

newspaper coverage of
anthropogenic climate change
in the
United States & United Kingdom
2003-2006

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May 24th, 2007

for the 2007 Amsterdam Conference

International Human Dimensions Programme, Global Environmental Change

the role of mass media

“Few things are as much a part of our lives as the news...it has become a sort of instant historical record of the pace, progress, problems, and hopes of society.”

~ W. Lance Bennett, 2002



consensus/convergence in climate science

↔ contention in policy/practice

VIA MASS MEDIA

anthropogenic climate science

- 2007 IPCC AR4 WGI

“Most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is **very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations**”

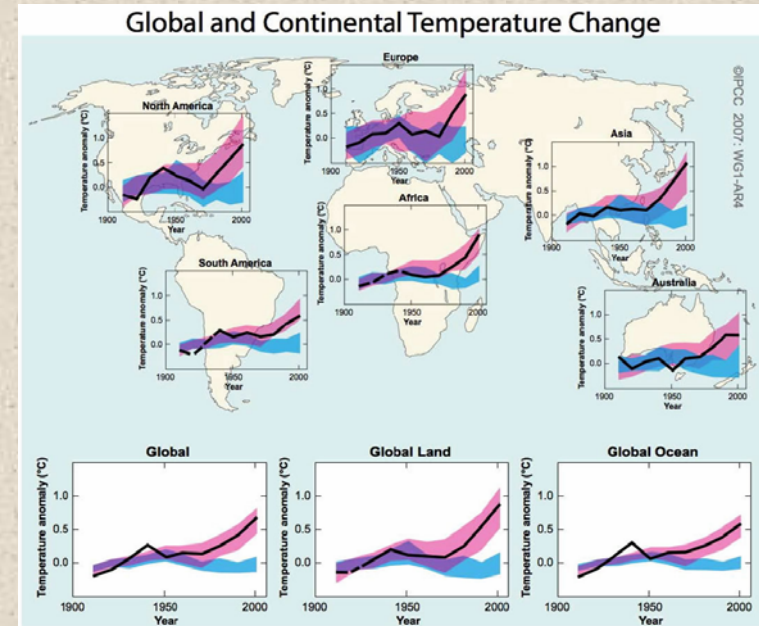
- 2004 Oreskes study in Science

- 2000 Crowley study in Science

- IPCC 2001 TAR

- IPCC 1995 SAR

- The Keeling Curve (1957 →)



IPCC WGI 2007 fig SPM.4

policy-relevant ‘honest brokers’?

[drawing on Taylor and Buttel 1992, Hajer 1995, Adger et al, 2001, Pielke Jr. 2007]

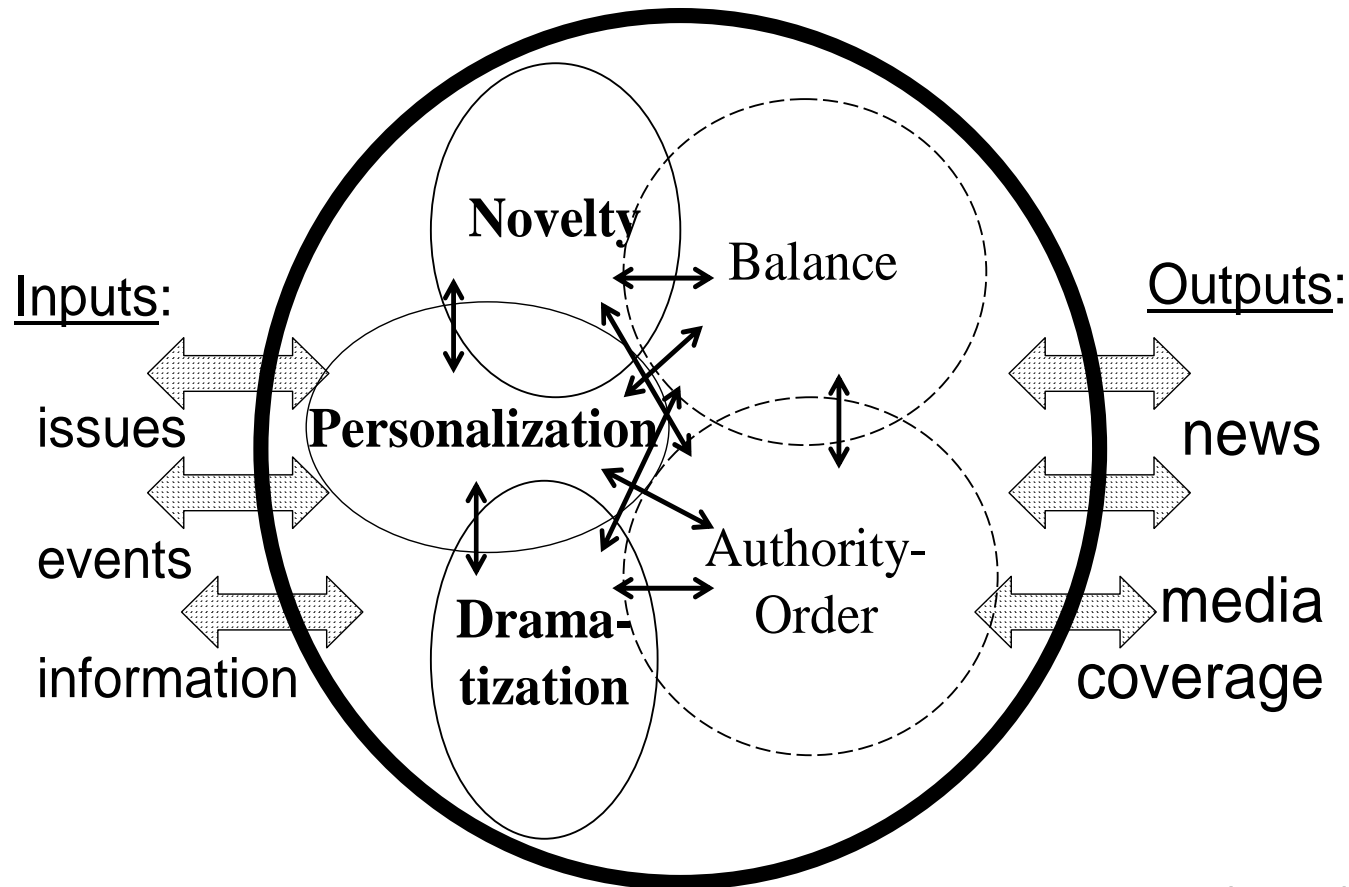
“Global environmental change...is particularly vulnerable to deconstruction” ~ Taylor & Buttel (1992)

“We know that science is not capable of delivering the kinds of final authority that is often ascribed to it...However, when this occurs without the benefit of a clear understanding of the importance of the substantial areas where scientists do agree, the effect can undermine public confidence” ~ Rayner (2006)



journalistic norms and pressures

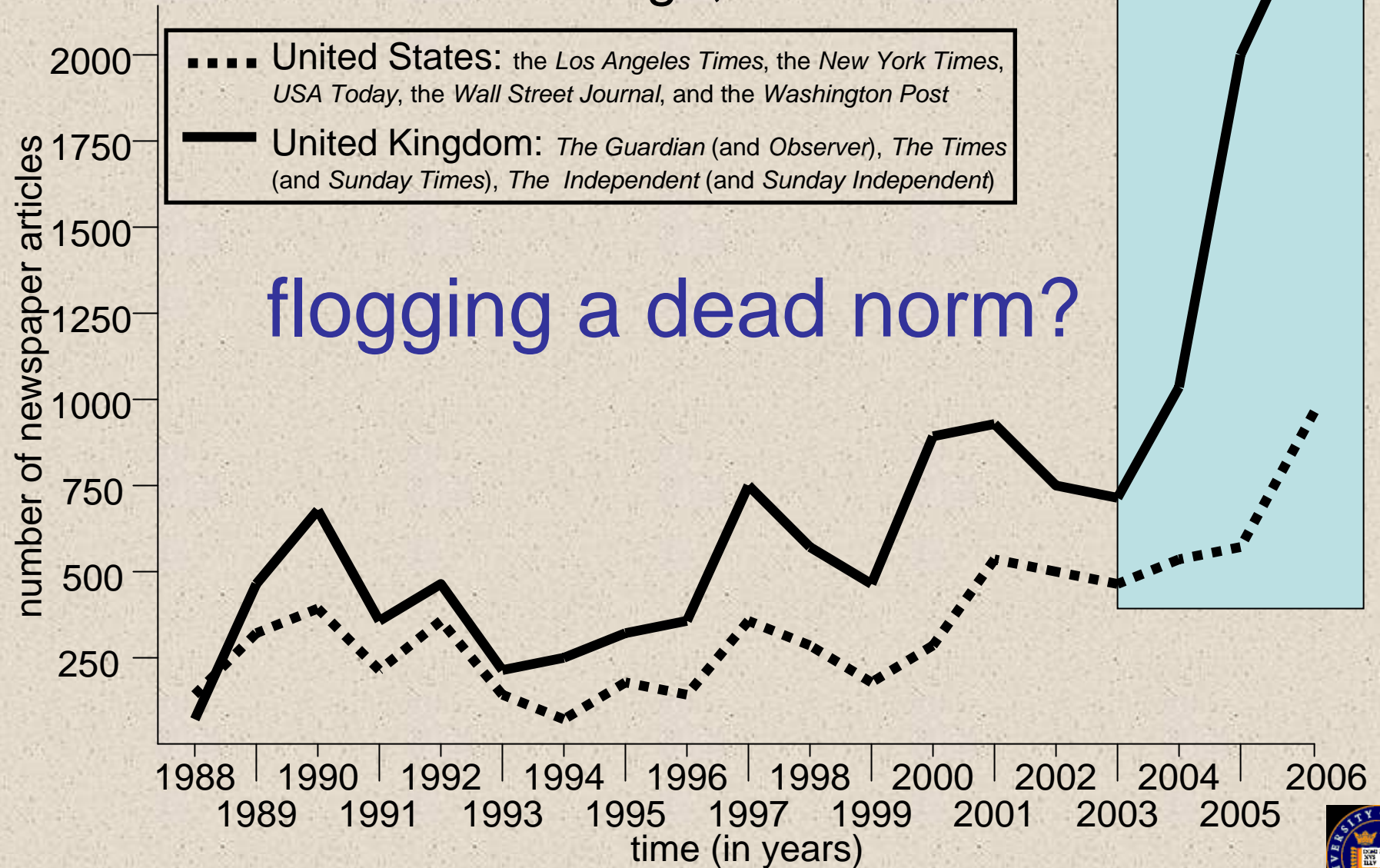
Interacting Journalistic Norms



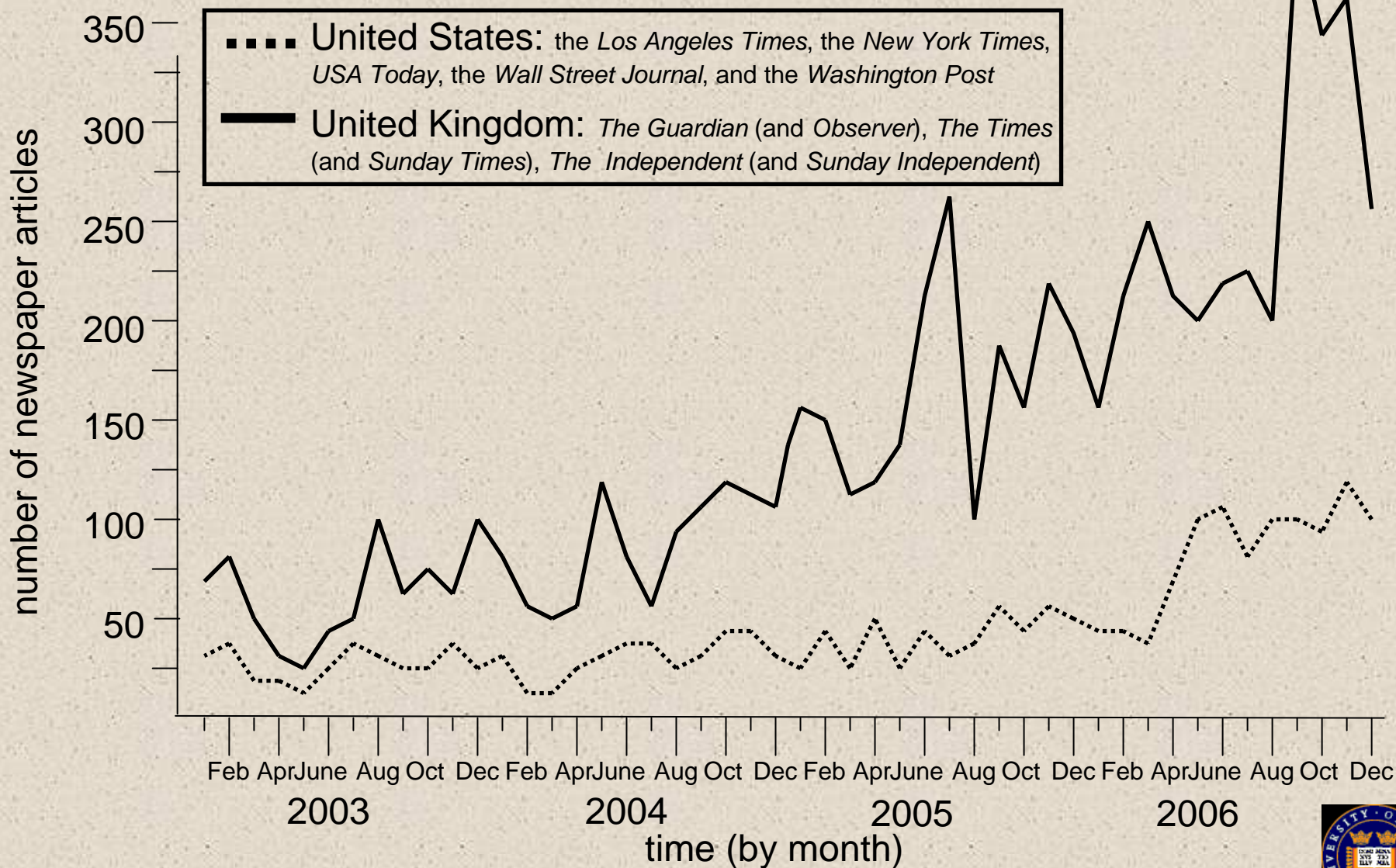
Boykoff & Boykoff (2007)



USA and UK Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change, 1988-2006



United States and United Kingdom Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change



US & UK newspapers 2003-2006

some results: bias as balance update

- UK 'quality' newspapers → no significant divergence over the 4 years
- US 'prestige-press' newspapers → 'significant' 'balanced reporting' in 2003-2004
- but US newspaper reporting → no significant divergence in 2005-2006



why differences between countries?

- **'home country effects'**: politics and contrarians
 - salient moral v. political issue
 - entrenchment of carbon-based industry interests
- **context and labeling**



context example: U.S. coverage of ExxonMobil

The New York Times

‘Exxon Backs Groups that Question Global Warming’ by Jennifer Lee

Exxon Mobil has publicly softened its stance toward global warming over the last year, with a pledge of \$10 million in annual donations for 10 years to Stanford University for climate research. At the same time, the company, the world's largest oil and gas concern, has increased donations to Washington-based policy groups that, like Exxon itself, **question the human role in global warming** and argue that proposed government policies to limit carbon dioxide emissions associated with global warming are too heavy handed... **"There is this whole issue that no one should question the science of global climate change that is ludicrous. That's the kind of dark-ages thinking that gets you in a lot of trouble"** [Tom Cirigliano, a spokesperson for ExxonMobil] noted....



context example: U.K. coverage of ExxonMobil

The Independent

'Exxon spends millions to cast doubt on warming'

by Andrew Buncombe and Stephen Castle

The world's largest energy company is still spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund European organisations that **seek to cast doubt on the scientific consensus on global warming** and undermine support for legislation to curb emission of greenhouse gases..."ExxonMobil invests significant amounts in letting think-tanks, seemingly respectable sources, sow doubts about the need for EU governments to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," said Olivier Hoedeman, of the Corporate Europe Observatory. "Covert funding for climate sceptics is deeply hypocritical because ExxonMobil spends major sums on advertising to present itself as an environmentally responsible company."



ongoing considerations

insights from US and UK cases

watch this (contested) NSA space!

opportunities/challenges for new mechanisms for climate governance?

- medium: news & opinion v. entertainment
- content: mandatory v. voluntary
 - public understanding
 - public engagement and resistance

MEDIA

Actual Expert Too Boring For TV

SECAUCUS, NJ—Dr. Gary Canton, a professor of applied nuclear physics and energy-development technologies at MIT and a leading expert in American nuclear-power applications, was rejected by MSNBC producers for being “too boring for TV” Monday.



“We could deal with Dr. Canton being so short,” said Cal Salters, a segment producer at MSNBC. “And we could’ve made him up so he didn’t look like he spends all day in front of a computer. We even considered cutting away to stock footage so our audience didn’t have to look at him for too long. But when it turned out that listening to him is about as interesting as picking the lint off his lapels—well, there was nothing we could do about that.”

Canton was brought in for a test interview based on a recent op-ed in the *Boston Globe*, in which he argued that increased reliance on nuclear power is “inevitable.” When asked to address nuclear power’s potentially disastrous consequences, however, Canton launched into a well-reasoned lecture that balanced modern energy demands against safety and environmental concerns.

“At MIT’s Laboratory for Energy and the Environment, we see nuclear-power technology as the best option for the United States and the world to meet its energy needs. Other energy options include increased reliance on wind, solar, and other atmospheric pollutants.”

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“I don’t know what, because my mind just shut off. I tried to lead him in the right direction. I told him to address the fears that the average citizen might have about nuclear power, but he still utterly failed to mention meltdowns, radiation, or mushroom clouds.”

“I’m sure he knows what he’s talking about,” Salters added. “But we have a responsibility to educate and entertain our viewers. In the end, we had to go with someone else.”

Salters was not impressed.

“[Canton] went on like that for six minutes. He started spewing all these statistics and facts, and I just thought, ‘This is boring.’”

MSNBC chose Skip Hammond, former Arizona State football player, MBA holder, and author of *Imprisoned: America’s Coming Nuclear-Power Holocaust*. Hammond is best known for his “atomic domino” theory of chained power-plant explosions and his signature lavender silk tie.



“Absolute Armageddon,” Hammond said when asked about the dangers increased reliance on nuclear power might pose. “Atoms are not only too tiny to be seen, they’re too powerful to be predicted. Three Mile Island? Remember R? I do. Don’t they?”

“Clouds of radiation, glowing rivers, a hole reaching to the earth’s core—that’s what we’re facing,” Hammond continued. “Death of one in four Americans! Count off, everyone: one, two, three, you. Millions of people gone. And no one’s even mentioned terrorism yet. You have to wonder why not.”

According to Salters, Hammond was “perfect.”

“The way Skip looked right into that camera and said ‘annihilation’ with perfect enunciation—I’ve been in the news business for 14 years, and I still get goose bumps,” Salters said.

Reached at his office, Canton said he was unsure why he wasn’t chosen for the program.

“I discussed the interrelated technical, economic, environmental, and political challenges associated with increased nuclear-power usage over the next half-century and their relevance to government, industry, and community leaders,” Canton said. “You’d think it would be exactly what they wanted. It was exactly what they wanted, according to the producer who contacted me.”

Hammond is scheduled to appear in all six parts of the upcoming Learning Channel series *Frost Or Fire: America’s Coming Energy Tribulations*.

the Onion (2005)

