



**Richard Maxwell, Ph.D. and Toby Miller, Ph.D.**  
Greening the Media

# Trump Coal Rolls the World

The president rejects the Paris Accord unsure what planet he inhabits.

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Posted Jun 05, 2017



There's a significant subculture in America composed of white men who drive pick-up trucks rigged to blast clouds of thick black smoke from engines overdosed on diesel fuel. These good-old-boys are known as "coal rollers." You might have seen one of their trucks rumbling down the road, marked by decals warning that their exhaust is a "Prius Repellent." They learn to "roll coal" at truck-pulling shows where billowing clouds provide a sublime moment of environmental destruction.

While it's a punishable offense to drive on public roads with engines altered for coal rolling, and more states are beginning to enact stricter laws prohibiting the practice altogether, these self-styled outlaws could not care less—for them, such laws exemplify governmental over-reach, an attack on their way of life. They reserve particular ire, and well-aimed blasts of noxious fumes, for environmental do-gooders who drive low-emission vehicles, cycle, jog, or support ecologically-aware policies.

Coal rollers are anxious about a world threatened by climate change, but not because of planetary decline. They're freaked out because the communities in which they live are beginning to adopt environmentally sound practices to adjust for the harsh realities of global warming. They see their freedom disappearing (or at least the freedom to pollute that their fathers and grandfathers enjoyed). And they don't like it.

What a relief, then, to have a president who thinks climate science is a con game, coal is cool, and laws and programs protecting the environment are impositions on liberty. It's not surprising that truck-pulling aficionados have adopted the Trump name to show off their coal-rolling prowess.

Imagine if Trump's close advisor Stephen K. Bannon remade *Smokey and the Bandit*. It could feature the Koch brothers as coal-rollers wreaking havoc on the lives of tree-hugging Prius drivers and Environmental Protection Agency head (and chief critic) Scott Pruitt as the ineffectual sheriff who pretends to catch them.

But climate change means playtime is over. That was the message of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord, which encouraged the world to reduce carbon emissions. In our column at the time, we pointed out many of the Accord's shortcomings, focusing in particular on the way climate science and environmental justice were overshadowed by *Realpolitik* and corporate interests.

But while political face-saving overshadowed saving the planet, the Accord did establish a framework of international governance to counter a planetary problem, potentially helping to extend the civic virtue of green citizenship from local to global forms of belonging.

And therein lies the threat to Trump, Bannon, Pruitt, and the coal rollers of this country: the Accord's cosmopolitan goals are antithetical to the white nationalist interests promoted by their America First anti-globalist demagoguery. The Paris deal is all about a duty of care for our planet *by all, for all*.

The agreement attempts to constrain unsustainable freedoms (to pollute) in order to engender new kinds of

freedom (within the existing political economy) that are attuned to changed climates and ecosystems—such that renewable energy replaces fossil fuels, global finance expands through green economies, information and communication technology giants drive digital capitalism, and new profit centers open up to corporate dominance.

Many big multinational corporations, including Exxon, BP, Dutch Shell, and other fossil-fuel giants, lobbied the White House to stick with the Paris Accord. Bannon's white nationalists may demonize them as evil globalists, but the fact remains that Trump's decision does not reflect the interests of the most powerful sectors of capitalism.

This nationalist-globalist rift highlights chronic disunity on the American Right. On the nationalist side, 22 senators who had received major contributions from US-based oil and coal industries implored Trump to leave the Paris Accord.

But for many people across partisan divisions, the US withdrawal from the Paris Accord signals a loss of American environmental leadership and creates the possibility for Western Europe and China to exercise greater influence over the direction and refinement of climate regulations. That could result in a striking shift in world leadership.

On the globalist side, many US firms with international operations step away from Bannon and his ilk. And a growing group of state and municipal governments, businesses, and experts are preparing to stand in for Washington as the representative body for the US in the Paris agreement.

Meanwhile, most Americans say they want renewable energy to become the major source of electricity powering homes and digital lifestyles.

American youth want the government to stop promoting fossil fuels, and a group of them has filed suit to reform US climate policy.

In general, the media have failed to cover climate change responsibly. It's a national disgrace. No wonder Trump called Fox News for its endorsement before announcing his decision.

But the last few days have seen the press doing a remarkable job of explaining climate science, the potential impact of the US withdrawal—and the fact that the public supports the spirit of the Paris Accord. What would our national conversation be like if we received daily news coverage of climate change as consistent and urgent as that which has emerged since June 1st? To make that happen we need to keep pressing and pressing.



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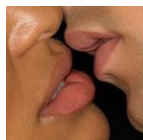
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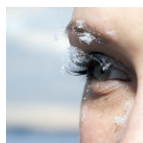
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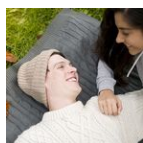
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