

CHASING WINDMILLS: THE USE OF CONSPIRACY THEORY BASED NARRATIVES

BY ANTI-AGENDA 21 MOVEMENTS

By

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Chasing Windmills: The Use of Conspiracy Theory Based Narratives by Anti-Agenda 21 Movements

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development has become a controversial issue in the United States. A fundamental part of the resistance against sustainability programs has manifested in the anti-Agenda 21 movement. Despite the fact that Agenda 21 is a several decade old voluntary United Nations sustainability program with no enforcement capabilities, the political right wing of the United States has worked the last few years to legally prohibit the program and label it as a nefarious plan that would damage American society. This movement has the support of the Republican Party, the Tea Party, several conservative think tanks, and various conservative aligned media outlets. The narrative used by these groups to attack the sustainability plan are rooted in a several decade old, obscure conspiracy theory that has been revitalized and has evolved to fit the current political climate. The following work analyzes the conspiracy narratives that allowed an obscure conspiracy theory to become a political issue that has triggered anti-Agenda 21 legislation as well as a right wing social movement. This analysis includes the birth of the conspiracy theory, how it has evolved during its new iteration, and the effects this has on the American political system.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Lucy McGuffey

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is strong resistance to sustainability programs in the United States. Concepts such as climate change, sustainable growth as well as many other aspects of environmentalism and “green” development have become highly contested political arguments. However, there is a substantive amount of the debate constructed on conspiracy theory based ideology and propaganda constructed from this type of worldview. The resulting social narratives used to argue and work against sustainability programs or for “anti-sustainability” laws are then often derived from these ideologies. In turn, these narratives become a window into how environmental policies are argued in many instances in the United States. Through discourse and narrative analysis, we can understand that many opponents of sustainability programs are fighting said programs based on conspiracy theory driven worldviews that are often logically, epistemologically, and factually incorrect (these aspects of conspiracy theories will be discussed in depth below). One such concept that has been the subject of much debate and several state laws working towards prohibition of sustainability programs is the United Nations sustainable growth program entitled Agenda 21. Although this plan is a non-binding document that does not proscribe any form of punishment for non-compliance, opponents have argued that it is actually a nefarious plan to erode property rights and create a world system based on control and a utopian environmentalist vision. The following study will look at how the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory has come into existence, the methods with which it has spread and the social effects of this conspiracy theory becoming the basis for political discourse and public policy.

Conspiracy theories are a well-entrenched part of the political culture of the United States. From the early Puritanical fears that cabals of witches, sorcerers, and non-Christian

indigenous people were attempting to destroy the new colonies to modern claims that the standing president is a foreign born Muslim who is using a socialist health care plan to kill off the elderly with “death panels” (Goldberg 2001, 2-3) (Farhi 2010, 33-34). Further, there are long-standing themes within conspiracy theories of incorporating political concepts that relate to international politics and the UN into a grand narrative of worldwide conspiracy (James 2001, 83-84).

Conspiracy theories have served as an alternate explanation and, in some cases, the official explanation, for events that cause social anxiety. It can be easy to brush off conspiracy theorists as victims of a “paranoid pathology” and dismiss their ideas as fringe nonsense (Hofstadler 1964). Culturally, our media and entertainment often portray conspiracy theories as the beliefs of marginalized individuals who worry about UFO invasions, the secrets behind the JFK assassination, or outsiders who think that a shadowy one-world government is behind almost every conceivable social ill (Bell and Bennion-Nixon 2001). These people do exist in some number, but as social science researchers point out, they often have trouble participating and being a part of a normal, healthy, political life (Keeley 2006, 53-55). The point here is that common conceptions (or misconceptions as I will later argue) of conspiracy theorists do not lead us to an immediate assumption that these people would have a significant effect on political culture.

However, the reality is that conspiracy theories and the social narratives they aid in constructing have had a dramatic impact (often in very negative ways) throughout human history (Aaronovitch 2010, 8-10). Rhetoric and the assignment of group identity to “others” based on the belief in a conspiracy theory has led to systemic violence against Jewish people from the Crusades to the Inquisition and later through various programs that went far as the Holocaust and

still serve as the basis of anti-Semitic violence today (Pipes 1997, 129-145). Individuals that lived during the “red scare” period of the Cold War could have their civil rights denied and their lives effectively ruined for having gone to a single Communist party meeting years before, for socializing with people perceived to be communist, or for espousing unorthodox political views. This political “demonization” of communists was directly tied to the conspiracy theories of the era that labeled members of the political party as part of a worldwide plot to destroy the United States and political rights, such as liberty and personal choice (Rogin 1987, 44-81).

A list of systemic violence based on conspiracy theories and narratives derived from said conspiracy theories could go on at great length, but is unnecessary here. Instead, these examples can help us understand two important points about this type of social discourse. First, we can see that some conspiracy theories can be quite harmful. Not all of these concepts are simply marginal ideas; instead, we can see that imagined conspiracies can lead to actual violence and oppression. Second, we can see that the power required to initiate actions such as state sponsored anti-Semitic violence or government-led witch-hunts against a specific political ideology is not something that can be done by the paranoid individual “outsider” type described above. These actions require power and the ability to garner mass support. In other words, these events require political elites to be part of the process. The problem here is that we often neglect to understand and explain the roles that political leaders have in the reinforcement and spread of conspiracy theories and the ills they produce for society.

Problem Statement

The lack of attention in our political culture to the usage of narratives derived from conspiracy theories as a form of propaganda and justification for policy by elites is mirrored by a lack of attention to the same subject matter in the social sciences. A scholarly article

“Conspiracy Theories: Cause and Cures,” by Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) describes the gap in the data succinctly in the following quote about the current limits of academic understanding of conspiracy theories.

Most of the academic literature directly involving conspiracy theories falls into one of two classes (1) work by analytic philosophers, especially in epistemology and the philosophy of science, that explores a range of issues but mainly asks what counts as a “conspiracy theory” and whether such theories are methodologically suspect; (2) a smattering of work in sociology and Freudian psychology on the causes of conspiracy theorizing (p. 203).

In essence, most scholars look at how conspiracy theories are built on poor logic and why people continue to believe in them.

The research for this work is in agreement with Sunstein and Vermeule’s assessment of academic literature involving conspiracy theories. I have only discovered a few authors such as Goldberg, Rogan and Bratich, who address issues surrounding elites using conspiracy theories. As Goldberg points out in his introduction, this is a very important dynamic but such work is notably scarce (Goldberg 2001, xii). What is addressed in this limited pool of work is how elites use conspiracy theories to justify “counter subversion” that stifles dissent or how leaders use conspiracy theories in order to stimulate fear in order to gain support for a policy (Rogin 1987, 44-80) (Aaronovitch 2010, 52-86) (Goldberg 2001, 1-21).

These instances describe circumstances in which state actors have used conspiracy theories against non-elites and other such groups. I will be looking at a case in which the conspiracy fueled rhetoric and narratives are aimed at inter-elite conflicts or attempts by elites to stop a policy they oppose. In essence, with this work on Agenda 21 conspiracy theories, I will be analyzing how elites are using conspiracy theories as a method to attack other political elites, or governmental bodies. This is not to say that political elites normally refrain from accusing each other of participation in some form of dark machinations. There is a distinct “flavor” of

old, entrenched “tin-foil-hat” style conspiracy theories in the case I will be discussing. What appears with this analysis is an entire narrative developed from a conspiracy theory. This narrative appears as if it were part of the belief system of the paranoid non-politically functioning individuals mentioned above, yet are used by members of the political elite as a basis of policy. As I will show across this work, these alternative explanations of Agenda 21 are part of an understanding of reality developed through the evolution of pre-existing conspiracy narratives. This narrative may have changed slightly over time due to the speaker and social context but the core beliefs and concepts remain intact. In turn, this leads to the construction of public policy and anti-sustainability movements founded on concepts that are simply untrue.

If it can be shown that political leaders are increasingly spreading conspiracy theories and making them part of our mainstream political culture and discourse as a method to gain popular support, we could see the rise of many negative aspects of this type of belief system. These problems run a gamut from a faulty understanding of cause-and-effect in political systems to decreased participation and faith in the ability of legitimate government (Skinner 2001, 106-109) (Keeley 2006, 56-59). Further, the belief in conspiracy theories is also credited with increased polarization and an inability to understand the need for compromise and respect for other viewpoints in contentious situations (Featherstone 2001, 31-38). Finally, and quite simply, many if not most conspiracy theories, can be proven to be logically flawed and factually incorrect (Basham, *Living with the Conspiracy* 2006, 61-69). If this is the case, then political elites and supporters who work against sustainability programs due to unfounded fears are simply misdirecting and harming important environmental policies.

Review of the Literature

There is much debate in the social sciences as to why conspiracy theories become a part of our political narrative and why people believe in these alternative explanations of political events. The main scholarly explanations can be broken down into four basic categories. These categories include personal political psychology, social anxiety, adherence to ideologies that understand events in a good-versus-evil dichotomy, and conspiracy theories as an elite political strategy.

The concept that conspiracy theories are rooted in a person's psychology comes from some of the first researchers to give the topic serious academic consideration. One of the earliest modern scholarly attempts to explain conspiracy theories and their adherents was "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" by Richard Hofstadter. This brief essay written in 1963 and viewed conspiracy theories as the product of a type of social or collective paranoia in which a conspiracy theorist believes that outsiders are plotting against their national culture and political beliefs (Hofstadler 1964, 3-7). This type of group paranoia differs from the personal paranoia of a clinically ill person who feels threatened as an individual (Hofstadler 1964, 3-7). Hofstadler's work also discusses the roles that elites have in reinforcing such conspiracy theories, however, it settles with an analysis in which the political psychology of individuals is to blame for the behavior. British philosopher Karl Popper wrote a small piece in 1972 entitled "The Conspiracy Theory of Society" that came to similar conclusions as Hofstadter regarding the paranoia of individual conspiracy theorists. However, Popper goes a step further and depicts these individuals as the antithesis of social scientists. For Popper, conspiracy theorists are people who attempt to explain events, but do so in a dysfunctional manner and as a result create harmful pseudo-sciences in order to achieve their goals (Popper 2006, 13-17). In 1997, Daniel Pipes,

author of *How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From*, comes to similar conclusion about the genesis and propagation of conspiracy theories. Like Hofstadter and Popper, he believes conspiracy theories are the product of a paranoid political “pathology.” Although he does touch upon the subject of leaders and their roles in conspiracy theories becoming more prominent, he references less mainstream leaders, such as Joseph Stalin or Pat Buchanan, who blatantly have a very ridged, extreme ideology on the far left or right of the political spectrum (Pipes 1997, 21-36). Despite the fact that that these works do address leaders espousing conspiracy theories the reader is left with the general impression that this is uncommon and that these individuals are simply paranoid individuals that abuse their positions.

However, not all scholars agree with the assumption that conspiracy theorists suffer from paranoia problems. Some researchers look at how social anxiety shapes the usage of conspiracy theories as an explanation for political events. Jane Parish takes a different tone than the scholars who deem paranoia to be the main cause. Instead, she looks at patterns of social change and anxiety from pre-colonial witch scares to modern globalization in order to argue that people indulge in conspiracy theorizing to make sense of their fears (Parish 2001, 1-16). Peter Knight has a similar take on the subject. He explains that humans often make decisions in an “environment of risk.” Although this factor comes from the unintended consequences of other actions, the use of conspiracy theories as a method of explaining how the world works constructs blame, labels an identifiable enemy, and seeks to add an elements of agency and control over anxiety producing events (Knight 2001, 17-31). Alasdair Spark works with a similar idea of how fear of random or unexpected social events also leads to conspiracy theorizing. His specific focus is on New World Order style conspiracies. He argues that both the left and the right of the

political spectrum¹ are less distinct than they were during the Cold War. This ebbing of concrete political groups and their associated ideologies, in combination with rapid globalization, pushes many people to indulge in conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories become a way of reinstating the political duality and power relations associated with the Cold War and older methods of international relations. Spark contends that the appeal of conspiracy theories is that they “seek totality and impose order” (Spark 2001, 46-62). In essence, the villain(s) of a conspiracy theory, despite their nearly omnipresent nature give comfort in times of anxiety as they become a scapegoat for social frustration and instability.

However, the need to create order in a chaotic world is not the only reason individuals believe in conspiracy theories, a person’s ideology is also a very influential factor. Nigel James, while discussing right wing militia groups in the United States, argues that conspiracy theories are often the product of religious and cultural ideologies that explain the world and events within a good versus evil dichotomy. In turn, this right or wrong distinction fits perfectly within the narrative of most conspiracy theories (James 2001, 63-93). Jonathan Skinner also touches on ideological and identity based concepts that promote conspiracy based thinking. He argues that belief in conspiracy theories is an attempt to construct a political narrative and functions as if it were an evangelical religion. Conspiracy theorists often evaluate the world with a good-versus-evil dichotomy with the belief system becoming an important part of one’s identity. He further argues that conspiracy theorists construct a political framework in order to evaluate the world. However, he points out that this framework is often constructed through poor epistemology and links singular events into an all-encompassing narrative. In turn, this poorly constructed

¹ This is a bit of a rarity in the discourse, as most scholars attack conservatives and give left of center conspiracy theorists a pass on their behavior.

narrative becomes one's personal identity but also as the basis for the persons' political identity (Skinner 2001, 93-111).

The first three categories focus on the psychology and belief systems of conspiracy theorists, while the fourth explains conspiracy theories as a form of elite political communication. Although some of the authors who focus on behavioral and ideological explanations do discuss leaders and conspiracy theories, their work is based on the psychology of elites.

Another important dimension of this topic is how leaders and elites use conspiracy theories as a political strategy. Charles Pigden argues that elites take advantage of the preconceived notions that society has about the term "conspiracy theory" and can label the opposition's ideas as such in order to stifle debate and make the subject taboo within public discourse (Pigden 2006, 17-45). Michael Rogin takes a different approach and shows how elites use conspiracy theories in order to stimulate fear in a society and stifle dissent. In essence, he argues that through a process of "political demonology" political elites use conspiracy theories to create fear and justify harsh actions against dissent and unorthodox political thought (Rogin 1987, 44-87). Robert Goldberg reinforces this idea by showing several cases, ranging from the witch-hunts in the New England colonies to the Red Scare during the Cold War in which leaders espoused and acted upon conspiracy theories. Each instance ended with harmful results for many members of the population (Goldberg 2001, 1-21). David Aaronovitch and Mark Fenster offer similar support in two separate but similarly themed books that focus on elite and state-driven conspiracy theories and the harms they have created throughout history (Aaronovitch 2010) (Fenster 2008). Jack Bratich looks at a similar topic and argues that elites create "conspiracy panics" that have long reaching effects across the rest of society (Bratich 2008). The above data

is a sample of the main scholarly debates concerning conspiracy theories. Although not exhaustive by any means, these works display the four main academic explanations of conspiracy theories and the subsequent externalities they produce. This study will look at instances in which elites use traditional “paranoid style” conspiracy theories against each other or a governmental body. However, unlike the other scholars who focus on elite use of conspiracy theories and narratives, I will not be looking at the situation as though it is part of an intentional strategy. As there is little data to support assertions that the elites discussed in my work are lying about their beliefs for political gain, I will treat this situation as an honest reflection of the subject’s belief system. Further, I will be using this case to develop an analysis of how conspiracy theories become part of a larger social narrative.

Theoretical Framework

In order to complete this study I will be working with several theoretical assumptions. These frameworks and concepts will be derived from existing literature discussing conspiracy theories. First, one must answer the question, what is a conspiracy theory? It is important to define and work with a specific definition for this term. As one scholar reminds us, the official explanation for the September 11th terrorist attacks is, in essence, a conspiracy theory in itself. It just happens to be a conspiracy theory that is provable, accepted, and is often given credence through official governmental channels. We also have a tendency to view a conspirator’s activity differently when such activity is committed by people and/or groups we support (Coady, *Conspiracy Theories and Official Stories* 2006, 115-117) (Pigden 2006, 17-23). However, I will be using the more common understanding of conspiracy theories with the negative associations that this term often carries. This type of conspiracy theory, also known as an “unwarranted conspiracy theory” or “malevolent global conspiracy theory” are implausible alternative

explanations that refute the accepted explanation of events (Basham, Malevolent Global Conspiracy Theory 2006, 93-95) (Keeley 2006, 46-48). Further, these types of conspiracy theories are often founded on “errant data” and poor logical reasoning (Keeley 2006, 46-48). They assume shadow governments under the control of evil people use their power for malevolent, world controlling goals (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, 204-211). Further, conspiracy theories assign agency where there is often just coincidence in order to construct narratives that put order to the world (Coady, An Introduction to the Philosophical Debate about Conspiracy Theories 2006, 8).

The next theoretical concept contained within this work is that conspiracy theories are an ideology or worldview. The key point here is that people who believe in conspiracy theories truly understand the world in a completely different manner than most of society. If they believe the world is organized in a manner that allows secret powerful groups to run amok at the expense of the masses, this implies a severely different view of systemic processes and the limits of human power that non-conspiracy theorists do not hold (Keeley 2006, 59-60). Further, scholars assume that this belief extends past a single conspiracy theory. If one believes that international governmental bodies have the desire and capacity to infiltrate and manipulate governments, there is no reason to discount their ability to hide assassinations, “false flag” terror attacks, or any other type of malevolence. Although a conspiracy theorist may not openly admit to such belief on every topic, the roots of this type of thinking are embedded in the basic methods with which they define the world (Pipes 1997, 25). Conspiracy theories help the believer maintain their sense of self and reality in times of anxiety and social stress. This can occur as the villains in the conspiracy become a scapegoat for the conspiracy theorist’s problems. Instead of blaming, the chaos of human relations and the unexpected externalities of events for their fears and problems,

the villains of the conspiracy theory take the blame (Melley 2008, 163). In turn, this process of scapegoating presents an ideological “paradox” in which a person may lose faith in their way of life when it is challenged or proven to be less than perfect (Melley 2008, 163). In essence, belief in conspiracy theories is a way of life like any other political or religious ideology and functions as such psychologically (Pipes 1997, 23-25) (James 2001, 78-83).

The next theoretical concept important to this work is that conspiracy theories are a form of narrative. Early social science evaluations of conspiracy theories assumed that they were the product of paranoia and were nothing more than a “simple assemblage of claims and proofs” (Paf 2005, 58). However, in recent years many scholars have changed shifted the dominate paradigm regarding of conspiracy theories and consider them a legitimate source of narrative and argumentation (Paf 2005, 58-59). This is not to say that scholars now accept conspiracy theories as accurate depictions of reality. Instead, researchers have recognized that despite the erroneous nature of many conspiracy theories, they fulfill the requirements of a narrative and can serve as useful analytical tools. As narratives, conspiracy theories follow a “temporal progression” that “narrates the past,” explains the present and “predicts the future (Paf 2005, 60). Further, conspiracy theories fulfill narrative standards such as “narrative probability” and narrative fidelity” (Paf 2005, 62). Narrative probability refers to the “internal cohesion” of the story and follows basic guidelines such as having a discernable plot and characters² (Paf 2005, 62). The other category, narrative fidelity, explains how well the narrative fits within the audience’s expectations and understandings of the situation and reality (Paf 2005, 62). Overall, we can see that modern standards for narratives no longer view conspiracy theories as a non-functional story cobbled together to justify paranoia. Instead, modern evaluation of conspiracy theories

² Although these standards may appear to describing concepts that one would use to evaluate fiction, they are also standards used for non-fictional accounts. The author cited for this point discusses Lincoln’s “House Divided” speech and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* as his examples.

understand the alternative explanations as a coherent (though often factually flawed) system of storytelling that attempts to explain the world.

Another important concept for this work is that elites use conspiracy theories and the media and masses tend to follow their example. This concept is also well established in scholarly writings involving conspiracy theories. Hofstadter explains that one of the key problems with conspiracy theories is that if elites give them credence than the media and subsequently the masses have a tendency to work themselves into a state of panic with the information (Hofstadler 1964, 1-7). Other studies have pointed out that when a group's leaders espouse conspiracy theories, the members of said group will follow the example in high numbers (Simmons and Parsons 2005, 590-595). Further, historical analyses of conspiracy theories show that leaders introducing conspiracy theories into political discourse creates panic that the media spreads and reinforces among the population (Bratich 2008).

The final theoretical concept I will mention is that conspiracy theories matter in political culture and are essentially harmful to society. Once started, a conspiracy theory often grows and is hard to stop. This affects political behavior in a spiraling manner where historical myths, poor logic, and misinformation reinforce each other (Spark 2001, 47-51). Additionally, belief in conspiracy theories constructs a worldview in which political processes and officially sanctioned knowledge are at best flawed and at worst outright lies (Keeley 2006, 56-57). Conspiracy theories can also establish a good-versus-evil mentality that poorly equips one for a participatory political life (James 2001, 78-83). Further, conspiracy theories construct one's worldview in such a way have a greater tendency to view themselves as isolated and apart from others (Featherstone 2001, 43-44).

In summation, conspiracy theories are attempts to explain political events by assigning agency and responsibility to powerful secretive forces. These ideas are then blended with other discourses (such as elite public discourse, existing conspiracy theories and fiction) to form a narrative that explains the world. These explanations defy officially accepted answers as to why something occurs and assumes some type of malevolent plot. Elites are often guilty of using conspiracy theories in a strategic manner. The elite component gives credibility to the conspiracy theory and thus they are spread by the mainstream media to the masses. Since conspiracy theories are a type of ideology and are a part of our culture, these messages easily find listeners and fantastical ideas of conspiracy become part of the narrative of our political culture and can lead to actual harms to society. These ideas then become a part of the believers' identity, which leads to the incorporation of more ideas into the conspiracy and a greater personal need to defend the concepts.

Methods

In order to complete this work, I will be using a qualitative study of the discourse surrounding Agenda 21-based sustainability programs in the United States. I will look primarily at statements, documents, and policy constructed by groups as this work focuses on narratives and ideological patterns within groups. The goal is to establish the role of elites in spreading these ideas via their statements. In turn, I will be interpreting how the media validate elite-driven conspiracy theories and how this shapes the beliefs of the masses. The situations that I will be studying to make my case are the anti-Agenda 21 arguments that have led to the formation of anti-U.N. and anti-sustainability laws in several states.

I will look at the language used to argue against sustainability programs and such arguments fit into a narrative based on long-standing conspiracy theories. The reason for

selecting this case is that it contains the following attributes. First, there is ample conspiracy theory rhetoric available from elite political leaders and groups on the subject. Second, the conspiracy theories espoused by elites mirror longstanding conspiracy theories found in our culture. Third, there is ample media coverage of this concept that will allow an in-depth study of the dissemination of these ideas. Finally, this conspiracy theory has had real effects on policy and the implementation of sustainability laws in the United States.

In order to accomplish this goal, I will be conducting a discourse analysis utilizing qualitative methods. The type of knowledge I am seeking is “contextual” to the situation in which I am studying and is best found using an “interpretivist” theory that allows one to gauge “human volition” within a situation (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 23). This type of study intentionally focuses on “subjective meanings” and assumes actions are based on how people perceive the world around them (Della Porta and Keating 2008, 24-25). In essence, I will look at the political discourse and social narratives surrounding the above-mentioned issues. I will then interpret how these ideas filter through the media and into the general population and become part of our political culture.

In this work, I will use three main characteristics of conspiracy theories/narratives in order to analyze this situation. First, conspiracy narratives tend to use a process of political demonization against opponents. This term refers to discourse used to label people and groups as monstrous villains (Rogin 1987, 41-81). Second, conspiracy narratives are often based on unsubstantiated claims. Although conspiracy narratives may have an internal cohesion that allows them to function as an explanatory story, this does not mean the logical flow of the work is based on fact. This idea fits into Keely’s explanation of conspiracy theories as concepts based on errant data, poor logic, and assumptions (2006, 46-48). Third, conspiracy narratives often

attempt to assign agency to situations. Although all narratives assign human agency, conspiracy narratives do so in a very specific manner. This occurs from assigning a greater level of human agency than can be proven to opponents or by downplaying the agency of victims of conspiracies (Melley 2008, 161). These three characteristics, along with the concepts of narrative fidelity and narrative probability will be used to explain how the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative functions.

The Goals of this Work

My goal with this work is to understand and explore the complexities of this particular situation. Much like any study of narratives and discourse during instances of social conflict, the analysis of this data must be contextual to the situation. Therefore, it is important to remark that this work is only meant to determine the roots and shape of conspiracy theory based arguments regarding the adoption and implementation of Agenda 21. It is true that many of the theoretical aspects of the conspiracy theory discussed in the work may remain true across several narratives, and that many conspiracy theories are part of an interrelated belief system of malevolent plots. However, there is still distinct and important differences between the creation, dissemination, and reinforcement of Agenda 21 conspiracy theory versus other conspiracy theory such as “birther” or “truther” concepts. I will also show the intricacies of this specific narrative within the common features shared by all conspiracy theories.

CHAPTER II

AGENDA 21 FACTS AND CONSPIRACY BASED NARRATIVES

Agenda 21 is the name of the sustainability project developed by world leaders, NGOs, and activists at the 1992 Earth and Development Conference (commonly known as the Rio Conference or the Earth Summit). The conference focused on the creation of a worldwide program of sustainable development and environmental policy in order to prevent further excesses in use of resources and the creation of pollution (United Nations Department of Public Information 1997). The conference had representatives from 172 countries with 108 “heads of state” attending the event. Further, the conference drew over 2400 NGOs and tens of thousands of other participants (journalists, business leaders, and individuals) resulting in “the most comprehensive and, if implemented, effective programme (sic) of action ever sanctioned by the international community” (United Nations Department of Public Information 1997). In order to understand the conspiracy theory and conspiracy narrative associated with this UN plan one must understand the actual policy, how it relates to existing conspiracy theories, and how the conspiracy theory has been adapted for use in current political context.

Agenda 21 addresses many issues concerning “eco-efficiency” and attempts to minimize environmental degradation that occurs due to development and industrialization. The main goal of the treaty is to encourage suitable and environmentally sound development in the coming century (the 21st century, thus Agenda 21) by focusing on local initiatives that worked within a global framework (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). This includes but is not limited to planning land usage for business and homes, alleviating poverty and the many ill effects that stem from resource deprivation, and other top down efforts to change normative patterns of consumption in rich countries (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992).

Further, this is not just a fix for current ecological and economic issues. Many of these

ideas are designed to consider environmental concerns as future policy is developed (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). This is done by addressing issues such as industrial pollution, projected consumption patterns in rich countries, the use of fossil fuels for energy and transportation, and many other concepts related to ecology, and sustainability and poverty eradication (United Nations Department of Public Information 1997). The result of this conference is the Agenda 21 document, a non-binding set of recommendations, that outlined suggestions for the future that do not exacerbate economic and environmental problems that have led to the worlds current state of environmental degradation (ICLEI 2013).

The Roots of the Conspiracy Theory: Malthus, the New World Order and the John Birch Society

Despite the information discussed above, this is not how many conspiracy theorists understand Agenda 21 and its associated sustainability programs. Instead, many conspiracy theorists view the United Nations' plan as a political maneuver launched by collectivist elites in order to facilitate an authoritarian global government (Field 2012) (Snyder 2014) (Dickson 2014). Agenda 21 conspiracy theories³ can be understood as an evolution of New World Order and Depopulation (or Malthusian) Conspiracy theories. Although this work focuses on the Agenda 21 theory, it is important to understand that these ideas do not develop solely as a response to Agenda 21. Instead, like most conspiracy theories, they are part of a larger social narrative that draws from a preexisting ideological understanding of reality (James 2001). In order to understand how the Agenda 21 conspiracy is a product of longstanding conspiracy

³ Although it may seem more logical to call the subject of this paper a singular conspiracy theory this does not accurately describe the situation. The concept of Agenda 21 conspiracy theories may follow a similar narrative within a specific ideological framework. However, there is still some differences in how each theorist explains the conspiracy. Much like a campfire story, the basics may stay the same, but little details change. Further, more importance may be placed on one aspect of the conspiracy depending on the fears or agenda of the speaker/author.

narratives that is now incorporating current social context, it is important to take a brief look at some of the major components of the conspiracy. The most important roots of the current Agenda 21 conspiracy theory is the “depopulation conspiracy theory” (also often referred to as a Malthusian Conspiracy) and New World Order conspiracy theories.

The concept of a Malthusian/depopulation conspiracy is related to the works of 19th century British philosopher Thomas Robert Malthus. Malthus wrote a philosophical essay on population limits and resource production entitled “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (Malthus 1798). This work discussed Malthus’ concerns about population increases and resource consumption in the future. Malthus believed that populations would eventually exceed our species capacity for food production and that “evils and suffering” such as famine, poverty, and violence would spread to endemic levels and cause massive hardships for humanity (Malthus 1798). His suggestion is that societies take steps in order to limit excessive population growth in order to avert disaster (Malthus 1798). However, conspiracy theorists have taken a different view on this philosophy that go far past warnings to keep the world population within sustainable limits.

Within conspiracy narratives, the term “Malthusianism or Malthusian” are used as negative terms that do not refer to the externalities associated with overpopulation, or long-term planning that would ensure that an overpopulation problem does not occur. Instead, this term is laden with negative assumptions about population control that involve subjugation and mass murder (Klenetsky 1992) (Maessen 2009). In the context of most conspiracy theories, the assumption is that controls on population will be done in a manner that is violent, secretive, and for the purpose of increasing the power of some type of shadow government in pursuit of an extreme leftist political agenda. (Klenetsky 1992) (Maessen 2009). This last part concerning a

shadow government helps link this conspiracy theory with New World Order conspiracy theories.

The other relevant pre-existing conspiracy approach that factors into the Agenda 21 theories is the New World Order (NWO) conspiracy. The NWO conspiracy theory is one of the most recent iterations of what Pipes would classify as a “secret society” conspiracy (Pipes 1997, 28-29). This incarnation of secret society conspiracy is based on a paper from the John Birch Society and is named after a statement on world peace and global governance by George H.W. Bush during a post-Cold War speech⁴ (Stewart 2002, 147). However, The John Birch Society’s use of the term does not carry the same meaning as was originally intended by Bush. Bush’s speech was a hopeful prediction that the end of the Cold War would lead to peaceful, democratic globalization (Stewart 2002, 147). The John Birch Society used this term as a label for an authoritarian global government. The changes to how the idea is used fits into a conspiracy narrative that voices fears about the loss of sovereignty and the destruction of the American way of life by outside forces.

Unlike the roots of many conspiracies that are difficult to track to a single source, this specific incarnation of the secret society conspiracy was constructed by the John Birch Society⁵ (Stewart 2002, 426). At the end of the Red Scare period of the early Cold War, the group found themselves in a period of decline. During this period the group worked on a new theory in order to ensure that “collectivism and internationalism” were still seen as ultimate evils, the group constructed their “master conspiracy” (Stewart 2002, 426-430). The result of this attempt

⁴ Of course this is not the only instance of political elites using such language, it is simply one of the most famous instances and cited by academics evaluating NWO conspiracies. The phrase itself can be traced back to the title of an H.G. Wells novel.

⁵ Although this conspiracy has American roots and is authored by an American political group, there is strong belief in this conspiracy theory in other countries. A poll by a Russian media source showed that 45% of respondents believed that the world was run by a shadow government (The Moscow Times 2014)

was a large- scale conspiracy theory that incorporated the last several centuries of human history into a united narrative that connected many political actors, groups, and ideas under the agency of a mysterious group seeking a New World Order. In this “master” conspiracy theory, the Cold War, the wars in Vietnam and Korea, and many other trade deals and treaties are minor parts of a larger nefarious plan (Stewart 2002, 430-435). It is because the John Birch Society conspiracy viewed communism as only a small part of a larger scheme that the idea of global collective rule is still considered a threat (amongst conspiracy theorists), even after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Stewart 2002, 434-435). Within the narrative constructed by the John Birch Society, communist movements were just a different tactic used by the same groups that had been working against humanity for centuries.

The Malthusian and NWO conspiracy theories can be traced further back to other conspiracy theories, such as narratives that focused on ideas of European monarchs, Freemason, Jews, or the Catholic Church had secret plans intended to rule the world and destroy America (Pipes 1997, 77-79). If one were to follow these ideas to their actual creation (not just the current form), a long running narrative of conspiracy appears that creates agents and scapegoats with which societies blame their anxiety over social change, trauma, and fears of the “other” (Pipes 1997, 128-153) (Parish 2001, 2-10). However, this analysis does not require that we follow each of these ideas to their roots in some ancient or medieval history. Instead, with the data presented, one can understand that these ideas are simply the current evolution of a consistent narrative based on conspiracy theories that assign agency to instances of social anxiety

By analyzing conspiracy theorizing as a form of narrative that explains an ideological understanding of events, much can be understood through the basic logic of the theories. If one believes that a group is able to control and depopulate much of modern civilization, then it

follows within that logic that there must be a powerful enough political entity in existence that can perform such an action. Instead of understanding conspiracy theorists as people with an odd view about one aspect of politics, one can understand that conspiracy theories as a complete narrative that describes and explains the whole world. Within a “normal” understanding of human power relations Agenda 21 conspiracies do not fit into common paradigms of governance, the limits of human agency, or the limits on how societies work. However, the people constructing and spreading these ideas have an entirely different understanding of political reality, human agency, and social relations than those who accept official explanations of events. Further, by understanding this narrative structure we can understand how these ideas (much like any other social narrative) adapt to the contextual changes in society in order to remain relevant.

The Schiller White Paper: Creating a Conspiracy

This brief overview helps us understand the roots as well as the cultural and ideological basis of this type of conspiracy theory. I will now further delve into the specifics of how Agenda 21 became a part of this narrative. The Agenda 21 conspiracy theory is based on a mixture of depopulation and NWO conspiracy theories. However, the melding of the two ideas into a single theory that attacks a specific policy is the work of a group called the Schiller Institute. The Schiller Institute is a conservative think tank named after a German intellectual from the late 1700s (The Schiller Institute 2014). The group is led by Helga Zepp LaRouche, wife of Lyndon LaRouche and advocates his economic and political theories (The Schiller Institute 2014). LaRouche’s think tank refers to him as an “economist and political thinker” (The Schiller Institute 2014). However, he is also a conspiracy theorist that publicly supports several alternative political narratives. Some of his views include the idea that the Queen of England

directly controls the military and foreign policy goals of Europe. He also supports claims that the long-term plans of the British Monarch include many dark and clandestine projects to destroy the sovereignty of the United States (Macky 2009). Further, concepts that LaRouche supports are the notion that the Affordable Healthcare Act is taken directly from the social policies of Nazi Germany. This includes many authoritarian aspects of the Nazi state, such as forced labor camps and forced euthanasia (Macky 2009).

On the surface, the group's website does not appear to be any different from the websites of any other think tank or political action committee. However, if one delves past the front page stories that cry out for world peace and economic collusion, a different narrative appears. One of the current postings the website offers is an evaluation of "green" policies, in which the Schiller Institute describes sustainability oriented policies as "green fascism" and "green genocide" (The International Schiller Institute n/d). These concepts do not directly relate to Agenda 21 conspiracy theories, however as I will next explain, they use a similar set of frames and a similar narrative as another release by the Schiller Institute.

The initial document constructing the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory was originally a Schiller Institute white paper from the early 1990s. The paper, entitled "Eco 92 Must Be Stopped" was then reprinted in the magazine entitled *Executive Intelligence Review* and is published by the Schiller Institute (The Schiller Institute 1991). The paper is intended to serve as a step by step outline that explains the "true" intent" behind Agenda 21 and the Rio Conference. This work is essentially the root of Agenda 21 conspiracy narratives and explains how the sustainability plan became a part of the New World Order and a part of Malthusian conspiracy theories. The next few pages will contain an analysis of the important narratives, framing devices, and implied ideological understandings of reality that make the conspiracy theory

possible. This is not an attempt to “debunk” the Schiller paper in its entirety. However, I have added commentary on the basic logic or factual nature of a claim in several places. This is not done with the intent of completely disproving the claims of the Schiller Institute, these points are included to help show the difference in how a narrative derived from conspiracy theories forms connections and interprets reality. Further, I will show how this narrative uses political demonization, how it uses a large number of un-substantiated claims, and how it assigns human agency in order to function as a complete explanatory narrative.

The “Eco 92” paper starts with a simple two-sentence summary of what Agenda 21 is intended to do (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28). However, even in this initial explanation, the author of the document set up the reader for a critique of the program by referring to the Earth Charter as a “so called” document. Although this seems like a small slight aimed at the program, the initial questioning of the basic validity of the program sets the tone of disapproval and distrust that permeates throughout the rest of the work. After this brief and pejorative introduction, the author quickly finishes the introduction/abstract with the strong assertion that the policies and ecological goals are nothing more than a “hoax” and “giant fraud.” The Schiller institute “reveals” the real intent of Agenda 21 is to create a program meant to “consolidate the Malthusian New World Order promoted by the Anglo-American financial elite” (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28). This line in particular deserves some attention, as this is where we can see the establishment of a link between Agenda 21 and established conspiracy. With a simple connection such as this, the paper links the Malthusian conspiracy theories and New World Order conspiracy theories into a singular narrative and places the agency for the conspirator’s behavior (and all associated evils) in the hands of those participating in the Rio Summit.

The author then finishes the introduction with a statement of purpose for the construction of this paper. The main point of Eco 92's creation is to "expose the true intentions of the oligarchical (sic) architects of Eco 92", "to debunk the pseudo-scientific myths upon which it is premised," and "to explain the historical roots of the Malthusian policies" which the Schiller institute claims are the basis for Agenda 21 (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28). These claims help to frame Agenda 21 as more of the same malevolent behavior attributed to powerful elements of the international community (within conspiracy theory narratives) instead of a new and innovative plan to stop environmental degradation.

With the conspiracy narrative established, Eco 92 then proceeds to give a point-by-point analysis of the "The Real Agenda" that the Schiller institute claims to understand. The author starts by explaining that these ecological ideas are rooted in a form of pagan philosophy (that does not actually seem to exist outside of the conspiracy theory) derived from the teachings of a cult of which many of the attendants of the Rio Conference are members (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28). In this part of the writing we can see an attempt to label ecologically minded leaders and activists as part of an obscure and apparently (via the authors framing) offensive religion. After this political demonization has occurred and Agenda 21 supporters are labeled as a cult filled of nature worshipping fanatics that "places man on a par with lower life forms such as microbes" the author begins to explain their assumptions about the true intention of the creators of Agenda 21 (Rogin 1987, xiii-xx) (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28).

The first claim is that Agenda 21 is a method to destroy national sovereignty. This is a somewhat similar to common argument from conservative politicians and legal scholars concerning international treaties (Davenport 2005) (Casey and Rivkin Jr. 2005). However, the methods and reasoning offered by the Schiller paper are unsubstantiated and much different from

the concerns of legal scholars. Within the works mentioned above, the concern is primarily for a weakening of American sovereignty due to the goals that are stated within the laws and treaties (Casey and Rivkin Jr. 2005) (Davenport 2005). In the case of the Schiller paper, we can see the fear of not just weakened sovereignty, but a fear of the total surrender of sovereign rights. Further, the argument made for “why” this would occur are not based on actual provisions in Agenda 21, but are instead founded on conspiracy theory based assumptions that are constructed around Agenda 21. Not only does this ignore the language and intent of the Agenda 21 document, but it also incorporates the document into embedded conspiracy narratives that fear the loss of sovereignty to a world empire, commonly called the New World Order. By referencing these ideas, the Agenda 21 conspiracy receives validity by making Agenda 21 a mechanism for other nefarious goals that the conspiracy theory community has believed for some time. This helps to maintain the narrative fidelity and probability of the work by linking this new narrative with existing conspiracy theories. In essence, Schillers explanation of Agenda 21 fits into a narrative of secret societies and shadowy cabals of elites intent on world domination. At this point for the conspiracy theorist, Agenda 21 becomes more of the same, or perhaps a new revelation, on how long standing fears of an evil world government will finally come to power.

The next claim is that Agenda 21 is a plan to depopulate the globe. Although the work of the Rio Conference does discuss the need to decrease population explosions and work towards a sustainable human population, the Schiller paper frames this idea within the context of the Malthusian Conspiracy Theory (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992) (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28-29). This is achieved by making unsubstantiated arguments that population controls under Agenda 21 will be accomplished through “involuntary abortions and sterilization”

(The Schiller Institute 1991, 29). There is no reference to any of these ideas in Agenda 21. The terms do not even appear in the document. Instead, there are passages that simply explain the need for developmental policies to take population growth into account and work towards alleviation of poverty and social conditions that exacerbate pollution (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992, 25). Further, when discussing population, Agenda 21 stipulates that any program that works towards population control must be done in a manner that includes “full recognition of women’s rights” (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992, 25). When one compares the Schiller Institute’s assumptions with the actual concepts embedded within Agenda 21, it is almost impossible to understand where the ideas originated, unless you are already familiar with the conspiracy-based explanations of the situation. However, if one already believes in conspiracy theories, these claims provide narrative probability and fit well within existing understandings of the situation.

The third issue discussed by the Schiller report is the concept of “Technological Apartheid.” This term, as explained in Eco 92, is a situation in which controls on the use of technology will be strictly held to environmental standards. The author postulates (with no evidence or clear argument as to why) that standards will be so stringent that important or lifesaving technology will be withheld from developing nations (The Schiller Institute 1991, 29-30). Further, they predict that this will lead to a total ban on nuclear energy that will result in an increased use of wood and fossil fuels, thus furthering pollution (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). Although Agenda 21 does discuss technology at length, it does so in order to advise that sustainability technologies should be given high research and development priorities. Further, the UN plan suggests developing states should be supplied with sustainability technologies if they cannot afford the cost (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). This point is in

stark contrast to the Schiller Institutes claims of a coming man-made technological dark age that would place some populations “at a pre-industrial level” (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). The Schiller Institute’s claims about bans on nuclear energy is similarly unfounded as the sections pertaining to this issue in Agenda 21 only advise that countries use careful planning when developing a nuclear program in regards to handling the waste in a sustainable manner (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992, 267).

The fourth goal of the Agenda 21 conspirators ”revealed” by the Schiller paper is that states will be forced to contort their economies to a condition of “zero economic growth.” This point refers to the portions of Agenda 21 that hope to establish methods of “sustainable development.” Normally this term would imply development that plans for or avoids factors that could lead to greater environmental damage (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). However, in the Schiller report the concept of sustainable development is simply a euphemistic term for stopping science, stopping the use of natural resources, and is a subtle justification for radical depopulation (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). Once again, there is truly no basis in the Agenda 21 document that substainates these claims.

The fifth statement against Agenda 21 is that it is an attempt to construct a system of “enforced backwardness.” This statement starts by claiming that this nefarious goal will be accomplished “under the banner of defending Indigenous Rights” (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). The author then describes indigenous groups as people who essentially still live in an unchanged Stone Age culture. It then suggests that Agenda 21 will force humanity to regress to hunter-gatherer societies. The author then explains (uncited) that the earth can only support around 10 million humans with this type of resource extraction. In turn, the Schiller report uses this assembly of somewhat unconnected ideas as proof that Agenda 21 is part of a Malthusian

depopulation program (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). This point may seem a bit jumbled with some jumps in logic, as if the reader must already understand part of the story. However, to a person that already assumes that the NWO exists and that they are working on depopulation programs, this idea supplies important information on “how” the enemy will act. In the narrative constructed for conspiracy theorists, this chain of ideas not only makes sense, but also fits into accepted norms and provides greater narrative probability.

The sixth claim is that Agenda 21 will be used for “debt collection.” In this context, the debt collection refers to austerity programs and structural adjustment programs issued by the IMF and World Bank (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). The paper claims that these programs will be used to force developing countries to halt development and only participate in sustainable programs or face economic blackmail until they comply. This will be done by forcing states to turn over sovereign territory to IGOs under the guise of conservation programs (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30). Similar to the last two points, this statement is backed up with little proof or logical argument development. Instead, the Schiller paper simply supplies a quote from one of the U.S. delegates to the Rio conference that stated he hopes to not pay for any more unsustainable development projects (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30).

The seventh claim that is made against Agenda 21 is simply titled “Paganism.” This section of the paper is a bit harder to understand when one first reads it. However, the framing and narrative attempts to construct the idea that environmentalism is not actually a scientific or secular moral principle held by people who want to preserve the planet. Instead, the Schiller paper claims environmentalism is rooted in a pagan Gaia worshiping religion (The Schiller Institute 1991, 30-31). Once this idea is put forth, the authors then try to further the argument with anecdotal claims based on the statements of British Royalty and the (at the time of Eco 92)

Brazilian Secretary of the Environment. The basic argument is that the Brazilian Secretary is a member of a Gaia cult. His appointment was supposedly backed by a few members of the British Royalty who are quoted in the Schiller report for making comparisons between bacteria outgrowing their hosts and humans for destroying their environment. This portion of the Schiller paper serves to demonize several supporters of Agenda 21 as well as the program itself.

The Schiller paper continues to argue that the architects of Agenda 21 are working towards mass depopulation by quoting a member of the British Royalty as saying he would like to “reincarnate as a deadly virus” in order to help the world’s overpopulation problem (The Schiller Institute 1991, 31). The final point of the argument explains that another member of the British Royal family once praised indigenous peoples for their understanding of sustainable culture and humanity’s place in the eco system (The Schiller Institute 1991, 31). This leads the author of the Schiller paper to a conclusion that something nefarious must be going on with Agenda 21. The basic argument when each point is united into a singular idea is as follows. The Agenda 21/Eco 92 conference is going to be held in Brazil. The Brazilian secretary of the environment is a pagan Earth worshiper who has backing from the British Royal Family. The royals are also members of the Gaia cult and (due to some out of context remarks) show little to no concern for humanity. Thus, Agenda 21 is the work of evil people who want to do harm to humanity as a whole. In essence, this whole point is an attempt to create connections and label the opposition. The result is not really a form of argument but instead political demonization that constructs the opposition into villains. If one were to use this type of rhetoric in peer-reviewed paper or in an article from a mainstream journalistic source it would likely be discounted as a baseless claim meant only to smear an opponent. However, this point cannot be dismissed as a simple attack or ad hominem fallacy as it is an important part of the narrative that

presents the situation as a battle of good-vs evil and often shows the proponents of Agenda 21 as monstrous individuals.

As this paper is written utilizing a narrative based on conspiracy theories, this portion of the paper fits an important niche. It assigns unified agency for a large global event and assists the author in constructing the situation into a simple good versus evil scenario. As discussed previously in this work, these are key aspects to how conspiracy theories function (James 2001, 74-75). Thus, the rhetorical methods used by Schiller may make Eco 92 less acceptable to mainstream readers, but it helps make the document fit into the common ideological and narrative parameters for this type of document.

The next section of the Schiller paper goes past assumptions about the U.N. and NWO's hidden attempts to dominate and then depopulate the world. Once the author has established that Agenda 21 is a cover for manipulating world society, they begin to argue that current science about ecological degradation is simply false and constructed in order to justify the behavior of conspirators. The Schiller paper claims that some of the world's greatest scientists⁶ have "debunked" these ecological issues, that the media is compliant in the cover up, and that dissenting scientist were intentionally excluded from the Rio Conference and Agenda 21 planning (The Schiller Institute 1991, 31). The paper then launches a point-by-point analysis of major ecological concerns and offers counter arguments based on unsubstantiated claims and errant data as to whether or not they will actually have a negative impact on humans. These points are listed below

The first ecological concern that the Schiller paper addresses is the depletion of the ozone layer. The paper claims that the degradation of the ozone layer is simply untrue. In order to prove this idea they offer data that claims the amount of natural chlorofluorocarbons, a chemical

⁶ Once again, unnamed scientists and uncited studies.

that is one of the core parts of ozone depletion, are much higher than human created CFCs (The Schiller Institute 1991, 31). However, this theory has been disproven and can be debunked via well-cited scientific data available from the EPA (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2010). Aside from the dubious science and lack of citation offered by the Schiller paper, the basic argument is not really on topic. Even if it were true that volcanoes or other natural sources of CFCs do more harm to the ozone layer, volcanic eruptions are uncontrollable by humans unlike the human-produced pollution that Agenda 21 tries to control. In essence, the Schiller argument is founded on bad science and does not really address Agenda 21, but instead tries to shift the point of the argument to fit within the narrative flow of the rest of the paper.

The next major ecological topic the Schiller paper attempts to discredit is global warming. At the time that the Schiller paper was written, climate science was not as advanced as it has become in the last few decades. However, the only data that the author offer is a critique of computerized climate models and a vague reference to a handful of climate studies from the 1940s-1960s (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). Given that the Schiller paper was first published in 1991, it seems safe to say that a substantive amount of data is missing from this argument. Further, the mentioned studies are not cited or explained, the Schiller paper simply conveys the message that global warming is simply fake. This point is very much like the other “scientific” topics as the argument is founded on the dismissal of ecological concerns. The Schiller paper provides little evidence other than erroneously attacking the science behind climate research and labeling the entire idea as false.

The third argument is that nuclear waste is not an actual problem. Instead, the Schiller report explains that nuclear waste is a beneficial resource if handled properly. They claim that only a small percent of the byproduct is truly a waste product and that much of it could be reused

for fuel. They even provide a brief amount of data with no citation or reference to how the calculation was reached on how many barrels of oil or tons of coal could be saved if the United States were to make use of the material (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). Although some of this data could be truthful in the correct context, a key point to this argument is the assertion that humanity will eventually develop technologies that allow the reuse of nuclear waste (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). Thus, the real argument is that nuclear waste is useful and a good thing for humanity, if we had the technology to do it. As we do not currently have access to this form of waste recycling, this line of argumentation is based on scientific fantasy.

The fourth ecological point the Schiller paper addresses is opposition to the use of pesticides. Instead of providing an analysis of how environmental scientists and activists are incorrect, the author shift the topic from the environmental impact of pesticides to the possible risks of not using pesticide. What is supplied as evidence are claims that the entomologist Dr. J Gordon Edwards estimated that not using pesticides in the name of the environment has caused at least 100 million human deaths (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). The claim is that insect-born-disease and lower crop yields result in the loss of many lives (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). The Schiller paper does not offer any citation or explanation as to how these numbers are reached. They supply a quote from Edwards that states, "I can't see any good reason for these actions except that the environmentalists intend to cut the population in the poorer nations of the world" (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). Thus, the pesticide argument is framed in a manner that gives murderous intent to environmentalists. Unlike some of the environmental points that the Schiller paper addresses, Agenda 21 does discuss the use of pesticides. However, the discussion centers on goals of either reducing toxic exposure to humans and wildlife, the development of new less toxic pest-eradication methods and increased study of the health and environmental

risks of pesticides (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). There is no language in the document to suggest that the use of pesticides would be banned (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992).

The fifth point that the Schiller report addresses is the ecological fears of carcinogens. This point, much like the pesticide argument, is founded on dismissing the claims of opponents as false. The paper cites the studies of Dr. Bruce Ames that conclude that man-made carcinogens are less common and also less dangerous than natural carcinogens (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). Dr. Ames has argued in his studies that natural carcinogens are far more prevalent and deadly. Dr. Ames has stated that he feels environmentalists overplay the risk of contracting cancer from pollution and carcinogenic sources (Brody 1994). Oddly enough, the term carcinogens or any derivation of the word does not even appear in the Agenda 21 documents. The problem with the Schiller argument is that it does not really argue against the proposals in Agenda 21. In fact, it does not really argue anything other than the concept of manmade carcinogens. This may seem like an odd tangent. However, it does help to build the Schiller papers narrative fidelity. It helps to make environmentalist look foolish and illogical while urging the reader to question not just their scientific basis for discussing carcinogens but any of these environmental topics. In essence, it perpetuates the image that the Schiller paper wants the reader to have of Agenda 21 supporters and lends cohesion to the narrative .

The final ecological point that the Schiller report directly address is deforestation. This argument diverges from the method used in the points above, because it does not attempt to persuade the reader that the problem of deforestation is untrue or conflated. Instead, the author fully embraces the notion that massive deforestation is occurring and highly detrimental to the earth and humanity (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32-33). However, the reasons behind why

deforestation occurs and the method with which human agency in the situation is assigned forms their argument against Agenda 21 sustainability policies. The Schiller report states that much of the deforestation that occurs is due to people in poor countries using wood as a fuel source (The Schiller Institute 1991, 32). The assumption made by Schiller about the primary causes of this ecological problem is based on outdated assumptions that have long been discredited by peer reviewed scientific sources. The myth that deforestation is being driven by the use of wood as a fuel source can be traced to policy decisions in the 1970s that were intended to deal with possible externalities of recent population booms (May-Tobin 2011). In some developing countries, leaders were afraid that the increased population would lead to heavy deforestation. In turn, they developed programs in order to offset this perceived problem. However, once scientists studied these assumptions, they found that firewood was not a significant factor in deforestation (May-Tobin 2011). Further, the Schiller report makes two other false assertions in their remarks about deforestation. The first is the manner in which the Schiller report only discusses firewood when speaking about the use of biomass as a source of energy. By only including firewood and ignoring other forms of biomass, the claims of the Schiller paper are not only inaccurate, but appear to be picked only to justify the rest of the argument put forth in the conspiracy.

Second, there is no part of the Agenda 21 documents that calls for a ban on fossil fuels. A small section points out the importance of moving away from fossil fuel dependency through the implementation of different forms of energy generation. Further, Agenda 21 actually prescribes a greater use of fossil fuels (with supplements of firewood) in poor and rural regions that have energy deficiencies (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). This point is quite important as we see the Schiller paper's concern is heavily based on the notion that since Agenda 21 is an environmental policy it will call for draconian restrictions on the use of fossil

fuels despite the human cost. However, as one can see despite the environmental focus of Agenda 21, it values humans having access to necessary utilities even if it requires the use of a polluting energy source. This does not fit into the narrative constructed by Schiller that paints the architects of Agenda 21 as an obsessive cult of environmentalists with little regard for human life.

With these sections of the paper complete, the Schiller paper shifts the argument to who is behind this massive conspiracy. This portion of the document works within the above-discussed narrative that paints the architects of Agenda 21 as villains using false pretense to hijack the world's politics. However, this portion of the paper takes on a different tone. The above listed sections (although often done with problems) are constructed as an argument. When discussing the supporters of Agenda 21, the Schiller paper is less informative than confrontational. This portion of the paper attempts to discredit and create villains of the financial backers and NGOs that contributed to the cause. It begins by explaining that the people behind Agenda 21 (Eco 92) have constructed a "myth" that environmental political causes are part of a "grass-roots movement" (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). The paper explains that the "fact" is that Eco 92 (Agenda 21) is actually the fruition of several decades of elite planning to orchestrate a "Malthusian Conspiracy" (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). With these statements, we can see that the Schiller report is attempting to remove the agency of grass roots environmentalists and a variety of political actors that worked towards the Rio Conference and Agenda 21. Instead, we are to believe that the real power and motivation behind the program is to facilitate the plans of a small and nefarious group of financial and political elites..

The Schiller report then introduces Maurice Strong into the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). Maurice Strong is a former energy and finance executive

turned environmental policy maker. He has served in a few leadership roles within the United Nations and was the organizer of both the Stockholm Conference of 1972 and the Rio Conference in 1992 (Manitou Foundation 2012). Further, Strong is also a key figure in many conspiracy theories due to his role in international politics (Hickman 2010) (Infowars 2009) .

The Schiller paper points out Strong's ties to environmental groups and international sustainability projects, which are all true, though discussed as some type of manipulation by the rhetoric used in the Schiller paper. By doing so, the Schiller paper starts to build conspiracy based connections between Strong and other financial backers of environmental policies. The Schiller paper at this point again describes Agenda21/Eco 92 as a "Malthusian plot," then states that it is financed by "blueblood" elites from Europe and the United States (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). Although this could seem like a simple attempt to label these people and foundations as aloof elites, the reality is these labels help to keep the Eco 92 conspiracy theory within the narrative already established by LaRouche, in which European royalty and a few powerful Americans are villains (Macky 2009). The rest of this section simply lists several charitable foundation, large banks, and corporations that have donated funds to the NGOs that worked towards Eco 92/Agenda 21. There is no analysis or commentary provided from the Schiller paper at this point, there is simply a large paragraph that lists all of these people and groups (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). One may assume that there would be need for the Schiller paper to further elaborate as to how these groups are connected to the conspiracy theory (past donations to NGOs). However, if a person looks at the source of the material (LaRouche's "political" periodicals) they can understand that nearly anyone that can be labeled as an American or European political or financial elite, is already condemned and considered part of some conspiracy theory (Macky 2009). A reader of Executive Intelligence Report would likely have

been exposed to and would be familiar with the concept that political elites are part of a larger conspiracy. This white paper follows a well-established narrative that does not need further clarification.

The last section of the Schiller paper are a few paragraphs entitled “Stopping Eco 92.” This section starts by stating that approval of Eco 92/Agenda 21 was not going well at the time of the document’s creation (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). The document lists a few political actors, such as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Algerian delegate to the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) and several unnamed members of the Brazilian military and congress who are supposedly in opposition to the plan due to concerns over sovereignty (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). Further, the Schiller paper hints that at least 77 (unnamed) delegates to the UNCED stated they would not agree to any plan that revoked their sovereignty over natural resources within their territorial boundaries (The Schiller Institute 1991, 33). This point is particularly interesting as the Schiller paper implies that these representatives are wholly against Agenda 21. However, all that it really tells us is that many representatives who attended the conference wanted to ensure that their country’s sovereignty was protected. If one assumes that the Schiller paper’s narrative is true, and Agenda 21 is a “Malthusian” conspiracy that will strictly control resources and development, then it is easy to believe the implied idea that these representatives would refuse to sign Agenda 21. However, when one realizes that the works of the UNCED did not allow for the strict controls that Schiller predicted, the suggestion that many representatives would resist Agenda 21 on the grounds of protecting sovereignty becomes a much less important and convincing point.

As one can see, there are many problems both logically and factually with the claims of the Schiller report. If one understands the efforts of Agenda 21 and the actual limits of power

that a United Nations non-binding resolution has in regards to domestic policy, the majority of the above claims simply fall apart. However, past understanding that the Schiller paper is essentially a work of fiction, the analysis of the Schiller Institute's Agenda 21 conspiracy theory helps to illustrate the complexities, connections and underlying ideological assumptions necessary in order for a conspiracy theory to function as a cohesive narrative. Although many of the points are factually incorrect or debatable, and some of the conclusions drawn by the author are made from poorly assembled logic, the result is a fleshed out narrative that seeks to explain events in an identifiable manner in which a person can understand and interact with. This narrative, despite its roots has found a home within the Republican Party and the Tea Party movement. The methods with which these groups (and smaller associated groups) have adapted and used the conspiracy theory will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

ELITE AND MEDIA USE OF AGENDA 21 CONSPIRACY THEORIES

In this chapter, I will discuss and analyze how the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory has been used in our political culture. In order to do this, I will look at the manner in which several elite groups, including influential think tanks, political parties and conservative media sources, take part in Agenda 21 conspiracy theories. I will use the previously outlined criteria for conspiracy narratives in order to discuss the situation. The discourse and rhetoric that follow includes elite and media dissemination of conspiracy theories, as well as arguments for “anti-Agenda 21” legislation or laws against programs that may be influenced by Agenda 21.. The second concept is quite important as many sustainability programs can easily be incorporated into a narrative that associates sustainability with Agenda 21 and the UN. This is due to the narrative constructed by conspiracy theorists and elites who help spread the ideas, as well as the broadness and contextual nature of the recommendations of Agenda 21. Through an analysis of the discourse and the narratives elites use when explaining the need to suppress plans related to Agenda 21 one can understand the ideological basis and social narrative justifying their behavior. Further, looking at the declared goals (whether a piece of legislation is successful or not) of an elite actor can help us understand the possible externalities of using conspiracy theory as an argument for policy debates. Finally, this portion of this work is not just helpful for understanding the elite component of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory; it also allows us to understand the ramifications of elite involvement in similar conspiracy based narratives.

Elites and Conspiracy Theories

Elites are often the enemy in conspiracy theories, yet history and current events are awash with elite actors espousing conspiracy theories to explain social events. Many infamous

leaders such as Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, used conspiracy theories in order to justify their actions and garner public support (Aaronovitch 2010, 44-86). During the Red Scare era of the Cold War, many Americans had their basic rights violated and public lives ruined by elite actors, based on conspiracy theories about communism (Rogin 1987, 63-77). The same communism based conspiracy theories evolved into the John Birch Society's New World Order conspiracy theory that still serves as the basis for many current conspiracy theories (Stewart 2002, 435-437). More extreme American politicians, such as Pat Buchanan and Lyndon LaRouche, have practically built their political careers by using conspiracy-laden rhetoric (James 2001, 86) (Macky 2009). A variety of groups, such as white supremacists, fundamentalist Christian militias and to some extent the Tea Party, are controlled by leaders espousing conspiracy theories to help support their ideological stance (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 443-446) (James 2001, 66-70).

Further, prominent religious leaders, such as televangelist Pat Robertson, Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, and leaders of many fundamentalist religious groups (regardless of their faith) weave narratives that explain the perceived evils of the world through conspiracy theory (James 2001, 72-74) (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 8-10). Although the above examples are of elite actors who are often at the extreme end of a political or religious spectrum and perhaps less descriptive of more mainstream elites, one can also see a large influx of conspiracy theories throughout the Republican Party since the election of Barack Obama and the growth of the Tea Party. This can be seen in the discourses surrounding very prominent conspiracy theories such as "Birther" conspiracies, and the conspiracies surrounding the Affordable Health Care Act (Contantini 2013) (Eichelberger 2013). Further, one can see this

trend in other debates, such as the UN Small Arms Treaty and the UN Treaty for the Disabled (Kane 2012) (Beauchamp 2012).

When looking at elites using conspiracy theory one should not look at just the depth of the conspiracy or how paranoid and fantastical their beliefs appear. Leaders may show different levels of belief in conspiracy theories. As Daniel Pipes points out, leaders such as Joseph Stalin or Louis Farrakhan, incorporated nearly every concept into existing conspiracy theories, while other elites may only “brush the surface of conspirator thinking” (Pipes 1997, 22-24). Further, a person who subscribes to some conspiracy theories is accepting the basic tenets of a different ideology and others have no real method of determining how deeply they subscribe to all the tenets of that ideology (Pipes 1997, 25). This concept has been described as an ideological “funnel” in which many people may be at the large end of the device. Some believers may stay at the top and represent people who identify with conspiracy narratives in very broad terms. While a smaller group of people will fall deeper into the funnel and only accept an ideology derived completely from conspiracy theories (James 2001, 64). This occurs as the conspiracy theorist develops a deeper understanding of conspiracy theories and incorporates the ideas into their understanding of the world (James 2001, 64-65). Additionally, if we understand conspiracy theorizing as a form of ideology and that conspiracy theorists often realize they are following unpopular and possibly embarrassing beliefs that most of the population would reject, they have an interest to self-censor their public opinions in order to make them more palatable to the general public (Pipes 1997, 20-24) (Bacon 2012, 783). This creates a situation in which one cannot truly evaluate how deeply a person who expresses a belief in some conspiracy theories accepts an ideology based solely on conspiracies. A conspiracy theorist has already accepted some aspects of a narrative that is counter to dominant ideological concepts within a society

unless conspiracy theories are the norm for the society, such as the USSR under Stalin or Germany under the Nazi Party. However, unless the person is very open about their beliefs we cannot accurately appraise how deeply one has gone into the “funnel.”

This point is relevant in the fact that if we have powerful elected officials who embrace conspiracy (even smaller, less “paranoid” conspiracies), they are essentially functioning within a belief system that often sees the political structure they serve as the enemy. However, one must understand that there are differences between a conspiracy theorist and a leader that may see an actual problem within their government. The non-conspiracy theorist leader is fighting within a system against observable moral or legal wrongs that take place in the “chaos of history “ (James 2001, 83-88). While the conspiracy theorist beliefs are based on a good vs. evil dialectic that assumes some type of nefarious agency at the roots of social problems (James 2001, 83-88).

It may seem easy to dismiss elites who use conspiracies in their political rhetoric as paranoid or members of a fringe ideology. However, many of the elite political groups discussed later in this chapter are not part of a political fringe movement or filled with individuals that base much of their career on conspiracy theories. Many of these political groups work closely with the Republican Party or are simply part of the GOP. Additionally, this problem is not based on the efforts of a few individuals within the GOP. The Republican National Committee (RNC) has officially joined in accepting the conspiracy narrative when discussing Agenda 21. Despite the erroneous nature of many conspiracy theories, there is a real effect when leaders communicate in this manner to their followers. Some of the more extreme examples above such as Hitler and Stalin need little elaboration. However, the leaders in question do not have to reach these extremities in paranoia in order to shape the behavior of their followers.

The British think tank Demos has released a paper on extremism and conspiracy theories that analyzes the effects of groups when their leaders use conspiracy theories as an explanatory method for events (Bartlett and Miller 2012). The study explains several important factors as to how groups are shaped by leaders using conspiracy theories as the basis of the group narrative. Conspiracy theories often function by “demonizing” the enemy (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6). This process helps create a cohesive identity for the group, but also constructs villains as a side effect (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6). This leads to a situation in which non-believers or those who question the ideology can be easily labeled as sympathetic with the enemy or “part of the conspiracy” (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6). This factor can weed out “moderates” and other “voices of dissent” within the group (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6). Further, groups that use conspiracy narratives as a key part of their ideology have a tendency to justify and embrace the use of violence for their cause (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6).

As these groups define themselves through their resistance to whatever conspiracy they believe and the villain in their narratives is often the government, they cannot healthily work within an established political system (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 6-8). Further, the Demos study suggests that as these groups grow they can form their own political entities, which can lead to greater recruitment of marginalized people (Bartlett and Miller 2012). The authors further explain that these are the basic steps that led to the creation of groups such as al-Qaeda and militant white power groups (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 7).

It is important to state that the groups in the Demos article are much more extreme (regarding violence and their use of conspiracy narratives) than groups such as the Tea Party or Republicans who support GOP- issued conspiracy theories. The inclusion of this information is not meant to suggest that groups who identify with the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory will

coalesce into an international terrorist group. However, one of the key points of the Demos article is that conspiracy theories can serve as a “radicalization multiplier” within a group (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 3). Even if groups do not become violent, conspiracy theories exacerbate the problems of dehumanizing one’s enemy and not being able to function well in a political environment based on democracy, compromise and multiple diverse viewpoints still exist (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, 216-218). Further, believers in the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory share anti-government and anti-international viewpoints with extremist right wing groups (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 3-10). This is not to say they have similar behavior or will eventually turn into extremists. But it is important to realized that many of the concepts that form the basis of the Agenda 21 conspiracy also form the basis of the ideology followed by right wing militias, violent Christian fundamentalists and white separatists/ white supremacists groups which have little ability to function in a normal political system (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 3-5) (James 2001, 74-75). Looking at the situation using the “funnel” metaphor describe earlier in this work, one can realize that followers of conspiracy based ideology can cause damage to a political system by how their belief shape their political behaviors without reaching the extremities of the ideology such as people like Timothy McVey or members of al-Qaeda.

As one can see, conspiracy theories are not just the domain of paranoid recluses, draped in tin-foil hats as many people assume from our current social narrative involving conspiracy theorists. We must understand that conspiracy theorists are a broad group of people who may fit the preconceived notion of a marginalized paranoid type, but also there are conspiracy theorists in positions of power. In turn, this allows conspiracy theories, despite their often-fantastical nature, to be a very real factor in politics, often to the detriment of less powerful groups and society in general.

Elite Organizations, the GOP, the JBS and the Tea Party

In this section, I will discuss the political groups that use the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory as part of their official discourse with the public. This includes groups such as the Republican National committee, the conservative think tank The John Birch Society, and other conservative media outlets.

An important moment of elite validation of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory can be found in the 2012 Republican Party Winter Meeting resolutions. The result of the 2012 Winter Meeting is a ten-page document of resolutions by the RNC. Page three of the document is dedicated to Agenda 21 and entitled “Resolution Exposing United Nations Agenda 21” (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). The resolutions adopted at the 2012 GOP Winter Meeting are close in content and narrative tone to existing conspiracy theories. Despite the fact that the resolution does not directly state that Agenda 21 is a Malthusian plot engineered by the New World Order, many of the statements about its sustainability program fit within the framework laid out by the Schiller paper and other grand malevolent conspiracy theories. The GOP resolutions expresses a set of very similar (yet less detailed/fleshed out) expectations of the results of Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 is explained in a manner that assumes the supporters of the program have a hidden, malevolent plan for world politics and that the sustainability project is a ruse intended to facilitate this plan. In essence, the narrative reaches a similar conclusion as the one constructed by the Schiller paper, but the “paranoia” often attributed to conspiracy theories has been sanitized. Whether this is intentional in order to make the document more palatable to the general public, or simply a newer context/adaption of to the conspiracy theory, the result is an official document intended to shape the policies of our nation based on conspiracy and

assumption (Knight 2008, 182-183) (Bacon 2012, 783). The key difference is the manner in which blame is assigned. Instead of a cabal of business people, members of the royal family and the Schiller paper's cult of eco pagans, this document simply blames the United Nations. This does not change the bulk of the narrative but instead, omits some of the detail given in works such as the Schiller paper. As the more developed conspiracies blame the United Nations under the control of a secret group, the resolutions the RNC simply places the responsibility for the perceived malevolence with the United Nations or the Agenda 21 document.

The winter meeting document (much like any resolution of this kind) begins with several declarative statements that make claims about the nature of Agenda 21. These statements each begin by stating "Whereas" (in this context, the word meaning is "in view of the fact") and then making claims against Agenda 21 (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). This method of rhetoric may be commonplace for this type of resolution, yet it is important to realize that this language implies that all of the statements are a matter of fact and are not open to interpretation. The first of these statements explains a basic overview of Agenda 21 from the GOP perspective. It claims that Agenda 21 is "comprehensive plan of extreme environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control" (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). This immediately sets the tone of their resolutions by declaring the extremity of the plan and suggesting that it is not just a plan for avoiding future ecological destruction, but also a method to control and contort societies. As with other global malevolent conspiracy theories, this portion of the resolution establishes a remote, shadowy villain

The next statement claims that Agenda 21 is "being covertly pushed into local communities" by the NGO, the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). Although the ICLEI is one of the primary

mechanisms with which the policy recommendations of Agenda 21 have been actualized, the RNC statement frames the implementation as something coerced by a branch of the United Nations. This point goes on to explain the methods that the ICLEI uses to implement the plan upon states. They list several aspects of “sustainable development” such as “Smart Growth, Wild lands Projects, Resilient Cities, Regional Visioning Projects and other “Green” or “Alternative” programs, and state that these concepts are a method for the ICLEI to “covertly push” political control over states (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). However, the importance of this point is not only the terminology used but the way the terms are written. The concepts sustainable development, green and alternative are written in scare quotes meant to imply some type of irony to the terms and invalidate the ideas (American Psychological Association 2015). This helps to further the conspiracy narrative by portraying the basic vocabulary of Agenda 21 supporters as somehow false or terms that obscure the truth.

The next statement also begins with the ironic/dismissive use of quotation marks while describing Agenda 21 as “plan of radical so-called ‘sustainable development’” (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). This phrase in this context implies that there is some form of deception in the statements of their opponents and that the ideas at their most basic level (such as green or sustainable,) are somehow dishonest concepts themselves. The rest of this point is dedicated to explaining that Agenda 21 threatens the “American way of life” such as private travel, home ownership, family farms and private vehicle ownership as they are seen as environmentally damaging (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). There is no clarity or detail as to how these concepts are specifically related to Agenda 21 programs or how they would be harmed. Instead, there are just vague comments written in a manner that implies these concepts are threatened by the UN plan.

The next section of the resolution explains that the United Nations' concept of social justice includes "the right and opportunity of all people to benefit equally from the resources afforded us by society and the environment" (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). Alone this sentence is close to the truth explaining how social justice involving resources is described in Agenda 21 (United Nations Sustainable Development 1992). However, the next part of the sentence takes a turn by explaining that under Agenda 21 this type of social justice "would be accomplished by socialist/communist redistribution of wealth" (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). These terms are not defined in a manner that would explain why this type of redistribution should be considered harmful. The terms fit into the conspiracy narrative in a manner that implies that these economic systems are offensive and authoritarian and can only have a negative outcome. The lack of reasoning coupled with the implied negativity of the concepts constructs the ideas as bogeymen with little clarification as to why a person should be concerned. This section of the document concludes by explaining that Agenda 21 sees domestic national sovereignty as a social injustice. This point is not factual, as a primary aspect of Agenda 21 is to keep sovereignty intact by working with local governments through voluntary programs to adapt sustainability programs to their specific regional context (ICLEI 2013). However, as the loss of sovereignty to international agencies is a key factor to Agenda 21 and the New World Order conspiracy for which it is derived the concept fits well into this story and provides greater narrative probability.

With the completion of this list of claims against Agenda 21, the document then begins to list the solutions and "resolutions" to these perceived problems. First, the document explains that the "RNC recognizes the destructive and insidious nature of United Nations Agenda 21" (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). The reason for these claims is to ensure that political

elites are aware of the “dangerous intent of the plan.” In this line, we can see further invalidation of the ecological plans as it is labeled as something evil that must be stopped through educating their party members. This fits into conspiracy ideologies and narratives as they often function within a good versus evil mentality that morally obligates believers to resist the evil and act as a force for good (James 2001, 75). This is of great importance to understanding the conspiracy theory and its vague approach to explaining the “whys” of the enemies’ plan. As James Nigel points out, a conspiracy based on good-versus-evil duality does not have to explain the ideological differences with opponents. As the narrative labels the opponents as evil, their motivations are based on this inner darkness instead of differences in ideology (James 2001, 75). Thus, there is no need to explain further or seek compromise because evil is simply evil.

The next resolution to these issues is an explanatory point that is truthful and should invalidate the fear of the conspiracy theorists, by explaining that the United States is not required legally to follow Agenda 21 (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). This is true; although the United States signed on to the document at the Rio Conference; it is not a legally approved, formal treaty. If this set of resolutions was less vitriolic and conspiracy laden this statement would appear as nothing more than the truth of international and domestic laws. However, in the context of these resolutions, this statement is not intended to assure readers that Agenda 21 is a voluntary program that lacks coercive legal power over domestic actors and institutions. It is another method to strip validity and support for the program. In this context, explaining that Agenda 21 is not formally a law does not serve to quiet fears about possible overreach by IGOs or threats to domestic laws. It is included as a method to invalidate Agenda 21 and the program’s domestic supporters on the grounds that there is no legal requirement to follow the suggestions of the program. Several resolutions follow this statement by explaining

that the GOP's response will be to inform every level of the American government of the threat of Agenda 21 and its "destructive strategies for sustainable development" (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). Further, the GOP promises with this resolution that it will "endorse rejection of its (Agenda 21) radical policies" as well as any associated funding for said programs (Republican National Committee 2012, 3). Again, the resolution uses language that implies the program is disruptive and dangerous while creating a political position that rejects any compromise on the issue. .

The document closes by ensuring the reader that the party will ensure that all relevant members of their party including elected officials, members who are running for office or members who can vote at a party assembly will all receive a copy of this document and work towards making these resolutions a part of the Republican national platform. This last pledge, to make resistance to Agenda 21 part of their official party platform, did happen.

The section of the party platform that is derived from the winter meeting is discussed very briefly, but stays within conspiracy narrative. In a small sub category titled "Sovereign American Leadership in International Organizations" the document explains that the Republican party, due to concerns of sovereignty, is adamantly opposed to several international treaties (GOP Platform Committee 2012). There is a passage that claims that UN programs are responsible for forced abortions in China and Mexico. The platform explains concerns for the "long range impact" of several UN policies on the American family, such as "various declarations from the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development" (GOP Platform Committee 2012). The platform does not explicitly connect the ideas of forced abortion programs with the UNCED. However, the flow of the document does not separate the ideas or clarify why they are lumped together at all. The reader is shocked with statements about forced

abortions and then is immediately told that the GOP has concerns about American families due to a sustainability policies. Although this is not as deeply developed as the Schiller paper, these statements fit well into the Malthusian aspect of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory. In the next line of the platform, Agenda 21 is directly mentioned as follows: “We strongly reject the U.N. Agenda 21 as erosive of American sovereignty, and we oppose any form of U.N. Global Tax” (GOP Platform Committee 2012). This line flatly states that Agenda 21 will damage American sovereignty and attaches the idea that participation in the program will result in America being forced to participate in a global taxation system. This is very close to the conspiracy narrative for Agenda 21 that assumes the program would strip states of autonomy and force harsh redistributive policies on the world. And much like the conspiracy narrative in the Schiller paper, this is accomplished by making several unsubstantiated claims against Agenda 21.

With this small paragraph, the Republican platform touches on the key points of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory. It subtly and without mentioning the roots of the conspiracy, expresses fears of an authoritarian control over reproductive health, fears over erosion of sovereignty, and fear of the loss of American culture. These concepts are a nearly perfect summary of the main points of the Agenda 21 conspiracy, but are discussed with less detail than found on a conspiracy website or a work like the Schiller paper. However, the result is very similar. A narrative based on unsubstantiated claims that demonizes international political groups and assumes they are working to destroy the United States.

Before an analysis of how this proclamation affected the behavior of the GOP there is another important part of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory that requires discussion. As stated in chapter 2 of this work, the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory is built upon pre-existing conspiracy theories. One of the most important of the pre-existing conspiracy theories is the New World

Order conspiracy, a product of the John Birch Society. Within the John Birch Society “Master Conspiracy Theory” all other conspiracy theories are part of the New World Order’s plan for global communal rule (Stewart 2002, 442). Given the JBS history of embracing and spreading conspiracy theories, it is not surprising that we can find the conservative NGO at the heart of a campaign to spread the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory and pass legislation against the United Nations sustainability plan. There is a page on the website Scribd (an online digital library) created by Hal Shurtleff, a JBS coordinator for the northeastern United States (John Birch Society 2011). This page contains 48 document templates for state laws against Agenda 21 (Shurtleff 2012). The site explains that there are no documents for the states of Alabama and Michigan, as Alabama has already passed an anti-Agenda 21 bill and Michigan was working on passing a similar law when the documents were posted (Shurtleff 2012). The model bills are all essentially the same with the exception of the state’s name in each individual template. The bills start by affirming a right to due process in regards to property issues within all of the state’s political subdivisions. It then declares that no “environmental or development policy” can “infringe or restrict the property rights of the owner of the property” (Shurtleff 2012). Although this line could simply be an affirmation of property rights within the state, in the context of the subject being discussed, and the views of the NGO that constructed this document, the statement fits well in the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative that assume the U.N. sustainability plain will result in property seizures.

The next section of the bill simply outlines the reach of the proposed law and explains it would affect every level of government in the state (Shurtleff 2012). Then the template states that the law would prohibit any level of the state’s government from actions that would “deliberately or inadvertently infringe or restrict private property rights without due process, as

may be required by policy recommendations originating in, or traceable to "Agenda 21" (Shurtleff 2012). The bill further states that it would offer protection against Agenda 21 or any other international law that may conflict with the federal or state constitutions (Shurtleff 2012). This portion of the bill essentially makes a claim by offering protection from a non-existent issue. Outside of the conspiracy narrative, Agenda 21 does not enable the United Nations to seize property. However, this part of the bill explicitly supports the assumption that Agenda 21 policies may require property seizure through methods illegal in the United States. The construction of a law against this behavior implies that it not only exists, but that the issue is pressing enough that Americans need to be protected. This lends validity to conspiracy theories that espouse similar claims. This section also implies that Agenda 21 is an international law as opposed to a set of recommendations. As with many claims made by opponents of the sustainability plan, this is simply not true.

The final part of the bill⁷ deals with the groups working towards implementation of Agenda 21. The bill states that the "United Nations has accredited and enlisted numerous non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations to assist in the implementation of its policies relative to Agenda 21 around the world." It also states any level of the state's government "may not enter into any agreement; expend any sum of money, or receive funds contracting services; or giving financial aid to or from those non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations as defined in Agenda 21." This section of the bill offers a few points for analysis. First, it furthers the narrative that the NGOs and supporters of Agenda 21 are working towards goals dangerous to the American public. Additionally, this part of the proposed bill would actually have an effect on policy. The early lines about prohibiting constitutionally illegal property

⁷ There is another small paragraph that offers a timetable for implementation of the bill upon approval. However, it is simply a matter of when the provision would become active if the law was is passed and offers no relevant political discourse.

seizures by NGOs and IGOs would not cause any real change to the issues due to existing property laws, the supremacy of the American constitution in these matters, and the lack of legal and coercive power behind Agenda 21. However, the ban on governments voluntarily taking part in sustainability programs associated with Agenda 21 could actually impede sustainability plans as it would cripple the NGOs that assist local and state governments by providing, scientific information, support, and funding for sustainable development. As Agenda 21 has no enforcement power and is developed for voluntary regional projects, prohibitions on the methods for implementation could genuinely harm any future hope of utilizing the plan's environmental recommendations. An important point here is that when the conspiracy theories go this far it is no longer simply shaping norms or narratives⁸, instead it becomes a concrete factor in the political system that creates (if the law passes) a fixed official state response to the matter.

As of the writing of this document, conservative political groups, such as the GOP, Tea Party, and smaller ideologically similar groups have attempted to pass anti-Agenda 21 legislation in at least 26 states⁹ (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 209). These laws have come to vote as both "binding laws and non-binding resolutions" (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 209) (Shurtleff 2012). All of the legislation contains language that prohibits the state from working with or receiving funds from the United Nations or any of the political groups that is associated with implementation of Agenda 21 (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218).

A few of the state bills/resolutions included lines that would require the state to set up studies of the sustainability plan in order to determine if it was harmful (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218). Some of the states attempted to pass both laws and resolutions. However,

⁸ This can be damaging enough within a political community.

⁹ A few of these states attempted to pass more than one of the bills or resolutions.

only Alabama, the first state to consider this type of legislation, has passed laws against Agenda 21. As for the non-binding resolutions, only four have been approved (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218).

The very low rate at which these pieces of legislation pass may seem like a victory for sustainability activist and a social barometer for the acceptance of the conspiracy theory. In actuality, the bulk of anti-agenda 21 activists interviewed felt that even if a law was not passed it had served to further the cause by making more people aware of Agenda 21. The same sense of victory was observed in activists when legislators proposed non-binding resolutions (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218). The hope of many activists and anti-Agenda 21 groups is that the continual proposal of these bills, regardless of passage, will create a “chilling effect” on future sustainability programs by making their opponents afraid of introducing environmental programs due to the resistance they will face (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218). There is no method to determine if these bills will have any future deterrent effect on eco activism. But the above lines help us see that, at the very least, these bills have an empowering effect for anti-agenda 21 activists and groups.

A recent study of such bills and related resolutions and how they spread shows that there are several key concepts that remain consistent across the debates. The authors of the article found several factors that shaped public approval and acceptance of anti-Agenda 21 bills. Some of these factors include former military service, rates at which the state already had high levels of social spending, and the amount of vehicle dependent homes in the state¹⁰ (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218-224). However, two of the major influencing factors were whether or not the state elected Republican Tea Party candidates in the 2010 election and if the voters in the region subscribed to a set of Tea Party narratives concerning the federal government (Frick,

¹⁰ As well as many other small concepts that offered very minor changes in the statistical data.

Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 223-4). Whether or not the state elected Tea Party members in the 2010 election is in line with the analysis provided in my work. For the most part this conspiracy theory, with only a few notable exceptions¹¹ have been created, spread, and kept alive by the works of conservative think tanks and right aligned political groups and media sources. A person's adherence to Tea Party narratives is also unsurprising, however, the specific set of narratives that the researchers found to be important are quite helpful in further understanding of the situation.

The study looked at four different aspects of the Tea Party's narrative that were repeated by interviewees. They can be summarized as follows: anti-Agenda 21 activists were "Citizen Patriots" combating government overreach. Interviewees recounted belief in a mythological "Founders Tale" based on property ownership and defense of American culture from outsiders, a belief that the American middle class is threatened by lower income groups through redistributive social policies, and a sense of "romanticism" based on the struggle of "neophyte" legislators fighting the other issues (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 213). We can see that the primary concepts that are attributed to Tea Party narratives fit well within the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory. There is fear about the loss of property and the American way of life from the machinations of foreigners. The narrative also denotes a fear of redistributive principles deemed socialist or authoritarian. Finally, we see that the narrative offers a "romanticized" version of history that assigns a hero status to those combating the evil of powerful central governments. The study also found that many of the people interviewed were less concerned with loss of sovereignty than they were with The Affordable Healthcare Act. Despite the fact that the two have nothing to do with each other, a narrative that Obama was forcing healthcare legislation on people became a point of resistance and a spur to activists against other public

¹¹ Such as the group Democrats Against Agenda 21.

policies the group felt were the result of an overgrown government forcing redistributive policies on the nation (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 224). Overall, we can see a situation in which similar narratives between conspiracy theorists and the Tea Party have provided a fertile environment for elite political groups to use the concept for policy and their public rhetoric. This has allowed for the conspiracy theory to spread and become normalized as part of our political discourse and in some instances public policy.

Right Wing Media and Agenda 21

The final elite aspect of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory I will discuss in this chapter is how media sources discuss and use the concept. Many journalistic sources regularly release stories about the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory with a variety of perspectives. This ranges from discussing the situation factually with a neutral ideological stance, to left-of-center media outlets that insult and attack anti-Agenda 21 groups, to the right-wing media that often embrace some aspect of the conspiracy or at the very least find fault in Agenda 21. However, the sources that are important to this work are the third group, the news channels, radio shows, and websites that cater to political conservative audiences. These sources are important not simply because they discuss this topic with greater frequency and within the conspiracy narrative. The additional relevance of these conservative media sources appears when we understand that their role in stimulating the growth of the groups and ideas that form the basis of the anti-Agenda 21 movement is part of an intentional political maneuver. Scholarly data on the growth of the Tea Party and the resurgence of the GOP in 2010 looked at several factors that allowed this situation. One of the most important factors in the study was the growth of ideologically driven new sources.

There has been a long history of conservative media beginning in the Depression Era with news radio programs featuring religious leaders that warned against communist conspiracies, anti-American conspiracies, and other points of social anxiety (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 446). However, the very politically driven news media that we are accustomed to today did not start to take shape until the 1980s. During this period, Rush Limbaugh began a new format for a call-in talk show based on conservative politics (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 477). The result was a very popular radio show that focused on attacking liberal values and groups that opposed (or groups that were opposed by) Republican values through discourse labeled “hate radio” by its’ critics (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 477). This type of programming was previously disallowed until 1987, when Ronald Reagan ended the “Fairness Doctrine” (policies that required balanced viewpoints in news media) from broadcast rules (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 477) . Today, these conservative radio shows are an important sources of news and entertainment for nearly one-in-five Americans, mostly white, middle-class males.

The two most popular hosts, Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, actively promote Republican ideals and serves as an “echo chamber” for conservative ideology (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 477). The reach of conservative media grew much larger when News Corp unveiled the television channel Fox News in 1996. The network offered content very similar to conservative news radio under the guise of “fair and balanced” broadcast news (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013). The network slow grew in popularity with several spikes in viewership during George W. Bush’s 2000 presidential campaign, the 9/11 attacks and the election of Barack Obama. During the network’s growth, it became home to Glen Beck, a key figure in both the Tea Party’s growth as well as an adamant supporter of anti-Agenda 21 conspiracy

theories (Burack and Snyder-Hall 2013, 448). Further, there is data that show these media companies are simply one part of a much larger conservative political network that disseminates conservative political ideology and political agendas (Meagher 2012, 469-470). This vast conservative “network” funds and organizes a variety of think tanks, non-profits and the media outlets that share their ideas with the public. The result is a well-designed social network that works as a pipeline of ideas from think tanks and politicians to activists and voters (Meagher 2012, 469-470). In the remaining part of this chapter, I will discuss the messages concerning Agenda 21 that are coming from the media arm of the conservative political network.

The data provided in this section are by no means exhaustive. However, the information provides a good sample of how some of the more popular broadcasters in conservative media treat the situation. Sean Hannity is the host of both television and radio shows. During his time on the air, he has had anti-Agenda 21 supporters such as Tom Deweese (head of the conservative group American Policy Center) and Newt Gingrich (at the time a presidential candidate) on his radios show to discuss the situation (DeWeese 2012). As one may expect the guests discussed the subject within the conservative narrative previously analyzed in this work (DeWeese 2012). Past the use of the Republican conspiracy narrative, an important point to gather from these guest interviews is the empowerment it gives anti-Agenda 21 activists and the validity it lends to their cause. When an important figure in the GOP voiced his support for the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative on one of the most popular conservative new shows the story becomes much more credible to the general public than information gathered from a conspiracy website with questionable authority in the matter. This has been described in an editorial for the conservative news magazine *The New American* as an important moment for the cause as it served as “a sign

that the mainstream Conservative movement is coming on board in the Agenda 21 fight” (DeWeese 2012).

Rush Limbaugh, one of the most popular voices in conservative media, talks less about Agenda 21, but still uses the narrative of anti-Agenda 21 supporters. Internet searches of “Rush Limbaugh Agenda 21” provides several links from left leaning media sources criticizing the Republican party and pundits such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh for taking part in the conspiracy theory (Lacey 2012) (Media Matters 2014). However, these links do not document any instances of Limbaugh actually attacking Agenda 21. The search also provides several links to right wing media sources and conspiracy websites that have reposted an article by a conservative/conspiracy author Dr. Ileana Johnson Paugh (Paugh 2013). In the article, Paugh supports the conspiracy narrative associated with Agenda 21 and references a specific monologue from Rush Limbaugh that she feels supports her case. This monologue does not reference Agenda 21 either. Further searches of the media archives on Limbaugh’s site provide little support to either side’s assertion that Limbaugh regularly (or at all) discusses this subject. However, as multiple sources on both sides of the political spectrum have mentioned this specific segment in reference to Agenda 21 conspiracies it seems appropriate to include it in this analysis.

During one of his 2013 monologues, Limbaugh delivers a long speech about the evils of central planning, mass transit, and in essence any form of government interference with land development. He never expressly mentions Agenda 21 during the diatribe, however, the narrative he uses to attack the federal government, HUD, and liberal development is close to the works of anti-Agenda 21 activists (Limbaugh 2013). He discusses at length his opinion of HUD programs from the 1970s that he considers an attempt to strip away people rights in order to

create racial equity in housing (Limbaugh 2013). After this, Limbaugh switches to an assault on current HUD policies that he criticizes for attempting to regulate urban density and what type of housing can be build. This is very much within the narrative for Agenda 21 conspiracies as many of the conspiracy based fears concern a large central government that forces people from their current living situation into dense urban area. Finally, Limbaugh discusses his view that central planning of this nature is a liberal plot to keep people from living within the groups and cultures they choose (Limbaugh 2013). This part of the monologue, although not directly related to Agenda 21, touches on the narrative as it implies liberals are using central planning schemes, under the guise of equity and smart planning to chip away at American cultural norms. Of the narratives shared in this paper, Limbaugh's monologue is the least similar to the conspiracy theories of the Schiller paper and the Republican documents. However, the narrative is close enough that both sides of the Agenda 21 debate feel that his is part of the discussion and thus relevant to how they understand the situation.

The last media figure I will discuss and perhaps one of the strongest voices against Agenda 21 is conservative pundit, talk radio host, and author Glen Beck. The former Fox News host has been a strong supporter of both the Tea Party movement and anti-Agenda 21 groups on his television and radio shows. Further, his news site *The Blaze* features its own web portal specifically devoted to stories related to the topic. Additionally, he has co-authored a fictional novel about Agenda 21. What follows is a sample of Beck's work against Agenda 21.

In a television segment that is representative of his broadcasts on the subject, Beck gives an overview of his opinions and understanding of the United Nations plan. He begins by pickings small sections of the document that appear innocent in wording and gives his summary of how these ideas are actually masking plans for "central planning of all human life on earth."

(Beck 2011) He then explains this is all because of socialist redistribution that is outlined in Agenda 21 (Beck 2011). Next, Beck attacks Dr. Gro Brundtland a former Prime minister of Norway and one of the key figures in planning The Rio Summit of 1992 (Bärlund n/d). After mocking the pronunciation of her name and implying she is unattractive and dour, he states she is a member of several socialist groups and friends with Bill and Hilary Clinton (Beck 2011). Although these concepts may not seem that damning in some political circles, Beck rolls his eyes, mocks these people, and through his behavior and dismissive statements implies that these social connections are proof that Agenda 21 is much more than a simple sustainability plan. , After attacking Dr. Brundtland, Beck moves on to his next target, a figure in international politics that anyone familiar with the Schiller paper would recognize, Maurice Strong. Beck then spends several minutes talking about how Strong is part of many sustainable development plans, and implies these plans are a ploy (Beck 2011). He then states that Strong would require people to be licensed to have children and that he hopes for industrial society to collapse (Beck 2011). He offers no source or context with which these comments were supposedly made, he simply states sarcastically “no, nothing nefarious there” (Beck 2011).

Beck moves on to how this will affect viewers. He uses this time to explain that any instance in which local or state governments are attempting to use programs deemed “sustainable” are likely something that is secretly being pushed by the ICLICE. Much like other conspiracy based works concerning Agenda 21 he labels the ILCIE as a covert attempt to push United Nation control over American municipalities (Beck 2011). He then attacks several people within the ILCIE. He labels these people as either socialists or communists working towards a malevolent world government (Beck 2011). Beck then explains that Agenda 21 is a long-term covert plan to enact global government under the guise of environmentalism (Beck

2011). He goes on to talk about how large and well-entrenched the plan is within policy and international politics. After he has built a fearful monster out of Agenda 21 and its supporters, one that may seem undefeatable to viewers, Beck explains his theory that God will take part in this situation. He explains that God will step into protect freedom. He then quickly shifts the topic to how anti-Agenda 21 activists have been keeping the nation aware of the problems and are fighting back (Beck 2011). At the end of his diatribe, he warns viewers to look for the terms “sustainable planning” and “social justice” as “buzzwords” used by the enemy to trick people into believing that Agenda 21 and environmental policy are positive for society (Beck 2011). This monologue by Beck is very interesting as it uses more of the original conspiracy theory than the works of other major conservative broadcasters. Limbaugh uses a similar narrative but shifts the blame for central planning and loss of freedoms to the federal government, Beck fully embraces the narrative of the Schiller white paper. He discuss the plan and highlights aspects of Agenda 21 that fit both Malthusian and New World Order conspiracies. He attempts to explain the plan as a covert and nefarious action by a cadre of international elites. Finally, Beck’s narrative explains the situation as a battle of good vs. evil and implies that God is on the side of anti-Agenda 21 activists.

This monologue provides us with a good example of the style and narrative in which Beck’s broadcasts discuss Agenda 21. However, this is not the only method that Beck has used to malign the sustainability plan. Beck’s news website *The Blaze* features a special section that deals with nothing but Agenda 21 conspiracy theories (The Blaze Inc. 2015). This section of the website features dozens of articles from the last few years that discuss instances in which groups have fought against Agenda 21 or a local sustainability plan is being labeled as part of the

conspiracy (The Blaze Inc. 2015). These articles all work within the frame that Beck has developed to support his assertions about the evil of Agenda 21.

The last and perhaps strongest piece of work Beck has put forth concerning Agenda 21 is a fictional novel he “co-authored” with Harriet Parke. The novel is titled *Agenda 21* and is a dystopian science fiction novel set approximately fifteen years after the implementation of the United Nations sustainability plan (Beck and Parke, *Agenda 21* 2012). The plot of the book takes several aspects from classic dystopian science fiction novels. The setting is a bleak totalitarian world in which the protagonist has imperfect/unreliable information about the world in which she lives, creating a very similar social settings to both George Orwell’s classic *1984* as well as Ayn Rand’s novella *Anthem* (Orwell 1961) (Rand 1995). The book centers around a teenage girl who was born shortly after the implementation of Agenda 21 and describes her experiences in a nightmarish world created by the provisions of the sustainability plan. The main plot points are directly related to the conspiracy narrative surrounding Agenda 21. The main characters live in a small dense settlement under the control of a distant authoritarian centralized government that serves as the New World Order (Beck and Parke 2012, 10-13). The society appears very underdeveloped and has strict controls on the use of technology, energy, food and any natural resource (Beck and Parke 2012, 10-12). These aspects of the book are much more vivid than the warnings of the Schiller paper, yet follow the narrative almost perfectly.

There are other sections of the book that illustrate the narrative of conspiracy theorists, such as a scene that describes a shrine-like feeding area that produces fat, over fed squirrels and wildlife, while humans starve (Beck and Parke, *Agenda 21* 2012, 29). This scene appears to address the parts of the conspiracy theory that assume that the Agenda 21 plan is run by an eco-cult that worships nature and has little regard for human life. Another important sub-plot is how

reproduction and population are strictly regulated through either a centralized breeding program for the young or a euthanasia program for the old and weak (Beck and Parke, *Agenda 21* 2012, 34-40). These points supply the Malthusian aspect of the conspiracy that warns of harsh government controls concerning population and reproduction. Overall, the novel follows the predictions of conspiracy theorists, covering all of the major points of works, such as the Schiller paper with graphic and often violent scenarios.

However, it is not simply what is said that is important with this work. For this discussion, it is important to understand the type of book one encounters when reading *Agenda 21*. This work is not an “ethical political novel” that seeks to provoke an interest and open discussion about a social situation (McAlear 2009, 197-198). Instead this novel is written with methodological and narrative tactics (whether intentional or not) that mirror propaganda novels such as *The Turner Diaries* (McAlear 2009, 198). The novel does not contain situations of moral ambiguity that could lead one to debate the concepts or wrestle with questions that arise from the context of the work. Instead, the work is written as a personal narrative that follows the perceptions of a single character. This format has been analyzed by scholars as a less effective method for provoking discussion with a political novel and as a method better suited for the dispersal of propaganda and persuasion (McAlear 2009, 197). Beck and Parke’s novel follows a similar method used for the creation of the *The Turner Diaries* an infamous dystopian propaganda novel written by a white supremacist about American society after a race war (McAlear 2009). Further, Beck and Parke’s novel *Agenda 21* has other similarities in narrative construction with *The Turner Diaries*. Both novels are written with framing and narratives in which the current era is corrupted, and a better future is expected to come from a new era that takes people back to the purity of a lost past (Beck and Parke 2012, 347-353) (McAlear 2009,

194). These concepts form the basis of the resolution in Beck and Parke's novel as the protagonists flee their prison-like society to escape the current totalitarian order and to rediscover social conditions from the past before Agenda 21 (Beck and Parke, *Agenda 21* 2012).

This is much different than other political dystopian novels such as Alexis Huxley's *A Brave New World* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Although the format of these novels do have some similarity with Parke and Beck's *Agenda 21* novel and the *Turner Diaries*, using the standards applied above they also have a greater "ethical content" (McAlear 2009, 198). This is based on the structure of the novels that focus on the view point of various characters, show more than one moral viewpoint and leave the reader with a bit of tension as to why people follow the authoritarian governments and how the situations occurred (Bradbury 1951) (Huxley 1932) (McAlear 2009, 197-199). In works such as *The Turner Diaries* and *Agenda 21*, these concepts are notably missing and the antagonists are simply evil or villainous as opposed to complex characters making decision within a social context that effects their motivations and actions.

A final point about the novel *Agenda 21* is the special afterward written by Beck. In a short section at the end of the book, Beck addresses readers directly. He compliments Parke for her work and explains that the method of using a novel to tell the story has had a great influence in spreading awareness about the issues (Beck and Parke 2012, 356-7). Beck then explains that the novel is fiction, that he is not a conspiracy theorist, and that the scenarios in the novel are the most extreme examples of what could happen under Agenda 21 (Beck and Parke, *Agenda 21* 2012, 357). However, immediately after he assures readers that the events of the novel probably will not happen, he then offers several pages of information to show how it could happen. This includes a short outline of the conspiracy theory concerning Agenda 21. The outline includes a list of supporters of the plan such as Maurice Strong and their supposed connections with

socialist groups; a primer on how to watch for any language usage that could be connected to the plan, and a list of resources for readers to better inform themselves about the dangers of the plan (Beck and Parke 2012, 358-376). Further, Beck urges activism against the plan at every level of government. Finally, he finishes the work by thanking the Republican Party for officially supporting anti-Agenda 21 movements through the resolution approved at the GOP 2012 Winter Meeting (Beck and Parke 2012, 379).

This is a fascinating piece of work for this analysis. It fully embraces the conspiracy narrative concerning Agenda 21 and gives graphic illustration as to how the world could look if conspiracy theorists are correct. The novel is entertaining, yet never really deviates from the established framework that views Agenda 21 as a Malthusian plot by the New World Order to control all life. The novel is a piece of political fiction, yet it is written with methodology that is better suited for propaganda. After 350 pages of anxiety-inducing prose, Beck directly addresses the reader and supplies ample amounts of information that helps to add validity and authority to the work. Although he attempts to downplay the possibilities of the horrors in the novel, he only does so for a few sentences before he begins to preach as to how this all could happen. The novel as a whole gives more weight and detail to the conspiracy than a non-fictional account, as anything that seems too implausible can be discounted as fiction as opposed to the ravings of a paranoid person.

In this chapter, we have seen how a network of conservative think tanks, political parties and media sources have adapted and used an older conspiracy theory to modern public policy. In the final chapter of this work, I will discuss some of the ramifications of this behavior and what this type of behavior could mean in the future.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this work, I have attempted to explore and explain the evolution and usage of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory. For the majority of this analysis, I have looked at the narratives used by conspiracy theorists and political groups to rationalize and justify their opposition to a several decade old, voluntary sustainability plan. What was once a grand malevolent style conspiracy theory cobbled together out of existing Malthusian and New World Order conspiracy theories by fringe elements of the conservative/conspiracy crowd has evolved into a mainstream political concept.

For the most part this political phenomenon is a product of conservative aligned political groups. A few exceptions exist, such as Democrats Against Agenda 21. The group is led by Rosa Korie, a self-proclaimed Democrat, who states she is in favor of many left leaning causes such as marriage equity (though oddly described as pro-gay marriage), civil rights, and other progressive causes (Korie n/d). Despite this assurance that she is an active part of the political left in America, Korie's website offers little proof of her claimed political allegiance. The website is filled with quotes and videos supplying the same conservative conspiracy narrative discussed in this work, including links to her appearances on Glenn Beck's television program (Korie n/d). However, Korie is an exception to the general rule of who is spreading this type of narrative. From its creation, the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory has been the work of conservative and right wing political groups. As we have seen previously in this document, the Schiller Institute, under the leadership of Lyndon LaRouche published a conspiracy narrative for its extremely conservative followers. The Schiller paper was based on the works of other conservative and conspiracy-based groups, such as the John Birch Society and their New World

Order master conspiracy theory. Then we see the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory becoming more mainstream and part of the Republican Party's public political discourse and public policy. This occurred with the rise of a well-developed network of conservative political groups and partisan media outlets as well as the growth of the Tea Party.

This summary of my previous analysis helps us to see a few things. The most obvious is that this current conspiracy theory is the product of the Republican Party and their support network. The states that have attempted to pass or have passed anti-Agenda 21 legislation or resolutions with small exception are all "red states" or states that primarily elected Republicans and voted heavily for Tea Party candidates in the 2010 elections (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218-222). The bulk of the mainstream media that supports anti-Agenda 21 movements and conspiracy theories are all part of a well-developed and well-funded conservative social network (Meagher 2012, 469-471). All of these factors help demonstrate that homophily is a factor in this situation.

Homophily is a term for the concept that humans tend to associate and form groups due to similarities in ideology and social status (Lazer, et al. 2010, 249). This factor of human interaction draws people with similar viewpoints together for a variety of reasons. Some homophilic behavior is simple human psychology and the fact that we are attracted to people with similarities to ourselves (Lazer, et al. 2010, 250). Homophily is also shaped by systemic factors that often result in work places and living situations in which people of similar attitudes and socio-economic backgrounds often end up in groups (Lazer, et al. 2010, 250). There are several reasons that humans have a tendency towards this behavior. These include, gathering information, forming strong social bonds, a sense of validity that comes from being with others of similar viewpoints and an avoidance of "cognitive dissonance" that can occur in relationships

with people that are ideologically dissimilar (Lazer, et al. 2010, 250). Each of these factor help to explain the situation concerning Agenda 21. With the creation and growth of conservative media networks there is ample “news” that provides an ideologically similar outlet for gathering information. If this source is one of the more popular conservative news sources, the viewer will be receiving the anti-Agenda 21 movement’s version of the narrative. This factor could greatly increase the spread of this conspiracy narrative as the people often discussing Agenda 21 such as Glenn Beck, Rosa Koire, and even state legislators while arguing for anti-Agenda 21 legislation, encourage their audience to do their own research on the topic (Beck and Parke, Agenda 21 2012, 357-379) (Koire n/d) (Jost 2013). If a person that does such at the behest of a conservative media figure or politician and the research is preformed via conservative media, they will find ideologically similar information that adds validity to the conspiracy narrative. Through this human tendency towards similarity and a well-developed political network designed to take advantage of such behavior we can begin to understand how an obscure, three decade old conspiracy theory is shaping current political behavior.

Another important factor to address is the subtle changes in the narrative. Although we can see a consistence in the manner with which conservatives and conspiracy theorist understand Agenda 21, there is some variation as to how each source tells the story. There are a few concepts that help explain this. Foremost, is that narratives must change and adapt with social context. Conspiracy theories are often an indicator of points of social anxiety (Parish 2001, 2-10). As the reasons for this fear shift with the passage of time and new events, conspiracy theories must adapt as well. Another important factor is that political and social elites have an interest in keeping their narratives believable to their audience. When elites construct alternative narratives to explain situations they go through a process “selective appropriation” in which parts

of the story are taken from existing understandings of culture and history (Bacon 2012, 781). When they supply the alternative explanation in hopes of it becoming the primary narrative on the subject, they must be careful that their viewpoint is believable to their audience or they “risks unraveling the narrative, with potentially catastrophic results for narrators with regard to their legitimacy” (Bacon 2012, 782-783). A final narrative-shaping factor is that conspiracy theories as a whole are starting to change. Peter Knight discusses this in a study of different narratives concerning the 9/11 conspiracy theory. He observes that newer conspiracy theories are less likely to blame singular agents or malevolent secret societies (Knight, *Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States* 2008, 193). Instead, there is a growing trend that conspiracy theories are becoming “a portrait of power as decentered and dispersed into a vast network of interlocking vested interests within the wider process of globalization, a picture that cannot easily be pinned down to an evil cabal, even if at the surface level it is presented in those traditional terms” (Knight, *Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States* 2008, 193). In essence, we can understand that conspiracy theories may change over time in small ways due to social context and how the audience’s expectations shape the narrative.

This helps us understand how the Schiller Institute and Glenn Beck may have a slight different story than the RNC as to the dangers of and who is behind Agenda 21, yet the narrative remains basically the same. It has been adapted by the speaker in order to ensure the belief of its intended audience, while at the same time careful taking the important points from past iterations of the narrative in order to maintain legitimacy. Further, changes in the narrative that move the concept away from global malevolent conspiracy theories to an approach that blames the collusion of IGOs, NGOs, and Agenda 21 supporters show a broader understanding of

globalization and political interconnectedness amongst conspiracy theorists and anti-Agenda 21 activists.

A final point worth mention in this analysis is the possible damage that the anti-Agenda 21 movement may cause. Although the bills and resolutions put forth by the GOP have had little success, they still serve as a source of empowerment for anti-Agenda 21 activists (Frick, Weinzimmer and Waddell 2015, 218). Further there is a commonly repeated theme amongst Agenda 21 conspiracy theorists that attempts to label nearly any term related to ecological and environmentalism as covert methods to trick people (Beck and Parke 2012, 375-376) (Republican National Committee 2012, 3) (The Schiller Institute 1991, 28-29). These attacks on sustainability concepts and vocabulary are aimed at Agenda 21; however many of the ideas are much broader ideas that are used to describe nearly any type of environmental movement. If conspiracy theorists co-op these terms and construct them as negative concepts within the debate about Agenda 21, there is little reason to believe they will accept the concepts in other situations. This leaves us with a political situation in which the basic concepts and narratives required to discuss and solve important problems are fractured and a point of contention before the real debates even begin.

However, my research was not able to prove that this narrative has had a large impact on public policy or public opinion. As discussed in the previous chapter, nearly all of the anti-Agenda 21 laws and resolutions have failed to pass. Further, the most important question to this study is whether the conspiracy narratives concerning Agenda 21 have had an effect on American political norms. Currently, it appears that anti-Agenda 21 media, legislation, and activism has not had a significant effect. Utilizing several public opinion polls there appears to be no major resistance to either Agenda 21 or sustainability programs.

A 2012 poll by the American Planning Association found that 85% of respondents when asked, “Do you support Agenda 21” did not know enough about the program to answer the question (American Planning Association 2012, 22). Of the remaining 15 percent of respondents, 9% supported the plan, while only 6 percent opposed Agenda 21 (American Planning Association 2012, 22). Further, polls concerning sustainability and the environment do not give any indication that anti-Agenda 21 movement is shaping Americans’ view of ecologically centered public policy. This is important, as the narrative discussed in this work often labels sustainability and many environmental concepts as part of the conspiracy.

A 2014 Gallup poll about global warming revealed that only 25% of respondents had no concerns about global warming (Saad 2014). This is 3% drop from the 28% of respondents who did not believe in global warming in 2010 (Saad 2014). The Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative explains that global warming is a false concept, manufactured for the sake of justifying political controls by international elites. If the narrative was having a great effect on the American public we would expect to see an increase in the number of people who disbelieve global warming is occurring and is an important issue. However, this poll helps us understand there is no increase and actually a slight drop in the number of people who hold this opinion.

A 2013 poll showed that 66% of Americans believed that the villain of the conspiracy narrative, the United Nations “plays a necessary role in the world today” (Jones and Wendt 2013) Of the respondents who identified as Republicans, 46% said they thought the UN was necessary (Jones and Wendt 2013). If the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative was greatly shaping Americans perceptions of the program and the United Nations, it is not likely that the majority of Americans would respond that the United Nations is necessary. Further, as the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative is disseminated by a conservative policy and media network, it does not

seem likely that the narrative is shaping norms if almost half of Republican respondents view the United Nations favorably.

Finally in a large data set that looked at trends in environmental polls since over the last few decades there is little data to support postulation that Agenda 21 conspiracy narratives have led to negative perceptions of sustainability programs and environmental politics. The consolidation of these polls show an overall trend in which the majority of respondents were concerned about ecological issues and in most cases backed some type of political response from the federal government (Gallup 2014). An important question to my work asked if the United States should sign a legal binding treaty based on the Copenhagen climate change summit. The majority of respondents (55%) thought that the U.S. should sign the treaty, with only 38% opposed to the plan (Gallup 2014). This is not what one would expect if the conspiracy narrative had convinced people that international sustainability plans were part of an evil plot. The fact that a majority of people believe that the United States should sign an international treaty intended to ensure sustainability and protect the environment, helps us understand that the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative has not greatly shaped public opinion.

These polls help us see that American norms and political views have not been greatly affected by the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative. The vast majority of people do not even know enough about the program to decide if they support or oppose it. Of the very small percent of people that do have an opinion, less than half are opposed to the program. If we look further at public opinion regarding sustainability programs and environmental politics, we see environmental and sustainability issues are important to most Americans. Further, Americans see the United Nations as a necessary institution and believe that their country should participate in international agreements concerning the environment. All of these polls ask questions about

concepts that fit within the Agenda 21 conspiracy narrative. However, the available data does not show an increase resistance to or disbelief in these ideas. For now, it appears that this narrative is not a strong influence on American public policy or norms.

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