined? Who counts among the people served in ostensible fairness and equality in the liberal democracies of Anglo-settler colonies? Part of that answer is found not in the writings of American philosophers, but on a more visceral and intuitive level. This level is the aesthetic, and it is worth discussing in some detail.

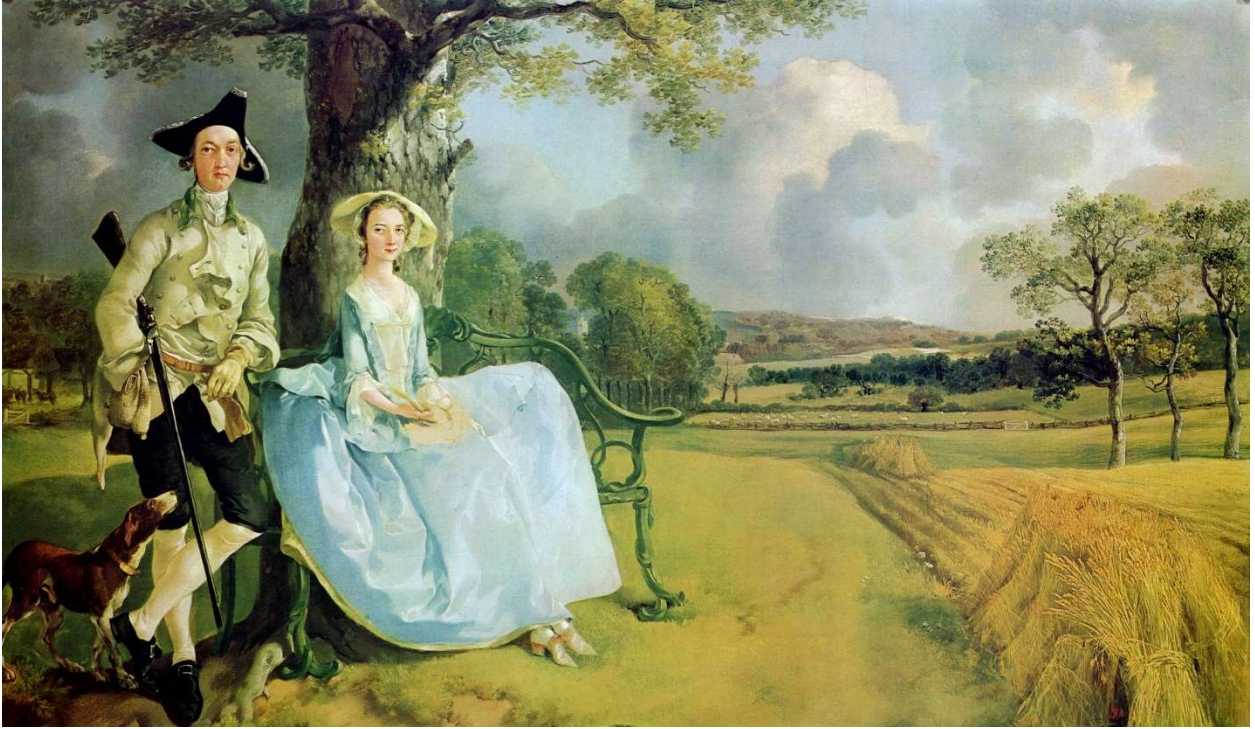
## Power and aesthetics

The power to decide what entities count as humans, and as persons, is a critical element to the foundation of modern states. How does power operate in its most invisible form, without overt coercion or violence? Assuming an idealist stance, the hegemony of political definitions of personhood is as real as soil and water and carbon dioxide. Object-oriented ontology (OOO) permits speech acts to become objects with agency. Thus, the power structure of global society is also a complex system actor, able to act independently against human willpower. From this conception of hegemony, it follows that the cultural politics of a nation can have meaningful impacts on the material reality of climate change. However, it leaves many unresolved questions: to what extent is hegemonic power amenable to change? How does hegemonic power operate? If it operates through national political culture, to what extent do those interrelations affect the outcome of climate policy debates? An in-depth analysis of questions may be beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it presents intriguing possibilities for future research. The realm of aesthetics, which contains things such as texts and visual art, can be assessed through the lens of OOO. Aesthetic objects are therefore potential expressions of hegemony that can take on a life of their own.

One example of discourse analysis employed on visual media is John Berger's study, *Ways of Seeing*. Berger believed that western art was an extension of capitalism, especially oil paintings, legitimating the hegemony of European capitalism over the entire world. The example he uses is Gainsborough's "Mr and Mrs Andrews." Berger writes: "They [the Andrews] are not a couple in



Nature as Rousseau imagined nature. They are landowners and their proprietary attitude towards what surrounds them is visible in their stance and their expressions.”<sup>217</sup>



**Figure 3 - Thomas Gainsborough, Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, c. 1750, oil on canvas. National Gallery, London.**

Art more broadly has been described by other political theorists, especially the old Frankfurt School of cultural Marxists, as a tool of capitalist legitimation. Rather than considering the Enlightenment as rooted in the modernist philosophers from England, Scotland, France and Germany,

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<sup>217</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 107.

Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the thread of the Enlightenment could go as far back as archaic Ancient Greece, citing Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>218</sup> They claimed the Enlightenment was, in fact, indistinguishable from myth; the two reinforce each other. Capital dominates culture, and therefore co-opts attempts at cultural subversion through the arts, redirecting them towards reinforcement of capital power. As such, the rise of Nazi Germany is not incompatible with the historical trajectory of Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment dream, that of universal cosmopolitanism, must be 'saved' from misuse of rationality that arises from perverted Enlightenment thought. Otherwise, the system self-destructs through its fascistic drive to conquer both society and nature. As Adorno and Horkheimer asserted in the *Dialectic*, "Civilization is the triumph of society over nature—a triumph which transforms everything into mere nature."<sup>219</sup> It is the removal of consciousness and agency from the entire political system that reverts it into a purely mechanical system of domination. The emotional drive towards intensified democratic liberalism is merely fuel for such a system. Decades before the Anthropocene was given a name by scientists, the cultural Marxists had discussed the philosophical/world-historical implication of the interlinking of "nature" and the global human civilization:

The human species is not, as has been asserted, a freak event in natural history, an incidental and abnormal formation produced by the hypertrophy of the cerebral organ. The assertion is true only of reason in certain individuals, or perhaps even of a few countries over short periods.

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<sup>218</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 35–62.

<sup>219</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 153.

The cerebral organ, human intelligence, is firmly established enough to constitute a regular epoch of the Earth's history. In this epoch, the human species including its machines, chemicals, and organizational powers—for why should they not be seen as a part of it as teeth are a part of the bear, since they serve the same purpose and merely function better?—is the last word in adaptation. Humans have not only overtaken their immediate predecessors but have eradicated them more thoroughly than almost any other recent species, not excluding the carnivorous saurians ... A philosophical interpretation of world history would have to show how, despite all the detours and resistances, the systematic domination over nature has been asserted more and more decisively and has integrated all internal human characteristics. Economic, political, and cultural forms would have to be derived from this position.<sup>220</sup>

This was remarkably prescient. Here, Adorno and Horkheimer presaged contemporary thinking on OOO, and hinted at the conception of a world-political system of human beings inextricably bound up in the natural world. In other words, it could be an early description of the nascent Anthropocene, and the climate change which accompanies it.

One feature of fascism is the veneration of an origin myth. This type of myth is called “palinogenesis,” which originates in an imagined and glorious past.<sup>221</sup> An example of a prototypical expression of a palingenetic past would be “when America used to be great.” Thus, the invoking for America to become “great again,” has a fascist seed that invokes the mythical past, as a call to arms against the enemies of the nation. This is the second piece of connective tissue, other than

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<sup>220</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, 184–85.

<sup>221</sup> Roger Griffin, “Modernity, Modernism, and Fascism. A ‘Mazeway Resynthesis,’” *Modernism/Modernity* 15, no. 1 (2008): 9–24, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2008.0011>.

the exercise of arbitrary authority and violence, which permits the transition of settler-colonial styles of conservatism into fascism.

The expression of this veneration of the palingenetic myth is apparent from the visual art of the landscape. In addition to laying claim to the private ownership of nature, landscape painting further serves the purpose of illustrating the idea of nature. This tradition of art is relatively new in world history and reached its maturity in the era of European oil paintings.<sup>222</sup> The aesthetic of the frontier, the backwoods, and the wilderness man who dominates nature through his skill and tenacity, is a long-standing group of visual imaginaries in settler colonies. This is of course not unique to right-wing political ideologies. Prior to the invention of modern political ideologies, landscapes were uncritically thought to be apolitical and decorative. In addition to the elegant writings of early environmentalists, such as Henry David Thoreau or Aldo Leopold, the new art of the photograph also fuelled the myth of the untouched wilderness. In the US, Ansel Adams, one of the great photographers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was famed for his depictions of the Yosemite National Park. The most notable feature of his work, apart from his technical skill and showcasing of the park's 'natural' splendour, is the nearly total absence of human beings. Indeed, the process

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<sup>222</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

left unsaid in the photographs was the process of virtual ethnic cleansing, whereby the indigenous inhabitants must be removed to preserve John Muir's "uninhabited wilderness."<sup>223</sup>

In addition, the work of the Group of Seven presented this uninhabited wilderness in many of their paintings of the Canadian landscape. This group, whose original membership included Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley, created some of the most iconic images of the Canadian landscape in the national consciousness. Like the American landscape painter and the American landscape photographer, Canadian artists also presented the image of the land without its people, serving to reinforce settler colonialism.<sup>224</sup> In presenting these images, the Group of Seven painters engaged in the process of "pure channelling of local nature."<sup>225</sup> Critical scholars in other fields have also noted the connection between Canadian landscape painting and the settler-colonial impulse towards the process of the 'elimination of the native' as described by Patrick Wolfe. "The [Group of] Seven

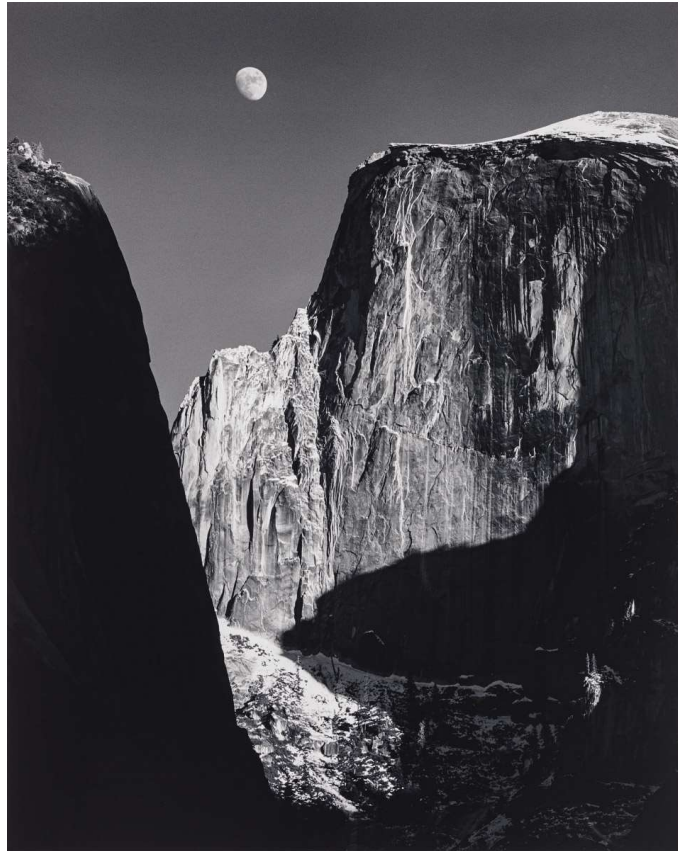
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<sup>223</sup> Isaac Kantor, "Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks," *Public Land and Resources Law Review* 28 (2007): 41–64.

<sup>224</sup> Lize van Robbroeck and Damian Skinner, "Landscape and Settler Nationalism in the 'White Dominions,'" in *Archiving Settler Colonialism: Culture, Space and Race*, ed. Yu-ting Huang and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351142045>.

<sup>225</sup> Robbroeck and Skinner.

participate in a distinctly North American mode of valorizing forgetting” the indigenous inhabitants of the land they painted.<sup>226</sup> Territorial scholar at the University of Cambridge, Tiffany Kaewen Dang, noted that “As [an artistic] discipline, landscape not only reflects social and political power relations as a symbolic aesthetic medium; it is itself an instrument and agent of power.”<sup>227</sup>



**Figure 4 - Ansel Adams. Moon and Half Dome, 1960, silver on gelatin print. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.**

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<sup>226</sup> Jacob Gallagher-Ross, “Twilight of the Idols,” *Theater* 50, no. 3 (November 1, 2020):30, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01610775-8651179>.

<sup>227</sup> Tiffany Kaewen Dang, “Decolonizing Landscape,” *Landscape Research* 46, no. 7 (October 2021): 1008, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2021.1935820>.

These ‘natural’ landscapes were also a part of the mythology of the national park, which saw the brutal expulsion of indigenous peoples for the purposes of removing ‘poachers’ from game land to preserve it for rich hunters. The myth “virgin wilderness” was replicated in Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, which “[obscured] a history of Native land dispossession.”<sup>228</sup> Even as the national park was gradually transformed from the rich white man’s game parks into a biodiversity conservation areas and tourism destinations, the hidden legacy of settler hegemony remained. Settler colonialism produced the reality of the vacuum, which transformed into the mythologized vacuum. In a way, the legal doctrine/fiction of *terra nullius* in Australia therefore had been expressed in other Anglo-settler colonies, in the aesthetic of the landscape.

As technology of art production developed into more complex tools, photography was also used in a less commercial, more academic way to reinforce settler colonialism. It was a critical element of early anthropology in Australia, which served a twisted double purpose: both to capture the life of Aboriginal people in its ‘pristine’ state; but also, to invent the myth of the pristine Aboriginal that was both timeless and primitive enough to justify their subjugation.<sup>229</sup> The trend of these representations continued to the present day, as can be seen in mundane pieces of art, such

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<sup>228</sup> Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as the Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019), 92–95.

<sup>229</sup> Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2018); Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*.

as car advertisements in glossy magazines. Notably, the visual language of the settler colony is seen in North American ads for automobiles (especially SUVs and pickup trucks) but not in European ones.<sup>230</sup> Everyday landscape photos, such as the Microsoft Windows XP operating system's default wallpaper, *Bliss*, is conspicuously absent of humans—and thought to be more generically beautiful because of it.



**Figure 5 - Charles O'Rear. *Bliss*, 1996. Digital scan of a photographic print.**

Today, the conventions of landscape photography very rarely recognize the cause of the emptiness of humans from the land. When humans are elements in those photos, they do not commemorate the expelled indigenous peoples who used to call those places home, but instead are used to advertise products in *Backpacker* magazine, or to fill the accounts of ‘influencers’ on the now-

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<sup>230</sup> Matthew Paterson and Simon Dalby, “Empire’s Ecological Tyreprints,” *Environmental Politics* 15, no. 1 (February 2006): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010500418654>.



Facebook-owned social media platform Instagram. Indeed, I am one such photographer, who aims to produce landscapes of great beauty, but almost invariably devoid of human figures. Otherwise, in social media posts that primarily feature natural beauty, there is sometimes a figure of the photographer themselves, or perhaps a romantic couple presented as subjects, as ‘explorers’ or ‘adventurers’ traipsing across the empty and pristine land. Yet, the emptiness of the landscape remains a myth, and the perception of empty land contradicts the truth of continents as densely settled with indigenous peoples in the past. These images are now so ubiquitous they fade into the background of our lives. It therefore seems to be the case that settler colonialism produced the pristine landscape, and in doing so reinforced the hegemony of the settler. Could it be the palingenesis of the mythical backwoods serves liberal, as well as conservative or fascist ends?

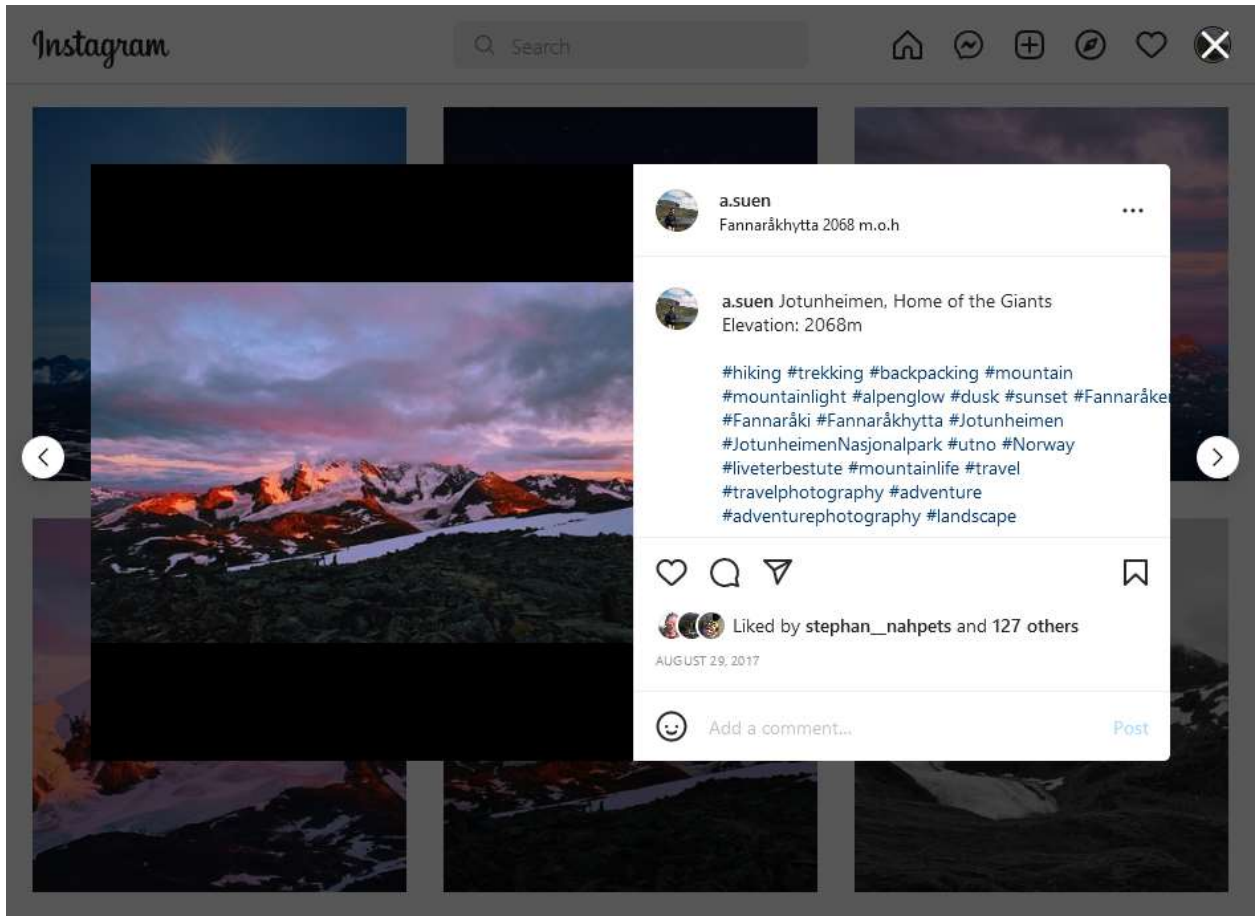


Figure 6 - Alexander Suen. Untitled, 2017, digital photograph. Screenshot of Instagram webpage.

The landscape is one aesthetic aspect of the imposition of settler colonialism, but another is the portrait. The static portrait creates images of hunter-gatherer societies that simultaneously reinforce the ‘noble savage’ trope, while other portraits also propagate the image of the merely violent savage.<sup>231</sup> Another representation of indigenous peoples is created through the transformation

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<sup>231</sup> Robert Sheardy, “The White Woman and the Native Male Body in Vanderlyn’s Death of Jane McCrea,” *The Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 1 (March 1999): 93–100, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1999.00093.x>.

from the mere savage into the noble savage, through the neutralization of indigenous peoples as a major political force. Some of this was accomplished through disease, force of arms, and various methods of subjugation. Another method was rooted in the popular performance arts, such as through exhibits in the World Fairs, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows.<sup>232</sup> While sometimes photography was used by indigenous peoples to assert a 'civilized' identity (for example, in the Cherokee depictions of themselves as fully westernized in dress, architecture, education, and economy) the mythos of noble savage became the dominant stereotype held by the white settler. Along with the discursive turn towards the empty wilderness of *terra nullius*, and the artistic depiction of the landscape fundamentally devoid of human life (and especially human society in settled farming communities), the aesthetic of both portrait and landscape served the political purpose of erasing indigenous people from their actual historical contexts, as well as mitigating their ability to claim property rights to their former lands. The savage, noble or not, is not equivalent to a human person. Therefore, the settler could be free to evict, forcibly relocate, marginalize, and kill their indigenous counterparts. In the final year of Trump's Presidency, this ideology was vividly reflected in his decision to hold an Independence Day event at Mount Rushmore, a symbol of white settler domination over both the landscape and the indigenous inhabitants of the land.<sup>233</sup> It is worth noting that

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<sup>232</sup> Welch, "Savagery on Show: The Popular Visual Representation of Native American Peoples and Their Lifeways at the World's Fairs (1851–1904) and in Buffalo Bill's Wild West (1884–1904)."

<sup>233</sup> Darren R. Reid, *Native American Racism in the Age of Donald Trump* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58718-5>.

the original construction of Mount Rushmore was organized by the Klu Klux Klan supporter, Gutzon Borglum, and occurred over the objections of the Lakota people.<sup>234</sup>

The political culture of the settler colony, then, is inextricably bound up in the movement of capital and the historical trajectory of capitalism. Along with its European progenitors, it is also the site of development for much of modern science which led to the understanding of climate change and its interactions with humanity. We now turn to a survey of these historical movements, and how the domination of indigenous peoples has led up to the quagmire of climate inaction near the present day.

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<sup>234</sup> Amy McKeever, “The Heartbreaking, Controversial History of Mount Rushmore,” National Geographic, October 28, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/the-strange-and-controversial-history-of-mount-rushmore>.

## 5. THE HISTORY OF ANGLO-SETTLER COLONIES

My argument relies on establishing the uniqueness of the historical origins of the national case studies: Australia, English Canada, and the United States.<sup>235</sup> Specifically, the three countries are unique in being white, predominantly-Protestant, English-speaking colonies of Great Britain, which *supplanted its native populations* in overall percentage of the population and domination of political leadership.<sup>236</sup> This excludes, for example, South Africa and India. Establishing the historical processes of Australia, Canada, and the United States, is critical for understanding how their national political cultures germinated and evolved, and consequently formed the basis for their approaches to climate policy and diplomacy. For this dissertation, periodization in the core analysis extends from c. 1600 CE to the year 2016 in general, with some discussion of the early colonization period dating back to the voyages of Columbus in 1492.

European colonization was first motivated by the desire to establish oceanic trade routes to Asia and enabled by the newly discovered understanding of the South Asian monsoon, trade winds,

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<sup>235</sup> I will refer to ‘English Canada’ as simply ‘Canada’ henceforth, for the sake of brevity. I ask that French and indigenous Canadian readers forgive me for this indiscretion. Furthermore, I will be referring to the ‘United States’ as ‘America’ at times, also for the sake of brevity.

<sup>236</sup> New Zealand is largely excluded from the study due to limitations in scope. I decided to use the three wealthiest, most populous and diplomatically prominent countries in the international system. The three countries also all have higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita than New Zealand.

and the development of the advanced long-range sailing ship.<sup>237</sup> According to a plethora of popular and academic writers, disease played a crucial role in supporting European colonization efforts in temperate climates. War, deprivation, and novel diseases decimated the American continents, ultimately extinguishing 90% of native lives.<sup>238</sup> The latest archeological studies, combined with state-of-the-art paleoclimatology, found that 56 million indigenous people in North and South America had been killed between 1492 and 1600.<sup>239</sup> This may have killed up to 90% of the entire human population from 1493 to 1650, if the larger estimate of the precontact population is correct.<sup>240</sup> This “Great Dying” was so catastrophic, that it contributed to global climate change by reforesting North and South America. It is thought that this calamity contributed to the ‘Little Ice Age’ of the Early Modern Period. In the contemporary public discourse on this event, the most (in-)famous of popular nonfiction books was *Guns, Germs and Steel*, written by American geog-

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<sup>237</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 105–31.

<sup>238</sup> Alexander Koch et al., “Earth System Impacts of the European Arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (March 2019): 13–36, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2018.12.004>.

<sup>239</sup> Koch et al.

<sup>240</sup> Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, 158.

rapher Jared Diamond. Diamond popularized the argument that European technological superiority, combined with their lethality of their epidemics, made the elimination of native peoples a foregone conclusion.<sup>241</sup>

However, virgin soil epidemics were not unique to European colonization of the New World. Diseases played critical roles in world history in other contexts, for example, when the Crusaders failed to expand their kingdoms into the Middle East. Crosby argued that malaria was probably the culprit that inhibited crusader imperialism.<sup>242</sup> What is more, the argument that European settlers had overwhelmingly superior leadership or technology has been criticized from various angles. While firearms and steel armour were indeed formidable military technologies, Spanish conquistadors found themselves wearing the hardened cotton armour of their Aztec enemies. The Aztec armour was better-suited for fighting in subtropical heat, and like the similar European gambesons, offered good protection even against steel swords.<sup>243</sup> In South America, the Inca possessed a sophisticated state-like empire, a courier service, 22,500 kilometers of paved roads, a standing army,

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<sup>241</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

<sup>242</sup> Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 61–67.

<sup>243</sup> Gwynne F. T. Jones, “The Organization of Land Warfare in Europe at the Time of Columbus, and a Brief Comparison with Aztec Warfare,” *Parergon* 12, no. 2 (1995): 61–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.1995.0106>.

a capital city with hundreds of warehouses, and a population between 50,000 and 100,000.<sup>244</sup> The Inca could also build oceangoing ships that rivalled the Spanish caravel in size and capacity, amongst other impressive technologies.<sup>245</sup> By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Cherokee Nation had their own printing press and newspaper, invented a syllabary for a written version of their language, and implemented European-style government (though these ‘advanced’ signs of ‘civilization’ were ultimately unable to prevent their decimation in the Trail of Tears).<sup>246</sup> Pre-colonization Australia also saw Aboriginal peoples who lived in settled, agricultural communities, contrary to their popular image as hunter-gatherers.<sup>247</sup>

Another missing piece from Diamond’s work is the role that was played not just by disease, but other kinds of biological exchange. By stitching two supercontinents together, in what has been called the “Columbian exchange” or the “New Pangaea,” one of the possible earliest periods of the Anthropocene began.<sup>248</sup> The flora and fauna carried by European ships were transferred across

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<sup>244</sup> Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: Conquest and Resistance in the Americas* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2015), 72.

<sup>245</sup> Wright, *What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order*, 29–30.

<sup>246</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007).

<sup>247</sup> Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*.

<sup>248</sup> Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, 164.



the Atlantic Ocean, triggering a serious decline in biodiversity. It was a shift of “geologic importance.”<sup>249</sup> But these changes to biodiversity were not just a matter of natural selection taking shape after the initial anthropogenic transfer of life. European settlers acted as terraformers, creating landscapes and ecosystems that promoted certain plants and animals above others.<sup>250</sup> Thus the proliferation of invasive species that were especially useful to settlers, was in part due to the action of settlement itself, and not entirely because of evolutionary competitive advantage. Perhaps the only argument of Diamond’s which is incontrovertible is that the Europeans benefitted from useful domesticated animals compared to the species available in the Americas.<sup>251</sup>

If Diamond’s claims are insufficient, then what explains the conquest of the New World, if not the overwhelming advantages of technology and disease? One possible explanation is that European colonization was primarily a product of a set of political decisions, including the launching of wars of ethnic cleansing, and an ideological fixation on a broader imperialist project. This project was supported by a set of worldviews and politico-religious frameworks which J. M. Blaut calls “geographical diffusionism,” wherein European peoples were considered inherently superior to non-Europeans, seeking to explain away a contemporary situation by cutting off all historical

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<sup>249</sup> Lewis and Maslin, 165.

<sup>250</sup> Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*.

<sup>251</sup> Andrew Sherratt, “The Secondary Exploitation of Animals in the Old World,” *World Archaeology* 15, no. 1 (June 15, 1983): 90–104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.1983.9979887>.

context from before Europe was ascendant.<sup>252</sup> The spread of disease is generally thought to be unintentional, and the ‘terraforming’ consequences of the Columbian exchange was almost certainly not grasped by European settlers. However, the project of settlement demanded marginalization, elimination, and disruption of indigenous peoples, and which then necessitated the creation of a national myth that wiped out the memory of the genocidal crime. Firstly, settlers found that it was necessary to physically reduce the numbers of indigenous peoples through warfare and policies of deprivation. Secondly, the suppression of the memory of native peoples as sedentary, agricultural people who could contend with European colonists as equals, or at least possessing some measure of political agency, served to eliminate any sense of moral responsibility for what became a genocide. Thus, the physical domination and the ideological hegemony of the settler-colonial relationship with the indigenous peoples are a political project, and not merely coincidence of a biogeographically predetermined outcome. For the countries I will be analyzing for this dissertation, histories of native subjugation will be summarized in this chapter.

In the early phase of the colonization of the American continents, the decimation of native populations resulted in a critical labour shortage in the lucrative cash crops of sugar and cotton. The solution was brutal: the European empires decided to import slave labour from the Atlantic

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<sup>252</sup> J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1993).

slave trade to make up for the gap.<sup>253</sup> The Americas and Australia also served as an important release valve for European populations, allowing for religious minorities, political dissidents, and common criminals to be sent across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and away from domestic troubles.<sup>254</sup> Colonies could also serve not just as sites of extraction, but to enforce “captive markets” that would ensure a steady rate of consumption of manufactured goods from the mother country.<sup>255</sup> While at first the colonies were a net drain on their homelands’ economies, eventually the colonies came to be highly profitable and major sources of strategically and economically important materiel. Timber from Canada was used to fuel the might of the Royal Navy, while cash crops farmed by slaves in the Thirteen Colonies contributed towards the British treasury. The scientific revolution eventually bore fruit in the invention of germ theory, and advancements in sanitation and medicine. These discoveries permitted Europeans to colonize regions heretofore closed off to their expansion, although ultimately, they would settle in large numbers primarily in the more temperate latitudes of the New World.

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<sup>253</sup> Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, 161.

<sup>254</sup> James Davie Butler, “British Convicts Shipped to American Colonies,” *The American Historical Review* 2, no. 1 (October 1896): 12, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1833611>; Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, “Convict Transportation from Britain and Ireland 1615-1870,” *History Compass* 8, no. 11 (November 2010): 1221–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00722.x>.

<sup>255</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary*, 45.

According to Louis Hartz, these European colonies were “fragments” of their “mother countries.” The first settlers arrived bearing an aspect of their original cultures, but they changed and developed unique hybrids that made them clearly distinguishable from their homelands.<sup>256</sup> This process involved the settlement and hybridization with local cultures, developing into novel national arrangements with distinct political cultures. According to Hartz, the colonization of settler colonies like the US is not purely a transplant of the original culture: “And yet if colonialism is gone ... if that [new] situation does not create again the sense of being half in and half out of a European country ... it surely creates a new type of diversity.”<sup>257</sup> This hybridization was not just a process of equals sharing cultural features, but it was also process of domination and coercion, including outright warfare and what we might now call ethnic cleansing. To understand the shape of settler-colonial histories, we now turn to the discussion of three of these fragments.

## **United States**

In the process of splitting of from Britain, the Anglo-settler colony became a “fragment” of the mother country, inheriting features from both its original and its new social environments.<sup>258</sup> One

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<sup>256</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*, ed. Louis Hartz (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964).

<sup>257</sup> Hartz, 64.

<sup>258</sup> Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*.

part of this hybridization can be seen in the political structure of the United States, which is said to have adopted elements from indigenous North Americans, and particularly the Iroquois Confederacy.<sup>259</sup> Here, we will focus on the imperial process as it played out in the historiography of the United States. It is increasingly accepted that the genocide and forced migration of indigenous peoples paved the way for Manifest Destiny, and the settlement of white peoples between the Pacific and Atlantic.<sup>260</sup> But this was not a foregone conclusion. Instead, it was the product of a specific political philosophy underpinning a set of actions taken by settlers, squatters, and the nascent militarized state. At the time of the Seven Years' War (also known as the 'French and Indian War' in the US, 1756–1763), the Wappinger Indians controlled 205,000 acres in New York, converted to Christianity and aided in the British invasion of French Canada. However, when the war ended, the Wappinger returned home only to find that their villages had taken over by white landlord speculators.<sup>261</sup> As conflict broke out between the settlers and the Wappinger, the latter appealed to London to sanction the landlords, but failed to secure cooperation from local

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<sup>259</sup> Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>260</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>; Andrew Woolford, "Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 4, no. 1 (April 2009): 81–97, <https://doi.org/10.3138/gsp.4.1.81>; Wright, *What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order*.

<sup>261</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750—1804* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 68.

authorities.<sup>262</sup> Despite these setbacks, indigenous peoples in America continued to resist through various means, including violent resistance. But they continued to find the British authorities to be intransigent allies. The British made half-hearted attempts to enforce the boundaries laid out by the 1763 Royal Proclamation, without success. Unable or unwilling to muster enough troops to handle the unruly settlers, “British officers hoped that the Indians would take bloody revenge on intruders and murderers.”<sup>263</sup> The contradictory relations between the various indigenous tribes, and their mounting contention with the increasingly autonomous American colonists, resulted in ever-changing loyalties and shifting factionalism as they tried to secure their independence against the encroaching settlers. However, the end of the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) also saw the lifting of British protection for good, which opened the floodgates to a series of increasingly violent land grabs by the forces of the nascent United States. The brutal war between the mother country and the colonists resulted in an economic depression that destroyed as much as 30% of GDP, greater losses than the country faced a century and a half later in the Great Depression.<sup>264</sup> In a mainly agrarian society, a potential solution to the economic crisis would be conquering lands then still under the control of indigenous peoples. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous resistance by warfare became an increasingly difficult prospect.

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<sup>262</sup> Taylor, 69.

<sup>263</sup> Taylor, 75.

<sup>264</sup> Taylor, 361.

The creation of three unified states was never a foregone conclusion, and some scholars have argued that they were set off by highly contingent events. Historian Alan Taylor takes this view of the founding of the United States and in the Revolutionary War. In the early years of the American Revolution, most revolutionaries did not view themselves as traitors to King George III. In fact, many believed they were fighting on *behalf of* King and Country, merely rebelling against the tyranny of Parliament. The war progressed several years before a major war aim became formal independence and the creation of a new polity. Nor was unity within a single state considered a conscious aim. Indeed, after Independence, the States occasionally skirmished with one another over territorial disputes. The original factions that emerged in wake of Independence, were the Federalists represented by leaders like George Washington, and the Democratic-Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson. It is important to note that these ‘political parties’ were not fully analogous to the Republican Party and the Democratic Party of today’s United States. The post-Independence Federalists were elitist, preferred strong central authority, and wanted to restrict or slow settlement in the West. The Democratic-Republicans, by contrast, were populist, preferred decentralized authority amongst the States, and pushed for westward expansion.<sup>265</sup> Ultimately, the Jeffersonian Republicans became the dominant faction, and settlers spilled over the borders of the Thirteen

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<sup>265</sup> Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750—1804*.

Colonies. This policy was enshrined in the notion of Manifest Destiny, the idea that the entire North American continent was the birthright possession of the US.

Meanwhile, indigenous enemies of the Revolution suffered greatly, with the Chickamaugas (a “dissident faction” of the Cherokee Nation) being the victims of scorched earth tactics.<sup>266</sup> The first written mention of a smallpox epidemic in 1780 decimating the Chickamaugas, appeared as late as 1857 in the memoirs recollecting the experiences of an old man. However, primary documents contemporaneous with the war, describing the razing of the Chickamaugas towns, the burning of their corn fields, and the slaughter of their people and livestock, were commonplace.<sup>267</sup> Clearly, the displacement of indigenous peoples were not wholly driven by epidemics, and violence played a major role in the expansion of American territory.

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the War of 1812, British influence South of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel waned even further. In upstate New York, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (also called the Iroquois) or “the people of the longhouse,” were left unprotected as redcoats abandoned their forts.<sup>268</sup> The Iroquois had fought on both sides but suffered harsh treatment regardless of their

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<sup>266</sup> Paul Kelton, “Remembering Cherokee Mortality During the American Revolution,” in *Beyond Germs: Native Depopulation in North America*, ed. Catherine M. Cameron, Paul Kelton, and Alan C. Swedlund (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 198.

<sup>267</sup> Kelton, “Remembering Cherokee Mortality During the American Revolution.”

<sup>268</sup> Wright, *What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order*, 109.



loyalties. Those who were loyal to the Crown were expelled to Canada, while those loyal to the rebels were subjugated. According to George Washington, Iroquois people were “savage [like the wolf], both being animals of prey though they differ in shape.”<sup>269</sup> A wolf cannot own property, and therefore native title to and land in the US were considered null and void. Once it became clear that their alliance with the British would not be backed by force, American squatters and soldiers poured into their lands.<sup>270</sup>

With British influence receding, the project of Manifest Destiny could begin in earnest. A generation after the end of the Revolutionary War, the so-called Five Civilized Nations became targets. The history of the Cherokee Nation is exemplary for several reasons. Chiefly among them was that it was relatively well-documented, though their experience was far from unique. The subjugation of the Cherokee Nation by the US and the expulsion of the people from their ancestral lands exposed both the practical functioning and the mythmaking artifice underlying *terra nullius*. When indigenous peoples aimed to replicate settler cultures and social structures, and even when they largely succeeded in the transformation of their societies into American-style farms and towns, they were still expelled from the land and their homes were occupied through a coercive and violent process. As late as December 1829, President Andrew Jackson justified the expulsion

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<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Wright, 109.

<sup>270</sup> Wright, 96–97.

of the Cherokee by framing their lifestyle as that of hunter-gatherers rather than settled farmers: “tracts of country on which they have neither dwelt nor made improvements, merely because they have seen them from the mountain or passed them in the chase.”<sup>271</sup> This process was by no means exclusive to the Cherokee. In 1814, Andrew Jackson defeated the Red Stick Creeks and negotiated a surrender treaty forcing them to cede 20 million acres of land in Alabama and Georgia.<sup>272</sup> However, even this unequal treaty was offensive to Jackson, who believed that it was “absurd” to negotiate with natives as equals.<sup>273</sup> Even at this late stage, the combined force of squatter posses, federal troops, and state militias were still insufficient to compel whole native nations to evacuate without bringing force to bear. However, this intolerable situation soon shifted in favour of the white settlers, as Andrew Jackson wrote to President James Monroe in 1817, “circumstances have entirely changed ... the arm of government [is] sufficiently strong to carry [a new policy] into execution.”<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*, 60.

<sup>272</sup> Perdue and Green, 49–50.

<sup>273</sup> Perdue and Green, 50.

<sup>274</sup> Perdue and Green, 50.

In 1820 the Choctaw Nation was compelled to sign a removal treaty, and in 1825 the Creek Nation was forced to sign a treaty which expelled them from Georgia.<sup>275</sup> The main difference between past removals was that the Cherokee Nation was completely surrounded. In the past, Indians could quietly withdraw to the West, or otherwise fought tenaciously until they were defeated on the battlefield. Now, the Cherokee removal would have to be “orchestrated” rather than allowing migrations to occur ‘of their own accord.’<sup>276</sup> All told, about one-quarter of Creek, Choctaw, and Cherokee had been killed by 1838.<sup>277</sup> But the ethnic cleansings continued unabated as the US expanded its territory to the Pacific. In 1857, militia groups in northern California attacked and forcibly expelled various Pomo groups, in what is now known as the Pomo Death March.<sup>278</sup> In 1863-1865, the Diné (Navajo) people were ethnically cleansed from Arizona by the forces of General James Carlton, in the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo, killing 2,000 people.<sup>279</sup> The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and the Treaty of Mendota, both signed in 1851, forced all four Dakota nations to

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<sup>275</sup> Perdue and Green, 57.

<sup>276</sup> Perdue and Green, 66.

<sup>277</sup> Wright, *What Is America? A Short History of the New World Order*, 129.

<sup>278</sup> Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as the Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock*, 46.

<sup>279</sup> Gilio-Whitaker, 45–46; Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019), 102.

a disastrous land cession that left them with a twenty-mile (32 km) strip of land. Desperate conditions led to the brief 37-day US-Dakota War in 1862, which ended with US victory and largest mass execution ordered in US history. Thirty-eight Dakota men were hung under orders from Abraham Lincoln.<sup>280</sup>

The Cherokee Nation went further than the Chickasaw and Choctaw, in westernizing and adopting the social norms of their settler counterparts. It did not matter that the Cherokee were, by the 1820s, living in settler-styled homes, wore settler-styled clothes, had invented a syllabary for a written script in Cherokee language, had produced a newspaper, or even owned slaves. They even attempted to protect their sovereignty using the same legal methods as the settlers, bringing their case, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* 30 U.S. 1 (1831), all the way up to the Supreme Court.<sup>281</sup> Regardless of these efforts, the logic of settler societies was based on domination, extractivism, and colonialism. It scarcely mattered if the land was truly ‘improved’ by the standards of European settlers, or that the indigenous peoples adopted their ways of living. The myth subsumed the reality in almost every case.

The military actions and subsequent presidency of Andrew Jackson, and the uprooting of the Cherokee Nation in the Trail of Tears (amongst many other native dislocations), set the pattern of

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<sup>280</sup> Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, 101–2.

<sup>281</sup> Stephen Breyer, “The Cherokee Indians and the Supreme Court,” *Journal of Supreme Court History* 25, no. 3 (March 17, 2000): 215–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1059-4329.00009>.

settler-indigenous interactions a few decades after Americans achieved independence from the British Empire.<sup>282</sup> Europeans and their settler colonies thus gained two ‘free’ continents worth of resources and *Lebensraum*, fuelling the nascent Industrial Revolution and amplifying their power globally. On the other side of the globe, state-of-the-art British warships assaulted China in the Opium Wars, while American Commodore Perry’s Black Fleet forced Japan open to free trade with Europe.<sup>283</sup> However, the unique feature of Anglo-settler colonies were that they reduced the populations of the colonized land to the point where the white settlers formed the overwhelming majority of the population. This occurred to some extent in South and Central America, but the complex racial caste system implemented by the Spaniards and Portuguese implied significant admixture.<sup>284</sup> The more complex and relatively less unequal basis for the Latin American style of colonization could be seen in the *Leyes de Burgos*, or Laws of Burgos, that were promulgated on 27 December 1512. These laws guaranteed certain rights for the indigenous peoples under Spanish rule, providing a basis for the legitimate personhood.<sup>285</sup> The effects of this law were mixed, and

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<sup>282</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*.

<sup>283</sup> Charles Holcombe, *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilizations to the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 221–25; 241–44.

<sup>284</sup> Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Pluto Press, 2010), <http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/31777>.

<sup>285</sup> Ronald D. Hussey, “Text of the Laws of Burgos (1512-1513) Concerning the Treatment of the Indians,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 12, no. 3 (August 1932): 301, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2506673>.

obviously did not prevent massive loss of indigenous life in the Americas. It also did not prevent the enslavement of millions of indigenous people, according to contemporary chroniclers.<sup>286</sup> Regardless of their actual implementation, the legal framework had existed since the first New World conquests that were theoretically non-genocidal in intent. The social complexity, monumental constructions, and high population densities of the Aztec and Inca Empires made it impossible to deny the ‘civilized’ nature of indigenous peoples in Mexico, Central America, and South America, and therefore may have precluded the implementation of a doctrine similar to *terra nullius*, as it had been in North America and Australia.<sup>287</sup> In addition, intermarriage was, for the most part, legally permitted in Central and South America. The racial caste system was in some ways, more permissible and allowed more personal freedoms than the system that prevailed in the US until after the Civil Rights Era.

By 1846, the political situation in the Cherokee Nation stabilized, but at great cost in lives and immense hardship faced by the Cherokee people. Leaders who negotiated the resettlement were assassinated, and bootleggers and other settler exploiters descended on the population. The Treaty of 1846, signed with President Polk, finally cemented stable territorial borders, provided general

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<sup>286</sup> Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*, 195.

<sup>287</sup> Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2006); Wright, *Stolen Continents: Conquest and Resistance in the Americas*.

amnesty for political crimes and assassinations, and provided compensation for “losses and damages” sustained by the Cherokee during the removal.<sup>288</sup> But the story of the Cherokee did not end despite the forced relocation. Eventually, Cherokee Nation developed an autonomous legal foundation of their own, and new constitution was drafted in 1976 and revised in 2003.<sup>289</sup> Long after the Trail of Tears, the increasing prominence of human rights globally and the Civil Rights era in the US led to the spread of the belief in universal human rights, and not just rights for the wealthy and light-skinned peoples descended from Europe.<sup>290</sup>

In 2010, US President Barack Obama moved to formally apologize to the indigenous peoples of America, but the statement of apology was itself contained inside a vast defense expenditure bill, which included no funding to address any indigenous issue.<sup>291</sup> That same year, the US State Department issued a statement on UNDRIP and reversed its previous vote against it, but it also included a reinforcement of American national domination over indigenous peoples. The State Department declared that “the United States understands to call for a process of meaningful consultation with tribal leaders, but *not necessarily the agreement of those leaders*, [emphasis my

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<sup>288</sup> Perdue and Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears*, 159.

<sup>289</sup> Perdue and Green, 161.

<sup>290</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*.

<sup>291</sup> Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, 244–45.

own] before the actions addressed in those consultations are taken.”<sup>292</sup> A few years later, American commitment to UNDRIP would be tested most prominently in North Dakota over the proposed construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Perhaps the most visible intersection between indigenous politics in the US, climate change, and the world fossil fuel energy system, was at Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota in 2016. A protest movement emerged which tried to block the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was centred on the Oceti Sakowin Camp and the Dakota people.<sup>293</sup> Riot police were used to violently clear the camp, as the sovereignty of the Dakota was subsumed under the right of conquest. Obtaining the agreement of indigenous peoples is evidently not necessary when the important business of laying pipelines was at stake.

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had ravaged the globe and claimed millions of lives. In a cruel but predictable irony, the Cherokee Nation, the Dakota, the Canadian First Nations, and all other indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada were exposed to more risk and suffer critical vulnerabilities in the face of the novel disease.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> US Department of State, “Announcement of U.S. Support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Initiatives to Promote the Government-to-Government Relationship & Improve the Lives of Indigenous Peoples,” December 16, 2010, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/184099.pdf>.

<sup>293</sup> Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*.

<sup>294</sup> Elizabeth Hlavinka, “COVID-19 Further Strains Care Disparities Among Native Americans,” MedPage Today, May 21, 2020, <https://www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/covid19/86633>; Ann M. Seymour, “Canada’s Unequal Health System May Make Remote Indigenous Communities More Vulnerable to the



## Canada

In Canada, the transition between colony and country was more gradual than in the US, but here too the Fathers of Confederation were not vying for the creation of a sovereign state. While its national origin differs substantially from the US in that it did not involve a violent revolt against the rule of the mother country, it was similar in that its ‘founders’ did not believe they were in fact operating with the intention to separate entirely and become a sovereign, independent state.<sup>295</sup> The commonly accepted date of Canada’s creation, 1867, was therefore a post facto justification of national symbolism, in a similar fashion to the date of America’s independence being accepted as 1776. As with the US, Canada’s ‘invention’ was a creature of historically contingent events. Arguably, it was not until the First World War, or even as late as the Second World War, before English Canadians saw themselves as truly citizens of a sovereign state.<sup>296</sup>

In Canada, relations between the settlers and the indigenous people were less overtly violent than in the US or in Australia, but the eventual outcome was remarkably similar: the marginalization of native peoples, the transfer of populations to reservations, and a campaign of what we now

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Coronavirus,” *The Conversation*, April 22, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/canadas-unequal-health-system-may-make-remote-indigenous-communities-more-vulnerable-to-the-coronavirus-134963>.

<sup>295</sup> Robert Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2006), 217–20.

<sup>296</sup> Bothwell, 360.

call cultural genocide implemented. Canada also frequently failed to uphold treaty obligations on numerous occasions, with violations stretching until the present day.<sup>297</sup>

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) gave the term “cultural genocide” official recognition in its condemnation of the residential school system in Canada.<sup>298</sup> Popular non-fiction books on Canadian history, published as late as 2006, scarcely mentioned indigenous peoples beyond a few pages. In Robert Bothwell’s otherwise excellent survey of Canadian history, pre-contact indigenous histories take up only twenty-one pages in a nearly 600-page book. The 1990 Oka Crisis is described in a single short paragraph.<sup>299</sup> Beyond the absence of discourse in Canadian nonfiction books, indigenous culture was suppressed in innumerable ways. I will briefly list a few examples here.

Entire cultural practises, like the potlatch ceremony, were outlawed nationwide from 1885 to 1958, and had to be held in secret.<sup>300</sup> The notorious residential schools were still operational as late

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<sup>297</sup> Brandi Morin, “Canada and the First Nations: A History of Broken Promises,” Al Jazeera, March 17, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/3/17/canada-and-the-first-nations-a-history-of-broken-promises>.

<sup>298</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary*, 1.

<sup>299</sup> Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada*, 493.

<sup>300</sup> Alicia Elliott, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* (Toronto, ON: Doubleday Canada, 2019), 26.

as the 1970s, and aimed to extinguish native religions and languages from Canada while traumatizing and impoverishing multiple generations of native students.<sup>301</sup> At the same time, the government authorities aggressively removed indigenous children from their families in the “Sixties Scoop,” transferring them to white foster parents.<sup>302</sup> Other examples of ethnic cleansing abounded, such as the forced resettlement of Inuit to the far reaches of the Arctic, in order to justify Canadian claims to territorial sovereignty in one of the most remote and inhospitable lands on Earth. The Inuit were not informed of their destination before being loaded onto helicopters and forced to permanently relocate thousands of kilometres to the North.<sup>303</sup> The Cold War was also linked to uranium mining, where the Dene people were exposed to radiation poisoning and other pollution throughout the 1950s.<sup>304</sup>

Canadian settler-indigenous conflicts came to a turning point in 1990, when developers in the resort town of Oka attempted to expand their golf courses into Mohawk land. The ensuing Oka

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<sup>301</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary*.

<sup>302</sup> R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 6th ed. (Toronto, ON: Nelson Education, 2008), 422.

<sup>303</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *The High Arctic Relocation: A Report on the 1953-55 Relocation* (Ottawa, ON: Canada Communication Group — Publishing, 1994), [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2016/bcp-pco/Z1-1991-1-41-3-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/bcp-pco/Z1-1991-1-41-3-eng.pdf).

<sup>304</sup> Dean Neu, “Accounting and Accountability Relations: Colonization, Genocide and Canada’s First Nations,” *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 13, no. 3 (August 2000): 268–88, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513570010334126>.

Revolt ended with the deployment of 4,000 soldiers and police officers to suppress a few hundred Mohawk warriors.<sup>305</sup> Despite protests breaking out across the country and offers from the Oka Mohawk to disarm if a joint commission was established, equal negotiations were precluded from possibility. Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the Canadian government, and the Quebec provincial government under the premiership of Robert Bourassa and the Quebec Liberal Party, would not be satisfied with anything less than unconditional surrender.<sup>306</sup> At the end of the 1990s, the final residential school was finally closed, but the true cost of their activities remain poorly understood.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper finally issued a formal apology to indigenous Canadians for the residential schools in 2008, but the unwillingness to sign UNDRIP fuelled native anger.<sup>307</sup> Harper had also commissioned the TRC report, but despite the acknowledgement of wrongdoing, both the Conservative and the subsequent Liberal governments' actions were limited and marred by controversy. Library and Archives Canada fought against disclosure of data to fulfill the terms of the 2008 Settlement Agreement but lost the adjudication on January 20, 2013, signalling the

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<sup>305</sup> Wright, *Stolen Continents: Conquest and Resistance in the Americas*, 349.

<sup>306</sup> Wright, 380.

<sup>307</sup> Heather Exner-Pirot, "Friend or Faux? Trudeau, Indigenous Issues and Canada's Brand," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 24, no. 2 (May 4, 2018): 165–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2018.1461667>.

Canadian governments continued opposition to the process of reconciliation through obstructionism via the courts.<sup>308</sup> Criticisms from media and indigenous groups have marred Trudeau's and the LPC's attempts to portray Canada as a global leader on indigenous rights: "Despite high hopes, and the high expectations the Liberals set for themselves on the Indigenous relations file, two and a half years on there is a sense among many Indigenous Canadians that few concrete achievements have been made."<sup>309</sup> Combined with apparent police recalcitrance to investigate murders and missing persons cases involving native women, widespread structural and day-to-day racism, and the ghettoization of the reservations, the Canadian government has been accused of intentionally pursuing a policy of genocide.<sup>310</sup>

It seems clear that across Canadian history, both before and after Confederation, all these acts were undertaken on indigenous peoples. This fact finally achieved something close to official recognition with the publication of Final Report of TRC in 2015, as previously mentioned. But outrages and unequal treatment continued; indigenous peoples questioned the point of the endless commissions when their grievances remained unaddressed. According to indigenous studies scholars Corntassel and Holder, the "state-centered" investigations and commissions in Canada and

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<sup>308</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary*, 27.

<sup>309</sup> Exner-Pirot, "Friend or Faux? Trudeau, Indigenous Issues and Canada's Brand," 169.

<sup>310</sup> Woolford, "Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Canadian Aboriginal Peoples."

other settler colonies “ultimately failed to hold states fully accountable for past wrongs.”<sup>311</sup> The contention over the issue of reconciliation has been recently inflamed by the discover of thousands of unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools. The first major discovery to achieve prominence in the news occurred in May 2021, when 215 unmarked graves of children were discovered at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School.<sup>312</sup> Based on official records, there were estimated to be 3,201 named and unnamed children reported buried at these sites, but in July 2021 ground-penetrating radar scans have found over 1,500 unmarked graves at just seven sites.<sup>313</sup> School records were intentionally destroyed as part of official policy, so that obtaining a full count of student deaths remains elusive.<sup>314</sup> Results from ground-penetrating radar scans may cause the final tally to dramatically exceed the earlier TRC estimate, casting a yet another dark shadow over the legacy of Canadian colonialism. It may be many more years before the children are fully accounted across the entire national residential school system, and surviving relatives notified.

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<sup>311</sup> Jeff Corntassel and Cindy Holder, “Who’s Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru,” *Human Rights Review* 9, no. 4 (December 10, 2008): 465, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-008-0065-3>.

<sup>312</sup> CBC News, “Remains of 215 Children Found Buried at Former B.C. Residential School, First Nation Says,” CBC News, May 21, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-emlúps-te-secwépemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778>.

<sup>313</sup> Steven Dyer, “‘I’ve Been Very Overwhelmed’: Survivors Gather at Former Residential School Site,” CTV News, July 6, 2021, <https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/i-ve-been-very-overwhelmed-survivors-gather-at-former-residential-school-site-1.5499456>.

<sup>314</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—Volume One: Summary*, 90.

Incidents over the past decade have led to anger over apparent murders of First Nations men and women that had gone uninvestigated, while postings on social media fuelled racist attacks against indigenous people in general. American-influenced ‘self-defence’ movements were made apparent with the killing of Colten Boushie, a young man of the Cree Red Pheasant First Nation. Boushie was killed by a Saskatchewan farmer, Gerald Stanley, on 9 August 2016. Even though Boushie was apparently murdered in cold blood, Stanley was acquitted of all charges in 2018. Comments on Facebook painted a picture of drunken, dangerous ‘Indians,’ who had to be destroyed in the name of self-defence.<sup>315</sup> The death of Boushie at the hands of a white man demonstrated that illegitimate racist violence continues within the eliminationist logic of the settler colony.<sup>316</sup> In Canada there is no jurisdiction with an American style ‘stand your ground law,’ and gun violence in general is eight times less common than in the US, similar ‘self-defence’ rhetoric was employed to justify the killing.<sup>317</sup> But murders and other forms of violence are only one source of risks to indigenous peoples in Canada. Various factors in combination have reduced the average

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<sup>315</sup> Elliott, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*, 54–55.

<sup>316</sup> Neil Nunn, “Toxic Encounters, Settler Logics of Elimination, and the Future of a Continent,” *Antipode* 50, no. 5 (November 2018): 1330–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12403>.

<sup>317</sup> Nurith Aizenman, “Gun Violence Deaths: How The U.S. Compares With The Rest Of The World,” NPR, March 24, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/03/24/980838151/gun-violence-deaths-how-the-u-s-compares-to-the-rest-of-the-world>.

life expectancy of indigenous peoples, being 15 years lower than other Canadians.<sup>318</sup> Meanwhile, some of the indigenous groups in Canada also have clashes with the federal government over pipeline construction, in much like the No DAPL movement in the US.

Since these incidents, indigenous peoples have soured on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, leaving relations between settlers and indigenous people in continued acrimony. The future of indigenous peoples in Canada is also faced with the looming threat of climate change, which among other things, has the potential to cause disproportionate impacts on indigenous health.<sup>319</sup> A 2018 report from the Office of the Auditor-General failed to address the impact climate change would have on indigenous peoples, leaving an apparent gap between government rhetoric and actual policy needs.<sup>320</sup> The overwhelming concern of the Canadian government with the tar sands and the construction of pipelines continues to supplant both climate goals and the sovereignty of indigenous peoples.<sup>321</sup> The recent discovery of thousands of unmarked graves in residential school sites

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<sup>318</sup> The Canadian Press, “Lifespan of Indigenous People 15 Years Shorter than That of Other Canadians, Federal Documents Say,” CBC News, January 13, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/indigenous-people-live-15-years-less-philpott-briefing-1.4500307>.

<sup>319</sup> James D. Ford et al., “Vulnerability of Aboriginal Health Systems in Canada to Climate Change,” *Global Environmental Change* 20, no. 4 (October 2010): 668–80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.05.003>.

<sup>320</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, “Perspectives on Climate Change Action in Canada—A Collaborative Report from Auditors General—March 2018.”

<sup>321</sup> Angela V. Carter, “Petro-Capitalism and the Tar Sands,” in *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for Environmental Justice*, ed. Toban Black et al. (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2014), 23–35; Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Assembling Consent in Alberta: Hegemony and the Tar Sands,” in *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for Environmental Justice*, ed. Toban Black et al. (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2014).



are also highly suggestive of the gulf that remains between the stated goals of reconciliation and actual outcomes.

## **Australia**

Of the three settler colonies examined here, Australia saw the most astonishingly complete destruction of their indigenous peoples in the shortest span of time. A population decline of 80% in 20 years occurred in the territory that became the state of Victoria, and other areas saw even more calamitous population declines of 90% over only 10 years.<sup>322</sup> In Tasmania, a near-total annihilation of indigenous lives occurred on the island in a stunning genocide. Up to 99.34% of the indigenous inhabitants disappeared in less than half a century as victims of local death squads and forced starvation. British colonial authorities failed to intervene.<sup>323</sup>

Amidst this genocide, a paligenetic myth was developed to support the ideological evaporation of aboriginal societies and ideological transformation of agricultural peoples into noble savages. According to Patrick Wolfe, the field of anthropology itself originated in a kind of negation of the identity of the Australian aborigine as an independent culture with its own cultural autonomy. Some early pioneers of anthropology invented the concept of “nescience” to explain the lack

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<sup>322</sup> Tony Barta, “‘They Appear Actually to Vanish from the Face of the Earth.’ Aborigines and the European Project in Australia Felix,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 4 (December 6, 2008): 519–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520802447768>.

<sup>323</sup> Benjamin Madley, “From Terror to Genocide: Britain’s Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia’s History Wars,” *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 21, 2008): 77–106, <https://doi.org/10.1086/522350>.

of aboriginal concern for establishing fatherhood and patrilineal inheritance. This concept had the effect of creating an assumption of extreme naivety of the 'primitive' aborigine, who were painted as so deeply ignorant that they did not understand that children were produced via sexual intercourse. The concept of nescience thus served to place the white settler above the aboriginal, in hierarchical fashion. It would be the role of the white settler to *educate* the Aborigine. As such, the process of white colonists 'civilizing' such primitive peoples fed into the idea of 'White Man's Burden':

What the colonial nation-state nostalgizes [*sic.*] ... is *not*, of course, the precolonial indigene as this subject 'really was' - that would only conflict with the business of subjugating empirical natives. It is, rather, an imaginary precolonial subject who is no more than a that the colonizer entertains about himself, in which the colonized are discursively recruited to fulfil the colonizer's own ancestral wishes. ... Colonialism does not appropriate a historical indigeneity; it replaces it with a conveniently mythical one of its own construction<sup>324</sup>

There was also a paradox in the process of ethnography itself. The anthropologist would enter aboriginal society and produce the first iconic photographs of humanity in a presumed pristine, uncivilized state. But by the process of exposing the researcher to aboriginal society, he had already changed the object of his supposedly neutral and objective observation. Furthermore, the early days of anthropology were also imbued with a certain blindness towards the possibility that the peoples and cultures being observed *had already been* altered by the time an anthropologist

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<sup>324</sup> Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, 208.

had arrived to conduct his ethnography. Diseases and invasive animal species spread by white settlers would invariably infect populations and alter the landscape, far in advance of the presence of anthropologists arriving on the scene.<sup>325</sup>

Prior to the invention of anthropology and the arrival of its researchers, the first settlers to Australia were confronted with clear evidence of settled indigenous peoples with permanent houses and forms of agriculture, game farming, and aquaculture. But the arrival of the white settlers along with their cattle and sheep destroyed the land, washed away the light soil, and caused erosion that made aboriginal farming methods difficult or impossible. Along with outright armed conflict, the herds of livestock trampled the land into a permanently eroded state. In short order, the prior landscape was wiped out, and the white Australians rapidly developed a mythology of a primitive, pre-agricultural aboriginal. This paved the way of the *terra nullius* myth being so commonly accepted, that archeological evidence of settled agriculture was disregarded as “of unknown use” in museum labels.<sup>326</sup> Stone artifacts that had telltale markings of threshing grain, were instead thought to be used merely for “penis worship.”<sup>327</sup> With the prevalence of these assumptions, the

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<sup>325</sup> Wolfe, 9–42.

<sup>326</sup> Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*, 38.

<sup>327</sup> Pascoe, 36.

true complexity and nature of pre-contact Aboriginal society became obscured by a cloud of settlers' (usually derogatory) assumptions and stereotypes. Even in the supposedly objective analysis provided by anthropologists both past and present, are unable to gaze past the other end of the fog. Only in very recent academic literature have claims of agricultural Aborigines been taken seriously.

The contact between Australian aborigine and white settler anthropologist was presaged by the mythmaking of the other nations examined in this study. The assumption of primitive, 'uncivilized' peoples was used to justify the unjustifiable. Ethnic cleansing, forced resettlement, and other methods of cultural genocide, erased the memory of indigenous peoples as settled and agricultural. The experiences of the colonized indigenous peoples could be incorporated into policy responses towards the now all-encompassing threat of climate change, but they continue to remain obscurities hidden in academic circles.<sup>328</sup> Indeed, what is considered 'common knowledge' even amongst academic historians have been shown to be mythmaking in service of indigenous erasure. The clearest example of this is the popular *and* academic perception of Batman's Treaty in Australia. The popular perception, amongst even many experts in Australian history, is that Batman's Treaty was an example of a small group of malcontents exploiting the naivety of the Kulin people, with the

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<sup>328</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 206–15.

British Crown playing the role of a noble monarchy nullifying the unfair treaty. However, the truth was likely far more nuanced. There exists ample evidence that the Kulin had understood the treaty that Batman's party had offered and exercised political agency in agreeing to sign over rights to *access* their land, without ceding ownership. It was in fact the British Crown that decided enforce *terra nullius* and completely subsume the land rights of the Kulin and all other aboriginal groups.<sup>329</sup>

In the contemporary cultural milieu of the frontier settler colonies, indigenous people are still considered almost entirely composed of hunter-gatherers, hunter-fishers, and other kinds of low-complexity nomadic societies. As in Canada, Australian Aborigines were also subjected to a system of residential schools that perpetuated a cultural genocide.<sup>330</sup> Their unwritten histories have been largely forgotten, as good history done in the academic setting can only rely on written primary sources. This is especially evident in the Australian case, but the erasure of a (pre-)historic past of complex chiefdoms is still subsumed under prevailing hegemonic assumptions of what counts as indigeneity. The otherwise superb *New Atlas of World History*, by John Haywood, is one example. The *Atlas* provides a series of world maps dating from the first emergence of our species to the year 2010. Among other features, it includes a counter of the world's five largest cities of the year represented in each map, and a sliding indicator along a line graph showing the global

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<sup>329</sup> Robert Kenny, "Tricks or Treats?," *History Australia* 5, no. 2 (January 18, 2008): 38.1-38.14, <https://doi.org/10.2104/ha080038>.

<sup>330</sup> Rosemary Norman-Hill, "Australia's Native Residential Schools," in *Residential Schools and Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Stephen James Minton (London: Routledge, 2019), 66-94, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429463044-4>.

human population. Until the maps reach the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, different societies are colour-coded by social complexity: “hunter-gatherers,” “settled farming cultures,” “pastoral nomads,” “complex farming societies/chiefdoms,” “urbanized societies/kingdoms,” and “empires.”<sup>331</sup> However, the map of 1812 still codes the “Australian aborigines” as “hunter-gatherers,” despite the evidence for settled agriculture and aquaculture that perhaps goes back tens of thousands of years.<sup>332</sup> From this, it seems evident that the settler-colonial features of Australian national origin created a durable and lasting mythology, in which Aborigines were marginalized in politics, and knowledge of their precontact life were banished from the pages of history. Even now, archeology struggles to grasp the native peoples of Australia in their true context.

What is clear from the histories and recent events of the US, Canada, and Australia, is that the white settler colonies of the British Empire had important similarities in their national origin, and parallels in their continuing relationship with indigenous peoples to the present day. This colonial relationship has been characterized by physical genocides at first, and cultural genocides closer to the present day. In all three countries, a system of abusive boarding schools which led to severe trauma to indigenous peoples, resulting in long-lasting health, economic, and social problems that

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<sup>331</sup> John Haywood, *The New Atlas of World History: Global Events at a Glance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>332</sup> Haywood, 144–45.

continue to the present day.<sup>333</sup> This system of oppression directed at indigenous peoples also served to make the indigenous past invisible to the white settlers. Though the myths of *terra nullius*, the ‘savage,’ and the ‘noble savage’ were contradictory, they served approximately the same social function in white settler society. This function was to eliminate any claims indigenous people had to their lands, and instead create the national founding myths of a settler birthright to land that became thought of as either empty, or only sparsely populated by unworthy people. These national mythologies may have helped produce a political culture which, I argue, became inimical to the mitigation of climate change centuries later.

With historical summaries of the three settler colonies now completed, we now turn to an overview of climate change skepticism as political movement and policy.

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<sup>333</sup> Stephen James Minton, ed., *Residential Schools and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429463044>.

## 6. CLIMATE CHANGE SKEPTICISM

In addition to research from historians and political scientists, there are insights from many of the other social sciences that are relevant to this dissertation. Generally, the works examined here are divided into three overlapping fields: scientific communications to the broader academic community and to the lay public; the sociology of climate change denial, and the social psychology of climate change denial.

In books on the politics of climate change, skepticism of climate science is often mentioned in a single line dismissing it as a relic of a less enlightened, bygone era. It seems indisputable that in high level diplomatic meetings, outright denial of greenhouse gas physics, or the broad scientific consensus that human activity is the main driver for contemporary climate change, is entirely absent. However, the presence of such discourse is never very far away from even the top-level diplomatic discussions. This kind of discourse has been called “scientific reticence” by the “grandfather of global warming,” former NASA scientist James Hansen.<sup>334</sup> When the IPCC’s Summary Reports are edited, diplomats go through every line to ensure that anything that could resemble an alarmist conclusion would not be included.<sup>335</sup> This pattern has been reflected in media reporting

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<sup>334</sup> James E. Hansen, “Scientific Reticence and Sea Level Rise,” *Environmental Research Letters* 2, no. 2 (April 2007): 024002, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/2/2/024002>.

<sup>335</sup> Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines*, 90–91.



on climate change during the critical decades between Hansen’s 1988 testimony and the 2015 Paris Agreement. Factual evidence of worse-than-expected outcomes were underreported by a factor of twenty.<sup>336</sup> According to climate scientists themselves, the process of science naturally tends towards conservative projections. Consequently, the models used by the IPCC usually excluded uncertain (and therefore usually ‘erred-on-the-side-of-caution’) evidence, which resulted in actual observed global warming being worse than anticipated.<sup>337</sup> Nonetheless, the overall conclusion of the climate science community, that human activity was responsible for climate change, achieved a level of consensus that was as certain as cigarettes causing various cancers, or close to that of scientific laws like gravity. Following Kuhn’s model of scientific revolutions, the establishment of consensus is an important part of creating the widely-accepted truth of anthropogenic climate change in scientific research.<sup>338</sup> Repeated surveys revealed that the percentage of climate scientists in agreement with the anthropogenic cause of modern climate change were between 95 and 99%.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Freudenburg and Muselli, “Global Warming Estimates, Media Expectations, and the Asymmetry of Scientific Challenge.”

<sup>337</sup> Rahmstorf et al., “Recent Climate Observations Compared to Projections”; Rahmstorf, Foster, and Cazenave, “Comparing Climate Projections to Observations up to 2011.”

<sup>338</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

<sup>339</sup> Naomi Oreskes, “Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change,” *Science* 306, no. 5702 (December 3, 2004): 1686, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1103618>; Peter T. Doran and Maggie Kendall Zimmerman, “Examining the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change,” *Eos, Transactions American Geophysical Union* 90, no. 3 (2009): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2009EO030002>; Cook et al., “Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature.”

Establishing consensus was an important part of translating the attribution of climate change to human activity to public understanding.<sup>340</sup> Yet there was no country with available survey data which approached this level of agreement in wider public opinion. This was true even of the most apparently progressive countries on environmental policy, including Norway and Sweden.<sup>341</sup> What accounts for these discrepancies?

Some scholars argued that it was the responsibility of the scientists to effectively communicate their findings to the public.<sup>342</sup> Others claimed a relationship between the immense influence that the fossil fuel industry had on shaping the public discourse on climate change.<sup>343</sup> Political scientists and ethicists have also found that the problem climate change poses is so stretched in time, space, and culpability, that it has extended beyond the scope of normal policy practises and the abilities of normal policy tools.<sup>344</sup> Along with a multitude of other challenges to humanity, it has extended

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<sup>340</sup> Stephan Lewandowsky, Gilles E. Gignac, and Samuel Vaughan, “The Pivotal Role of Perceived Scientific Consensus in Acceptance of Science,” *Nature Climate Change* 3, no. 4 (October 28, 2012): 399–404, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate1720>.

<sup>341</sup> Ipsos and EDF, “Climate Change and Public Opinions International Observatory—Mobilization, Concern or Indifference: How Do the Citizens of 30 Countries Feel about Climate Change?”

<sup>342</sup> The irony of this belief stands out in stark relief to anyone who primarily conducts research and writes for an academic audience.

<sup>343</sup> Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Turth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*; Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*.

<sup>344</sup> Gardiner, “A Perfect Moral Storm: Climate Change, Intergenerational Ethics and the Problem of Moral Corruption.”

into the realm of “super-wicked problems.”<sup>345</sup> Hyperobjects, after all, are definitionally outside the scope of normal human perceptions of time, space, and understandings of cause-and-effect. Arguably, it would be rather incredible if humanity had reacted to the looming threat in a ‘rational’ way.

Science historians such as Oreskes and Conway have drawn a connection between the various scientific denial movements and American conservative political organizations. Some of these movements were not entirely based on notions of economic conservatism (free markets, limited government intervention, and Lockean sanctity of private property), but also an extension of that ideology as part of the geopolitical superpower competition between the US and the Soviet Union.<sup>346</sup> Despite the demise of the Soviet Union, the fear of a ‘mythical’ communist threat pervades English-language conservative discourse. Social theorists have called this strain of thought “anti-reflexivity.”<sup>347</sup> Others refer to “cornucopianism” and the “rearguard of modernity,” to which “environmental skepticism” is the vanguard against the purported threat of communism.<sup>348</sup> In the study of international environmental politics, Steven Bernstein has called the influence of this

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<sup>345</sup> Levin et al., “Overcoming the Tragedy of Super Wicked Problems: Constraining Our Future Selves to Ameliorate Global Climate Change.”

<sup>346</sup> Oreskes and Conway, “Challenging Knowledge: How Climate Science Became a Victim of the Cold War.”

<sup>347</sup> Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “Anti-Reflexivity: The American Conservative Movement’s Success in Undermining Climate Science and Policy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (May 24, 2010): 100–133, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409356001>.

<sup>348</sup> Peter Jacques, “The Rearguard of Modernity: Environmental Skepticism as a Struggle of Citizenship,” *Global Environmental Politics* 6, no. 1 (2006): 76–101, <https://doi.org/10.1162/glep.2006.6.1.76>.

guiding principle “the compromise of liberal environmentalism.”<sup>349</sup> This compromise shields the standard neoliberal package of market-based solutions from radical solutions that might be more effective. If market solutions are insufficient to significantly ameliorate global warming, yet being the only conceivable policy option, the future of climate change looks bleak indeed. As Fredric Jameson said, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.”<sup>350</sup> Thus, the ‘threat’ of mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts feels like more of a ‘real danger’ than unconstrained climate change impacts resulting from catastrophic global warming.

Perhaps the most directly salient work is Mike Hulme’s 2009 book, *Why We Disagree on Climate Change*. To briefly summarize his argument, Hulme argued that ‘we’ disagree because we have differing worldviews. He appears to imply that the cultural framing of climate change is a stronger factor in disagreement than political or economic interests. He goes on to describe four types of cultural framing. In the racist framing, climate is viewed as a bio-essentialist mode of thinking about different groups of people. Immanuel Kant had once said “The inhabitant of the temperate parts of the world ... has a more beautiful body, works harder, is more jocular, more controlled in his passions, more intelligent than any other race of people in the world. That is why

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<sup>349</sup> Bernstein, *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism*.

<sup>350</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 65–79, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II21/articles/fredric-jameson-future-city>.

at all points in time these peoples have educated the others and controlled them with weapons.”<sup>351</sup>

The latter-day version of this can be seen in studies and popular nonfiction books that traffic in strict geographic determinism, of which Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel* is the most famous example. Diamond has been criticized for “euro-environmentalism,” or geographic determinism based on environmental factors.<sup>352</sup>

The other framings include mastery of nature, of which Hulme provides examples from American, Chinese, and Soviet attempts at outright weather modification.<sup>353</sup> A third is the “wildness of nature,” which is the archetypal or stereotypical view of environmentalists who wish to ‘save the Earth’ by reverting it to its imagined pristine state.<sup>354</sup> Finally, there is the “system (in-)stability” framing, in which premodern climates are assigned a sacrosanct status, and is purportedly the aim of modern scientists and the UN-based multilateral system.<sup>355</sup> Thus, according to Hulme, climate change represents “near infinite plasticity” in how it can be moulded into whatever form

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<sup>351</sup> Immanuel Kant, “On the Different Races of Man,” in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 62–64.

<sup>352</sup> J.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2000), 149–72.

<sup>353</sup> Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>354</sup> Hulme, 25.

<sup>355</sup> Hulme, 25. Parentheses in original.

someone's cultural standpoint requires.<sup>356</sup> Hulme points out that the main differences in the cultural framing of climate change are based on four divergent approaches to risk perception. He describes them each as an interpretation of the risks which nature represents to humanity. These four groups are listed as follows: nature as capricious, or "fatalists"; nature as perverse or tolerant, or "hierarchists"; nature as benign, or "individualists"; and nature as ephemeral, or "egalitarians."<sup>357</sup>

While Hulme's general thesis is convincing, there are many important questions that his work brings up that remain insufficiently addressed. Hulme was a climate scientist by training but appeared to indulge in unfounded skeptical rhetoric. While he would argue that he had no intention for creating a denialist argument against any climate policy, his criticism of all cultural framings that seek to mitigate climate change would appear to be highly useful for environmental skeptics for achieving their political goals. Hulme says that the tremendous inertia makes climate change "insoluble" and "beyond our comprehension," which is similar to what scholars have said about the Anthropocene and its hyperobject nature<sup>358</sup> But Hulme proscribes 'solving' climate change,

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<sup>356</sup> Hulme, 28.

<sup>357</sup> Hulme, 188–90.

<sup>358</sup> Hulme, 333.

and instead consider it as a cultural tool for achieving societal goals. But then he contradicts himself, declaring that the "Presaging Apocalypse," a "myth" that is "counterproductive."<sup>359</sup> Is climate change really a myth used in service of society, if a particular myth is inadequate for ameliorating climate change? Aside from these inconsistencies, a close reading of Hulme's book leads us to multiple points where he uses a dismissive and disparaging tone, repeating common skeptic myths and rhetorical strategies. Climate scientists and economists alike are transmuted into "high priests of Gaia," which conveys a denigration for expertise in general:

Whether one believes [economists] of the World Bank, the efficacy of the traditional nation-state, or the scientific high priests of Gaia, believing that we can 'make a name for ourselves' [through intentional geoengineering or other mitigation methods] by mastering and stabilising global climate requires an inordinate degree of faith."<sup>360</sup>

Hulme concludes that to even attempt to curtail climate change is in fact a "hubristic goal," and that humanity would be better off accepting an unlimited level of harm that comes from unmitigated climate change.<sup>361</sup> The emotional content appears to the reader as derisive and disbelieving: 'I cannot believe that climate change experts and activists are so deluded and full of hubris that they would say the things they say.' To put it another way, the author is apparently disgusted, an emotion that we will see occur repeatedly in skeptical editorials analyzed in the case studies.

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<sup>359</sup> Hulme, 345.

<sup>360</sup> Hulme, 353.

<sup>361</sup> Hulme, 358.

The arguments employed by Hulme feed into climate change skepticism and by downplaying the urgency of the looming crisis. If climate change is more of a cultural artifact than a physical phenomenon, mitigating action is consigned to a secondary role. Instead, it is a kind of postmodern stage where ideological battles are fought. In this, however, Hulme proved to be remarkably insightful. Surveys of climate change opinion and analyses of media representations of climate change have varied along political lines in the United States, Canada, Australia, and beyond.<sup>362</sup> Furthermore, his broad conclusion of the cultural framing of climate change rings true and appears to be backed by studies of climate change skepticism in social psychology.<sup>363</sup>

What, then, can this study offer that has not been already described? For one, the multitude of explanations are complimentary and not at all mutually contradictory. However, there appears to be a gap in the explanations centred on self-interest and economic and infrastructural path depend-

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<sup>362</sup> Anthony Leiserowitz et al., “Climate Change in the American Mind: Americans’ Global Warming Beliefs and Attitudes in November 2013” (New Haven, CT, 2014), <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/Climate-Beliefs-November-2013.pdf>; Young and Dugas, “Representations of Climate Change in Canadian National Print Media: The Banalization of Global Warming”; Bacon, “A Sceptical Climate: Media Coverage of Climate Change in Australia—Part 1: Climate Change Policy”; World Bank, “Public Attitudes towards Climate Change: Findings from a Multi-Country Poll” (Washington, DC, 2009), [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2009/12/09/000333037\\_20091209011700/Rend ered/PDF/520660WP0Publi1und0report101PUBLIC1.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2009/12/09/000333037_20091209011700/Rend ered/PDF/520660WP0Publi1und0report101PUBLIC1.pdf).

<sup>363</sup> Andrew J Hoffman, “Talking Past Each Other? Cultural Framing of Skeptical and Convinced Logics in the Climate Change Debate,” *Organization & Environment* 24, no. 1 (May 16, 2011): 3–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026611404336>.



ency. Firstly, there is a poor correlation with national economic wealth and willingness to implement environmental policies.<sup>364</sup> While some states like Saudi Arabia or Russia seem to be obviously acting in narrow national self-interest on climate change, this does not explain the reason why countries like Canada, the US, and Australia are far outside other OECD countries in their implementation of climate policies. The US had formally withdrawn from the Paris Agreement under the presidency of Donald Trump, though it is now in the process of rejoining. Australia created a national carbon pricing mechanism in 2011, but it was repealed only three years later by the conservative Liberal Party of Australia (LPA).<sup>365</sup> Canada saw foot-dragging from the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and the subsequent Liberal government under Justin Trudeau has failed to alter the course of Canadian emissions and deforestation. The most recent CCPI report at the time of writing places all three countries near the bottom of the rankings on climate change action across 62 total countries, including the poor performance in climate policy.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Rowlands, “Explaining National Climate Change Policies.”

<sup>365</sup> Kate Crowley, “Up and down with Climate Politics 2013-2016: The Repeal of Carbon Pricing in Australia,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 8, no. 3 (May 2017): e458, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.458>.

<sup>366</sup> Burck et al., “Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2020.”

The low performance of Canada can be clearly seen in the example of its approach to its fossil fuel industry and the debates on pipeline construction. Controversy and Provincial infighting surround the development of the oil sands. Despite the poor evidence of pipeline construction providing actual economic benefits to oil-producing Provinces or Canada as a whole, the issue has been polarized into a belief in pipelines as a panacea for all Western Canada's economic woes. In 2020, the withdrawal of a \$20bn CAD oil sands project by Teck Resources Limited was cited by Alberta Premier Jason Kenney as clear evidence of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's obsequiousness towards environmentalists and indigenous peoples, and malign intent towards Western Canadians. Yet a close reading of Teck's notice of withdrawal letter to federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada strongly implies that the regulatory problem is due to the vacillation and instability of the newly elected Conservative Provincial government.<sup>367</sup> Many of Teck's concerns about climate change and the future of regulation coincided with the scientific consensus. No matter: the public opinion and politicians' framing of the issue gives the general impression that the LPC is at fault for the failure of this project. Statements made by Kenney and others imply that tar sands are the geese that lay golden eggs, and that such geese are not mythical but in fact reality.

This media and political framing of the oil sands belies another kind of environmental skepticism that goes beyond throwing fundamental science into doubt. To Kenney and supporters of the

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<sup>367</sup> Don Lindsay, "Letter to Minister Wilkinson," February 23, 2020, <https://www.teck.com/media/20-14-TR.pdf>.

tar sands, the idea that the tar sands *could be* economically unviable, or not worth the potential negative externalities, potential to become a stranded asset, and so on, are *unthinkable*. To declare that the oil sands will bring tens of thousands of jobs, and that the Trudeau and the LPC are against all oil development, is a thought-terminating cliché.<sup>368</sup> It is a kind of denial which impedes thoughtfulness in everyday political discourse, which translates into perverse political outcomes in a democratic system. Sensible or otherwise unremarkable policy suggestions are met with mockery, disgust, and dismissal. Thus, policies which may be necessary to solve a certain problem may be twisted by the discursive turn into the thought-terminating cliché is a common rhetorical feature of skeptical newspaper editorials, as we have seen in the case studies.

Another contradiction is in the willingness of states to spend several percentage points of GDP on national militaries with an extremely low probability of an enemy attack. By contrast, climate change is already manifesting impacts in several, highly visible weather disasters and tropical storms. In the past 30 years, there were multiple deadly heat waves that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people in each event.<sup>369</sup> Climate change can be rationally explained as a low priority for governments, but not in a way that is consistent with other policy priorities. One way in

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<sup>368</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China*.

<sup>369</sup> S. Rahmstorf and D. Coumou, "Increase of Extreme Events in a Warming World," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 44 (November 1, 2011): 17905–9, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1101766108>; Peter A. Stott, D. A. Stone, and M. R. Allen, "Human Contribution to the European Heatwave of 2003," *Nature* 432, no. 7017 (December 2004): 610–14, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature03089>.

which these discrepancies can be resolved, to an extent, is by examining the role of political culture. The US, Canada, and Australia are unique from other OECD countries by virtue of being white settler colonies of Great Britain. They displaced existing native peoples and civilizations, and instead of hybridizing with local cultures on a deep level like in Central and South America, they existed start-to-finish as majority white countries that subjugated their non-white populations. Indigenous peoples were pushed to the margins of political life. Anglo-settler colony formation may have also contributed to an aversion to multilateral diplomacy in the usual UN institutionalist fashion. This anti-multilateral sentiment was evident in wake of the GFC, with the rise of ultra-wealthy “super-managers” in ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries such as the UK, the US, Canada, and Australia.<sup>370</sup> Settler colonialism as also fundamentally genocidal project, as we saw from the historical surveys of the three latter states.

Analyses of climate change issues have been framed in a polemical way, often seeking to establish the veracity and trustworthiness of basic science. The argument being made is that climate science is a political project which has been created to undermine treasured freedoms and the right to unrestricted property accumulation. From the case studies, it is apparent that the threat to property rights as RO motivates much of elite discourses that cast doubt on basic science. It is extremely rare for scientific concerns to be expressed in absence of overt or implied reference to a threatened

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<sup>370</sup> Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 315–18.

world, one in which present is elevated above future, rich above poor, and more sinisterly, white people above non-white people. Above all, challenges to property rights of a small minority of the global population are the hegemonically conceived RO which remains inviolate, and from which all other policy challenges are subsumed. But this RO is not inviolate in an abstracted or universal way, but specifically protects the minority against legitimate claims made by indigenous peoples or others who stand in the way of property accumulation.

Rhetoric can be an important tool in the process of turning discourse away from climate change solutions. Some of the rhetorical techniques used by climate change skeptics follow a consistent pattern, which are listed in the chart below.

Description	Explanation
Conspiracy theories.	Accusation of large-scale scientific malpractice, deceit, or fraud in specific aspects of climate change, or climate science in general. Occasionally, scientists are seen as allies of bureaucrats, celebrities, and environmental activists in an organized campaign to harm capitalist economies. The ‘Climategate’ controversy is one prominent example.
Fake experts.	Individuals who purport to have authoritative knowledge on climate change, whether or not they actually have formal training in climate science. The Oregon Petition is the most notable example of this tactic.
Cherry-picking.	Misuse of statistics, particularly truncation of data and inappropriately drawing conclusions from short trends. This is often used to argue

	that the Earth is not warming, or that it is actually cooling.
Impossible expectations of what the research can deliver.	Contrarians may selectively apply an unrealistic burden of proof to climate science. For example, computer climate models are often declared by contrarians to be totally useless, because they are unable to predict short-term weather patterns.
Misrepresentation and logical fallacies.	Contrarians often use various invalid arguments or misquote and misinterpret climate scientists' publications and utterances to support contrarian arguments.

**Table 5: The Five Types of Climate Change Denial<sup>371</sup>**

Examples of these arguments can be seen in any record of conversation or written source. Assertions of motivation form a core part of fallacious conspiratorial thinking, which is determined through close reading of the sources. Regardless of motivation, the use of skeptical rhetoric is a kind of political action, and like emotions, create political outcomes. These assumptions would render the physical-*scientific* view of climate change an irrelevancy, as the core values at stake are not the preservation of the wellbeing of actual human beings that exist today and in the future. But climate change is, in their view, a threat to the established system of values that could in part be underpinned by the system of Anglo-settler frontier culture. This system includes, but is not limited to, cornucopianism (the idea of limitless natural resources), extractivism (the veneration of primary

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<sup>371</sup> Adapted from Hadyn Washington and James Cook, *Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand* (London: Earthscan, 2011), 43–70.

resource industries), capitalism, individualism, and us-versus-them mentality. It is a system of Deep Anthropocentrism, which not only assumes that human beings are in the centre of all things, but that Nature itself is dominated so thoroughly that there is no allowance for a Nature that can exert its own power on the global human civilization.<sup>372</sup> Most of all, the necessary condition is the settler state formation, in which the domination of indigenous peoples is seamlessly melded with the total domination of human beings (that is, only the settlers), over Nature. The idea of climate change threatens this assumed domination and breaks apart the foundational assumptions of how the world works. The danger climate change presents to the skeptic is not to the body or to the happiness or to the economy. Rather, climate change literally ‘destroys the world,’ rending it into pieces, giving the feeling that if climate change were to be accepted as consensus-agreed scientists and economists and environmentalists portray it, the skeptic would fall through the Earth and into oblivion.

To better understand the presence of climate change skepticism in the case studies, I will explain some of the most common fallacious skeptical arguments. These arguments are listed below to provide a guide to which rhetorical elements I identified to provide a classification for each article:

1. The Earth is in fact cooling.

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<sup>372</sup> Peter Jacques, “The Rearguard of Modernity: Environmental Skepticism as a Struggle of Citizenship,” *Global Environmental Politics* 6, no. 1 (February 2006): 76–101, <https://doi.org/10.1162/glep.2006.6.1.76>.

2. The Earth is not warming or cooling.
3. The Earth is warming, but it is not significant for human beings.
4. The Earth is warming, but it is not caused by the activity of human beings.
  - a. The Sun somehow drives global warming.
  - b. Cosmic rays or other space phenomena somehow causes global warming.
  - c. Mars, or a different planet is warming, which implies a non-human driver of global warming
  - d. Volcanic eruptions somehow explain global warming.
5. The data is forged by scientists.
6. Scientists are fools who make fundamental errors, or create hopelessly flawed computer models, making them unreliable sources for assessing global warming.
7. A secret conspiracy is working to increase taxes on people, or otherwise damage their interests in some way.
8. Politicians openly use climate change as a means of increasing taxes on the people, or otherwise damage their interests in some way.
9. Global warming may be happening, but it is unfair to be asked to reduce emissions or implement any other kind of climate policy until another country unilaterally reduces their emissions first.



10. Global warming may be happening, but all proposed mainstream climate policies are inadequate or not recommended for various reasons.<sup>373</sup>

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but most skeptical rhetoric will fall within these ten groups. As seen from the case studies, skeptical editorials tend to be either mainly be concerned with economics, deny the basic science on climate change, or both. They also employ rhetoric which expresses and reproduces specific emotions that shape and reinforce reader biases. Through the cultural politics of emotion, climate change skepticism therefore inhibits critical thinking through the deployment of rhetoric as thought-terminating cliché. But scientific skepticism, or broader anti-intellectualism directed towards social scientists and government experts, are not the only kinds of media products that inhibit action on climate change. Even pro-consensus articles tend to draw boundaries around what is politically acceptable. These are a form of manufactured consent, in constraining path-dependency and absencing radical or non-liberal policy alternatives which could be more effective than the heretofore floundering UNFCCC process.

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<sup>373</sup> Adapted from Washington and Cook, *Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand*; G. Thomas Farmer and John Cook, "Rebuttals to Climate Myths," in *Climate Change Science: A Modern Synthesis* (New York, NY: Springer, 2013), 469–86.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Once, the Dream's [i.e. the hegemony of white America] parameters were caged by technology and by the limits of horsepower and wind. But the Dreamers have improved themselves, and the damming of the seas for voltage, the extraction of coal, and the transmuting of oil into food, have enabled ... plunder with no known precedent. And this revolution has freed the Dreamers to plunder to plunder not just the bodies of humans but the body of Earth itself. The Earth is not our creation. It has no respect for us. It has no use for us. And its vengeance is not the fire in the cities but the fire in the sky ... It was the cotton that passed through our [i.e. black slaves'] chained hands that inaugurated this age. It is the flight from us that sent them sprawling into the subdivided woods. And the methods of transport through these new subdivisions, across the sprawl, is the automobile, the noose around the neck of the earth, and ultimately, the Dreamers themselves.<sup>374</sup>

In the essay, *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote about the life and politics of living as a black man in America. He saw that the domination of people was inextricably tied to the ideology of dominating the Earth. This can be seen not just in climate change, but also in global health threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the break in emissions growth because of the pandemic, climate change resumed its previous course as soon as economic growth was restored. In an interview with Reuters, climate scientists from the University of East Anglia Corinne Le Quéré said, “This drop [in carbon emissions] is not due to structural changes so as soon as confinement ends, I expect the emissions will go back close to where they were.”<sup>375</sup> A new carbon

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<sup>374</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 150–51.

<sup>375</sup> Shadia Nasralla, Valerie Volcovici, and Matthew Green, “Coronavirus Could Trigger Biggest Fall in Carbon Emissions since World War Two,” Reuters, April 3, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-emissions/coronavirus-could-trigger-biggest-fall-in-carbon-emissions-since-world-war-two-idUSKBN21L0HL>.

budget analysis confirmed that this was indeed the case by late 2021.<sup>376</sup> Thus, the urgency of climate change returns once the global economy resumes growth. It would be a reasonable assumption that any future break in emissions growth (such as a temporary reduction in solar luminosity, either through natural fluctuations or a period of geoengineering) will also be quickly followed by resumption of rapid warming. What can be said about efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change when emissions growth returns? Given the various issues with the solar radiation management (SRM) type geoengineering, durable and long-term emissions reductions will be essential in preventing dangerous and catastrophic climate change.<sup>377</sup> Most importantly, is the prevailing political culture of the settler colonies inimical to effective policy? If so, what can be done to ameliorate its effects, or transform this political culture into something more useful and less dangerous for global climate change?

When it comes to editorial articles in newspapers of record, expressions of elite opinion have served to reproduce and spread the hegemonic political culture of Anglo-settler colonies, thereby producing manufactured consent. It creates a sense of elite unity, as well as setting the tone for upholding popular support for the continuation of the status quo. Thus, what I have described here

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<sup>376</sup> Rob Jackson et al., “Global Emissions Rebound to Pre-COVID Levels,” *Scientific American*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/global-emissions-rebound-to-pre-covid-levels/>.

<sup>377</sup> David Humphreys, “Smoke and Mirrors: Some Reflections on the Science and Politics of Geoengineering,” *The Journal of Environment & Development* 20, no. 2 (June 16, 2011): 99–120, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1070496511405302>.

is the discourse of elite opinion, and how it draws boundaries around the possible. It can express the political emotions that have infiltrated into voting publics and policymakers; circulating and reproducing the cultural constraints on the political will needed to enact efficacious climate policy. It also raises walls around the acceptance of non-market possibilities, constraining them and fortifying hegemonic thinking on climate change. The marginalization of alternative, non-market policies is cemented, reinforced, and reproduced in the face of rising global temperatures. When it comes to conservative political ideology within settler colonialism, scientific facts are turned into muddled fictions, and the discourse within the editorials of conservative newspapers help amplify skeptical voices and perpetuate ignorance. The circulation of elite opinion reinforces the national mystique of the wild frontier, and White Man's birthright to dominate nature, without regard for the social consequences or negative externalities. Combined with the powerful economic and infrastructural path dependency of 'fossil democracies,' settler-colonial thinking on the interface between humanity and nature could be additive in its deleterious impacts on climate policy.

My study has not established causation with quantifiable explanatory power. My hypothesis and analysis of the research question remain exploratory and primarily descriptive. But the link between settler colonialism as political culture, and how it inhibits meaningful and substantive action on climate change, warrants further exploration. With the rise in global authoritarianism, the matter has become urgent in more than 'just' climate change. As climate change envelopes more and more of our world, its scale as hyperobject permeates everything in political life, as a hypercube with four spatial dimensions might pass through a mundane three-dimensional wall.

This means that the connection between ideologies could have outsized impacts on how global society is able to grapple with climate change. As societies across the globe shift towards conservatism, and down to the potential fork in the road towards nationalist authoritarianism or even outright fascism, global civilization could cement its path dependency towards irreversible and catastrophic climate change even further. The stickiness of neoliberal environmentalism, and the reinforcement of settler-colonial domination, threatens humanity's ability to discover and implement effective action in the face of complex challenges.

In addition, climate change has and will continue to inflict disproportionate harm on the indigenous peoples of Anglo-settler colonies. If the unequal distribution of harm continues to remain invisible to their governments, climate change will continue to reproduce the exploitative dynamic of the settler colony. Disturbingly, if the inhibition of climate action is rooted in a contiguous set of compatible ideologies, then the presence of mere liberal democracy is no panacea against climate inaction. Currently, global human societies already have trouble assessing the nature of hyperobject threats. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is the clearest example of this blindness, as expert knowledge fails to translate to effective policy or public understanding. Even in its diminished and limited form of authoritarian government, the Trump administration was able

to inflict enormous damage on the environment before it was finally removed from office.<sup>378</sup> While the election of Joe Biden and to the presidency and the capture of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the US Congress have created a renewed sense of hope for climate policy in the US, actual policy action has been underwhelming so far in the admittedly new administration. Any potential legislative gains could be stymied by conservative-leaning Senator for Virginia, Joe Manchin, amongst other Democratic lawmakers, while most of the immediate progress has been done through the signing of executive orders reversing Trump-era rollbacks.<sup>379</sup> There is no guarantee that the gains made by the government will remain durable, or that American voters will continue to support a ‘Green New Deal.’ It is also far from clear whether Biden’s proposed climate policy will meet the scale of the challenge that is facing the US and rest of the planet. The proposals are still focused primarily on the concept of the social cost of carbon (SCC), and thus wedded inexorably to the continuation of business as usual in the neoliberal economic paradigm.<sup>380</sup> Therefore, I argue that the theoretical as well as the practical analysis of political culture will not cease

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<sup>378</sup> Alvin Chang et al., “75 Ways Trump Made America Dirtier and the Planet Warmer,” *The Guardian*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2020/oct/20/trump-us-dirtier-planet-warmer-75-ways>.

<sup>379</sup> Emma Newburger, “Biden’s Climate Change Agenda Will Face Big Obstacles with Evenly Divided Senate,” CNBC, January 30, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/30/bidens-climate-change-agenda-to-face-obstacles-with-senate-.html>.

<sup>380</sup> Ramin Skibba, “The Biden Administration Increases the Social Cost of Carbon,” Undark, March 2, 2021, <https://undark.org/2021/03/02/biden-weighs-social-cost-of-carbon/>.

to be a critically important part of integrated studies on climate change, due to a change in government of the world's sole superpower. Right-wing opposition will almost certainly stymie efforts to launch a Green New Deal, and there remains an opening for a resurgent extremist faction of the Republican Party to turn back the clock on whatever climate policies the Biden administration and the Democratic Party-controlled Congress are able to generate.

Furthermore, if certain types of political culture exist at the national level, they could very well be scaled to the *international* level in a world of intense globalization. The hegemony of neoliberal economics, statist constructions of sovereignty, and other commonly accepted features of the present international system may be the product of an international political culture which affects the behaviours of all the actors that subscribe to that culture. These elements of a global culture, fuelled by the political culture of the settler colonies and particularly the hegemonic power of the United States, could explain the variation in climate policies beyond economic incentives alone. It is not clear that settler colonialism, as I have described here, is a clearly separate phenomena of a venerable, transnational, and hegemonic cultural construction of capitalism, of which its rationality cannot be taken for granted.

## **Avenues for future research**

There are several avenues for future research, which could be explored based on the findings of this study. In this dissertation, I have not established that the Anglo-settler colonies are different

from other political cultures in ways that meaningfully impact climate policy. Establishing a quantitative model, with a sufficient degree of reliability and validity for standards in social science, could help refine my hypothesis and establish the strength of the theoretical model. Alternatively, qualitative and theoretical avenues could be explored further in future studies. Several roads are open for exploration:

1. Expansion of the dataset. More years could be included in the analysis, as far back as either 1988 (the creation of the UNFCCC and the IPCC), to near the present day. Alternative databases might yield a more complete picture of the editorial pages of newspapers of record. However, ownership of *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* merged in 2018, which might complicate a quantitative analysis using the same continuous dataset. Another possibility is to incorporate online-only editorials, letters to the editor, or ordinary reporting, to broaden the representation of opinions on climate change. Comments sections on newspaper websites, and discussion of climate change articles on various social media platforms, will also become increasingly dominant as time goes on. However, the inherent selection bias of such data, and the proliferation of bots and cyberwarfare operatives, makes it difficult to employ a truly systematic study of such information.
2. A most-similar cases comparison with Latin America. Based on the standard research design for political science studies employing quantitative methods, Canada, the US, and Australia can be compared against another kind of New World colony, which is identical



in almost every aspect except for the imperial power from which they originated. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, sometimes referred to as the ABC countries, have also displaced indigenous populations and implemented European-style liberal democracies in *terra nullius*. Their historical trajectories are very similar, and their social distinctions have more parallels than incongruities. They differ in that they are colonies of Spain and Portugal, rather than the UK. Religion has also shaped their political culture, but with Catholicism rather than Protestantism. In terms of methodology, a most-similar cases study would be the most rigorous.<sup>381</sup>

3. A most-different cases comparison with the two largest and wealthiest of the BRICS, China and India. This could be useful in identifying the variations in political culture in what may be the most significant states in the current century and beyond. The context gained from such a study would also be helpful for researchers seeking to use a standpoint methodology for similar work.
4. A most-different cases comparison with the indigenous peoples that the Anglo-settler colonies have supplanted in their native land. In developing an Anthropocene worldview, indigenous perspectives could prove to be both interesting and useful. Indigenous academics

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<sup>381</sup> On a related note, the role that religion plays in especially the US political culture was not adequately explored in this dissertation. Given the religious connection to right-wing conspiracy theories and the Christian Dominionist aim of overthrowing the US government, further analysis of this movement is sorely needed.

have pointed out that indigenous peoples of the Americas have already endured a near-total genocide, and the looming threat of climate change is “our ancestors’ dystopia now.”<sup>382</sup> This is an especially intriguing possibility, given that the cultural element of politics may be the lynchpin of other kinds of socioeconomic transformation. Examining the evolution and history of indigenous political cultures may have many useful lessons beyond that. Furthermore, including a detailed case study of New Zealand could be illuminating. Their settler-Maori relations are less oppressive and genocidal, which may produce a unique political outcome compared to the other three colonies. Amongst other climate-related policies, New Zealand has gone beyond the other settler colonies and agreed to resettle refugees from small Pacific Island states doomed by sea level rise.<sup>383</sup> Furthermore, New Zealand has generally produced more ambitious policies and superior outcomes when it comes to climate change. Could it be that a more just society produces materially better outcomes too? What is clear from this study is that more research could illuminate the role of settler colonial political culture in motivating some states towards inaction on climate change. Comparisons with other types of political culture can expand our understanding of the differences between national approaches towards climate change. More research on the subject could serve to illuminate the

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<sup>382</sup> Whyte, “Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene.”

<sup>383</sup> Nina Hall, “New Zealand: A Global Leader on Climate and Displacement?,” Policy Forum, June 25, 2019, <https://www.policyforum.net/new-zealand-a-global-leader-on-climate-and-displacement/>.

cultural pathways to acceptance of substantive climate change policies and point the way towards a broader social acceptance of the fundamental knowledge required to preserve the Earth's climate.

Understanding the role of settler colonialism in preventing action on climate change may also point the way towards more effective ways of communicating goals, or even establishing the need for substantive climate policy, or else triggering revolutionary change in the neoliberal world system. Political theorists have suggested that creating a more just political order would not only provide a more effective means of mitigating climate change, but also potentially improve social outcomes and environmental justice in adaptation.<sup>384</sup> The clearest example of the second-order benefits is in supporting the stability of liberal democratic governments of settler colonies. It is possible that justice and fairness in the political economy and the democratic structure of states produce more equitable outcomes that benefit the most people in a utilitarian sense. But there is another possibility that invites hope for a better future: that justice for the people and the planet are not separate issues, but in fact indivisible. Reforming the political culture and political economies of the settler colonies would therefore have wide-ranging implications that are deserving of close attention and future analysis by scholars of cultural studies, environmental politics, and global governance, amongst other important fields.

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<sup>384</sup> Natalie Osborne, "Intersectionality and Kyriarchy: A Framework for Approaching Power and Social Justice in Planning and Climate Change Adaptation," *Planning Theory* 14, no. 2 (May 30, 2015): 130–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095213516443>.

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