

Andre Ye

Dr. Reagan

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In “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math”, Bill McKibben argues for a collective movement against the fossil-fuel industry to slow climate change. The amount of carbon dioxide that is stored in the inventory of fossil-fuel companies vastly outweighs the amount scientists estimate can be released without significantly impacting global temperatures. Political leaders balance between financial interests and climate change, McKibben asserts, and their acquiescing to the former has caused ineffective progress towards addressing the latter.

In “How Wealth Inequality Has Changed in the US”, Rakesh Kochhar and Anthony Cilluffo illustrate wealth inequality between white, black, and Hispanic households by income level. They find that the middle-class gap between white and nonwhite households increased during the Great Recession and is not decreasing during the recovery.

In *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Keeanga-Yamattha Taylor argues that the removal of formal political and economic barriers for black people allowed for the formation of a black elite class. This black elite class, including figures like Obama, was held as a proof for America’s moving past racism, and supported or was used to support ideas like the “culture of poverty” without challenging institutions like free enterprise. Only after a broad coalition of the “ordinary people” assembled into rebellions and movements, Taylor maintains, were black elite figures like Obama pressured to resolve institutional sources of racism.

McKibben presents forth a claim to the general public for greater involvement in addressing the climate change problem with, as he puts it in the subtitle, “three simple numbers that add up to global catastrophe – and that make clear who the real enemy is.”¹ Using this presented “new math”, McKibben argues for making the fossil-fuel industry their “enemy” and for a movement of “moral outrage” to fight against that industry. While climate change is certainly a pressing issue, it is also a very complex one, and McKibben offers a simple pathway forward. I argue that in order to construct sure, deterministic solutions, McKibben – by necessity – premises his argument on an initial solidification of arbitrariness, causing the remainder of his argument to be effective. At the core of McKibben’s analysis is the number 2 degrees Celsius. He introduces this number as the “official position of planet Earth” on the maximum threshold for temperature increase. Even he, however, hints at the arbitrariness of this number. The number first gained prominence at a 1995 climate conference is involved with politicians like Obama and Merkel – it has become “conventional wisdom”, he notes; however, conventional wisdom is (often) not scientific. He then cites scientists as suggesting that the 2 percent Celsius limit is far *too* lenient. However, given the tangibility, and hence usefulness, of that statistic, McKibben holds 2 degrees as the golden number to work forward with – despite that it was conceived by politicians (a group he later attacks). Thus, the number holds a *political*, not a scientific, basis. To be safe, he does state that 2 degrees is “the bottomest of bottom lines”² to attach some semblance of continuity to his discrete numerical claims. This qualifier of continuity, though, is all but absent in the remainder of the piece. McKibben goes on to use the golden number to generate the second number of 565 gigatons – the amount of carbon dioxide

¹ Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math: Three simple numbers that add up to global catastrophe – and that make clear who the real enemy is” (San Francisco: Rolling Stone, 2012), 1.

² McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math”, 3.

that can be pumped into the atmosphere while staying below 2 degrees in change. The third number, 2,795 gigatons – the amount of carbon dioxide present in the reserves of the world’s major oil companies is put into comparison with 565 gigatons. This is an explicitly noncontinuous comparison – several more are made throughout the remainder of the piece; McKibben has generated numbers from a political arbitrary basis but puts them in rigorous comparison with each other. This is effective; it puts forth a convincing and seemingly precise argument – the “cold, mathematical truth”, as he puts it. Towards the end of McKibben’s essay, the 2 degrees statistic and scientific hesitancy surrounding it have disappeared. His arguments are instead forceful, and undeniably logical; the conclusions and avenues for change are clear: for instance, a tax on carbon high enough to keep us under 2 degrees of increase needs to be placed on oil companies. The proposals are not hesitant or ambiguous in a way that is not subject to attacks construing McKibben as apocalyptic and unreasonable.