

Chapter 1

Globalism, Oil, and the Power Elites

Now to be sure, neither expansion nor conquest of nature was unknown before the onset of the capitalist world-economy in the sixteenth century. . . . What we mean by historical capitalism is a system in which the institutions that were constructed made it possible for capitalist values to take priority, such that the world-economy was set upon the path of the commodification of everything in order that there be a ceaseless accumulation of capital for its own sake.

—Immanuel Wallerstein, *The End of the World As We Know It*

In the coming decades the twenty-first century will increasingly become characterized and understood as a period of stark and fundamental historic transition. This transition will likely be characterized by escalating and often violent resource conflicts throughout the world. These conflicts will be precipitated by an expanding human population guided by an overarching economic growth agenda and worldview proselytized by the current economic and corporate elites primarily centered or originating in the United States of America.¹

The battle is on for the earth's remaining natural resources, and unprecedented expansion of human population coupled with an American-style propagation of an unlimited economic "growth paradigm" is forcing a critical historic transition. This epochal change or transition may become portrayed as a descent into ever-expanding violent conflict, chaos, and anarchy fueled by ruthless competition over Earth's remaining natural resources. It is unlikely that the current state of affairs and rate of greed and acquisition, especially characterizing American economic consumption, will prevail at this pace without forcing severe environmental and social conflict and chaos.

The term *globalization*, withstanding its plethora of interpretations, definitions, and approaches, may be understood within the context of my argument as a primarily American corporate and economic elitist view of the world that perceives the world's remaining resources—especially fossil fuels, and specifically oil and gas—as commodities for the taking by the strongest and the richest. In the worldview of American-led global capitalism, the remaining and rapidly dwindling fossil fuel resources are sources of huge profits propelled by rising prices and consumer demand at home. Wealthy elites in the oil industry, in conjunction with their political and military allies and cronies, are scouring the globe to locate, extract, and transport dwindling oil and gas resources to their increasing numbers of demanding consumers, especially American consumers.

In this book I argue on the theoretical level that globalization, for its various interpretations, is fundamentally a twenty-five-year story about the ascendance of business values and practice over the practice of public politics and government, the co-optation or takeover of democratic and representative government by business, financial, and corporate elites.² This is a crucial assumption, that the U.S. national government is now a corporate state, whose increasingly privatized corporate military, funded by the average American taxpayer, is enforcing corporate global strategies to secure the remaining stores of natural resources, mostly in the form of oil and gas.³

If the invasion and attempted colonization of Iraq is not entirely about the seizure of up to 225 billion barrels of possible oil reserves, then it certainly is a significant part of the strategy, and likely was discussed and planned during Vice President Dick Cheney's fourteen-week energy task force in the spring of 2001.⁴ The foreign policy of the neoconservative oil corporate Bush administration centers upon the targeting and seizure of oil and gas resources. The U.S. federal government is an oil government, staffed by former (and future, once they leave office) oil company executives and board members.

There does not appear to be a more crucial subject at this time in history than the nexus of two issues: how multinational corporations and big money are buying and influencing politicians and affecting policy decisions—destroying the processes of good public governance—and how the energy industry, exemplified by the big oil monopolies, is fighting with all of its financial power to keep the level of power and profit to which it has become accustomed throughout the twentieth century, the “oil century.”

The most exponential expansion of oil exploration and production for profit is causing parallel dramatic escalations of conflict mostly throughout the developing world, from the Middle East to Africa to Southeast Asia to South America. Oil production is on the decline, and according to expert energy analysts, energy derived from oil and gas will soon begin to decline by

2 percent a year, causing massive direct and indirect economic and social hemorrhages to industrial society.⁵ Because of this decline, oil companies are desperately searching the globe for new and economically viable production and transportation opportunities. Expanded exploration and production is in turn causing an increasing number of conflicts with local and/or indigenous populations that are “in the way” of these proposed start-ups for oil and extraction.⁶ Unfortunately, given an (American) economic growth worldview applied to political decision making, these fossil fuel resource wars are only going to get worse, as the wealthy appropriate the resource profits for themselves at the expense of local populations, and ultimately the planet. Resource conflicts are endemic to the developing world, as transnational corporations, exemplified by the oil companies, take advantage of weak or nonexistent national government labor and environmental regulations—weak law—and acquire crucial influence among national, regional, and local political elites enabling access to the resources.

CORPORATE GLOBALISM AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

This book assumes that global (fossil fuel) resource wars will dramatically escalate over the upcoming decades of the twenty-first century. My argument and discussion will address two primary theoretical questions. First, *who* is causing these wars or conflicts, that is, where does the true power lie? I argue that the private corporate sector is really in power, using political elites as front men to further its profiteering interests. That is, if democracy ever did exist in the United States—and it never did for indigenous peoples or black slaves—at present it has surely denigrated into a corporate state. Big business dictates policy to political front men and uses the Pentagon as its global police force. No corporate sector better embodies this process at present than the oil industry, and a discussion of the Alaska case is used as a rather bold, clear example of how a resource war is precipitated by economic elites and their powerful political allies.

Much of my argument involves the *naming* of the top-down hierarchical power structure and cause in these conflicts, naming the private corporate powers behind the political fronts, thus describing the corporate state.⁷ Second, who is fighting this development and appropriation of resources, and what are they fighting for? Thus while the first question entails the naming of the political-economic power structure and the corporate elites, the second question confronts the fundamental clash over worldviews and a discussion of why and how these values and ideologies collide. What is at stake are deeply opposed worldviews concerning how humans perceive and interact with nature and other humans, and this places local struggles over

development and resource conflicts within ever-expanding spatial contexts at the regional, national, and global levels.

The “anatomy” of resource conflicts reveals a concentration of elite political-economic power motivated by private profit, in stark contrast to those visions promoting public-spirited ecological sustainability and decentralized, local forms of grassroots democratic practice. A primary goal of this book is to portray clashing twenty-first century ideologies against the wide canvas of globalization. Globalization has been variously characterized by leading theorists, covering a diversity of perspectives. The term *globalization* itself is problematic, as it poses a myriad number of definitions and approaches as there appear to be new ideas, social movements, manufactured forms of knowledge and information, and plural forms of cultural and social identities. One scholar has used the term to denote “a compression of time and space.”⁸ Indeed, the almost dizzying effects of meteoric technological advancement in communications and transportation, the global flow of unprecedented amounts of capital and investment, and unprecedented numbers of human beings migrating across cultural and state boundaries all culminate in a compression of time and space not seen in the 100,000-year history of human civilization.

My purpose in this book is to focus upon one defining element that has shaped and driven the process of globalization. Manfred Steger, a preeminent scholar in critical globalization studies, calls this defining force “globalism,” and he crucially distinguishes it from the broader and often inchoate term *globalization*. Globalism, asserts Steger, refers to a specific political-economic ideological project manufactured and promoted by neoliberal or modern classical Anglo-American economic interests. I use the term *neoconservative* throughout this book to convey the same meaning. Steger points out that in the past three decades,

Anglo-American proponents of the nineteenth-century market utopia have found in the concept of “globalization” a new guiding metaphor for their neoliberal message. The central tenets of neoliberalism include the primacy of economic growth; the importance of free trade to stimulate growth; individual choice; the reduction of government regulation; and the advocacy of an evolutionary model of social development anchored in the Western experience and applicable to the entire world.⁹

The “evolutionary model of social development” is akin to what I refer to as “Manifest Destiny” in later chapters, which logically extends to what Andrew Bacevich calls “Pax Americana,” derived from a parallel to Roman imperialism.¹⁰ Pax Americana consists of nothing less than an American political-economic-militarist effort to spread and enforce American liberal

democratic capitalism across the globe. It is corporate-militarist globalism, securing consumer markets, by force if necessary.

Steger argues that the globalist neoliberal project is in essence one ideology of many in the constellation of globalization. The neoliberals or neoconservatives have merely harnessed a sophisticated public relations machine—propaganda, in Noam Chomsky's analyses—to convince a naïve public that *laissez-faire* liberal capitalist ideology is actually nothing less than an end point of history, a culmination of natural scientific process and evolution. The mistake, Steger would argue, is to confuse a political economic ideology with some kind of inevitable evolutionary process interpreted through a lens of scientific method.

Thus the Anglo-American global capitalist agenda is but one competing ideology, not a teleological culmination of historical grand design in the twenty-first century. My purpose in this book is to illuminate the presence of some important alternative ideologies to this powerful globalist agenda, as witnessed in one case study. The need to peacefully and ideologically confront and challenge the American corporate-militarist project, *Pax Americana*, in the upcoming years will determine for the most part the type of world succeeding generations will find themselves living within. It is this second great global force, public civil society, in Chomsky's view, that poses the greatest threat to the legitimation of the corporate-political-military power elites.¹¹

Sociologist Amory Starr's theory on anti-globalist resistance movements provided initial inspiration for the development of this work. Six concepts describe Starr's understanding of global corporate economic development in the Third World, concepts that apply to indigenous societies in the First World as well: growth, enclosure, dependency, colonialism, anti-democracy, and consumption.

In summary, economic growth threatens to destroy global ecological systems as the South attempts to industrialize at accelerated rates to match the North, and as northern transnational corporations work to exploit natural and human resources in the Third World. China is a perfect example of this phenomenon, especially in its meteoric rise in oil use, thus contributing to global warming at accelerating rates.

Global corporations either purchase local land or work with local allies in these countries, displacing indigenous farmers or forest peoples, "enclosing" the natural resources for the benefit of exports and consumers in developed countries. The ANWR case fits this model, but it may be narrowed to the analysis of political-economic control over nonrenewable fossil fuel resources in indigenous lands, a phenomenon taking place all over the world.

In the dependency concept of the model, indigenous populations become dependent upon introduced monetized economies, providing cheap labor for foreign corporations, and this economic colonialism thus becomes anti-democratic. In

Starr's model, consumption accompanies economic growth as an ideology, a cultural form of consciousness, destroying—subtly—indigenous or local traditions and legacies, often spiritual and religious, in the face of homogenous consumer acculturation and the commodification of human beings. These factors all apply in varying degrees to the ANWR story, to the “corporate and anti-corporate natives.” This model is relevant to tying corporate activity to the direct and often indirect economic abuses of indigenous or local peoples and cultures throughout the world.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY POWER ELITES

Starr's economic growth and enclosure concepts align with current and future goals of the Anglo-American oil-military power complex. The major oil corporations are utilizing military power to forcibly take oil and gas fields throughout the world, relying upon outright force once peaceful economic enclosure becomes impossible. Iraq is the prime example, however, U.S. military force is supporting oil company aims on all continents—U.S. military bases, advisors, and private military firms are guarding oil sites and pipelines in Columbia, the Caspian region, Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East. In Burma, Unocal just hires the local military dictatorship to take care of “security.”¹²

Throughout this book I refer to the U.S. “oil-military complex.” It is a twenty-first century force of unprecedented economic and technological power. Perhaps no theoretical work better predicted this monopoly of political-economic power than C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*, first published in 1956. In Mills' analysis of the American elite decision makers, a triad of power largely inaccessible to the middle and lower levels of society is outlined. This elite of corporate executives and lawyers, military generals, and politicians in the executive branch forms an interlocking directorate overseeing vastly enlarged and centralized economic, military, and political hierarchies. These institutional domains are structural in the sense that individuals are for the most part absorbed into their respective yet overlapping value systems.

At mid-twentieth century, Mills was actually writing about the U.S. corporate-military globalism of the twenty-first century. The corporate-military-political executive directorate encapsulates U.S. domestic and foreign policy alike, driving corporate globalism. The “higher circles” of these three institutional hierarchies are for the most part fluid and interchangeable, as corporate executives, generals, and politicians in the executive branch work in a revolving door, moving freely among the three domains. In 1956, Mills was careful to avoid characterizing this triad of elite decision making as being perfectly conspiratorial or always unified in its goals, values, and policy making.

However, the corporate monopolization of economic power of the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century dwarfed anything seen at the time of Mills' writing. Many of the top corporations at the time merged in the late 1990s, and some of the prominent ones are the subjects in this book. These oil companies now wield enormous political-economic power and are more closely allied with the military elites and political front men in Washington, D.C., than ever before. In this sense, Mills foresaw the future.

Mills' theory of the elite triad is relevant for any study of the oil-military complex today and the upcoming decades, as the key lies in the relative power of each domain relative to the other two. Corporate monopolization and control over the political domain is not new to the neoliberal globalist project of the past thirty years since the late 1970s, for corporations exerted great control in the United States from circa 1890 until the early 1930s and the New Deal. And contrary to other analyses, Mills did not believe that the political domain of the New Deal era clearly reestablished control over the corporate domain but merely equalized relations, infusing a balance of interests such as labor into the political mix.

With the advent of World War II, and the succeeding Cold War until 1989, the U.S. military rose to unparalleled levels of power, and in the globalist era it has come to dominate the international arena. Through the progression of American history, as noted by Mills, the political domain has diminished in power relative to the corporate and military sectors: "Insofar as the structural clue to the power elite today lies in the political order, that clue is the decline of politics as genuine and public debate of alternative decisions."¹³ Mills believed that since 1939, the attention of the power elite directorate shifted from domestic toward international affairs, and that "Since the governing apparatus of the United States has by long historic usage been adapted to and shaped by domestic clash and balance, it has not, from any angle, had suitable agencies and traditions for the handling of international problems."¹⁴ In Mills' diagram of the power triad, then, the U.S. military filled that political vacuum to essentially take a dominant role in international affairs and U.S. foreign policymaking, along with the corporate "chieftains." Thus today we see the corporate oil-military complex as the primary driver of policy in the political executive branch. Mills' corporate chieftains and "warlords" wield the political power. Chalmers Johnson and Bacevich refer to these military warlords as the new Roman "proconsuls," exerting enormous political decision-making ability in global affairs.¹⁵

We may view the corporate oil-military complex in light of Mills' concept of the American "permanent-war economy and a private-corporation economy":

American capitalism is now in considerable part a military capitalism, and the most important relation of the big corporation to the state rests

on the coincidence of interests between military and corporate needs, as defined by the warlords and the corporate rich. Within the elite as a whole, this coincidence of interest between the high military and the corporate chieftains strengthens both of them and further subordinates the role of the merely political men. Not politicians but corporate executives sit with the military and plan the organization of the war effort.¹⁶

In this view the military capitalism of private corporations exists within a weakened and merely formal democratic system “containing a military order already quite political in outlook and demeanor”:

Accordingly, at the top of this structure, the power elite has been shaped by the coincidence of interest between those who control the major means of production and those who control the newly enlarged means of violence; from the decline of the professional politician and the rise to explicit political command of the corporate chieftains and the professional warlords; from the absence of any genuine civil service of skill and integrity, independent of vested interests.¹⁷

Erily, this describes the American political-economic landscape today, sixty years after its writing. The corporate-military elites become more unified in dramatic fashion, for example, in dominating the world for the last fossil fuel reserves, while mid-level political interest groups and politicians battle each other to perpetual stalemates, and the lower-level masses remain fragmented and oblivious to a sophisticated propaganda machine designed to draw attention away from the secret decisions made by the elites. This is a theory of American political-economic power, and as such it is highly relevant to any discussion of twenty-first century corporate oil-military globalism, as well as the competing ideologies challenging such a liberal capitalist global order, the Manifest Destiny of Pax Americana. This “American Peace” is already precipitating violent resource wars across the globe, conflicts eliciting deep-seated ideological, political-economic, and cultural clashes.

SCALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARCTIC REFUGE

This book focuses upon one of those wars, perhaps the most widely recognized and prominent resource conflict in the United States over the past thirty-five years. It has certainly intensified over the past decade to reach a level of white-hot polarization of values, ideas, emotions, and political strategies and tactics, all culminating in what I argue is a conflict representative

of a fundamental clash of the German *weltanschauung*, the term for world outlook, or worldview.¹⁸

The battle or resource war over the ANWR is far more significant both on a global level and on a historic level—in spatial and temporal scope— than is typically portrayed as the fight to protect public, federal, and wilderness lands against development interests in industry and politics. Indeed, it is comprised of the uniquely American environmental battle to protect wild public lands from development, however, it symbolizes much more. It is far more representative of this critical juncture in our historical period, the “transition point” as it were between two roads: the choosing of hopeful values and socially and ecologically sound visions for our future relationships to other human beings and the natural world, along with just political-economic policies to implement these values, versus the current values and policies instilled by economic elites to garner greed and profit at the expense of the human poor and disadvantaged, as well as the destruction of the natural world, including nonhuman species of life.¹⁹

The Arctic Refuge “war” takes on real and symbolic value of historic and global significance and needs to be understood in context of global (spatial) and historical (temporal) scales for its value as a precursor for events to come. The war of values and ideas over the refuge, and the political tactics stemming from those contrasting ideologies, is a model or blueprint for resource conflicts in the era of corporate globalization, where wealthy and powerful economic elites use their political “front men” to pursue and obtain favorable political policy decisions and corporate subsidies—paid by the public—favoring business elites. No example is clearer or more apropos at present than in viewing the relationships between oil companies and national politicians in the United States.

It may be, and it has been argued, that Third World political ecology, or the study of how powerful transnational political-economic elites exploit and degrade natural environments as well as the poor peoples who live in those environments, cannot be applied to a conflict in the developed world, such as the United States.²⁰ I argue that it may certainly be applied, for the plight of the Gwich’in Athabaskan indigenous people at the heart of the conflict in the refuge is little different than that of any materially disadvantaged, locally based community around the globe currently targeted by oil and gas development.

The Arctic Refuge has not entailed overt violent conflict—yet. Its remarkable and unique characteristic among global “resource wars” is precisely because the vast coalition defending the refuge and the indigenous people fighting oil development in that area has been so successful to this day. The success story of the anti-development alignment of environmental, indigenous, religious, labor, investment, and national political congressional actors

makes the apparently nonviolent refuge conflict a special model in the study of resource conflicts, by virtue of its popular and grassroots democratic action and mobilization network and appeal to the legal and political process at the national level. Activists long involved in the issue emphasize that the battle to deter oil development in the refuge has been nothing short of a “miracle” in the face of incredible political-economic power, some of the most powerful and richest forces in the world.

ASSAULT ON THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS BY WEALTHY ELITES

Still, the refuge may be developed at any time in the relative near future, given the change in just one or two votes of a neoconservative-controlled Congress, specifically the Senate, where the proposals to drill have been stopped time and again. Thus the future of the refuge, like any pristine natural area in the world inhabited by indigenous peoples affected by oil development, is tenuous at best, given the profit-crazed agenda by the federal oil administration now in control. The only reason the Arctic Refuge has remained unscathed to date is due to an amazing and a dedicated phalanx of diverse nongovernmental organizations that have labored long and tirelessly to lobby congressional members and to educate the general public all over the country as to the long-term significance of saving a natural area, its wildlife, and the entire culture of an indigenous people whose very way of life personifies the principles of sustainability and subsistence in contrast to short-term economic greed and growth.

A political ecological approach to resource conflict in the United States is applicable at this point in history, precisely because democratic processes and honest representative government have been severely weakened and continue to be weakened by the power of big money corrupting the political process, just as in the traditional developing or “Third World.” Concerning political corruption, I argue that the United States is rapidly coming to demonstrate political qualities that have always characterized developing countries, exhibiting the same patterns of an utter disregard for democratic process and the respect for a fair and an uncorrupted legal system. In the terms of one activist, the “violence of money”²¹ is thoroughly corrupting a relatively sound constitutional structure. The financial interests and obligations of elected and appointed public officials are quickly dismantling any respect for representative government and accountability to those politicians’ constituents.

For example, three weeks prior to the 2004 presidential election, the U.S. Senate, by a bipartisan vote of 69 to 17, voted for a \$136 billion reduction in corporate taxes. Heavily lobbied by business, the Senate replaced a \$50 billion export tax subsidy for corporations such as Boeing, Microsoft, and Caterpillar with an across-the-board \$77 billion corporate tax cut for manufacturers and a

\$43 billion cut for companies operating overseas.²² In response to complaints by the European Union regarding the export tax subsidy extended to benefit U.S. corporations such as Boeing and Microsoft, the World Trade Organization ruled against the subsidies. In turn, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives cut the \$50 billion subsidy, replacing it with the \$77 billion and \$43 billion tax cuts. The tax cuts for the overseas operators will greatly benefit the energy companies and the military corporate contractors, further enriching the power elites at the expense of the public. General Electric alone will benefit from an \$8 billion tax cut over ten years. The U.S. Congress, with a strong bipartisan vote, demonstrated that its members have degenerated into mere corporate salesmen, contradicting any notion that public representative government still exists. Unfortunately, many of these “public officials” are part of a revolving door, moving freely back and forth between their public and private corporate positions.

With the state of the current U.S. government and political economy, we are witnessing an unprecedented abuse of public power for private interests. The contemporary account of American corporate globalism, as well as that of the Arctic Refuge as one example here “at home,” is the sophisticated and devious use by economic elites of front individuals, groups, organizations, and politicians to shift attention away from (secretive) corporate activities, to remain anonymous and unnoticed in the face of civil and public scrutiny. The secretive strategies and tactics displayed by the pro-energy Bush-Cheney administration are unprecedented in conservative or Republican American politics, simply because the “public” federal government is operating exactly as private corporations and business have always operated, in secret, unaccountable to public view, working overtime to circumvent public laws.²³

Importantly, this subversion of the public democratic process bears greatly upon a discussion of the Arctic Refuge as a case study of political economic power exerting its will to change a physical environment and adversely affect a 30,000 year-old indigenous culture purely for an immediate profit for a current generation of people, and a few people at the top, to be specific. Any political ecological analysis of a resource conflict must take into account, above all, the top-down nature of the conflict and the resistance from “below” to elitist money power propelling the unsustainable development. It involves the essential battle between authoritarian and centralized power versus the horizontal democratic process, two fundamentally different sets of values and subsequent political tactics to achieve those values.

FUNDAMENTAL CLASH OF WORLDVIEWS, IDEAS, AND VALUES

The battle over the Arctic Refuge has portrayed the supreme war over public relations, using words and ideas in lieu of guns as weapons, with the

pro-oil development and anti-development sides passionately arguing their respective positions. On its face, the Arctic Refuge represents a classic pitched battle between economic growth and environmental conservation. This is indicative of a general polarized split that we have seen in environmental politics in the United States ever since the early 1970s, when environmental regulation, whether in the form of pollution control (e.g., the Clean Air and Water acts) or public lands and wilderness protection, received great levels of support in Congress and the executive administrations, especially the Carter administration. The argument concerning development and environmental politics in the United States has usually been one framed by an either/or debate, as in allowing one of two options, either blatant unsustainable economic growth, or the opposite, protecting wild lands set aside from human and industrial intrusion, that is, preservationism.

We can still see this either/or “particularly American” mentality in the Arctic Refuge war of ideas, coming from the traditional pro-growth (in this case, oil) position and the traditional environmental community’s stand on wilderness and wildlife protection. However, this is where the significance of the Arctic Refuge case becomes much more complex and murky given present and future realities of issues, including indigenous rights, human rights, and social justice, more generally, as well as what it means to live in ecologically sustainable local habitats and communities, both in rural and suburban and urban areas.

If we probe the basic, deeper values—worldviews— of the actors and participants in the Arctic Refuge debate, we come up with much more complex and subtle revelations concerning the nature and purpose of development and the very relationship at stake between humans and the nonhuman natural world. The Gwich’in Athabaskan presence in the matrix of actors in the Arctic Refuge truly gives the case a different quality than would be present if this were just about developing oil or saving wildlife and what traditional American environmentalists view as separate “wilderness,” the latter being viewed as some primitive as yet uncivilized area still protected from the groping hands of an American unlimited growth worldview depicted in the notion of “Manifest Destiny.”

The unlimited growth paradigm of development ideas, personified in the pro-oil actors in this story, is the polar opposite of the pro-wilderness view, however, it could be argued that both are products of a distinctly Euro-American industrial and Christian dominion worldview that sees “nature” as something entirely separate from human society, whether it be conquered and “tamed” (pro-economic growth) or put aside from human intrusion. The interesting and subtle aspect of the refuge debate brings in the indigenous piece of the puzzle, and what that piece signifies not only to the other actors

in the issue but to the overarching significance of the debate in temporal and spatial terms, or “future history” and global meanings.

The whole issue of ecological sustainability, whether in rural or urban settings, involves the traditional idea of humans living in some kind of inseparable balance with their natural surroundings, with balance and relative equilibrium being the key concepts. In this sense, the indigenous voice in the Arctic Refuge debate represents far more than just asking congressional officials to save the caribou, which the Gwich'in have subsisted upon for hundreds of generations. The Gwich'in, I learned in my brief visit to their village above the Arctic Circle, represent and signify a most profound message for our future global world, and this concerns what it means to be sustainable in all of the forms inherent to that term, as well as locally self-sufficient and self-determined socially and politically. Both of these aspects, sustainability and local self-determination, stand powerfully as representations flying in the face of a global capitalist agenda engineered by American economic elites.

Physically, and on the face, the battle for the refuge appears to be another traditional fight between American neoconservative Republicans pushing a pro-growth economic agenda and traditional American environmentalists seeking wilderness protection. However, what is at stake in this representative battle is a model of ideas and proposals for the future, proposals for living in sustainable balance with our differing natural geographical environments as well as instructing us how to live locally politically and socially (relatively to be realistic) self-reliant lives actually demonstrative of democratic process. The Gwich'in set of values starkly contradicts everything representative about American global capitalism and the latter's control of distant, local communities through the use of centralized networks of political-economic power.

The case of the Arctic Refuge and its stage of actors is an excellent lens through which to view our future history and the coming conflicts between competing worldviews and values that truly cut to the core of diverging and converging human psychosocial belief systems. The incredible political polarization of the debate, and the heated emotions involved, which I experienced firsthand in my two visits to Alaska over two summers, has to point to something far deeper at stake in the psyches of the actors, of global and future historical dimension. It is important to see the amazing local, regional, and national political and information battle over a remote area of land on the Arctic coast as nothing less than a battle against global capitalism, with historical importance.

What is at stake is not merely how many barrels of oil might be pumped out of the refuge to fill up gas tanks in Southern California, or whether the refuge might be developed with a minimal “human footprint” as the pro-drilling adherents argue. They do not get the big picture, for they are still

ensconced within that very American belief system comfortable with the unconscious conviction in one's inexorable right to exploit and dominate nature for economic profit. The symbol of the Iroquois nation belief of "seven generations" is really what is at stake: future sustainability for future generations of children and their descendants. What is the growth paradigm leaving to those future generations? At present rates of climate change, environmental devastation, and unmitigated consumption of the diverse natural resource base globally, the "tragedy of the commons" appears to be the fate of the future planet as a whole: too many people swallowing the propaganda of economic elites preaching unlimited growth, rapidly destroying resources and creating chaos with Earth's climatic ecosystem.

POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

If the war of ideas, values, and worldviews over the Arctic Refuge has illustrated an almost perfect example of polarized visions between neoconservatives and progressives in the American political landscape, then the values of the neoconservative and progressive worldviews absolutely extend to dictate the types of political tactics used by the respective belief systems.

The pro-oil big business, Republican-led, neoconservative attempt to develop the Arctic Refuge has become increasingly characterized as a type of "take no prisoners" ideological war, led by the politicians of the Alaska State delegation, in conjunction with its extreme right political allies in the Bush-Cheney administration. Through research and live interviews with various actors in the refuge debate, it became readily apparent that I was not dealing with an ordinary issue or contest guided by fair and reasonable guidelines for dialogue and discussion. The situation was and continues to be extremely emotional, defying the rules of civil debate and the public responsibility of elected government officials. I made every effort to professionally contact and request interviews with the pro-drilling actors in the issue, and if not entirely ignored, such as by Governor Frank Murkowski's office in Juneau, Alaska, then I received outright refusals to interview, as with Senator Ted Stevens in the Anchorage, Alaska, office. This is not to suggest that all parties from the anti-drilling side responded to my letter, phone, or e-mail solicitations, as some did not even do so.

What became obvious was the overall difference of the two sides in tone and approach in tactics. The pro-drilling actors are some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the world, which makes the Arctic Refuge a crystalline symbol of global wealth-power disparity once this power is starkly contrasted with the villages of Venetie and Arctic Village, the two Gwich'in villages 200 miles north of Fairbanks that have single dirt roads running

down materially poor villages of some 200 people each. The glaring difference between political economic power and wealth contrasted with people just struggling to survive and be left alone carries over into political tactics as well.

The pro-drilling right in Alaska mirrors the extremist neoconservative right at the national level in the Bush-Cheney administration and seems to demonstrate the same disregard for civil discourse, relying upon secrecy, the propagation of disinformation, an utter disregard or manipulation for scientific evidence, and what I refer to as a “bunker mentality” in approaching and dealing with anti-drilling forces. I will explore the tactics of disinformation in a later chapter, illustrating this through my interview with Arctic Power, the primary lobbying “front” organization for the state of Alaska, the Alaska congressional delegation, and the oil industry (British Petroleum, as I will explain later, has pulled out of publicly supporting Arctic Power).

The war over the refuge has, for the pro-drilling side, become a war of propaganda, paralleling the constant misuse of information by the neoconservative Republican administration now in Washington, D.C. This war of disinformation is frightening for its underlying dismissal and contempt for truth, scientific evidence and knowledge, intolerance of differing viewpoints and values, and in general a basic unwillingness to participate in reasonable civil dialogue, the backbone of democratic practice. As Alaska State Representative Sharon Cissna substantiated in an interview with me in Anchorage, the Republicans in Alaska and the federal government have “morphed” into something quite different than previously experienced, even in the Reagan and first Bush administrations.

Whether it is the bullying, or the take no prisoners mentality, or the secrecy, or the disinformation campaign, I was fascinated with the underlying reasons *why* the extreme right has taken on these tendencies thus characterizing its tactics indicative of a dismissal of democratic process. For the Arctic Refuge, nonviolent “war” over development has devolved into very real hatreds and fears, becoming something much more significant than the extraction of zero to 7 billion barrels of oil, or the preservation of 120,000 caribou and many other forms of wildlife. As the astute and philosophical episcopal bishop of Alaska alluded to in an interview in Fairbanks, these deep-seated emotions, hatreds, and fears are representative of some truly epoch-changing crossroads now hanging in the balance for our future history, and on a global level.²⁴

The recent social Darwinistic attitude of the radical corporate/Republican right—the belief in the survival of the richest, and a “you are either with us or against us” mentality—might be understood in broader historical terms, as a kind of Hegelian “antithesis” reacting to the rise of ecological and environmental consciousness and political activism.²⁵

The reaction and hatred are likely indicative of a deep-seated knowledge—both conscious and unconscious—that the industrial age, fueled by oil,

is already at its end, its deathbed. The severe reaction by the radical right at this point in time points to a rich and spoiled minority unwilling to give up its wealth and power, knowing full well that the growth paradigm driven by fossil fuel energy must give way to an ecologically sustainable form of paradigm for the upcoming century and beyond. There is obviously nothing new about rich (industrial) elites pulling up their drawbridges, protected by their moats. However, at this critical time in the world, massive human overpopulation is combining synergistically with the outdated “economic growth is progress” worldview to create dangerous ecological instability at the global level. Those elites know this, that the oil age is finished, primarily because of global warming and climate change.²⁶

The bellicose reaction at this historical time, and I think what is really characterizing the tone and nature of the debate over the Arctic Refuge, is the refusal to relinquish power to those new visionaries who accept the death of an age and embrace the challenge of facing a difficult transitional point in history. It is all about money, and as we see all around the world, from the isolation of the Arctic Refuge to the chaos of Iraq, the oil era is about the violence of money.