It's not easy being green: understanding strategic environmentalism in a post Earth-Day presidency

Karla Ann Stevenson
University of Iowa

Copyright 2012 Karla Ann Stevenson

This dissertation is available at Iowa Research Online: http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/3540

Recommended Citation
http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/3540.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd
Part of the Communication Commons
IT’S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTALISM IN A POST-EARTH DAY PRESIDENCY

by

Karla Ann Stevenson

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

December 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Emeritus Bruce Gronbeck
Associate Professor David Hingstman
ABSTRACT

This project examines the impact of environmentalism as it operates in presidential rhetoric after Earth Day 1970. Specifically, I look at how environmentalism is constructed and then utilized in the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, H.W. Bush, and William Jefferson Clinton. I argue that U.S. presidents use the rhetoric of environmentalism as a rhetorical tool to define their ideal citizen, interpret complex rhetorical situations for the American people, and introduce policies. Environmental vocabularies, I argue, are crucial to understanding presidential communication, as they enable presidents to move policy discussions away from technical discourse and frame ideas using accessible and familiar terms. This project, in many ways, highlights the discursive identity of the American people and the role of structuring vocabularies in presidential power. In each post-Earth Day administration, the citizenry is invited to participate in a version of environmentalism that also reflects the chief executive’s political vision for the country.

Through a Burkean cluster and agon analysis, each of the three case studies reveals the unique way each presidency defines environmentalism and the strategic function of each definition. Chapter 3 uses a cluster-agon analysis to demonstrate how environmental rhetoric helps Ronald Reagan construct his economic policy. Chapter 4 argues that H.W. Bush’s unique definition of environmentalism functions as a strategic communication tool that helps shape his domestic and international policies. It was also an important step in breaking down binaries between economic development and environmentalism that had shaped present-day understandings of environmentalism. A
cluster-agon analysis reveals that although he was considered to be a failed environmental president, Bush’s definition of environmentalism laid the groundwork for future, more successful environmental presidencies. As the last case study in this project, Chapter 6 looks at environmentalism within President Clinton’s presidency, arguing that his definition of environmentalism operationalizes a unique cluster of terms that allows him to advocate for social justice issues and circumvent a lame-duck Congress.

By understanding the environment as a set of values and not a tangible object, these case studies unpack the wide variety of cultural work that its language is able to do. This research on a macro level is an analysis of political communication strategy, understanding what words work and what words don’t. Unlike many rhetorical projects, however, this project uses environmentalism as a lens through which the possibilities and limits of presidential power can be explored.

Abstract Approval:

Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date

Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date
IT’S NOT EASY BEING GREEN: UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTALISM IN A POST-EARTH DAY PRESIDENCY

by

Karla Ann Stevenson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

December 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Emeritus Bruce Gronbeck Associate Professor David Hingstman
Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Karla Ann Stevenson

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication Studies at the December 2012 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

David Hingstman, Thesis Supervisor

Bruce Gronbeck, Thesis Supervisor

Tim Havens

Takis Poulakos

Joy Hayes
Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going to get better. It’s not.

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Bruce Gronbeck for being OK with who I am and at the same time bringing the very best out of me. Your faith and guidance are irreplaceable gifts.

Thanks Mom and Dad for making sure I stayed curious and Nana for making me appreciate the power of a good story.

Thanks Kitty for being the first friend to visit me in Iowa City and the last friend to help me pack up my things as I left 6 years later.

Teddy, Coco, Chanel, and Alex: I hope I can be the person you think I am. Thank you for showing me unconditional love.

Thank you BT for putting up with my ridiculousness and giving me tea and a quiet place to work when I needed it most, and EBell, EEisenberg, and MStuckey for letting me fall in love with rhetoric.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. THE NATURE OF THE ENVIRONMENT: PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY ................................................................. 1

The New Environmentalism ........................................................................................................ 1
Project Justification ....................................................................................................................... 2
Human-Nature Binary .................................................................................................................... 6
Preservation-Progress Binary ....................................................................................................... 8
Function of Environmental Rhetoric ............................................................................................ 9
How Can We Understand Rhetoric and The Environment? ..................................................... 11
Types of Environmentalism ....................................................................................................... 12
Scholarship in Presidential Rhetoric ............................................................................................ 16
Other Presidential Scholarship ................................................................................................ 19
Environmentalism as a constitutive discourse ........................................................................ 21
Genre, Performance and Style .................................................................................................... 22
Layout of the Book ...................................................................................................................... 26

CHAPTER 2. WHO SPEAKS FOR THE TREES: ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS .................................................................................................................. 30

The Environmental Turn ............................................................................................................ 30
Cluster Analysis as a Methodology ............................................................................................ 33
Voices of Environmentalism ..................................................................................................... 34
Exploitation ................................................................................................................................. 37
Conservation .............................................................................................................................. 39
Preservation and Stewardship .................................................................................................... 42
The Ecological Turn .................................................................................................................... 43
The Carson Effect: Silent Spring & The Population Bomb ....................................................... 47

CHAPTER 3. IT’S THE ENVIRONMENT STUPID: CONSERVATIONIST DISCOURSE AS ECONOMIC JEREMIAD ........................................................................................................... 51

The Reagan Revolution ............................................................................................................. 51
Reagan’s Frontier ........................................................................................................................ 56
The American Jeremiad .............................................................................................................. 59
Reagan’s Environmental Vocabulary ......................................................................................... 64
Conservation .............................................................................................................................. 71
The Rhetoric of Reaganomics .................................................................................................... 74
Defining the Rhetorical Situation ............................................................................................... 80
An Appropriate and Fitting Response ....................................................................................... 83
The Rhetoric of Technology ........................................................................................................ 85
Crafting the Solution to Economic Pollution .......................................................................... 86
Dear Federal Government: Live Within Your Means! ........................................................... 87
Reagan’s Rhetorical Limitations .............................................................................................. 90

Bush’s Environmentalism ........................................................................................................ 97
A New Approach ..................................................................................................................... 102
Strategic Use of Technology .................................................................................................. 107
Creating an Environmental Frontier ..................................................................................... 109
The Rhetorical Function of Space Exploration .................................................................... 116
Localizing Environmentalism ................................................................................................. 120
Rethinking a Failed Environmental Presidency .................................................................... 125
Implications .................................................................................................................................. 130

CHAPTER 5. GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: PRESIDENT CLINTON AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ..................................................... 132

A Different Kind of New Covenant ......................................................................................... 136
Contextualizing Clinton’s Environmentalism ......................................................................... 138
Expanded Environmentalism .................................................................................................... 142
Environmental Justice ............................................................................................................ 143
Clinton’s Environmental Justice ............................................................................................... 145
The Impact of Executive Powers ............................................................................................. 162
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 167

CHAPTER 6. THE POWER OF GREEN: IMPLICATIONS OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTALISM .................................................... 170

Introduction and Review .................................................................................................... 170
What We’ve Learned ............................................................................................................. 173
Impact .................................................................................................................................................. 175
Vocabularies for Policy Making: Say X not Y ..................................................................... 176
Function of Clusters ................................................................................................................. 178
What’s Next: Future of Environmental Rhetoric .................................................................. 181

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................................... 187

The New Environmentalism

On Easter Sunday in 2009, The New York Times ran Thomas Friedman’s column as usual. Environmentalism was the topic of choice. More specifically, Friedman (2009) chose to write about Costa Rica’s new approach to resource management. He defined nature as a commodity that citizens are obligated to buy (Friedman, 2009). More than any other nation, he claimed, “Costa Rica is insisting that economic growth and environmentalism work together” (Friedman, 2009). It is natural for businesses and environmentalists to work together, according to Friedman, and this approach is one that the U.S. would be wise to adopt. “You have to pay for using nature,” he laments. “It is called ‘payment for environmental service’— nobody gets to treat climate, water, coral, fish and forests as free anymore” (Friedman, 2009). If we don’t responsibly use the “incredible range of economic services” nature provides for us, he warns, we might “end up impoverishing both nature and people” (Friedman, 2009).

Friedman’s column reveals how much our understanding of what nature is and what it isn’t has developed over the years. We currently operate in a culture that supports the idea that good environmental practices also mean good business practices. Unlike Jonathan Bartram, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, who lived in a world where stewardship of nature meant creating fewer economic opportunities, Friedman understands natural resources as billable services. His argument is grounded by a few
simple assumptions. His argument is predicated on the assumption that nature and people
are two separate yet interdependent communities. It also assumes that there are
consequences for irresponsible use of natural resources. Moreover, Friedman challenges
the idea that economic growth and environmentalism are antithetical to one another.
*Interdependency, conservation, and green economics* are three terms that govern his
argument. As the way humans think about themselves in relation to nature is a
continually evolving and sometimes-contradictory process, they are also three words that
have recently entered the environmental lexicon.

**Project Justification**

Because nature is a rhetorical construct, its metaphors “have important rhetorical
functions…Variations in their use reflect the issues and tensions of particular societies
and moments in time” (Burch, 1971, p. 68). According to Herndl and Brown (1996), the
environment is not an unmediated object but instead is:

A concept and an associated set of cultural values that we have constructed
through the way we use language. In a very real sense, there is no objective
environment in the phenomenal world, no environment separate from the words
we use to represent it. We can define the environment and how it is affected by
our actions only through the language we have developed to talk about these
issues … what we know, how we know it, and who can speak about it
authoritatively are largely determined by our language. (p. 3)

By understanding the environment as a set of values rather than a tangible object,
we are able to unpack the cultural work that its language is able to do. Because
environmentalism is never a fixed term, when examining how it is defined in any one
instance, we can also discover its strategic function in that particular moment the
different ways it is used. The way rhetors choose to define environmentalism and the
terms they choose to use to define it both reflect and affect the current political climate.
When spoken from the platform of the presidency, environmentalism’s function as a unique and highly versatile rhetorical tool that presidents can use to navigate institutional and cultural constraints become visible and its impact is discovered. My project exists at the intersection between the smaller discipline of environmental communication and the larger field of presidential rhetoric. The relationship between environmental rhetoric and presidential communication, therefore, is complicated, as it is a hybrid of two genres that, on the surface, seem unrelated. As do other works in this vein, this project understands that “presidential rhetoric both constrains and is constrained by political action regarding the natural environment” (Peterson, 2004, p. 3). Like Peterson, I am also “motivated by an interest in the cultural milieu beyond that traditionally associated with public address” (Peterson, 2004, p. 7). Hoping to “redeem the promise of practicality for public address scholarship,” this project explores the impact of environmental rhetoric when spoken from the platform of the presidency (Peterson, 2004, p. 9).

Whether Americans choose to see themselves as located within, in control of, or locked in a constant struggle against the environment, the way we define environmentalism structures our relationship to almost everything else, including collective identity. The following chapters, therefore, engage the political channels where dominant environmental discourses publically circulate, re-centering the constitutive attributes of environmental language. In rhetorical studies, it is assumed that the language we use to describe our world determines our subject position within that world. How does the way we describe the natural world determine what we can and cannot do as political agents (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996)? This is a common question in rhetorical studies, but for the majority of environmentalists, scientists, and social
sciences, however, the function of language has not been thoroughly explored. According to most rhetoricians, including Cantrill and Oravec for example, attention to language is crucial for understanding nature. They argue, “the only hope we have of ever preserving our environment is to collectively understand and alter the fundamental ways we discuss what we continually re-create” (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996, p. 2). As a rhetorical project, each of the case studies presented here “foreground the constitutive and constructive role of communication approaching environmental issues” (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996, p. 2).

Of course, there are many ways to understand the relationship between environmentalism and identity. Looking specifically at presidential public addresses after Earth Day 1970, this project hopes to shed new light on the impact of environmental rhetoric on the office of the presidency and each administration’s success or failure. Cantrill and Oravec (1996) argue, “of our environment, what we say is what we see” (p. 2). As the highest political office in the land, the presidency is the nation’s “primary rhetorical institution and the chief executive has become responsible for explaining the nation to itself as well as interpreting important national events” (Stuckey, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, along with presidential rhetoric scholars such as Mary Stuckey, I recognize the President of the United States (POTUS) as a political agent who can act both as commander-in-chief and interpreter-in-chief. Thus, this project looks at the instances where U.S. presidents use the rhetoric of environmentalism as a tool to help define or interpret situations for the American people. Along with understanding the factors that constrain the president, this project also understands presidents as individual agents who each make unique rhetorical choices. Examining the tension between individual agency and public support with institutional constraints such as lame-duck sessions, this project
discovers the unique function environmental rhetoric serves in shaping each administration. Each chapter unpacks how post-Earth Day presidents use environmentalism to define their ideal citizen. Through a Burkean cluster and agon analysis, the terms they use to redefine their version of environmentalism are also discovered. In short, like most rhetoricians, I am interested in communication strategies and in understanding what words work and what words don’t. Unlike many rhetorical projects, however, environmentalism here is used as a lens through which the possibilities and limits of presidential power can be explored.

I have always been interested in determining the impact of presidential public address because, as Stuckey observes, “more than for any other participant in the national conversation, the task of articulating the collective culture, like the responsibility for managing the collective action, belongs to the president” (Stuckey, 2006, p. 7). Indeed, the presidency is a unique platform to enact and enunciate national identity and values when speaking publicly (Stuckey, 2006). Each administration uses the executive power of definition differently. This privileged space is worthy of scholarly inquiry, as its impact goes beyond the art of elocution and into the realm of identity construction and citizen mobilization. As David Zarefsky notes (2004), these rhetorical choices are “a reflection of a president’s values and world view. And it is also a work of practical art, often richly layered and multivocal that calls for interpretation” (p. 610).

I began this project because I am also interested in environmentalism as a discursive rhetorical formation. Environmentalism is a versatile vocabulary and it can be appropriated in surprising ways. A wide-ranging examination of environmental rhetoric post-Earth Day reveals its many functions in the production of national identity and
political policy. Its instability as a term is also exploited when understood as a rhetorical tool and not just another item on a president’s political agenda. Each administration since Earth Day 1970 has made strategic use of environmental language to frame critical issues. As each of the three case studies presented here note, this vocabulary has played a different role in each administration but presidents consistently use it to define themselves and construct their ideal citizen. In this context, environmentalism operates as a Burkean God Term, defined by different clusters of words depending on the context and strategic goals. Each administration chooses to define environmentalism differently and as such, is also enabled and constrained by those choices. Each version of environmentalism, therefore, is comprised of different clusters of terms, binaries, and rhetorical traditions. Unpacking the political work that different definitions are capable of doing is the purpose of this project.

**Human-Nature Binary.**

Friedman’s short column makes a complicated argument in that it rejects some of the dominant binaries that commonly structure environmentalism. It is just one of many epideictic texts that implicitly instruct people how to define environmentalism and, by extension, how to organize their world. Each definition is an amalgamation of different traditions and terms. As they cluster to form new vocabularies, they also become organizing structures people can use to make sense of the world. Because he makes a distinction between people and nature, Friedman’s environmentalism reinforces the human-nature binary. Yet, by calling environmentalism a practice that can create economic growth, he rejects an economic-environmentalism binary that has defined environmentalism throughout much of history.
Environmental exploitation in the service of economy has been a key theme in America’s Judeo-Christian history. Christianity, according to historians like Lynn White Jr. (1967), “not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (p. 1205). Thus, God sanctioned the exploitation of natural resources. It became a practice allowing settlers to preserve their position as God’s chosen people. Similarly, Roderick Frazier Nash argues that paradise and the “fall” of Adam and Eve are key narratives that created an approach to environmentalism that is uniquely American. The human-nature binary, therefore, is an outgrowth of the paradise-wilderness binary that was one of the dominant themes in the Old Testament. Nash (2001) argues:

The capstone of civilized dreams was the idea of paradise – an environment perfectly suited to human interests. The opposite of paradise was of course, wilderness…nature lost its significance as something to which people belonged and became an adversary, a target, merely an object for exploitation. (p. xiii)

Defining wilderness as a site that can be controlled and exploited by humans created some very significant ideological consequences. Since its discovery, Nash (2001) argues, Americans have “bet our evolutionary future on the idea of controlling nature…the largest portion of energy…was directed at conquering wildness in nature and eliminating it in human nature” (p. xii). The idea of nature, specifically its wildness, not only posed a threat to early settlers, but also became “the basic ingredient of American culture” (Nash, 2001, p. xi). In short, the relationship between humans and nature became a structuring binary used to define their place in the world (Nash, 2001, p. xi). This binary allowed people to understand nature as a space that could be conquered, controlled, and exploited. Accepting humanity as a separate category from nature
legitimated exploitative practices; thus, exploiting wilderness in the name of American progress became an unquestioned practice.

The human-nature binary also structures a version of environmentalism that encourages stewardship over nature. That humans are in a position to control nature is a key assumption that structures many versions of environmentalism, including the rhetoric of conservation. Management is a key term in for conservationists, as the conservation and management of natural resources are required to sustain labor, consumption, and economic growth. Thus, “the American propensity for unlimited growth, intense competition, and the domination of nature” characterize the rhetorics of exploitation and conservation (Nash, 2001, p. xii).

**Preservation-Progress Binary.**

I am most interested in presidents’ relationship to nature because, as Friedman’s column beautifully captures, there is a long-standing tension between preservation and progress. This tension is the result of a complicated and contradictory relationship with nature. Environmentalism reflects this complexity, functioning in presidential discourse as an ideological trope to define who and what is uncivilized. Thus, how we define environmentalism has implications for the exclusion and inclusion of citizens. How we see ourselves, what policies we make, and how we use our land, for example, all depend on how we organize our world. Policy that understands humans as conquerors of wilderness, for example, does very different political work than policy that assumes we are part of an ecological system that includes people and nature. Thus, at the root of national identity lurks an important tension. As Stuckey (2006) argues:

All presidents face tensions between preservation and progress. All presidents face questions of who and what to include – and exclude – as they seek to craft a
coalition capable of sustaining both instrumental and constitutive goals… That is, in telling us what sorts of policies we ought to espouse or what sorts of values we hold dear, presidents are telling us who we are, what kinds of people we have been, and how we will proceed into the future. They are telling us who we are — and by implication who is not one of us (pp. 7-9).

Because this is a rhetorical project, it positions environmental rhetoric as a site of struggle, where different rhetorics come together to create new rhetorical clusters of terms. One of the ways this tension is mediated is through presidential speech. The relationship between political rhetoric and collective identity, however, cannot be understood as cause and effect. Any person cannot speak and his or her subjects are magically constituted into whatever he or she desires at will. The president occupies a unique subject position that Stuckey (2006) and others have argued is the key to shaping national identity. Presidential choices define for us who “we” are and who “we” are not.

**Function of Environmental Rhetoric**

Environmental rhetoric functions on many levels. It helps frame environmental issues for the public as policies and as a discourse it helps presidents constitute collective national identity. This project highlights more than specific rhetorical moments or drastic paradigm shifts. Environmental rhetoric is unique in that the term is constantly engaged in a subtle struggle for redefinition. Post-Earth Day 1970, various versions of environmentalism have become topoi that presidents have used to also talk about social, political, and international issues. Examining this discourse through presidential speeches “helps the scholar to understand better the richness of a very specific situation that already has passed and will not return exactly in the same way” (Zarefsky, 2004, p. 610). Like David Zarefsky (2004), this project also acknowledges, “that while no two situations are exactly alike, patterns of rhetorical choice so tend to repeat across situations with the
same central characteristics” (p. 611). Thus, by situating presidential address within larger environmental discourses, the tension between individual agency and rhetorical constraints becomes apparent.

Not only are presidents able to define political reality, as Zarefsky (2004) argues, but they are also instrumental in constituting dimensions of various citizenries. Because “all presidential speech is also persuasive oratory” and when presidents address the nation “it is always toward a specific political end,” what presidents say about the environment and the implicit arguments about how to treat the environment and what American’s relationship to it should be are extremely important for not only rhetorical scholars but environmentalists as well (Stuckey, 2006, p. 8). Central to my project, and keeping in the same vein as Cantrill and Ovarec (1996), as well as many other presidential scholars, the constitutive power of the presidency and the constitution of collective national identity by the office of the president are key. Because presidential “interpretations are important elements in the national self-identity,” as Stuckey (2006) notes, what kinds of people are hailed into being by the president, at what times, and for what political purposes are of utmost importance (p. 6). This project situates presidential public speech about the environment within larger narratives that extend beyond the office of the presidency. It also seeks to demonstrate how individual presidents and the office of the presidency are instrumental in shaping environmental discourse and making important contributions to environmentalism as a field.

By situating presidential public address within larger contexts, this analysis adds nuance to current understandings of how the presidency is shaped by discourses outside the vein of “traditional” political rhetoric. This collection also contributes to answering
how presidents constitute collectivities that can be mobilized. Each chapter, therefore, examines the relationship between presidents, environmental discourse, and national collective identity; through a defined collective, policies can be implemented that reflect the value system of that collective. Through public discourse, presidents have the power and opportunities to define a normative standard of Americanism. Although their definitions vary depending on the administration, all presidents highlighted in this project use environmental rhetoric to communicate a specific way Americans ought to think about themselves and behave. Through these case studies, environmentalism is redefined as a significant rhetorical tool that helps American presidents define citizenship and communicate the criteria necessary to remain Americans.

**How Can We Understand Rhetoric and The Environment?**

While presidential environmental rhetoric may be an understudied topic in academe, it is not underused in practice. After many hours of reading *Presidential Papers*, it became clear that environmental speeches have become a convention of presidential public address; presidents talk about nature a lot. They do so in different ways, at different historical moments, and for specific political goals, but environmental rhetoric is a genre that appears in every presidency. The collective identity constituted by presidential discourse is largely dependent upon how each president chooses to define environmentalism; embedded in all environmental discourse are instructions about how to understand the human-nature and environmental-economic binaries. Presidents also define the environment using some combination of terms borrowed from the rhetoric of exploitation, conservation, or preservation.
Because environmental language is a rhetorical tool that is talked about as a tangible object, its constructed qualities are obscured. Presidents speak about nature as a material object, and even though its meanings change as exigencies change, presidents never explicitly define environmentalism as a term.

Because each president uses a different working definition of environmentalism, this project is organized using three subcategories of environmental rhetoric: exploitation, conservation, and preservation. The following chapters present three unique ways these subcategories combine to form new definitions of environmentalism. Mapping the three subcategories also situates presidential environmental speech within larger discourses. Thus, each chapter identifies a different version of environmentalism, comprised of different clusters of terms and containing underlying assumptions about the relationship that humans should have with nature.

**Types of Environmentalism.**

Preservation, conservation, and exploitation are the main discourses through which environmentalism is defined. The second chapter of this project explains the dominant environmental rhetorics in detail and the impact it has on presidential speech. A brief description, however, is also included here.

**Preservation and Ecology.**

The ideology of preservation rests on some important assumptions. Nature is not understood as a manageable resource. Instead, it is the act of preserving nature not so humans can exploit it, but because they have an ethical responsibility to protect it. Its key figures include Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, William Bartram, Rachael Carson, President Lyndon Johnson, and President Grover Cleveland. Influenced
by nineteenth century romanticism, preservationists utilized discourses of the sublime and the rhetoric of wonder and awe. Traces of its ideology can also be found in some forms of American exceptionalism. In recent years, preservation also evolved into what has now become known as ecology. As an outgrowth of preservation, ecology takes a more progressive position. It rests on the assumption that humans and nature are part of a larger ecological community; everyone is dependent on everything. Ecology is also respected as a legitimate science.

Conservation.

Conservationists, on the other hand, take a utilitarian approach to nature. They assume that nature is something that can and must be managed so that humans can survive: “The traditional American conservation movement had relied almost exclusively on human self-interest. Society would take care of nature so that nature would take care of society’s material and recreational needs” (Nash, 2001, p. 150). Key figures include Pinchot and presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, and William McKinley.

Exploitation.

Exploitation is the opposite of preservation. As a practice it refers to the process of utilizing natural resources for human consumption. As an ideology, it is grounded by the assumption that nature and humans are separate and that nature is something humans have a right to control; the needs of humans should come before any concern for the wellbeing of flora or fauna. Terms including individualism, progress, capitalism, private property, expansion, and control all cluster around the term exploitation. This discourse justifies the use of land. Its key figures include: Frederick Jackson Turn, John

Political speeches that talk about the environment are not thought by many to do much political work. These chapters demonstrate that one of the most important ways that presidents help the country define itself is through environmentalism. Presidents make deliberate rhetorical choices that define nature and Americans’ relationship to nature and in doing so construct distinct ideal citizens with specific understandings of what environmentalism is, how it is practiced, and why it’s important. Each chapter in this project traces the unique ways presidents use these terms in public speeches. Even as each president is bound by different sets of situational constraints and speaks during particular political, social, cultural and historical circumstances, he or she is able to redefine environmentalism and the impact of poor environmental legislation. By mapping how discourses of nature and discourses of national identity are used by presidents, its impact becomes clear.

This is also a rhetorical project, as it deals with the constitutive functions of rhetoric and theories of agency and power. However, it is also relevant for environmental scholars because it discusses how understandings of environmentalism are communicated to citizens. Examining the relationship between environmental discourse and presidential address allows for a better understanding of presidential agency and the role environmental rhetoric has in shaping collective identity. Understanding the environment as not an unmediated object but something constructed by language has important implications. The environment, as Herndl and Brown (1996) argue:

About which we all argue and make policy is the product of the discourse about nature established in powerful scientific disciplines such as biology and ecology,
in government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and its regulations, and in nonfiction essays and books such as Rachael Carlson’s *Silent Spring* or Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* (p. 3).

Attention, therefore, must be given to the ways presidents choose to use this vocabulary. This project may also impact scholarship in political science, international relations, and public policy because it demonstrates the political impact of strategic clusters of terms. As each chapter demonstrates, how presidents choose to talk about the environment has material consequences that show up directly in domestic and international policy and indirectly when constituting a public. This genre of presidential discourse, although often presented as one-dimensional, also does important political work in shaping a citizenry that is receptive to the president’s agenda. By tracing these environmental themes as they circulate post-Earth Day, each chapter gives more insight on how presidents use environmental rhetoric to navigate the constraints of their office. It also provides more insight on the constitutive function of environmental rhetoric, as the language of the environment provides rhetors with certain advantages that other discourses cannot.

These chapters accomplish two goals. First, they re-center failed environmental presidents within a larger cultural history of environmentalism. Each chapter interrogates the assumption that environmental rhetoric is only used to save the environment. These three case studies prove that its usefulness extends beyond the rhetoric of preservation. As the following chapters prove, environmentalism can be used to push anti-environmental legislation, controversial economic policies, and advocacy for social justice. Its function and versatility as a rhetorical tool are useful when questioning how presidents use rhetoric to exercise power.
Secondly, it re-centers the environment as sets of key topoi for understanding presidential agency. This project, therefore, also raises questions about presidential agency. Although each presidency is unique and responds to different rhetorical situations, the rhetorical choices presidents make are part of larger discourses that predate American politics and present-day environmentalism. By limiting the scope of this project only from 1980 to 2000, the impact of the Post-Earth Day presidency becomes clearer. Because these administrations are situated within larger historical and cultural discursive frameworks, results come about less because of the rhetorical skills of “great men” and more because of the rhetorical power of the office; this unique subject position allows him or her to define and influence the national vocabulary.

**Scholarship in Presidential Rhetoric**

Theodore Windt (1990) first defined presidential rhetoric as an individual subfield within rhetorical studies. He argues that one of the most important “weapons” a president has is his ability to define issues (Windt, 1990, p. 4). It is the ability to define that not only characterizes a presidency but the power of definition also “gives political meaning to events that might not otherwise be seen or interpreted outside a political context” (Windt, 1990, p. 4). Thus, presidential rhetoric can be broadly defined to mean the president’s use of political speech to do political work. He or she is bound by the constraints of responding to overlapping rhetorical situations that require different responses. The presidency, however, is also a subject position that can create rhetorical situations, define terms, and shape the national political agenda. In other words, the president is the quintessential “subject who speaks” but is simultaneously forced to respond to preexisting rhetorical situations that demand an appropriate and fitting
response. Achieving a balance between utilizing the constitutive function of presidential rhetoric and responding to pressure to reflect public sentiment is undoubtedly very tough. Presidents must echo the needs of the citizenry while also setting the terms of debate, defining what issues should be most important to the body politic.

Mary Stuckey (2004), therefore, uses the term “chief interpreter” to define the president. In *Defining Americans*, she argues that the president has the power to rhetorically “embrace, articulate and invigorate our sense of national identity” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 2). Stuckey reminds us, “more than for any other participant in the national conversation, the task of articulating the collective culture, like the responsibility for managing the collective action, belongs to the president” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 7). Thus, this project sits at intersection between and among language, politics, and collective culture.

The environment has always been a contentious topic for presidents. Stuckey argues that it is the root of the tension that all presidents face between “preservation and progress” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 7). Since the founding, she argues, property ownership’s constitutive characteristics made some citizens “politically visible and valorized while others were marginalized or rendered politically invisible” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 22). For example, Stuckey (2004) notes that Jefferson’s ideal citizen, the yeoman farmer, used the land peacefully to support a small farm and feed his family, while Jackson’s key to citizenship, she argues, was not Jefferson’s farmer but rather the pioneer. The adventurous pioneer “opened up the nation and increased its territory…its emphasis on land helped render that dynamism politically stable” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 22). Thus, the frontier became a key term that shaped environmentalism through the present. Theodore
Roosevelt “rested his idea of nationhood on the frontier myth” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 23).

Conservation and preservation also became discourses that influenced national identity. Christine Oravec (1996), for example, locates conservationist discourse within larger political myths. She writes:

My position…is that myths do not stand alone as instigators of public action; they are woven into the political, scientific, social and economic threads of a nation’s culture. Therefore one should expect of the conservation movement not only a spiritual imperative but also a scientific and bureaucratic rationale for the placement of its followers within the concept of the myth itself. (Oravec, 2004, p. 63).

Each of the chapters in this project positions each president’s environmental rhetoric within larger, extra-political rhetorical traditions and highlights their constitutive function. The constitutive functions of presidential rhetoric give the president unique advantages. Windt (1990) argues presidents have the capabilities to shape the terms of political debate. He writes:

In national affairs, presidents establish the terms of discourse. Presidents speak with an authority, especially in foreign affairs, that no senator, or representative or citizen can match….Their messages create the arenas in which others will do rhetorical and political battle….Discourse is a source of power for presidents. Contemporary presidents have the option of “going public” over the head of Congress and directly to the American people to marshal support for their policies. (Windt, 1990, p. 3)

Indeed, the power of the president to “go public” is one of the most widely understood strategies in political communication. Thus, this project understands environmental rhetoric as a versatile rhetorical tool that presidents can use to present their social, economic, and international agendas to the citizenry, without having to negotiate with the other two branches of government (Tulis, 1988). As presidents utilize their platform to “go public,” they also present their versions of ideal citizenship to the public. As a constitutive rhetoric, presidential public speech becomes “a source of national
identity essential to the operation of the public sphere and the constitution of the polity” (Ivie, 1996, p. 162). So when a president talks about nature, environmentalism is taken out of the scientific sphere and becomes a national issue with the potential to constitute a collective (Peterson, 2004). Each of the chapters in this project understands environmental rhetoric as essential to “the construction of political culture” (Ivie, 1996, p. 162).

Indeed, the ability for the constitutive properties of presidential public address to create support for specific public policies is the focal point of this project. The use of metaphor, therefore, is central to presidential address and this project illustrates the materiality of metaphor in creating specific policies. Zarefsky (1986), for example, uses Johnson’s War on Poverty campaign to unpack the policy impact of metaphors. Johnson’s choice to frame anti-poverty legislation as a “war on poverty” was chosen on the belief that it would rally support among citizens (Zarefsky, 1986). Zarefsky (1986) understood metaphor as a presidential tool used to shift the rhetorical ground and constitute supporters of a war. Environmental rhetoric too has the ability to shift rhetorical ground, but as these chapters demonstrate, as a rhetorical tool and as a vocabulary, it is more versatile and is not limited to metaphors. It functions unlike other discourses in that it can be used by the president frame economic, international, and social issues that have little to do with the environment.

**Other Presidential Scholarship.**

Although not explicitly examining rhetoric within the presidency, other forms of presidential scholarship have addressed the tension between individual agency and situational constraints. Neustadt (1960), as an example, famously argued that presidential
power is located in the power to persuade. Similarly, Kernell’s (2007) going public argument maintains that the president uses persuasion to exercise power. Kernell’s (2007) argument, however, understands presidential power to be located in public address. Using public address to garner support for initiatives, he argued, was easier and more effective than persuading members of Congress to get bills and initiatives passed. It also, according to Tulis, hinders the deliberative democratic process. Tulis (1988) argues that public appeals replace popular rhetoric with rational debate between the executive and legislative branches, a shift in communication that changed the constitutional system for the worse. As this is a rhetorical project, these case studies do not position public communication as an act detrimental to deliberative democracy, but rather a tool presidents use to maintain a mediated relationship with a diverse citizenry.

Although the office of the president has gotten increasingly more rhetorical as time progresses, critically examining how presidents use language to define and redefine key issues allows us to have a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between and among presidential public address, democracy, and national identity. Each chapter makes a unique contribution to this process in that it highlights instances where environmental rhetoric provides the president with a unique opportunity to redefine the relationship between citizens and the natural world. It gives the president a flexible vocabulary in which he or she uses environmental rhetoric as a rhetorical tool to mobilize the citizenry. In some instances, environmental rhetoric can be used to collapse the environmental-economic binary and encourage collaboration between industry and environmentalists. In others, environmentalism is used to collapse the human-nature binary and advocate against social injustices. Thus, this project seeks to redefine
environmentalism as a key rhetorical strategy that allows the president to re-imagine ways to organize the world. Its vocabulary gives the president a means to restructure dominant binaries and create space for social change.

**Environmentalism as a constitutive discourse**

Rhetoric not only has the power to describe the world, but also the power to create a cultural imaginary. Thus, this project highlights environmental discourse’s constitutive properties. The president, as interpreter-in-chief, has the power to define and disseminate a normative definition of citizenship that reflects his policies. As, Michael McGee (1975) argued, naming subjects constitutes the people into a collective. According to McGee (1975), “The people are more process than phenomenon. That is, they are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end, wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals” (p. 242). Thus, each presidency presents a unique rhetorical moment to mobilize the citizenry and is instrumental in defining social reality (Zarefsky, 2004). By looking at the way each post-Earth Day presidency clusters terms, this project understands identity as both subjects of and subject to language. As subjects constituted by language are capable of action, the political work that environmental rhetoric does becomes a fruitful topic of inquiry.

Although presidential rhetoric is also in some instances reactionary, reflecting the current political climate, this project argues that the power to constitute particular collectives at particular moments is a unique source of empowerment for the presidency. The impact of public address extends beyond identity construction, as it has the potential to mobilize collectives that support his agenda, and through the act of voting, operationalize presidential rhetoric. Through the democratic performance of voting,
policies are enacted. In short, the power of presidential public address is not limited to
the temporal production of collectives, but rather, the collective identities have material
consequences. Blending Kernell’s (2007) theories in *Going Public* with Charland’s
(1987) idea of constitutive rhetoric allows rhetoricians to fully grasp the impact of public
speeches on identity constitution. As environmentalism is used to define a people, once
the people are defined and “hailed into being,” certain public policies follow;
environmental rhetoric is not just persuasive or prescriptive – it is also constitutive
(Campbell & Jamieson, 2008).

**Genre, Performance and Style.**

While many cultural studies scholars are preoccupied with examining moments of
rupture, this project also tracks consistency. Thus, this project also adds nuance to
understanding environmental presidential rhetoric as a genre, and understanding the
moments of presidential address as an amalgamation of rhetorical moments helps us see
the presidency as an evolving process, looking for continuity and recurrence. Indeed, this
type of scholarship understands the presidency as a result of deeds done by all presidents
(Campbell & Jamieson, 2008). This project categorizes preservationist, conservationist,
and exploitative discourses as distinct genres used to create different definitions of
environmentalism.

The ways that presidents define environmentalism depend largely upon his policy
goals and the political climate. However, agency is not only limited by these factors, but
also generic constraints; the rhetorics of preservation, conservation, and exploitation each
have possibilities and limitations. Understanding public address as a hybrid of other
environmental genres allows us to see the presidency as an amalgamation of practices,
events, and rhetorical moments. As Campbell and Jamieson (2008) note, “a generic perspective applied to the major types of presidential discourse emphasizes continuity within change and treats recurrence as evidence that symbolic institutional needs are at least as powerful as the force of events in shaping the rhetoric of any historical period” (p. 15). Because my project is largely about tracing and identifying patterns in presidential discourse, engaging the genres in which presidents speak is particularly important, as this approach is specifically designed to “observe the recurrent patterns in the speeches of those who ascended to the presidency” and “reduces the significance of any single piece of discourse or message” (Campbell and Jamieson, 2008, p. 15). Indeed, the discourses used to define different versions of environmentalism function as part of the process “in which generic functions are fulfilled over some period in a series of discourses” (Campbell and Jamieson, 2008, p. 15). Through the lens of environmental rhetoric, we are able to see the constitutive aspects of this genre and the policy impact of presidents’ rhetorical choices.

The role of environmental rhetoric as a rhetorical tool used to legitimate presidencies is an underdeveloped issue. As such, this project also interrogates the ways environmental rhetoric legitimates proposed policies. As Combs (1980) argues, “institutions and roles persist because people believe them to be ‘real’ and ‘right’ as the proper and legitimate setting for activities to occur” (p. 12). And it is in these reified spaces that a president’s action becomes public action sanctioned by the people (Combs, 1980, p. 12). The rhetorical process, where presidents rely on key clusters of terms to reify audiences, is central to influencing national collective identity. This project highlights the instances where environmental rhetoric becomes central to improving the
ethos of the president. It becomes a key tool in affirming their performative role as the interpreters-in-chief. As Combs (1980) suggests, the president, as a political actor, performs “on stage with images of audiences in their minds…audiences are reified objects for the actor engaged in political courtship” (p. 13). This “mutual dramatic communication”, where audiences reify rhetors and vice versa, legitimates the presidency as an institution and constitutes the audience as political stakeholders (Combs, 1980, p. 13).

This project also recognizes moments of difference, as each president chooses to define environmentalism differently. Addressing these variations demonstrates how presidential discourse works to constitute a collective that is reflective of specific presidencies and political agendas. Thus, each chapter addresses the ways environmental language helps the current president define his or her presidency. This vocabulary is understood as a tool presidents use to differentiate themselves from other administrations. To quote Robert Hariman (1995), “Our political experience is stylized…Relations of control and autonomy are negotiated through the artful composition of speech, gesture, ornament, décor, and any other means for modulating perception and shaping response” (p. 2). Thus, different ways that environmental discourse functions in presidential rhetoric helps rhetoricians understand how presidents define themselves against their predecessors.

Each president invites the electorate to see and organize the world in very different ways. Each of these chapters, therefore, helps us understand the flexibility of the executive branch, as it looks at each president’s rhetorical choices and limitations.
responses, each post-Earth Day president has made the decision to use environmental rhetoric as an ideological tool. Each administration’s unique definition of environmentalism is made up of different clusters of terms. Thus, each ideal citizenry has different values, cultural practices, and normative ways to think about and practice environmentalism. The president also has the ability to organize the social hierarchy, as each ideal citizenry has a different conception of the environmental-economic and human-nature binaries. Thus, environmental rhetoric, as a genre, is a crucial tool that each president uses to define his or her ideal citizenry and mobilize support.

Although it is a versatile discourse, this project also addresses instances where the language of environmentalism does not function as a viable rhetorical tool. Environmental rhetoric’s limitations as a discourse are also dependent upon the manner in which each president chooses to perform his or her role. Indeed, style is important, and as Combs (1980) argues, “there is considerable variability in playing a role. The public character of presidents has ranged from the country populism of Truman to the aristocratic celebrity of Kennedy” (p. 15). As each of the case studies presented in this project demonstrates, environmental rhetoric, while functioning as a discourse that can be applied to speaking on many subjects that sit on all parts of the ideological continuum, is not always successful. As the following chapters demonstrate, environmental rhetoric is often unable to provide an appropriate and fitting response to an exigency and is not always able to compensate for deficiencies in public character. These case studies, therefore, also add nuance to our understanding of the limitations of presidential rhetoric and its constitutive power. The type of environmentalism a president chooses to evoke is made up of different genres or traditions of environmentalism. In each administration we
see presidents combining different genres, taking aspects of each to create a version of environmentalism that creates space for political action.

**Layout of the Book**

The second chapter in this project, therefore, carves out different genres within environmentalism. Ecology, deep ecology, preservation, and conservation all have overlapping but different key figures and histories, and are each characterized by different ideas. This project situates contemporary political address within a larger context of the history of environmentalism. One example is Thoreau’s argument that abuse of nature is as severe a crime as abuse of people heavily influenced preservationist discourse. Preservationist John Muir, as another example, recognized people as members of the natural community and was partly responsible for mobilizing the ecological movement. Jeremy Bentham, Aldo Leopold, and Liberty Hyde Bailey, to name a few, were the key figures in the “greening of Americanism” and have often been referenced in presidential discourse (Nash, 1989, p. 130).

The definition of “wilderness” has evolved throughout American history. It became “the basic ingredient of American culture. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness, Americans built their civilization and used the idea of wilderness to give their community identity and meaning” (Nash, 2001, p. xi). Each chapter, therefore, addresses the way presidents use wilderness as an organizing term to define humans’ relationships to nature. Wilderness is a key term in the rhetoric of exploitation, as it is has an important function within the frontier myth. In nineteenth century Romanticism, wilderness is a site of wonder and awe. Thus, as Chapter 2 explains, wilderness becomes a site of the sublime and, therefore, serves as grounds for the preservation movement. Wilderness is
also important in defining the conservation movement, as the citizenry moved from understanding themselves as unapologetic consumers of natural resources to a harsh realization that scarcities of natural resources have draconian implications for survival. Reproduction and sustainability of wilderness became terms that defined the conservationist movement. Nash’s projects, however, do not contain much information about those in political positions of power who might also have shaped environmental discourse and policy. This project seeks to fill this lack and discover the role presidents have had in shaping how the populace organizes their world. Indeed, there is a reciprocal relationship between the built environment and culture (Milton, 1996). Lamenting that ecology cannot account for “cultural diversity in any but the most superficial sense,” this project, like Milton’s (1996), explores the current role and the possibilities of environmentalism in political discourse, using rhetorical criticism as a mode of analysis to bring a new understanding of the politics of environmentalism (p. 6).

Because environmentalism as a strategic tool for the presidency has not been a well-explored topic in recent years, the three case studies featured in this project go beyond merely highlighting this vocabulary’s constitutive properties. This project also provides a corrective narrative to the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton presidencies. Chapter 3 redefines Reagan beyond a president whose success was credited to strategic use of media and his ability to capitalize on a cowboy ethos. Chapter 3 argues that environmental rhetoric was as important in shaping his presidency as the rhetoric of the frontier. Chapter 4 repositions President George H.W. Bush beyond a failed environmental president and instead, attributes Bush’s failures to the disconnect between his definition of environmentalism and the economic climate in which he spoke. This
Chapter also argues that much of Bush’s efforts in defining environmentalism did not make an impact until years later. Chapter 5 also provides a corrective narrative for President Bill Clinton’s presidency, as Clinton’s commitment to social justice is something that is often gone unrecognized as part of his environmental agenda. His expanded definition of environmentalism functions as a constitutive rhetoric that integrates the disenfranchised back into civic life. Through this expanded version of environmentalism, Clinton constructs an ideal citizen that is expected to prevent injustices and inequalities.

Because the environment we experience is a product of human discourse, interrogating how the language we use to understand the way the world works affects our relationship to it is an important process (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996). However, the relationship between environmental public address and constitutive presidential rhetoric warrants attention from academe but what, if any, are the actionable items this kind of project reveals to other communities? Some that sit outside of academia may question the benefit of approaching the politics of presidential rhetoric from an environmental rhetoric perspective. Perhaps the most relevant argument for why these types of projects warrant attention is that they can help to “redeem the promise of practicality for public address scholarship” (Peterson, 2004, p. 9). As Peterson (2004) argues, public address scholarship can “contribute sophisticated interpretative approaches for understanding the texts from which policies and continued debates transpire” (p. 9). It can help people better understand the complicated relationship between rhetoric, politics, and culture and determine why some presidencies succeed and others fail. Presidents’ poor rhetorical choices, as displayed in the following case studies, can sometimes be the reason for their
failure and of course, situational constraints can hinder the most skillful of orators. This project seeks to understand what political impact environmental vocabulary allows a sitting president to make. Conversely, by choosing to employ the rhetoric of the environment, what political work cannot be done? How does employing the language of the environment position a president to navigate institutional constraints and national crises? In short, this project reveals what words work for particular situations, what words don’t, and why.

Written at a time where environmentalism is a billion dollar industry, this project also provides a solid foundation for future research about the role of environmentalism in the presidency. It interrogates the function of the newly minted green vocabulary designed to bridge economic and environmental anxieties, imagining a new possibility for the impact of environmental rhetoric. If communicated in a cultural context conducive to supporting green products and businesses, the language of sustainable development and the newly emerging green industry may be able to solve environmental conflicts and create environmentally friendly policies.
CHAPTER 2. WHO SPEAKS FOR THE TREES: ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS

All we can hope for is that the thing is going to slowly and imperceptibly shift. All I can say is that 50 years ago there were no such thing as environmental policies.

- David Attenborough

The Environmental Turn

“Protecting the Environment is Homeland Security” is an attention-getting slogan. It’s also something that environmental scientists and public health scholars have been saying for decades: scarcity of resource allocation has the potential to create global conflict. What struck me as odd is that I didn’t run across it in an environmental securities journal or government study. Instead, it was posted in 2009 at the local Starbucks in Iowa City, Iowa. Seeing this flyer in a small college town in the middle of the Midwest inside a chain of coffee shops owned by a Fortune 1,000 company prompted my rhetorical studies “ah-ha” moment. Ten years ago and before 9/11, this poster would have never been printed, much less understood. Before 2001, the shared knowledge required recognizing and understanding the connections between security and environmentalism had not yet spilled from academic communities into public discourse. How has the introduction of environmentalism into American political discourse changed how we think about politics and the environment? Conversely, what cultural and political conditions allowed this vocabulary to circulate?

From public frustration with President Bush over the rejection of the Kyoto Treaty in 2001 to approval of President Obama’s rejection of the Keystone Pipeline in January 2012, the environmental movement has scrutinized each administration’s environmental policy. They do this not just because the president has the power to
introduce environmental legislation, but also because the president can position the citizenry to think and act in certain ways. In recent years, however, the environmental vocabulary has spilled from the environmentalist movement into mainstream American discourse.

In recent decades, American industry has developed a fascination with sustainability and cultural compulsion to insert environmentalism into different genres and industries whose practices of production and consumption would normally be antithetical to the environmental movement; “green” products and services have been created by just about every industry, including, ironically, household cleaning products, and construction. The number of new green products and services that have emerged in the past decade alone is enough evidence to suggest that environmental terms are used in the public sphere more now than they were a half a century ago; it’s become trendy (not to mention lucrative) to become green. Even Leslie Paul Thiele (2012), political theorist and director of the Sustainability Studies Program at the University of Florida, writing for the popular cultural studies blog *Berfrois*, admits that, “sustainability is quickly becoming the lingua franca of public discourse.” Not surprisingly, new words are added to this lexicon all the time. In 2011, for example, new environmental terms that once circulated in speech communities reserved for engineers entered the public vernacular. We now recognize *fracking*, for example, as a term associated with drilling and environmental risk. Indeed, the compulsion to live green is also reflected in academic scholarship with what is called the “environmental turn” in the 1980s and ’90s (Buell, 2005, p. 5). This project is also part of that turn toward environmentalism.
Post-Earth Day, the citizenry consistently lives through and talks about environmental anxieties; with each decision where exploitation or excavation of the Earth occurs, we’re constantly questioning the environmental impact and potential threats to the environment. Even in foreign policy, debates regarding reconstruction in the developing world have environmental concerns that must be addressed. Environmental questions over mining in Afghanistan, for example, point to the impact that environmentalism has on American and international foreign policy. It can be argued that this concern for the environment has become a major cultural anxiety not unlike the anxiety over domestic security in the years following September 11th. Indeed, the implications for national security if humans don’t practice environmentalism were implicit in the flyer at Starbucks.

The fetish of greening ourselves in a post-Earth Day world can be seen in a cornucopia of cultural artifacts. In children’s literature, for example, one could point to the bestselling book in 1990, 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth, and its sequel, The New 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth, published nineteen years later in 2009. Given the plethora of objects ripe for consumption and the very public political debates that take place in the public sphere on how best to care for the earth, it is not difficult to argue that environmentalism, as a social movement, cultural practice, and most importantly, a vocabulary, has become deeply entrenched in the American psyche. This project is concerned with tracing the American environmental vocabulary and laying the groundwork for understanding what political work environmental language can do when used as a tool for the presidency. In order to understand the cultural function of this vocabulary and its potential, as it continues to
operate in political discourse, we must understand how humanity’s relationship to nature has shifted and competing ontologies that have emerged.

Although environmentalism as an ideology, cultural practice, and social movement has only recently dominated discourse, from presidential debates to Disney films over the past few decades, humanity has had a complicated relationship to the environment for a very long time. How did we get from unquestionably clearing the land in the early days of the frontier to recognizing conservation as a major component of global security? A mere half century ago, few citizens, much less cultural studies scholars, cared much about “the environment,” nor could they have guessed it would ever become at the center of politics and foreign policy. Indeed, it was only till the mid to late sixties that this preoccupation with nature could be readily seen in mainstream pop culture and political discourse (Nash, 2001, p. vii). Why did this explosion of interest in the environment happen; it certainly didn’t happen overnight. When Aldo Leopold published Sand County Almanac, for example, it was first largely ignored; only later it became a bestseller, taken up as a canonical text for multiple fields including ecology, ecocriticism, and nature writing.

**Cluster Analysis as a Methodology**

Understanding how these terms adapt to the cultural climate they are operating within provides rhetorical critics with insights into what a set of vocabulary words can accomplish rhetorically when used by the office of the president. To properly engage how these terms and traditions function within presidential rhetoric, Kenneth Burke’s cluster-agon analysis provides a useful methodology. In *Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke (1973) argues that literary images should be analyzed in context. Words are
"grounded in . . . ‘contexts of situation’" (p. 96). This project is, in part, a cluster analysis because it discovers “what subjects cluster about other subjects” and tries to answer what political work those clusters of terms allow presidents to do (Burke, 1984, p. 322). It also follows Burke’s cluster-agon analysis in that it defines “what goes with what,” “what is opposed to what,” “from what, through what, to what,” and “what changed into something else.”

This chapter contains a brief cultural history of the environmental movement and traces how the American relationship to nature has evolved from an expansionist, frontier ideology to a full-blown environmentalism is centered by an ethical concern for non-human life. Through this evolution, many different discourses and terms emerge. Some terms and attitudes repeatedly appear together in different contexts and some run in direct opposition to others. Showing what terms go together, what terms function to counteract other terms, and why some strands of environmentalism morphs into something else, is what this chapter is designed to do. Indeed, environmentalism and its future depend upon the uptake and circulation of these terms that make up the present-day environmental vocabulary. Looking closely at environmental vocabulary in use reveals to rhetoricians a way of thinking and malleable cluster of terms that can adapt to particular kinds of situations presidents face. The three case studies that follow this chapter aim to discover what discourses and political agendas these environmental terms are working through in order to help presidents position the citizenry and congress to think and act certain ways.

**Voices of Environmentalism**

This chapter traces the evolution of the environmentalism, understanding it as sets of fluid and sometimes contradictory discourses rather than a static cultural practice. It
traces the rhetorical shifts in the events leading up to Earth Day, a day that marks the
culmination or celebration of the induction of a new vocabulary into American political
discourse. This chapter also demonstrates that environmentalism stems not only from the
publication of Silent Spring, but from a much larger, older, and more complicated
intellectual tradition. Understanding the environment as “a concept and an associated set
of cultural values that we have constructed through the way we use language” allows
rhetoricians to understand what these discourses can help a president accomplish
argue in Green Culture:

There is no objective environment in the phenomenal world, no environment
separate from the words we use to represent it. We can define the environment
and how it is affected by our actions only through the language we have
developed to talk about these issues … what we know, how we know it, and who
can speak about it authoritatively are largely determined by our language… the
environment about which we all argue and make policy is the product of the
discourse about nature established in powerful scientific disciplines such as
biology and ecology, in government agencies such as the Environmental
Protection Agency and its regulations, and in nonfiction essays and books such as
Rachael Carson’s Silent Spring or Paul Ehrlich’s The Population Bomb. (p. 3)

In short, it is important for the field of rhetorical studies to understand, at least
briefly, how we went from inhabiting spaces to vehemently, often violently, try to protect
places. Recognizing the emergence of new environmental words into our existing
vocabulary helps US understand how environmental language in practice can constitute
the symbolic relationship to the world we physically inhabit; the collection of terms
creates a vocabulary with material and ideological consequences. Terms like space,
place, wilderness, conservation, preservation, environmentalism, and ecology, to name a
few, all constitute a different relationship between humans and the material spaces they
occupy; such terms are important because the relationship between humans and nature has “influenced the course of world history” (Buell, 2005, p. 2).

The definition of the term nature is predicated upon the assumption that something can be natural or unnatural. It also has deep roots in western thought. Because by definition it means something not created by humans, it masks its own constructedness; this distinction between humanity and the natural world has profound material consequences. As Lawrence Buell (2005) notes:

Humankind’s earliest stories are of earth’s creation, of its transformation by gods or by human ingenuity’s ‘second nature,’ as Cicero first called it – tales that frame environmental ethics in varied ways…The opening chapters of Genesis…have been blamed as the root cause of technodomininationism: God’s mandate to man to take ‘domination’ over the creatures or the sea and earth and ‘subdue’ them (pp. 1-2).

Indeed, the Eden described in the Bible is largely credited with creating the concept of “paradise.” Its opposite was an unruly world humanity was forced to control; this narrative had an important cultural function. As historian Roderick Frazier Nash (2001) argues, it was “environment most suited to human interests” and “the capstone of [humanity’s] civilized dreams” (Nash, 2001, p. xii). This idea of paradise was the very opposite of wilderness. Nash (2001) asserts that if “paradise was early man’s greatest good, wilderness as is antipode was his greatest evil” (p. 9). Thus it is not surprising that “the largest portion of energy of early civilization was directed at conquering wildness in nature and eliminating it in human nature” (Nash, 2001, p. xii).

Ecological critic Lawrence Buell (2005) argues that, “up to a point, world history is a history of space becoming place” (p. 63). Thus the environmental vocabulary that has so quickly become part of our political and cultural vocabulary also “arises within and against the history of human modification of planetary space, which started in remote
antiquity but has greatly accelerated since the industrial revolution, when ‘environment’
first came into use as an English noun” (Buell, 2005, p. 62). Along with the term
“environment” comes an implied assumption of belonging and ownership. According to
Buell (2005), environmentality is characterized as a “self-conscious sense of an inevitable
but uncertain and shifting relation between being and physical context” (p. 62). Thus,
implicit within the language of environmentalism is the transformation of space to place.

If space is a geometrical measurement, then place usually refers to a physical
location within that measurement which has assigned value or meaning to it. For
example, before someone buys a condominium they might look at the empty unit and say
something like “What a great space.” But when homeownership is acquired, and they
invite friends to visit their new home, they might say something like, “Welcome to my
new place,” because it is a physical location where value is assigned. Buell refers to this
as “place-attachment” rather than “space-attachment.” Quoting spatial theorist Eugene
to say, “A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered” (p. 63).
In short, “place” is used when people feel like they have a personal stake in something
(Buell, 2005, p. 63).

**Exploitation.**

Modernization can also accomplish the reverse: rearranging place into an abstract
non-space.¹ Buell (2005) contends that, “as scale and mobility expand, placeness tends to
thin out,” thus giving weight to the assumption that cities are non-places, and a theme

---

¹ A non-space is a phrase coined by Auge and is loosely defined as a neutral space such as an airport that
provides protection without attachment for displaced people. Non-places have been the subject of
numerous conference panels and a subject of inquiry for scholars across disciplines. Non-places, ironically,
have also become the setting for numerous films (i.e. *Vacancy, The Airport, Love Actually, The Shining,*
and *1408,* to name a few).
that is consistently re-imagined in literature, film, music, and poetry (p. 63). Indeed, the process of spaces becoming places has enormous ideological and material consequences. The American settler-conquest is a potent example. Buell (2005), quoting historian David Harvey, argues that the violent re-appropriation and renaming of space by settlers was an occasion where “the world’s spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations and then reterritorialized, according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administrations” (p. 64).

Much of American identity comes from this re-appropriation of space, more specifically, the construction of nature, “the wild,” and wilderness. The etymology of the word wilderness is as follows: derived from Norse and Teutonic languages, it’s root is “will,” meaning self-willed or uncontrollable and eventually became the descriptive word “wild” as in disordered or unruly (Nash, 2001, p. 1). The Old English word “deor” meaning animal referenced the mythical and savage creatures that lived in the forests. Thus, wilderness means “the place of wild beasts” (Nash, 2001, p. 2). According to Roderick Frazier Nash (2001), author of the most comprehensive history of the environment, wilderness is “the basic ingredient of American culture” and a concept that made the settlers’ lives American experiences (p. xi). He writes:

Civilization created wilderness. For nomadic hunters and gatherers, who represented our species for most of its existence, “wildness” had no meaning. Everything natural was simply a habitat, and people understood themselves to be part of a seamless living community. Lines began to be drawn with the advent of herding, agriculture, and settlement. Distinctions between controlled (domesticated) and uncontrolled animals and plants became meaningful, as did the concept of controlled space: corrals, fields, and towns. For the first time humans saw themselves as distinct from and, they reasoned, better than the rest of nature. It was tempting to think of themselves as masters and not as members of the life community. The conceit even extended to the idea that they “owned” it. The intellectual consequence was the application of the concept of “wild” to those parts of nature not subject to human control. (Nash, 2001, p. xii)
The construction of wilderness juxtaposed with the creation of controlled spaces, a massive increase in population, economic success and advances in technology constituted a collective that bet their “evolutionary future on the idea of controlling nature,” which was understood to be an “unknown, disorderly, and dangerous” place (Nash, 2001, p. xii). The understanding of the wilderness as a “wild savage place” also meant that its human inhabitants were as wild and as savage. “The wild people of the New World seemed ‘savages,’ and their wild habitat a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and transformation in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity” (Nash, 2001, p. xiii); the consequences of the pioneer bias against wildness meant that they “sensed that they battled wild country not only for personal survival but in the name of nation, race and God…In the morality play of westward expansion, wilderness was the villain, and the pioneer, as hero, relished its destruction” (Nash, 2001, p. 9).

This ideological positioning did not die with the proverbial “closing” of the frontier. President Kennedy (1961), for example, spoke of “conquering the deserts” in his inaugural. Republican Party chairman Mike Steel in 2008 made “drill baby drill” the new battle cry of the conservative movement. And, of course, most Hollywood westerns glorify and circulate the frontier ideology in countless films.

**Conservation.**

Other ways of understanding our relationship to wilderness began after the symbolic “closing” of the American frontier in 1890. Conservation was likely prompted by the scarcity of natural resources and an anxiety of not knowing what would happen if they ran out. Also a factor was the even greater realization that the American way of life
would self-destruct if they did not cease to continue to exploit the land. Others saw the benefits of a non-exploitative attitude towards nature because of its aesthetic qualities; American nature was what could legitimize a young and vulnerable nation. Or even more sophisticated, that natural resources should not be exploited because it has “rights” as humans have rights.

Certainly the beauty of America’s wilderness coupled with America’s vulnerability as a young nation contributed to changing attitudes about nature once again. Appreciation by “literary gentlemen wielding a pen,” rather than the “pioneer with his axe,” also contributed to a “new” appreciation for nature (Nash, 2001, p. 44). The concept of “the sublime” laid foundation for a favorable conception of uncontrolled space and because deism, which brought together nature and religion, was also gaining influence – what was wild was now revered and fertile ground for the Romantics was laid (Nash, 2001, p 44). It is worth noting that popular books, such as Thomas Burner’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1691), helped circulate this new attitude toward nature (Nash, 2001). And, of course, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant’s talk of the sublime also helped it circulate. Burke’s argument that the terror that comes from observing nature comes from wonder and awe; the sublime brought together God and wild-ness in a way that transformed the way Americans thought about nature (Nash, 2001). “By the mid-eighteenth century, wilderness was associated with the beauty and godliness that previously had defined it by their absence. Men found it increasingly possible to praise, even worship, what they had formally detested” (Nash, 2001, p. 46).

Romanticism, while very different from the sublime and deism, emerged as the dominant discourse; romantics “preferred the wild, turning instead to “the unkempt

“Conquest was not their primary concern…Building on the European conception of the natural world that gave rise to deism and the sublime…[were] the ‘glorious works of the Creator’” (Nash, 2001, p. 54). In short, the romantic tradition fused nature’s sublime and God’s grandeur, and allowed exceptionalist claims to be made about America’s nature (Nash, 2001). It was appreciation of America’s wilderness that prompted nationalists to suggest that, “it was in the wildness of its nature that their country was unmatched” (Nash, 2001, p. 69). Painter Thomas Cole, President Thomas Jefferson, and First Lady Abigail Adams, for example, all made exceptionalist claims using American nature as their grounds.

The 18th century transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau, also made a substantial contribution to the evolution of nature in the American cultural imaginary. Thoreau and Emerson both shared the idea of a kind of ideal society “composed of self-reliant individuals mutually gathered together by choice rather than compulsion and able to survive alone or together” (Burch, 1971, p. 99). For transcendentalists like Thoreau, “wilderness was a reservoir of wildness vitally important for keeping the spark of the wild alive in man” (Nash, 2001, p. 88). The wild became a place to go to achieve peace and tranquility. But of equal importance is the insistence that science must be humanized.

---

2 Nash (2001) defines Transcendentalism as “the belief that a correspondence or parallelism existed between the higher realm of spiritual truth and the lower one of material objects…Nature mirrored the currents of the higher law emanating from God” (p. 85).
not eliminated. They valued the “rationality of science… Not unlike Leopold’s ecological observations” (Burch, 1971, p. 103).

**Preservation and Stewardship.**

The inexhaustibility of resources “was the dominant American myth for a century after independence” (Burch, 1971, p. 118). Following the frontier, transcendentalism, romanticism, sublime, and deist ideologies sacrilized the American nature. It is not surprising, then, that with sacrilization comes anxiety of its destruction; the realization that resources were exhaustible brought about dramatic changes in American environmental policy and Americans’ relationship to nature (Nash, 1989, p. 32). For example, a 1936 study on the Dust Bowl, commissioned by the U.S. Congress, investigated the cause and defined it as a national tragedy (Burch, 1971). To define the Dust Bowl as a tragedy rather than a crisis, emergency, or natural disaster is significant and indicates a change in the way Americans understand themselves in relationship to their land. Change in behavior became necessary. It noted that “rehabilitation of a great region was not merely a matter of encouraging better farm practices and desirable engineering works, and the revision of ownership and tenure institutions, it also required the revision of deep-seated attitudes of mind” (Burch, 1971, p. 119).

Thus, legal efforts arose to preserve; place attachment began to emerge and it became the basis for stewardship. Stewardship is rooted in a personal attachment to and responsibility for the care of a particular place (Buell, 2005). The introduction of stewardship marks a major shift in American environmental history and lays the groundwork the modern environmental movement. That the government should be responsible for the care and conservation of wilderness was a remarkable shift in
Americans’ relationship to nature. Stewardship as a national practice “completely countered dominant American purposes” and ran against the ideology of the frontier (Nash 2001, p. 96). Its uptake as an acceptable cultural practice was necessary for the success of the preservationist movement (Nash, 2001). The 1832 declaration of the Arkansas Hot Springs as a national reservation and the 1864 grant of Yosemite for the State of California set important precedents for government sponsored preservation in America (Nash, 2001). Similarly, Yellowstone was signed into law by President Grant in 1872, marking it the first of many preservationist acts by the federal government.

Leisure and enjoyment of nature were intrinsic to stewardship. Industrialization brought transportation to rural areas. It also made education readily available to children. Children went to school not to work in factories. Out of childhood and the ability for families to travel long distances came the vacation. Parks became a popular tourist destination and the place the American family could spend time together. Through leisure time’s introduction into the American family, vacations to national parks became another way American exceptional was reinforced.

The Ecological Turn

Stewardship stood in the way of progress but the shrinking reservoir of natural resources was also a reality. The impulse to prolong exploiting resources for as long as possible drove many to embrace conservationism. Conservationism rations resources to prolong their use. It is a practice that is not designed to preserve resources, but allows for their exploitation by industry. With conservationism, aesthetic appreciation and recreation take a backseat to utilitarian attitudes about nature. Declining water levels in the Erie Canal, for example, prompted legislators to realize that lumber and mining
companies had been stripping the surrounding forests of minerals and trees. Forestry and mining had possibly created a flood zone. As a response, on May 15, 1885, Governor David Hill approved a bill creating a forest preserve. 715,000 acres were to remain “wild forest lands.” Wilderness was preserved but for commercial purposes. Utility became the dominant reason to set aside land. The tension between preservation and conservation can still be seen in present-day environmental debates. Dominant players in the conservationist movement include Pinchot, the chief forester in the United States Forest Service, who believed in the prudent use of natural resources. Preservationists like former friend John Muir, a publicist for national parks and spokesperson for the movement, fought in vain to keep most of his “virgin forests” but emerged victorious when he befriended President Roosevelt, an avid steward of the environment but also a hunter (Nash, 2001, 138).

Up until 1864 arguments in favor conservation were largely economic. George Perkins Marsh became a key player in using ethics as grounds for conservation. His 1864 publication *Man and Nature* was the first book about destruction of the environment (Nash, 1989, p. 38). A product of his time, Marsh did not challenge anthropocentrism and agreed with human domination of nature (Nash, 1989). But *Man and Nature* was the first American publication to frame concern for the environment in ethical terms. This move was uncharacteristic for 1864. Largely due to the circulation of his book, custodianship of the planet became an ethical issue.

By the late 1800s, a variety of discourses permeated public rhetoric and policy. Preservation, conservation, and stewardship worked alongside movements such as transcendentalism, romanticism, deism, and expansionist ideologies to create ideological
and material changes in nature. Ethical arguments became attached to environmental practices. Because there were so many overlapping and competing discourses, major environmental players, such as Muir and Pinchot, began to clash. But the ecological movement, which symbolically changed man’s position within the physical world, constituted the most significant additions to the environmental vocabulary. Sociologist William Burch (1971) writes “ecology’s organizing principle is built upon a communal metaphor that establishes harmony through the natural forces of diversity”…There is considerable similarity between the transcendentalists’ world view and that found in the science of ecology” (p. 103).

Thoreau, a transcendentalist, and Muir, a preservationist, are among those whose ideas made important contributions to this early version of ecology. The word ecology dates back to 1866 but the work that laid the groundwork for its legitimacy predates the term; it could be argued that there were ecologists before there was a vocabulary to constitute them. Indeed, Thoreau was a major groundbreaking thinker in creating ecological discourse. For Thoreau, abuse of nature is as horrible a crime as the abuse of people. Moving beyond ethical concerns, he challenged the anthropocentrism that dominated environmental discourse and changed the discourse about the relationship between animals and people (Nash, 1989). Both Muir and Thoreau thought, “the basis of respect for nature was to recognize it as part of the created community to which humans also belong” (Nash, 1989, p.39). Muir saw all people as members of a natural community (Nash, 1989). Thus, community became one of the basic premises of Ecology as a discipline. Scientist Barry Commoner explained it best when he said that, “the first law of ecology is that everything is related to everything else” (Nash, 1989, p. 40). The idea that
humans were members of a community that extended beyond humanity had profound ideological consequences. As Nash (1989) in *The Rights of Nature* argues:

> Once an American conceded that something was a member of his or her community, the argument for its rights was hard to deny. Each time democratic ideology broadened since 1776 it was to accommodate new groups as members of Jefferson’s ambiguous community of equal men…that the community to which human beings belong did not end with people.” Ecology, the study of interdependent communities, would aid this cause, providing new scientific reasons for yet further widening the circle of ethical relevancy. (p. 56)

Reason, science, and even transcendentalism provided a basis for ethical environmental thinking but in early circles, the central idea that provided an intellectual basis for environmental ethics was “community membership and its attendant rights” (Nash, 1989, p. 36). That nature had “rights” just as people had rights marked a major shift in humanity’s history. It was slow to catch on for a few reasons, mainly because people were preoccupied with issues, such as slavery, that concerned the rights of people (Nash, 1989).

In 1935, Arthur Tansley coined the word *ecosystem*. Prior to that, early ecologists used the community metaphor in its place. That community had become an “-ology” contributed to an increased interest in the new discipline. But Aldo Leopold, author of *The Sand County Almanac* (1940), was perhaps ecology’s best publicist. *The Sand County Almanac* was not very popular during the time of its publication, most likely because Americans were preoccupied with fighting in World War II and the readjustment period that followed. It was later taken up in the late 1960s as a canonical text of the ecological movement and became a bestseller. *The Sand County Almanac* was written as a response to what Leopold considered an abomination: an environmentalist ideology that
was concerned with preserving capitalism more than ethics and natural resources (Nash, 1989).

Ecology is a discipline that also relies upon technology and scientific method; it emerged at a moment when an interest in the environment and fascination with science and technology were gaining momentum. As Roderick Frazier Nash (2001) writes nostalgically in the prologue to the fourth edition of his 1967 book *Wilderness in the American Mind*, the 1960s was a time Americans experienced “broad changes in American values and priorities that we know as 1960s environmentalism, the ecological perspective, and the counterculture…Suddenly it seemed that the wilderness was relevant” (p. vii). Nash (2001) goes on further to say that:

This was a period of growing criticism of American culture; it followed that the antipode of civilization, namely wilderness, would attract attention. ‘Ecology’ and ‘environment’ became household words between the first (1967) and second (1973) editions of the book…If, as Outside Magazine said in 1996, *Wilderness and the American Mind* was one of the books that changed our world, then, it must be recognized that the world was ready to change. (p. viii)

**The Carson Effect: Silent Spring & The Population Bomb.**

In 1962, Rachael Carson published *Silent Spring*, the book credited with creating environmental awareness on a national scale. In 1964, President Johnson signed the Wilderness Act. 1969 saw the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act; the first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970. More than policy, *Silent Spring* helped create a movement that would change environmental vocabulary once again. Carson was able to “tap into the public’s growing uneasiness over science and the military in the Cold War era, when the threat of Armageddon seemed real” (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996, p. 27). Carlson illuminated the darker side of science. Circulating within the glory years of space exploration, which did much to create enthusiasm for science and exploration, *Silent
Spring made agricultural science seem just as destructive to the world as a nuclear missile (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996). “Agricultural science, as Carson depicted it, joined with agribusiness to produce chemicals. Ironically, these chemicals increased agricultural production, but in the long run threatened the environmental safety of the very citizens who prospered from the advances in farming technology. It created a discourse that ran in direct contradiction to the scientific ideology stemming from the Enlightenment—that science could free us” (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996, p. 27). Silent Spring prompted a radical paradigm shift away from the “Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy” and toward a more ethical science of ecology (Carson, 1962, p. 297).

Carson’s effort to spread her message was successful largely because she didn’t behave like a typical scientist and wrote for a lay audience. Reaching out beyond the scientific community, Silent Spring took these ideas outside the walls of traditional science’s academic conferences and journals and into the public sphere. This made her famous, garnering attention from the likes of President Kennedy and Bob Dylan (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996). With the success surrounding Silent Spring, the environmental movement gained momentum. A short five years later, Paul Ehrlich authored The Population Bomb, a book that became the most successful environmental book ever with sales topping three million dollars in the first ten years (Killingsworth & Palmer, 1996). The Population Bomb warned readers that in the next ten years, 1970s America would see famines and a world increase in the death unless something is done about population control. Ehrlich’s (1971) arguments are worth quoting at length:

I have understood the popular explosion intellectually for a long time. I can to understand it emotionally one stinking night in Delhi a couple of years ago. My wife and daughter and I were returning to our hotel in an ancient taxi. The seats were hopping with fleas. The only functional gear was third. As we crawled
through the city, we entered a crowded slum area. The temperature was well over a hundred and the air was a haze of dust and smoke. The streets seemed alive with people…People visiting, arguing, and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking gave the scene a hellish aspect…All three of us were frightened. It seemed like anything could happen. (p. 12)

Indeed both Erlich and Carson were weary of technological progress. Both influential works contain a familiar anxiety that the continual exploitation of once limitless natural resources would eventually cause human life on earth to end. Growing concern for the state of the environment and what it might mean for the future of humanity created new editions to an ever-growing vocabulary of ecological language. Due to the popularity of *Silent Spring* and *The Population Bomb*, the modern environmental movement that was constituted from their popularity, many new words entered the American environmental vocabulary between Carlson’s *Silent Spring* and Earth Day 1970. Terms such as population control, energy crisis, and population explosion, among others, permeated the American vocabulary. This vocabulary collectively became what Killingsworth and Palmer call *ecospeak*, a “distinctive and limiting language of ecological campaigning and consciousness” (Myerson & Rydin, 1996, p. 28). *Ecospeak*, as Killingsworth and Palmer define it, is detrimental to rational political discourse, leading only to polarizing arguments and one that is “unable to connect with mainstream America. While ecospeak is a strategic rhetorical tool designed to divide, George Myerson and Yvonne Rydin’s (1996) *environet* is more neutral. An *environet* includes, but is not limited to, encompassing terms such as *pollution*, *global warming*, *climate change*, *greenhouse effect*, *sustainable development*, *resources* and
energy, population, biodiversity, species, rainforest, sustainability, green, and environmentalism (Myerson & Rydin, 1996).
CHAPTER 3. IT’S THE ENVIRONMENT STUPID: CONSERVATIONIST DISCOURSE AS ECONOMIC JEREMIAH

The Reagan Revolution

Upon assuming office, Reagan inherited what he called in a February 5, 1981 speech “the worst economic mess since the Great Depression” (Berger, 2004). It was imperative that, as president, he took action. The poor economy opened the door for what some called “The Reagan Revolution” and, “almost overnight, transformed the national debate over domestic policy. From the beginning of the New Deal, the question had been what federal programs to expand. Under Mr. Reagan, the question became what programs to cut” (Berger, 2004). The Reagan Revolution is commonly characterized by a series of policies rooted in neoliberalism. Reaganomics, as his new and controversial economic plan had been nicknamed, assumed tax cuts would stimulate the economy and reduce the deficit. “In the 1980 Republican primaries, Mr. Bush called this supply-side plan ‘voodoo economics.’ And Mr. Reagan's own director of the budget, David A. Stockman, suggested that the president was simply proposing a repackaging of economics intended to favor the rich, whose gains would ultimately trickle down through the rest of the economy” (Berger, 2004).

Despite all the controversy, Reagan was able to persuade the American people and Congress to accept his new economic plan; many critics who understood this program to be detrimental to many disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged factions still wonder how this happened. His public ethos as a western film star, positive media presence, and good fortune to have been able to benefit from Peggy Noonan’s
rhetorical skills, earned him the nickname “the Teflon President.” Indeed, Reagan seemed to be able to get away with things other presidents could not. Remembered in the cultural imaginary as a leader who took up space exploration as the next frontier, Reagan is also noted for his strategic use of television as a medium to further circulate his cowboy ethos (Stuckey, 2006). While, historians position him as the president who exploited the environment, Reagan’s economic rhetoric has been largely under-examined by rhetoricians.

Thus, this chapter attempts to reposition Reagan beyond a rhetor whose success depends upon his ability to exploit the myth of the frontier. Instead, it makes sense of Reagan as a political agent who repurposes the vocabulary of environmentalism to successfully make a case for Reaganomics. Focusing on his use of the environmental vocabulary and the function of that language within Reaganomics, this chapter examines his appeals to the citizenry and identifies the extra-political discourses and clusters that structure Reaganomics. While the overarching goal of this project is to understand how environmental vocabularies are produced and consumed by presidents, this chapter argues that the vocabulary of conservation helped Reagan construct a rhetorical situation where an economic plan rooted in neoliberal policies became the only response that was fitting.

This chapter makes an important contribution to the fields of environmental and political communication. The cautionary language of conservation and the expansionist themes associated with the frontier myth are on opposite ends of the environmental continuum. If anything, conservation is a practice that emerged in response to expansionist rhetoric and acts that exploit and destroy nature; it is a discourse that came
about when people realized America did not have a limitless supply of natural resources.

Remarkably, Reagan is able to use conservationist vocabulary to promote a neoliberal policy agenda that helped him later exploit natural resources. Neoliberalism, according to political theorist David Harvey (2007), is:

The theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 22)

In this project, the term neoliberalism points to a set of beliefs, practices, and policies that are characterized by economic expansion, free market capitalism, deregulation, privatization, more emphasis on individual agency, and less on societal responsibility. Harvey (2007) argues that neoliberalism is a hegemonic discourse that “has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world” (p. 23). Since it privileges economic success over social responsibility, it is fair to assert it also enables exploitation of natural resources and pollution of the environment if preserving or conserving natural resources comes at the expense of economic growth. Therefore, neoliberalism runs against conservationist and preservationist vocabularies. For Reagan, economic success and environmental responsibility were inversely proportional.

This chapter is also the first case study out of three in this project that attempts to answer the question: “What does using environmental vocabulary in public discourse allow presidents to do?” Among Republican strategists, evoking the rhetoric of environmentalism is not assumed to be a logical rhetorical strategy for enhancing the
neoliberal agenda. If anything, environmentalism is more commonly associated with the rhetoric of Democrats Al Gore and Bill Clinton, whose administration was responsible for some of the most memorable environmental legislation. Thus, recognizing that vocabularies not ostensibly recognized as political sometimes do important political work for presidents is important for advancing rhetoric and public discourse as fields of study. Part one of this chapter situates environmental discourse within the frontier mythos and American jeremiad, two rhetorical genres that prefigure environmentalism. The second section briefly surveys prior use of environmental vocabularies by President Carter. The final portion demonstrates how Reagan’s use of a conservationist vocabulary works to create an economic jeremiad. It is the economic jeremiad that positions Reaganomics as the appropriate course of action. Ultimately, I argue that the rhetorical choice to utilize this vocabulary made it possible to explain Reaganomics to the American people.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that, “the essence of metaphor is understanding one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). What is ultimately at stake by examining the role of environmental language within Reaganomics is rethinking how vocabularies and metaphors structure how a chief executive explains key initiatives to the body politic. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue:

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (p. 3)

Language often functions like mass-produced objects. As rhetorical tools, clusters of vocabulary words are consumed, used, and often reappropriated by different people and structures in different and sometimes unexpected ways. Presidents, as the
interpreters-in-chief, have the ability to define and redefine for the populace what things are, what they mean, and what words should be used to describe them. Thus, it is possible that an environmental vocabulary could be used to speak about something other than the environment. The previous chapter outlines three categories of environmental discourse and the vocabulary words that cluster around them. This chapter demonstrates the discursive nature of language by highlighting Reagan’s ability to create new clusters.

Set against the frontier myth and the jeremiad, two rhetorical figurations that predate environmentalism, this chapter argues that a conservationist vocabulary is the key rhetorical tool that allows Reagan to successfully frame his economic agenda. Working through the rhetoric of an economic jeremiad and the exploitive rhetoric of the frontier, the president is able to define the economic situation of the early 1980s as a crisis, the economy as an environment, and use the conservationist ethos to help Americans understand Reaganomics as the only viable solution.

The remainder of this chapter explores the ways Reagan reappropriates an environmental jeremiad to accomplish several economic goals. First, Reagan constructs the economic crisis of the early 1980s as a “rhetorical situation that needs an immediate and appropriate response” (Bitzer, 1968). Second, Reagan uses this vocabulary to reframe the economy as an ecosystem, constituting an “economic environment” that demands protection. Third, Reagan offers his economic policies and neo-liberal political ideology as a path to redemption; Reaganomics is reframed as the appropriate course of action that allows us to move towards economic salvation and encourages progress.
Reagan’s Frontier

The frontier has tremendous ideological and historical significance in American identity formation; its creation, according to Stuckey (2004), “is the key to American National identity” (p. 40). In terms of westward expansion and the conquering of the frontier, “wilderness was the villain, and the pioneer, as hero, relished its destruction” (Nash, 2001, p. 25). The frontier myth has also played an important role in presidential discourse, structuring the rhetoric of chief executives including, but not limited to, Jackson, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan, and George W. Bush. It has also had material consequences in the form of expansion and land acquisition. In the case of President Jackson’s presidency, for example, “maintaining the national balance meant expanding the nation’s boundaries” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 57). It is not surprising, then, that President Jackson’s ideal citizen became the frontiersman (Stuckey, 2004). Jacksonian conceptions of citizenship, like his predecessors and those that would follow, depended in part on a particular relationship between Americans and their physical environment. The idealized yeoman farmer of Jeffersonian America became “Jackson’s independent frontiersman” and land became the “surrogate for independence” (Stuckey, 2004, p. 53). Expansion became a transformative tool, enabling citizens to have “what Jackson considered a truly democratic character” (53). As Nash (2001) notes in Wilderness and the American Mind, “frontiersmen acutely sensed that they battled wild country not for personal survival but in the name of nation, race, and God. Civilizing the new world…meant ordering chaos” (p. 25). Fredrick Jackson Turner in a famous address at the 1893 American Historical Society meeting declared that the process of westward expansion created “a new product that is American” (as cited in Beasley, 2004, p. 31); with the taming of the land,
“somehow, American character had sprung up from the ground along with their crops” (Beasley, 2004, p. 31).

Indeed, the relationship between nature and American values is very complicated. American conceptions of work centered around productivity, progress, and ingenuity. Consequently, attitudes associated with the American entrepreneurial spirit such as determination, courage, strength, and independence are worth exploration because they have so deeply permeated the American political psyche. For many people, including presidents, Americans’ ability to invent things, expand onto new territory, and make lots of money in the process exemplify what it means to be an American. Much of what it means to be American at any given historical moment can be determined by examining how the population talks about and uses land. According to Turner, the “genesis of American consciousness” can be found “within the American landscape” (Beasley, 2004, p. 32).

Indeed, as Rosteck and Frentz (2009) note, the way nature is described is dependent upon the current cultural climate. “As we might expect, in times when we are moved to glorify nature’s grandeur, rhapsodic rhetoric predominates, while when we fear too much use and abuse, jeremiad comes to the fore” (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 3). Rosteck and Frentz (2009) rightly suggest that the rhetoric of conservation, predicated upon the assumption there is too much abuse of natural resources, and the rhetoric of preservation, which often makes an exceptionalist argument to glorify American nature, depends upon the dominate issues of the current historical period. But Rosteck and Frentz (2009) neglect a third strain of environmental discourse: the rhetoric of exploitation. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of exploitation, which makes arguments in
favor of consumption, capitalism, private ownership, individualism, and entrepreneurship, can surface when we are moved to assert men’s and women’s dominance over nature and argue our right to act upon that dominance by exploitation of the landscape.

Harnessing the power of his built-in cowboy ethos, Reagan utilized the frontier mythos in innovative ways. The Reagan era was in some ways a response to the Carter era. When Carter was in office, Americans were asked to conserve energy, money, and live a more temperate life. In many ways, the success of the Reagan campaign was an argument against a Carter-era lifestyle. Whereas Carter expressed concerned for the collective, Reagan was a display of unapologetic individualism. Speaking from within and through a peanut farmer turned politician ethos, he was often unable to excite and mobilize the citizenry. Carter also had problems with public speaking and connecting with the populace. Some individuals, including members of his own party, attribute this lack of popularity to his lack of charisma (Hahn, 1984). Sen. Eugene McCarthy famously called Carter “an oratorical mortician” (as cited in Hahn, 1984, p. 265). Perhaps Carter’s Peanut Farmer ethos could not offer the excitement, glamour, and hopefulness that the expansionist rhetoric of the frontier could provide. Indeed, his inability to connect with his audience contributed to his unpopularity and created a rhetorical opportunity for Reagan. What emerged was the opposite of a farmer.

The Ronald Reagan in the cultural imaginary was a western hero, complete with a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, and western saddle. Reagan was also able to tap into the frontier narrative that is central to the narrative of California. Nevermind that he was a trained English equestrian who regularly competed at horse shows; Reagan’s cowboy
ethos from his film career served him better than seemingly elitist equestrian competitions ever could. His unquestioned credibility as a frontiersman was in part enabled by his strategic use of media. Images of Reagan as a real California cowboy working at a real California ranch allowed Reagan to also exploit the expansionist and exploitive discourses characteristic of the frontier genre. Utilizing the frontier mythos, the cultural cachet of the state of California, and his political performance as a modern-day cowboy who can reclaim the American spirit, Reagan speaks within a frontier ideology that encourages economic expansion and environmental exploitation. Reagan’s frontiersman became the anti-environmentalist and the opposite of the peanut farmer. Having commanding usage of these discourses allowed him to push policies that expand businesses, private enterprise, and the free market.

**The American Jeremiad**

The frontier ethos gave Reagan the language that encourages economic expansion and environmental exploitation. What he needed was a discourse that could help him define a crisis and the appropriate and fitting response needed to lead the people to salvation. The frontier, while useful for understanding Reagan, has its limitations, as it does not take into account the persistence of the jeremiad within Reagan’s public speeches. Along with the frontier, the “jeremiad plays an important role in process of Americanization and in the development of middle class America” (Bercovitch, 1978, p. 82). Examining how the jeremiad functions with the rhetoric of the frontier allow for the analysis of the prophetic strains in his public discourse. The American jeremiad within Reagan’s discourse helps us understand how expansionist strains function within the context of a cycle of anxieties, crises, and redemption.
In a 1952 essay Perry Miller developed the theory of the Puritan jeremiad. A term coined by Miller, the jeremiad was a specific rhetorical form Puritans used to make sense of the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves. The late 16th century was characterized by “a flurry of calamities: droughts, fires, epidemics, crop failures, and Indian attacks. Rather than attributing unfortunate events to nature or sinful actors, they became signs of God’s wrath.” Thus, the jeremiad was characterized by rhetoric that lamented settlers’ departure from the objectives of the original covenant. These sermons “admonished the people to repent and return to their divine calling or else they would face the judgment of God” (Jue, 2006, p. 175). Miller argues that early 16th-century Massachusetts founders sought to create a version of Christian reformation that would serve as a model for the rest of the Christian world to follow; the new world would become what Winthrop famously called “a city on a hill” (Miller, 1956, p. 15).

Taking a rhetorical approach, Ernest Bormann (2001) uses fantasy theme analysis to argue that the jeremiad has an important political function. When the populace finds God’s path again, “the result was a glorious happy ending, a time of regeneration and rebirth, as indicated by a prospering of the community in this world” and gave a community’s success ties to larger themes that extended outside the local community (Bormann, 2001, p. 43). The jeremiad assured the people that nothing happened by accident. When someone experienced misfortune, for example, they had offended God (Bormann, 2001). Thus, the jeremiad had a powerful cultural and rhetorical function. It became a rhetoric that could entice action and reform:

If they [the people] worked hard and did the right thing, God would reward them, showering success. By working hard and doing the right thing they released the guilt and worldly success became evidence that their conscience need no longer be troubled. Should their efforts result in failure, the speakers could deliver
further jeremiads which used the failure as evidence that they had not tried hard enough, had not humiliated themselves enough, had not repented enough, and that they must work even harder and be even better to win God’s favor. (Bormann, 2001, p. 132)

Bormann (2001) argues this fantasy of “Fetching Good Out of Evil” was a significant rhetorical form in that it not only gave local events a deeper meaning, but it became the justification for many acts of violence and reform (p. 134). Bercovitch (1978) defines the jeremiad as a “ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting ‘signs of the times’ to certain traditional metaphors, themes and symbols” (p. xi). Indeed, Bercovitch (1978) also argues that the jeremiad is instrumental in helping create American national identity goes a step further in her characterization of the jeremiad, arguing that it is essential to creating a national ritual of progress that “contributed to the success of the republic” (p. xv). According to Bercovitch (1978), the American jeremiad works because it blurs the individual and the collective. Redemption occurs when the individual assumes responsibility to improve the community. The American jeremiad, however, leaves little room for resistance to dominant ideologies or structuring narratives; individual acceptance of the causes and constraints of the discourses is the only way to achieve purification and communal redemption. Thus, accepting the system, rather than moving to change it, becomes the way that communities progress. John M. Murphy (1990) notes, "The jeremiad deflects attention away from the possible institutional or systemic flaws and toward considerations of individual sin. Redemption is achieved through the efforts of the American people, not through a change in the system itself. ... The jeremiad, then, serves as a rhetoric of social control" (pp. 402, 412).
It is this dimension of progress that differentiated the American Jeremiad from Miller’s characterization, and one that is particularly useful for understanding how environmental language creates and sustains a climate of economic anxiety Reagan spoke within. Indeed, the jeremiad is important for situating Reagan’s speech within a specific rhetorical exigency and helps rhetoricians understand why Reagan’s rhetoric resonated with the American people at this particular place and time. Puritan errands, as Sacvan Bercovitch (1978) suggests, help answer the question not “who are we” but “when is our errand going to be fulfilled” (p. 81). Helping to define this rhetorical situation as crisis and also identifying Reaganomics as the only appropriate and fitting response that would lead the citizenry toward salvation, the jeremiad could “unite an audience while reaffirming its values” (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 12). Its “warnings of impending doom” is coupled with the promises of salvation if citizens behave as they “are capable of acting” (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 12). Thus, the jeremiad functions to “create a climate of anxiety” (Bercovitch, as cited in Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 12).

Indeed, the jeremiad as a rhetorical form, as Bormann (2001) suggests, is a “recurring pattern of discourse which cuts across rhetorical visions” (p. 131). As such, even radical groups must employ the American jeremiad in order to gain traction with the American populace (Bercovitch, 1978). It is not unusual, then, that the American jeremiad prefigures environmentalism. Rosteck and Frentz (2009) argue that the jeremiad is used within environmental strategies that “persuade people to act in certain ways by means of apocalyptic predictions designed to mobilize emotions” (p. 3). Indeed, it is the “rhetoric of impending catastrophe and future redemption” that prefigures much public environmental discourse (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 3).
But aside from functioning as a form of constitutive rhetoric that could terrify, unite, and reaffirm a community, Bostdorff (2003) argues that the jeremiad is also a form of epideictic rhetoric, helping the rhetor define the narrative and terms of the debate. Fulfilling epideictic expectations, the jeremiad also was part of a public ritual that aimed to reinforce community by inducing conformity to community standards. The jeremiad allowed Puritan ministers to display their eloquence in ways that entertained and underscored their leadership role. In all, the jeremiad in puritan New England fulfilled the overarching epideictic function of creating communal definition. Thus, it also has the potential to structure important relationships to the natural world. According to C. Bryant Short, the Puritan errand, what he calls the oldest American myth, was also central to create a cultural identity that is uniquely American, offering “an unlimited license to expand,” and “provided the ideology of a nascent free enterprise culture” (Short, 2004, p. 139). Short (2004) argues that

The errand became the most important part of defining the American experience…The errand became a narrative that manifested itself in many avenues of American life. It provided a theological and historical lens for viewing the immense and mysterious American landscape; the concept of wilderness was invested with visions of private property, capitalism, agricultural development, and harvest of natural resources. And most significant for the evolving American identity, the errand was more than a journey, it was a pilgrimage. (p. 139)

In sum, the frontier myth and American jeremiad structured relationships between Americans and nature. The frontier mythos provides a rhetoric of exploitation while the jeremiad provides a path to salvation and a reverence to forces greater than the individual. It can be argued that these two rhetorical formations contribute to what Rosteck and Frentz (2009) argue is a schizophrenic and contradictory understanding of nature that is uniquely American:
On one side, the environment is revered as awe-inspiringly sublime, a synecdoche of our relation to the cosmos – and therefore inviolate; on the other, it is the resilient source of raw material, a wilderness to be mastered – a site of our manifest destiny. Our bifurcated attitude toward nature is both spiritual and political, with the dominant trend in any era being a kind of barometer of cultural attitudes. (p. 1)

Indeed, out of an ideological relationship to nature, we can see the beginnings of a national identity that is uniquely American. This complex relationship asserts itself in political discourse, most notably, perhaps, presidential rhetoric. Although operating in different ways and responding to different political exigencies, talk about nature has been part of presidential and popular discourse for centuries. In recent decades, however, with the advent of new technologies, global threats, and rhetorical situations, the environmental vocabulary is employed in many different and often contradictory ways.

Reagan’s Environmental Vocabulary

Since the 1970s, the emergence of the environmentalist movement brought with it an ideology that stresses conservation and encourages restraint; the conservation movement’s accompanying vocabulary shifts and complicates the conversation about national identity that was central to the expansionist and preservationist vocabularies. Reagan’s economic rhetoric marks a new use for environmental vocabulary. Chapter 2 outlines the language that clusters around three categories of environmental discourse: exploitation, conservation, and preservation. Specifically looking at President Reagan and the use of environmental vocabularies within economic discourse, this chapter more closely examines the ways these discursive sets of language work within other discourses outside the genre of environmentalism. Armed with a built-in frontier ethos, most of Reagan’s environmental language during his presidency reflects the “curiously double sided” preoccupation Americans had with the environment” (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p.
1). On one hand Reagan uses preservation rhetoric, engaging us in an “epistemological rhapsody,” highlighting the beauty and grandeur of the American wilderness and speculating on the place of America within the cosmos, while on the other hand, introducing legislation widely considered to be anti-environmental and encouraging environmental exploitation. As much as his policies reflected otherwise, avoiding using environmental language all together would prove very difficult for President Reagan. Elected ten years after the first Earth Day, the language of environmentalism was well entrenched in public vocabulary; predating environmentalism as a social movement, echoes of the American jeremiad continued to permeate American discourse.

As briefly described in Chapter 2, Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Paul R. Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* (1968) marked a major shift in environmental discourse. These two literary texts prompted a social movement that culminates in an explosion of concern for the environment with the first Earth Day. Conservation became a key term. Carson and Ehrlich’s persuasive texts changed the motives for paying attention to pollution. Not only would Americans need to be concerned with preserving the environment for the economic or moral reasons outlined in the second chapter, but discourses highlighting public health and safety issues also emerged. An environmental jeremiad, where practicing good environmental habits became inextricably linked to the health and salvation of the populace, developed; saving the environment became synonymous with saving people. As with the American jeremiad, the environmental jeremiad uses apocalyptic metaphors and stresses the individual’s contribution to saving the community; Carson and Ehrlich, for example, both argue that the world might be destroyed but small individual efforts might be enough to save it. Drawing from the parts
of the American jeremiad that stress voluntary action, environmental jeremiads encourage voluntary conservation and preservation of resources by the citizenry. The environmental jeremiad as a genre stresses the fragility of the natural world and gives the population specific behaviors that contribute to environmental damage pose a threat to the earth’s future. The scarcity of time also remains a key theme and provides grounds for immediate action.

Of course, environmental rhetoric has been circulating within political discourse since before Reagan took office in 1981. Employing an environmental jeremiad, Presidents Johnson, Ford, and Carter urge Americans to change environmental practices and conform to a new set of rules “before it is too late.” They all make a similar argument: that if each American chooses to do their small part, Americans can collectively create a new sustainable world. It is not very significant, given the legacy of the American jeremiad, which its echoes are found in Reagan’s speeches. What is surprising, however, is that an environmental jeremiad is used to justify his economic agenda.

As the interpreter-in-chief, the president has the ability to use the office to define the crisis, reinforce community by “inducing conformity to community standards,” and offer solutions through specific and deliberate displays of power and concern. Legislation creating Earth Day and environmental proclamations are examples of ways chief executives are able to “display their eloquence in ways that entertained and underscored their leadership role” (Bostdorff, 2003, p. 295). Lyndon Johnson, for example, follows this pattern in a speech on October 20, 1965, that celebrated the signing of the Clean Air Act amendments and Solid Waste Disposal Bill. The president used his
position as chief executive to define air pollution as a crisis, arguing that the erosion of our natural resources also meant the “erosion of our civilization.” Using Carson as an authorizing figure, he says “Rachel Carson once wrote, ‘In biological history, no organism has survived long if its environment became in some way unfit for it. But no organism before man has deliberately polluted its own environment’” (Johnson, 1965).

As the chief executive, Johnson defines the crisis, formally introduces legislation as a solution, and through the public performance of this address, underscores his leadership (Bostdorff, 2003, p. 295). In the same speech he goes on to place the responsibility to resolve this crisis on the individual, arguing each citizen has been “given the responsibility not only of stimulating our progress, but of making that progress acceptable to our children and our grandchildren” (Johnson, 1965). This speech is an example of an occasion where a chief executive uses an apocalyptic narrative to define a crisis and stresses individual agency, and offers specific public policy initiatives as a solution. Similarly, also stressing voluntary action and individual agency in the interest of conserving the earth’s natural resources, President Ford, in a 1975 Earth Day proclamation, said, “The earth will continue to regenerate its life sources only as long as we and all the peoples of the world do our part to conserve its natural resources. It is a responsibility which every human being shares.” He then names voluntary action as the appropriate solution: “Through voluntary action, each of us can join in building a productive land in harmony with nature” (Ford, 1975).

Keeping within the genre of conservationist rhetoric, in a speech marking the 10th anniversary of Earth Day, President Carter calls for a renewal of a prior commitment to the environment:
In marking the anniversaries of the National Environmental Policy Act and of Earth Day, let us rededicate ourselves to our great goal—freeing the people of this earth from disease, pollution, and the spread of toxic chemicals; from the lack of basic necessities; and from the destruction of our common natural and cultural heritage. Let us rededicate ourselves to the creation and maintenance of safe and healthy surroundings, to the wise husbanding of the natural resources that are a pillar of our well-being, and to the protection of free-flowing streams, majestic mountain forests, and diverse cityscapes pulsing with life.3 (Carter, 1980a)

Determining “what goes with what” here is obvious. In his Earth Day speech, Carter explicitly links conservation to beauty, health, and national identity.

Environmental exploitation is linked to disease, harmful chemicals, and the destruction of heritage. Environmental damage, brought about by careless use of natural resources, is labeled a threat to our nation’s survival: “damage to our environment had become a clear threat to the Nation's general welfare.” Keeping within the generic expectations of an environmental jeremiad, Carter argues Americans should act, not for themselves, but to ensure prosperity for future-generations: “The return on wise investments in our environment will be reaped not only by ourselves, but by generations of our descendants. We must achieve another decade of environmental progress.” Indeed, environmental jeremiads as a genre contain common key terms, imagery, and themes. In the 20th century, generally speaking, an environmental jeremiad is also an argument against consumption and pollution. In a message to Congress on February 19, 1980, Carter (1980b) argues:

Of all the social, political, and economic changes of the past decade, perhaps none is more important to the future of our planet and the survival of our children than the change that has taken place in the way we look at our world and its resources. In the past 10 years, we have come to understand that our own wellbeing and the health, the safety—indeed the existence—of future generations depend on how we treat our world today. We know now that our planet is both fragile and finite, and that the decisions we make today will spell the difference between a polluted,

---

3 Portions of his famous energy speech mirror a political jeremiad urging Americans to rededicate themselves “and conform to the teachings of God’s word, before it’s too late” (Bostdorff, 2003, p. 294).
unproductive and eventually uninhabitable world and a world that can sustain it and the creatures that live on it indefinitely.

Here, Carter evokes an environmental jeremiad. *Conservation* is a key term again. It becomes the act required for success of the community and a prerequisite for citizenship. Much like Jefferson’s yeoman farmer, Carter’s ideal citizen is a conservationist. Given its rhetorical power and the problems brought about by the energy crisis, it is not surprising that conservation becomes central for Carter; it is a useful term that structures his environmental, economic, and crisis rhetoric. For Carter, conservation in many cases can free the American people. Indeed, the energy crisis of the late 1970s amplifies conservation’s centrality to his rhetoric. The energy crisis became a situation that demanded the response of the nation’s chief executive. Inflation was out of control, as was unemployment. Carter attributed these things to dependence on foreign oil and the energy crisis. The solution rested not with negotiations overseas or the development of new energy sources, but instead, at the level of the individual. In his famous “Malaise Speech” given on July 15, 1979, Carter links *conservation* to *national renewal*. Citizenship is dependent upon Americans’ ability to conserve energy and make sacrifices:

I'm asking you for your good and for your Nation's security to take no unnecessary trips, to use carpools or public transportation whenever you can, to park your car one extra day per week, to obey the speed limit, and to set your thermostats to save fuel. Every act of energy conservation like this is more than just common sense. I tell you it is an act of patriotism…Our Nation must be fair to the poorest among us, so we will increase aid to needy Americans to cope with rising energy prices. We often think of conservation only in terms of sacrifice. In fact, it is the most painless and immediate way of rebuilding our Nation's strength. Every gallon of oil each one of us saves is a new form of production. It gives us more freedom, more confidence, that much more control over our own lives…I do not promise you that this struggle for freedom will be easy. I do not promise a quick way out of our Nation's problems, when the truth is that the only way out is an all-out effort. What I do promise you is that I will lead our fight, and I will
enforce fairness in our struggle, and I will ensure honesty. And above all, I will act...We can manage the short-term shortages more effectively and we will, but there are no short-term solutions to our long-range problems. There is simply no way to avoid sacrifice.

The Malaise Speech also presents an opportunity to discover, as Burke might say, “what goes with what,” and why it matters. According to Carol Berthold (1976), cluster analysis begins by looking for “the verbal combinations and equations in which the speaker tends to associate a key term with other terms”… searching for “equations and oppositions, or clusters and agons of the key terms” (p. 303). Indeed, a contextual analysis of Carter’s Malaise Speech reveals conservation to be a “god” term, as it is “the ultimate term through which other terms are ranked by degrees of comparison with it” (Berthold, 1976, p. 303). Conservation, or its synonym, is linked to other key terms such as security, patriotism, citizenship, national strength, freedom, equality, and individual independence. These surrounding terms are “good” terms that “are not given the ultimate power of a god term” but are second to the god term. The close association with the “good” terms enhances the rhetorical weight of the term conservation. Terms’ position within the rhetorical hierarchy is dependent upon the relationship to the “god” term.

The significance of conservation as an action, for example, significantly increases when it is linked to patriotism: “Every act of energy conservation like this is more than just common sense. I tell you it is an act of patriotism.” Carter makes a cause-effect argument: individual acts of conservation allow the private citizen to renew his or her commitment to the country. Additionally, conservation is also linked to freedom, “not through a lineal link,” but through a double use of the same key term (Berthold, 1976, p. 305): “Every gallon of oil each one of us saves is a new form of production. It [conservation] gives us more freedom, more confidence, that much more control over our
own lives…” In Carter’s rhetoric, conservation, freedom, and “control over our own lives,” a synonym for freedom, give rhetorical weight to conservation as a “god” term. Working through the genre of an environmental jeremiad, these key terms position conservation of resources as a way to lead the American people to reclaim their identity and heritage. In fact, these practices become the only way to avoid catastrophe. Through individual redemptive acts, the collective can be saved. Conservation, sacrifice, and responsibility all function to give solutions to the energy crisis; all are environmental terms.

Conservation.

Reagan also uses the same terms in an economic jeremiad. Conservation becomes a “god” term that is linked with “good” terms such as security, freedom, national strength, and patriotism, to name a few. Instead of urging Americans to conserve energy, the government is who should sacrifice. These terms help Reagan frame the economic crisis and justify cuts to social programs as necessary sacrifices that will place America on the path back to prosperity. Reaganomics cannot work without making that important sacrifice. Conservation, sacrifice, responsibility and community, when placed within Reagan’s economic jeremiad, become useful tools for framing and justifying his economic agenda. In short, environmental terms have an important role in presidential discourse, even when the environment is not the subject of debate.

Reagan is included among the presidents who have employed the frontier and the jeremiad in public speeches. And of course, many have already argued President Reagan, armed with the ethos of a Western genre Hollywood actor, exploited his image as a cowboy to “‘portray American history as a continuing struggle’ for both ‘economic
advancement’ and ‘military strength’” (Dorsey, 1995, p. 2). Indeed, Mary Stuckey (2006) has explored Reagan’s use of the frontier in his 1986 Challenger Address, constructing space as “a site for the rhetorical representation of a mythic frontier and for the material placement of a missile defense agenda” (p. 58). But aside from his reputation as “The Great Communicator” and “The Teflon President,” Reagan’s presidency is also characterized by his bold economic policies and an antagonistic relationship with environmentalists. In terms of his environmental rhetoric, Short has argued that “strands of the Puritan errand and the frontier thesis are at work” in Reagan’s political discourse and that “one cannot understand his mission without acknowledging the Puritan mission to New England” (Short, 2004, p. 149). Reliance on personal responsibility, creativity, and the drive of the individual coupled with his belief that Americans are God’s chosen people, characterize Reagan’s presidential legacy. In his obituary article in the New York Times on June 6, 2004, one day after President Reagan passed away, Marilyn Berger (2004) writes:

> Against Mr. Carter’s politics of sacrifice and retrenchment, Mr. Reagan offered an America of inexhaustible resources and boundless opportunity. In his 1980 acceptance speech for the Republican nomination, he promised that America would be able to recapture its destiny.

> The inexhaustible resources and boundless opportunity Berger speaks of does not refer to physical expansion. Reagan’s frontier was not so much an expansion of space but an expansion of an ideology. It is the implementation of reaganomics that would offer the American citizens an opportunity to reclaim their destiny. In his 1985 Inaugural Address, for example, Reagan argues:

> The time has come for a new American emancipation—a great national drive to tear down economic barriers and liberate the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country…From new freedom will spring new opportunities
for growth, a more productive, fulfilled, and united people, and a stronger America…We’ve come to a turning point, a moment for hard decisions. I have asked the Cabinet and my staff a question and now I put the same question to all of you. If not us, who? And if not now, when…I will shortly submit a budget to the Congress aimed at freezing government program spending for the next year. Beyond this, we must take further steps to permanently control government’s power to tax and spend. We must act now to protect future generations from government’s desire to spend its citizens’ money and tax them into servitude when the bills come due.

Emancipation from economic abuse is what is needed according to Reagan. Through the jeremiad, he is able to offer the possibility of redemption. It is through the rhetoric of the possible the jeremiad offers that Reagan is able to offer Americans the opportunity to reclaim their rightful place as God’s chosen people by taking a chance on his new economic plan. The president also evokes a sense of urgency characteristic of the jeremiad. His economic plan becomes the necessary action that will protect Americans from disaster. By defining the financial crisis as a turning point, Reagan is able to position them to also ready them to make hard decisions.

Reagan does several things to ready the electorate for a new and highly controversial economic approach. Reaganomics’ larger agenda stressed “governmental regulation, private enterprise, energy policy and even national defense” (Short, 2004, p. 137). “One cannot understand his mission without acknowledging the Puritan mission to New England,” but an environmental vocabulary is also at work (Short, 2004, p. 149).

Although his economic policies and a neoliberal political ideology that privileges the free market, low government involvement, and personal responsibility are at face-value incompatible with environmentalism, in order to ready the electorate for Reaganomics he uses a vocabulary and metaphors borrowed from conservationist vocabularies. The economic jeremiad as a genre frames the current state of the economy
as a crisis, locates the blame within the current political system, and gives the population specific ways to save themselves, thus expunging themselves of guilt and moving toward redemption. The scarcity of time also remains a key theme and provides grounds for immediate action. Framing Reaganomics as a revolutionary yet necessary economic paradigm shift and positioning himself as a cowboy who could chart new territory, Reagan employs the rhetoric of the frontier. These two discourses give him several advantages. Using the platform of the office of the presidency and his ethos as a real-life cowboy, he is able to talk about the economic crisis much like his predecessors framed the environmental crisis. In doing so he is able to use expansionist and conservationist rhetoric.

Reagan’s economic jeremiad accomplishes several economic goals. First, it enables Reagan to construct an economic situation of the early 1980s as a “rhetorical situation that needs an immediate and appropriate response” (Bitzer, 1968). It is a situation that becomes a crisis. Second, Reagan reframes the economy as an ecosystem, constituting an “economic environment” that demands protection. Third, Reagan positions Reaganomics as a solution to this crisis; thus, Reaganomics becomes the appropriate course of action that allows Americans to expunge their guilt, move toward redemption, and progress as a nation. The frontier rhetoric also works to position Reaganomics as a new frontier that can expand the American economy into prosperous new territories and industries.

**The Rhetoric of Reaganomics**

“The worst economic mess since the Great Depression” is the ultimate rhetorical situation for a president. The economy demanded Reagan take action. But in order for
Reaganomics to be accepted as the response that was needed, he needed to define the situation and set the terms of the debate. Reagan, acting as what Mary Stuckey calls “the interpreter-in-chief,” identifies an exigency that demands rhetorical attention and, acting as a “subject who speaks,” constructs an economic crisis with specific characteristics. Using the crisis rhetoric of the jeremiad, Reagan defines the economic situation facing America in the 1980s as a crisis, and therefore defines the terms of the conversation. The crisis becomes a sign that the electorate has strayed from the correct path. In order for the electorate to return to ITS status as a city on a hill, America must have a strong economy. As Vatz (1973) argues, situations “obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them” (p. 159). Much like an environmental threat that has the potential to destroy America’s natural resources forever, Reagan’s economic crisis, if left unattended, threatens to destroy American life. Echoing the jeremiad, Reagan communicates a sense of urgency. In his Inaugural Address on January 23, 1981, Reagan explicitly defines the economy as a problem needing urgent attention:

“These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our natural history…It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people. Idle industries have cast workers into unemployment, human misery, and personal indignity…To continue this long trend is to guarantee tremendous social, political and economic upheavals.

When defining the situation, identifying point of origin, assessing the current state of affairs, and identifying one’s policies as the best course of action to bring an end to the crisis are imperatives. Because it would not be politically advantageous to define a crisis’ beginning as something caused by Republicans, Reagan defines the Democrat led policies of the 1970s and the Carter administration as the point of origin. But although the threat of continued destruction is located within the Democratic party, the responsibility
to mitigate future threats lies not with politicians, but with the electorate; exploiting the
gap between the individual and the collective, he argues their acceptance of his new
program will save the collective. Furthermore, Reagan’s campaign runs on defining
candidate Reagan as the anti-Carter; it is not surprising that he would attribute the
economic crisis to Carter.\footnote{Carter attributed the cause of the crisis to energy not government. As the sitting president, naming government as the problem would undermine his authority as president so fittingly Carter attributed inflation and unemployment to the energy crisis and dependence on foreign oil. In his famous Malaise Speech, he explicitly says that they are the “cause of the increased inflation and unemployment that we now face. This intolerable dependence on foreign oil threatens our economic independence and the very security of our Nation” (Carter, 1979). Energy, not big government, is what threatens America. By shifting the terms of the debate from energy and to government, Reagan is able to introduce policies that are less than environmentally friendly and ones that reduce oil regulations.} He argues that:

The trends of the past are clearly disturbing in that they have sapped our Nation’s economic vitality. Of greater significance, however, is the danger we face if the policies of the 1970s are continued…the Nation’s economy and financial system are on a dangerous course – one which – if not reversed, would lead to a prolonged stagnation of economic growth and employment, even higher inflation rates, and potentially a financial crisis. (Reagan, 1991, p. 143)

This economic jeremiad, like most others, functions to “create a climate of anxiety” (Bercovitch as cited in Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 12). Reagan defines the crisis but also defines what he feels is perpetuating the crisis. He argues in his inaugural “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem” (Reagan, 1991, p. 2). Almost perfectly evoking the American jeremiad, in the same address he later adds, “It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government” (Reagan, 1991, p. 3). Here, government is clustered around the terms unnecessary, intervention, intrusion, and excessive.

Conservation becomes the solution to these terms. Reagan defines the economic crisis as an unfortunate consequence that happens when the entire community has headed down
the wrong path. Like Winthrop, He argues that it is a sign of the community’s failures; an impending financial meltdown is unavoidable if government does not conserve.

The market not God gives the people a sign that they have strayed off course. It is worth noting that the term *government* refers to a Democrat-led government. Paradoxically, because he chose to name *government* the problem, as a rhetorical strategy, solutions could not be located within the existing government. Thus, Reaganomics, the executive branch’s anti-government answers to the economic crisis, must be introduced as the administration’s external solution, mirroring a familiar western narrative: a cowboy stranger sweeps into a town in crisis, restoring order. Acceptance would restore America back to a position of wealth and prosperity. Just as Al Gore had done in *An Inconvenient Truth*, Reagan’s jeremiad gave Americans “warnings of impending doom” and the promises of salvation if they would only behave as they “are capable of acting” (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009, p. 12).

In environmental rhetoric, toxins are causes FOR many environmental problems. In Reagan’s economic jeremiad, government defined using toxic metaphors. In a report outlining his program for economic recovery given in his first two months of his presidency, he devotes two sections to making the case for the government’s role causing inflation (Reagan, 1991, p. 143). In an Address to the National League of Cities, he uses the metaphor of a plague: “the plague of inflation and stagnation is brutalizing this country” (Reagan, 1991, p. 216). Not surprisingly, Reaganomics is the solution. On February 12, 1981, referring to an audit of the U.S. economy, Reagan says:

This audit confirms that the economy of the United States needs a profound and dramatic change in direction. Inflation and unemployment are threatening the American way of life, as never before, and without a change of policy these intolerable conditions will get worse. This audit also suggests a sense of urgency
that we must halt the growth of government and the corresponding burden of overspending, taxation, and regulation before we irreversibly alter the character of this nation (Reagan, 1991, p. 111).

Reagan’s call to halt the growth of government, a synonym for conservation, is a “god” term. In this instance, conservation, a “god” term that is clustered with “good” terms security, freedom, and patriotism, does not appear alongside those terms or any of their synonyms. Instead, conservation is surrounded mostly by contrasting concepts or “devil” terms that function “as the foundation for many other oppositions” (Reagan, 1991, p. 307). An agon analysis of this excerpt reveals that Reagan places the ”god” term conservation in opposition to intolerable conditions and government growth: “…these intolerable conditions will get worse …we must halt the growth of government and the corresponding burden of overspending, taxation, and regulation…”

Interestingly, although Reagan never directly mentions it by name, Reaganomics, is a “good” term, is lurking within his rhetoric. “Without a change of policy,” he argues, “the intolerable conditions will get worse. The change he is arguing that the country needs is his new economic plan. Regulation, taxation, and spending are all terms positioned in opposition to Reaganomics, a plan that favors “good terms” deregulation, tax cuts, and limited spending, all terms that also cluster around conservation. Also implicit within this passage is the “good” term national identity: “Inflation and unemployment are threatening the American way of life.” Here, agons inflation and unemployment are named threats to “the American way of life,” a synonym for national identity. Agons government, overspending, taxation, and regulation are also poisoned against the phrase character of this nation, a synonym for the “good “ term national identity: “we must halt the growth of government and the corresponding burden of
overspending, taxation, and regulation before we irreversibly alter the character of this nation.” In short, conservation, a “god” term, and reaganomics, a “good” term, are rhetorically positioned against agons inflation, unemployment, government growth, overspending, regulation and taxation.

But instead of urging Americans to conserve energy, the government is what should be sacrificed. These terms help Reagan frame the economic crisis and justify cuts to social programs as necessary sacrifices that will place American on the path back to prosperity. Reaganomics cannot work without making that important sacrifice. Using language borrowed from an environmental jeremiad, similar to Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth, Reagan creates urgency by threatening the potential demise of a current way of life. Echoing rhetoric of an environmental jeremiad such as The Population Bomb and Silent Spring, Reagan warns, “We’re out of time.” Indeed, he evokes the jeremiad to set a very specific deadline while also offering them a way to redeem themselves and reclaim their identity. Here, Reagan highlights the gap between the individual and the collective; individual action can be taken to save the entire community from destruction. Reagan also evokes the frontier. Where many jeremiads call for a return to a particular set of values or way of life, Reagan calls for a “profound and dramatic change in direction.” Paradoxically, this profound and dramatic change that Reaganomics should bring will prevent the nation from changing so much it irreversibly alters its character.

As president, he continues to define the terms of the debate by expressing what sounds like environmental concerns. As the lack of environmental regulations posed a health risk to Americans, the deficit becomes not simply an economic problem but a threat to the health of the collective; it is recast as “a clear and present danger to the basic
health of our republic” (Reagan, 1991, p. 106). A report released by the administration outlining his program for economic recovery identifies high inflation and stagnant growth as “the twin problems” that have caused this crisis.

**Defining the Rhetorical Situation.**

Framing the situation as a crisis stemming from policies of the 1970s and identifying inflation and lack of productivity as consequences of those policies that threaten American life gave Reagan the rhetorical ground to set the stage for further defining the terms of the debate. To set the terms of the debate and frame the situation, Reagan chooses an environmental metaphor to help the electorate understand the complicated economic discourse that plagued politics at this time. Framing one thing in terms of another, he discussed the economy as an environment. This is an important rhetorical choice, not only because of what this language allows him to do, but what limits it imposes. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest:

In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a metaphorical concept…can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor…So when we say that a concept is structured by a metaphor, we mean that it is partially structured and that it can be extended in some ways but not others (pp. 10, 13).

The situation to which Reagan can respond becomes an “economic climate” and an “economic environment” that needs to be preserved, much like an ecosystem and saved from a poisonous government. The constitution of this symbolic space allows him to argue, for example, “excessive government spending and overly accommodative monetary policies have combined to give us a climate of continuing inflation” (Reagan, 1991, p. 143). Thus, Reaganomics functions as a viable solution; it is presented as an appropriate and fitting response that can correct damage to the economic environment.
For example, he argues, “dramatic improvement in the underlying economic environment…will set a new and more positive direction to economic decisions throughout the economy” (Reagan, 1991, p. 143). If environmental language is a transformative tool for Reagan that grants the populace the opportunity to explore the art of the possible, then it also creates a space where controversial or radical policies can be taken seriously. Reagan’s economic philosophy relies upon a neoliberal ideology with an emphasis on resilience and individualism to construct a solution.

Metaphors, according to William Rueckert (2006), are “ontological riddles. They cross and join different categories which, in reality, cannot be joined”. Their value is that they offer a “creative capacity to discover new ways of thinking” (Rueckert, 2006). Drawing on environmental metaphors provides Reagan an occasion to “modify an existing reality at the verbal level,” creating an opportunity to understand economy as another ecosystem. Surprisingly, environmental metaphors also surface when he evokes the frontier; the ingenuity, ambition, and creativity that are at the heart of the frontier myth and essential to citizenship also satisfy the neoliberal conditions of Reaganomics.

Regan’s ideal citizen is a version of the frontiersman: resilient, creative, and individualistic. But where Reagan differs from other presidents thus far is that the ideal citizen is also integral to maintaining healthy economic ecosystem. In Reagan’s system, the citizens are the natural resources that keep the economic environment healthy: “we must remember a simple truth. The creativity and ambition of the American people are vital forces of economic growth. The motivation and incentive of our people…are the most precious resources of our nation’s economy” (Reagan, 1991, p. 139). As Rueckert (2006) reminds us, “metaphors are ontological riddles because they crossbreed to produce
unnatural, but all too human, offspring…Metaphors create new being and meaning. They create new realities” (Rueckert, 2006). Here, frontier values are crossbred with an ecological metaphor to produce a new reality and new conditions essential for citizenship and civic engagement. Reagan’s use of metaphors to argue that the economy is an ecosystem is an important rhetorical choice. He chooses to use metaphors to frame the rhetorical situation; he does not make the argument that the economy is like an ecosystem. A simile is a hypothetical statement that prompts analogic thinking, while the metaphor does not (Rueckert, 2006). Instead, the metaphor masks the rhetorical act of using an analogy in the first place. As Rueckert (2006) argues:

The metaphor is at a much higher level of reality and intensity than the simile. Instead of bifurcating our vision so that we think in double columns, going back and forth between them on the basis of similarities, metaphors present us with a unified or consubstantial vision in which two are one; or, perhaps a bit more accurately, two are brought together to create a new one, to give us a total of three.

Indeed, environmental metaphors work within Reagan’s economic jeremiad create a reality where human capital is a natural resource, the government is a pollutant, and Reaganomics is a policy that will restore order to the American economy. The president, as the chief interpreter with the power to define, uses metaphor to naturalize the rhetorical constructiveness of the situation and locate the threat outside his party and administration. The metaphor “economic environment,” for example, prompts audiences to understand the economy the way they would an ecosystem. The economy becomes a physical space that is in danger of being destroyed if Americans don’t act immediately and deliberately. In short, by defining the terms of the debate, Reagan circumvents critiques that Reaganomics is too radical and is able to preempt alternative solutions that do not meet the neoliberal conditions of citizenry.
An Appropriate and Fitting Response.

Along with defining the problem and the scope of the debate, Reagan must outline specific solutions. He needs solutions that operationalize a neoliberal ideology and American ingenuity. Reaganomics, as an economic and rhetorical strategy, operationalizes both discourses.

The plan…seeks properly functioning markets free play of wages and prices, reduced government spending and borrowing, a stable and reliable monetary framework, and reduced government barriers to risk-taking and enterprise. This agenda for the future recognizes that sensible policies, which are constantly applied, can release the strength of the private sector, improve economic growth, and reduce inflation…High taxes are not the remedy for inflation…Well-intentioned government regulations do not contribute to economic vitality. In fact government spending has become so extensive that it contributes to the economic problems it was designed to cure. More government intervention in the economy cannot possibly be a solution to our economic problems. We must remember a simple truth. The creativity and ambition of the American people are vital forces of economic growth. The motivation and incentive of our people…are the most precious resources of our nation’s economy (Reagan, 1991, p. 139).

Following an American jeremiad, the solution presents is dependent on the adaptation of specific policies and behaviors of the people. If Americans want to avoid a crisis of apocalyptic proportions, they need to trust him as a leader and support unconventional policies. Just as The Population Bomb and Silent Spring offered hope along with a solution, so too does Reagan. In his February 18, 1981 address he says, “I’ve painted a pretty grim picture, but I think I’ve painted it accurately. It is within our power to change this picture and we can act with hope” (Reagan, 1991, p. 130). Reagan’s ideal citizen embodies many qualities embedded in the frontier mythos. Here, the landscape metaphor is used and, much like the frontier mythos that destroyed many natural landscapes, American ingenuity has the potential to change the economic environment.
Using the apocalyptic language characteristic of an environmental jeremiad, Reagan argues more damage can be avoided if the populace supports deregulation:

Overregulation causes small and independent business men and women, as well as large businesses to defer or terminate plans for expansion...Now, we have no intention of dismantling the regulatory agencies, especially those necessary to protect the environment and assure the public health and safety. However, we must come to grips with inefficient and burdensome regulations, eliminate those we can and reform others...this, then, is our proposal – America’s new beginning: a program for economic recovery. (Reagan, 1981b)

Here, the collective is called to act as good stewards and protect the economic environment. Acceptance of this new program for economic recovery gives Americans a new beginning and allows them to rid themselves of guilt. The small and independent businessman and women also become part of Reagan’s ideal citizenry.

In order to create conditions where Reaganomics is needed, the president needed to create a sense of urgency and offer evidence that a change of policy was warranted. In 1981 Reagan released the findings from an audit of the U.S. economy and used its findings to define that the country’s current situation as a crisis. In a statement to the press about the audit Reagan lamented:

This audit confirms that the economy of the United States needs a profound and dramatic change in direction. There can no longer be a business-as-usual approach. Inflation and unemployment are threatening the American way of life as never before, and without a change of policy these intolerable conditions will get even worse. This audit also suggests a sense of urgency that we must halt the growth of government and the corresponding burden of overspending, taxation, and regulation before they irreversibly alter the character of this Nation. We're still the most productive people in the world, living in a nation with a potential that staggers the imagination. I'm confident with the facts before them, the American people will understand the need for the changes that we'll propose next.

In this statement aimed at reporters, Reagan names inflation and unemployment as the elements that threaten the American way of life. Government, overspending, taxation, and regulation are terms that define current situation. Once the citizenry accepts these
terms as legitimate threats to prosperity, they can be receptive to the proposed solutions. The audit is presented as material evidence that a crisis exists, an appropriate response is needed, and the president has a viable solution to help America once again fulfill its potential as the city on a hill.

**The Rhetoric of Technology.**

The rhetoric of technology is an important rhetorical tool within Reagan’s economic jeremiad. An integral part of his new frontier, it expands the scope of the economic environment and offers a path to salvation. Working within the genre of frontier rhetoric where success is dependent upon American ingenuity, the development of new technologies is offered as a solution. As technology is used to enforce neoliberal economic solutions, Reagan strategically combines frontier and technological discourses. In his 1983 State of the Union Address, he redefines technology as a “frontier of high technology” (Reagan, 1991, p. 110). Technology combined with American ingenuity, as would be seen with his commitment to the space program years later, would be the practice that allows America to escape inevitable decline and head towards salvation.

Along with the American ingenuity that is a prerequisite for invention of new technologies, Reagan also points to production and consumption as practices that can save the economic environment. As cultural practices, production and consumption encourage expansion, exploitation of natural resources, and exploration. None of his ideas on how to save the nation focus on conserving or preserving natural resources, marking a shift away from the conservationist rhetoric of the 1970s. Indeed, his plan represents a departure from the practices encouraged in the environmental movement just a decade prior. As Short (2004) notes:
Reagan offered his plan to save the economy, repeating his theme that conservation for natural resources was not the answer. Calling for greater exploration of oil, coal, and natural gas, Reagan presented his view of how people and the environment should be connected, announcing that ‘we are going to reaffirm that economic prosperity of our people is a fundamental part of our environment. (p. 144)

**Crafting the Solution to Economic Pollution.**

Indeed, a variety of environmental discourses that characterize the relationship between humans and nature lurk within Reagan’s economic rhetoric. On one hand, Reaganomics favors government deregulation, lower taxes, smaller government, personal responsibility, and individualism. These are all characteristic of expansionist and exploitative rhetoric found within the frontier narrative. But, on the other hand, Reaganomics exploits ecological metaphors that traditionally are used within conservationist discourses. These metaphors create a reality that positions the citizenry to behave in certain ways. Using an environmental vocabulary to instruct the populace how to react within the troubled economic environment, Reaganomics stresses conservation, responsibility, sacrifice, patience, and a change in cultural practices. These metaphors have behavioral consequences. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, “we act according to the way we conceive of things” (p. 5). Located within his economic discourse, Reagan outlines specific expectations of the government and of the citizenry.

Instead of using metaphors to define pollution as the crisis, people as the problem, and encouraging people to live within their means, Reagan clusters these terms around the economy, transferring the threat from people to government. Reagan takes a future-oriented approach, as seen in conservationist discourse, arguing that his solutions will sustain future generations. Now, just like the behavior Carlson encouraged in people, the government must conserve and be responsible; just as big corporations sacrifice profits to
ensure a better world for their children, so called “special interest groups” must sacrifice their programs for the greater good. In the State of the Union address on January 25th 1983, he uses environmental metaphor and vocabularies to argue against government waste:

To assure a sustained recovery, we must continue getting runaway spending under control to bring those deficits down. If we don’t, the recovery will be too short, unemployment will remain too high, and we will leave an unconscionable burden of national debt for our children. That we must not do. (Reagan, 1991, p. 106)

Reagan here stresses the burden of debt we will leave on future generations. Borrowing from an environmental vocabulary, Reagan asks the electorate to substitute financial risks and government spending for environmental risks.

**Dear Federal Government: Live Within Your Means!**

Operating within the “economy as polluted environment” metaphor, and having already defined government as the problem, gives Reagan the grounds to force government to live within its means: “Our aim is to increase our national wealth so that all will have more, not just redistribute what we already have which is just a sharing of scarcity. We can begin to reward hard work and risk-taking but forcing this government to live within its means” (Reagan, 1991, p. 97). These environmental metaphors define government as the problem and privilege solutions that encourage less government involvement.

Indeed, environmental rhetoric defines pollution as the problem, people and industry as the cause, and conservation and sacrifice as the solution. Reaganomics flips this on its head. Here, a conservationist vocabulary works to support some of the most environmentally unfriendly policies in the 20th century. Rather than people, he wants the
government to live within its means, act responsibly, and waste less. For Reagan, it’s not people destroying the environment and exploiting nature. Rather, the cause are “negative economic forces” that are “running out of control.” To put it simply, Reagan calls for regulation of government, not government regulation.

In Reagan’s economic jeremiad, neoliberalism is what will save the population. In this economic environment constructed in part by environmental metaphors, government, not citizens, needs to practice conservation. When referring to social programs that need to be cut, Regan says “we can with compassion, continue to meet our responsibility to those who, through no fault of their own, need our help…We cannot continue any longer our wasteful ways at the expense of our children” (Reagan, 1991, p. 97). He continues: “And to you my fellow citizens, let us join in a new determinism to rebuild the foundation of our society, to work together, to act responsibly. Let us do so with the most profound respect for that which must be reserved as well as with a sensitive understanding for those who must be protected” (Reagan, 1991, p. 98).

Speaking within the neoliberal tradition, social programs are unnecessary. Using environmental metaphors, Reagan reframes social programs become an agon that is positioned against a healthy economy and instead are repositioned as waste harmful to the environment. The health and future of the populace becomes dependent upon expunging this waste from the environment. The citizenry is called to act responsibly to save the future. Environmentalism encourages small acts of conservation; the ideal citizen is responsible to work together with his or her community to develop less wasteful solutions to problems. Here, Reagan is asking the same of Americans. The object identified as a pollutant, however, is very different. Like environmentalists, Reagan’s
ideal citizens behave responsibly, think about the contributions they can make to save their community, and work with their peers to expel toxins from the environment. As conditions for citizenship, however, his ideal citizen also must accept the new economic proposal and also define of social programs as government waste.

Echoing *Silent Spring* and *The Population Bomb*, Reagan’s economic discourse calls for conservation and sacrifice by all for the greater good. In his State of the Union Address on 25, 1983, Reagan, speaking of the plan to save social security, says “when it comes to the national welfare, Americans can still pull together for the common good…It asks for some sacrifice by all – the self-employed, beneficiaries, workers, government employees, and the better-off among the retired – but it imposes an undue burden on none.” In the same address he stresses patience of the electorate for his economic recovery plan, warning that there are no quick fixes to this crisis:

> Our confidence must also be tempered by realism and patience. Quick fixes and artificial stimulants repeatedly applied over decades are what brought us the inflationary disorders that we've now paid such a heavy price to cure…The permanent recovery in employment, production, and investment we seek won't come in a sharp, short spurt. It'll build carefully and steadily in the months and years ahead. (Reagan, 1991, p. 106)

Reagan uses a future-oriented rhetoric, warning Americans that a major change in their way of life is coming. In his Address to the Nation on February 5, 1981, referencing the audit of America’s economic condition, he says:

> I’m speaking to you tonight to give you a report on the state of our Nation’s economy…You won’t like it. I didn’t like it. But we have to face the truth and then go to work to turn things around…It’s time to recognize that we’ve come to a turning point. We’re threatened with an economic calamity of tremendous proportions, and the old business-as-usual treatment can’t save us. Together we must chart a different course… We can leave our children with an unrepayable massive debt and a shattered economy, or we can leave them liberty in a land where every individual has the opportunity to be whatever God intended us to be. Together we can forge a new beginning for America. (Reagan, 1981c)
Reagan’s Rhetorical Limitations

Reagan was not kind to the environment. Operating within the frontier ethos, his policies and public speeches reflect that he thought environmental damage was a necessary consequence of progress. In Reagan’s universe, the environment/economics dichotomy is a reality. Helping the environment means hurting the economy; both efforts cannot coexist. Indeed, in the 1980s, “going green” had not yet become a “project for American capitalism” (Singer, 2010, p. 135). Today’s current eco-capitalist system breaks down the environment/economics dichotomy and marks a new turn within environmentalism. Within this system, saving the planet can also mean financial success and technological innovation. This type of rhetoric may have been particularly appealing to President Reagan because, unlike environmentalism, eco-capitalism relies on neoliberal principles to make its case. As Ross Singer (2010) notes, in eco-capitalist discourse “the economic rhetoric of neoliberalism has played a major role in redefining national identity” (p. 136). Eco-capitalism, Singer argues, is a “distinctly neoliberal form of ecological jeremiad that re-envision American progress in terms of a sustainable free market frontier” (Singer, 2010, p. 136). While there are still troubling contradictions that make “new” environmentalism enabling for economic development, it is clear that with the emergence of eco-capitalism and a “green” industry, a new vocabulary is also surfacing. Terms like greenwashing and ecopreneur are becoming part of every-day vocabulary. In academe, a student can major in “sustainability studies.” Job seekers can read about the “green job market” on LinkedIn. In 2012, the EPA and the private sector have even worked together to develop a Green Power Partnership of 1,300 businesses and organizations that “support the development of new renewable generation capacity
nationwide while also helping protect the environment” (EPA, n.d.). It is unclear whether Reagan would have supported green partnerships, but it is also necessary to point out that he was never given the opportunity to make that decision. President George H.W. Bush, however, as I argue in the following chapter, understood the economic potential of environmental goods, services, and technologies and incorporated this emerging vocabulary into his public rhetoric about the economy and the environment.

**Conclusion**

In sum, Reagan’s economic jeremiad calls for the government, rather than people, to conserve. In order for him to construct government as the problem he must offer a version of government grounded in its characterization as an intrusive, wasteful, gluttonous, and repressive apparatus. Using this version of government as grounds for critique, he is able to call on government to stop spending; borrowing from the language of conservation, what threatens to destroy America is not toxic waste but government waste. Reagan’s ideal citizen does not advocate for environmental protection so that future generations may enjoy America’s majestic landscape, nor should they call for stricter environmental policies. In stark contrast, Reagan’s ideal citizen is supportive of Reaganomics, a solution structured by neoliberal policies.

Metaphors turn abstract technical concepts like the environment into understandable, accessible discourses. In order to encourage or elicit action from his audience, Reagan needed to put his ideas in terms that were relatable to ordinary people; success depended upon choosing metaphors they could understand. His arguments work because metaphors transform an abstract concept into something familiar. Reagan’s economic jeremiad constructed an identifiable crisis, a specific cause, and clear plan to
recovery. Reaganomics does not allow for attention to environmental issues. Even though Reagan viewed progress and environmentalism as antithetical to each other, he is able to use environmental language to make his economic arguments work. Thus, to understand Reagan’s relationship to economics requires an understanding of his strategic use of the discourse of conservation.

My project is a critical study of recurring rhetorical forms and vocabularies in political public address. Environmental vocabularies within presidential discourse provide a useful framework for understanding how sets of language become part of larger, strategic arguments. Reagan’s policies run in opposition to many of environmentalist practices and yet he is able to use that vocabulary to reframe a highly technical, almost scientific discourse like economics. Environmental vocabulary allows him to sidestep many legitimate critiques of challenges to Reaganomics. As discussed in Chapter 2, a Burkean cluster analysis looks at what words go with what words. Agon analysis, on the other hand, helps discover what is opposed to what. Reagan complicates economic and environmental vocabularies. Prior to the Reagan administration, environmental words would rarely cluster around economic arguments.

Indeed, Reagan, as he is understood in the cultural imaginary, and environmentalism, as a movement, are talked about as terms that are opposed to each other. This chapter reveals that a sitting president, as the chief interpreter, when conditions are favorable, is able to reappropriate the vocabulary of an entire social movement. As such, this case presents a unique opportunity to examine language in use and presidential power. As the chief interpreter, he is able to have influence over what words go with what and what words are opposed to what. Perhaps one of the reasons
Reagan became known as “the Great Communicator” is because he was skilled at using metaphors to help Americans understand one thing in terms of another, defining the terms and limits of the threats America faced, and providing solutions that required plenty of faith but little sacrifice.
CHAPTER 4. THE GREEN ELEPHANT: PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH AND THE RHETORIC OF ECO(SYSTEM)NOMICS

The 1990s marked the end of the Reagan era. His movie star charisma, cowboy ethos, and divisive economic and social policies made Reagan an American political icon. Personifying his cowboy alter ego, as president, Reagan positioned himself as a political outsider who spoke plainly and with conviction. His public performance legitimated claims that his presidency would restore order and hold an out-of-control government accountable. As Lincoln Mitchell (2010) from the Harriman Institute at Columbia University pointed out, Reagan’s presidency was not just memorable – it was transformative. Although Reagan’s policies were polarizing, “he very effectively used his personal popularity, if not necessarily that of his policies, to pass legislation with an enormous impact on the US. This strategy was central to the transformative nature of the Reagan presidency” (Mitchell, 2010).

While Reagan’s popularity certainly benefited the GOP, it worked against George H.W. Bush. As Bush’s highly popular predecessor, an icon within the Republican Party was a tough act to follow. In many ways, George Herbert Walker Bush was the anti-Reagan. Reagan was a cowboy, complete with horse, California ranch, and film-career to back it up; Bush was an east coast Yalie. Reagan positioned himself as a political outsider; for Bush, serving two terms as his vice president and also director of the Central Intelligence Agency and ambassador to China, this was impossible. He could not escape being labeled a political insider with a life-long political career. Reagan was a smooth orator with initiatives that were as polarizing as they were bold. Bush, by contrast, was less radical with his policies and less skilled as an orator. His decision making style was
careful, methodical, and more reminiscent of a northeastern ivy leaguer than a west coast frontiersman. Defining his legacy meant defining himself against Reagan, but Bush was faced with the challenge of also supporting the conservative ideology that put him in office. Indeed, when Bush spoke, he did so within a rhetorical situation that forced him to differentiate himself from his predecessor; he has to become the anti-Reagan and still lead Reagan’s party.

Because Reagan was still popular when Bush took office, it is not surprising that Bush’s toned down rhetorical style made him an easy target of criticism. In the first few months, he was accused of lacking direction and floundering. Ted Kennedy famously made several public statements critiquing Bush’s perceived lack of direction. Although his style was considerably less flamboyant than Reagan’s, Bush did try to positively define his presidency. One strategy was making environmental issues central to his campaign. Destructive environmental policies contributed to Reagan’s reputation as a controversial figure. Further defining himself against Reagan, Bush made the environment a campaign issue, ensuring Americans that if elected, he would be “the environmental president.”

Bush’s environmental record has some redeeming moments. His named William Reilly, the former president of the World Wildlife Fund, as director of the EPA. It was a bold move, as Reilly was the first professional conservationist to ever hold the position. Reilly’s appointment was a clear signal that the environment was a serious issue. Where the Reagan administration was characterized by policies that favored deregulation, Bush passed the Clean Air Act of 1990. He took proactive stances against acid rain and ocean
dumping and called for a “no net loss” policy on wetlands and the acquisition of more lands for the national park system (Carcasson, 2004, p. 265).

Despite concerted efforts to re-center the environment within GOP priorities, however, Bush’s environmental efforts have largely been ignored and he was unable to become the true environmental president he had hoped. Examining his environmental record more closely, however, is still beneficial to presidential and rhetorical researchers. Bush’s rhetoric reveals that the environment played a key role in defining his presidency. Operating through environmental rhetoric allowed Bush to pursue many of the key actions and initiatives that reflected his beliefs and defined his presidency. This chapter argues that despite the fact that the environment was largely an overlooked theme of the Bush administration, it must be understood as a useful rhetorical tool that created an opportunity to promote key themes that defined his presidency. Specifically, environmental language was essential to helping the president define himself as a moderate conservative. As a rhetorical tool, this language strengthened his ethos as a non-polarizing politician. In short, the environment, a politically charged term by the time he took office, was what enabled Bush to frame himself as a cooperator.

Although considered failed policy, environmentalism, I argue, also provides the opportunity to push additional initiatives that are outside the scope of environmentalism. This chapter shows that President George H.W. Bush uses the language of the environment in four important ways:

1) Bush expands the definition of environmentalism, reimagining it as a practice that breaks the economy vs. environment binary and inserts economic considerations into the language of stewardship. His definition of stewardship
positions the concepts as interdependent. Bush also re-centers the environment within the national heritage narrative; stewardship as a practice of preservation becomes a prerequisite for citizenship.

2) Bush re-imagines environmentalism as an American practice that has always already been part of the frontier. The frontier is redefined as a mythic space where technological and environmental vocabularies reinforce each other.

3) Environmentalism becomes grounds for promoting international peace building and cooperation, as both concepts are central to his ethos and became the key terms that define his presidency.

4) Bush’s environmentalism includes the local and private sector communities. This rhetorical strategy allows him to also use environmentalism as a tool to support the capitalist and small business initiatives that became the hallmark of the conservative movement in the early 90s.

**Bush’s Environmentalism**

Bush uses the term *stewardship* to expand the concept of quality of life and define his ideal citizen. For Bush (1995), this means achieving a balance between a healthy environment and a healthy economy, arguing that, “economic growth and a clean environment are both part of what Americans understand a better life to mean” (p. 69). The Reagan administration defined quality of life as something that was contingent on economic growth, defining environmentalism as a social movement that worked against American progress. In a move to define his presidency against Reagan, Bush tried hard to destroy this binary. To do this, he had to define what quality of life should mean and identify specific ways that ordinary Americans could obtain it. In a June 8, 1989 speech
for example, Bush defines quality of life as contingent upon the health of the environment. His ideal citizen becomes an advocate for nature:

Any vision of a kinder, gentler America – any nation concerned about its quality of life, now and forever, must be concerned about conservation. It will not be enough to merely halt the damage we’ve done: our national heritage must be recovered and restored…We can and should be nature’s advocate…It’s time to renew U.S. leadership on environmental issues…Renewal is the way of nature, and it must be the way of man. (Bush, 1989a)

Using the environment as a platform, Bush expands quality of life to include conservation. National identity and renewal are rhetorically positioned as terms dependent upon conservation; in this version of environmentalism, terms national renewal, national identity, restoration, and advocacy cluster around conservation. Keeping in touch with conservative ideology, Bush locates the power to conserve and renew their heritage within the individual. Within Bush’s environmentalism, it becomes the citizen’s responsibility to be nature’s advocate. The private citizen, not a government agency, becomes nature’s hero and Bush’s ideal citizen. Thus, citizen environmental activism becomes the way national identity is reclaimed.

Reflecting conservative principles that encourage individual agency and less government involvement, Bush’s version of environmentalism allows the citizen activist to have greater visibility in the political landscape. The private citizen is rhetorically positioned as a solution to faceless government bureaucracy. His ideal citizen utilizes the private sector economic opportunities available to preserve, conserve, and restore the environment. The citizen activist becomes a useful rhetorical persona. Through this rhetorical figure, the president is able to argue against big government, for individual responsibility, while also advocate for conservation and environmental practices that work against Reagan-era exploitation.
In order to successfully stitch together the popular environment-economy binary, he expands the definition of stewardship to mean a normative cultural practice necessary for acceptance into the body politic. His ideal citizen always practices stewardship, as it has been redefined as an identity-building act that is integral to preserving our national heritage and identity. As an example, in his 1989 inaugural, President Bush defines stewardship as a form of “new activism” (Bush, 1995, p. 2). As part of an environmental jeremiad, Bush offers stewardship as the way that Americans can renew their promise and keep from going astray. Also in his inaugural, he shifts his attention to baby boomers. Speaking directly to them, he defines stewardship as a quality that is passed on from one generation of Americans to the next. Here, stewardship is what Americans must do to be worthy of the sacrifices of the Greatest Generation, arguing that the “generation born after the Second World War has come of age” (Bush, 1995, p. 2). Conservation becomes what baby boomers can do to ensure that the sacrifices of their parents were not in vain. Responsibility to continue the legacy of national renewal rests heavily upon their shoulders.

Renewal, however, is not limited to commitments with God. Bush argues that conservation allows for a renewed commitment with nature, implying that there is an existing covenant that has been broken. In a significant philosophical departure from his predecessors, national renewal depends upon the ideal citizen’s ability to renew their covenant with nature. Renewing this covenant allows Americans to embody the frontier ethos. In a June 21, 1989 speech, Bush argues the following:

It's time to renew our commitments, both to nature and to our fellow man. The American spirit of exploration must be joined with the new sense of restoration. And the natural world that supports us and the society that sustains us both need our help…So, we must do more than simply limit the damage that we've already
done. We must work to preserve and restore the integrity and richness of this continent's natural splendor. (Bush, 1989b) (768-771).

Going beyond conservationist and preservationist discourse, Bush’s environmentalism requires that the citizen activist correct prior exploitation without abandoning aspects of the frontier ethos that encourage exploration. Paradoxically, expansion without exploitation becomes necessary for citizenship. This version of environmentalism allows Bush to evoke Reagan’s cowboy ethos that encouraged innovation and exploration while also working to correct past exploitation. Bush instructs the American people to understand the frontier narrative as something that also encompasses preservation and restoration. In a move that further defines his presidency, Bush includes environmental restoration as part of his definition of environmentalism and makes it central to the practice of good citizenship. In this speech, conservationist and corrective practices become preconditions for progress. In order to renew their covenant and reinforce the country’s status as the city on a hill, Americans must correct the damage they have already done. Restoring integrity and richness of the American landscape means preserving the richness and integrity of the American people. Only until that is accomplished can forward progress be obtained. Thus, the terms conservation and restoration cluster around exploration and national renewal.

Preservation is also a prominent term. Bush argues for a return to citizen activism that encourages preservation through stewardship among the citizenry, locating national heritage within the American landscape. Evoking preservationist rhetoric, the aesthetic value of the landscape is not just a metaphor that reflects the greatness of the nation; it maintains America’s symbolic position as a city on a hill. In the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, American nature becomes synonymous with American
identity. To make an exceptionalist argument, Bush uses champions of the preservation movement Henry David Thoreau and President Eisenhower as authorizing figures. For example, in a June, 1989 speech when talking about the national parks, Bush says:

> Henry David Thoreau's ideal was that if you borrow an axe, you should return it sharper than when you got it. And President Eisenhower probably had that in mind when he decided to buy some farmland with rundown soil near Gettysburg to let nature's restoration take its course. And he lived to see his experiment working. "There are enough lush fields," he said, "to assure me that I shall leave the place better than I found it." And that must be every American's goal. (Bush, 1995, pp. 768-771)

Bush uses national parks strategically to make exceptionalist claims. The national parks function as an epideictic tool that is used to instruct the rest of the world how to behave. The parks serve a dual rhetorical function for Bush. As an idea, they symbolize the democratic ideal that the rest of the world should replicate. As a physical space that is uniquely American, the national parks are used to argue that while other countries should adopt democratic systems and emulate our system of government, imitators cannot replace America. Instructing the citizen to support the national parks reinforces America’s symbolic positioning as the democratic ideal and constitutes the ideal citizen as a consumer of nature. In a speech praising the national park system Bush argues:

> And that's why we need to do more for our national parks. The idea of a "national" park is an American original that the rest of the world has come to admire and to imitate, because those parks are wide open, for everybody to enjoy. And it was once said that "The national parks are America's unique contribution to the democratic ideal." And it's true: Our parks are our most open institutions -- 80 million acres of the most spectacular terrain on the planet, open to the wind, the sky, and the stars -- and open to every traveler with the sense and spirit to stay a moment and appreciate nature's beauty. (Bush, 1995, pp. 768-771)

The citizen activist’s responsibilities are not limited to stewardship of national parks. Bush’s ideal citizen also consumes them. Through consumption and stewardship of a democratic space, national identity is renewed. Each time an individual visits the
parks, consuming it as a cultural object, America upholds its promise as the democratic ideal. That the ideal citizen is not only an activist but also a consumer fits well into Bush’s definition of an environmentalism that includes capitalism and destroys the environmental-economic binary. Bush, also a Republican, seeks to recapture an environmental focus that was eclipsed by Reagan’s economic rhetoric. The call to “become nature’s advocate” allows him to develop a concept of environmentalism that can include economic growth.

**A New Approach.**

Bush (1989a) understands environmentalism differently from his predecessors, stating on multiple occasions that his approach to legislation is “driven by a new kind of environmentalism”. He positions ecology and economics as interdependent systems that are mutually beneficial. In a speech to the members of Ducks Unlimited, for example, Bush (1989a) states that his administration believes

> Pollution is not the inevitable byproduct of progress. The first principle is that a sound ecology and strong economy can coexist. But let’s remember, the burden of proof is on man, not nature. And the fact is, our ecology and the economy are interdependent. Environmentalists and entrepreneurs must see how their interests are held in common. It’s time to harness the power of the marketplace in the service of the environment.

Bush attempts to restructure the economic-environmental binary by re-clustering these key terms. Here, pollution and progress function as agon. Where previous administrations and private industry had harnessed the power of natural resources in the service of the marketplace through conservation and exploitation, Bush offers an inversion of this concept as the ideal option. His ideal citizen understands the marketplace and capitalism as supporting systems. For the first time after Earth Day 1970, capitalism is in the service of environmentalism; terms that once clustered around
exploitation now cluster around this new form of environmentalism. Thus, terms *capitalism, entrepreneur, marketplace, progress,* and *economy* cluster around *environmentalism* and *ecology* in ways they were previously could not. Through these new clusters, the president can encourage environmentalists and entrepreneurs in the private sector to communicate and collaborate. This rhetorical move allows him to justify positioning himself as a cross-cultural collaborator.

Bush’s new environmentalism is built on five principles. In a speech given at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln Bush outlines five principles that structure his environmental policy: “harnessing the power of technology and the marketplace, promoting state and local environmental initiatives, encouraging a common international effort, concentrating on pollution prevention, and strict enforcement of environmental standards” (Bush, 1995, pp. 721-724). These principles reveal the function of the environment as a rhetorical tool within his presidency. Although he cares deeply about the environment, his position as POTUS mandates that he must also address the economy. Bush recognizes that there is money to be made in the service of the environment and uses the environment to talk to different publics. His version of environmentalism makes success and recovery dependent upon private sector and new technologies, creating a space to speak to the business community and ecologists. His environmental policies put the marketplace and technology in the service of environmental issues but they also create an important rhetorical opportunity to engage the private sector during difficult economic times. As interpreter-in-chief, the president is uniquely poised to help the private sector recognize the need for their services and guide them in exploiting those opportunities. Using *the environment* as a unifying term, he is
able to encourage two groups who are normally at odds to work together while also promoting a conservative agenda that privileges capitalism.

Bush also uses environmentalism as a tool to build international relationships and positions himself as an international collaborator. Through environmental discourse, he is able to speak to the international community on global issues. Internationalism and collaboration are themes central to his presidency; environmentalism provides him with a useful vocabulary to engage a global audience and advocate for international collaboration. Defining pollution as a global problem serves as grounds for this multinational and intercultural approach. Pollution becomes an equalizing term; all nations are affected by pollution and therefore must work together regardless of their symbolic global positioning. Environmentalism as a strategic rhetoric allows Bush to advocate for different environmental policies for different counties. According to the President, developed countries have a responsibility to set a global example and are in an economic position to adopt environmentally responsible policies in a way that the developing world cannot. By making the environment a priority, Bush is able to publically recognize that developing and non-developing worlds are different and prescribe policies for each. Positioning himself as an environmentalist, the president can also speak as a proponent of internationalism and consensus building. This subject position also gives him room to further define his presidency against the Reagan administration and still evoke the capitalistic rhetoric of the GOP.

That Bush decided to run as an environmental president is a significant choice. Reagan did not understand ecology and economics to be mutually dependent disciplines and instead argued that economic success should never come at the expense of
environmental concerns. Bush clearly thought things differently. “Economic progress should not come at the expense of our heritage, our common inheritance – the environment,” he argued in a July 10, 1989 speech in Warsaw. This is a significant shift in presidential position, particularly because Bush was part of the Reagan administration. Rhetorically positioning the history of environmentalism as synonymous with our national history is another attempt to collapse this binary. In this new narrative, the environment functions as a term that erases cultural, racial, and gender difference. For Reagan, the environmentalism was a divisive term that prevented progress. It is reclaimed in the Bush’s framework as a nationalizing discourse; a shared environmental history becomes the one thing all Americans regardless of background have in common, and therefore, one of the discourses that constitutes people as Americans. By attempting to redefine and re-cluster key terms, Bush tries to frame Reagan’s environmentalism as outdated. The binary becomes positioned as a rhetorical construction Americans no longer have to make. Thus, environmentalism is a presidency-defining theme.

Second, the environment, as a rhetorical tool, is not limited to influencing abstract ideological constructs. It also has policy implications. In a speech given at the Paris Economic Summit, Bush outlined more practical reasons for making environmental protection a key concern:

> Environmental protection is integral to issues such as trade, development, energy, transport, agriculture, and economic planning. Therefore, environmental considerations must be taken into account in economic decision-making. In fact, good economic policies and good environmental policies are mutually reinforcing. In order to achieve sustainable development, we shall ensure the compatibility of economic growth and development with the protection of the environment. Environmental protection and related investment should contribute to economic growth. (Bush, 1995, p. 966)
The language of environmentalism enables the president to define other issues within his political agenda not traditionally associated with nature. By making the success of other policy issues contingent upon the adoption of responsible environmental policies, the president is able to create a space to define what good economic and environmental policies look like. Here, stewardship becomes the term that words normally reserved for economic discourse cluster around. *Trade, development, energy, agriculture, economic growth and development,* and *investment* become part of this new definition. This new cluster of terms makes protecting the environment synonymous with protecting American investments and making sound economic judgments. For example, when speaking to a group of climate change experts at an intergovernmental panel, Bush (1990b) reinforced his position on the environment and its relationship to economic stability, stating that:

> As experts, you understand that economic growth and environmental integrity need not be contradictory priorities. One reinforces and complements the other; each, a partner. Both are crucial. A sound environment is the basis for the continuity and quality of human life and enterprise. Clearly, strong economies allow nations to fulfill the obligations of environmental stewardship. Where there is economic strength, such protection is possible. But where there is poverty, the competition for resources gets much tougher; stewardship suffers.

Indeed, by framing the environment as an international issue that enables nations to achieve quality of life and continue to progress, Bush continues to argue against the economic-environment binary and push policies that encourage international collaboration. Health of the environment is not simply something that leads to quality of life for citizens. While the environment is an international issue that affects all countries regardless of location, population, or politics, all countries, according to Bush, are not capable of enacting responsible environmental policies; there is a politics of global
stewardship that is reflected in Bush’s public speeches. According to Bush, an unhealthy environment is an indicator of a weak nation. Therefore, Bush places the burden of environmental responsibility upon strong nations, making it difficult for political adversaries to argue that all nations should be held to the same standards. Because the U.S. is the embodiment of the shining city on a hill for all nations to admire and emulate, the U.S. is forced to lead the global environmental effort and set an example. Through stewardship, the U.S. can renew its covenant with nature and fulfill its domestic and international obligations.

**Strategic Use of Technology.**

Bush’s new environmentalism also incorporates a technological vocabulary. Like Reagan, Bush is intrigued by the opportunities for exploration and innovation that technology provides. Reagan was successful in communicating the importance of science and technology and linking scientific exploration and progress to national identity. Bush’s environmentalism, however, takes this a step further, clustering environmentalism around economic policies and the rhetoric of science and technology. When combined, these three vocabularies work together to position his presidency as a distinct rhetorical construct. For Bush, the environment cannot be protected through stewardship; protection becomes predicated upon utilizing new technology. Thus, he is able to also speak to the private sector and engage them in a conversation about stewardship in ways that his predecessors could not. In a speech swearing in energy secretary Jim Watkins, Bush says:

> Our great economic expansion will not be complete until every area of our country is reaping its benefits. And I also want to see continued development of this clean-coal technology; a generation of safe nuclear energy; and also R&D, research and development, of alternative fuels and new technologies. And again, let me emphasize conservation methods as well. Energy is the most important basic ingredient in everything we produce, everything we consume, everything we
import or export. For America's economy to be competitive, we need sound energy policies and competitive energy industries. And for our national security to be guaranteed, we need the strongest possible national energy policy. (Bush, 1995, p. 194)

By offering technology as the solution to environmental damage, Bush is able to reassure his audience that capitalism and consumption will not suffer as a result of new legislation. Energy is a term that is frequently associated with conservation and ecology but Bush defines it as impacting more than just the nature. It is defined here as a topic upon which “everything we produce, everything we consume, everything we import or export” is dependent. Here, the president clusters energy with economic expansion, technological development, private industry, national security, and conservation. By linking energy to these other terms, he also is able to define environmentalism as an incomplete practice that needs research and development to prevent or reverse the damage caused by humans.

The use of technology as a term associated with environmentalism allows for fundamental differences from previous environmental rhetorics. This project examines the terms that cluster around Bush’s environmental discourse. However, his presidency is also defined by what rhetorical traditions it does not evoke and the types of behaviors it does not encourage. Where environmentally responsible policies were once characterized by encouraging sacrifice and curbing consumer practices, the introduction of technology into his environmental framework works to encourage consumption and capitalism. The apocalyptic rhetoric and jeremiad that characterize earlier environmental discourse are missing; the familiar language that that screams “conserve or else” is virtually eliminated with the strategic use of technological discourse. By naming technology as the solution that will prevent future environmental damage, Bush eliminates much of the urgency. As
an example, in a June 8, 1989, speech to Ducks Unlimited outlining his principles on environmentalism, the president says that, “preventing pollution is a far more efficient strategy than struggling to deal with problems once they’ve occurred. For too long, we’ve focused on cleanup and penalties after the damage is done. It’s time to reorient ourselves using technologies and processes that reduce or prevent pollution – to stop it before it starts” (691-694). Practices of consumption and consumer capitalism need not change. Under this distinct rhetorical construct, technology and private industry research and development become a natural component of environmentalism.

**Creating an Environmental Frontier.**

As a rhetorical strategy, the frontier myth has been used by a variety of U.S. presidents and politicians for centuries. Theodore Roosevelt, as Dorsey notes, used the frontiersman to promote conservation, a theme that was central to his environmental agenda and a defining characteristic of his presidency. Reagan too used the frontier. As Stuckey (2006) argues, in his famous “Challenger” address, Reagan uses the frontier myth to save the American space program. Bush’s offers up an expanded model of Reagan’s ideal citizen and it becomes a hybrid of a frontiersman, environmentalist and scientist.

Bush’s strategic use of the frontier marks a shift in environmental and presidential discourse. His expanded definition of environmentalism employs the frontier myth in new ways. Defining technology as a component of environmentalism allows Bush to re-imagine the frontier as a space of environmental and technological growth, ingenuity, and cooperation. Bush’s frontier becomes a site where the economic-environment rhetorics
can coexist for the benefit of all. His environmental frontier creates an opportunity to stress collaboration and internationalism, two key themes that defined his presidency.

Community is also a key term in ecology, as explained in Chapter 2. Bush attempts to link the discourses of ecology and he frontier through the discourse of community. At an air force base in Alaska, Bush expands the parameters of the frontier myth to include the term community saying “we often think of frontier values, you know, as being summed up in the phrase ‘rugged individualism’ but the real frontier creed as you all know is the sense of community, and that is the key” (Bush, 1995, p. 123). Re-centering the term community into the frontier myth is another way the president attempted to define his presidency. His ideal citizen is not the rugged individual reminiscent of Reagan, but instead, is an active community member.

But the frontier is not limited to a symbolic space for the president. In a statement made on the Observance of World Environment Day, Bush defines Alaska as “our last frontier” as well as a site where economic growth and environmental stability can coexist. He says:

In the minds of most Americans, Alaska is our last frontier -- vast, untamed, with plenty of room for opportunity and optimism. And at the same time, Alaska is a vital source of energy for the Nation as a whole. Alaska's abundant resources -- in all their diversity -- are, indeed, a sacred trust. But I am convinced that our natural resources can be developed without spoiling our environment. The plan to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge meets these twin objectives. And I know, as a businessman formerly and now as President of the United States, that we can and must develop our energy resources for the sake of economic development and particularly for the sake of the national security of the United States. There is too much dependence on foreign oil as it is. And as a sportsman, though, with a love and respect for our country's unparalleled natural beauty, I could never support development that failed to provide adequate safeguards for land and wildlife. (Bush, 1995, p. 123)
Like Reagan, Bush’s environmentalism includes exploitation as a practice. Bush’s framework, however, provides opportunity for exploitation by private industry, creates economic opportunities, and offers environmental protection. Here, exploitation and protections are not agons. For this seemingly contradictory language to work, Bush uses Alaska as a rhetorical strategy to illustrate the balance he would like to strike between environmentalists and industry. Alaska, for Bush, is the ultimate paradox: it is a frontier ripe for exploitation and a preservationist’s dream worthy of stewardship. Framing Alaska in this way gives the president the rhetorical opportunity to destroy the environmental-economic binary. It becomes a metaphor for new environmentalism. Alaska does not have to sacrifice any of its beauty or mythic reputation as the last American frontier for exploitation by industry. It is technology that allows for this paradox to occur; advances in science allow for responsible exploitation. Phrases national security vulnerabilities and foreign oil dependence become agons for Bush’s environmentalism. Paradoxically, Alaska, as a metaphor, creates grounds for an exceptionalist argument that responsible exploitation of natural resources is what will preserve America’s privileged position as a city on a hill.

Like his predecessors, Bush constructs science and economic growth as central to the frontier mentality. Its continued exploitation enables a consistent renewal of national identity. Bush’s environmentalism allows advances in environmental science and technology to also be ways that national identity is renewed. In a speech given at the University of Nebraska, Bush stresses the need to “harness the power of technology in service to our environment” (Bush, 1995, p. 722). The research done at the University of Nebraska becomes “pioneer work” and alternative fuel research is defined as
“trailblazing work.” Speaking at a research university that is responsible for developing new technologies in agricultural science and ecology, Bush says he wants to make “renewal and restoration our new watch words” (Bush, 1995, p. 723). Attempting to once again to bridge the gap between progress and environmentalism, Bush also promises that, “alternative fuel is going to help us reconcile the automobile to our environment” (Bush, 1995, p. 722). Here, environmental terms renewal and restoration cluster around terms frontier, pioneer and progress. In a defining rhetorical move, Bush attempts to weave very different discourses. As an example, in the same speech he shifts his attention directly to the people of Nebraska:

And we won't stop with alternative fuels. In the future, we're going to be using other technological alternatives, like biodegradables in the battle against litter and waste disposal, to ease the threats to our environment. Out here there's always been a strong environmental ethic. In this part of the country, taking care of the land is a way of life -- it's natural. And that's why I know when I call on all Americans to make renewal and restoration our new environmental watchwords, I can count on you. (Bush, 1995, p. 724)

As the president, Bush has the power to speak directly to the American people and the ability to use the power of national storytelling. He can instruct the citizenry on how to remember their past, and by extension, how they should think of themselves. Bush’s founding narrative fuses the frontier myth with environmental history. In Bush’s version of our national history, stewardship and preservation take the place of exploitation. As we have seen, his ideal citizen is a pioneer who always had “a strong environmental ethic” and was able to make advancements in service of progress and nature.

Because advancement in environmental science is crucial to progress, his ideal citizen is also a scientist. In a speech to the winners of the Westinghouse Talent Search
on March 3, 1989, Bush explicitly locates science as central to the pioneer spirit, arguing science is the only viable solution that can help save the environment from humans: “It is scientific advancements that made us aware of the damage to our Earth's protective ozone layer and the need to reduce CFCs [chlorofluorocarbons] that deplete our precious upper atmospheric resources.” In the same speech, Bush (1989c) clusters scientific ingenuity with national identity, calling ingenuity “our greatest natural resource.” In this speech, Bush’s frontier is not a physical place but a symbolic space of uncharted scientific exploration. If explored, it will allow America and future generations of Americans to continue. Bush’s (1989c) ideal citizen is someone who can commit to the pioneer spirit of exploration and possess the necessary scientific knowledge to “lead America into the next century.”

The discourse of the frontier becomes a rhetorical strategy used to define environmentalism. Also remarkable is that it is the lamp of knowledge rather than the ax that will lead America toward progress and environmental salvation. According to Bush, intellect is America’s most precious natural resource. Echoing the discourse characteristic of the enlightenment, knowledge and application of science coupled with the pioneer spirit is what allows the transformation of oil to fuel, grain to methanol, and sand to silicon. All the resources Bush mentions here are not at all natural. Rather, they are products of the American mind, driven by the pioneer spirit and knowledge of science. National parks, for Bush, become the embodiment of this new communal pioneer spirit, stewardship, and scientific discovery.

In Bush’s framework, national parks become the site where the frontier is explored, new discoveries are made, and the American imagination is put to work in the
service of the environment. The parks are an “environmental success story” rather than a site of contention as in past administrations (Bush, 1995, p. 719). As with other presidents, the parks become a way to make an exceptionalist argument: Americans have the best natural resources, in our citizens and in land, at our disposal. For example, in a speech in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming Bush says:

We meet in the heart of an environmental success story, part of a tradition that began when Abraham Lincoln granted Yosemite Valley to California, set aside as a preserve, and continued through Teddy Roosevelt and others who found inspiration in these majestic American peaks. And creating national parks was an American idea, an idea imitated all around the world. And it was one of our very best ideas. Five generations of Americans have since enjoyed Yellowstone and the Tetons, the largest intact natural area in the temperate zones of the Earth. (Bush, 1995, p. 717)

What separates Bush from his predecessors is his choice to re-center American ingenuity when making an exceptionalist argument. The parks are defined as a product of American prowess. Using Roosevelt as an authorizing figure, Bush re-centers the American mind as a key tool used in the service of the environment. It becomes a key element that helps preserve our “natural heritage.” Bush also defines the parks as “living laboratories, where our boundless curiosity is challenged by nature's unbridled forces” (Bush, 1995, p. 719). Arguing for the potential of the parks to do more for America than enhance its aesthetics, He goes on to quote Robin Winks, a professor at Yale University, who once said that, "Our parks are universities” (Bush, 1995, p. 719). Bush’s national parks become sites where both the physical frontier and technological frontier are explored and the power of the human mind is harnessed. In the same speech, for example, Bush says:

And we stand in the shadow of the Tetons, still an unspoiled frontier thanks to the vision of leaders no longer alive. But it's not the last frontier. After the Sun went down last night, we got a glimpse of the frontier beyond. It was up there beyond
the peaks, past the clear mountain air that we want to preserve for all Americans, up there in the stars. And as we closed our eyes to rest, we saw the frontier beyond the stars, the frontier within ourselves. In the frontiers ahead, there are no boundaries. We must pioneer new technology, find new solutions, dream new dreams. So, look upon these American peaks and at the American people around you and remember: We've hardly scratched the surface of what God put on Earth and what God put in man. (Bush, 1995, p. 719)

The pioneer, the Jacksonian frontier’s ideal citizen, exploits the land to make it safe for human occupation. Other origin myths begin with God creating natural resources for humans to exploit. Bush, however, makes an interesting change to this myth. The American mind, not God, creates its own resources. In a rhetorical move that is reminiscent of the Gospel of Thomas’ claim that “the Kingdom of God is within you,” Bush locates the spark that drives progress within the citizenry. Thus, “the frontier within us” opens up space for Bush to argue for more attention to science and technology. His ideal citizen becomes the technological pioneer. According to Bush, reason and intellect mediate our relationship with nature. Therefore, the possibilities for technological achievement are limitless, as long as we have people who possess the “knowledge and commitment” that can “lead America into the next century.” By reframing technological advancement as the last frontier, Bush is able to position human innovation as the missing component to collapsing the dichotomy between exploitation and preservation. By closing this frontier and developing new technologies, humans will reach their full potential, maintain their privileged position as the city on a hill, and keep their covenant with God. Americans will also be able to preserve and exploit God-given natural resources at the same time. In the spirit of collaboration and GOP politics, exploiting “frontier within ourselves” is also what invites private industry and preservationists to collaborate.
The Rhetorical Function of Space Exploration.

Space exploration serves a very important rhetorical function for the president. Another strategic move that separates Bush’s rhetoric from most other presidents is that while Bush’s frontier is also concerned with expanding America’s physical presence in outer space, it is also about expanding “the nation’s technological future” and promoting a kind of environmentalism that fuses progress and the environment (Bush, 1995, p. 311). Indeed, astronauts are a variation of the pioneer and, like his or her predecessor, are often defined as ideal citizens. Reagan, however, uses astronauts and the frontier myth as rhetorical tools to save the space program. Bush, on the other hand, uses the frontier myth to attempt to bridge the gap between environmentalism and progress; Bush’s pioneers are scientists, environmentalists, and explorers. In a speech given to honor the crew of the space shuttle Atlantis, he defines the astronauts as “pioneers pushing back the boundaries of our technological future” (Bush, 1995, p. 567).

On another occasion, for example, when speaking to the astronauts of the space shuttle Discovery, Bush binds the narrative of space exploration with the frontier narrative, arguing the pioneer spirit and the story of Discovery are “As American as opening day, timeless as our history. And it says to Americans, nothing is out of reach. It speaks to our capacity to dare and to dream the impossible” (Bush, 1995, p. 311). This spirit, says Bush, can be found in “every great moment of the American story” (Bush, 1995, p. 311). Bush uses the space program to not only make exceptionalist claims but also frames the space program as a unique structure whose efforts allows all Americans to reach their full potential. The space program is reframed as a system that enables Americans to take steps to close the new technological frontier. The space program, as a
rhetorical tool, enables Bush to further his goals of collaboration and internationalism. The scientific discoveries that will be made have the potential to enhance the quality of life for Americans and the rest of the world. In the Discovery speech Bush, referencing Adlai Stevenson says:

You know, Adlai Stevenson once spoke of the awful majesty of outer space. This voyage of the shuttle Discovery is over, but its spirit lives, linking the majesty of outer space with the greatness of America. And we're going to forge even stronger links as we reaffirm our commitment to the shuttle program, as our science missions open up new horizons of knowledge, and as space station Freedom symbolizes the promise of man. As we do, we will honor the spirit of Discovery, the spirit which throws open the possibilities of tomorrow and which points us toward the stars. (Bush, 1995, p. 311)

Evoking the rhetoric of covenant renewal and the sublime, reaffirming commitment to support a highly selective and very expensive space shuttle program, allows ordinary Americans exposure to “the awful majesty of outer space” to renew their covenant with God, and to maintain “the greatness of America.” Here, the frontier is reclaimed as more than a place where Americans discover new lands. Through this new frontier, Americans discover new technologies and keep promises to themselves and God. Indeed, Bush positions private industry well for developing technologies that can be used in service of his environmental agenda. In the Discovery speech, for example, Bush praises the crew saying “you showed anew America’s genus in science and technology… And you used the IMAX camera to study this planet’s environmental damage. I hope this will lead – I’m confident that it will – to our knowledge base and that, in turn, will lead to reducing the threat to our earth’s environment” (Bush, 1995, p. 311).

One example of Bush’s attempt to fuse environmental concerns and progress is Mission to Planet Earth (MTPE), a program through NASA that uses space technology to study the earth’s many ecosystems by viewing them from space. MTPE, according to
Bush, is a program that would “preserve our precious environmental heritage” and is “placed in the hands of the scientists who will make it happen” (Bush, 1995, p. 992). On the twentieth anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, Bush defines MTPE as a key part of NASA and a program that can offer new solutions for correcting environmental damage:

As I said in Europe just a few days ago, environmental destruction knows no borders. A major national and international initiative is needed to seek new solutions for ozone depletion and global warming and acid rain. And this initiative “Mission to Planet Earth,” is a critical part of our space program. And it reminds us of what the astronauts remember as the most stirring site of all. It wasn’t the moon or the stars, as I remember. It was the Earth- tiny, fragile, precious, blue orb-rising above the arid desert of Tranquility Base. (Bush, 1995, p. 992)

Environmental programs like MTPE provide an opportunity to push policies and programs that encourage cooperation and internationalism; as a result, he is able to more deliberately define his presidency and position himself within the GOP and against his predecessor. MTPE offers Americans an inversion of the existing relationship between nature and industry; it positions private industry in the service of correcting environmental problems and places environmental issues at the center of NASA’s agenda. Environmentalism as well as space and technology discourses are clustered together to make a political argument. Through NASA, American astronauts are able to experience the wonder and awe that is created by gazing upon the earth at a distance. This sublime moment is made possible through human innovation and technology. The earth becomes the exceptional object surrounded by the moon and stars. Its image, according to the president, highlights its fragility. Preserving the entire planet becomes a way to maintain the plane earth’s position as an exceptional place in the universe. It also allows Bush to evoke cooperation and push for coordinated international efforts.
Preservation also provides grounds for continued scientific exploration and partnerships with private industry. In another presidency defining rhetorical moment, discourses of the frontier, sublime, science and technology, exceptionalism, and environmentalism work together to help the president support specific initiatives. The MTPE initiative exemplifies the Bush administration’s attempt to reconcile these competing rhetorics and reframe the frontier to include environmental stewardship. In the same speech at the Grand Canyon, as another example, Bush explicitly argues for more science within environmental efforts:

> We want to use science to help us solve our chief environmental problems. And Bill Reilly put it best in a recent newspaper piece that he wrote, "The environmental debate has long suffered from too little science. There has been plenty of emotion and politics, but scientific data have not always been featured prominently in environmental efforts and have sometimes been ignored even when available." That was his quote, and I believe he is 100 percent on target. Good science hastens our progress toward a cleaner environment, and we ought to use it to our best advantage. (Bush, 1991)

Ironically, environmental rhetoric is key for developing policies that reflect the GOP’s political agenda and in defining Bush’s presidency. A version of environmentalism that includes science and private industry is a defining characteristic of his administration and help the president define what it means to be American. In the 1991 Grand Canyon speech, Bush clusters terms economic growth, environmental stewardship and science and technology as criteria necessary for citizenship:

> Recent world events make it clear that free markets and economic growth provide the firmest foundations for effective environmental stewardship. People tend to forget that environmental stewardship is a high-tech business, and it requires great ingenuity and insight. Science and technology give us tools for cleaning up our environment and keeping it clean. They help us identify our problems precisely and develop efficient solutions. Our genius will open up new frontiers of clean energy: nuclear power, solar power, geothermal power, and others that exist only in the imagination of our dreamers and innovators. (Bush, 1991)
The economic-environmental binary collapses when environmentalism is reframed as a high-tech business. This is a significant rhetorical strategy that allows the president to speak to multiple audiences at once and advocate for collaboration between communities. Bush’s ideal citizen is able to develop and use new technologies to practice an environmentalism that does not impede economic progress. Indeed, calls like these that encourage the free market to form a foundation for environmental stewardship are also a call for a new definition of environmentalism and what it means to be American. For Bush, a prerequisite for practicing good environmentalism is having faith in the free market. Bush’s ideal citizen practices environmentalism and free market capitalism. Environmentalism is also redefined as something that has always been a part of American ingenuity. Bush’s frontier is not limited to space exploration for the president. Rather, the new frontier is expanded to include environmentalism. Environmentalism is redefined here as a new frontier that provides an occasion to exercise American imagination and ingenuity. Through practicing this version of environmentalism, Americans can once again face a new frontier. The innovation, imagination, and ingenuity that they must exhibit to be successful in conquering this frontier define what it means to be American and an environmentalist. Thus, Bush’s ideal citizen is also a frontiersman, but one who uses tools of science and technology to interface with nature, rather than an ax or a pen.

**Localizing Environmentalism.**

One of the challenges Bush faced during his term was becoming a legitimate “environmental president” while still adhering to Republican Party principles that for the past eight years were not very environmentally friendly. In order to reconcile environmentalism and conservatism, Bush used his definition of environmentalism to
promote small, localized government and personal responsibility. These themes, among others, became the hallmark of the conservative movement in the early 1990s. Localized environmentalism became an important rhetorical strategy. In his speech to members of Ducks Unlimited, for example, a nonprofit dedicated to conservation of America’s wetlands; Bush applauds their localized efforts saying that “Your work is even better news for America, for what you’re doing represents just the kind of local, on-site, private sector initiative that we must bring to every environmental challenge” (Bush, 1989a). Here, Bush clusters environmentalism with localized private sector initiatives. He goes on to add that “a true commitment to restoring the nation’s environment requires more than just a federal commitment…So we’re working to promote more creative State and Local initiatives drawing on the energy of local communities and the private sector into the cause –pulling them into the cause of conservation” (Bush, 1989a). Re-centering the local within environmentalism gives Bush the opportunity to argue against big government without arguing for big business. It becomes the individual citizen’s responsibility, and thus the local private sector’s responsibility, to practice environmentalism.

Bush also clusters terms small government and environmentalism to advocate for local private sector policies. In his 1990 Earth Day proclamation, he argues that, “Earth Day – and every day – should inspire us to save the land we love, to realize that global problems do have local solutions, and to make the preservation of the planet a personal commitment” (Bush, 1990c). In his first Earth Day proclamation as President, Bush instructs citizens to “make a personal and collective commitment to the protection of the environment, to think globally and act locally” (Bush, 1990c). Thus, Bush’s ideal citizen
is a local business owner who advocates for the environment. One cannot be an environmentalist for Bush without understanding and using services provided by the local private sector. Also, one cannot truly be American without also having a personal commitment to protecting the environment.

Defining preservation and conservation as moral actions is what also makes Bush different from his predecessor. Often evoking famous environmentalists including Teddy Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, Bush argues that saving the environment is not only fiscally responsible, but it is also partly what makes Americans moral. As an example, in a speech announcing his tree planting initiative in 1990, the president says

> Nearly a quarter of a century ago, perhaps America's greatest conservationist, Teddy Roosevelt, put it best when he called our lands and wildlife the property of unborn generations and when he said this about America's sequoias and redwoods: they should be kept just as we keep a great and beautiful cathedral. (Bush, 1990a)

Using Teddy Roosevelt as an authorizing figure, Bush equates America’s sequoias to a church. Here, nature is sacrilized. Visitors are not just defined as tourists, but are invited to experience a sacred space. Through planting trees, Americans can reaffirm their covenant with God, preserving their privileged position for future generations. Thus, practicing environmentalism is crucial to the future of the country and preserving the forest also as important as preserving church. The reverence Americans should show to nature, Bush implies, is as important to behaving as moral Americans. According to Bush, nature does not belong to the present, but to the future. To not treat the forests in one’s own community the way one would treat a church is morally wrong and detrimental to future generations.
The emphasis on morality and localism is also exemplified in the president’s Thousand Points of Light Initiative to encourage environmentalism through localized volunteerism. In line with conservative principles, the Thousand Points of Light relies on the rhetoric of individualism and the protestant work ethic. Bush redefines volunteerism as an ethical and individual choice. In doing so, he defines his program against government-sponsored environmental programs; through community involvement, local support, and individual efforts, Americans can perform their citizenship and help the environment. That Bush defines volunteerism as a moral issue functions as the grounds for volunteerism and grassroots environmental stewardship. Rhetoric attempts to mediate capitalist and environmental discourses. It also, however, assumes existence of a class of responsible capitalists. Through volunteerism and environmental stewardship that springs from the local level, Americans can renew themselves and right their environmental wrongs. Using a discourse that makes moral claims to argue for responsible stewardship Bush argues that:

But behind all of the studies, the figures, and the debates, the environment is a moral issue. For it’s wrong to pass on to future generations a world tainted by present thoughtlessness. It is unjust to allow the natural splendor bestowed to us to be compromised. It is imperative that we serve the earth and all its blessings – to meet the challenges of renewal. (Bush, 1995, p. 693)

Here, Bush expands the definition of environmentalism again to include terms and concepts volunteerism, grassroots activism, and ethics alongside individual agency and national renewal. Introducing volunteerism and morality into public discourse is a rhetorical move that expands the definition of environmentalism, allowing Bush the rhetorical space to encourage specific behaviors and present certain policies favorably. Volunteerism, as a term, encourages cooperation from Americans and more distinctly
defines his administration. Volunteerism becomes the act where stewardship is performed and the means citizenship is renewed.

Encouraging local stewardship and small government, Bush, following a republican agenda, tries to reconcile environmental initiatives with the policies that encourage private sector growth. His 1990 Earth Day proclamation, for example, argues that Americans have “made much progress in the last 20 years, spending hundreds of billions of dollars to make pollution control work. In 1987 alone, we spent a total of $81 billion – over 62 of it in the private sector” (Bush, 1990c). Similarly, at the first White House Tree Planting Ceremony in 1990, Bush announced that he asked Congress for $175 million dollars to put towards tree planting programs. The National Tree Trust Act of 1990 would be a key program within his Thousand Points of Light Initiative. Weaving together stewardship, private sector initiatives, Bush makes a plea to congress to approve this bill. He argues:

Trees can be fragile, they can be sturdy, but they are always precious. So, in the budget I submitted to Congress, I asked for $175 million to plant 1 billion trees a year. Today I’m asking Congress to approve another step to protect the environment. We call it the National Tree Trust Act of 1990. It will foster the partnership between public and private sectors to plant trees all across America. Under our plan, we will designate a private nonprofit foundation to receive a one-time Federal grant to promote community tree planting and cultivation projects -- a foundation to solicit contributions from private sources, forging cooperation between individuals, businesses, governments, and community organizations. It will sound a nationwide call for each American to become a volunteer for the environment and, most of all, plant the trees that clean our air, prevent erosion, consume carbon dioxide, and purify our water. This act can preserve the heritage of trees -- their beauty that is breathtaking and their bounty that is breathgiving. (Bush, 1990a)

Indeed, this program clusters terms volunteerism, environmental stewardship, and private enterprise to create a definition of environmental movement in America that is not driven by formal government structures. Here, his ideal citizen is an environmentalist
and a volunteer; he or she becomes a steward of the environment because it’s the moral thing to do, not because they are mandated to comply with government programs or regulations. His ideal citizen is an active participant of the American environmental movement, but operates voluntarily and while also utilizing private sector resources. It becomes a personal choice citizens voluntarily make for the good of the community. Preserving the heritage of trees becomes preserving America’s natural heritage. Under this construct, stewardship and volunteerism become a defining patriotic and moral act. Those that preserve the environment become “the trustees of our future” (Bush, 1990a).

Rethinking a Failed Environmental Presidency

This project demonstrates that despite hundreds of speeches mentioning the environment and stewardship and dozens of policies introduced that took active steps in reducing and preventing environmental decay, as Martin Carcasson (2006) argues, Bush was unable to be taken seriously as an environmental president because it was inconsistent with his governing philosophy. However, rather than limit understanding this president only as a failed agent, whose setbacks were caused by poor or thoughtless decisions, this chapter attempts to situate Bush’s failures in a larger cultural context, considering the structural constraints that made his definition of environmentalism less likely to be taken up in public discourse. The constraints of the office of the presidency do not allow the chief executive to fully embody all elements that characterize the environmental movement. Thus, this chapter understands the Bush administration partly as a victim of circumstances, unfortunately sandwiched between two dynamic and proactive presidencies and within a struggling economy. It was difficult to live up to expectations and preconceived notions of how an environmental president should act.
Environmentalists worldwide expected an environmental presidency to be more proactive and less prudent than Bush could realistically be: an environmental president who would satisfy the expectations of 1990s environmentalists needed to be a proactive maverick. This was a difficult task considering that the early 90s also were characterized by a sluggish economy.

Despite his best efforts, the economic-environmental binary is difficult to completely replace. Given that in popular political culture, the president is the political figure most closely credited with strengthening or weakening the economy, it is a difficult task for a conservative president to also become the environmentalist-in-chief during a recession. While such a position necessarily must place environmental concerns above all else, a president must also consider economic ramifications of environmental policies. In times of fiscal crisis, Bush thought that Americans needed a prudent and thoughtful fiscal conservative. Thus the political context of the early 1990s brought with it situations that were less than favorable to a president who valued prudence and grassroots activism. While most of his presidency focused on achieving a balance between economic growth and environmental responsibilities, the recession called for a response that made a shift away from environmental activism and towards economic protectionism (Carasson, 2004, p. 266). As president running for reelection, the environment at various points of his presidency became subordinate to economic issues. As much as the president tried to become a legitimate environmental president, the constraints of the office made it very difficult to escape the economic-environmental binary he spent so many years trying to dissolve.
Despite his lack of enthusiasm for public speaking, anxiety over the struggling economy, and inability to fully destroy the economic-environmental binary, it is clear from his public statements and legislative initiatives that his efforts to be an environmental president were genuine. To be fair, many of Bush’s policies and programs supported the environment. The Take Pride In America program, for example, promoted stewardship of our lands, and according to Bush, is a program that “will get us into a better partnership with nature” (Bush, 1995, p. 771). In spite of these proactive domestic programs, one of the main setbacks to achieving his environmental goals stemmed from his failures in Rio in 1992. The United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio Conference, and Earth Summit, are a few names for the largest environmental conference ever held. The high-profile conference was a colossal failure and most of the public blame was placed upon the President, as the U.S. was the only industrialized nation that refused to sign the climate-change convention. In the conference narrative, the U.S. was the world’s villain and Bush was labeled as an eco-wimp (Carcasson, 2006). Rio also marked one of the moments where Bush, despite his earlier efforts, positioned environmentalism against economic growth. This contradiction works against Bush’s attempts to become an environmental president.

Another reason for Bush’s failures in Rio was caused by his philosophies towards environmentalism, government, and the materiality of rhetoric (Carcasson, 2006). Like any conservative who favored smaller government, his environmental philosophy was less supportive of environmental mandates. Instead, he favored initiatives that encouraged collaboration, grass roots activism, and a reliance on private industry and technology “worked against taking a proactive stance at Rio” (Carcasson, 2006). His
reelection, slow economy, and “uncertainty of global science” to come to the environment’s rescue also contributed to a creating rhetorical situation that was unfavorable to the president. Bush’s inability to lead the international community at Rio also damaged his ethos as an international collaborator.

When considering the impact of Bush’s environmental rhetoric, unfortunately for the president, history has been unfairly harsh. Sandwiched between Presidents Reagan and Clinton, Bush has been often been labeled the forgotten president without considering in what ways his version of environmentalism influenced those that would follow. In examining his public discourse and rhetorical strategies, it is clear that the Bush offers an expanded version of environmentalism that was different from any of his predecessors. This project demonstrates that environmental discourse was instrumental in defining his presidency and also sets important precedents for future presidencies. It is, however, also important in understanding why it failed during his term. Bush’s environmental rhetoric failed in two important areas.

First, his expanded definition of environmentalism cannot function comfortably outside conservative rhetoric. Although his language reflects concern for conservation and stewardship, it was too far a departure from mainstream environmentalist language. Bush’s environmentalism included the discourses of free market capitalism, private industry, and individualism, terms that in previous administrations functioned as agons. Bush’s ideal citizen supports private industry. Thus, a good practicing environmentalist could also be a good practicing capitalist under Bush. His version of environmentalism supports consumption while mainstream environmentalism encourages constraint. Bush’s version of environmentalism, as Carcasson (2006) argues, supported the “increased
funding for scientific research on climate change” (p. 130). This “merged well with Bush’s optimism concerning the market and science as environmental saviors” (Carcasson, 2006, p. 130).

For environmentalists, however, “such prudence seemed timid procrastination at best, and willful deceit at worst while to Bush it was prototypical conservative leadership. Once again, neither side seemed to consider the perspective of the other” (Carcasson, 2006, p. 130). Bush, unlike Carter, does not encourage Americans to change their consumptive habits. Bound by the rhetorical constraints of his political party and often plagued with the responsibility of a struggling economy, as true capitalist and conservative, Bush can only offer human ingenuity and technological advancements as solutions. When examining Bush’s rhetoric in context, science and ingenuity functioned as viable solutions to problems with conservatives and capitalists, but could not do so with environmentalists. As Carcasson (2006) notes, “for environmentalists, the problem lies in the possibility that the science will not be clear until it is too late for positive action to affect irreversible processes. The idealistic American belief in science, which showed no sign of decline during the Clinton years, is thus seen as a perilous stimulant to procrastination” (p. 130). Unfortunately for the president, individualism, consumption, and free market capitalism are not terms that regularly clustered around environmentalism during his presidency. Had the Bush presidency occurred even a half decade later, it is highly likely his environmental rhetoric would have been more accepted by Americans. Clinton, as the next chapter will explain, picks up some of this vocabulary.

Secondly, Bush’s environmentalism was ahead of its time. Ironically, being forward thinking hurt his environmental legacy in the long run. Indeed, his definition of
environmentalism enables Americans to imagine the possibilities of a world where environmentalism and capitalism are interdependent. However, his attempts to collapse the environmental-economic binary are in vain. Aside from the struggling economy, the 1990s present a rhetorical situation that cannot financially support a definition of environmentalism that compliments free market capitalism. Unfortunately for the president, the period where the green industry became a significant and powerful economic force is still several years away. As we have seen in the present-day economy, capitalism and environmentalism can coexist. In the 1990s, the vocabulary that characterized environmental turn had not yet entered public discourse. When Bush was president, for example, there were no such things as “green collar jobs,” or “green industries.” Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, on the other hand, were successful in arguing for the interdependency between industry and environmentalism because they were fortunate enough to speak during a period where the new “green” vocabulary was mainstream and there was a green industry to support it. Ironically, Bush’s expanded notion of environmentalism, one that includes economic growth and technology, when reexamined over two decades later, becomes even more significant. While he was unable to achieve his goal of becoming the environmental president, President Bush offered the rhetorical foundation for an expanded version of environmentalism that has been utilized by every president that has followed him to date.

Implications
This case study of a failed environmental presidency highlights the delicate balance between the subject who speaks and the rhetorical situation that presents the need for an appropriate and fitting response. While the impact of Bush’s environmental
rhetoric cannot be determined in policy, Bush caused shifts in ways of thinking about environmentalism that had consequences in later presidencies, as future chapters will explain. The limits of presidential power and influence on public discourse become apparent when we discover through rhetorical analysis what words work and what words don’t. It is clear that despite speaking from the subject position of the president, Bush’s environmentalism as a rhetorical construct was not powerful enough to yield immediate results and enable him to become a legitimate environmental president.

Bush developed a useful definition of environmentalism that was successfully used by those who followed him. When industry finally caught up with Bush’s call for a way to understand environmentalism that placed private industry in the service of nature, his definition fits in easily. In fact, presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama have used similar definitions of environmentalism to speak to industry and environmentalists. If anything, this case study demonstrates to rhetoricians and environmental communication scholars that when examining presidential rhetorical power and assessing impact, often times impact can only be seen after the president leaves office. Indeed, the presidency’s lasting influence and impact that can extend beyond an individual’s term is a very significant power of a president and the office of the presidency.
CHAPTER 5. GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: PRESIDENT CLINTON AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

When we talk about unemployment, the levels of underemployment, the decrepit schools, disgraceful school systems and decrepit housing, we’re talking about power and privilege versus poverty and relative powerlessness - and Race is integral. – Cornel West

It took several decades for environmentalism to become a term firmly rooted in the American vernacular. By the mid-1990s, its commercialization brought the success of “green” businesses such as The Body Shop, cartoons like Captain Planet, and a new “green” literary genre that produced books including 50 Things You Can Do to Save the Earth. Environmentalism also became a popular social issue politicians were expected to address. As a political issue, environmentalism was a polarizing term when Clinton assumed office. Bush’s failed environmental presidency created an opportunity for Clinton to assume that role. The economy, however, demanded attention. Bush could not fully escape being torn between economic and environmental decisions. Similarly, Clinton found himself having to situate his public discourse within two speech communities. He had to appease environmentalists frustrated with his predecessor’s failures and those concerned with jumpstarting a slow economy. It is no surprise expectations were high; it became crucial that the next president be a “real” environmentalist and someone who could fix the economy. “A number of variables either constrained or facilitated Clinton’s environmental agenda” (Nie, 1997, p. 39). “As in all presidential administrations,” as Nie (1997) argues, “Clinton did not inherit a tabula rasa regarding environmental policy. He responded to these contextual constraints by
promising his presidency would bring an authentic approach to environmentalism and an end to what he referred to as Bush’s “photo-op environmentalism” (p. 39).

Clinton’s leadership philosophy is rooted in bipartisanship. His environmental and social justice strategies, therefore, also reflect those values; his remarkable ability to connect with Americans in his campaign legitimated him as a consensus builder rather than a divider. Entering the Oval Office with a Republican House and Senate, however, poses problems, forcing Clinton to create new ways of making political change; upon assuming office, Clinton found himself operating within a rhetorical situation that contained a lame-duck Congress. It could not afford him the opportunity to pass many laws to support his agenda or live up to many of his campaign promises. A bipartisan approach would prove to be a response that could yield limited results. As he could not accomplish his goals by working through the other branches of government, creating change meant “going public” and exploiting the powers of the executive branch.

Certainly, Clinton’s rhetorical choice to make the environment a central issue in his presidency reflects the political climate of the 1990s. Presidential rhetoric, however, does not merely reflect the critical issues of the day. The Clinton presidency was characterized by a distinct approach to defining and practicing environmentalism. As the interpreter-in-chief, the president occupies a privileged position of having the power to define. This chapter, therefore, also examines the unique power of the president to redefine environmentalism. I argue that the discourse of environmentalism is an important rhetorical tool for President Clinton that becomes crucial to defining his presidency. Rather than attempt to collapse a constructed economic-environmental binary, Clinton uses the vocabulary of environmentalism as a tool to gain support for his
social agenda. Through his expanded version of environmentalism, social justice also becomes a topic for political consideration.

By the end of his second term, the Clinton administration established more national parks and monuments than any other president since Theodore Roosevelt. Many of these parks were created by executive order. His inability to negotiate with house and senate republicans forced him to use powers that are limited to the office of the president. Clinton also felt a sense of urgency as his impeachment placed his presidential legacy in danger. Furthermore, at the end of his term, he did not have to deal with the consequences of his policies in an upcoming election, nor did he have to worry about poll numbers. A perfect storm was created for the opportunities that executive powers provide to be exploited.

The first portion of this chapter contextualizes the Clinton administration’s environmental rhetoric within a social justice framework, arguing that external cultural and economic forces are what help Clinton successfully negotiate the environmental-economics binary, and push an environmental agenda that is socially responsible. I argue that environmentalism, as a rhetorical tool, is an essential element in creating Clinton’s ideal citizen. While Christian stewardship, as I have outlined in Chapter 2, is certainly an underlying theme within his environmental policy and a major theme in environmental rhetoric, Clinton’s commitment to social justice is something that is often ignored as part of his environmental agenda. Thus, Clinton also offers an expanded definition of environmentalism. This expanded definition employs the language of environmentalism as a constitutive tool that functions to integrate the disenfranchised back into American civic life.
The second part of this chapter argues that presidential proclamations and executive orders are also useful rhetorical strategies that can sidestep an uncooperative Congress and help presidents push their social agenda. The rhetorical power of executive powers highlights moments where constitutive rhetoric creates a tangible space that is symbolic of a rhetor’s social agenda. In the case of the Clinton proclamations, the creation of new parks replaces legislative and social policies that legislative branch republicans stunted. These proclamations became the appropriate and fitting response to a situation where the president had limited agency and occasions to assert his presidential power. I demonstrate the ways that executive powers showcase a unique component of presidential agency that can literally constitute physical spaces reflecting social policies. In President Clinton’s case, they were used to create a material space where environmental justice is symbolized: Americans of all races, genders, and classes can gather within this equalizing space to experience and consume nature; the constitution of nature into national parks prevent Americans, as the president envisioned in his 1995 State of the Union Address, from being divided by “interest, constituency, or class” (Clinton, 1995b).

Ultimately, this chapter argues that Clinton’s version of environmentalism functions as a key rhetorical strategy for the president. Through careful analysis of Clinton’s public discourse, this chapter uncovers the strategic uses of the environmental vocabulary that the Clinton administration used to weaken partisan politics and advocate for the social justice issues that defined his presidency. As John Murphy explains, situating Clinton’s discourse within other voices and languages that circulate within the public sphere is beneficial to understanding the “rhetorical traditions that organize the
‘social knowledge’ of communities” (Murphy, 1997, p. 72). Indeed, as Murphy (1997) points out “no one tradition can finalize the world or itself” (p. 73). Mapping the various rhetorical traditions presidents speak within is crucial to gaining a broader understanding of how presidential discourse operates and in understanding what contributions presidential public address makes to the public vocabulary.

**A Different Kind of New Covenant**

Like many presidents, Clinton employed the language of covenant renewal. Covenant renewal as a genre offers an opportunity to right past wrongs and reclaim a people’s place as God’s chosen people. Through supporting his policies, the “new covenant” provides citizens the opportunity to get back on track and renew their commitment to America, thus renewing their national identity. As a communication strategy, it gives Clinton the opportunity to speak directly to the American people, overcoming the limitations of an uncooperative Congress while still positioning himself as a bipartisan connector. As a construct, the new covenant creates a rhetorical space favorable for addressing environmental and social justice concerns. Under the umbrella of the new covenant, Clinton is able to craft a different definition of environmentalism, one that also clusters the rhetoric of social justice and economic responsibility, two themes that characterize his presidency.

Functioning an equalizing term, Clinton’s new covenant “looks out for the interests of ordinary people,” not dividing them “by interest, constituency or class.” Recognizing that Americans needed a leader who could “meet the challenges of time,” Clinton (1992) promises to bring a new social contract to leading the country. Clinton’s new covenant, unlike that of his predecessors, clusters race and class around national
renewal, creating a rhetorical space for a polarized country to start over. Like Bush, Clinton’s ideal citizen is also a grass-roots activist. His new covenant with Americans is a new agreement between the people and the state based not on what policies citizens are forced to follow by their government, but on what they can volunteer. Echoing President Bush, it is framed as a bipartisan commitment to creating a leaner government with less bureaucracy and more opportunities for free enterprise. Offering Americans a “new choice based on old values,” Clinton’s new covenant is contingent upon practicing social and economic responsibility. For example, in his 1995 State of the Union Address, Clinton argues “we cannot ask Americans to be better citizens if we are not better servants.” In the same speech, he defines the new covenant as something that could give the citizenry both opportunity and responsibility:

As we enter a new era, we need a new set of understandings, not just with Government but, even more important, with one another as Americans… I call it the New Covenant. But it’s grounded in a very, very old idea, that all Americans have not just a right but a solemn responsibility to rise as far as their God-given talents and determination can take them and to give something back to their communities and their country in return. Opportunity and responsibility: They go hand in hand. We can’t have one without the other. And our national community can’t hold together without both. (Clinton, 1995b).

Thus, like President Bush, Clinton’s ideal citizen favors private enterprise, smaller government, and grass-roots activism. His ideal citizen, however, also advocates for socio-economic equality and has a responsibility to help others succeed. Clinton differentiates himself from Bush and Reagan, as his new covenant also requires a commitment to social justice. Attending to race and class inequalities becomes a prerequisite for citizenship and national identity renewal. It offers Americans a chance for more equality and promises to “bring people together without regard for race” (Clinton, 1992). According to Clinton, the community can provide all citizens the
opportunity for advancement, but they also have a responsibility to ensure others have the same opportunities. Citizens also have a responsibility to ensure that all Americans live in a neighborhood free from environmental damage, pollutions, and toxins. This is a significant shift in philosophy away from his predecessors and an important rhetorical choice that helped Clinton salvage his legacy after much controversy.

**Contextualizing Clinton’s Environmentalism**

Clinton’s choice to redefine environmentalism to include terms such as race, class, and justice is best understood when placing his language within the political context of its time and considering his unique rhetorical style. Because Clinton is rhetorically situated at the intersection of environmentalism and social justice, he is in a unique position to inject new vocabulary into the environmental lexicon, expanding the exploitation, conservation, and stewardship strains of environmentalism that have been prevalent in other presidencies. Environmental justice becomes the term that merges these two traditions. Nature becomes a site where community is reclaimed and social justice is practiced. While Clinton continues the notion of stewardship, he also weaves the narrative of national renewal with the practice of environmentalism, making renewal conditional upon environmental and cultural sensitivity.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, environmentalism emerged as an important campaign issue. In 1992, “sixty-four percent of the electorate had more confidence in the president and the congressional Democrats, compared to 18 percent in the congressional Republicans to handle environmental issues” (Nie, 1997, p. 39). Adding Senator Al Gore to the ticket meant adding an environmentalist to an already pro-environment campaign. In a 1994 Earth Day speech, Clinton describes Gore as “a proven
friend of the environment who’s making government a more effective friend of the environment” (Clinton, 1994b). According to Clinton, Gore was specifically selected as his running mate because he had “phenomenal insight and knowledge of environmental issues.” Gore serves an important function for Clinton in that he, unlike Clinton, made the environment “the work of his lifetime” (Clinton, 1994b). He also understood how to navigate the environmental-economic binary. According to Nie, Gore’s book *Earth in the Balance* (1992) served as “a blueprint for striking an environmental and economic symmetry” (Nie, 1997, p. 41). If the success of Gore’s book and his popularity are any indications, by the 1990s environmental issues had become “woven into the fabric of our life” and were no longer “a special issue just for Earth Day” (Clinton, 1994b).

But Clinton lacked the congressional support to uphold his new covenant and “turn rhetoric into reality” (Clinton, 1992). The Republican takeover of the House in 1994 resulted in little except the creation and passage of NAFTA, largely significant because it created the World Trade Organization. Perhaps most notably, the 1998 session highlighted his lack of support from the legislative branches as it resulted in impeachment (Lewis, 1999). Clinton, like other presidents facing uncooperative congresses, used his executive powers in the form of presidential pardons, including one for a wealthy donor, and one for a family member. He also used the power of presidential proclamations to create more national parks.

But even armed with the executive power of proclamations and pardons, Clinton still faced environmental challenges and the environmental legacy left by his predecessors. Quite literally every region of the country was engaged in some sort of environmental debate. The forests in the Pacific Northwest were the center of a heated
political debate between the timber industry and environmentalists. In the South, the Florida Everglades also were at the center of controversy. The Midwest and West suffered from overgrazing problems and national parks were threatened with severe budget cuts. These issues, although localized, demanded presidential intervention, or at the very least, intervention at the federal level. The fabric of the country was changing as well. Clinton, in his 1995 State of the Union Address, acknowledged this stating

We face a very different time and very different conditions. We are moving from an industrial age built on gears and sweat to an information age demanding skills and learning and flexibility. Our Government, once a champion of national purpose, is now seen by many as simply a captive of narrow interests, putting more burdens on our citizens rather than equipping them to get ahead. The values that used to hold us all together seem to be coming apart. (Clinton, 1995b)

As Skowronek (1997) argues, Clinton, as the nation’s political leader, needed to “situate himself in public discourse and construct a narrative” defining “who he is and where he sees himself fitting into the nation’s history” (p. 24). Thus, his environmental narrative, and rhetorical choices became central to shaping his presidency and keeping his new covenant with Americans (Nie, 1997, p. 40).

The Clinton presidency is characterized by a strong attention to social justice, namely race and class issues. Clinton is forced to respond to racially charged events, such as the 1993 race riots sparked by the Rodney King police brutality trial. His attempt to create community both domestically and internationally can be seen permeating much of Clinton’s public discourse and policy proposals. Often publically evoking Dr. King, who spent his public life actively striving to create what he called a ‘beloved community’ from “the key values of the Christian and democratic traditions of American society,” Clinton too attempts to foster a “beloved community which would carry on King’s work while meeting the problems of the 1990s” (Murphy, 1997, p. 84).
Like Clinton, as I have argued in Chapter 4 of this project, Bush was also committed to bipartisanship and creating community. Clinton’s style and overt stance against racial inequality, however, positions Clinton among other dynamic political figures such as Robert Kennedy, one of Clinton’s heroes (Murphy, 1997, p. 83). Speaking as a “community member, he holds the community to its own standards of love and justice” and situates the racial problems of the U.S. within that tradition, where peace and equality can and must be fought for” (Murphy, 1997, p. 82). Although he is often accused of blurring racial differences, the tradition he employs in both his language and delivery “offered the President the resources for reflection and the means to create authority” (Murphy, 1997, p. 78). Indeed, to further his persona as a coalition builder, Clinton often uses civil rights leaders as authorizing figures (Murphy, 1997, p.81). As president and a white southern male speaking within the tradition of social justice, performing King’s unique style also contributes to his reputation as the “first black president” (Morrison, 1998). It is not surprising, then, that Clinton chooses to weave his desire for social justice and community into his environmental narrative.

Reading Clinton’s environmental narrative within the context of environmental justice and civil rights allows us to see a few things. Ultimately, this chapter repositions Clinton’s discourse and presidency within a larger context and intellectual history. As it has been argued in all five chapters of this project, the president is bound by both constraints on the office of the presidency and precedent laid by his predecessors. Clinton is able to differentiate himself in important ways. Because an environmental vocabulary is instrumental in defining his presidency, understanding the ways Clinton employs
environmental language to accomplish his rhetorical and political goals are essential to understanding his presidency.

**Expanded Environmentalism**

Environmentalism played an important role in Clinton’s new covenant and was positioned as a vehicle for social change. Under the umbrella of the new covenant, good environmentalism as a cultural practice becomes dependent on also ensuring social justice and practicing fiscal responsibility. Environmentalism as a term is re-clustered under Clinton’s framework to include rhetorics of social justice and fiscal responsibility. Under this framework, terms *community, justice, race* and *class* cluster around *environmentalism*. Clinton’s version of environmentalism provided an occasion to “strengthen our common community,” and offer Americans new ways of being socially and economically responsible (Clinton, 1992). Social justice and fiscal responsibility function as the gateways to civic engagement and good citizenship. This version of environmentalism offers Americans the opportunity to give back to their communities and behave responsibly. Thus, Clinton’s environmentalism becomes a prerequisite for citizenship. As a cultural and economic practice, Clinton’s environmentalism builds upon Bush’s definition; environmentalism continues to be a means of creating opportunity, a way to achieve economic growth, and a practice that can continue American ingenuity through entrepreneurship and inventing new green technologies. Clinton’s version, however, includes some important additions. His version of environmentalism is used as a rhetorical tool for social change. In Clinton’s framework, it functions as rhetoric of social mobility. For the president, environmentalism is a term with material consequences; it is a cultural practice that has the power to shift subject positions for its
practitioners. It was a practice through which the disenfranchised could “rise as far as their God-given talents and determination can take them” and “give something back” in return. Environmentalism becomes the vocabulary Clinton is working through to create a rhetorical opportunity that helps the citizenry make “new choices based on old values” (Clinton, 1992).

Through environmental justice, Clinton offers the citizenry a way to reclaim its communities, achieve social mobility, and give back to its country. Clinton’s environmentalism also presents an opportunity to paradoxically return to old values and progress toward the future; his unique use of environmentalism, however, cannot fully be understood unless situated in context.

**Environmental Justice**

Evoking the rhetoric of environmental justice is important in helping Clinton speak to the American people about race, class, and social injustices. Environmental justice as a movement is broadly defined as a localized group of citizens struggling “to protect their habitats from the hazards of waste incineration, dumping and toxic industries” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 189). Equating environmental degradation with social inequality, environmental justice, according to Kevin DeLuca (1999), is about identifying instances where communities are targeted as sites of dumping “because of class discrimination, institutional racism, and regional bias” (p. 189). Environmental justice is postmodern in that it has “a penchant for deconstructing foundations and metanarratives and fetishizing locality and place” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 191). They “question the modern grand narrative of industrial progress, seek to rearticulate identities, work toward reinventing ‘nature,’ open new possibilities for human-nature and human-human
relations, and break with conventional politics and rhetorics through the practice of a radical form of participatory democracy, thus enacting the political and rhetorical possibilities of a postmodern age” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 192). By integrating justice into presidential rhetoric, Clinton is able to cluster race, class, and justice within the environmental vocabulary.

His definition of environmentalism calls into question the normative idea in politics that humans, as non-animals who are separate from wilderness, are limited to being stewards or exploiters of nature. It is somewhat fitting that environmental justice destabilizes the nature-human relationship and the concept of stewardship; it can no longer be limited to something humans do to nature. The crisis of nature, of what things and beings “count” as part of nature, are in some ways central to postmodernism (DeLuca, 1999, p. 192). This crisis, according to DeLuca (1999), can also provide the framework for social change: “The dislocation of the modernist concept of nature as a storehouse of resources opens up the possibility of critiquing the domination of nature and rearticulating human-nature relationships…The deconstruction of nature presents both a foundering and an opportunity for environmental politics” (p. 193). Environmental justice rhetoric allows for the understanding of “nature as a culturally constructed ideograph in the open social field of discursive politics” (p. 196). As DeLuca (1999), quoting Haraway, argues, “when nature is thus understood, environmental movements become key sites for ‘the invention and reinvention of nature –perhaps the most central arena of hope, oppression, and contestation for inhabitants of the planet earth in our times’ and constructions of nature have become understood ‘as a critical cultural process for people who need and hope to live in a world less riddled by the dominations of race,
colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality” (p. 196). Grassroots environmental justice efforts have a short history of waging successful campaigns; in the 1996 presidential campaign and his subsequent presidency, Clinton made environmental justice an executive issue. Clinton’s use of environmental justice as a platform for social legislation implies that nature is more than a stagnate space ripe for exploitation, conservation, or stewardship by humans. Environmental justice problematizes the human-nature binary. Using it as a rhetorical strategy offers Clinton the opportunity to employ environmental language unlike any other president.

Clinton’s Environmental Justice.

Clinton uses environmentalism as rhetoric of social mobility. Thus, by making social justice part of the topoi of environmentalism, Clinton makes a radical break with his predecessors. Inserting race, class, and gender into the existing environmental vocabulary goes beyond stewardship and repositions the human/nature binary. Humans become more than protectors or stewards of the natural world and instead have the capacity to become victims or champions of environmental injustice, just like their nonhuman cohabitants. Thus, Clinton’s environmentalism makes a significant contribution to the politics of environmentalism, or what “counts” as an environmental issue. Indeed, just as environmental justice groups are redefining possibilities for understanding human nature and human-human identities, so is Clinton, as chief interpreter. By defining a particular situation as environmentally just or unjust, the president makes a powerful argument about the function of environmentalism in civic life. The impact of environmentalism is dramatically expanded. Under Clinton’s framework, class and social mobility are made possible.
Environmentalism also offers Clinton the opportunity to define his ideal citizen. According to Zarefsky (2004), “to choose a definition is, in effect, to plead a cause, as if one were advancing a claim and offering support for it…The presidential definition is stipulated, offered as if it were neutral and uncontroversial rather than chosen and contestable” (p. 612). By making the environment part of his administrative agenda and working with existing discourses about societal injustice, Clinton is “giving voice to what may be unexamined ideological commitments” (Zarefsky, 2004, p. 612). In short, defining a rhetorical situation as a case of environmental injustice “rearranges the rhetorical ground” into something that demands presidential action; it also dictates what responses are fitting, giving Clinton advantages he normally would not have if he had not defined the terms of the situation (Zarefsky, 2004, p. 616). By weaving together several intellectual traditions and defining the terms of the debate, he is also weaving together the “grammatical, formal, and ethical wherewithal” of those histories, forming a new or expanded “train of intellectual memory” (Murphy, 1997, p. 74). Thus “invention becomes the orchestration of the resources of rhetorical traditions into coherent artistic representations of community life in contingent circumstances” (Murphy, 1997, p. 74). Because Clinton makes the practice of environmentalism a requirement for inclusion into the citizenry, correcting environmental injustices become a way Americans redeem themselves and renew their covenant.

This notion of environmental justice fits well within Clinton’s new covenant, as it couples social justice language with economic policies that favor free market capitalism, private industry, and entrepreneurship. Scholars have also named Clinton as the first president to take such care to fuse environmental and economic issues and concerns
together (Nie, 1997, p. 42). Clinton’s agency as a president becomes less visible when talking about the economic-environment binary and stronger when using environmental justice. What Nye calls Clinton’s “moderate ‘New Democrat’ approach to environmental policy” is an extension of a very liberal social policy that focused on civil rights and social justice issues. His political style is characterized by terms like collaboration, community, and cooperation. Thus, Clinton’s environmentalism also clusters these social terms; interconnectedness is a common theme in social justice and environmental rhetoric. *Interconnectedness* allows him to frame environmental issues as global problems. “Environmental threats, according to Clinton, are a transnational problem that can only be solved at a transnational level” (Nie, 1997, p.43).

Class and social transition are made possible through attention to environmental injustices. Thus, attention to environmental justice is heavily woven into his Earth Day speeches. Using Earth Day as an opportunity to address race and class inequalities, Clinton chooses to focus on the grassroots bottom-up politics of Earth Day, rather than talk about it as his predecessors did as a day of remembrance. Its goal becomes not simply to better environmental practices, but to ensure justice for all. Ignoring environmentalism also means ignoring inequalities. His version of environmentalism adjusts the stakes to include environmental degradation and also social degradation. In his 1997 Earth Day address, for example, he argues:

> Earth Day started at the grassroots. Soon the force of neighbor joining with neighbor grew into a national movement to safeguard our air, our land, and our water…These environmental protections have done an awful lot of good. But one of the best things we can do in Washington to protect the environment is to give people in communities all across our country the power to protect themselves from pollution.” (Clinton, 1997)
Environmentalism as a discourse allows Clinton the opportunity to communicate the art of the possible. Also noteworthy is that Clinton re-clusters vocabulary normally used to describe social movements around environmentalism, thus prompting an occasion to re-imagine the impact and creative consequences of responsible stewardship. Clinton’s Earth Day address, for example, is an attempt to give agency to the voiceless. Clinton uses the environmental injustices affecting the disenfranchised as grounds for social change. Cooperation between the citizenry at the local level and government is a key theme in his presidency. Protecting the environment becomes the way they can protect themselves from harm. His focus remains on localized community activity; government is the thing that helps communities help themselves.

Speaking for the disenfranchised became a hallmark of Clinton’s presidency. In a 1995 Message to Congress, for example, he uses environmental justice to weave social justice and environmentalism together:

We have a moral obligation to represent the interests of those who have no voice in today’s decisions – our children and grandchildren. We have a responsibility to see that they inherit a productive and livable world that allows their families to enjoy the same or greater opportunities than we ourselves have enjoyed. Those who still believe in the American Dream will settle for no less. (Clinton, 1995a)

Clinton clusters terms *morality, responsibility, opportunities*, and the *American Dream* around environmentalism. In doing so, he invites us to imagine the possibilities of what social impact sound environmental policies can have. He presents a utopic image of a "productive and livable world" all citizens could enjoy. Similarly, in his 1994 Earth Day address Clinton argues that, “For too long, this kind of pollution has been associated and concentrated in poor communities, from central cities to small towns. And for too long, government has been part of the problem, not part of the solution” (Clinton, 1994b).
His ideal citizen is moral, just, socially responsible, and supportive of Clinton’s environmental and social policies.

Indeed, the link between human rights and environmental damage is made in Clinton’s public discourse. The above passage conflates the mythos of the American dream with the practice of environmentalism. Clinton’s environmentalism clusters the social and the political with the environmental. In Clinton’s rhetoric, environmental injustices are social injustices that demand political action. In his 1994 Earth Day address, for example, he argues “we must never forget that we share the air and the planet and our destiny with all the peoples of the world.” *Interconnectedness* and *social justice* are terms again used to demand environmental action. In the same Earth Day speech he says “we must help people in poorer countries to understand that they, too, can find better ways to make a living without destroying their forests and their other natural resources” (Clinton, 1994b).

Interestingly, the term *interconnectedness* provides the rhetorical grounds to argue that attention to environmental problems have global consequences. It becomes a moral responsibility of the United States to practice environmentalism; to not make green decisions is to deny the voiceless a viable future. Positioning the U.S. as a global leader that might ignore global environmental injustices also means that the country could not legitimately retain its position as an exceptional nation. To ignore environmental injustice becomes immoral, irresponsible, and against the founding principles. If the U.S. does not actively intervene in instances of environmental injustices, they will deny others the right to pursue their version of the American dream. To not respond becomes an unthinkable option.
**Sustainability.**

In the same 1994 speech, Clinton once again clusters new vocabulary words around environmentalism. In his 1994 Earth Day Address, for example, he argues:

The nations of the world are working together to achieve what is now called sustainable growth, growth that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing the needs of the future. It’s an ethic as modern as microprocessors and as old as the scriptures…Sustainable development is the golden rule for our children and our grandchildren and their grandchildren. (Clinton, 1994b)

Here, sustainability, sustainable growth, and sustainable development become key terms that cluster around capitalism and environmentalism. For example, he says “government should encourage people to work together, not pit business and workers and environmentalists against each other” (Clinton, 1994b). Sustainability is integral to covenant renewal and it becomes the term that allows the citizenry to practice environmentalism without sacrificing the mythos of the American dream. Echoing a Kantian moral imperative, sustainability becomes the new golden rule of the emerging green capitalist movement. Like Bush, Clinton tries to suture the economic-environmental binary. But unlike Bush, Clinton uses a new green vocabulary to help him do it.

**Environmental Injustice.**

Clinton’s rhetorical strategy, like many other politicians, relies heavily on storytelling. Relaying the stories of “everyday” Americans, he highlights the politics of environmental injustice. Speaking about a young man named Pernell Brewer, for example, Clinton uses his story to merge race and class inequalities with environmental issues:

He comes from a part of Louisiana now known as ‘Cancer Alley’ because it’s filled with chemical plants that may contribute to the unusually high cancer rates
found there in Louisiana. He told me that 20 of his relatives have had cancer; many have died of it, including his 10-year old brother who died of a rare brain tumor. (Clinton, 1994b)

Using a rhetorical strategy characteristic of the environmental justice tradition, Clinton uses narrative to explain the impact of environmental injustices for Americans. He repeatedly argues for the relationship between pollution and class, arguing “poor neighborhoods in our cities suffer most often from toxic pollution. Cleaning up the toxic wastes will create new jobs in these neighborhoods for these people and make them safer (Clinton, 1993).

As explained in Chapter 2, defining socioeconomically disadvantaged populations of people as victims of environmental damage is a relatively new concept within the history of environmentalism. It is also a new rhetorical strategy in the presidential rhetorical tradition. Environmental justice gives Clinton the rhetorical footing to add human and cultural elements to add nuance to the layperson’s understanding of environmentalism. By clustering race and class into the environmental vocabulary through the vocabulary of environmental justice, Clinton is able to move beyond Gore’s environmentalism, which used scientific arguments as the basis for his claims. Race and class inequalities are reframed as grounds for environmental action. As a rhetorical strategy, these new clusters of terms become rhetorical formations that allow him to push both his social justice and environmental agenda. Environmental justice in the Clinton administration was not limited to his speeches and can be found in his policies.

Environmental Exceptionalism.

Indeed, environmental justice allows Clinton to accomplish several political goals and push his social agenda, but it also creates the rhetorical space needed to evoke the
rhetoric of covenant renewal, a key theme among presidents and essential for maintaining national identity. Clinton, however, speaking within this tradition of the new covenant, defines Earth Day as the point of departure for a “journey of national renewal” that can only be completed once environmental injustice is no longer a problem. In his 1994 Earth Day address, Clinton says:

Since the first Earth Day 24 years ago, our nation has been on a journey of national renewal. But as long as 70 million Americas live in communities where the air is dangerous to breathe; as long as half our rivers, our lakes, and our streams are too polluted for fishing and swimming; as long as people in our poorest communities face terrible hazards from lead paint to toxic waste dumps; as long as people around the world are driven from their homelands because what were their fields are now deserts, their fisheries are dying, and their children are stricken by diseases, our journey is far from finished.

Environmental justice is again presented here as a barrier to exceptionalism. Americans cannot occupy a privileged position if they turn a blind eye to global environmental problems. Thus, abolishing environmental injustices become a necessary step to national identity renewal. This rhetorical strategy differentiates him from other presidents. Arguing that the mythos of the American dream is out of reach for 70 million Americans, the poor become redefined as victims. As long as environmental injustice exists, Americans cannot experience collective national renewal. However, just as environmental injustice is a condition that prevents Americans from renewing their national identity, the beauty and majesty of American nature in Clinton’s environmental constructs often function as evidence of environmental justice. The national parks function as a social equalizer, symbol of equality, and a rhetorical construct that perpetuates the mythos or fantasy of egalitarianism. In his 1996 Earth Day address, for example, he claims
Not everybody can travel to see the great palaces of the world. Even the great art galleries of the world are beyond the reach of many of our fellow citizens. But everyone can come to this park without out regard to their income, their station in life, what their other resources are. This all belongs to the American people, and we have to dedicate ourselves to making sure that as long as there is an America there will be a national park system with these treasures there for every single citizen of this country.

In the above passage, terms *stewardship* and racial *equality cluster* around the national park narrative. Stewardship becomes the term that Americans must work through to achieve equality and renew their covenant. Clinton’s new covenant promises to “bring people together regardless of race” and through a commitment to stewardship of the national parks, Americans can keep that covenant (Clinton, 1995b). His choice to talk about the national parks in this way, however, is not surprising. The national parks have long been a symbol of egalitarianism and national renewal. As I have outlined in chapter two, many presidents have strategically used nature to make exceptionalist arguments. Clinton, however, takes this claim a step further. American nature is not simply better than European art. Instead, they are redefined as transformative places. Through experiencing natural treasures, people from all walks of life, including the disenfranchised, are reaffirmed as Americans and all are stripped of race and class privileges. Through the act of stewardship, Americans can reclaim their national identity. Paradoxically, national parks allow Americans to maintain exceptional status but they are also places that do not discriminate against race or class differences. As an example, his speech from a restored community park in Washington focuses on park restoration. The president honors those citizens who “reclaimed” the park, as it “represents what we, as a people, can do” (Clinton, 1994b). He argues:

The people of this community took this park back. They made it a place where families could come and young people could come and children could play. And
now, because of what you have done – look at it, I mean look at the fountain, the water, the beauty of this place. Its absolutely unbelievable and a great incredible tribute to the people in this community. The most important things I think we can say or do today, just to recognize the power of ordinary citizens to rebuild their own lives, environmentally, responsibly, and make their lives better at the same time…Just as this community has restored this park, he park has helped to restore the community.

Again, it is Clinton’s attention to race and class that redefines environmentalism, and his presidency. His environmentalism invites Americans to re-think stewardship’s impact. Stewardship becomes necessary for environmental justice, and it is through the practice that the community can keep his new covenant. Building off of Bush’s environmentalism, Clinton’s citizens are also able to restore nature through community driven stewardship. Stewardship is, for Clinton, a transformative term. It is also the catalyst that helps a socioeconomically disadvantaged citizenry make their lives better. As an example, using John Muir as an authorizing figure, Clinton (1994b) weaves together the narrative of the localized park-making practice and the national park narrative:

I am here today because what this community has done is what our country as a whole must do. In restoring a piece of nature, the people here have helped restore a strong sense of place, of their own history, of their roots, a sense of purpose, a sense of pride, and a sense of hope for their children, proving the wisdom of the great American naturalist John Muir, who founded our national parks and whose birthday we celebrate today. He said almost a century ago, ‘Garden – and park making goes on everywhere in civilization, for everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the soul.

**Restoration, Reclamation, and Stewardship.**

Reframing environmentalism to include race and class is what contributes to defining Clinton’s presidency. The term *restoration* allows Clinton to redefine the
national parks. They become not just a symbol for national identity and national renewal, but a space where identity can be reclaimed. Park making at the local level, for Clinton, is the act that restores a sense of place and allows the disenfranchised to reclaim their identity as citizens. It is a practice that creates social mobility. *Preservation*, as a term, within the tradition of environmental justice, also has restorative power. When speaking about the restored park, Clinton (1994b) specifically says that preserving nature can bring fragmented communities back together saying that when “we renew our environment, we renew our national community.” It is also something to which Americans are entitled:

> Each of us has a special place where we can stand silently alone, except for the presence of nature and the Creator. And if we don’t, we need it and we deserve it. When I was growing up, it was the lakes, the woods, the hills of my native State. For a young man or woman growing up in this community, it may well be this wonderful park. Preserving those things enable us to bring our communities and our country back together.

Clinton argues that stewardship and preservation are at the core of national identity. Reclaiming nature, within the tradition of environmental justice, becomes a way Americans can complete the journey of national renewal and keep his new covenant. As cultural acts, stewardship and preservation give voice to the voiceless and connect the disenfranchised to “a national community” (Clinton, 1994b). For example, in an Earth Day speech he argues:

> There is clearly a hunger today in our national spirit not only for more security, for more economic opportunity but for something we can all be involved in that is larger than ourselves and more lasting than a fleeting moment. Reclaiming our rivers, our forests, our beaches, and our urban oases, like this one, is a great purpose worthy of a great people. The love of nature is at the core of our identity as individuals, and certainly as Americans and increasingly, thankfully, a part of the community of nations. (Clinton, 1994b)
Clinton’s environmentalism rests on the idea that preserving the environment “is at the core of everything we have to do in our own country, building businesses, creating jobs, fighting crime and drugs and violence, raising our children to know the difference between right and wrong, and restoring the fabric of our society” (Clinton, 1994b). Clinton uses his definition of environmentalism as a rhetorical tool to soften the tension between nationalism and internationalism. Environmentalism is what allows the country to live within the city on a hill among a community of nations. It is the common practice keeps that Americans exceptional but also part of an international community.

It is productive to focus on consistencies within the presidency as well as ruptures. Indeed, as a strategic term within presidential rhetoric, stewardship is not new and, as Chapter 4 notes, it was integral to practicing Bush’s failed environmentalism. Clinton, however, speaks within a different rhetorical situation and therefore, stewardship has a different and more productive function in his presidency. It is instrumental in helping him accomplish different goals. Clinton, speaking within the tradition of covenant renewal, uses Earth Day as an opportunity to offer a new course for America on April 21, 1993. He ties in stewardship of the Earth into the founding narrative:

For all of our differences, I think there is an overwhelming determination to change our course, to offer more opportunity, to assume more responsibility, to restore the larger American community, and to achieve things that are larger than ourselves and more lasting than the present moment…That is the American spirit. It moves us not only in great gatherings but also when we stand silently all alone in the presence of nature and our creator. (Clinton, 1993)

Clinton weaves Earth Day into the founding narrative, defining it as the culmination of a love of nature that has always already existed. Rather than frame Earth Day so that it creates awareness for environmentalism and constitutes a public that will put those ideas into practice, Clinton takes it a step further, reframing Earth Day as the
culmination of a social movement integral to understanding the founding narrative; participation in this social movement exemplifies ideal citizenry. Americans in Clinton’s presidency are defined by their commitment to nature. By inserting Earth Day into the founding myth, Clinton is able to erase and ignore the exploitative practices of Americans from the national narrative. In his 1993 Earth Day address, for example, environmentalism is clearly added to the founding narrative:

If there is one commitment that defines our people, it is our devotion to the rich and expansive land we have inherited. From the first Americans to the present day, our people have lived in awe of the power, the majesty, and the beauty of the forests, the rovers, and the streams of America. That love of land, which flows like a mighty current through this land and through our character, burst into service on the first Earth Day in 1970. (Clinton, 1993)

Redefining Earth Day allows it to more easily fit within the national capitalist narrative. Like his predecessors, Clinton uses this version of the national narrative to develop grounds for his claims but paradoxically redefines Earth Day as resulting from a long history of stewardship that has always defined Americans. Reframing the founding narrative as a long-standing commitment to nature rather than conquest is especially a useful strategy when framing Earth Day as a site of national renewal. Earth Day no longer becomes a site of resistance against consumption and exploitation. Stewardship becomes a natural act that Americans have always already done. As an example, the 1993 Earth Day Address asks Americans to reaffirm their “willingness to assume responsibility for our common environment and to do it willingly, hopefully, and joyously.” He challenges them not to sacrifice but rather “to celebrate and create,” challenging them to offer their time and creativity and volunteer.

Environmentalism here is positioned as a cultural practice that allows Clinton’s ideal citizens to overcome environmental and social obstacles. A collective commitment
to environmental justice becomes a precondition for citizenship and a necessary act for covenant renewal. Using Maya Angelou as an authorizing figure in his 1996 address, he challenges Americans to “look at the rock, the river, the tree, your country” in order to “face our challenges, exercise our responsibilities, and rejoice in them” (Clinton, 1996). Earth Day in this passage does not encourage Americans to change existing environmental practices, but instead becomes an occasion to follow through with an existing commitment. Through a commitment to environmental justice, Americans renew themselves; it offers an opportunity to regain the social consciousness that has always already defined them. In his 1996 Earth Day address, for example, he says:

There’s something for each of us to do. But the remarkable resurgence in support for clean air, for clean water, for a safe environment in our urban areas as well as our rural areas, for standing up for our national parks, that has not come from those of us in public life. Fundamentally, it has come from those of you who are citizens who live in our neighborhoods and walk our streets and climb our mountains and walk our trails day-in and day-out. You have given America back its soul, its conscience and its commitment on the environment…So on this Earth Day, as we stand beneath the eagle in this wonderful treasure that we have been given, let us vow that there is more to do. None of our children should have to live near a toxic waste dump or eat food poisoned by pesticides. Our grandchildren should not have to live in a world stripped of its natural beauty. We can and must protect the environment while advancing the prosperity of the American people and people throughout the world…if we make that commitment and stick to it, then America will have a bright future indeed. (Clinton, 1996)

The president links stewardship of our national parks to socioeconomically disadvantaged areas where environmental degradation diminishes the quality of life. Therefore, a commitment to the environment becomes a commitment to social change. Just as his environmentalism reframes the founding narrative to include stewardship of nature, his use of environmental justice makes national renewal possible through stewardship of the disenfranchised. That is, citizens are able to correct past mistakes through an active commitment to environmental justice. For example, Clinton’s
environmentalism also provides the grounds for a unique version of American
exceptionalism. Using stewardship as the term he is working through that keeps the U.S.
in a privileged position, the president argues:

I just came back, literally just came back from a remarkable journey all around
the world. I flew here to Alaska and refueled, and then I went to Korea and Japan
and on to St. Petersburg and Moscow. And I was thinking, standing here today I
saw some of the most magnificent manmade creations anywhere in the world: the
Imperial Palace in Tokyo; the great Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg; the
entire Kremlin has just been redone and restored to its historical grandeur. But
none of it is any more beautiful than this wonderful nature that God has given us
right here in this national park. (Clinton, 1996)

American nature functions here as a synecdoche. It is a part that stands in for the
whole. Nature is not simply defined as a gift from God, given to his chosen people.
Rather, much like Abigail Adams and her writing on American flora and fauna,
American nature represents the greatness of its people and becomes evidence that is
justifies America’s global positioning. Implicitly, Clinton is arguing that while other
countries have to build things to demonstrate their grandeur, God has given America gifts
even more beautiful to his chosen people.

**Creating a New Relationship to the Economy.**

Arguing that the U.S. must “maintain a lead in the world economy by taking the
lead to preserve the world environment,” Clinton’s environmentalism clusters global
economic rhetoric and preservation. Green business practices create space for social and
economic success and are essential for Americans to keep the new covenant. Thus, this
definition is also successful in breaking down the environmental-economics binary that
plagued his predecessors. As Chapter 4 argues, Bush speaks within a rhetorical situation
where there was little infrastructure that could support a green economy. A green
economic vocabulary had not yet dominated popular discourse. Good environmental practices may not mean good business, as Clinton can now argue.

Like Bush, Clinton frames the new challenge to go green as a time-honored, familiar challenge to the American entrepreneurial spirit, arguing Americans can “out conserve and out-compete anyone else on earth” (Clinton, 1993). The entrepreneurial spirit is an example of an “old value” that helps Americans make “new choices” (Clinton, 1992). *Free market capitalism, private enterprise, creativity, and technology* are terms that cluster around Clinton’s environmentalism. In his ’94 Earth Day Address, for example, Clinton makes a strong effort to suture the environment-economics binary:

In everything we do to protect the environment, we must, it seems to me...understand that a healthy economy and a healthy environment go hand-in-hand. We cannot have one without the other...there is now a $200 billion to $300 billion market for environmentally conscious products, from technologies for cleaning toxic dumps and scrubbers for power plants to energy-efficient air conditioners...We Americans can do what we set our minds to do, including slowing down global warming without cooling down our economy...Good environmental policies are, in fact, good businesss. (Clinton, 1994b)

Clinton also defines good environmental practices to include responsible economic decisions. Inversely, he also defines good economic decisions to mean those that also include responsible environmental policies. Although Bush tried to accomplish this goal, he did not speak within a rhetorical situation where there was a billion dollar market for “green” products.

Thus, it is not surprising that Clinton’s 1993 Earth Day address focuses heavily on creating economic development and green jobs. His was the appropriate and fitting response to a rhetorical situation that called for presidential action; in the time he has assumed office, environmentalism had become a legitimate economic generator. For example, Clinton makes it a point to let the American people know that his jobs package
he presented to Congress contained a green jobs plan: “from waste water treatment, to energy efficiency, to the restoration of our national parks, to investments in new technologies designed to create the means by which we can solve the problems of the future and create more jobs for Americans…” He then goes on to add that investments in green technologies “will create tens of thousands of new jobs, and they will save tens of thousands more.” Environmental technologies, according to Clinton, would grow into a $300 billion dollar market by the year 2000. Indeed, Clinton is speaking within a rhetorical situation where green technology and consumer products are thriving (Clinton, 1993). Energy efficient light bulbs, he argues, is a 500 million dollar industry that is projected to reach 10 billion by the year 2000 (Clinton, 1993). The creation of new green jobs and new industries is what will allow the citizenry to continue to achieve exceptional status while still being socially and economically responsible. Clinton also has the advantage of utilizing alternative energy, a new technology, to reconcile this tension. In an interview with Science Magazine in 2000, Clinton says

I think that research and the funding for the climate-change related areas and the development of alternative energy sources and energy conservation technologies is profoundly important. In the end, that has got to be the answer. We have to be able to create wealth with smaller and smaller amounts of greenhouse emissions. We have to. And you’re either going to have to have alternative energy or greater conservation. If India and China have to grow wealthy the same way we did, since they will not give up the right to become wealthy, we’re not going to whip this climate change problem. (Malakoff, 2000)

The global economy in the year 2000 helped shape a rhetorical situation that allows him to successfully re-center environmental issues within international politics. Walking away from the biodiversity treaty in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio, Clinton warns, was a costly mistake. Signing it would have preserved species and created new products, medicines and jobs. His 1993 Earth Day address positions the biodiversity
treaty as something that “protects American interests and the world environment.” He hails it as “an example of what you can do by bringing business and environmentalists together instead of pitting them against each other. We can move forward to protect critical natural resources and critical technologies.”

**The Impact of Executive Powers**

Although Clinton was operating within a lame-duck session, the cultural and economic climate he spoke within allowed him to make more environmental progress than his predecessors. It also allowed Clinton to introduce new policy initiatives that increased national awareness of the environment. One of the ways Clinton exercised his unique rhetorical power as president was through environmental presidential proclamations.

A presidential proclamation is defined as “an instrument that states a condition, declares a law and requires obedience, recognizes an event or triggers the implementation of a law by recognizing that the circumstances in law have been realized” (Cooper, 2002, p. 116). Proclamations are another means a president can use to define what is important and issue orders that become “legal or economic truth” (Rottinghaus, n.d.). Thus, proclamations allowed the president to assert his agency as an executive during a rhetorical situation where it was particularly difficult to “turn rhetoric into reality” (Clinton, 1992). Executive orders and presidential proclamations, for Clinton, function as the “appropriate and fitting response” to a stubborn congress. Through executive order, he created national parks. These physical spaces represent his social policies. Although presidential proclamations are “dismissed as a practical presidential tool for policy making” because they carry the perception among presidential scholars that they are
“largely ceremonial or symbolic in nature,” Clinton’s use of them went beyond the symbolic and into the material (Rottinghaus, n.d.).

Certainly, presidents are no strangers to using executive powers. In his presidency, Clinton issues proclamations that were designed to call attention to certain events, causes, and people. In 1993, for example, he issued proclamations in remembrance of the Death of General James H. Doolittle, to create National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and National Hispanic Heritage Month, to name a few. But the Clinton presidency is unique in that he used executive powers to go beyond defining what is important. In his eight years as president, Clinton used executive orders to create over 20 national parks and monuments; 17 of those came between 2000 and 2001, during a period an uncooperative congress created legislative roadblocks. Through this executive privilege, Clinton supported designating almost 8 million acres of desert in the west as wilderness and therefore protecting it from being overwrought by developers. He “backed the proposed rewrite of the 1872 Hardrock Mining law which would have increased government royalties collected from public lands mining regulations” (Nie, 1997, p. 44). He pushed for a more rigid interpretation of The Clean Water Act. He supported the reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act. He also threatened to “veto any legislation that allows for oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge” (Nie, 1997, p. 44). By 1996, he “designated 1.8 million acres of southern Utah as the Canyons of Escalante National Monument” (Nie, 1997, p. 44). By 2000, he established the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral reef Ecosystem Reserve and 11 other national monuments. According to Clinton, in addition to creating national parks, expanding existing parks, supporting legislation that protects the redwoods, everglades,
and Grand Canyon, he also set aside 40 million acres of national forest. New marine sanctuaries were created in Michigan, Massachusetts, Florida, and Washington. He tried to protect the oceans – which occupy an interesting transnational space by organizing the first National Oceans Conference. The Hawaiian Coral Reefs that he created contained 10 percent of America’s coral reefs and is larger than Florida and Georgia combined (Clinton, 2000a). It’s the largest nature preserve ever established in the U.S. At the end of his term, Clinton’s administration was responsible for more land protection than any other president since Teddy Roosevelt. Aside from signing an executive order on environmental justice, Clinton also established The Council on Environmental Justice that developed policy recommendations. Additionally, he introduced the community right-to-know law requiring public disclosure that citizens be informed of any chemicals and substances are being released in their communities. The Clinton administration can also be credited with doubling the number of chemicals that must be reported (Clinton, 1997).

Indeed, Clinton’s environmental accomplishments are not limited to social policies or environmental legislation. President Clinton’s use of his executive powers is significant because he employed them to turn American land into sacred ground. In a 2000 proclamation honoring national park week for example, Clinton (2000b) boasts that of the United States’ 379 national parks, “each site offers a unique opportunity to experience the wonder of nature, to stand in the footprints of history, to learn about our culture and our society, to study the natural world, and to look toward the future.”

Through executive power, protected land was physically constituted into spaces where Clinton’s version of environmentalism could be practiced. The parks serve as a
place where Americans can consume nature and America’s history. In the same 2000 proclamation honoring National Park Week, he defines the national parks as “living libraries and laboratories, where all Americans can experience the beauty and variety of nature and learn about our Nation's history and culture.” Within this proclamation, America’s history of social justice is inserted into the history of national parks. Clinton (2000b) adds:

The national park system also captures America's more recent history. In the National Historic Sites and along the National Historic Trails maintained by the men and women of the National Park Service, we learn about the lives and achievements of American heroes like Lewis and Clark, Sojourner Truth, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Wright Brothers, and Thomas Edison. From Fort Necessity in Pennsylvania, where a young George Washington saw action in the French and Indian War, to the quiet acres of Gettysburg, where one of the Civil War's bloodiest battles was fought, to the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where the modern civil rights movement reached its emotional peak 35 years ago, Americans can see and touch their history.

Executive powers afford Clinton the opportunity to create spaces where Americans can consume a version of American history that re-centers social justice. By using Lincoln, Stanton, Truth, and Justice as authorizing figures, Clinton adds race, class, and gender to the national parks narrative and argues that through experiencing nature Americans can also experience America’s complicated cultural history. The national parks position visitors as subjects within an exceptionalist framework. As an example, Clinton (2000b) argues in the same proclamation that each park offers Americans “an opportunity to experience the wonder of nature, to stand in the footprints of history, to learn about our culture and our society, to study the natural world, and to look toward the future.” Again, in another proclamation honoring national parks, Clinton (1999) takes the opportunity to turn his attention to social justice issues:
Each of these sites is interwoven with America's richly diverse natural and cultural heritage to make up the pattern of our past, the fabric of our present, and the promise of our future. The two newest additions to our park system reflect this grand tradition. Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site in Arkansas pays tribute to the courage and quiet dignity of nine young African Americans who crossed the color line and changed American society forever. Alabama's Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site celebrates the World War II exploits of the all-black Army Air Corps unit whose members prevailed over prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces to compile a distinguished combat record in defense of freedom.

Here, Clinton makes an exceptionalist argument when using national parks as a rhetorical tool. This proclamation recenters social justice within a national parks narrative. Speaking within an exceptionalist framework, he also creates sacred spaces that reflect America’s progress toward social justice. These newly constituted spaces argue that despite injustices of the past, America is still an example for others to follow; America continues to be a city on a hill despite its history of racial injustice and class struggles. Through creation of new parks, victims of discrimination are reconstituted as heroes. For example, Clinton (1994c) argues that parks have the ability to “connect us with the spirit of our past and form a national family tree, celebrating our triumphs and remembering our tragedies.”

Indeed, through the power of the executive branch, Clinton is able to constitute places where everyone who visits, no matter race, gender, income, or culture, experience the same places in the same way. In short, by not “going public” and using powers limited to the executive branch, Clinton is able to create physical spaces that allow citizens to practice his version of environmentalism, one that erases race, class, and gender differences through the practice of stewardship. It also defines his ideal citizen as a green consumer, a subject position that denaturalizes the economic-environmentalism binary.
The parks serve as an equalizing space where, through the collective practice of consumerism and stewardship, Americans are constituted into ideal citizens. Through the creation and stewardship of these spaces, parks allow citizens to keep their end of Clinton’s new covenant that “looks out for the interests of ordinary people,” not dividing them “by interest, constituency or class.” According to Clinton (1994a), parks symbolize “the legacy of every generation. They're our hope for the future, our tie to the past, our connection to the land. They're bigger than any of us, and they make us all better.”

Conclusion

As Mary Stuckey (2004) astutely observes, every president negotiates the tension between preservation and progress. Certainly, President Clinton is no different. I have argued here that Clinton had a more successful environmental presidency than his predecessor, mostly because he was able to successfully situate himself in a public discourse that supported his policies. He, like President Bush, attempted to soften the environment-economic binary. An uncooperative Congress gave him the opportunity to use the power of executive order to act as the chief executive and uphold his new covenant with the American people. Clinton presented the American public and Congress with a version of environmentalism that was more attuned to issues of race, class, and gender, presenting a radical departure from the environmentalisms of his predecessors. He recenters the environment within the rhetoric of covenant renewal in new and interesting ways; environmental practices become part of founding narrative, and the notion of stewardship includes American and international communities. Using environmental rhetoric as the basis for many of his arguments, he reframes the narrative of covenant renewal to include stewardship of land and of the disenfranchised. His ideal
citizen is environmentally, economically, and socially conscious, and able to keep his new covenant.

The president, as the nation’s most powerful elected definer of national identity, is in the unique position to introduce new terms and concepts into the American vocabulary. (Stuckey, 2004, p. 2). In this case with environmental justice, Clinton provides us with a new way to understand environmentalism and introduces us to language with the capacity for social change. Clinton, as chief-interpreter, extends environmentalism beyond the human-nature and economic-environmental binaries. This is certainly not the only way to read Clinton’s rhetorical presidency, but it can provide environmental and presidential scholars with a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which they are entwined with each other.

Environmentalism functions less as a distinct genre and more as a rhetorical tool in presidential public address. It is a useful rhetorical tool that can help a president define the ideal citizen, set the conditions for citizenship and national identity renewal, and redefine the way environmentalism is understood in everyday life. Skilled presidents not only reflect the preferences of their audiences but as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2008) argue, they also “engage in a process of transforming the audiences they hear into the audiences they desire” (p. 5). Environmental rhetoric, as this chapter has demonstrated, provides the president with distinct advantages in public appeals. This vocabulary also is useful when exploiting executive powers in that it allows the president to speak independently of Congress and without directly appealing to the American people. Thus, this topic is also a fruitful one worthy of scholarly inquiry as it offers us insights into Clinton’s rhetorical strategy and the different rhetorical traditions
that inform his public discourse. In short, this understudied genre plays an integral role in the Clinton presidency. Understanding its vocabulary is essential to understanding its role in American Politics.
CHAPTER 6. THE POWER OF GREEN: IMPLICATIONS OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

Introduction and Review

If the political process is a maze, the president, as the interpreter-in-chief, provides the citizenry with a useful map to navigate the political terrain. From these case studies, we have seen that environmentalism becomes very useful in this regard. As a strategic communication tool it functions, in many cases, as a map-making instrument at the executive level. Because it is also a discursive formation, strategic uses of environmental terms enable presidents to explain policy to us in understandable and familiar ways. As a God term, it gives presidents the flexibility to advocate for policies and attitudes that reflect their style and unique leadership approach. In short, this vocabulary has presidency-shaping capabilities and is one of the most important discourses in political communication.

In a lot of ways, Americans are spoiled. Unlike in other, more volatile parts of the world, presidents do a lot of the work for us. They publically identify problems, assure us that they have the best solutions, and introduce policy; in a practical sense, all that is required of citizens is that they vote. But presidents require much more of citizens than the performance of voting. The presidency also has constitutive powers. Instances where the president uses environmentalism as a constitutive discourse is the focus of this project. This project, in many ways, highlights the discursive identity of the American people and the role of structuring vocabularies in presidential power. Each of the three case studies presented reveals a unique relationship a president has to the environment and a distinct way it is used in each administration. The citizenry is invited to participate
in a version of environmentalism that also reflects the chief executive’s political vision for the country.

Chapter 3 attempts to provide a corrective narrative for the Reagan presidency. This chapter positions Reagan beyond current understandings as a cowboy president whose success is largely due to his ability to exploit the myth of the frontier and leverage his movie career. Instead, it repositions him as a political agent who repurposes the vocabulary of environmentalism as a communication strategy. Environmentalism becomes a useful political tool, allowing him to successfully make a case for Reaganomics. Ultimately, it is the vocabulary of conservation that helps Reagan construct a rhetorical situation where an economic plan rooted in neoliberal policies becomes the only fitting response possible. This chapter highlights a case where the cautionary language of conservation ironically serves the expansionist rhetoric that exploits and destroys nature. It is the only example of the three case studies where environmental vocabulary is used to promote policies that exploit nature.

Chapter 4 reveals that despite the fact that the environment was largely an overlooked theme of the George H.W. Bush administration, it must be understood as a useful rhetorical tool in his presidency. Bush took advantage of environmentalism and used its terms to define his presidency and position himself as a moderate conservative. As a strategic tool, this language strengthens his ethos as a non-polarizing politician and a credible cooperator. Bush, as we have seen, however, tried hard to convince Americans that environmentalists and economists could have mutual interests and share benefits, despite the fact that there was not a thriving industry to support his claims. Although considered a failed environmental president, as part of a corrective narrative I argue that
Bush’s failures to use a definition of environmentalism that resonates with the economic climate in which he spoke additionally contributed to his administration’s overall failure. In this chapter, environmentalism allows us to see the limits of presidential rhetoric’s constitutive power.

In what is the most post-modern of the three case studies presented here, Chapter 5 presents a corrective narrative for President Clinton. Clinton’s environmentalism presents a radical departure from his predecessors. Chapter 5 interrogates the function of environmental rhetoric within social justice advocacy. Operating within a definition of environmentalism that understands humans as part of a larger ecosystem, Clinton evoked a version of environmentalism that engaged social issues. Utilizing the vocabulary of environmental justice, he was able to raise concerns for race, class, and gender inequalities. Clinton’s commitment to social justice is something that has often gone unrecognized as part of his environmental agenda. His expanded definition utilizes the language of environmentalism as a constitutive rhetoric that integrates the disenfranchised back into civic life. Through environmental justice, Clinton constructs an ideal citizen who is expected to prevent injustices and inequalities.

Most of what Clinton’s environmentalism is associated with is his unprecedented use of presidential proclamations and executive orders in the service of the environment. This chapter, therefore, reframes presidential proclamations and executive orders as useful rhetorical strategies that allow presidents to sidestep institutional constraints. Executive powers highlight moments where constitutive rhetoric creates opportunities for a president to accomplish with language goals that he or she cannot through policy.
Executive powers created thousands of acres of national parks that gave people of all races and classes equal opportunity to provide the environmental justice he advocated for.

**What We’ve Learned**

Terms like environmentalism are layered. They mean different things to different people. As environmentalism’s definition is constantly evolving and expanding, it makes meaning on many different levels. Taking a closer look at presidential rhetoric through the lens of environmentalism allows us to see the possibilities and limitations of rhetoric in each administration. It also allows us to see how the environment operates against a number of other discourses including the frontier, the jeremiad, and social justice. Each of the instances where environmentalism is used as a tool demonstrates the polysemy of terms that most people think are relatively stable. I am hoping that this project, in some small way, has contributed to environmental and rhetorical scholarship. But even more than that, I am concerned with drawing attention to the aspects of everyday language that we often think of as constant and fields that we take for granted as scientific or truthful. Lest we forget, environmentalism is a science and in popular culture, its technical discourse masks its own constructedness.

Conducting a study on environmental language in use, therefore, reveals some important functions of rhetoric. When comparing environmentalism to other *isms*, its primary impact as an ideological formation and not a noun is exposed. Because as a term, it is not commonly understood as a socially constructed concept, it works that much better as a strategic communication tool than words whose meaning is always already recognized as nuanced and ambiguous. Used as a metaphor, as we have seen in Reagan’s administration, environmentalism can “put this in terms of that” with ease, as its audience
does not recognize its multiple meanings and complicated cultural history. Thus, it is simultaneously understood and misunderstood by all citizens; it is a science, a new opportunity to make money, and a political hoax designed to slow economic growth, depending on whom you ask. This project understands it as a valuable tool in strategic communication and political rhetoric.

No matter how environmentalism is used at any given moment, its definition, as I have mentioned in Chapter 2, is as contentious and unstable a term as terrorism, an ism whose contractedness became the source of intense political debate and very public struggle over meaning. People had very deliberate and thoughtful arguments over how to define it. Environmentalism’s struggle for meaning has been elegantly subtle and it is through rhetorical and ideological criticism that its struggle becomes visible. Although overshadowed by its alter ego, the noun, environmentalism the idea, is structured by two dominant binaries: environmental-economic and human-nature. As Chapters 1 and 2 have demonstrated, humans have struggled over how to define their relationship to nature for centuries. As this project has also shown, each environmental tradition understands humans’ subject position differently. For example, humans are often positioned as nature’s natural care takers, and at other moments bureaucratic managers who define environmentalism in terms of labor and profits making sure there are enough natural resources left to continue exploiting them. Whatever the environmental tradition a president chooses to evoke, its convenient flexibility yields subtle results with a big impact.

Of course, the political work that environmentalism has the potential to do is unique and greatly differs from terrorism; both isms derive their meaning from the
current cultural and political climate. Both terms are highly versatile strategic communication tools. Varying definitions are dependent upon the rhetor’s political ideology and the cultural context in which he or she speaks. In both cases, words that cluster around these two terms will reflect those elements. Thus, rhetorical criticism’s contribution is that it allows a critic to unmask the instability of the imperceptibly discursive language we use to construct identities. Environmentalism in the presidency, therefore, provides a rich site for doing rhetorical analysis. While through rhetorical analysis we now understand environmentalism to be comprised of fluid clusters of terms, we can also appreciate it as more of a process than a static practice. This approach allows us to take environmentalism out of the technical and scientific and into the public sphere and more fully unpack its impact on the political, re-centering it as a key discourse worth paying attention to.

**Impact**

As a whole, this project underscores the importance of understanding environmental terminology as tools that can function in support of larger political projects. Shifting environmentalism to the center of political discourse enables the critic to see both the limitations of executive power and the extent and impact of presidential rhetoric. As Reagan’s case study shows us, environmentalism’s vocabulary is crucial to the success of his presidency, even though the environment is often not the topic of discussion. Bush, on the other hand, was unable to fully capitalize on environmentalism’s usefulness, as the rhetorical situation in which he spoke could not support a definition that could not legitimately function in an early 1990s economy. Clinton, on the other hand, presents an almost perfect example of a rhetorical presidency that is both a success and failure. A
lame-duck Congress highlighted the institutional constraints that so often go
unacknowledged during terms. But even as his agency was limited, his use of
proclamations and executive orders enabled him to navigate around institutional
constraints. Clinton’s decision to use environmental justice to raise public discussion of
race and class issues also draws attention to the impact environmental rhetoric has on the
human world.

The scope and limitations of the presidency and of environmentalism, therefore,
reveals the need for much more collaborative, cross-disciplinary projects. Tracking how
environmentalism evolves through a two-decade span opens up space for future debate
and more research. It also facilitates discussion between industry, science, and activism.
Indeed, projects like this lay the groundwork for environmental liberalism, such as the
cooperation between environmentalists and the private sector that encourages free
enterprise, individualism, and entrepreneurship. As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate,
presidents have increasingly been asking citizens to participate in accepting a collective
vision of environmental-economic collaboration. This project provides a point of
departure from which to speculate on the future of environmentalism as an industry,
giving rhetorical critics a framework to understand how language impacts innovation. It
reveals the impact of what happens when discourses merge and identifies the ideal
citizenry needed to make presidencies successful.

**Vocabularies for Policy Making: Say X not Y**

Choosing to understand environmentalism’s role through rhetorical analysis
highlights the usefulness of strategic language in policy making. Using the right words to
communicate policy is crucial but, of course, that’s often easier said than done.
Policymaking is a laborious process and the language of legislation is cumbersome, convoluted, and inaccessible. This genre’s ambiguity also makes it easier for political actors and staff to craft misleading arguments about what faction of the citizenry a piece of legislation helps and hurts. It also doesn’t help that proposals are hundreds of pages long and contain pork barrel projects that have little to do with the intent of the actual bill. It is no wonder Americans are confused and inundated with pundits, politicians, and so-called experts on cable news, telling them how to interpret a bill. The words used to teach the citizenry how to process this information are a strategic choice that can make or break public support.

Environmental language provides useful insight into the impact language has on policy. Reagan’s choice to use environmental terms to explain Reaganomics, for example, in hindsight was, in all honesty, pretty brilliant. His vocabulary choices gave an unfamiliar set of terms a familiar frame of reference and helped Reagan’s audience appreciate his policies as he appreciated them. His word choice simplified, defined, and glamorized economics. It became more than a policy. His strategy of explaining economics in terms of the environment created the opportunity for his audience to see a clear vision for the future of America; through words that worked they saw Reagan’s ideology reflected in his policy, making it very easy for supporters to develop attainable goals out of technical discourse and mobilize support to reach those goals. Language, not policy, caused the shift from voter to Reaganite. As a result, Reaganomics became a movement and a rare rhetorical moment of right-wing advocacy in the service of economic reform and social change. Indeed, Reaganomics provides a rich case study for appreciating the impact specific clusters of terms have on policymaking. As Dr. Frank
Luntz (2007) has been famous for saying, “it’s not what you say. It’s what people hear” (p. xiii).

Much about what makes an argument successful and a policy gain popular support is dependent upon the clusters of terms chosen. Because words are also signifiers, clusters become meaning-making tools. “Every instance of language and action resonates with the memory, the fear, or the anticipation of other signifiers,” reminds Murray Edelman (1988), “so that there are radiating networks of meaning that vary with the situations of spectators and actors.” (p. 10). We have seen three instances where environmental vocabulary was employed in the service of various policies. Successfully discovering what words work within specific contexts has enormous consequences. The framework that clusters a powerful vocabulary provides “become devices for creating disparate assumptions and beliefs about the social world rather than factual statement” (Edelman, 1988, p. 10). As Edelman (1988) argues, these terms are strategies and regardless of whether they are deliberately chosen to function as such, they have the power of “strengthening or undermining support for specific courses of action and for particular ideologies” (p. 11). This project analyzes the consequences of presidents’ rhetorical choices, while also identifying in what contexts certain terms fail and what conditions are necessary for success.

**Function of Clusters**

In terms of methodology, this project sits at the junctures between rhetorical analysis and cluster-agon analysis. This project is concerned with how people talk and the consequences that talk has FOR policy. Like most rhetorical projects, it does not measure reality or truth, but rather how knowledge is constructed and circulated. As Edelman
(1988) argues, “it is not ‘reality’ in any testable or observable sense that matters in shaping political consciousness and behavior” (p. 10). Instead, what is worth paying attention to are “the beliefs that language helps evoke about the causes of discontents and satisfactions, about policies that will being about a future closer to the heart’s despite, and about other unobservables” (Edelman, 1988, p. 105). Cluster analysis makes the links between and among issues, concepts, and other words apparent while exposing how they operate within a specific cultural context. “Any item of symbol,” according to Donal Carbaugh (1996), “may be arranged into larger units of discourses, or systems of symbols and codes.” It is through this framework that culture then becomes a “system of symbols, codes of expression, and the grand and supersensible discourses it creatively implicates” (p. 46).

Thus, to use the rhetoric of environmentalism in any given context is also to invite the audience to “experience the spoor of other terms” and ideas embedded within (Edelman, 1988, p. 117). Environmental communication, as Carbaugh (1996) argues, is not just one type of communication that people produce, but rather “creatively integrates natural and cultural messages” (p. 41). Although environmental rhetoric’s function as a meaning-making device is the subject of this project, it also provides useful insight into the limitations and possibilities of deploying specific vocabularies when framing policy.

Discovering what words work and what words cannot work can be done many ways. Polling voters, running focus groups, and quantifying language are certainly legitimate approaches that are used by political communication professionals every day. There are, however, benefits of examining language in use. Cluster analysis identifies what words go with what words, and therefore, also allows a system of language to
become visible. Clusters of terms make up the vocabulary that shapes understanding of a term or concept. Political language, like most discourses as Edelman (1988) argues, “can be understood as creating an endless chain of ambiguous associations and constructions that offer wide potentialities for interpretation and manipulation” (p. 111). Thus, structural relationships and associative meanings discovered through cluster analysis can present the rhetorical critic with an opportunity to understand what political work these clusters are capable of doing. From an applied perspective, cluster analysis can provide political communication professionals with a visual map of an ideological terrain. It can allow us to see the significant terms, phrases, and ideas that structure successful political arguments and key narratives.

By figuring out what words go with what, political communication strategies can be built to reinforce public sentiment and speak to a populace using terms that resonate with them. Conversely, examining agons can prevent communication professionals from making costly errors and developing messages that use words that work against successful arguments. In short, agons and cluster analysis can operationalize rhetoric and allow the communication professional justifiable reasons to declare with confidence, “say this and attack that.” Rhetoric and humanities projects are usually not predictive in their assessments. Often times critics will look at a given situation or rhetorical moment and assess what knowledge is produced, how ideas are circulated, and what identities are constituted.

This project presents a challenge for rhetorical critics to attempt to assess what will happen next to the future of environmental language. It also presents professionals an opportunity to operationalize rhetorical theories and weave questions of agency,
ideology, and identity into assessments when making recommendations for political action. Because political language is political reality, rhetoric does important critical work and rhetorical criticism becomes a crucial tool in assessing reality and determining how best to shape it. In short, despite its characterization as a discipline useful only to other humanities scholars, rhetoric can help determine what groups of terms legitimize a political actor, mobilize supporters, and immobilize oppositions.

**What’s Next: Future of Environmental Rhetoric**

Certainly, there exists many opportunities for future research on this topic. Environmentalism as it functions in a post-9/11 presidency is an understudied topic. Thus, this project lays the groundwork for future projects that interrogate environmental rhetoric’s capability as a discourse of social change and identity construction. It also makes a contribution to the cultural history of environmentalism, as it tracks its vocabulary in use and occasions where dominant meanings are complicated and new forms of environmentalism are produced. Living in a post-9/11 world, however, also means that environmentalism’s relationship to national identity is undergoing yet another shift. Unpacking instances where environmentalism is used to constitute a post 9/11 citizenry and moments where it is used to help the citizenry make sense of America’s position in an increasingly dynamic global order are possible topics for future research.

Its potential to fulfill Earth Day’s promise to create a functional ecological ethic, predicated on humanity’s interdependence with nature, however, remains to be seen (Nelson, 2002, p. 174). Such an approach recognizes “the common heritage and concern of men of all nations,” according to activist Gaylord Nelson in a 1970 speech to Congress, and “is the surest road to removing the mistrust and mutual suspicions that
have always seemed to stand in the way of world peace” (Nelson, 2002, p. 174). Using environmental rhetoric to emphasize community involvement, cooperation, and collaboration, Presidents Bush and Clinton came closest to using environmentalism to advocate for the environmental ethic called for by Nelson. This “new citizenship” for which Nelson advocated aimed to fuse cultural systems with natural systems, but how it should operate in today’s current political climate where 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan complicated the idea of citizenship and the role of nature in national security is unclear. Thus, environmental rhetoric’s role in political advocacy and achieving social equality in a post-9/11 culture is a subject where more research is needed.

This project is also a call to rhetoricians and environmental communication scholars to expand theories and practices that problematize current ideological positionings that limit environmentalism as practices where humans can exploit, preserve, or conserve natural resources. The words that we as a society use to construct nature reflect the ideas, beliefs, and values that we privilege. We must, therefore, take responsibility for our rhetorical choices. As we have seen, environmental terms can be put in the service of a wide variety of policies and political ideologies. This project, consequently, also functions as an occasion for future projects to also rethink nature and discover the art of the possible when grappling with global problems. On an applied level, exploiting this discourse in the service of social justice, peace and reconciliation, and other human problems can encourage rhetoricians and environmentalists to work together, directly fostering cross-disciplinary and intercultural communication to redefine environmentalism, and, by extension, the relationship between humans to each other and
to nature for the purposes of building a more just and livable world. Interconnectedness, an important term in environmental discourse, if operationalized, may provide activists with a useful strategic tool.

I have traced the discourse of environmentalism through the three presidencies featured in this project with the goal of discovering, among many things, how vocabularies are put to use in the service of policy. I wanted to capture the amorphous quality of language by tracing a specific vocabulary’s development over time. Environmentalism’s influence, of course, does not end with the three presidents featured here. Their successors, however, have continued to expand the definition of environmentalism and its subsequent clusters of terms. The post-Earth Day presidency has also become a post-9/11 presidency, and moments where environmental vocabularies are used in the service of post-9/11 politics are already surfacing, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Thus, the study of environmental talk in the executive branch is an area ripe for future analysis. How have the first post-Earth Day presidents shaped post-9/11 environmentalism? What does the post-9/11 era mean for environmental policy? Because we are presently only a decade into living with a “war on terror” and only three-and-a-half years into Obama’s presidency, the answers to these questions are currently unfolding in real time, the answers growing thicker and more nuanced.

If the first Earth Day served as Gaylord Nelson (2002) puts it, as a “national call to arms for the environment,” the vocabulary of environmentalism has a successful track record of mobilizing a collective (p. xix). Although we have seen its constitutive properties exploited in a variety of ways, environmentalism still continues to be used as a presidential strategy. It is already apparent that Presidents George H.W. Bush and Barack
Obama have different approaches to environmental policy. Both, however, choose to speak of the mutual interests between environmentalism and business. Rather than arguing, as Reagan would have, that there can be no collaboration between environmentalism and industry without sacrifice, Bush and Obama have exploited the successes of green consumerism. Incidentally, George H.W. Bush, as I have argued in Chapter 4, unfortunately did not have this luxury. This move to collapse the environmental-economic binary could be reducible to an attempt to try to please everyone. It is also possible, however, that the type of environmentalism that positions humans as part of a larger ecological community has gained more traction in the White House. It is possible that subsequent administrations have built upon the shaky foundation laid by President George H.W. Bush and presidential administrations are starting to recognize environmentalism as a strategic problem set that can help the president gain traction with industry and ecologists.

Environmentalism’s meaning is growing yet again and its use as an epideictic and strategic tool is far from waning. As a structuring vocabulary in the Obama administration, environmentalism is helping the president connect issues that previous administrations might not have recognized as related. As an example, Obama’s administration uses environmentalism to address national and international security strategies. His decision to look at security through the lens of environmentalism, as The Wilson Center’s Geoff Dabelko (2009) argues, “provides an opportunity to promote new approaches that recognize the links connecting issues and to create integrated programs that address them” (p. ix).
Increasingly, mainstream outlets such as NPR have referenced Obama as a president who must navigate the “national security environment.” Characterizing it as an environment and not a “national security risk” or “national security concern” places the president as an agent of change within a larger international community. Using the environment as a structuring metaphor allows national security to be understood in almost neutral terms. It is not a threat or an asset, but instead, evokes the rhetoric of conservation. Like the natural environment, the national security environment must be carefully managed and controlled for future exploitation.

Increasingly, environmentalism's usefulness as a strategic tool is becoming more and more popular in a post-9/11 public sphere. Although it is a subtle shift, environmentalism is becoming used more and more as an epideictic tool where technical subject matter, reminiscent of Reaganomics in their complexity, are put in terms a lay audience can comprehend using concepts they understand. As a structuring metaphor in Thomas Hylland Erikson’s research, for example, environmentalism is helping this public intellectual explain “this in terms of that.” Erikson argues that the best way to describe contemporary economics, globalization, finance, and identity are by explaining them in environmental terms. Overheating, for example, becomes a useful way to characterize the economy. Specifically, Erikson uses global warming metaphors to argue that through global warming’s vocabulary lies a useful way of describing contemporary social and economic crises.

“Of our environment,” according to Cantrill and Oravec (1996), “what we say is what we see” (p. 1). This project purposefully examines environmental rhetoric as it is used in public discourse while contextualizing it in terms of national identity and
presidential agency. All of the chapters featured in this project credit environmental language as instrumental in helping presidents to legitimate policies and distinguish their administrations from those that came before. These cases are meant to address the impact of what happens when the political is presented in environmental terms. Conversely, this project also looks at times when the president calls upon the populace and use environmental issues as a way to deliver a call to action. Environmentalism’s ability to help actors advocate for social change and mobilize a population, whether it is to the left or right of the political continuum, is extraordinary. Each administration presents an opportunity to restructure citizens’ relationship to nature and their collective identity.

Environmental language’s impact, therefore, lies in its ability to help create a shared national vision. Tracing environmental traditions within the presidency also highlights the instability of national visions. Like brilliant mimics, they mirror the core values of each administration, elegantly withering away after each change of leadership. Sometimes these discourses resurface months, years, or decades later, reminding critics that discourses never completely die, but like many things that occur in nature, triumphantly return when the climate is favorable.
REFERENCES


Cooper, P.J. (2002). By Order of the President: The Use and Abuse of Executive Direct Action. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.


