Vindicating the Right?

Populism and the Origins of the Tea Party Movement

By

Martin Walter

March 2016

Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed:

Martin Walter
March, 2016

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Anthony Hutchison, Professor Peter Ling and Dr Robin Vandome for many stimulating discussions, their feedback on my work, their immense patience and for giving me so much space to develop my own ideas. I am also very grateful to Dr Hutchison and Professor Sharon Monteith for their help with my funding application. Without the generous financial support of University of Nottingham's European Union Research Excellence Scholarship I could not have written in this thesis. Equally important for my first steps was Professor Crister Garrett, who had mentored my work during its early stages.

A special thanks goes to my post-graduate peers (alas, too many to name them all) for their indispensible feedback, their insightful ideas, their friendship and their company. They made me feel at home in Nottingham and without their help I could have never finished this project. I would also like to thank the staff of the American and Canadian Studies Department, the Graduate School and the university library for helping me with all kinds of administrative obstacles and for all their supportive work.

Most of all I would like to thank my entire family, especially my parents, my wife and my daughter. My parents have encouraged and supported throughout my life and raised me with an open mind. I owe my wife more than I can express in words for her support, her infinite patience and relentless encouragement. Thanks to my little daughter for cheering me up and for reminding me what really matters.

The years I have spent working on this thesis, has possibly been the most exciting time of my adult life. It was the time I have become a husband and a father. During my time at the University of Nottingham I had the opportunity to work side by side with some of the most gifted minds in my field and I will always cherish this experience.

Abstract

Vindicating the Right? Populism and the Origins of the Tea Party Movement analyses the founding process of the Tea Party movement using the framework of populism theory. At the centre of populism theory stands the claim that populist movements frame politics as confrontation between the virtuous 'people' and powerful elites. The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe further argues that populism is used to articulate hegemonic projects. As scholars have found, in contemporary liberal democracies populism articulates hegemonic projects that claim to represent 'the people' against unresponsive governments often in response to widespread dissatisfaction with democratic processes.

Tea Party populism is no exception. This thesis argues that the foundation of the Tea Party took place in the context of a multi-layered crisis related to the economic downturn, the crisis of contemporary conservatism, rising party polarisation, growing inequality and declining faith in government and democratic institutions. I contend that the initial appeal of the Tea Party was due to the movement's capacity to respond to this crisis and channelled a deep seated distrust of government into populist anti-elite resentment.

With the help of a wide range of sources, including Tea Party literature, blogs, websites, videos and accounts from periodicals this thesis demonstrates how the movement constructed a collective identity of 'the people' as defenders of constitutional right, national values and free market capitalism. The Tea Party's reliance on the themes of conservative Americanism also relates it to the hegemonic project of American conservatism and this thesis demonstrates that the Tea Party movement is as much an outcome as it is a part of the conservative

movement's attempt to use populism to rearticulate its hegemonic claims in the aftermaths of the defeat of the Republican Party in the elections of 2008.

Key terms:

Tea Party movement, American conservatism, populism, social movements, American politics

Contents

List of figures

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACORN	Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
AFP	Americans for Prosperity
ARRA	The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
CIMC	Chicago Independent Media Center
CFL	Campaign for Liberty
CPAC	Conservative Political Action Conference
EESA	Emergency Economic Stabilization Act
FDR	Franklin D. Roosevelt
GOP	Grand Old Party
HERA	Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008
LPI	Libertarian Party of Illinois
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PAC	Political Action Committee
RINO	Republicans In Name Only
RNC	Republican National Convention
TARP	Troubled Asset Relief Program
US	United States

Chapter One – Introduction

The Rise of Tea Party America

This thesis is about the founding of the Tea Party movement and the role populism played in it. It is a thesis about people – most of them conservatives – who found themselves at a crossroads during the final months of 2008 and the early months of 2009. Many of them had firmly believed in the efficacy of conservative politics, in the power of entrepreneurship and free market ideology. Now they neither fully trusted the outgoing Republican President, nor did they like the Democratic leaders who took over. Many of them lost faith in social and political institutions and stopped feeling represented in the political system. Guided by resentment of, variously, contemporary liberalism, corporate favouritism and Republican leadership, these people began to embrace a populist identity and united under the Tea Party banner in February 2009.

For many people the Tea Party movement came as a surprise when it erupted in early 2009. On the surface, the circumstances for the emergence of a movement that vigorously defended free market capitalism and other conservative principles could not have been less propitious: the global financial and economic crisis had shaken Americans' confidence not only in deregulated financial markets but in the ideological foundations of contemporary conservatism. President George W. Bush, the leading figure of contemporary conservatism, left office with terrible approval ratings, having lost the support not only of the Republican Party but also of the conservative movement (Kazin 2010).[1] The historian Julian E. Zelizer, for

[1] During the weeks leading up to the 2008 presidential elections, the President's approval dropped to 25 per cent (Gallup 2009).

instance, writes "With America battling an economic crisis as Bush exited the White House and with continued instability overseas, Bush's presidency concluded with conservatism in a state of political instability, raising serious questions about the future of the movement" (Zelizer 2010, 13).

Signs of the erosion of American conservatism were all around. In November 2008 the first African-American, a progressive Democrat, Barack Obama, easily won the presidency on a platform that promised, among other things, substantial healthcare reform and extended coverage and tax increases for the wealthy; a man, in other words, who sought to turn back the clock on a political conservatism that had dominated American politics with few interruptions since the beginning of the Reagan administration. Sam Tanenhaus' *The Death of Conservatism* (2009) indeed read like the obituary of a bygone ideology and the social forces it inspired: "movement conservatism," he wrote, "the orthodoxy that has been a vital force in our political life for more than half a century and the dominant one during the past thirty years, vanquishing all other rival political creeds […] was vanquished in the elections of 2008" (Tanenhaus 2009, 4). At the time, the election of Obama in 2008 seemed to mark a major realignment in American politics that saw progressives taking over the government and conservatives defeated.

Yet this presumed realignment proved to be short-lived, if indeed it took place at all. From the beginning, the newly elected president faced a strenuous and united Republican opposition in Congress that did away with any last remnants of bipartisanship that had survived the increasing polarisation of American politics, and opposed any kind of liberal-minded reform. Outside of Congress, the Tea

Party movement became the most visible manifestation of the fact that conservatism was far from dead.

The Tea Party movement came into being only a few weeks after Obama entered the White House. Rumblings about the need to reorganise the conservative cause could be found in different places: in the conservative media, blogs, social media outlets and the Republican Party. In a few locations small numbers of protesters began to rally against government spending. Most commonly the Tea Party movement's starting point is associated with the so-called "Santelli rant," in which CNBC Chicago stock market correspondent Rick Santelli began to 'rant' against a proposed bailout of troubled homeowners on February 19, 2009. His call to all "capitalists" to have a "Tea Party in July" and dump derivate securities into Lake Michigan (Zernike 2010a, 20-1) was answered faster and by more people than Santelli could have ever imagined. On February 27, 2009, about a week after the rant, a few thousand protesters in more than a dozen cities across the country held rallies against bailouts, taxes and government spending. The protesters stood side by side with local Republicans and representatives of conservative advocacy groups. By April participation had multiplied. On April 15, traditionally known as Tax Day, between 440,000 and 810,000 people gathered at more than 500 protest sites under the Tea Party banner (Madestam et al. 2013, 7). By then a variety of national Tea Party organisations had formed drawing support from a wide-ranging network of local chapters throughout the US (Burghart and Zeskind 2010).

The astonishingly quick rise of the Tea Party movement, which drew half a million Americans to the street only two months after its emergence and played such a crucial role in electoral politics and public policy thereafter, confronted analysts, both popular and academic, with a number of important questions. How

could a conservative movement gain such traction and momentum under such seemingly adverse circumstances? Why did it win over so many Americans, when the election of Obama appeared to suggest a significant realignment in favour of progressive politics? After all, did not the GOP's electoral disaster suggest that, as Tanenhaus put it, the "movement conservatism is not simply in retreat" but truly "outmoded" (Tanenhaus 2009, 4)? How could a moment that contemporaries identified as one of progressive transformation turn into one of conservative resurgence? Since the Tea Party's emergence, answers to these questions have been offered by a number of disciplines, most notably from the fields of social movement scholarship (e.g. Van Dyke and Meyer 2014), political science (e.g. Rosenthal and Trost 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013), and historians of American conservatism (e.g. Kabaservice 2012) and protest culture (e.g. Hall 2011).

Above all, the emergence of the Tea Party suggests that American conservatism in 2008 was merely in disarray. Neither its powerful infrastructure of think tanks, advocacy groups and media outlets showed any signs of dissolution, nor did conservative supporters magically disappear from the electorate. Rather the *annus horribilis* of the American Right had triggered a realignment, not of the American electorate, but within the conservative movement itself. The Tea Party played an important role in this realignment, as it moved the Republican Party notably to the right (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 188) and signalled a temporary end to the predominance of neoconservative establishment politics, which had characterised the presidency of George W. Bush (Zelizer 2010; Kazin 2010).

This thesis addresses the key questions about the emergence of Tea Party by using populism as an explanatory framework. The term *populism* has been frequently used in relation to the Tea Party movement. This is as true of the media (e.g.

Mead 2011, MacGillis 2014) as it is of academic analysis (e.g. Berlet 2012a; Formisano 2012). In the context of this study, the concept of populism is, for the most part, borrowed from the field of political theory, which implies that this work enters the sometimes uncertain anti-foundationalist terrain of social enquiry. In the most basic sense, this thesis understands populism as a "language" (Kazin 1998, 1) or "social logic" (Laclau 2007, xi) that frames politics as a conflict between a virtuous, yet powerless, 'people' and a powerful, self-serving elite.

Throughout each of the chapters this work employs distinct key concepts of populism theory. The Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau holds that populism addresses mainly "the nature and logics of the formation of collective identities" (2007, ix). This idea is central to this thesis. It looks at the formation of the Tea Party as a process that created a new collective identity - an identity that allowed conservatives to distance themselves from the failures of contemporary conservatism in national politics and to reinvent the struggle of conservatism as one of ordinary people against the power of the (liberal) state. In doing so, the movement sought to vindicate capitalism as an egalitarian ordering principle of society and identify conservative ideology as identical to America's founding values.

Instead of building on the traditions of modern American conservatism, the movement sought to align itself with the leaders of the American Revolution, finding solace from a desolate conservative present in the distant American past (Lepore 2010). At the same time, the movement dismissed the presumed political consensus in Washington DC, and especially Obama and Congressional Democrats, as un-American, elitist usurpers of power. That the movement, on the one hand, shifted the fault lines of American politics from Republican versus

Democrats to ‘people’ versus ‘elites’, while, on the other hand, staying strictly within the ideological confines of conservative orthodoxy, was not seen as a contradiction by movement supporters (Braunstein 2014). Instead it pointed, from the beginning, at the double identity that the movement developed and cultivated: the Tea Party saw itself simultaneously as a movement of democratic restoration and of conservative resurgence.

This thesis shows how the collective identity of the Tea Party emerged as a collaboration of different levels of conservatism’s hegemonic project, ranging from Republican Party strategy, advocacy groups and media outlets to organisers and protesters at the grassroots level. It shows that the movement’s early mobilisation successes relied to a large extent upon its ability to capitalise on a perceived democratic and economic crisis and on deep-seated resentment towards government and economic elites. What is more, the Tea Party was able to incorporate transversal issues, like the opposition to bailouts of the financial sector, into its own political narrative. This gave Tea Partiers the opportunity to address the question of political inequality and present the movement as a post-partisan social force that opposed elite privilege in any form.

In order to demonstrate how populism intersects with the founding of the Tea Party movement in multifarious ways, the thesis covers a somewhat uneven terrain, which is reflected in its structure. The first part of the thesis is dedicated to the larger historical and political context in which the foundation of the Tea Party was embedded and traces the reasons for public discontent during the presidency of George W. Bush and the transition phase to the Obama presidency. The second part of the thesis analyses, in more detail, the founding process of the Tea Party as well as the movement’s early organising and protesting. As the thesis progresses

to the analysis of small organising groups and individual protests, ideas of populism theory are increasingly operationalised with the help of social movement scholarship. The analysis of the first Tea Party protests reveals that participants were very resourceful in their attempts to signify the idea of 'the people' in their political actions and that populism determined the movement's identity and self-perception as a democratic restoration movement.

This thesis touches upon a variety of different fields; most prominently existing studies on the Tea Party, the history of American conservatism, social movement studies and populism scholarship. The analysis of Tea Party populism requires the use of a distinct terminology and central assumptions. The rest of the introduction addresses these subjects. The following section gives an overview of existing theories on the emergence and early mobilisation on the Tea Party, identifies possible research gaps and situates the thesis in the current research landscape. Thereafter the introduction explains key terms and a number of relevant assumptions of populism scholarship, and details their use in the study of American history and the modern conservative movement. After that the introduction states reach the thesis' claims, methodology, sources and structure.

Explaining the Origins of the Tea Party Movement

A look at the existing literature reveals a number of key assumptions surrounding the Tea Party's foundation. Accounts differ in their weighting of the causes of the Tea Party's founding and in the attitudes researchers, journalists and activists have towards the movement, whether negative, 'neutral' or positive. These differences also raise two relevant questions related to the Tea Party's emergence: Firstly, in what political lineage or tradition should the movement be placed? And secondly, how do we explain the movement's rapid rise? Arguments for both favourable and

unfavourable views are easily found. As Meyer and Pullum (2014), for instance, write, people

> Seized upon the Tea Party to find authentic American democracy, horrific American nativism, regular citizens newly engaged in politics, marginalized crazies newly legitimized, an astroturf lobby for wealthy interests […] or a backlash against government intrusions on healthcare, bank bailouts, gun regulation, taxation, or antipathy to the election of the first black President. Given the standards of evidence on the web and in contemporary political dialogue, we can claim all of these things and find an anecdote to support the claim. (78)

This multiplicity of theories surrounding the Tea Party's founding is grounded in the complexity of the movement itself. The Tea Party movement engaged in a variety of political causes, operated on the local, state and national level, forged alliances with multiple political organisations and changed significantly over time in composition and outlook. Four perspectives on the Tea Party's founding can be distinguished: (a) the Tea Party movement as a context-driven phenomenon, (b) the Tea Party movement as conservative rebellion, (c) the Tea Party movement as "white citizenship movement" (Disch 2012), and (d) the Tea Party movement as 'heirs' of social movement tendencies since the 1960s.

The Tea Party Movement as Context-Driven. Many scholars have attributed the beginning of the Tea Party to a number of contextual factors. Several authors focusing on these factors argue that it is crucial to "recall the political environment of late 2008 and early 2009" (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 1). The historian Ronald P. Formisano, for instance, claims that in early 2009 "economic, political, and cultural shocks came together to activate ordinary persons across the country – mostly conservative Republicans, but also independents and others – to organize and mobilize" (Formisano 2012, 27). These shocks, according to these scholars, were related to the political and economic inheritance of the departing

President George W. Bush. High levels of economic inequality and political polarisation left behind a politically disoriented and "dwindling middle class" (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 2). The US found itself entangled in a number of unpopular and expensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A worrying deficit plagued the federal budget (Patterson 2010). At the same time, the financial crisis, which had begun to take shape in the sub-prime mortgage sector in 2007, was developing into an economic crisis of global proportion. What became known as the Great Recession had, in turn, triggered a series of highly unpopular government bailouts of the financial sector, which began under the authorship of Bush's cabinet and were continued under President Obama (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 9; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 6). These factors thus placed the founding of the Tea Party movement at a "unique economic and political moment" characterised by widespread "fears of American decline" (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 9).

Taken together all these short-term factors give a clearer picture of the environment out of which the Tea Party arose in early 2009. They also establish that the Tea Party movement responded to a diverse set of signals. One branch of social movement scholarship analyses this correlation between the emergence of social movements and context under the label of "political opportunity." According to political opportunity scholarship, collective political action is predominantly context-driven: groups of people form social movements in response to perceived threats to their interests, political constellations that open spaces for collective action, or when they lack any other possibility to take influence and have their voices heard (Meyer 2004). Others have argued that protest phenomena can be seen as responses to election results and transitions of

power (McAdams and Tarrow 2010). Given the number of different factors which political opportunity theory takes into account, this approach may provide a synthesis of influences that lead to the emergence of movements such as the Tea Party.

In the case of the Tea Party movement such a synthesis has been undertaken by David S. Meyer and Amanda Pullum (2014). Both authors categorise the Tea Party as a movement of "Conservative Populism", arguing that the movement sought to appear as a "campaign to *redemocratize* the United States" (italics in the original, 75) while pursuing a largely conservative policy agenda. In the mould of political opportunity scholarship, they write that the "Tea Party movement provides a clear case of a constituency mobilizing in response to bad news, that is, perceived exclusion, and the threat of unwanted policy initiatives. The Tea Party" according to the authors "represents the mobilization of conservatives in the face of defeat and threats, and the absence of viable institutional alternatives for influence" (80). According to Meyer and Pullum, the elections of 2008 were a key event for the founding of the Tea Party movement. The elections provided Democrats with safe majorities in Congress and the control of the executive branch, thus excluding people (mostly conservatives) who opposed the government bailouts and the proposed healthcare overhaul from any institutional means of political influence (79). At the same time it liberated conservative Republicans and conservatives at the grassroots from any "responsibility of governance", allowing them to take an "untempered" stance (81) against these unwanted policies. The lack of access to institutional channels of power made movement activism a logical choice of political action.

The elections of 2008 according to Meyer and Pullum (2014) were of high significance due to the changing power relations between both major parties. The Republican Party had already suffered considerable losses in Congress in the 2006 midterm elections, due to the increasing unpopularity of the Bush administration. By the 2008 elections, many contemporaries predicted a major paradigm shift in American politics in favour of progressive, liberal politics (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 2). However, the takeover of Obama at the height of government bailout measures represented a considerable political liability for the incoming president. As, for instance, Theda Skocpol (2012a) remarked, the timing of the transition of government had repercussions for the initial policy priorities of the newly elected president. As presidential candidate Obama had already been involved in the passing of the unpopular multi-billion banking bailout under the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). After the elections Obama appointed "Wall Street-friendly advisors" (Skocpol 2012a, 22) and continued the banking bailout policies. "During his first two years" Skocpol writes, "Obama had to deal with a sudden financial and economic meltdown, and did so in ways that looked like a betrayal to many Americans worried about loss of savings, livelihoods, and jobs" (2012a, 7). These actions naturally damaged his initial image as champion of working and middle class interests and gave conservatives inside and outside the Tea Party movement the chance to portray Obama as an ally of corporate interests.

Rasmussen and Schoen (both Tea Party enthusiasts), for instance, argue that the continuity of the bailout era between Bush and Obama, fed into pre-existing sentiments of "populist" elite resentment of the American public mainstream against government. They see the Tea Party as a "new populist revolt that has emerged overwhelmingly from the right" (2010, 19) but which represents claims

shared by people beyond the conservative constituency. “For the first time in recent history” the authors write, “the majority of Americans qualify as populists” (20). Both authors identify the roots of the Tea Party’s founding in its immediate political environment.

> At the time of this writing, failed leadership in Washington, obscene greed and abuse on Wall Street, and continued economic suffering on Main Street have provoked widespread anger, resentment, and frustration. There is a deep distrust of the elite in government and in business, and a pervasive sense […] that the powerful are conspiring against ordinary Americans. (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 20).

Rasmussen and Schoen suspect the long-term causes for this “populist revolt” lie in a sense of democratic malaise, the sense that government has been irresponsive to people’s needs and the growing rift between elite preferences and those of ‘ordinary’ Americans (81-109).

The Tea Party Movement as Conservative Rebellion. The Obama takeover also mattered in relationship to the Tea Party movement because it represented the preliminary culmination of an ongoing crisis of conservatism (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 6-7; Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 2-3). As already mentioned, by the end of the Bush administration conservatism had suffered greatly in public esteem. As a preliminary response the GOP had nominated the moderate conservative John McCain, who had a reputation as bipartisan deal-maker (Kabaservice 2012, 381), as its presidential candidate. When McCain was defeated by a progressive Democrat in the general elections and control of Congress passed into the hands of the Democratic Party, conservatives found themselves excluded from the decision making process at the federal level. This was seen by many in the orbit of the Tea Party movement as a “blessing in disguise” (Farah 2010, 16). Self-proclaimed Tea Party leader Joseph Farah, for

instance, argued that the "Tea Party movement arose from the disaster of 2008" (2010, 16). Had McCain won the election, so Farah, there "would be no popular [Tea Party] uprising" (12). The election of Obama, in other words, put soon-to-be conservative activists into their comfort zone and provided them with a formidable foe.

In the context of the crisis of conservatism of 2008, authors have also linked the Tea Party movement's emergence to an internal power struggle within the conservative movement that had been brewing for several years. The point of contention was the extent to which Bush's brand of "compassionate conservatism" actually represented the anti-statist ambitions of conservative orthodoxy (Kazin 2010). This internal discussion among movement conservatives appears odd at first, considering that to many outside observers, the Bush administration appeared very conservative in every respect (e.g. Hacker and Pierson 2005; Tanenhaus 2009, 8). Despite its undoubtable conservative credentials, however, President Bush "did not govern consistently as an ideological conservative" (Kabaservice 2012, 383). Libertarians and fiscal conservatives in particular began to resent the administration's expansion of government activity in healthcare, education, domestic security and subsidies as well as its lack of fiscal discipline, and began to criticise Bush and his cabinet more openly (cf. Slivinski 2006, 2007; Kazin 2010; Formisano 2012, 12). By the time of the 2008 primaries many frustrated libertarians in the Republican camp began to support Ron Paul's libertarian anti-establishment campaign.[2] After the end of the primaries, this disgruntled constituency within the conservative

[2] Among them was, for example, Brandon Steinhauser, an employee of the libertarian advocacy group FreedomWorks and one of the key figures of the early Tea Party movement (Zernike 2010a, 2).

movement were left with a choice between John McCain, who had even fewer conservative credentials then Bush, and Obama.

Placing the beginnings of the Tea Party movement against the backdrop of the presumed "Bush-era betrayals of small government principles" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 6) and the power struggle within the conservative movement appears plausible for a number of reasons. The libertarian and (fiscally) conservative organisations that promoted the free market gospel made up a significant part of the conservative infrastructure and consequently wielded considerable influence in the Republican Party and the conservative movement.[3] During the years preceding the conservative crisis of 2008, some of these organisations had furthermore endeavoured to build a grassroots following for their political causes.[4] That these groups were heavily involved in the Tea Party's founding and later development – to the degree that many critics called the movement an astroturf campaign (cf. Formisano 5-15; DiMaggio 2011; Lo 2012)

[3] The dense network of libertarian think tanks (e.g. Cato Institute, Foundation for Economic Education), educational institutions (e.g. Mercator Center of the George Mason University), magazines (e.g. *Reason*), legislative advocacy groups (e.g. American Legislative Exchange Council), policy advocacy groups (e.g. Americans for Tax Reform), and grassroots advocacy groups (e.g. Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks) represents only some of the institutions which promote libertarian ideas (Doherty 2007, 404-410; Mayer 2010). Those are flanked by myriads of conservative organisations which promote and disseminate libertarian idea about the economy (e.g. Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute) and PACs which intend to sway candidates with a libertarian economic agenda into political office (e.g. NCPAC, American Crossroads).

[4] Within the network of libertarian organisations the brothers Charles and David Koch have played a significant role in linking up its branches with the conservative grassroots. Their substantial financial commitment bought the Koch brothers a high degree of control over large parts of the libertarian movement, which they free admit (Doherty 2007, 409). The host of organizations that constitute the so-called "Kochtopus" are the core of what Charles Koch describes as "an integrated strategy, vertically and horizontally integrated, to bring about social change, from idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organizations to lobbying to litigation to political action" (Doherty 2007, 410).

– represents an academic consensus (e.g. Mayer 2010; Lo 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 100-18; Fetner and King 2014).

Even before the Tea Party movement emerged there were signs that indicated the potential to rally many disenchanted conservatives for libertarian, anti-status causes. Maltsev and Skaskiw (2013) argue that the roots of the Tea Party lie in the failed presidential run of Ron Paul, which featured many of the elements (like the insistent reverence of the 'founding fathers' and the Constitution, dismissal of the Republican establishment, libertarianism etc.) that the Tea Party adapted as their own (25-47). That the Tea Party rose as a movement of restoration of anti-statist conservative principles to the Republican Party is furthermore affirmed in many of the Tea Party movement's own accounts of its founding (cf. Beck 2009b, 22-3; Farah 2010, 1-18; O'Hara 21-40; Paul 2011, 23-76). Acknowledging the anti-statist, libertarian roots of Tea Party places the movement into a political tradition of conservative insurgencies like the Goldwater campaign of 1964 and the populist conservative uprisings of the 1970s (Zernike 2010a, 49-63; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 81-2).

The Tea Party's founding thus fits into a longer narrative of partisan polarisation and the ongoing migration rightwards of the Republican Party (Abramowitz 2012; Kabaservice 2012). Geoffrey Kabaservice's *Rule and Ruin* (2012), which describes this process as an incessant war between party moderates and conservative hardliners from the 1950s to the present day, sees the Tea Party as little more than the latest instalment of this conflict.

> The Tea Party movement was only the latest on a cycle of insurgencies on the Republican Right that had shaken the GOP since the McCarthy movement of the 1950s and the Goldwater revolt in the early 1960s. Even the name of the movement

> was a throwback to the "T Parties" of the early '60s, part of the right-wing, anti-tax crusade of that era. (Kabaservice 2012, 387).

The Tea Party's role in this process became most apparent from the primary season for the 2010 midterm elections onwards. Despite the repeated claims of Tea Partiers that they represented the political centre of American politics, the purges of so-called "RINOs" (Republicans In Name Only) and the rightwards orientation of Republicans in the 112th Congress suggest the movement's commitment to steering the GOP towards the Far Right (Abramowitz 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 157-71).

Somewhat similar to Rasmussen and Schoen, authors have sought to place the Tea Party movement within what can be roughly described as right-wing populism. They situate the movement within a long line of (conservative) populist movements, based on its expressed elite resentment, anti-governmentalism and proneness for conspiracy and subversion theories (cf. Berlet 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Formisano 2012, 15-23). Skocpol and Willamson for instance, write that "most aspects of Tea Party thinking are not new; they add up to the most recent incarnation of American conservative populism" (2012, 81).

Movement critics agree with the category of right-wing populism but see its characteristics entirely differently from movement supporters like Rasmussen and Schoen. Most prominent among these critics is Chip Berlet, whose understanding of right-wing populism centres on its anti-liberal, conspiracy-driven elements and the idea of "producerism" (Berlet and Lyons 2000; Berlet 2012a).[5] The Tea Party consequently frames its resentment in the form of a dualism between hardworking

[5] Producerism, can be understood as an American surrogate for class conflict, denoting the "idea that real Americans are hardworking people who create goods and wealth while fighting against parasites at the top and bottom of society" (Berlet 2012a, 57).

Americans on the one side and liberal elites – as well as freeloading, parasitical minorities – on the other. Apparently fitting into this mould, Berlet identifies the Tea Party as akin to the Cold War Far Right.

The Tea Party Movement as White Citizenship Movement. For authors who discuss the rise of the Tea Party movement in relation to questions of race, the fact that Obama was the "first African American to assume the presidency" (Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 9) plays a central role. This had a symbolic value that is consistently highlighted in relation to the Tea Party movement's founding (e.g. Zernike 2010, 5; Formisano 2012, 112; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 77-81; Parker and Barreto 2013, 35-9). In particular, Parker and Barreto's *Change They Can't Believe In* (2013) proposes the hypothesis that the Tea Party movement was a direct reaction to the election of Obama, arguing that the new President evoked racial resentment and fears of status erosion and subversion among the mostly white Tea Party constituency.[6] Parker and Barreto consequently dismiss the Tea Party's official focus on libertarian and fiscally conservative positions and place the movement in a long line of Far Right, nativist, reactionary conservative movements ranging from the Know-Nothing Party and the second Ku Klux Klan to the anti-communist John Birch Society (5); a conclusion that is shared by a number of other authors as well (Postel 2012; Berlet 2012a; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 78). These views on the Tea Party movement's founding are usually informed by the work of Richard Hofstadter (1964; 1969), especially his concepts of the "paranoid style" in American politics and "status anxiety."

[6] The authors, for instance, write: "We believe that President Obama, by virtue of his position as president, and the fact that he's the first nonwhite person to hold the office of president, represents to some an assault upon a specific ethnocultural conception of American identity and everything for which it stands. In short, Obama and his policies threaten the America that has come to be identified white, middle-class, middle-aged, Christian, heterosexual, mostly male indentity [sic]" (Parker and Barreto 2013, 35).

Variations of this assumption can be found in the work of other authors, who claim that the election of Obama was significant, not so much because it triggered racial and subversive fears but because his policies represented a direct threat to the economic privileges of white working and middle class Americans. The basis of this theory of Tea Party activism reveals a paradox among Tea Party supporters. On the one hand, Tea Partiers at the grassroots self-identified as supporters of free market ideas and express resentment of "big government" measures. On the other hand, polls and field work indicate that a clear majority of them supports the large government welfare state programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security (Disch 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 59-68). In other words, Tea Partiers are – like most other Americans – "ideological conservatives" and "operational liberals" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 54). Lisa Disch argues that

> The Tea Party movement is sparked, in part, by the threats its supporters perceive to their share in [...] key programs of the liberal welfare state. Tea Party politics is conservative, but its supporters' material commitments and even aspects of their rhetoric place them in a *liberal* genealogy. They defend interests and identifications that they have inherited from the New Deal [...] the Tea Party movement *belongs* to liberal America even as Tea Party rhetoric denounces liberalism and liberals denounce Tea Partiers. (2012, 133-4)

Disch and other scholars argue that at a time when government debt skyrocketed and President Obama promised to further expand health care coverage to minorities, white people in the Tea Party in particular saw the financial sustainability of their government benefits threatened and took to the streets to defend them (Disch 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 55). In terms of timing this is plausible. By the time of the Tea Party's founding much money had been spent on bailouts of the banking sector while the proposed Stimulus heralded further constraints on the federal budget. Furthermore the first nationwide rallies

on February 27, 2009 took place shortly after the Obama administration made its first, financially ambitious budget proposal public. Tea Partiers, in other words, defended their economic interests by defending the whiteness of the welfare state. At the same time, non-whites were more likely to be characterised as "freeloaders" and "moochers" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 68-72). Opposition to Obama was thus based on a racially coded material self-interest rather than on paranoia and nativist, cultural panics.

Meyer and Pullum's account of the Tea Party's founding also addresses the question of whiteness. They, however, relativize the overrepresentation of white people in the Tea Party movement to some extent. The authors refer to a number of studies that suggest that "movements of the middle class in American history have almost always been overwhelmingly white" (82) and are based in "constituencies who already feel a sense of connection and entitlement in mainstream politics" (84). The election of Obama, which was based in part on the disproportionate support of minority groups and the promised social improvements to these groups (Davis 2013), was consequently perceived as a threat of exclusion by many whites who had become accustomed to political influence. Thus acknowledging the ideas of Parker and Barreto, Meyer and Pullum hold that the Tea Party movement was, at least in part, a response to the perceived loss of status of (often) conservative, middle class whites.

The Tea Party Movement and the Legacy of the 1960s. Similarities between the Tea Party movement and the protest culture of the 1960s have caught the eye of numerous observers, whether scholars or journalists.[7] This has obvious reasons.

[7] Journalist Bill Keller (2013), for instance, wrote an article in the *New York Times* entitled "The Right Gets Its '60s." Keller writes: "The Republicans are finally having their '60s. Half a century after the American left experienced its days of rage, its repudiation of the political establishment,

Long before Tea Party candidates won electoral races at the 2010 mid-terms and began to shape public policy in a variety of arenas, the movement started out first and foremost as a protest movement, engaging in forms of political action usually associated with the Left. Following the assumptions of various scholars, the Tea Party's indebtedness to the 1960s relates to tactics and strategy as well as language and political symbolism (Hall 2011; Meyer and Pullum 2014).

Several social movement scholars argue that the 1960s emancipated street protest and social movement activism as a legitimate form of participation in the political process (McVeigh 2014; Meyer and Pullum 2014).[8] This normalisation of social movement activism, however, did not only change America political culture; over time, it also changed the nature of social movements. As movements became "a routinized part of modern politics, more accepted, less disruptive" (Meyer and Pullum 2014, 76) they also increasingly relied on professional organisers, bureaucratic structures and became dependent on financial support and connections to political elites (75-7).[9]

The 1960s, however, did more than just normalise and professionalise protest and social movement activism. Movements such as the civil rights movement also provided its successors – left and right – with a shared language and repertoire of

---

conservatives are having their own political catharsis. Ted Cruz is their spotlight-seeking Abbie Hoffman. [...] The Tea Party is their manifesto-brandishing Students for a Democratic Society. Threatening to blow up America's credit rating is their version of civil disobedience. And Obamacare is their Vietnam" (Keller 2013)."

[8] The sociologist Rory McVeigh (2014), for instance, noted that up until the 1960s, "political protest was viewed as being more similar to crime and deviant behavior than it was to voting, lobbying, or other forms of political action" (15). By the 1970s these new forms of political participation were considered legitimate and seen as signs of a healthy pluralism and an active civil society.

[9] Scholars comprised the omnipresence of movement activism in the political process under the term "social movement society" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998).

tactics. As Simon Hall (2011) writes, movements as diverse as the movements for gay rights and women's rights, the anti-busing movement, the California tax revolt and the anti-abortion movement consciously learnt from the experience of the 1960s, organising at the community level, using marches and rallies and other forms of direct action to attract attention, and employing a patriotic, Americanist style and language that sought to present them as the true heirs of America's founding and constitutional principles (140-2).

To see the Tea Party movement within this lineage, as some authors do (Hall 2011, 143-4; Meyer and Pullum 2014, 76-9), makes sense, considering that, especially at its beginning, it engaged in various forms of direct action and made reverence to the Constitution, American patriotism, and the founding era hallmarks of its identity (cf. Lepore 2010). Movement influentials went as far as the claim that the Tea Party was the civil rights movement of its time or deliberately used the ideas of left-wing protesters in pursuit of conservative/libertarian politics.[10]

The four different hypotheses that scholars have associated with the emergence of the Tea Party movement should make clear that the movement represents a considerable analytical challenge. Scholars have located the movement somewhere between the civil rights movement and the Ku Klux Klan, between the New Deal and the libertarian or Far Right fringe, with movement activists all the while claiming an ancestry to the 'founding fathers' of the American Republic.

[10] Self-acclaimed Tea Party leader Glenn Beck, for instance, held a rally at the Lincoln Memorial at the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech," telling his audience that King's dream "has been so corrupted" and that its "time we pick the dream up and we finish the job" (Milbank 2010, 231). As Kate Zernike describes, Tea Party-affiliated groups such as FreedomWorks, compiled a list of mandatory readings for its employees, which included Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* (2010, 38).

Tea Party scholarship explains the origins of the Tea Party movement in several different ways, using a variety of approaches and methodologies. In all cases, their comments on these origins, however, form part of larger academic endeavours, which cover a variety of different subject matters. More often than not authors only briefly list a number of factors they deem relevant to the Tea Party's founding, retell it within a few pages, and move swiftly on (e.g. Trost and Rosenthal 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 5-7). While works of American history often treat the emergence of the movement as the most recent manifestation of larger historical processes (cf. Hall 2011; Kabaservice 2012) and consequently talk about the Tea Party in concluding chapters, studies focusing specifically on the Tea Party movement tend to discuss the movement's emergence briefly in their introductions before moving on to discuss other subjects (Rosenthal and Trost 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Though the overwhelming majority of these works have their distinct merits, it is furthermore notable that the different academic disciplines occasionally fail to inform each other sufficiently in their attempt to understand the movement's beginning: sociologists and political scientists are, at times, oblivious to the complexities of the history of American conservatism, while historians show little appetite in using the methodological and theoretical insights of social movement scholarship.[11] Neither side makes extensive use of political theory.

This thesis attempts rectify some of the shortcomings in at least two respects. Firstly, the thesis focuses exclusively on the origins and founding of the Tea Party

[11] It should be noted that the above hardly counts as shortcoming of these works, since none of them is primarily focusing on the emergence of the Tea Party. The most notable distinction – in terms of balancing the insights of different disciplines – is Skocpol and Williamson's (2012) *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Yet though the work does justice to historiography and political science, the work is not focusing on the movement beginnings.

movement, covering for the most parts events that have taken place between September 2008 and February 2009. At the centre of this study stands the complex interaction between conservative media, advocacy groups and grassroots organisers, which is itself set against the background of a political crisis, triggered by the sharp economic downturn, the bailout negotiations in Congress and the looming debt crisis at the advent of the Obama administration. At the same time, the thesis deems it necessary to develop an interdisciplinary approach, fusing the insights of social movement scholarship, historical scholarship and political theory in order to come to an advanced understanding of how the Tea Party emerged and what drew people into it. Since such an account does not exist so far, this thesis seeks to close a gap in contemporary scholarship. The founding of the Tea Party movement, as this thesis claims, is of great importance because it established the movement's identity and helps to explain its dynamics in subsequent years.

Secondly, this thesis looks at the founding of the Tea Party movement from the perspective of populist collective identity making. The important role that collective identity plays in the Tea Party movement has been confirmed by a number of scholars (e.g. Lepore 2010; Braunstein 2014). Others authors, however, have been reluctant to take the movement's identity work and rhetoric seriously. Among them, for instance, are Skocpol and Williamson, who set out to understand the reality of the Tea Party phenomenon in "*Behind* the Costumes and Signs" (italics added, 2012, 19). This thesis, on the other hand, tries to look *at* the costumes and signs and the context in which they were used in order to understand why people founded the movement and why so many Americans came to embrace it. It analyses how people at different levels of political influence and

power seized a distinct moment in American politics, to develop a new form of conservative populism that became a central element of conservatism's hegemonic project. As traced above, authors come back to the claim that the Tea Party movement is related to the idea of populism in certain ways. However, their application of the term differs significantly. This work substantiates and clarifies this claim, applies it to the movement's founding moment and explains why populism is crucial for the understanding of the Tea Party movement.

The Concepts of Populism and their Role in Modern American Conservatism

Conceptual scholarship on populism originated during the 1960s from rather dispersed interests in political regimes and ideologies. Academics applied the term to political phenomena in the context of the decolonization of Africa, politics in Latin America, the US and Europe, and even in connection with communist ideological currents without much consideration for the comparative potential that populism offered (Ionescu and Gellner 1969).[12] Defining populism has been a challenging task for scholars since the beginning of structured research on the subject.[13] Two definitions of populism, which also serve as working definitions in the context of this thesis, help clarify the term. The first definition comes from the American historian Michael Kazin. He defines populism as "a language whose

[12] In 1967 the journal *Opposition and Government* organized a conference at the London School of Economics with the purpose of bringing these scholars together to define a common ground for the understanding of populist phenomena. The outcome of the conference and the subsequent landmark publication of *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (1969). Similarly influential books from the following decades, include Margaret Canovan's *Populism* (1981) and Yves Mény and Yves Surel's *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (2002a).

[13] The contributions in *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (1969) locate populism somewhere between an ideology, a movement, a recurring mentality, a political psychology, an anti-phenomenon, a worship of 'the people' or mentality that is eventually absorbed by socialism, nationalism or peasantism (Ionescu and Gellner 1969, 3-4).

speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter" (1998, 1). The second definition comes the political scientist Francisco Panizza who defines populism

> as an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between 'the people' (as the 'underdogs') and its '*others*'. [...] the identity of both 'the people' and '*the other*' are political constructs, symbolically constituted through the relation of antagonism, rather than sociological categories. (Panizza 2005b, 3)

Several assumptions relevant to this thesis can be deduced from these definitions. Firstly, at the centre of populism stands a view that condenses politics into a conflict between 'people' and 'others' (most commonly 'elites'). Both of these groups are not clearly defined sociological entities but rather constructs of populist discourse. In a pluralistic society like the US, based on divergent subject positions (such as the position within the relations of production, political affiliation, race, gender, sexual orientation etc.), 'the people' as a collective identity, is far from a given category. It can only be constructed symbolically. In that sense, 'the people' are what Benedict Anderson (1991) called an "imagined community," which in populism is constituted in relation to an 'other.' As part of the political vocabulary, these discursive constructs, however, stand in direct relation to political mobilisation (cf. Rodgers 1998).

Secondly, given the simple core assumption of populism and its presence in various political projects of the Left and the Right, populism cannot be considered a political ideology or primary identity of historical subjects (cf. Laclau 2005, 32). Rather it is a distinct form through which ideology is mediated or an identity is

constructed. In *The Populist Persuasion* (1998), Kazin, for instance, clarifies his understanding of populism as follows:

> I do not contend that my subjects *were* populists, in the way they were unionists or socialists, Protestant or Catholic, liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans. Populism, more an impulse than an ideology, is too elastic and promiscuous to be the basis for such an allegiance. Rather, my premise is that all these people employed populism as a flexible mode of persuasion. They used traditional kinds of expressions, tropes, themes, and images to convince large numbers of Americans to join their side or to endorse their view on particular issues. (Kazin 1998, 3)

Kazin asserts that populism in itself does not constitute a principle identity of certain groups, but a way in which these groups forward their distinct political beliefs. He thus highlights populism's instrumental character with regard to mass mobilisation and the social reproduction of ideology.

This connection is also expressed in the work of the political theorist Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. Their book *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* (1989), originally published in 1985, starts out with a critique of Marxist orthodoxy, especially its narrow focus on class struggle and the inevitability of a proletarian revolution. Against the historical background of an increasing presence of new social movements on the one side, and the triumph of Reaganism and Thatcherism on the other, the two authors argue in favour of a reorientation of the contemporary Left. Their starting point for this reorientation lies in the concept of hegemony, as outlined by the Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci (65-71). In order to break the hegemony of political Right, the two authors conclude, the Left needs to articulate a hegemonic project of its own. The Left needs to fuse the particular struggles of organised labour, feminism, gay rights activism, peace movement and racial justice movements into a single hegemonic identity capable of mounting a credible challenge to the concentrated power of state oppression and globalised

capitalism (176-93). The hegemony of the Left, in other words, depends on a coalition of diverse social forces beyond economic determinism and a unifying discourse. For Ernesto Laclau this unifying, hegemonic discourse is populism (cf. Laclau 2005, 2007).

In his book *On Populist Reason* (2007) and in a number of articles (e.g. Laclau 2005) Laclau presents the identity of 'the people' as the ultimate expression of hegemony. In the course his work, Laclau makes a number of relevant observations and elaborates several key concepts on populism. Firstly, at the centre of populism is the discursive construction of 'the people.' However, in populist discourse the 'people' does not coincide with the entire population but is instead constructed through an "antagonistic frontier separating the 'people' from power" (Laclau 2007, 74). The 'people' are thus constructed as excluded from power. Secondly, the social base of populism is made up of different "demand" groups which come together in the subject of 'the people' because their demands remain unfulfilled by the political system. What binds them together in solidarity is their perceived exclusion from power and their opposition to the 'system' which they perceive as unjust and undemocratic (77-83). Thirdly, this togetherness, expressed in populism's concept of 'the people,' relies on the production of unifying symbols – in Laclau's terminology "empty signifiers" (cf. Laclau 2005, 39-40) – which express the unity of these demand groups and their opposition to the 'system.' These signifiers, Laclau writes, cannot be chosen at will but are instead contingent and emerge from specific historical contexts (Laclau 2007, 115). Finally, Laclau, like Kazin, insists that populism is a specific form through which movements, leaders or parties mediate their politics and not a primary designation of these groups. Populism plays a role in all political formations to

different degrees. “To ask oneself if a movement *is* or *is not* populist is, actually, to start with the wrong question,” Laclau writes, “The question that we should, instead, ask ourselves, is the following: *to what extent* is a movement populist?” (2005, 45). Laclau’s concept of populism, as well as the concepts of other authors, plays a central role throughout this thesis.

As an analytical framework populism becomes important in relation to other subjects. One of them is the idea of democracy. Since the inception of modern democracy, the idea of ‘the people’ and popular sovereignty has formed the basis of political legitimacy (Canovan 2005). By claiming that the will of ‘the people’ is excluded from political power, populism problematizes perceived shortcomings in contemporary liberal democracies.

The problematic relationship between populism and democracy has been discussed by a number of authors (Riker 1988; Taggart 2002; Panizza 2005b; Laclau 2005). Many of these scholars have identified populism as a threat to pluralism and democratic institutions. This becomes most obvious when it is discussed in the context of contemporary western democracies. In the 1990s scholars began to focus on populism in the context of the rise mostly right-wing populist parties and movements in western democracies (Betz 1994; Meny and Surel 2002a; Mudde 2004; Decker 2006). The rise of populist phenomena was attributed to a number of factors, including frustrations with representative politics, lack of citizen input in public policy and the weakness of traditional parties (Meny and Surel 2002a). Citizens frustrated with politics, so the assumption went, joined or supported populist parties or movements that promised to “make their voices heard” in systems presumably controlled by unresponsive self-serving elites. Offering simplistic solutions to complex political

problems while fostering a climate of resentment towards democratic institutions, governing elites and minority groups, populism, in these works, is considered harmful to democratic politics. It is, as Cas Mudde (2015) writes, an "illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism." Scholars such as Laclau, however, also sees the potential populism might have in advancing democratic claims (Laclau 2005, 2007). Panizza defined a middle ground in this debate writing that

> By raising awkward questions about modern forms of democracy, and often representing the ugly face of the people, populism is neither the highest form of democracy nor its enemy, but a mirror in which democracy can contemplate itself, warts and all, and find out what it is about and what it is lacking. (2005, 30)

Populism thus provides an opportunity to identify presumed democratic shortcomings.

In a second sense, populism's idea of 'the people' is directly related to ideas of the nation, national values and identity, and nationalism. In the American context scholars such as Michael Kazin have identified Americanism as a central aspect of American populism, arguing that national identity itself functioned as a form of ideology that has been contested since the American Revolution (1998, 12-3). Alan Ware similarly tied American populism to "nation-building" (Ware 2002, 105). American populism, however, not only seeks to define what is American but also what is considered un-American. Ware writes that "just as there are 'American' values, so correspondingly there are 'un-American' values" (105). The theoretical lens of populism thus offers an opportunity to analyse how a movement negotiates the question of Americanism, national identity and citizenship in its identity project.

The relevance of populism to the understanding of American politics, and *vice versa*, has been affirmed on a number of occasions, by scholars of American history and political scientists alike (e.g. Kazin 1998; Laclau 2007; Formisano 2008). Paul Taggart, for instance, writes that it "is hard to understand politics in the United States without having some sense of populism. It is impossible to understand populism without having a sense of populism in the USA" (Taggart 2000, 25). Proof to this claim is easily found, considering that those who have theorised populism over the years have frequently resorted to case studies from American politics to advance their concepts (Canovan 1981; Taggard 2000; Laclau 2007; Priester 2007), while American historians have employed the concept as an analytical framework (Hofstadter 1969; Kazin 1998; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Lowndes 2005; Formisano 2008).[14]

Authors have found instances of populism throughout American history, ranging from the Shay's Rebellion of the 18th century, the Anti-masonic movement, Jacksonian democracy, the Know Nothing Party and the Populist movement of the 19th century, to the temperance movement, organised labour and post-war conservatism and the New Left of the 20th century (Kazin 1998; Taggard 2000; Ware 2002; Formisano 2008). During this time populism has served to convey very different political projects or ideologies, and has united very different groups

[14] Scholars have traced the roots of American populism back to the founding period of the country. Kazin, for instance, see its fundaments in the "pietistic impulse" (1998, 10) of the Protestant Reformation and the "secular faith of the Enlightenment" (11). Alan Ware finds the roots of American populism in the egalitarian creed of American political system and a pronounced tradition of anti-governmentalism which "had its origins in the conflicts between colonial authorities and colonists in the years leading up to 1776." (2002, 108). Different from most other countries the constitutional "We the people" not only establishes the people as ultimate sovereign of political system but connects it to the country's founding itself. It is therefore not surprising that American populists frequently refer back to the founding period and claim to restore America's founding values (cf. Kazin 1998; Formisano 2008).

into the identity of 'the people.' Formisano has divided American populism roughly into a "progressive" and a "reactionary" strand (2008, 11-14).

Up until the 1940s political conservatism, however, seemed remarkably resistant to populism and its rabble-rousing invocations of 'the people.' Kazin, for instance, writes that "until the 1940s, conservative populism was an oxymoron," given that since the Gilded Age conservatism's hallmark "had been its support for unregulated capitalism" and "the maintenance of public order" against any kind of mass mobilisation in favour of egalitarian politics (1998,166).[15] This changed with the rise of Cold War conservatism when the New Deal era provided conservatives with an "historical opportunity" to use populism as a means to advance its own hegemonic project and to mobilise various sections of American society. With New Deal liberals in power, conservatives discovered the language of populism and the identity of 'the people' and started to mobilise against the allegedly un-American expansion of government activity (Kazin 1998, 165-93).

Perhaps the most striking feature of modern conservative populism was its attempt to construct the idea of 'the people' along socio-cultural lines rather than class or economic self-interest. The conservative 'people' potentially included almost everyone on the economic scale from the poorest of the working class to the heads of powerful corporate businesses. Instead the basic criterion for belonging to 'the people' was a commitment to ostensibly American values: opposition to communism, commitment to free-market capitalism, tradition, stability, order, family and religious values. From its ascendency, modern conservatism proved remarkably flexible and adapted its populism to changing

[15] John Gerring's work on American party ideology furthermore located populism firmly in the Democratic Party, calling the years between 1896 and 1948 the party's "Populist Epoch" (Gerring 2001, 187-231).

historical circumstances. At different times the enemies of these conservative 'people' were communists at home and abroad, their alleged allies in the New Deal coalition and on university campuses, the 'liberal' media, organised labour, dangerous 'radicals' in new social movement, "secular humanists," moderate Republicans, liberal Democrats, Washington bureaucrats, certain racial minorities, 'dependent' welfare recipients, illegal immigrants etc. (cf. Kazin 1998, Berlet and Lyons 2000). As much as 'the people' were associated with authentic traits of American identity, their enemies were associated with characteristics anathema to American values (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1989, 170).[16]

Conservatism's notions of 'the people' and their enemy consequently changed over time, as did the groups which supported the conservative cause. As conservative discourse developed over time, it was able to win over more and more groups of American society. The rise of conservative hegemony can consequently be retold as the constant growth of a network of conservative organisations and the conservative constituency in the American electorate (cf. Diamond 1995). At its beginning in the 1940s, libertarian and traditionalist intellectuals, both opposed to the New Deal, formed the core of the modern conservative project (Nash 1996, 1-49). With the rise of anti-communism as a social phenomenon, the conservative began to make common cause with "Protestant and Catholic churches, veteran's groups, middle-class neighbourhoods and professional organizations, and the Republican Party" (Kazin 1998, 166). Conservatives found supporters in many suburban communities in California and the Sunbelt (Schuparra 1998; McGirr 2001) and parts of the business community,

[16] Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons' study a number of rhetoric styles of right-wing populism based on the rhetoric of producerism, demonization, scapegoating, conspiracism, apocalyptic narratives and millennial visions to discredit political opponents (2000, 6-13).

which was engaged in a furious propaganda war against organised labour and New Deal legislation (Fones-Wolf 1994, Philips-Fein, 2009). Much of the anti-communist, anti-liberal fervour galvanised in Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964. [17]

The Goldwater campaign, however, failed, and proved that conservatism was not yet the dominant force in American politics.[18] However, after years of turmoil and radicalisation of some of the protest movements from the 1960s, many traditional constituencies of the Democratic coalition began to turn away from political liberalism and towards conservatism by the beginning of the 1970s, among them many blue-collar workers and white southerners (Carter 1995; Schulman 2002; Lowndes 2008). Perhaps paradoxically, the pioneering role can be attributed to two men neither of whom were nominally committed to movement conservatism: George Wallace and Richard Nixon. Wallace and Nixon entered the presidential race of 1968 with a stark anti-liberal, anti-radical rhetoric, constructing 'the people' against the perceived excesses of cultural and political liberalism and the radicalism of the 1960s (Lowndes 2005; Kazin 1998, 221-55). By the beginning of the 1970s, the rhetoric of elite resentment, anti-liberalism and invocations of the "silent majority" of "Middle Americans" began to enter the oratory of the New Right.

---

[17] In his campaign tract *The Conscience of a Conservative* (2007 [1960], xxi) Goldwater cultivated the newly-found populist language of American conservatives. "I find that America is fundamentally a Conservative nation," (xxi) Goldwater writes in 1960, arguing that while the American "people" "yearn for a return to Conservative principles" (xxi) the dominant elites in Washington continue to implement "radical ideas […] under the guise of Liberalism" (xxii).

[18] Among the problems conservatives found in the 1960s, was that their ideology did not add up to a consistent belief system. Instead conservatism merely gave a home to all those groups who opposed liberal governance and communism for very different reasons. By the time of the Goldwater campaign, conservative intellectuals sought to reconcile the traditionalist and libertarian impulses in the concept of fusionism (Himmelstein 1990 45-62; Nash 1996, 161-71).

At the same time conservatives, supported by the sections of the business community, responded to the dominance of liberal ideas in the media and high education and began to build up a conservative "counterintelligentsia" (Rodgers 2011, 7) of new think tanks, media outlets and university positions dedicated to the dissemination of conservative, market fundamentalist ideas. An organised Christian Right also joined the ranks of the conservative cause (Diamond 1995, 161-177). Furthermore, after more than a decade of infighting, conservatives of the New Right also gained the upper hand in the Republican Party (Kabaservice 2012, 326-62).

The 1970s was in many respects a watershed decade for American conservatism and its populist discourse (cf. Schulman 2002; Schulman and Zelizer 2008; Cowie 2010). As conservatives began to embrace the rhetoric of the 'people' some of them began to lose their fear of 'the masses,' which had previously been a sign of distinction among conservative intellectuals (Nash 1996, 30-49). Conservatives at the grassroots began to engage in a number of campaigns and sustained movement activism against secular textbooks in West Virginia, school desegregation in Boston, taxes, the Equal Rights Amendment or abortion.[19] This new type of conservative activism consciously used the tactics and symbolism of their political opponents of the civil rights movement and the New Left (Kazin 1998, 258-9; Hall 2011).

Conservatives, active in these movements, sought to frame their respective mobilisation efforts as patriotic causes by constructing distinctly conservative

[19] Several historians consider the conservative movements of the 1970s actual birthplace of modern conservative populism. Dominic Sandbrook (2011) argued that conservative grassroots movements of the 1970s formed the backbone of an emerging political tradition of the "populist right." Michael Kazin (1998) places grassroots conservatives in the context of a "Conservative Capture" (245) of populist imagery in American politics in the 1970s and 1980s (255-66).

forms of Americanism: American flags were displayed at rallies and other types of gatherings, protesters dressed in garbs of the Revolutionary period, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were cited, and the "ideals of the Founding Fathers" (Hall 2011, 141) were invoked. In the eyes of movement leader Howard Jarvis, the tax revolt was a "second American Revolution" (quoted in Hall 2011, 96), its successes "another Boston Tea Party" (109).[20] The political message these efforts transmitted was simple and effective: opposing the desegregation of public education, property taxes and abortion was not merely right in itself; it was a patriotic duty that was perfectly in line with the American political tradition. Protesters were patriots first and conservatives second. The government was tyrannical, oppressive and unresponsive to the 'ordinary' people just like the British crown in the 18th century.

New Right strategist Richard A. Viguerie's *The Establishment vs. The People* (1984) sought to place movement conservatism into a tradition of populist insurgencies. "Populism" he wrote, "represents the class of Americans variously referred to as 'the little people,' 'the forgotten men and women,' […] 'the working class,' and 'the silent majority.' It is distrustful of large institutions but fiercely patriotic" (11-14). Like few other authors, Viguerie articulated a new populist sentiment within the conservative movement that understood itself as a constant 'people's' insurrection against elites of any kind. Though nominally claiming the ancestry of left-wing (e.g. "the forgotten men" "the working class") as well as right-wing ("the silent majority") tropes and branding even conservative heroes like Reagan as elitist (11), Vaguerie's populist crusade against "Big Banks" "Big Business" "Big Government" "Big Unions" and "Big

[20] For other references to the tax revolt as a "modern Boston Tea Party" see Schulman (2002, 212-5).

Media" remained fiercely loyal to the anti-statist, anti-liberal orthodoxy of conservative ideology.

At the onset of era of conservative hegemony in the 1980s, conservatives had, as Kazin put it, "captured" (1998, 245) the idea of 'the people' in American political discourse. Conservative populism found its expression at every level from the presidency to the grassroots. The dominating antagonism at the centre of this discourse divided society "between two poles: the 'people', which includes all those who defend the traditional values and freedom of enterprise; and their adversaries: the state and all the subversives (feminists, blacks, young people and 'permissives' of every type)" (Laclau and Mouffe 1989, 170). As a unifying language, populist discourse sought to keep a diverse coalition of social forces together that had little more in common than standing on the same side of this antagonism. Furthermore, conservatives not only laid claims to American values and founding history but sought to "redefine the notion of democracy itself" (173), as a system that should maximise "individual liberty" (172) against the intrusions of the liberal state.

The concepts of hegemony and hegemonic projects are important to thesis. In order to clarify the understanding of the conservative movement as a hegemonic project (both terms are used interchangeably in this thesis) some observations about its dynamics must be added. The conservative movement in the United States is a more complex hegemonic force than right-wing populist parties in European countries. It consists of a vast network of organisations, including the Republican Party, media outlets, think tanks, advocacy groups, PACs, educational institutions and grassroots groups. It is difficult to identify a true centre of power or a single movement leader. Instead, all of these institutions or groups have a

certain amount of power, influence and resources. Perhaps the best way to describe the internal structure of the conservative movement with regard to mobilisation is through the concept of "three-layer movements:"

> The bottom layer consists of grassroots activists and their participation, energy and contributions. Above them [...] is an infrastructure of organisations and networks that coordinate activism and mobilize participants. The top layer [...] is a set of well-funded supporters of the movement who contribute resources to building and maintaining the movement infrastructure and sponsoring mobilisation of the grassroots. In addition to corporate and elite sponsors, the top layer also consists of the various foundations, think tanks and media organizations that provide leadership and cultural resources [...]. (Fetner and King 2014, 38)

It is thus possible to speak of the conservative movement as a structure that has a centre and a periphery and a network of organisations that connect both. The relationship between these parts is equally complex. All parts are, of course, committed to conservative ideology. However, what this ideology includes and what the priorities of the movement are can be highly contested and lead to prolonged conflicts between different movement factions. Conflicts between traditionalist and libertarians or between neoconservatives and paleoconservatives are two prominent examples (cf. Gottfried 1993; Nash 1996). Different organisations, Republican politicians or entire factions are thus constantly competing for resources, influence and grassroots support. Furthermore, the grassroots have considerable agency in the conservative movement as they can lend or withdraw support from organisations at the centre.

Populism is important to conservatism's hegemonic project in two ways. It can provide signifiers that unify the different interest groups of the movement behind a common cause. And it can be used, as Kazin puts it, as a "flexible mode of persuasion" (1998, 3) to convince Americans to support conservative policies or candidates at elections. Populism is thus a form through which the conservative

movement reaches out to those who might be otherwise uncommitted to its ideology. By fostering resentment towards political opponents, conservative populism can build temporary or permanent alliances around certain issues or leaders. The phenomena of the anti-communism movement and Reagan Democrats illustrate this idea (cf. Kazin 1998).

The Tea Party movement clearly stands within this tradition of modern conservative populism and is organisationally closely connected to conservatism's hegemonic project. The movement, in many ways, is the result of decades of conservative identity work and represents one of the most recent manifestations of conservatives' claims to representing 'the people' and to political leadership. As the Tea Party began to construct its collective identity as 'the people', conservative ideology played a central role in defining what they considered American and un-American, who was included within the construct of 'the people' and who was deemed 'the people's' enemy.

Claims, Methodology, Sources and Structure

This thesis pursues two guiding hypotheses: Firstly, it argues that the Tea Party fits into the category of right-wing populist movements as they have occurred in other liberal democracies. The movement responded to negative developments in American political culture and a perceived sense of crisis. By the end of 2008, the decreasing trust in democratic institutions and the establishments of both major parties, as well as the economic crisis and the crisis of contemporary conservatism, created a space for populist politics that particularly favoured anti-statist messages. The main source of support for Tea Party populism came from disenchanted conservative Republicans. However, the movement also appealed to a section of the American population that harboured a strong distrust of

government, which it considered unaccountable to the will of 'the people'. As in other cases of recent right-wing populist movements, the Tea Party promised to reinstate the will of 'the people' in national politics and to challenge the power of political elites.

At the same time, this "will" was identified to a large extent with conservative ideology, especially fiscal conservatism and libertarianism. In order to unify its two major constituencies into one movement, the Tea Party constructed a flexible concept of the collective identity of 'the people.' This concept either defined 'the people' as 'true' conservatives or as an idea of the American people based on shared national values (cf. Braunstein 2014). Consequently, the constructed enemy of these 'people' were either liberals and 'socialists', or the political class in general. The Tea Party thus claimed to be simultaneously a movement of conservative resurgence and of democratic restoration (Meyer and Pullum 2014). The movement sought to reconcile the inherent contradictions of this approach by conflating conservative ideology and national identity: only a return to conservative principles – especially free market capitalism – would restore the sovereignty of 'the people.' Through this argument the Tea Party sought to vindicate both conservatism and free market capitalism.

Secondly, although the Tea Party movement enjoyed a degree of autonomy from conservative elites, it is still an intrinsic part of the hegemonic project of American conservatism. What distinguishes the Tea Party movement from other right-wing populist movements is that it did not create an entirely new hegemonic project. As this thesis demonstrates, the origins of the Tea Party are closely linked to conservatism's effort to respond to its current crisis and to renew its claims to political leadership and representation of 'the people'.

Central to this process was mobilisation at the grassroots level. What enabled conservatives to mobilise their base and appeal to a constituency of Americans beyond the conservative movement was the appropriation of the anti-bailout cause during the second half of 2008. As this thesis demonstrates, the theoretical framework of Laclau's theory of populism (cf. Laclau 2005, 2007) is particularly useful in analysing this process of appropriation. Laclau's framework also helps to understand the connection between the resurgence of conservative hegemony, the founding of the Tea Party movement, and the recreation of its populist collective identity. For conservatives, the anti-bailout cause functioned as an "empty signifier" that represented a larger populist struggle of the American 'people' against an alliance of the political class, powerful economic interests, and other undeserving freeloaders. This thesis demonstrates how the anti-bailout cause was subsequently integrated into a populist identity project that associated this undemocratic alliance with the politics of American liberalism and presented capitalism and conservatism as the only valid alternatives. The Tea Party movement was a result of this conservative attempt to renew its hegemonic claim to represent 'the people' and became an integral part of conservatism's resurgence in 2009 and 2010.

Overall this thesis is thus dedicated to the exploration of conservative identity politics, which time and again have sought to align conservative ideology and American national identity, and to frame politics along populist fault lines (cf. Kazin 1998; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Ware 2002). To an extent, the thesis follows the prescriptions of social movement scholars who claim that identity has a strong impact on movement recruitment, goals, choice of tactics and strategy (e.g. Polletta and Jasper 2001). This branch of scholarship tries to answer questions of

why people become involved in movements and why they act the way they do through the analytical lens of identity. Margaret Somers summarizes this standpoint in the formula “I act because of who I am” (1994, 608). Some caution here is certainly justified. It would be farfetched to assume that this approach could adequately answer these questions for every given social movement.

However, the Tea Party movement represents an exceptional case. There is hardly any other contemporary movement that is so obsessed with its own identity (cf. Lepore 2010). The Tea Party negotiates identity at every turn: protesters appear in costumes of the Revolutionary era at protest rallies, members constantly reaffirm their identity in local chapters (Braunstein 2014), while its self-proclaimed leaders seek to justify their actions constantly in relation to identity in movement literature (e.g. Farah 2010; Leahy 2012; Meckler and Martin 2012). The populist nature of this identity is hard to overlook. The claim to represent the American people against government tyranny is an omnipresent mantra in protest signs, speeches and literature.

The advantages of this thesis’ application of populism theory are manifold. The distinct branches of populism scholarship address the causes, sources of support, impact and discursive strategies of populist formations and explain the specificities of populist collective identities. Ernesto Laclau’s framework of populism furthermore addresses the creation and internal dynamics of populist collective identities and their relationship to ideology and hegemony. This thesis thus helps to establish the relationship between identity, ideology, and the movement actions of the Tea Party and contributes to the understanding of the movement’s appeal, successes, and failures.

With regard to methodology, the focus on populism and collective identity initially suggests that this thesis engages primarily in discourse analysis (cf. Kazin 1998, 291-2). What this entails requires some substantiation. This thesis makes use of an extended understanding of discourse as prescribed in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1989). Discourse, in their understanding, is a "structured totality resulting from articulatory practice" (105; cf. Laclau 2005a, 68-9). However, this "practice of articulation […] cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena; but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured" (Laclau and Mouffe 1989, 109). Discourse analysis thus means more than the study of language. Furthermore, this thesis follows Michael Kazin's insight that political discourse "does not speak itself; it is the creation of people engaged in institutions with varied resources and agenda" (1998, 292). This study of the founding of the Tea Party movement through the analytical lens of populism thus entails an analysis of signs, practices, and rhetoric as well as of the people and institutions that used them and of the contexts in which they were used.

The study of populism in itself does not prescribe any specific methodology. As mentioned in a previous section, the subject has attracted people from different disciplines ranging from history, political science, social movement studies to political theory. Many of the insights of these studies have been contemplated for this thesis and found their way into this analysis. In order to develop its main arguments this thesis thus pursues an interdisciplinary approach. Notwithstanding, in order to situate this work into the existing research landscape, this thesis might be best placed at the intersection of populism studies and American political history.

The question of sources placed certain obstacles to this study. Since the Tea Party is a relatively recent phenomenon, Tea Party studies is a relatively new field. Much of the secondary literature was published while this thesis was written. Furthermore, the Tea Party continued to take actions in American politics and changed over time. To my knowledge there are still no Tea Party archives – or they are still in the making. Personal circumstances forced me to refrain from field trips. Much of the field work and quantitative studies on the movement were produced in 2010 and 2011 (cf. Zernike 2010a; DiMaggio 2011; Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013). They are thus only partly indicative of the movement's founding moment in early 2009. Such a lack of data might explain why scholars have so far been reluctant to write longer pieces of work on the movement's founding. Due to a lack of archives this thesis explores the movement's origins and the emergence through a variety of different primary sources ranging from the vast body of Tea Party literature, to newspaper accounts, Tea Party websites, blogs, photography collections and videos. Fortunately, Tea Party organisers, members, and supporters tend to be prolific writers and leave multiple traces on the internet and on paper.

This thesis has a chronological structure and covers events between the second term of the Bush administration and the end of February 2009. The goal is not to analyse the political actions of the Tea Party movement after its founding. Instead, the thesis analyses the origins of its populist identity and its relationship to the conservative movement, and ends with the founding moment on February 27, 2009. This analysis takes place against the background of the campaign and the elections of 2008, the TARP bailouts, the inauguration of Obama and the passage of the Recovery Act.

The thesis is structured so as to address the two guiding hypotheses, and is divided into two parts. The first part, which includes chapter two and three, is dedicated to the context out of which Tea Party populism emerged. Chapter two argues that the Tea Party movement emerged in response to changes in American political culture and politics. It starts out with a number of key assumptions of populism scholarship which hold that populism in liberal democracies emerges in climates of democratic malaise and crises of representation. The subsequent analysis traces sources of democratic discontent in American political culture and the crisis of conservatism during the second term of the Bush administration. The chapter also explains the appeal of the Tea Party's populist framing by analysing how these crises were negotiated in the Tea Party movement's own literature as a rationale for the movement's founding.

Chapter three analyses the more immediate context of the Tea Party's emergence during the second half of 2008 and early 2009. It argues that the right-wing appropriation of the anti-bailout cause was a central catalyst to the renewal of conservatism's hegemonic project and marked the return of conservative populism to anti-statism, fiscal conservatism and libertarianism. This appropriation took place in the complex environment of government transition, social mobilisation and partisan politics. As this chapter shows, the appropriation process was pushed by a wide range of forces at the centre of the conservative movement including Republicans in Congress, conservative media organisations and advocacy groups. From this centre the issue was mediated in various forms to the periphery of movement conservatism. The chapter shows how a landscape of local conservative networks and movement entrepreneurs began to lay the foundations of the Tea Party movement, using the anti-bailout cause to validate

the virtues of conservative principles and integrate it into an anti-liberal, populist crusade against the Obama administration.

The second part of the thesis consists of chapter four and five and is dedicated to the role of populism in the foundation of the Tea Party movement. Chapter four argues that by February 2009 conservatism's turn to populism had reached the grassroots. It discusses how the anti-bailout dissent began to translate into actual protests at the conservative grassroots and beyond. The chapter focuses on three distinct protest actions, all of which have been claimed as the first Tea Party protests: the tea bag campaign of Market Ticker and FedUpUSA, the anti-stimulus protest at Fort Myers, Florida and the anti-Porkulus protest in Seattle, Washington. These protest actions show respectively the construction of politics along populist lines as a conflict between the people and an anti-democratic elite conspiracy; the relationship between conservative/libertarian organisations and organisers at the grassroots level; and how people at the conservative base began to rethink conservatism as a bottom-up phenomenon. As the chapter demonstrates, the anti-bailout case functioned as common denominator for a new 'popular' coalition that consisted of various conservative organisations, grassroots conservatives and people otherwise uncommitted to the conservative cause.

Chapter five argues that populism played a central role in the founding of the Tea Party movement and its first nationwide rallies at the end February 2009. The chapter explains how the "Santelli rant" functioned as an "affective" moment which the newly formed Nationwide Tea Party Coalition sought to translate into sustained mobilisation. The analysis of the protests shows how participants negotiated the Tea Party's double identity as democratic restoration and conservative revival and represented the idea of the 'the people' in signs,

speeches, rituals and as a coalition. The protests thus played a crucial role in identity-making and created a sense of community and empowerment which the protesters experienced as an "awakening." Retrospectively Tea Party literature framed the protests as an heroic stand against government tyranny and as an awakening of the American people.

PART I: THE CONTEXT FOR TEA PARTY POPULISM

Chapter Two – A Populist Moment

Introduction

What constitutes a populist moment? This was the question which Lawrence Goodwyn (1978) sought to answer in his seminal work on the 19th-century Populist movement; one of the most emblematic movements to which the term "populism" has been ascribed. More than anything, Populists, in Goodwyn's eyes, seemed to respond to a sense of crisis in Gilded Age America. Goodwyn, part of the new social history tradition, saw the Populists first and foremost as a "mass democratic movement" (1978, viii); a reform movement that called "into question the underlying values of the larger society" (xiv). The Populists recognised that "the economic premises of their society were working against them" (Goodwyn 1978, vii) and began to challenge the "partisans of the established order" (xviii) with the democratic hope of changing these premises in their favour. As such the Populists, for Goodwyn, "represent a political, an organizational, and above all, a cultural achievement" (xvii) which he contrasted to the "popular resignation" and "escapist modes of private conduct" (xiv) he diagnosed in the US of his own time.

The very title of his book, *The Populist Moment*, suggests that the timing of the movement's beginnings was not coincidental but, to the contrary, was a response to its immediate political and cultural environment. What, however, constitutes such a moment of "popular democratic aspiration" (Goodwyn 1978, xiii)? If we take the Omaha platform of 1892 as a standard for the Populists' state of mind, a

populist moment can be understood as a moment of public insecurity and immanent crisis:

> [W]e meet in midst of nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material crisis. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized [...] We witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. (Omaha Platform 1966, 90-1)

The crisis the Populists identified in their own time was multifarious: economic, social, moral and political, deeply embedded in the context of Gilded Age America. A crisis in one sector of the economy was connected to a political crisis that challenged the legitimacy of governing elites at all corners of the political system. In order to construct a narrative of empowerment, the restoration of popular sovereignty and systemic overhaul, large sections of the population needed to fear or experience poverty and disenfranchisement. Democratic aspiration followed democratic despair.

This chapter argues that, just as the Populists responded to a perceived crisis in the Gilded Age, so the Tea Party movement responded to a crisis situated in early 21st century America. It demonstrates that the populist impulse of the movement developed from a complex mixture of multiple crises: a crisis of confidence in democratic institutions and elites; a political and economic crisis; and a crisis of American conservatism. The idea of a crisis as the setting for populist politics is a common theme in the scholarship of populism (e.g. Taggart 2000; Meny and Surel 2002a; Panizza 2005; Laclau 2005, 2007).[21] Some of the insights of

[21] As most of these scholars agree, "crisis" is certainly an elastic term. Considering the rapid political, economic and social changes of the post-industrial global economy, crisis is permanently immanent for some section of the population. The mass migration of people across national borders, the crumbling sectors of national economies, and political mismanagement – whether perceived or real – put considerable pressure on individual communities as well as on the

populism scholarship appear useful in explaining how the emergence of the Tea Party is related to the socio-political context of the 21st century US. Since the 1990s, political scientists have studied the emergence of (mostly right-wing) "populist" parties in western, liberal democracies (Betz 1994; Mudde 2004; Ociepka 2005; Decker 2006). What triggered many of these populist phenomena, which view politics as a struggle between the 'people' and elites, is, according to these scholars, a certain "democratic malaise" and "disillusion in many western democracies" (Meny and Surel 2002b, 1). The sources of this "malaise" are traced back to dissatisfaction with traditional forms of political representation and political parties, which, according to certain parts of the population, fail to deliver specific policy results, provide for a stable socio-economic order and frustrate meaningful citizen input.[22] The resulting disillusion in most case studies leads to a "decline of electoral support for political incumbents" and the emergence of a "politics of resentment" (1) that fills this void. Populists cultivate this resentment, claim to speak for 'the people' and to represent them towards a political system that presumably has become unaccountable and oblivious to citizens' demands.

---

credibility of political systems and governing elites (cf. Laclau 2007, 229-32). This omnipresence of crisis, however, does not render the term "crisis" meaningless. Rather, it points to a multiplicity of social factors that can potentially lead to emergence of populist politics.

[22] One of the most concise catalogues of "sources of dissatisfaction" (2002b, 14) has been compiled by Meny and Surel. According to these two scholars, dissatisfaction may stem "from the political parties accused of being unable to propose programmes which match the aspirations of sectors of the population, or from the defence of specific interests; from the gap between electoral commitments and actual policy output; from the inability of the political class to put problems on the agenda and to debate solutions; from the lack of proper procedural or institutional instruments capable of channelling non-conventional views or ideas which disturb the internal equilibrium of political parties or institutions; from political or economic outputs, particularly in relation to economic and social policies; from the loss of trust in politicians or institutions." (Meny and Surel 2002, 14)

The implications of populism for contemporary democracies are far-reaching. Francisco Panizza, for instance, equals populism with a "crisis of representation" (2005b, 11). "Populist practices," he writes, "emerge out of the failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate political subjects into a relatively stable social order. It is the language of politics when there can be no politics as usual" (9). The construction of the "imaginary unity of the people" (9) equals a symbolic reassertion of a lost sense of representation and popular sovereignty. Panizza, like a number of other scholars (Taggart 2000; Laclau 2005, 2007), specifically ties populist phenomena to questions of collective identities. Like the aforementioned scholars, he asserts that "failures of representation are characteristic of times of political, cultural, social and economic upheaval" (11).

This chapter argues that the roots of the Tea Party movement and its form of populism lie deeper than the immediate political environment of late 2008 and early 2009. The emergence of the Tea Party movement and its populist appeal is, in many ways, connected to a complex setting of crisis. The chapter claims that this crisis in the US had multiple origins: in long-term processes which had gradually eroded public trust in government, political parties and socio-economic elites and, more immediately, in the onset of the Great Recession, the election of 2008, and the crisis of contemporary conservatism. It thus responds to those scholars who focus on the Bush legacy and have explained the movement's founding as context-driven (e.g. Rasmussen and Schoen 2010; Formisano 2012; Trost and Rosenthal 2012) or as a conservative insurgency (e.g. Kabaservice 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The Tea Party movement, this chapter holds, was as much an outcome of these crises as it was a symptom of a resurgent anti-elitist, anti-government mood that attracted more and more Americans.

The movement's ability to absorb a more general sense of democratic malaise into its discourse, while reiterating the redemptive qualities of 'real' conservatism and capitalism, does not constitute a contradiction in the eyes of movement adherents. The dual tasks of restoring conservatism to its presumed original foundations and restoring trust in government and democratic institutions were in fact indistinguishable, according to the movement.

The first section of this chapter traces growing democratic discontent and an erosion of political culture during the Bush presidency. It discusses how these phenomena were discussed in the academic discourse of the time, especially in relation to political polarisation and growing inequality. The next section analyses the development of conservative discontent with conservative governance, which by 2008 pointed towards a crisis not only of conservatism but also within conservatism. The section expands to explore the realignment of conservative priorities during the election campaign of 2008 and the resurgence of populist resentment. The final section details how the Tea Party movement incorporated dissatisfaction with American democracy, as well as conservative dissent, into its movement literature and developed a political identity built upon the ideas of conservative principles and democratic restoration. Dismissive of conservatism's most recent past the movement asserted that only a 'true' conservatism, based on the country's founding principles, was able to reconcile Americans with their political system and that the dual task of restoring conservatism to its presumed original foundations and restoring trust in government and democratic institutions were in fact indistinguishable.

Democratic Malaise in the Bush Era

The legacy of the Bush administration ties the assumptions about the emergence of the Tea Party movement to key assumptions of the scholarship on populism. Scholars who have analysed more contemporary forms of populism in western democracies point towards a whole range of factors that appear to trigger democratic malaise as the basis for the emergence of populist phenomena. Democratic malaise has been linked to the lack of transparency in decision making processes (Canovan 2002); resentment towards representative politics (Taggart 2002); the erosion of party identification (Mair 2002; Kitchelt 2002); the lack of government responsiveness and openness to participation (Meny and Surel 2002b); and the growing economical and ideological gap between elites and parts of the electorate (Bartels 2006, 2008; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010).

Can such a malaise be identified during the Bush era? Increasing popular dissatisfaction with American politics, political institutions and elites are certainly reflected in polling data. Those start with the President himself. Bush had ascended to the White House in 2000. Having lost the popular vote against Democratic opponent Al Gore, his presidency started with a weak public mandate and his legitimacy tarnished. This only changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, after which many Americans clamoured for symbolic leadership. Polls indicate that ninety percent of Americans approved of the President in September 2001. What followed, however, was a constant decline in approval ratings throughout his presidency. By the time his presidency ended, approval ratings were down to 25 percent; the lowest approval rating for a president since Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal (Gallup 2009). Approval ratings for Congress fared even worse during the same timeframe, dropping from an equally unnatural high of 84

percent in the aftermath of 9/11 to a then all-time low of 15 percent in 2008 (Newport 2012).

At first sight, these figures might be related exclusively to the specific individuals who occupied these public offices. Other statistics, however, show that the actions of the President and Congressional representatives tarnished public confidence in the political institutions themselves: between 2001 and 2008 confidence in the presidency fell from 48 to 26 percent; in the Supreme Court from 50 to 32 percent; and in Congress from 26 to 12 percent (Gallup 2016). Dissatisfaction, in the Bush era, was not limited to political elites of the 'Washington establishment' and the institutions they represented. Instead, it became part of a larger cultural phenomenon of anti-elitism in American society. According to polls conducted by the General Social Survey between 2000 and 2008, public confidence not only declined towards political representatives but also towards "big business," "banks," "organized religion," and "the press" (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 72).

A study undertaken by WorldPublicOpinion.org in May 2008 shows that the declining confidence in elites and institutions seemed connected to perceived democratic short-comings. The study shows firm support for the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, with more than eighty percent stating that the "country should be governed according to the will of the people." These democratic ideals, however, clash with the way people perceive their actual influence in politics: eighty percent of Americans stated that the "country is run by a few big interests" rather than "for the benefit of all people." A clear majority did not trust the government to the "do the right thing." Frustrations about government responsiveness were further accompanied by frustrations over the public's political input, with clear majorities stating that citizen input should play

a role in politics beyond elections. These results were consistent with those in other western liberal democracies, where dissatisfaction with democratic institutions and processes reached similar levels (World Public Opinion 2008).

These corrosive tendencies in western democracies were reflected in the social science discourses of the time. Books such as *Post-Democracy* (Crouch 2004) or *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Meny and Surel 2002a) argued that the contemporary state of liberal democracies gave reason to worry, especially considering that in places like Austria, France or Italy rightwing anti-status quo parties could marshal considerable victories claiming to represent 'the people' against the interests of entrenched political elites. According to Alan Ware (2002) the American system seemed more resistant to these outsider challenges. He argued that both Republican and Democratic parties had incorporated populist rhetoric into their respective discourses, thus leaving little space for movement or third party challengers. Yet, as the numbers above show, in the eyes of the American public all was not well with the system of democratic governance. In fact, works like *Democracy at Risk* (Gates 2001), *Off Center* (Hacker and Pierson 2005), *The Great Derangement* (Taibbi 2008) or *Unequal Democracy* (Bartels 2008) made the case that the political system had lost its connection to the American public.

In the context of the US, academics at the time identified the polarisation of the party system as a decisive factor for the growing disenchantment of the American electorate with the political system and governing elites. Polarisation was certainly one of the most striking features of American political culture in 21st-century America. It refers to the increasing ideological sorting taking place in the Democratic and Republican Parties and among political activists: While

Democrats seemingly have moved towards the left on certain issues, the GOP has taken on increasingly right-wing positions on most political issues. At the same time conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans virtually disappeared from both parties, leaving little ideological overlap between them (Nivola and Brady 2006; Kabaservice 2012). Polarisation thus describes a process of change within both major parties as well as the repercussions of these changes for American politics.

William A. Galston and Pietro S. Nivola identified "large historical transformations, the changing role of religion, the mass media, and the way representatives are elected to Congress" (2006, 19) as the main causes of political polarisation. Authors mention in this context the demise of the New Deal coalition and the growing Republican dominance in the south; the gradual takeover of the Republican Party by conservatives (Kabaservice 2012); the repeal of the fairness doctrine "which prohibited broadcast news programs from engaging in overt editorializing" (Galston and Nivola 2006, 2); or the growing role of social wedge issues since the rise of the Christian Right. Furthermore, gerrymandering had a large impact on polarizing Congressional politics, leaving candidate selection increasingly in the hands of well-organised and ideologically committed organisations at the base (Fiorina and Levendusky, 70-1).[23]

According to these studies, polarisation helps to explain the American public's negative outlook and diminishing confidence in governance in the Bush era. To Galston and Nivola (2006), ideological entrenchment reduced policy makers'

[23] "Gerrymandering" describes the practice of redrawing electoral districts along the lines of party affiliation. Parties thus had increasing "safe" districts with supermajorities for either the Republican or the Democratic Party. "By 2004," according to Galston and Nivola, "less than 10 percent of the House was being seriously contested" (24).

capabilities to reform sensitive government programs such as Medicare or Social Security. At the same time, equally sensitive issues like national security or the confirmation of court nominees were overshadowed by partisan confrontation (35-9). From the electorate's perspective Congress consequently appeared to be increasingly dysfunctional, causing wide-spread dissatisfaction with the political process on the federal level. Polarisation increased the scepticism towards political elites and contributed to the increasingly hostile political climate between self-identifying liberals and conservatives, while at the same time reducing the political sway of centrist, moderate positions.

The history of the political polarisation started much before the Bush era. Already in the early 1990s, books like E.J. Dionne, Jr.'s *Why Americans Hate Politics* (1992) argued that Americans' dismay with politics was caused by increasing polarisation. At the onset of the Bush era the longing for bipartisan reconciliation was particularly notable. The American public had become tired of the embittered confrontations between House Republicans and the Clinton administration. The public's longing for a sense of bipartisan compromise and a new sense of unity seemed especially strong due to the economic recession of the early 2000s and the widespread insecurity following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

For a time after the attacks Congress actually seemed to act with a greater sense of unity, at least with regard to national security. The Patriot Act, the creation of the Department for Homeland Security, and the military engagement in Afghanistan met relatively little resistance in Congress. Bipartisanship even spilled over into other policy areas. The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform and the No Child Left Behind educational reform were passed with the support of Democrats and Republicans (Galston and Nivola 2006, 30-2). Bipartisan compromise was

favoured by the fact the Bush government philosophy of "compassionate conservatism" appeared to accommodate some form of commitment to the welfare state.

Towards the end of Bush's first term, polarisation resumed its former grip on American politics with a deeply polarising presidential election campaign in 2004. While Democrats sought to recover electoral ground by promising to reverse dramatic levels of economic inequality, Republicans in the Bush camp relied largely on social wedge issues such as gay marriage to mobilise social conservatives to their political course. The loss of post-9/11 political unity, which became abundantly obvious during the campaign of 2004, cast little favourable light on the country's political class. Instead of displaying the ability to reach agreement over pressing political issues, American politics appeared to be dysfunctional, self-referential and isolated from electoral concerns. Furthermore, the ever-increasing amount of negative ads and the deliberate spread of misinformation throughout the 2004 campaign eroded whatever positive expectations people might have had about the competing candidates and parties.[24] With regards to the campaign, Galston and Nivola concluded that

> a healthy civic culture ought to do more than bestir voters; it should build their trust in the nation's political institutions. […] An abundance of nasty campaign advertising, negative news media slants, and outbursts by truculent politicians does not necessarily discourage people from voting, but a citizenry ingesting a diet of partisan vitriol may nonetheless grow disenchanted and cynical. The fact that bodies such as the U.S. Congress consequently operate under a cloud of public mistrust is far from ideal. (2006, 40)

It is difficult to talk about the effects of polarisation without acknowledging the rapid transformation of public space through the expansion of digital media.

[24] For an overview of the growing importance of negative campaign adverts during the 2004 election campaign see "From Bush, Unprecedented Negativity" (Milbank and VandeHei 2004)

While the gradual dismantling of the Fairness Doctrine during the Reagan administration further contributed to the partisan character of the television, radio and newspaper landscape, media in general only provided very limited space for audience participation. From the 1990s onwards, most newspapers had established an online presence and have allowed readers to comment on articles. The appearance of a politicised blogosphere, social media platforms and website discussion forums multiplied people's opportunities to engage in political discussions. These developments extended and intensified the *Kulturkampf* between liberals and conservatives in the digital arena, which began to resemble an echo chamber of a disgruntled citizenry. Moderate voices seemed increasingly rare.

Overall, polarisation during the Bush era was a phenomenon that divided the public as much as the two major parties. Growing impatience with perceived government dysfunction was manifested in poll numbers. According to surveys conducted in spring 2006 by the Princeton Survey Research Associates, 53 percent of participants supported the idea of a third major party in American politics. 85 percent further agreed with the statement that the US had "become so polarized between Democrats and Republicans that Washington can't seem to make progress solving the nation's problem" (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 76). These numbers suggest that a large number of Americans did not feel represented by the current party system, a circumstance which authors have frequently linked to the emergence of populist movements in other countries (Kitchelt 2002; Mair 2002). The "crisis of representation" which Panizza (2005b, 11) sees as the starting point of populism seemed inextricably linked to the ever-increasing polarisation of the party system.

Polarisation, however, was only one of several corrosive elements of American democracy during the Bush era. Another debate that surfaced among scholars and public during the Bush years concerned the negative effects of growing economic inequality on political representation (e.g. Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Bartels 2008). Economic inequality in America had been clearly rising since the 1970s (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005, 4). In particular, the top 0.1 per cent of the population benefitted disproportionately from a shift in national politics (6). Ideologically this in itself has not produced widespread rejection among the American public. In a study commissioned by the Russell Sage Foundation, Jacobs and Skocpol point out that according to surveys "Americans are much more likely than Europeans to accept substantial disparity of income and wealth" (2005, 7). This acceptance, however, is conditioned by two factors: Firstly, Americans expect to have equal opportunities to advance economically and secondly, Americans expect that economic inequality should not impair political equality and their chances to "have an equal voice in representative government" (8).

It was in this way that American governance seemed to fail. Scholars found that "the government has become less responsive than it was several decades ago and that it is particularly attentive to the views of the affluent and business leaders" (Bartels et. al. 2005, 117). The politics of what Larry M. Bartels called "the new Gilded Age" (2008), were characterised by a number of new dynamics in the electoral decision making process. Some studies have found that more affluent voters wielded increasing political influence (Lehman Schlozman et. al. 2005; Gilen 2012). The affluent were more like to vote, engage in political actions, and donated higher amounts of money to election campaigns, which had become more expensive and consequently more dependent on financial contributions (Lehman

Schlozman et. al. 2005). The same studies show that politicians responded in kind and increasingly responded to the political preferences of this section of the electorate. The correlation of growing economic inequality and political inequality thus seemed to go hand in hand.

An additional change to the decision making process was caused by the increasing influence of organised interest groups on American politics. Interests exist across the political spectrum, ranging from those representing egalitarian causes related to organised labour, racial minorities, gay rights, environmental and consumer rights to professional associations and business interests (Lehman Schlozman et. al. 2005, 49-57). The way these groups influence public policy is similar. They entertain lobbyist groups in Washington DC and state capitals and seek to influence specific details in current legislation to their advantage. Their financial contributions to election campaigns "buy" them time with political representatives (Bartels et. al. 2005). Furthermore, some of them found think tanks and advocacy groups that provide politicians with specific ideas, concepts and model legislation, and seek to influence the public in their favour. As some scholars find, this influence, however, is not equally distributed, favouring business and affluent interests over those of the "economically disadvantaged" (Lehman Schlozman et. al. 2005, 54).

Jacobs and Skocpol (2005) see a clear relationship between economic and political inequality, the growing disaffection of Americans with their democratic system and distrust in government. During the Bush era they especially shaped the perception that government has become unresponsive to the will of ordinary citizens while catering to "a few big interests looking out only for themselves" (8). "Americans," the authors wrote at the height of the Bush administration, "are

increasingly worried about disparities of participation, voice, and government responsiveness" (8). Work on contemporary populism in western democracies related the rise of populist parties and movements to these concerns (cf. Taggart 2000; Meny and Surel 2002a). Yet these concerns about the erosion of popular sovereignty and democratic governance, and the suspicion of interest group politics in American politics follow to a large extent partisan lines. Kazin (1998), for instance, argued that while populism of the left tended to oppose the influence of corporations and business leaders, conservative populists made the same case about the influence of organised labour, women's rights groups as well as sexual and racial minorities. What united them was the discomfort with contemporary governance and equal representation.

The policies of the Bush administration did little to conceal the representational disparities between the low and high income segments of American society. In fact the President and the Republican-led Congress pursued a political agenda that openly favoured wealthy Americans: business regulations were relaxed, non-unionized industries were supported and taxes for the wealthiest Americans were drastically reduced (Zelizer 2010, 3-4).[25] To a large extent his politics of inequality represented an organic continuation of Republican Party politics.[26] What is more, however, during the Bush years, the formal and informal networks between corporate business and members of Congress increasingly became an object of public scrutiny.

[25] Hacker and Pierson's analysis reveals that "the richest 1 percent of Americans [...] reaped roughly 40 percent of the total rewards of the 2001 tax bill—a share almost identical to that received by the bottom 80 percent on the income ladder" (2005, 46).

[26] In his work on party ideology John Gerring argued that the pro-business politics of the GOP have been manifested in the party's ideological direction since the late 1920s (2001, 125-159).

There were reasons for this dynamic. Congressmen have become more and more dependent on the financial support of political action committees (PACs) to finance their election campaigns. It goes without saying that corporate support has given business interests a considerable leverage over Congressional politics once elections are over. Returning favours to campaign sponsors could be achieved in ways different from those described above. One that rose to prominence during Bush administration was the practice of "earmarking" or "pork barrel spending". An earmark is essentially a sub clause in a legislative bill which allocates parts of the federal budget to specific companies and other organized interest groups. They became a form of political currency with which, on the one hand, Congressman's vote for a specific bill could be 'bought,' and on the other hand companies could be secretly rewarded for campaign contributions. [27] Surely, not all earmarks are directly related to election campaign support. They are, however, the basis of an informal network of corporate business, interest groups, lobbyists and political decision makers and thus open the door to systemic corruption and what might be called crony capitalism.

The idea of cronyism rose to the level of national attention at several points throughout Bush's presidency. In 2005, the Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay was arrested on charges of money laundering and conspiracy in relation to irregularities in his campaign finance activities. A year later DeLay resigned from Congress and in 2010 he was sentenced to ten years on probation (McKinley 2010). The DeLay case came as a major blow to Congressional credibility, because it showed that systemic corruption had reached the highest

[27] Bowie and Lioz speak in this regard of "the appearance or reality of actual *quid pro quo* corruption" (2012, 9). The interjection of "appearance" is quite relevant, because it highlights the importance of public perception of these processes. Public perception surely weighs equally heavily in relation to confidence in the political system than the actual repercussions for public policy.

echelons of federal politics and that elections were won not on the basis of political arguments, but due to the accumulation of corporate money in election campaigns. At the same time it was part of a larger corruption scandal known as the Jack Abramoff scandal, which implicated several Congressmen and their staff, as well as several high-ranking officials in the executive branch and two Republican PACs (Moreno 2004; Schmidt and Grimaldi 2005; Wilber and Johnson 2008). The Abramoff scandal exemplified the informal structures of cronyism that operated not merely at the fringes of legality. As other cases of the period showed, politicians' (of both the Republican and Democratic parties) implication in conspiracy, money laundering and corruption was demonstrably illegal.[28]

There is little doubt that the close alignment of business interests and government elites substantially contributed to the eroding of trust in the political system. Not only did it suggest that Congressional politics were infested by systemic corruption, it also showed that political representation was unequally distributed in American society, favouring moneyed interests over public interests. Measures to counteract these tendencies, such as the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform or earmark reform endeavours, were hardly apt to restrain the influence of money in politics; especially not after the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in the

[28] Significant cases involving corruption schemes include: Republican Congressman Rick Renzi from Arizona was found guilty of extortion, racketeering and money laundering (Wagner 2013). Fellow Republican Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham pleaded guilty to charges of bribery and served several years in prison (Henry and Preston 2005). Democratic Congressman William J. Jefferson of Louisiana was convicted on charges of bribery (Stout 2009). Democratic Senator Robert G. Torricelli of New Jersey withdrew in the midst of his re-election campaign in 2002 after charges of ethical misconduct (Hernandez and Chen 2007). Democratic Congressman Jim Traficant of Ohio was found guilty of several counts of financial corruption, conspiracy, and tax evasion and served seven years in prison (Merchant 2009).

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission case removed virtually all limitations on the spending of corporate money in election campaigns.[29]

Looking back at the Bush presidency, it is not difficult to understand how dissatisfaction with political and business elites could become such a widespread phenomenon among the American electorate. Issues such as polarization, and the implications of growing economic inequality certainly worked as centrifugal forces, dragging representatives and electorate further and further apart. Certainly not all of this was of George W. Bush's making. Ideological polarization and the steadily increasing influence of concentrated wealth on American politics have been long-term processes. Bush, however, did little to rebuild the public's trust in the political class. He was neither a great unifier (apart, perhaps, from the time immediately after the 2001 terrorist attacks) nor a leading figure in the fight against systemic corruption. When he left the White House, the national debt was at an all-time high, the country was engaged into two devastating military conflicts and the nation faced the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Anti-elitism and democratic malaise were reflected in popular culture. Non-fiction publications stressed the otherness with which ordinary Americans perceived their ruling class. Books such as Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas* (2005) show that anti-elitism particularly flourished at the conservative grassroots. Frank explained at great length how political, cultural, and economic elites were being increasing characterized by conservatives as effete, cosmopolitan and, quintessentially un-American, with a lifestyle associated with the Eastern and

[29] The repercussions for political representation caused by the growing influence of Super PACs in recent years is the subject of Bowie and Lioz's "Auctioning Democracy: The Rise of Super PACs & the 2012 Elections" (2012).

Western seaboards. Similar stereotypes of America's elite can be found in David Brooks' *Bobos in Paradise* (2000). This identification of elite culture as fundamentally different from the American mainstream appeared to have further alienated parts of the electorate from their political representatives. As Papadopoulos notes,

> we expect rulers to be replicas of the man of the street, and to come from the same background, express the same preferences, or share the same values as ourselves. […] Ideally, we would like to be represented by those we consider our replicas and, all other things being equal, whom we regard as more able than ourselves to do the job in hand. (2002, 48-9)

Constructing America's elites as a group whose cultural and political preferences differ in virtually every aspect from an equally constructed American mainstream suggests the opposite. Rather than seeing their political representatives and other societal leaders as their "replicas," anti-elitist stereotypes insinuated that elites were "out of touch" with the needs and aspirations of 'average' Americans.

Especially during Bush's second term, anti-elitism became a defining part of the American zeitgeist. Books like Matt Taibbi's *The Great Derangement* (2008) sought to capture the mood. A regular political correspondent for *Rolling Stone*, Taibbi portrayed American society as fundamentally remote from political decision makers and politics in general:

> [B]oth parties, Democratic and Republican, were equally guilty in what really was a conspiracy to run the government without outside interference. The only way the public could protest all the handouts and earmarks and fast-tracked tax breaks and other monstrosities was to vote for the other party—and the other party, it turned out was inevitably whoring for the same monied masters. (2008, 3)

Confronted with such an unaccountable political system, writes Tabbi, large parts of the population turned away from politics altogether; dedicating their energy

instead to Christian fundamentalism or obscure conspiracy theory groups such as the 9/11 Truth movement. For Taibbi, the ideological polarisation of Congressional politics was little more than a distraction from the fact that the country was governed by a hidden elite consensus.

> The reality is that the dominant characteristic of our political system is the unchanging nature of the political consensus—while the two parties agree about most all of the important things, they disagree violently about the inconsequential stuff, providing the fodder and the drama for an endless political "struggle" that plays itself out in entertaining fashion every couple of years. (113).

For Taibbi, the movement of large sections of the American electorate towards the fringes of public life was an escapist response to systemic corruption and their perceived *de facto* disempowerment within national politics.

Looking at this panorama of democratic malaise and disenchantment in the America of the Bush administration, it is easy to identify crucial preconditions for the emergence of populism-related phenomena. "Allegations of corruption," Panizza writes, "malpractice or, more generally, the control of public life by a non-accountable and self-serving political elite are typical of the situation in which populism takes the form of the 'politics of anti-politics', as politicians and political parties become the 'other' of the people" (2005b, 12). The Tea Party movement is inextricably linked to this context. To understand this connection is to understand the initial mobilisation successes of Tea Party populism.

The Crisis of Conservatism, the Election of 2008 and the Return of Conservative Populism

If the years of the Bush administration constituted an era of declining confidence in political and economic elites, the process was accelerated when the economy began to slide into recession and the 2008 presidential election drew closer. As

discussed earlier, both events took place in a political climate of genuine distrust of government, mounting debt and military overreach. Polarised party politics, extensive coverage of Congressional gridlock, and corruption or lobbying scandals further contributed to public distrust. At the same time, the departure of Bush from the White House heralded a potential new beginning in American politics free from the reins of establishment, business Republicanism.

Before discussing the unfolding of a genuinely "populist moment" in 2008 and 2009, it is worth taking a look at what had happened to the political coalition that had helped to keep Bush in power. Bush had entered office in 2001 on a platform of "compassionate conservatism" that was geared to holding different conservative factions together while, at the same time, developing at least a minimal appeal to moderate Republicans (Kabaservice 2012, 381-2). Compassionate conservatism as a political philosophy sought to serve the interests of free marketeers, through tax cuts and deregulation, while simultaneously pleasing social conservatives through the rejection of abortion and gay marriage, and the inclusion of faith-based initiates in the delivery of welfare services. The landmark legislation on education and Medicare expansion for the elderly during his first term marked Bush as a president who was willing "to use activist government for conservative ends" (Critchlow 2007, 257). His influence among conservatives subsequently grew because of the role he played as a wartime leader after the 9/11 attacks and during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As during the 2000 election campaign, the 2004 campaign marked Bush and his political advisor Karl Rove as capable party leaders, who had managed to lead the GOP to electoral victories in 2000, 2002, and 2004 (257-63, 269-77).

Yet all was not well within the conservative movement. What surfaced during the Bush administration was a conflict which had, in different forms, arisen on several occasions since modern conservatives had first won the presidency in 1980. At the bottom of this conflict was the inability or unwillingness of conservative elites to pursue the political priorities which the different factions within the conservative movement had fought for since the emergence of modern conservatism in the 1940s and '50s. Among these were the destruction of the welfare state and federal government action more generally and the return to a traditionalist society based on the "Judeo-Christian tradition" (Nash 1996, 27). The reason why conservative elites had become reluctant to implement conservative principles too strictly, was that they had learned from past electoral failures. The doomed Goldwater campaign of 1964, which had sought to integrate a maximum of conservative movement demands into its campaign platform, had shown that a radical transformation of American society along conservative lines could not win over a majority of the American electorate.[30]

A central part in the project of shaping conservatism into a viable electoral force was played by neoconservative intellectuals.[31] In many respects the neoconservative outlook differed from those of movement conservatives. Neoconservatives had little appetite for libertarians' all-out crusade against the welfare state or the state in general. Neoconservative "godfather" Irving Kristol,

[30] In his book *The Conscience of a Conservative* ([1960] 2007), which served as campaign literature, Goldwater advocated many conservative key positions: the opposition to welfare state provisions, business regulations and civil rights; fiscal austerity; the support for states' rights in areas such as education; the end of farming subsidies; and a militantly anti-Soviet foreign policy. The rationale of Goldwater's political agenda was simple. For a detailed account of the Goldwater campaign see Perlstein 2009.

[31] Mostly Jewish or secular intellectuals and former "New Deal Democrats or socialists" (Nash 1996, 330), many neoconservatives defected to the conservative cause in the 1970s. Different from other branches of conservatism, neoconservatism never really manifested itself in the form of a social movement, and for the most parts neoconservatives sought to influence American conservatism as opinion makers, intellectuals and scholars (Diamond 1995, 178-81).

for instance, diagnosed that "People have always preferred strong government to weak government" (2003). Unlike libertarian purists Kristol had urged conservatives since the 1970s to fathom "what a *conservative welfare state* would look like," arguing that the "idea of a welfare state is in itself perfectly consistent with a conservative political philosophy" (Kristol 1995 [1976], 346). Based on a concept of conservative politics guided by moral certainty and virtue, neoconservatives were able to form an "unexpected alliance" with "religious traditionalists" against the alleged moral permissiveness of contemporary liberalism and to promote a foreign policy geared towards the "national interest" and the global spread of democracy and capitalism (Kristol 2003).

The significance of Neoconservatism, not only derived from its divergence from conservative movement politics but from its view on politics and power. Conscious of the radical, yet ultimately unsuccessful, beginnings of movement conservatism, Kristol ascribed a historical mission to the neoconservative project: "the historical task and political purpose of neoconservatism would seem to be this: to convert the Republican Party, and American conservatism in general, against their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy" (Kristol 2003). In order to "make the very idea of political conservatism more acceptable to a majority of American voters" (Kristol 2003), neoconservatives advocated a more flexible, pragmatic style of conservative *Realpolitik*, less preoccupied with fiscally conservative principles and more accepting of the welfare state and government size. If at all, the most radical conservative movement goals served as a long-term horizon for political conservatism rather than as its guideline for public policy.

Movement dissent against conservative governance surfaced whenever conservative leaders were unable to bridge the gap between the high expectations of the different conservative factions and the actual politics of the Republican Party. This was the case with George H.W. Bush, who was neither a movement conservative nor an orator on a par with his predecessor, Reagan. Furthermore, Bush was confronted by a conservative movement that had grown dissatisfied with the political achievements of the Reagan Revolution (Nash 1996, 337; Kazin 1998, 266). In 1992 this conflict was publically visible when the paleoconservative Pat Buchanan challenged the neoconservative Bush for the GOP ticket. After the primaries, the next outlet for disgruntled conservatives was independent candidate Ross Perot. Like Buchanan, the Texan billionaire sought dissenting conservatives' votes in the presidential races of 1992 and 1996. Unlike Buchanan, however, Perot challenged what he saw as a bipartisan ruling class, from outside the GOP. His Reform Party's platform presented conservatives with an alternative mix of fiscal conservatism, anti-internationalism, and moderate stances on 'social issues' (Holmes 1992). In 2008 and 2012 Texas congressman Ron Paul ran a GOP primary campaign that combined elements of Perot's fiscal conservatism, Buchanan's anti-interventionism and long-held conservative movement goals into a new kind of conservative libertarianism. This libertarianism developed significant traction among young voters and put other conservative candidates at several instances onto the defensive during the primary season (Taylor 2012). In each of these instances a dissenting leader sought to reinvigorate the populist language of 'the people' (cf. Kazin 1998; Paul 2008).

When Bush's son George W. Bush entered the White House, conservative dissent against the Republican leadership seemed to have faded. After the 9/11 attacks the

Republicans won the midterm elections of 2002 and brought Congress under their control. In August of the following year, a triumphant Irving Kristol published the short essay "The Neoconservative Persuasion" in *The Weekly Standard*. Neoconservatism seemed to have finally accomplished its "historical task" of making conservatism the dominant force in American politics. Bush was able to relate to the conservative base, garnering support from the business community and religious Right. He cut taxes and deregulated sections of the economy. Simultaneously Bush embraced activist government and used the budget surplus he inherited from the Clinton administration to finance ambitious programs in education and healthcare. Abroad he defended American democracy against "non-democratic forces", and the "national interest" against "world government" (Kristol 2003).

The almost unqualified support of the different conservative constituencies for Bush and Congressional Republicans, however, lasted little beyond the successfully concluded 2004 election campaign. As the federal deficit took on more worrying proportions and public approval for the Iraq war began to sour, many conservative groups and opinion makers began to criticise Republican lawmakers and Bush more openly.[32] The influential *National Review*, which had

[32] Criticism of Bush came indeed from a number of different directions. In 2005, James M. Buchanan, a Nobel Prize winning libertarian economist, judged it the right time to publish a collection of his work under the title *Why I, too, Am not a Conservative*. Associated with libertarian strongholds such as George Mason University and the Cato Institute, Buchanan makes the case of classical liberalism instead of modern conservatism or liberalism. Other Cato researchers became equally distant from modern Republicanism. Cato staffers were worrying about the "compassionate" element in compassionate conservatism. Steven Slivinski, by then director of budget studies at the Cato Institute and a former graduate from George Mason University, published *Buck Wild* in 2006, in which he criticised Bush and his fellow Republicans for their abandonment of anti-statist principles and their betrayal of the Reagan legacy. Additionally, the critics of the Iraq war and Bush's foreign policy became increasingly vocal. Peggy Noonan, one of Reagan's former speech writers, for instance, wholeheartedly supported Bush during his first term and turned against him thereafter, declaring in 2008 that he "destroyed the Republican Party" (Noonan 2008). Libertarians and paleoconservatives, like Patrick Buchanan

formerly praised Bush's commitment to the so-called "War on Terror" and lauded his economic record up until the 2004 elections, began to question his conservative philosophy during his second term (O'Sullivan 2003; Moore 2004). John O'Sullivan, one of *National Review*'s ardent defenders of the war in Iraq, for instance, began to question the Bush style of "strong government conservatism," for its commitment to an activist government saying that "it seemed to validate a liberal-statist Democratic conception of government" (O'Sullivan 2006). Other writers of *National Review* were equally sceptical of the GOP policy style, focusing either on the souring prospects of the Iraq mission, Republicans' embrace of government spending and the party's inability to counteract the politics of Congressional Democrats (Ponnuru 2005; Buckley 2007; O'Beirne 2007). In the light of worsening electoral prospects, the *National Review* began to reaffirm its former commitment to a limited-government philosophy and a return to more traditional anti-statist themes.

With public as well as conservative esteem evaporating during his second term, Bush swiftly turned into a toxic political asset that was bound to spoil the electability of any Republican candidate too closely affiliated with him. With hindsight Michael Kazin could observe the increasing isolation of Bush among conservatives as well as Republican Party candidates: "By late 2007, few activists on the right bothered to defend Bush, and the Republican candidates to succeed him, all of whom brandished the conservative label, condemned most of his domestic policies as well as his handling of the war in Iraq." It was therefore not surprising that no "GOP hopeful asked for Bush's endorsement" (Kazin 2010, 296) during the Republican primaries.

---

and Ron Paul, voiced criticism about the neoconservative influence on Bush and the Republican Congress almost from the onset of Bush's presidency (e.g. Buchanan 2004; Paul 2008).

The Republican primaries and the presidential election campaign reflected this new conservative introspection. This was the case not only because the primaries and general election were meant to replace an unpopular president, but also because they seemed set to replace an exhausted tradition of American politics. The era from the ascendency of Reagan to the downfall of George W. Bush was undoubtedly a conservative era. Whether in the form of the Christian Right, supply-side economics, neoconservatism, the Republican Revolution of the 1990s or the compassionate conservatism of the Bush era, conservatives had managed to redirect the outlook of many Americans towards the Right. As the era concluded with numerous corruption scandals, the large-scale distrust of voters in democratic institutions, elite resentment, ideological polarisation, growing economic inequality and a sharp economic downturn, this shift towards the Right was on trial during the election. Conservative hopefuls, who wanted to stand a chance during the GOP primaries, had to signal to the party's base that they were loyal to conservative principles. At the same time they had to create a symbolic distance between themselves and the pathological features of Beltway politics. The need to model conservative candidates as 'people's champions' and system outsiders was based on the mobilisation of a politics of elite resentment that gave populism a distinct appeal throughout the election cycle.[33]

As historian Ron Formisano noted, virtually all presidential contenders in the two major parties understood the need to reflect the anti-elitist, anti-Washington

[33] These symbolic, populist gestures were obviously not a new phenomenon in American election campaigns. Some of the most emblematic earlier examples of using populist, cultural gestures in presidential campaigns are portrayed in Jefferson Cowie's study of Nixon's re-election campaign (2010, 125-166), Rick Perlstein's monograph on the draft Goldwater movement (2009) and Joseph Lowndes' discussion of the George Wallace campaign (2005). Michael Kazin holds that since the 1980s populism has operated as a "deliberate rhetorical project" deployed by "any serious candidate." He further noted that these "projects" aimed at portraying candidates as champions of working and middle class, accusing opponents "for favouring rich people [...] and/or trying to live like one" (1998, 272).

sentiment of the electorate. Consequently, most candidates sought to incorporate populist themes in their respective campaigns (Formisano 2010). According to Formisano, these candidates pursued this strategy in different ways. He writes:

> A populist strategy aims to align candidates with ordinary people who lack power or are being oppressed by undemocratic elites who wield excessive power. The essence of populist language is to set up an *us* who claim to speak *for the people* against a *they* of elites or a powerful few who have taken over or corrupted the political system and rigged it to benefit themselves. (238).

This populist strategy was meant to signal certain attributes of candidates to the electorate. The most important of these attributes was to create a distance between candidates and the 'Washington establishment' held responsible for the contemporary fiscal, economic, foreign policy and democratic crisis. The distance between candidate and establishment as well as the proximity between candidate and 'people' was established by means of appearance, lifestyle, forms of mobilisation, political message, political style, and institutional or geographic location.

The populist language, which Formisano mentions, denoted certain forms of symbolic politics that reach beyond verbal communication. Conservative candidates of this particular election cycle, for instance, were prone to appear in "casual clothing" and to "mingle among voters at factories, community centers, clubs, or local halls," in order to "convey [a] connection to average people" (240). Geography played a role too. By adding actual Washington outsiders to the field of contenders, the Republican Party further continued a lasting trend of candidate selection which had paved the way for former governors such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush to enter the White House. Among these 'outsiders' were Mike Huckabee, Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani. Later, when the primaries came to an end, the former Governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, was selected as running

mate for John McCain. These candidates' absence from Beltway politics was conveyed as a political advantage. None of them, so the argument ran, was to be blamed for the dysfunctional character of Washington politics or for Republican decline; they were outsiders, who would inject with fresh and 'common sense' solutions into the politics of the capital.

Against the background of wide-spread elite resentment, "populism" became a key word of the election cycle. The eventual contenders, John McCain and Barack Obama, both tried to present themselves as candidates who stood for a new political style, transcending party polarisation and more responsive to the needs of average Americans. Asked by a reporter to describe his own approach to populism Obama answered, "my populism is built most powerfully around the sense that government is nonresponsive to these folks [...]. They're probably less angry at Wall Street for making money and angrier at Washington for not setting up some basic rules of the road" (Marcus 2008). McCain, the Republican consensus candidate, though a long-time Senator and thus a Washington insider, built upon his "maverick reputation" which he had cultivated by breaking with "the Republican leadership on select issues" (Kabaservice 2012, 381) at several points of his recent tenure. Although he certainly counted as a conservative, his joint effort with liberal Democrat Russ Feingold to pass a campaign finance bill during the Bush era appeared to qualify him as someone who could reach across the aisle and achieve bipartisan compromises. Consequently, McCain presented himself as a pragmatic reformer who placed fairness and concern for the plight of average Americans above the rigidity of partisan discipline.

The announcement of Sarah Palin as McCain's running mate at the Republican National Convention added another layer of populist imagery to the Republican

campaign. While McCain's reformist, middle-of-the-road public image sought to appeal to the moderate section of the electorate, Palin's candidacy was meant to energise the culturally conservative section of the Republican base. Palin's appeal among conservative voters relied upon her self-constructed persona as "an 'everyday American,' a small town girl, a hockey mom, mother of five, including an infant with Down syndrome, an NRA member and moose hunter, and an opponent of abortion even in cases of rape and incest" (Formisano 2010, 246-7). Increasingly skilful in constructing such a self-image, Palin tied her political positions to her own life experience in her autobiography *Going Rogue: An American Life* (2009):

> It went beyond common sense conservatism and traditional values to the fact that we are everyday Americans. We know what it's like to have to make payroll and take care of employees. We know what it's like to be on a tight budget and wonder how we're going to pay for our health care, let alone college tuition. We know what it's like to work union jobs, to be blue-collar, white collar, to have our kids in public schools. We felt our very normalcy, our status as ordinary Americans, could be a much-needed fresh breeze blowing into Washington, D.C. (Palin 2009, 220-1).

Her geographical distance to the capital, her biography and even her inexperience in foreign affairs and national politics were sold as a political asset to an electorate which had seemingly lost its confidence in government. Palin was the candidate who cared about working and middle class Americans, which she carefully constructed as a centre-right majority that was held together by Christian, "traditional" values, family, patriotic nationalism and economic hardship.

Palin's populism operated at an emotional level that suggested a direct identification of leaders with the population. At the same time, such invocations of the American heartland were contrasted against liberal elites in the 'mainstream' media and an imagined political oligarchy in Washington DC that

were at odds with 'traditional' American culture (cf. Ouellette 2012). Following the vice-presidential television debate with Joe Biden, conservative pundit David Brooks contended that "Palin took her inexperience and made a mansion out of it [...] she made it abundantly, unstoppably and relentlessly clear that she was not of Washington, did not admire Washington and knew little about Washington. She ran not only against Washington, but the whole East Coast, just to be safe" (Brooks 2008).

Palin had an important impact on the election campaign and the populism of the later Tea Party movement of which she became a symbolic leader.[34] Palin's impact essentially nullified the reformist image which McCain had cultivated during the primary season and replaced it with a renewal of culture war themes that uncannily resembled those of George W. Bush's during the most recent conservative past. Formisano noted that the selection of Palin drastically shifted the Republican strategy from "themes of economic populism" to a "full-blown culture war" (2010, 246).

The anti-Washington element of Palin's populist message, as well as her 'heartfelt' compassion for working America, survived the campaign and catapulted her onto the front line of the Tea Party. Although her economic agenda was largely in-sync with the conservative-libertarian section of Tea Party, her impact appeared to be mostly based on her expression of anti-elitist, anti-liberal sentiments. What *Rolling Stone* writer Matt Taibbi called the "tired succession of half-coherent one-liners," (Taibbi 2010) of which Palin's speeches seemingly consisted, nonetheless spoke to a multitude of Tea Party conservatives. They expressed an anti-establishment sentiment rather than a coherent political agenda.

[34] According to a survey conducted by the Sam Adams Alliance in 2010, a majority of Tea Party members wanted Sarah Palin to run for president in 2012 (Bedard 2010).

Her rhetorical style anticipated much of the communication style that Tea Party speakers and literature would use with its members, the general public and the media (cf. Farah 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012). In this regard Palin proved to be ahead of her time.

More generally, populist themes had put their stamp on the entire Republican campaign, including the primaries. With the approval ratings of the outgoing president and Congress at historically low levels, it appeared that neither worries about terrorism, nor the state of the economy, but rather the distrust of the political class was the common denominator of the elections. Candidates had more appeal, it was believed, the further they distanced themselves from Beltway politics. The eventual defeat of John McCain proved this to be a miscalculation. The electorate was worried about the economic crisis, and a McCain-Palin ticket turned out to be unable to assuage these economic anxieties. Instead, both Republican candidates returned to the kind of culture war themes that had characterised the Bush campaigns: they constructed an "us-vs.-them" paradigm, which constructed America as a centre-right nation in opposition to an entrenched elite. By redefining this elite as a Washington-based "political class," they sought to create a distance between themselves and the unpopular policies of the Bush administration. This distance, however, was more symbolic than grounded in a radical departure in terms of policy proposals.

Certainly, conservatives in 2008 were confronted with a difficult task: Not surprisingly the cumulative crises of public confidence, economic recession, foreign wars and budget deficits were largely considered an outcome of conservative governance. Unlike the pre-Reagan era, conservatives found it ever more difficult to present themselves as political outsiders. They were seen, with

justification, as the most powerful and best-connected political elite of the country, who could not evade responsibility for the political and economic situation (Hacker and Pierson 2005, 2011). The situation for conservatives became even more desperate when the economy and especially the financial sector began to rapidly disintegrate during the final weeks of the presidential race. Most observers shared the impression that such market failure effectively made "a mockery of the GOP's faith in unregulated markets" (Kazin 2010, 297). As the outgoing President Bush and a bipartisan coalition in Congress rushed to the rescue of the national economy with Keynesian relief efforts in the form of multi-billion dollar bailouts for crumbling financial institutions and corporations in the industrial sector, the crisis of the conservative political economy reached epic proportions. Not only had ever lower tax rates and deregulation failed to provide for a stable economy, but the system was stabilised by 'liberal' relief efforts. McCain, who in January 2008 declared that "the fundamentals of economy are strong, and [...] will remain strong" (Council on Foreign Relations 2008), never convinced the majority of the public that his grip on economics and the ensuing crisis were particularly sound. Nor did the campaign offer any decisive policy change that would enable the Republican candidate to step out of the shadow cast by the Bush administration.

The direction of a decisive policy departure from the Bush era was most coherently presented by the Ron Paul campaign. It deserves particular attention because of the way in which it anticipated many of the themes and strategies of the Tea Party movement. Paul had established his credentials as a politician untainted by the political fiasco of Bush conservatism quite early during Bush's presidency. In 2003 he published the essay "The Truth about Neoconservatism,"

which was a basic critique of the administration and its neoconservative ideology in all aspects. Here Paul lashed out against Bush's governmental initiatives in Medicare, education and farm subsidies. "Lip service is given to the free market and free trade," he wrote, "yet the entire economy is run by special-interest legislation favoring big business, big labor, and, especially big money" (Paul 2003). He spoke out against curtailing civil liberties which were "easily sacrificed in the post 9-11 atmosphere prevailing in Washington" (Paul 2003). At the same time Paul criticised neoconservatives' imperial ambitions in the Middle East as a project that was "a far cry from the advice of the Founders, who advocated no entangling alliances and neutrality as the proper goal of American foreign policy" (Paul 2003). Coming so soon after 9/11, such statements from a Republican congressman should have effectively ended his political career. But they did not. Paul continued to serve as congressman for his seat in Texas' 14th district without serious competition in primaries or general elections (Rink 2011, 161-184).

In 2007, the time for Paul's ideas appeared to have come. As the GOP and the outgoing president slipped ever deeper into a political crisis, many people began to look at Paul with renewed interest. Even though his campaign had little chance of success and his candidacy was, at times, vigorously opposed by much of the party leadership, Paul's campaign in key ways anticipated many of the ideas and tactics of the Tea Party movement (Doherty 2012). Like the Tea Party, it was organised by tech-savvy supporters, who made extensive use of social media platforms, websites, Meetup groups, YouTube and Twitter. The campaign relied on a highly decentralised network of local supporters and the campaign staff was able to communicate and to organise events that were targeted at nationwide audiences (Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 27-34). Among them were a "Revolution

March" in Washington D.C. in summer 2008, the "Rally for the Republic," and the Tea Party "moneybomb," which for many, including his son Rand, was the real beginning of the Tea Party movement. Rand Paul would recollect later:

> [O]ur government and its loyalists know there's something big happening at the grassroots of American politics. I began to sense this when I attended what many consider to be the first modern Tea Party event held on the anniversary of the original, where on December 16, 2007, over a thousand people crammed into the historic Faneuil Hall in Boston for an event in support of my father's 2008 presidential campaign. [...] The event featured an array of constitutional scholars and limited government advocates, and we shocked the establishment on that date by helping Ron Paul set an all-time record for online fundraising by collecting over $ 6 million in one day. Something was definitely brewing (Rand Paul 2011, 5-6).

Ron Paul and his political advisers understood quite clearly the importance of mass mobilisation for right-wing causes, a conclusion readily picked up by later Tea Party organisers. Once his presidential bid was essentially lost, the Paul team used the momentum and the remaining money of the campaign to convert enthusiasm for his message into a sustained grassroots movement: the Campaign for Liberty (CFL). The CFL made its debut on the national stage in early September 2008, during the Republican National Convention (RNC) in St. Paul, Minnesota. While the GOP delegates nominated McCain and running mate Palin for the upcoming presidential elections, a crowd of about 15,000 Paul supporters gathered in neighbouring Minneapolis to celebrate the "Rally for the Republic" (Henry 2008, Doherty 2012, 143-7). The event was not merely a counter-convention to the RNC and the birthplace of the CFL. It was a sign that libertarian conservatism, anti-statism, and opposition to 'bipartisan consensus politics' had reached a remarkable level of public support.

His "freedom philosophy" (Paul 2003) was directed against most kinds of state intervention and was meant to appeal to the left as well as to right wing critics of

government action. “The conflict of the ages,” Paul writes, “has been between the state and the individual: central power versus liberty” (Paul 2003). In his pursuit of liberty he had as much praise for the left’s opposition to war and its struggle for civil liberties as for the right’s embrace of Austrian economics. The struggle for liberty knows no left or right, he declared, it only knows “the state and the individual.” Paul’s program, eloquently summarised in his election pamphlet *The Revolution: A Manifesto* (2008), opposed the “War on Terror” as much as the “War on Drugs.” It argued against subsidies, bailouts, income tax, the Federal Reserve System and the welfare state. His justification for these demands was always the same: individual liberty must be protected from the encroachment of government.

Beyond that it was Paul’s uncompromising populism and the legitimisation of his demands through a conservative reading of the Constitution that shaped the Tea Party’s rhetorical style. In his campaign manifesto he writes:

> We should not think in terms of whites, blacks, Hispanics, and other such groups. That kind of thinking only divides us. The only us-versus-them thinking in which we might indulge is the people – *all* the people – versus the government, which loots and lies to us, threatens our liberties, and shreds our Constitution. (Paul 2008, 66)

Paul’s populism certainly differed from that of other candidates for the presidency. Formisano has demonstrated that other candidates experimented with populist gestures in their campaign in order to convey their proximity to Americans’ everyday concerns. They sought to discredit political opponents by pointing to their allegedly un-American lifestyles or pitted corporate influence against the concerns of the country’s poor and evaporating middle class. Paul, by comparison, was lashing out against the political elites of both parties, showing little or no signs of party discipline. Instead of party loyalty, he insisted on the

strict constitutionality of his position. The "political class" (Paul 2008, 55) as he saw it, barely concealed the "Great Bipartisan Consensus" (160) of Washington's "one-party system" (163). Where observers saw polarisation, Paul saw a bipartisan alliance against the interests of individual freedom and the people everywhere he looked. Often his views bordered on the idea of an elite conspiracy. "There are far more interest groups lobbying in Washington for special benefits and privileges than most Americans can imagine," Paul writes. "I do not oppose just this one or that one. I oppose the whole apparatus, the whole immoral system by which we use government to exploit our fellow citizens on behalf of our own interests" (107). This view on politics would inform the Tea Party and its writing (cf. Paul 2011; Kibbe 2012).

Content with the growing traction of his own grassroots outfit, the CFL, Paul would remain an outsider to the Tea Party movement, watching its growth benevolently from a distance. "The Tea Party people are sending the right message" (Green 2010) he told a journalist in 2010. However, the relationship between Tea Party and CFL has been ambivalent. *The Atlantic* journalist Joshua Green has described Paul's relationship to the Tea Party: "He is not the Tea Party's founder (there isn't one), or its culturally resonant figure (that's Sarah Palin), but something like its brain, its Marx or Madison. He has become its intellectual godfather" (Green 2010).[35] In the same way it is true to say that in

[35] With only a few exceptions, the Tea Party gave Paul little credit for his undeniable impact. As the following chapters show, many Tea Partiers showed little interest in the kind of quixotic crusades they saw in Paul's presidential runs in 2008 and 2012. A straw poll for the GOP candidacy of 2012, conducted by the Tea Party Patriots among its members, yielded Paul a meagre three per cent of support (Tea Party Patriots 2011). In comparison Paul's influence on contemporary conservatism was profound. At the Conservative Political Action Conferences (CPAC) he won the influential straw poll in two consecutive years in 2010 and 2011 (Falcone 2011).

2008 his CFL demonstrated the potential for mass mobilisation for populist, libertarian-minded causes.

In 2008, when economic collapse and consecutive electoral defeats of right wing Republicans indicated conservatism's immanent crisis, many activists questioned conservatism's contemporary state and direction. Paul's answer was as simple as it was convenient for many disoriented activists on the Right. There was nothing wrong with conservatism or capitalism; rather it was the wrong conservatism, wrought with liberal compromise, which had brought the country to the brink of economic ruin. The financial crisis was not the result of overly conservative governance but rather of a lack thereof. In *The Revolution* Paul wrote what many Tea Partiers would later express themselves (cf. O'Hara 2010, 41-50). The economic crisis, which had its origins in the real estate/financial sector originated in the "[g]overnment-sponsored enterprises Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac," which, "because of the advantages bestowed upon them by the federal government" were able to acquire "monopoly positions in the mortgage market" (Paul 2008, 158). With the help of their political allies in the Federal Reserve and both major parties, an unnatural boom developed. "The boom," Paul claimed, "had not been built on a sound foundation of savings" (159) and was thus destined to lead to recession. Such reasoning added up to a simple conclusion: the economy collapsed because the government interfered in the free market. Democrats, Republicans, the Federal Reserve and complicit banking elites were responsible for the economic breakdown. "Not a word about any of that, of course, because Americans might discover the role of the great wise men in Washington in this great debacle," Paul writes, "Better to keep scapegoating the mortgage industry or 'wildcat capitalism' (as if we actually had a pure free market)" (Paul 2008, 161).

The Paul and Palin phenomena in 2008 represented attempts to deal with the crisis of contemporary conservatism in different ways. While Palin sought to revive a conservative, populist language that resonated with the conservative base culturally, Paul sought to vindicate conservative purity and capitalism in the name of 'constitutional' principles. Both candidates, in their own way, anticipated political modes of expressions of later Tea Party populism. The campaign cycle of 2008 also demonstrated the difficulties of conservatives in the Republican Party to articulate its hegemonic claims at a time when a majority of Americans held conservatism responsible for the deterioration of democratic values and the multiple crises which the country faced at the time.

Tea Party Populism between Democratic Aspiration and Conservative Restoration

As this chapter stated at the beginning, scholars have identified a number of causes linked to the emergence of populism in contemporary liberal democracies. Most prominent among these factors is a sense of democratic malaise and frustration with the system of representation, which leads to widespread anti-elitist sentiments. As polling and academic and popular discourse at the time show, this condition applied to the Bush administration. The Bush years thus created the socio-political climate for populist mobilisation. As, for instance, Panizza (2005b) further argued, the populist relies on groups whose identity was threatened or "dislocated" and who constructed 'the people' to reaffirm what they perceive as a loss of popular sovereignty. The crisis of conservatism in 2008 explains why conservatives were among those who stopped feeling represented in contemporary America. On the one hand, the political fiasco of the Bush administration seemed to disprove basic assumptions of conservative ideology,

especially the faith in free market capitalism. This challenged conservatives' convictions and beliefs. On the other hand, the Bush administration and most Republican challengers during the election cycle of 2008 were unable to articulate conservatism's hegemonic claims of representing the American 'people.' By the end of 2008 the hegemony of conservatism in American politics seemed to have come to an end.

The populism of the Tea Party movement clearly responded to this environment. Its discourse was linked to the twin crises at the end of the Bush administration: the crisis of confidence in the political system and the crisis of American conservatism. This becomes clear in the vast body of literature by the Tea Party, which portrays the movement simultaneously as a revolt against Republican leadership and a revolt of 'the people' against a corrupted, unresponsive political system (e.g. O'Hara 2010; Paul 2011; Martin and Meckler 2012).

Many Tea Party writers certainly fit into the category of movement conservatives who felt crossed by the elites that oversaw conservative government. Young conservative and Tea Party enthusiast John M. O'Hara, for instance, noted that "Conservatism, the political philosophy […] has fallen politically inert. That is not to say that it has failed, that it is irrelevant, or that it is outdated. Instead, it has been drowned out, watered down, or thrust to the side" (2010, 21). For O'Hara – more a fiscal conservative than a social conservative hardliner – the departure of Ronald Reagan had been a watershed moment for Republican conservatism. He described George H.W. Bush as a man "[w]ithout a core philosophy" (27). From his presidency onwards conservatism in the Republican Party was either diluted with liberal compromise or betrayed by party elites. O'Hara labelled the George W. Bush years a "quasi-conservative presidency" (2010, 33) and articulated

conservative frustrations with the policy output of a Republican Party that had enjoyed comfortable majorities in Congress and the White House:

> The 2006 elections brought heavy losses for Republicans. Not that they were undeserved. By this time, Republicans held two branches of government and couldn't shrink government at all […] the Department of Education was thriving rather than being abolished. The budget was continually expanding rather than shrinking. The only obstacle that stood in the way of Republicans making change were Republicans standing against change. The revolutionary zeal [of Gingrich's Republican Revolution] from 10 years earlier had been lost. (O'Hara 2010, 35)

In his Tea Party manifesto O'Hara captures a return to an earlier era of conservative thinking. The flaw of Republicans in Congress and Bush in particular was their reliance on culture war themes that had played such a decisive role in preceding decades. O'Hara and other conservatives who shared his views, however, represented a generation of activists who had more in common with the anti-big government, anti-New Dealers of the Goldwater generation than with the Cultural Warriors of the 1980s and 1990s. Using words such as "revolutionary" and advocating radical change, these activists were at odds with a Republican establishment that appeared to have more in common with Democrats than with the conservative movement as they understood it.[36]

Bush's cardinal sin, however, was to bailout the financial sector, especially the 2008 Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). In the climate of turmoil in the financial markets and with the looming danger of economic depression, Bush and congressional Republicans cooperated with Democrats and ratified TARP in order to save the economy from further collapse. Aside from the obvious ethical concerns about 'bailing out' a corporate finance sector which singlehandedly

[36] It is therefore not surprising that books like Stephen Slivinski's *Buck Wild: How Republicans Broke the Bank and Became the Party of Big Government* (2006) or Joseph Farah's *Taking America Back: A Radical Plan to Revive Freedom, Morality and Justice* (2003) were well received by a conservative audience despite the fact that Republicans governed the country.

brought the economy to its knees, conservatives saw TARP as a betrayal of a central pillar of the American creed: free market capitalism. Indignation about Bush's 'betrayal' has lived on inside the Tea Party movement and is part of the rationale for its rejection of the establishment conservatism of the GOP. Tea Party Patriots' cofounder Mark Meckler remembered the impact TARP had on him personally:

> On December 16, 2008, President George Bush appeared on CNN and actually said, 'I've abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system.' A Republican president had openly repudiated the free-market capitalism that had been the engine of liberty and freedom in the world. My heart sank. For the first time in my life I thought the end of American prosperity, and ultimately democracy, might be at hand (Meckler and Martin 2012, 7).

Meckler's account is relevant because it is indicative of the sense of alienation of many conservative activists towards the Republican Party. He also connects the narrative of Republican betrayal with concerns about American democracy. For conservatives TARP was understood as a symbol of a bipartisan effort to expand the role of government in the economy and thus dismantle the free enterprise system, individual freedom, and, eventually, democracy. Meckler's outrage was further intensified by the fact that it was a Republican who betrayed him.

This reveals the scale of the crisis, which Tea Partiers perceived in representative political democracy: If neither of the two major parties defended the free enterprise system, capitalist America was without representation. In another section Meckler remarked that

> Republican or Democrat – it did not seem to matter which side was in power. Either way our government kept getting bigger, our liberties kept getting smaller […] The speed with which we drifted away from the founding principles ebbed and flowed, but the direction never seemed to change. (Meckler and Martin 2012, 5)

Seemingly betrayed by Democrats and Republicans alike, Tea Partiers like Meckler perceived the conservative movement's core philosophy as having been abandoned by the two-party system of the Bush era. Thus a sense of powerlessness characterized the sensibility among many conservative activists prior to the Tea Party movement's emergence. Panizza's "crisis of representation" thus affected movement conservatives and all those who had put their faith in the free market gospel conservatives had disseminated for decades. At the height of the bipartisan bailout efforts no free market, anti-statist rhetoric from the GOP establishment could convincingly articulate conservatism's hegemonic claims (2005, 11).These had to be expressed by something outside the GOP: by the Tea Party.

The populism in Tea Party discourse, however, was more complex and did more than merely position it in a confrontation between the conservative movement and GOP leadership. Tea Party populism, like other instances of populist mobilisation in other countries, sought to mobilise democratic discontent and elite resentment beyond the conservative constituency and channel it into a distinct political project (cf. Taggart 2000; Meny and Surel 2002; Panizza 2005; Decker 2006). In the case of the Tea Party this project coincided largely with the orthodoxy of movement conservatism. This seems counter-intuitive at first, considering that by the end of the Bush administration and with the escalation of the economic crisis, the efficacy of conservatism and deregulated capitalism seemed disproven. However, as noted above, the Tea Party argued that the Bush administration neither represented 'true' conservatism nor 'true' capitalism. The movement argued instead that both capitalism and conservatism in their purest form could overcome the democratic malaise caused by polarisation, political inequality and

cronyism. The movement, in other words, highlighted the redemptive qualities of capitalism and conservatism and sought to vindicate both.

Tea Partiers were apt to point to the dysfunctional aspect of democratic governance, which has resulted in large parts from polarisation, inequality and the perceived distance of Congressional politics from 'everyday' concerns. Favourable studies of the movement and movement literature have been eager to stress that the Tea Party represents the 'unrepresented' centre of US public opinion. These writings therefore locate Tea Party positions and activism in the middle of the political spectrum, describing them as "new centrism" (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 79), "the new center of American poltics" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 144) or representatives of a "Center-Right Nation" (O'Hara 2010, 38). The name of the 9/12 Project (a Tea Party faction led by hard-right, conservative entertainer Glenn Beck), was meant to "evoke the feelings of patriotism and unity Americans experienced after the 2001 terrorist attacks (Milbank 2010, 231), a moment when people left behind partisan divides and came together for a higher purpose (Beck 2009).

Presenting conservative outlooks as centrist has a number of historical precedents in Nixon's "Silent Majority" or the Christian Right's "Moral Majority." Tea Party literature continues this line of thinking in different ways. The Tea-Party-leaning study *Mad as Hell* (2010) by Scott Rasmussen and Doug Schoen discusses at great length and with the help of statistics how Tea Party positions are in sync with "the American mainstream" (82). Christian Right conspiracist Joseph Farah positioned the Tea Party at the centre of the political spectrum, aligned with "the philosophy that guided the founding of this [the US] country" (2010, 35-6). Farah argues that "the political spectrum, if it is to make any sense at all, should be

based on attitude toward government" (38). The left accordingly "places all power in the hands of government" (34) and includes a large group of political philosophies ranging from communism and fascism, which he calls "another brand of socialism" to the "soft socialists" (36) in contemporary US government. The right, according to Farah, is represented in anarchism and libertarianism (35). Shielding the US against the dangerous radicalisms of both left and right, the Tea Party movement's adherence to 'founding principles' are perceived as profoundly centrist.

These claims of political centrality are, of course, linked to the hegemonic project of the modern American Right. They are based in the idea that conservatism expresses the central aspects of American identity, shared by the majority of Americans and thus entitled to political and cultural leadership. Every other political philosophy that might ascend to power at the federal level is therefore perceived as a distortion of political representation, whether it is that of treacherous Republicans or liberal Democrats. As noted above, throughout the last few decades conservatives have found different ways to express this idea of centrality, depending on changing historical contexts and the changing groups this discourse sought to include. The Tea Party's stance on party polarisation and the centrality of their own views represent a continuation of the process.

At same time the writings of Tea Party leaders and the recorded statements of grassroots protesters reflect ambivalence to the realities of polarisation. Clearly the denunciation of "partisan bickering" (Beck 2009, 3) or "partisan nonsense" (Paul 2011, 48) has served to discredit Beltway politics and provide a sense of legitimacy to the Tea Party's self-ascribed "non-partisan" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 22) stance. The constitutional law scholar and Tea Party writer Elizabeth

Price Foley called the Tea Party movement an "antiparty" (Foley 2012, 218). All too often, though, Tea Partiers view polarisation as a smokescreen meant to conceal the liberal consensus that has allegedly guided Democratic and Republican rule (e.g. Beck 2009, 56-61; Paul 2011, 45-88). This view gathered particular momentum in response to the bailout and economic stimulus negotiations in which George W. Bush and a section of Congressional Republicans openly embraced the ideas of Keynesian crisis management. Bipartisanship in this context was almost universally rejected as a betrayal of conservative principles and the 'traditionally' American free enterprise system (e.g. Armey and Kibbe 2010, 37-64; O'Hara 2010, 39-50; Meckler and Martin 2012, 5-8).

The presumed centrism of the Tea Party was rooted in the claim that the movement did nothing more than reinstate constitutional principles that the current political leadership had abandoned (e.g. Leahy 2012; Foley 2012). The Tea Party Patriots, for instance, write:

> The Tea Party Patriots stand with our Founders, as heirs to the Republic, to claim our rights and duties which preserve their legacy and our own. […] Our founding principles are the same as America's. These beliefs are in America's DNA; they are each American's birthright. And this source code is favoured by an overwhelming majority of American citizens. Those who oppose fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets are free to argue against these principles. But those who do – whether Republicans or Democrats, liberal or conservative – will soon find themselves in a permanent minority and on the losing side of history. (Meckler and Martin 2012, 23-4).

As some scholars have argued, the movement's obsession with constitutional originalism and the legacy of the 'founding fathers' was one of its most idiosyncratic features (Lepore 2010; Braunstein 2014).

Yet it also proved relevant to Tea Party discourse and political argument. The vindication of capitalism and conservatism, in the case of Meckler and Martin, was founded not on placing the movement in the conservative movement tradition or the history of the GOP. Instead, the legitimacy of Tea Party demands was based on a presumed consensus of an "overwhelming majority" of 'the people' and an imagined political lineage that connected the movement back to the leaders of the American Revolution. This was the basis of the Tea Party's claim to represent the political centre. Conservatism was nothing less than "America's DNA." This argument assumed centrality in Tea Party populism. Embracing a conservative version of Americanism, the Tea Party elevated its own principles as the qualifying standard of citizenship. While 'the people' are constructed as American constitutionalists, its elite opponents are discredited as un-American. It goes without saying that such a view left little space for compromise or the acceptance of diverging opinions. Instead it drew, as Laclau (2007) put it, an "internal antagonistic frontier separating 'the people' from power" (74).

The Tea Party movement's ambivalent relationship to inequality was just as complicated. This becomes evident when looking at the way the movement and its allies framed the issue. Perhaps the most striking feature of Tea Party discussions of inequality is that – contrary to most scholarly opinions (e.g. Gilens 2012) – the movement neatly separated between political and economic inequality. It is not surprising that wealth and income inequality per se do not seem to constitute a major problem for many Tea Partiers. Although the popular theme of "too big to fail, too small to succeed" is frequently used in Tea Party writing, especially in the context of the bailouts (e.g. Armey and Kibbe 2010, 48; Meckler and Martin 2012, 6-7; O'Hara 2010, 217), many Tea Partiers were very selective in what they

considered political foul play or an unfair advantage for wealthy interests. Criticism of the Bush administration, for instance, never extended to its tax cuts or the deregulation agenda. Nor did corporate money in election campaigns constitute a serious problem in the eyes of nationwide groups such as the Tea Party Patriots. Meckler and Martin write:

> The solution to this problem isn't, as many on the political left suggest, some kind of campaign finance reform that will, invariably, either trample the First Amendment or further drive us into debt. The Tea Party knows the reason there is so much money in politics is that there is *so much money* in politics. So we strongly support the most effective form of campaign finance reform there is: a dramatic reduction in the federal budget. (2012, 89-90).

While defending the principle of corporate personhood and unlimited campaign spending under the First Amendment, the Patriots return to their universal cure of political ills: anti-statism and assaults on government 'largesse.'

Presumably such choices were made for ideological and strategic reasons. The Patriots' idea to make corporate campaign finance and lobbyism less lucrative by reducing government spending was characteristic of the movement's general attitude towards big business and moneyed interests. Tax cuts and deregulation were generally considered fair and were endorsed by organisations like the Tea Party Patriots in order to "unlock the spirit of entrepreneurship that has always driven Americans to economic greatness" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 46). On the basis of these convictions the collaboration between Tea Party organisations, business elites and free market groups such as the Americans for Prosperity, FreedomsWorks, and the Club for Growth makes perfect sense (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 171-7). Their free market ideology coincides with the interests of a large sector of the business community.

At the same time, however, Tea Party writings often resorted to a portrait of big business interests that was far less flattering and had more in common with the concerns about corruption, lobbying and inequality of political voices that was prevalent outside conservative circles. Efforts to distinguish between business Republicanism and free market ideology have been ongoing for some time. Conservative strategist Richard A. Viguerie's *The Establishment vs. The People* (1983) formulated the following distinction:

> Many of our political leaders and big businessmen use the term "capitalism" to describe the use of government power to benefit business, especially big business.[...] The so-called capitalism supported by the corporate and political elite entails government subsidies, minimum and maximum prices, tax loopholes for politically-favored activities, and the preservation of the status quo [...]. But the system the establishment supports is not really capitalism. True capitalism is an economic system free of government interference, in which all businesses, big and small, are free to succeed—or to fail. (31)

Viguerie's concept of "true capitalism" defends the idea that conservative free-market advocacy is completely reconcilable with the idea of conservatism as the ideology of the little man, of average Americans. His description echoes those of Tea Party publications, which maintain 'real' capitalism as a political horizon that would reconcile unrestrained economic competition with the idea of fairness and equality. The next generation of the free market crusaders would share Viguerie's outlook on the political economy and corporate interests and target regulations, subsidies, bailouts and government investment in the private sector as symptoms of the bipartisan consensus of cronyism, corporate welfare and breaches of the American free enterprise system (e.g. Paul 2008, 69-107, 137-56; Slivinski 2007).

Although big business is not unequivocally condemned by Tea Party groups and affiliates, the behaviour of corporate business and political elites is often considered harmful to political equality and democratic values. In these instances

their criticism resembles that of more centrist and leftwing observers. Matt Kibbe, the president and CEO of FreedomWorks and a chief architect of Tea Party mobilisation, serves as a typical example of this overlap. In *Hostile Takeover* (2012), Kibbe writes,

> All told, in 2010 corporate America spent more than $3.5 billion on hiring nearly 13,000 lobbyists, whose main job is to secure tax breaks, regulatory waivers, contracts, and congressional investigations to tilt the market for those who hire them: Wall Street, Big Pharma, Big Insurance, and Big Business. For all these industries, good business leads through Washington. [...] Economists call this behavior rent-seeking. But let's call it what it is: crony capitalism. [...] Americans rightly hate what capitalism in America is becoming: an unholy alliance between big government and big business. (153-4)

The argument of Kibbe uncannily resembles the type of criticism one would expect from the Occupy Wall Street movement. It also resembles the anti-big business rhetoric of the likes of Viguerie. Cronyism is considered a mutually beneficial alliance of political and economic elites that runs counter to American traditions of political equality. Again, 'true' capitalism emerges as a near-utopian egalitarian political project that needs to be seen as the antithesis of cronyism.

The glaring intellectual limitations and contradictions are evident to all those unconvinced by conservative orthodoxy, and the actual practices of conservative groups like FreedomWorks. That cronyism lies in the very nature of profit-maximising capitalist business ethics is an inconvenient fact that plays no role in these deliberations. Nor does Kibbe mention in his assault on lobbyism's detrimental effects that his FreedomWorks' lobbying efforts for deregulation were generously rewarded by companies such as Philip Morris and ExxonMobil (Pilkington 2009). It appears as though lobbying for business interests is an acceptable practice as long as its goals comply with libertarian-conservative concepts of 'true' capitalism. This seems to be the case whenever the goals are

anti-unionism, tax cuts or deregulation, which are seen as distortions of the free enterprise systems.

All these inconsistencies and contradictions aside, Tea Party discourse reflects democratic concerns over political inequality and party polarisation that were shared by political analysts and a section of the population, considerably larger than its immediate conservative constituency. In the moment when Tea Party leaders like Glenn Beck wrote about the negative impact of gerrymandering (Beck 2009, 50-56), the Tea Party Patriots scorned the venal political class for its transgressions (Meckler and Martin 2012, 90), or Matt Kibbe decried the influence of big business, or Rand Paul offered a negative verdict of George W. Bush and 'establishment' Republicans (Paul 2011, 47-57), they spoke to and for a potential majority of Americans who shared their concerns. Certainly, their outrage was entirely tilted towards a conservative perspective and the sincerity of their positions should be questioned. Yet the way in which they deliberately targeted political and economic elites and glorified the virtues of everyday, average Americans came straight from the playbook of the American populist tradition (Kazin 1998; Taggart 2000; Ware 2002). Far from blaming conservative governance or conservatism in general for the erosion of public trust in politics, Tea Partiers have made the claim that 'real' conservatism and 'true' capitalism would restore the people's control over the political system and provide equal opportunities and equal rights.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the roots of the Tea Party movement and its populist discourse lie far beyond the immediate political context of its actual

emergence in early 2009. Tea Party populism responded to a multilayered crisis of confidence in democratic institutions, economic recession and a crisis of conservatism during the second term of the Bush administration. What provided an opening for the Tea Party was a general sense of democratic malaise and a Republican Party unable (in spite of Palin's and Paul's best efforts) to articulate conservative hegemonic claims.

That the Tea Party movement emerged in a social terrain in which democratic malaise and anti-elitism came be to sentiments shared by larger parts of the population is far from coincidental. Rather, the Tea Party movement is entwined with the conflicted legacy of the Bush presidency and its impact on American political culture, making it a part of what Taibbi has called the "Great Derangement" of the American public. The link between the contemporary pathology of liberal democracy and the rise of populism such as the Tea Party movement confirms the assumptions of populism scholarship (e.g. Meny and Surel 2002; Panizza 2005b).

Tea Party literature reflects this connection to a large extent. Meckler and Martin, for instance, frame the beginnings of the movement in the following way.

> We, the people of the United States of America, felt threatened. We felt angry. We felt helpless as we watched our beloved nation […] slip away. We felt threatened because a government that once existed to protect our rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness had become the primary obstacle to the exercise of those rights. […] We were angry at politicians from both parties who had abandoned any pretense of responsibility. (2012, 13)

Statements in which Tea Partiers claim to represent the struggle of the American people as a whole can be found throughout their literature. With them the Tea Party reached out to Americans beyond the conservative constituency, to all those who were frustrated with the political elites and the state of American values and

democracy. The Tea Party identified ‘the people’ as an imagined community of Americans that transcends partisanship, race, gender and class divides. Instead ‘the people’ were constructed on the basis of a commitment to values expressed in conservative Americanism. By doing so the movement claimed that the crisis of confidence in American democracy and the crisis of the Republican Party were strongly related. According to the Tea Party both were caused by the abandonment of conservative principles. The only thing that could restore American democracy was a return to conservatism and free market capitalism.

Chapter Three – From Left to Right: The Right-wing Appropriation of the Anti-Bailout Protests and Emergence of the Tea Party Movement

Introduction

Tea Party populism has its roots in a culture of public disenchantment with politics and rising anti-elitist sentiments. The previous chapter showed that these phenomena at least partially grew out of frustrations with Bush-era policies. By 2008, the perceived failure of the Bush Administration to secure a successful and enduring legacy left Republican contenders for the presidency with few opportunities to sell the conservative cause to a majority of the electorate. While established conservatives sought to practice damage control by making John McCain the candidate of the Republican Party and distance themselves from Bush, many at the conservative periphery felt disoriented. Ultimately, the nomination of McCain appeared to be the GOP's desperate attempt to reach out to Americans beyond its core constituency. Did this not suggest that not even establishment conservatives believed in the validity of their own ideology? When large parts of the Republican Party and Democrats in Congress rallied behind the bailout policies of the departing President, the idea of deregulation and free market capitalism seemed politically irrelevant.

At the height of bailout controversy in 2008, a large part of the American public drew two important conclusions. Many saw the limits of conservative free market economics, especially its faith in self-regulating markets. As John Cassidy of *The New Yorker* expressed laconically in December 2008: "It is now evident that self-

regulation failed" (Cassidy 2008). Secondly, many saw in the bailouts their suspicions confirmed that the government primarily served the interests of corporate business. The discontent was tangible. The suspicion of cronyism accompanied the entire bailout process. While free market rules were applied to Main Street, Wall Street was receiving preferential treatment. Critics lined up on both sides of the ideological divide: Many on the Left demanded that the government also step in to help working class and middle class Americans. Free marketeers on the Right conversely argued that government should help neither Wall Street nor Main Street but let the market repair itself. Both sides responded to a perceived lack of political accountability, yet promoted very distinct visions of equality as alternatives: a government that helped everyone or a government that helped no one. Paradoxically, the implosion of the conservative economic model led libertarians on the Right to reaffirm the egalitarian quality of the free market and their anti-statist stance.

The Tea Party movement has repeatedly claimed the anti-bailout cause as its first political struggle (e.g. Armey and Kibbe 2010, 62). Many have gone so far as to claim that the bailouts were the very reason for the emergence of the movement (e.g. Armey and Kibbe 2010; O'Hara 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012). There are good reasons for that. As this chapter argues, conservatives' discovery and appropriation of the anti-bailout cause was a decisive step in the founding of the Tea Party movement and a crucial element of its populist identity work. By opposing the bailouts, movement conservatives found an issue that potentially appealed to all sides of the ideological spectrum that resonated with the free market persuasion of the conservative base and tapped into a culture of counter-establishmentarian resentment and anti-government sentiments. Connecting these

aspects, conservatives sought to redefine the fault lines of American politics along populist lines: the conflict was no longer between Republicans and Democrats but between a disenfranchised 'people' and a corrupt bipartisan consensus supported by economic elites. At the same time conservatives gradually shifted political responsibility for the bailouts to the incoming Democratic President Obama and thus aligned opposition to bailouts with a pronounced anti-liberal rhetoric.

The previous chapter used elements of populism theory to explain why the socio-political environment of the US favoured populist forms of politics. This chapter uses elements of the populism scholarship – especially the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005, 2007) – to explain the internal dynamics of populist politics and identity work. Of particular importance in this regard are the use of political symbols, of empty and floating signifiers (Laclau 2005, 38-43), in the process of constructing the identity of 'the people,' building popular coalitions and articulating hegemonic claims. As the chapter demonstrates, Obama and bailout opposition were two key signifiers in the rediscovery of conservative populism during the second half of 2008 and played a crucial role in the foundation of the Tea Party movement.

The right-wing appropriation of the anti-bailout cause was a complex process that involved a variety of stakeholders of American movement conservatism. This chapter covers the timeframe between the summer of 2008 and February 2009, between the ratification TARP and the ratification of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). It describes how conservatives captured the anti-bailout cause against the background of the presidential election, social movement activism and legislative politics. Bailout protests were initially dominated by progressive groups. What enabled conservatives to gradually champion bailout

opposition was the transition of power after the election of Obama and the demobilisation of the progressive anti-bailout coalition (cf. Skocpol 2012; Meyer and Pullum 2014). As this chapter shows, conservatives' attempt to reshape the conservative politics with the help of the bailout issue involved a concerted effort of Republicans in Congress, the conservative media, advocacy groups and think thanks, and an emerging landscape of social movement entrepreneurs.

In contrast to the following chapters, this chapter therefore focuses mainly on actors close to the centre of power of the conservative movement, equivalent to the top and middle layers of Fedner and King's (2014) three-layer movement approach. The chapter is divided into five parts. The first part analyses the protests of the progressive coalition when TARP passed through Congress with the help of Laclau's concept of signifiers and shows how the anti-bailout cause function as a populist symbol for the contemporary Left. The second part discusses how parts of the conservative infrastructure and Republicans in Congress began to champion the anti-bailout cause in national politics before and after the election of Obama. Part three analyses the role of the conservative media in using Obama and bailout opposition as signifiers to reaffirm conservative hegemonic claims in the second half of 2008, at a time when neo-Keynesian politics returned to American politics. The last two parts of the chapter analyse how individuals and organisations crucial to the Tea Party founding began to take up the anti-bailout cause and functioned as mediators between core and periphery of movement conservatism.

TARP and the Progressive Origins of Bailout Opposition

When George W. Bush entered the White House, he inherited two things from his predecessor that would determine his economic policies: a recession and a

substantial surplus in the federal budget. For Bush and his cabinet it was the ideal moment to demonstrate the efficacy of conservative economic doctrine. The team around Bush lost no time. In 2001 and 2003 they passed major tax cuts, especially for the wealthiest segments, and further deregulated the financial and other sectors of the economy (Patterson 2010). All the while, the free market enthusiast and head of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan, fanned the economy with low interest rates and relaxed regulations (Cassidy 2008). The growth of the self-regulating free market, so the rationale went, would not only compensate for the loss of revenue (due to the tax cuts) but lead the way out of the recession. For a while it looked as though these conservative economic prescriptions were effective. Unemployment dropped, inflation was under control and the Dow Jones Index rose from less than 8,000 points in 2002 to more than 14,000 in 2007. Conservatives were delighted. David Brooks, for instance, rejoiced in 2007 that "we're in the middle of one of the greatest economic eras ever" (Patterson 2010, 129).

However, by the time of Brooks' declaration the economy had already begun to take a drastic downward turn. In February 2007, the new head of the Federal Reserve Ben Bernanke, told the Senate banking committee that "The U.S. economy appears to be making a transition from the rapid rate of expansion experienced over the preceding years to a more sustainable, average pace of growth" (Cassidy 2008). What Bernanke unwittingly described was the beginning of the severest crisis of the world economy since the Great Depression. The availability of cheap credit and the lack of proper regulatory supervision had contributed to the creation of a 'bubble' in the mortgage security market that began to burst in the summer and autumn of 2007.

During the early months of the following year, the era of government bailouts had started. At an ever-increasing rate, the Federal Reserve and the US Treasury began to rescue Wall Street banks and insurance companies with billions of dollars. In March 2008, when the investment bank Bear Sterns faced bankruptcy, the government took over $29 billion of "toxic" assets to enable the bank's takeover by JPMorgan Chase (Ritholtz 2009, 186). The government-sponsored enterprises Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which destabilised rapidly after the collapse of the mortgage market, received billions throughout the summer before being "placed under the full conservatorship of the federal government" on September 7 (O'Hara 2010, xi). By September, the time had come for Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, to ask Congress to finance a $700 billion rescue plan (Cassidy 2008). The proposed Emergency Economic Stabilization Act (EESA), which set up the program that came to be known as TARP, was scheduled to be negotiated in Congress a few weeks later.

TARP was also a more immediate response to the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers on September 14/15, the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history, which left behind an astronomical total debt of $613 billion (Mamudi 2008). The idea behind TARP was to set up an organised, government-sponsored program that would distribute up to $700 billion to major banks and other financial institutions that had taken a severe hit from the collapse of the mortgage market and whose weakened state threatened to destabilise the entire financial system. The money was intended to re-capitalise the banks, increase liquidity and re-assure the stock market that the government was willing to intervene in the economy and protect investors. Negotiations over TARP lasted throughout the second half of September 2008 and were accompanied by extensive press coverage.

For the developing protest culture, the events of September played a crucial role. The TARP initiative was controversial from the start. Criticism as well as support for the program cut across party lines. President Bush favoured TARP, and so did the presidential nominees. However, Democrats and Republicans in Congress were deeply divided on TARP. Supporters and opponents could be found in both parties. The reluctance of many Congresswomen and Congressmen to support the bill is best explained by the amount of public hostility towards the program. According to a *Time* article, "constituent telephone calls to congressional offices [were] running 100 to 1 against the proposed $700 billion Bush Administration bailout plan" (Tumulty and Newton-Small 2008). The *New York Times* reported that Representatives and Senators received e-mails and telephone calls by the thousands on a daily basis; most of them rejecting the bailout plan (Gay Stolberg 2008).[37]

As negotiations came to a close during the final week of September, angry constituents began to move beyond contacting congressional offices and started to organise protests on Wall Street in New York City and in many American cities. Contrary to many Tea Party accounts, which tend to claim the anti-TARP protests as their own (O'Hara 2010, 3; Armey and Kibbe 2010, 53-64), the protests that surrounded the ratification of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act were ideologically diverse and tended to be organised by progressive, left-leaning organisations. In fact, the anti-bailout protests of September represented the last

[37] Opinion polls showed more ambivalence towards the issue, than the influx of negative feedback in the congressional offices might have suggested. Respondents either supported or rejected the plans, depending on how the polls phrased their question, thus giving an indication of its complexity and the ambivalence that the public felt towards the entire process (Benjamin 2008; Pew Research Center 2008).

big mobilisation effort of the hegemonic project of the liberal Left, which had organised against the dominance and politics of the Right since the war in Iraq.

On September 22, Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/Push alliance organised a protest in New York City in conjunction with the NAACP, the Institute of the Black World, the women's peace organisation Code Pink and various labour unions. Jackson told *The Nation* that he opposed "any plan to bail out Wall Street while not bailing urban America, rural America and the poor" (Mann 2008). Statements such as Jackson's show that progressive organisers neither opposed bailouts per se, nor banking bailouts in particular as long as they were accompanied by increased oversight over the financial sector and adequate relief measures directed towards vulnerable sectors of the American population. "We know that the economic situation has to be solved," declared the President of the United Federation of Teachers, "But we want a responsible rescue, not an opportunistic bailout" (Wiessner 2008).

Protests culminated on September 25, when progressive organisations planned a "National Day of Action" (Lueck and Phillips 2008). On that day a protest was organised by the New York Central Labor Council on Wall Street. Other protests across the country were organised by progressive groups such as USAction, TrueMajority.com, "Democracy for America, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and labor unions." TrueMajority.com alone claimed to have organised more than 250 events in at least 41 states to protest TARP (Rooney, Ben 2008). Several thousand protesters participated altogether (Mann 2008; McLane 2008). The progressive coalition that united under the anti-bailout banner encompassed women's and African American organisations, social justice groups, sections of the labour movement and anti-war

groups. What they shared was rejection of the idea of a bailout for large enterprises which left vulnerable groups to their own devices. The issue of inequality was paramount.

In many cases the reality of inequality was captured in the dichotomy between Main Street and Wall Street. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney for instance said "We want our tax dollars used to provide a hand up for the millions of working people who live on Main Street and not a handout to a privileged band of overpaid executives" (Wiessner 2008). Jesse Jackson called for "low interest rate loans and the restructuring of loans, not the repossession of homes" as a means to protect struggling new homeowners, "the victims of the tyranny" (Wiessner 2008) of Wall Street. Statements such as these drew a clear distinction between 'the people' and powerful elites, strictly along economic lines. The TARP bailouts were seen as a proof of the political privilege of entrenched economic elites. "They make the rules. They break the rules. They do whatever they want" declared an Atlanta protester, summarising the discontent with the bailout politics and the sense of disenfranchisement that drove many Main Street Americans on the streets in late September (Lueck and Philips 2008).

The goals of the anti-TARP protests as well as their themes varied as greatly as the groups that organised them. Groups like USAction forwarded alternative plans that would include "provisions for increased oversight of the financial markets, limits on executive compensation and protection for homeowners facing foreclosure" (Rooney, Ben 2008). Bailouts in their opinion only made sense if connected to a reinstatement of the regulatory regime, which had gradually been dismantled beginning with the Clinton administration (Ritholtz 2009). USAction's program director Alan Charney expressed a genuine distrust of Washington

politics saying “The people we entrusted to run our economy have failed us, [...] We can no longer trust them to get us out of this financial mess” (Rooney 2008).

Many times this distrust was joined by a sense of indignation about helping the country’s richest during a time of sharp economic downturn. On September 29, the Syracuse Peace Council organised a protest. Here an elderly woman held up a sign that read “NO WELFARE FOR MILLIONAIRES”, others read “GREED KILLS”, “BAIL OUT VETERANS”, “BAIL OUT SCHOOLS”, “BAILOUT HEALTHCARE” (miccinelli1 2008). At the Federal Plaza in Chicago, protesters chanted “Hey, hey, ho, ho Bush’s bailout we say no”. A little girl held up a sign that read “I CAN’T AFFORD TO BAILOUT WALLSTREET”. Here protests more directly targeted the departing president and the way in which the banking bailout has been put together. One of the protesters concluded:

> The economic bailout of Wall Street as originally proposed by President Bush is in fact completely unacceptable. It is taking tax payer money to bail out failed corporations without any provision for oversight, without any provision for citizen input. It is basically a handout to President Bush’s buddies. (CIMC 2008)[38]

The protester also voiced the concern that future generations would be burdened with the debt, a concern later shared by many Tea Party activists. Other protesters in Chicago equally mirrored statements that would later resurface among Tea Party activists and organisers (cf. Armey and Kibbe 2010, 37-64): A younger, long-haired protester said: “Personally I think it’s outrageous that we can privatize the profits of these corporations made and yet socialise the risk and the losses that have happened.” An elderly man took on a more conspiratorial view of the

[38] The abbreviation CIMC stands for Chicago Independent Media Center.

bailout's proceedings, claiming that the protesters were opposing a "coup d'état" by Wall Street and the administration's goal to acquire "dictatorial powers to control the future of our children" (CIMC). These fears of conspiracy, which have to be understood as symptomatic of a more widespread public distrust, showed their presence at other protests. In Phoenix, Arizona for instance anti TARP protesters mingled with supporters of 911truth.org, a website which made the claim that "elements within the US government [...] must have orchestrated or participated in the execution of the [9/11] attacks" (McLane 2008).

A form of populist identity construction is clearly visible in the statements and placards of organisers and protest participants. Organisers were prone to mention that 'the people' were the actual motor behind anti-bailout mobilisation. David Elliot of USAction claimed that "People all over the country are up in arms about this." Carney, direct of the same organisation, said "the American people are rising up and saying no, no, no," (Rooney, Ben 2008). The idea of 'the people' which emerged through the process of protesting did not fundamentally differ from the one that emerged from the discourse of the New Deal or the New Left and thus fits in a progressive populist tradition (cf. Kazin 1998). Jesse Jackson declared the bailout protests a "Roosevelt moment," a "time for reconstruction of manufacturing law, trade law and banking transparency" (Wiessner 2008). Protest discourse united rural as well as urban Americans, veterans, the poor, people in need of healthcare coverage and public education. Other groups, though perhaps not mentioned explicitly at protest sites, entered into the construct of 'the people' through the very presence of organisations. That is the case with women's, peace, labour and African American civil rights groups. The protests addressed those

groups most affected by the economic crisis: working and middle class Americans.

At the same time, the protests also developed a view of 'the people's' antagonists: Wall Street bankers, millionaires, as well as the political elites who were willing to use government action to redistribute tax money from the public to the financial sector. The EESA was seen as the absurd climax of the assumed alliance of political and economic interests that had become a constant feature of the Bush era's politics of inequality. More often than not the protests targeted the Treasury Secretary Paulson, Federal Reserve's Ben Bernanke and President Bush. The president personified the alliance of economics interests and government apparatus more than any other figure; an accolade he earned for himself through his tax cuts and deregulation policies. As such, Bush functioned as a unifying symbol at the anti-bailout protest.

According to Ernesto Laclau's theoretical work, these unifying symbols, which he calls "empty signifiers" (2007, 104), are indispensible, constitutive elements of any kind of populism. He writes that the condition for discursive formation of a populist identity of the 'people' depends on a "division of the social scene into two camps" that stand in an antagonistic relationship to each other:

> This division presupposes [...] the presence of some privileged signifiers which condense in themselves the signification of the whole antagonistic camp (the 'regime', the 'oligarchy', the 'dominant groups', and so on, for the enemy; the 'people', the 'nation', the 'silent majority', and so on, for the oppressed underdog – these signifiers acquire this articulating role according, obviously, to a contextual history). (Laclau 2007, 87)

For progressive anti-bailout protesters, a central "privileged signifier" who personified 'the people's' antagonist, had been Bush. Throughout his presidency,

Bush stood for a belligerent foreign policy, Christian conservatism, economic inequality, the erosion of the welfare state, and the curtailing of civil liberties.

Empty signifiers, however, do more than symbolically unifying 'the people' by naming an enemy. Also a demand can function as an empty signifier. Laclau defines the "category of 'demand'" (2005, 35) as the starting point for the construction of the "popular subject (37) that is 'the people'. Populism is an attempt at "building communitarian spaces out of a plurality of collective wills" (35). It can only exist if there is some sort of solidarity developing between different unfulfilled demands towards the political system.[39] In specific historical situations a demand, as empty signifier, can represent a plurality of other demands and express the essence of a hegemonic project (39). This condition was of course given throughout the anti-bailout protests. The demand of either stopping financial sector bailouts or connecting them to bailouts of the education or healthcare system, or troubled homeowners, created a form of inter-group solidarity of an imagined 'people'. As the placards and statements of protesters further suggest, this demand also represented the entire discontent many Americans harboured about the perceived loss of popular sovereignty, inequality and cronyism.

Organisers and protesters tied the bailout issue to a large number of contemporary progressive issues, whether through statements or the overt presence of other issue groups at protest sites. As a result, the bailout protests presented a wide-ranging issue coalition with demands supporting healthcare reform and public education

[39] Laclau writes "A social situation in which demands tend to reaggregate themselves on the negative basis they all remain unsatisfied is the first precondition [...] of that mode of political articulation that we call populism" (37).

reform, veterans, women, minority groups and labour etc. The idea of 'the people' clearly flourished from the solidarity that united these groups behind the anti-bailout cause. At the same time, comments and placards left little doubt that this solidarity was also built upon a negative dimension: the opposition to Bush Republicanism and the corporate finance sector.

Representing 'the people' in the counter hegemonic project of the Left was also reflected in the coalition's tactics and strategy. To a large extent, the progressive anti-bailout movement relied on a tactical repertoire it had established at the onset of the war in Iraq. According to the *New York Times* (Clemetson 2003), organisers since then had recurred to a set of tactics that evolved from protests since the 1960s (cf. Hall 2011). They relied on the support of a broad coalition of labour organisations, civil rights groups and other progressive interest groups. Like their predecessor, they used patriotic symbols - American flags were a regular sight at the rallies - and organised, nationwide protest days like the one on September 25 to ensure higher visibility and media coverage. Many of the groups had been working at the community level and organisers could encourage "citizen support in the form of letters to political leaders, discussions […] and small scale protests" (Clemetson 2003). 'The people' had to be 'masses' visible to a national audience, organised at the community level and, most of all, authentic American patriots.

The most significant tactical innovation of these groups took place in the field of online activism. Through online groups like MoveOn.org and TrueMajority.com, whose very names derived from web domains, they could reach large and dispersed audiences, organise petitions, coordinate nationwide actions, build powerful donor bases and "transform Web-based dissent into actual activism" (Clemetson 2003). The magnitude of online mobilisation was indeed

considerable. Observers noticed “probably the largest increase in online activity, in bottom-up protests [...] during the 2008 elections” (Davis 2008). This activity took different forms. Protesters wrote mock emails or set up websites such as www.buymysh**pile.com which asked visitors to “submit bad assets you’d like the government to take off your hands.” Others launched a series of online petitions or simply coordinated street protests (Davis 2008). These petitions reached Congress before the first vote on TARP (Lueck and Phillips 2008).

Compared to anti-Iraq war mobilisation, however, the immediate impact of anti-bailout protest was limited. This becomes obvious when considering the relatively limited media impact and the small turnout at most protest events. The looming collapse of the financial system created enough anxiety that people expected a decisive government response, however counterintuitive or suspect this response might have appeared. Furthermore, unlike the anti-war movement, the anti-bailout movement lacked support from decisive policy makers: the departing President, House Majority Leader and both presidential candidates had all come out in support of EESA.

Though the movement raised crucial questions about economic and political inequality, and corporate influence on national politics, it proved less willing to address these issues beyond the immediate context of the EESA in the way that the Tea Party movement and Occupy Wall Street did in subsequent years. However, the protests in September had several aspects in common with these later movements. The populist “us-versus-them” stratagem that had operated in progressive protests did not seek to develop a new Occupy-style movement on the political Left that would distract from the Democratic presidential campaign

which took place at the same time.[40] The protests did not intend to construct a conception of 'the people' that would solidly incorporate other social demands and transforms a single symbolic issue into a sustained challenge to the economic-political status quo that had made the banking bailouts possible in the first place. An anonymous e-mail that was widely distributed and presumably came from one of the organising groups assured that "[t]here is no agenda, no leaders, no organising group, nothing to endorse other than we're not going to pay" (Rooney, Ben 2008). It is therefore not surprising that after the EESA was signed into law, most progressive groups ceased to mobilise against the bailouts.

Rather than the birth of a movement, the left anti-bailout protests were limited in their scope and goals. As such the anti-bailout campaign fits into a larger trend in the protest culture of the American Left. As Kazin (2011) notes, the Left's reliance on "limited, if worthy, campaigns" (277) had become one of its characteristic organisational trends since the demise of the New Left. The anti-bailout campaign was no different. As the Left professionalised in different aspects of its internal structure, organisers became increasingly aware that mass mobilisation was a scarce and expensive resource better spent on limited, goal-oriented campaigns that enjoyed the support of allies in Congress rather than on all encompassing social movements. The populist gestures operated here merely within a mobilisation strategy that helped to delimit the 'enemy' and build a temporary 'people's' coalition of various political interest groups.

[40] In fact, there is no evidence that candidate Obama's complicity in TARP caused major anguish at the protests Hopes that the election of Obama would move the country "in a more progressive direction" was expressed, for instance, at a small rally in Phoenix, Arizona (McLane 2008). The fact that the candidate Obama and Congressional Democrats supported TARP was a circumstance that played little role in these progressive protests.

The limited character of the anti-bailout campaign was not clear to many analysts and the potential a more disruptive movement was tangible. “I’m not sure we’re going to see the Orange Revolution” said Andrew Rasiej of the Personal Democracy Forum “but if the anger and frustration with the bailouts doesn’t get addressed quickly, you’re going to see much more physical manifestations of protest” (Davis 2008). His prediction was belatedly confirmed by the emergence of the Tea Party Movement.

From a progressive point of view, the campaign’s lasting legacy in terms of public opinion and tactics proved to be more troublesome than helpful. Though limited and, ultimately, unsuccessful, these protests did have an influence. After all, they did generate considerable political pressure on the members of Congress, although they could not prevent the EESA. Nonetheless, the protests in September raised sufficient doubts about the bailout process and its underlying principles to create a sceptical national audience. The beneficiary of this audience, however, was not the progressive alliance that organised the protests but rather the Tea Party movement, which repeatedly claimed opposition to TARP as its first political engagement (O’Hara 2010, 3; Armey and Kibbe 2010, 53-64). Many Tea Party organisers later consciously copied the tactics that the anti-Iraq war, anti-bailout coalition applied throughout the Bush administration and used them to mobilise against the newly elected Democratic government (e.g. Carender 2009i).

Partisanship and the Rightwards Shift of the Anti-Bailout Cause

One of the crucial questions about the founding and early successes of the Tea Party was how the movement could steer right-wing, anti-liberal sentiments at a moment when the ideological pendulum of the American public seemed to swing into a more progressive, liberal direction. In September 2008, progressive groups

had championed the anti-bailout cause. How could the Tea Party turn it into a protest theme of the American Right? Several reasons account for this rightward shift of the bailout protests. Turning the bailout issue into a conservative cause was a complex process that originated from the centres of the conservative power before it radiated to the grassroots at the periphery. It originated from the strategy of conservative Republicans in Congress, conservative think tanks, advocacy groups and media outlets.

Conservatives were deeply divided on TARP. When negotiations about TARP came to a close, conservative organisations fell into two different camps. The Heritage Foundation and Americans for Prosperity lined up in support of the Bush administration's rescue mission (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 56). Other free market advocacy groups and think tanks such as FreedomWorks, the National Taxpayers Union, the Club for Growth and the CATO Institute opposed the TARP (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 53). They were the first to recognise the importance of the bailout issue for making the case for free market capitalism and sway public opinion in their favour.

In Congress, conservatives in the Republican Party saw themselves trapped between contesting considerations: while opposing TARP meant jeopardising election funding from the corporate finance sector and undermining a Republican president, supporting it meant acting against conservative orthodoxy and risking the wrath of the conservative base. The last few days of the TARP negotiations in Congress clearly illustrated that dilemma. As the final negotiations about the EESA approached during the weekend of September 27 and 28, support for the bill was coming from the Republican White House, the Democrat Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Republicans. House Republicans, however,

overwhelmingly opposed the EESA and demanded major changes in the bill. Their opposition can partly be explained by the fact that they had to stand for re-election on a more frequent basis and thus feared the backlash of the party's conservative base in increasingly competitive primaries.

The unpopularity of the bill became evident through the massive influx of negative feedback from constituents from all over the country. It is therefore not surprising that Pelosi declared on September 25 that she would "not bring any markets stabilization package to the floor without a majority of House Republicans on board" (Tumulty and Newton-Small 2008). House Democrats were eager to share the blame for the seemingly unpopular bill with their Republican colleagues. The talks that continued the following Friday were inconclusive. When the first vote came to the House floor on Monday September 29, the bill was defeated with 205 to 228 votes. While a majority of Democrats backed the bill with 140 to 95 votes, the Republicans voted 133 to 65 against it (Clerk, United States House of Representatives 2008).

House Republicans must have known that their opposition was largely symbolic. Theoretically speaking, the bill could have passed without them and it was out of the question that EESA would not eventually pass.[41] The symbolic stand against the bailout, which House Republicans took under the leadership of Minority Leader John Boehner, however, began to establish an image for the Republican Party as the anti-bailout party, despite the fact that a Republican President and his Treasury Secretary orchestrated the bailouts in the first place. The moral

[41] When the markets panicked after the first vote in the House – the Dow Jones index lost almost 800 points on the same day, the largest drop ever on a single day – the passage of the bill became a formality (Hirschfeld Davis, 2008).

responsibility for the largest banking bailout in history was passed on to the Democratic Party and, by extension, to the incoming President Obama.

This strategy was largely effective. In subsequent years, Bush's involvement in the passage of the EESA quickly became a distant memory. In 2010, 47 per cent of Americans believed that TARP was initiated by Obama, rather than the 34 per cent who held Bush responsible (Pew Research Center 2010). The Tea Party, which claimed to have been against the bailouts all along, could be understood, in part, as a product of the ambivalent stance that Republicans and conservative organisations took during the EESA ratification process. With regard to the strategic importance of the "incorrect belief that the bank bailout was initiated by the Democrats" (DiMaggio 2011, 174), Anthony DiMaggio remarks that the "association of the bailout exclusively with Obama serves Republican-Tea Party propaganda, as it allowed Republicans to masquerade as the party of populism during the 2010 midterm elections" (174).

What enabled conservatives to appropriate the anti-bailout cause was that opposition to bailouts was perfectly compatible with a purist reading of their ideology. Opposition on the Right argued that the bailouts were incompatible with free market capitalism. Such views were by no means new. Richard Viguerie for instance had already argued in the early 1980s against the practice of bailing out banks. His remarks could have easily been written in 2008:

> The threat to the ordinary citizens from banks in the last 12 years has come increasingly from the wildly irresponsible lending policies of the big money center banks—chief among them David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan, Citibank, The Bank of America, and the other giants. In a wild scramble for profits and market share, these big banks have made billions of dollars in initially profitable but economically unjustifiable loans. Then when those loans have begun to go sour, the big banks expect the taxpayers to bail them out. (Viguerie 1983, 52)

Viguerie saw his own resentment of the big banks rooted in a longer history of American anti-banking sentiment which he traced back to the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras (51). Opposing banking bailouts coincided simultaneously with his defence of "the little guy" (52) and free market capitalism, which he argued gave everyone a fair shot at making fortunes of their own. In Viguerie's "populist revolt" free market capitalism functioned as a corollary to democracy enabling opportunity in the economic sphere as the counterpart to genuine representation in the political realm. The work of Viguerie in the early 1980s and that of Paul and Tea Party activists share an important assumption: conservative populism is bound to pick up the argument that capitalism, understood as a free and equal economic sphere, functions as a point of departure for the conservative political struggle freedom and democracy. Tea Party influential Glenn Beck (2009) highlighted the political importance of capitalism in the straightforward formula "Capitalism isn't about money, it's about freedom" (43). 'Freedom' in the economic sphere and political equality are thus intrinsically linked. While this populism remains strongly affirmative of a pro-business political agenda, it should never shy away from stigmatising the cooperation of the corporate sector and the government as a danger to democracy.

The discovery of the bailout issue allowed conservatives to make their case for free market capitalism and rally against the state. It allowed them to vindicate conservative ideology at a time most Americans saw this ideology failing and disproven. The argument was fairly simple: in a truly free market economy there was no place for bailouts of big business. The market is impartial when sheltered from government intervention. Capitalism makes all of us free and equal. State intervention on the other hand, meant cronyism, distortion of democratic

principles and favouritism of wealthy interests. As empty signifier, the anti-bailout cause came to represent conservative's struggle for a free and equal society. As such the cause was essential to the renewal conservatives' hegemonic claims to represent 'the people' against powerful interests.

The right-wing appropriation of the anti-bailout cause also turned it into, what Laclau called, a "floating signifier" (Laclau 2005, 42-3).[42] In 2008 and early 2009 the anti-bailout cause played a central role in mobilising people of both the left and the right. This was the case despite the fact that as a political sign it represented, in essence, the same to both sides: opposition to government bailouts symbolised taking a stand against the influence of business interests on government, against cronyism and the distortion of democratic principles. It meant opposing what many, disaffected with American democracy, identified as 'the system'. The anti-bailout cause was an anti-status quo issue and thus expressed a certain radicalism. Yet in both contexts, it expressed two distinct hegemonic projects and two distinct forms of populism, dividing political space between 'people' and 'powerful' along different fault lines. For the Left, it represented a political struggle for public education and healthcare, the dignity of veterans, workers, women, racial minorities and those most affected by the Great Recession. For conservatives, it stood for a struggle for freedom from government intervention, American values and the egalitarianism they saw deriving from capitalism.

[42] The categories of both empty and floating signifiers are not mutually exclusive. As Laclau writes, the distinction between both is "mainly analytic, for in practice empty and floating signifiers largely overlap" (2005, 43).

Unsurprisingly, objections to the bailouts, articulated by progressive groups and individual protesters during the September protests, re-emerge in later Tea Party writings: the distrust of government, the skyrocketing national debt, and the conspiratorial fears of a dangerously powerful government and an undemocratic alliance of political and banking elites. This overlap between the positions of both Left and Right on the matter of government-sponsored bailouts made the issue complex at the level of ideology and helped conservatives to seize and transform a genuine moment for progressive activism and change it into a starting point for conservative mass mobilisation. To what extent individual protesters from the September protests actually chose to continue to take to the street under the Tea Party banner is unclear. On the level of organisations, however, some continuity is observable. FreedomWorks, a driving force behind Tea Party mobilisation, took a stance against TARP, although this did not translate into any significant 'offline' collective action until February 2009. A continuity of political activism that connects the anti-TARP protest with the Tea Party movement is most apparent in groups such as FedUpUSA as well as the remnants of the Ron Paul campaign, who had opposed TARP and lent at least initial support to Tea Party cause. Each of these groups demonstrates that variations of conservative ideology found ways to connect with anti-bailout sentiments at the time and convert their opposition into sustained mobilisation efforts.

This mobilisation was also dependent on another crucial factor, the political transition at the national level. In fact an integral part of what shifted the anti-bailout protests continuously to the Right after the EESA and TARP was Barack Obama's entry into the White House. As the protests in Chicago had shown, left-leaning protesters put the blame for the banking industry bailouts on Bush

personally. As an ‘empty signifier’ that represented a system many progressive groups opposed, Bush helped to unify them in a common political struggle. With electoral victory for the Democrats in November 2008, the political environment changed profoundly. The Democrats now found themselves in charge of both the executive branch and Congress. And with the departure of Bush, these groups found it more difficult to unite for common causes.

Arguably, this change in the political landscape had, at least initially, a moderating effect on the protest efforts of progressive organisers, while opening up the space for conservatives to rally against the newly formed government. After the Democratic takeover, large parts of the progressive coalition that had mobilised against the EESA, scaled back in their opposition to government policies and began to function as advocacy groups for progressive White House policy initiatives. USAction for instance joined the Common Purpose Project, a group that established a connection between the administration and a variety of independent organisations “to advance a progressive policy agenda” (Smith 2009). In 2011 USAction joined another coalition named Progressive Majority, who were “dedicated to the recruitment and support of [progressive] candidates at the state and local level” (vanden Heuvel 2012). To a large extent its activities were a response to the successes of Tea Party activism at the 2010 mid-term elections and its capacity to vindicate conservative policy goals. During the same year USAction furthermore endorsed the Occupy Wall Street movement (Kirsch 2011). Its advocacy included goals such as the extension of unemployment benefits, financial sector reform, progressive tax reform and the termination of the Bush administration’s tax cuts for wealthy Americans, the Affordable Care Act, and White House budget proposals (Smith 2009; Norfleet 2011; USAction 2015).

The transfer of presidential power in other words thwarted the anti-governmental impulse of the members of the progressive anti-bailout coalition. Conservative groups now took the initiative, making Obama their primary target.

The anti-bailout protests took place in a complex partisan environment. While the political constellation on the national level changed significantly after the elections of 2008, the economic situation remained precarious. The economic crisis had just begun to be felt in the labour market.[43] When the financial crisis began to affect other sectors of the economy more severely and hundreds of thousand Americans lost their jobs, a fragile consensus developed among Democrats and the remaining Bush Republicans that at least accepted the notion of substantial government intervention in the economy. In December, even the departing president felt obliged to justify his bailout policies by declaring that he "abandoned free market principles to save the free market system" (Welch 2008). Bush, unlike Obama, had the advantage of an opposition party that was willing to compromise and cooperate. While this bipartisan effort remained operative between the elections and Obama's inauguration, it never really won over the public whose discomfort with rescuing corporate businesses with taxpayer money remained.

Conservatives inside and outside the Republican Party were the first to break away from this fragile economic interventionist consensus. They sought to turn the election of Obama into a blessing in disguise. Oscillating between despair and a sense of opportunity, many of them changed their outlook on the bailouts

[43] During the second half of 2008, the unemployment rate increased by 1.5 per cent to 7.3 per cent, the highest number since 1993. Unemployment would peak in October 2009 at 10 per cent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014).

immediately after the election. Having just been voted out of power, they had little to gain from cooperating with the new president, especially from supporting the unpopular bailouts. When Obama won in November, Republicans found themselves on the side-line, at a time when the US economy was facing its severest crisis since the Great Depression. Being effectively relieved of direct political responsibility gave conservatives the opportunity to break with the tentative bipartisan bailout consensus fostered by the Bush administration and to pursue a more confrontational course of action[44]. This marked a sharp reemphasis of conservative ideology's most laissez-faire elements.

The Beginning of the Conservative Anti-Obama Crusade and the Return of Keynesianism

The chapter has so far discussed how conservative advocacy groups, think tanks and conservative Republicans discovered the anti-bailout crusade as a means to reaffirm their hegemonic project and create the basis for a conservative populism capable of reaching out to a plurality of disenchanted Americans. An equally important role fell to the conservative media. As discussed in the previous chapter, a partisan landscape was quickly gaining importance since the end of the Fairness Doctrine in the 1980s. Since then a conservative media landscape has begun to grow that included television channels such as Fox News, a variety of national and local radio stations, newspapers, news websites, blogs and social media platforms. Being on the one hand, well connected to powerful stakeholders of movement conservatism and on the other hand, able to reach national audience,

[44] Meyer and Pullum (2013) draw the same conclusion in their analysis of the emergence of the Tea Party populism, from the perspective of political opportunity theory. In Michael Grunwald's (2012a) book *The New New Deal*, he argues that Republican operatives decided in the weeks after the election of Obama that the most prudent strategy of the GOP would be to oppose any meaningful policy initiative of the White House.

especially rank-and-file conservatives, this media infrastructure played a crucial role in connecting core and periphery of the contemporary conservatism (cf. DiMaggio 2011). While many of these outlets often formally appear like regular sources of news, one of their primary functions is to feed the conservative base with talking points and to create a conservative "counter public" (Warner 2002).

During the six months before the emergence of the Tea Party, the conservative media was heavily involved in shaping the movement's populist outlook. This work had two essential dimensions. Firstly, the conservative media sought to energise conservative rank-and-file by reaffirming conservative principles, urging conservative policy makers in the GOP to return to their anti-statist, anti-liberal roots. Conservatism, though still amidst a substantial crisis, still had to offer answers to contemporary problems, appear as the national ally of the American 'people' and the only valid alternative to the contemporary system of cronyism. Secondly, it played a role in the appropriation process of the anti-bailout cause the production of other empty signifiers capable to restore conservative unity. Perhaps the most important of these signifiers was the incoming President Obama. Just like Bush had served to rally progressive groups on various occasions during his presidency, Obama had to fulfil the same function for conservatives.

Obama's election played a significant role in the making of the Tea Party movement, a fact confirmed by scholars and Tea Party activists alike. The political scientists Parker and Barreto (2013) claim that the Tea Party is to a large extent a "negative reaction to the presidency of Barack Obama" (10). Obama, according to the authors, was not simply seen as a politician in this context but as a symbol of 'radical' politics and the new demographic realities of a multi-cultural America. These observations on the significance of Obama for the emergence of

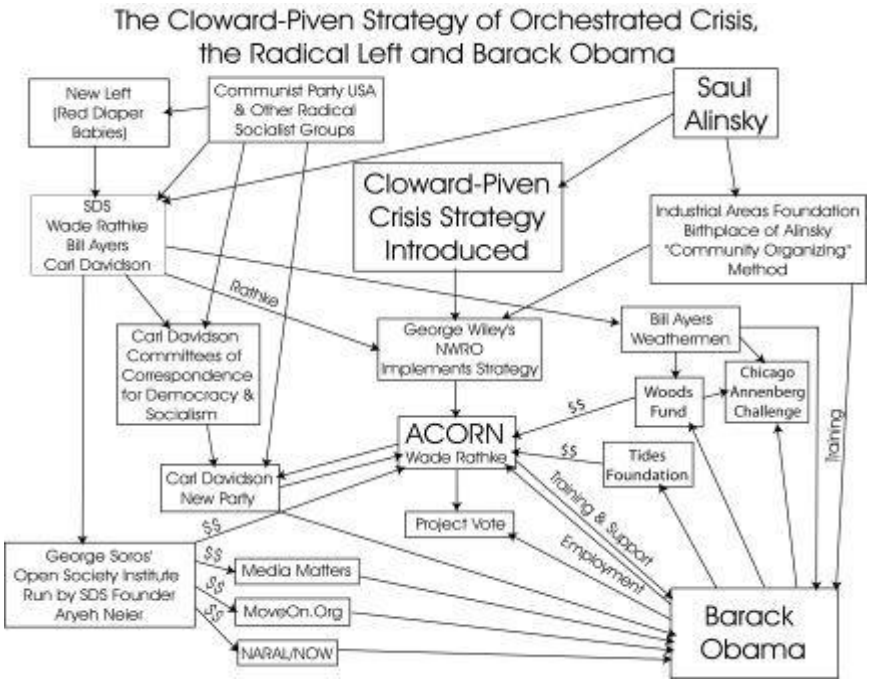
the Tea Party movement are also reaffirmed in the work of Skocpol and Williamson (2012, 77-82).

As the Far Right news website *American Thinker* and the conservative flagship publication *National Review* demonstrate, the conservative media infrastructure started early with attacks on Obama and the Democratic majority in Congress.[45] Already during the presidential campaign, the *American Thinker* ran a series of articles that attacked the candidate Obama on various fronts. The aim of these articles was to brand Obama as a corrupt crony and dangerous radical. Some articles sought to highlight his associations with "Chicago slumlord" Tony Rezko and a series of public housing development deals that allegedly formed a patronage system that became the basis of Obama's political power (Cary 2008a; Cary 2008b; Fuller 2008). Another article charged that powerful labour organisations were financing Obama's campaign in exchange for a radical extension of the power and influence of organised labour after becoming president (Factor 2008). Furthermore, Obama's personal and campaign finances became an issue in an article by Mac Fuller. Fuller casts campaign contributions by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in a dubious light due to their being subsequently recipients of bailout funds. Other sources of campaign money allegedly linked Obama to left-wing radicals, shady real-estate deals and a number of organisations and companies in his home district (Fuller 2008). The whole purpose of the article was to 'expose' Obama as a radical, and a venal crony.

[45] Out of vast conservative news landscape preference was given to *American Thinker* because of its apparent standing with conservative activists. Among those was Keli Carender, whose rally will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter (Carender 2009c). The *New York Times* called it "a major force in national conservative circles, attracting 1.2 million unique visitors [according to its news editor]" and enjoyed support from conservative media celebrities such as Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck (Libit 2010).

A longer article by James Simpson further pursues Obama's 'radicalism' and constructs an elaborate conspiracy theory of the 'radical' Left, termed the "Cloward-Piven Strategy":

FIGURE 1: THE CLOWARD-PIVEN FLOW CHART



Source: James Simpson (2008)

According to Simpson, this radical left-wing conspiracy, designed by "a pair of radical socialist Columbia University professors," sought to "orchestrate" a socio-political crisis to "hasten the fall of capitalism by overloading the government bureaucracy with a flood of impossible demands, thus pushing society into crisis and economic collapse." This crisis would then serve as a starting point for a socialist reconstruction of the US. The flow chart Simpson designed linked Obama and his campaign to 1960s radicals, community organiser Saul Alinsky, the progressive businessman and philanthropist George Soros and a variety of left-wing advocacy groups (Simpson 2008).

Conservative media outlets clearly understood that in order to construct a conservative 'people', a discursive concept which later took centre stage in the Tea Party, the new president Obama served as a nearly perfect symbol to represent the un-American 'otherness' that they saw in 'liberal' politics. The writings of Dave Smithee of *American Thinker* are revealing in this regard. He writes:

> Obama is not just a Democrat, or a liberal. Obama *is* liberalism. He is liberalism stripped of all of its false fronts of civic mindedness. Shorn of all its bogus declarations of interest in the public good, or lip service to free markets or property rights. He is liberalism as it exists only in the psyche of the petty tyrant, rarely glimpsed emerging in public. Shrieking, demanding as a newborn, nakedly ravenous for power. Worshipping expedience, debasing of life, and viewing everyone else's wealth as his own, with which he may conduct his vast social experiments on the subdued human landscape. (Smithee 2008)

Obama as a symbol or empty signifier represented an entire system, which conservatives accused of un-American radicalism, subversion and cronyism, a danger for democracy. For them he was the perfect villain, against which they construct their conservative 'people'. What followed in the construction of the Tea Party's populist worldview were but slight strategic and rhetorical modifications of Smithee's perspective.[46]

The *American Thinker*'s defamation of Obama is not an outlier but rather the tip of the iceberg. In the months before and after the November elections a wide spectrum of conservative media outlets and media personalities including Fox News and conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh questioned Obama's US

[46] the pronounced anti-liberalism gave way to expressions such as the 'political class' or 'beltway establishment' in the many Tea Party movement's public statements; an attempt to divert from the movement's partisan character as well as an attempt to self-characterise as non-partisan, independent and centrist 'people' which sought to mobilise beyond the conservative constituency.

citizenship status and thus his eligibility for the office of president (Stelter 2011). Such defamations reached an audience of millions of Americans and initiated the so-called ‘birther’ movement, which had a prolonged afterlife within the Tea Party rank and file (Lowndes 2012). One of the key players in spreading the rumours that Obama was born either in Kenya or Indonesia, was the right-wing conspiracy website World Net Daily, whose founder and CEO Joseph Farah was quick to jump on the Tea Party bandwagon after its inception in 2009 (Farah 2008).

At the time of the presidential elections there was little reason for the conservative infrastructure to moderate their anti-Obama tone. In fact, all-out opposition to Obama and his policies was soon embraced by many Republican politicians, various conservative groups and the conservative media (cf. Skocpol 2012, 21-38). The instrumental character that conservative media outlets played in framing later Tea Party views and mobilising movement participation is well documented and represents a scholarly consensus (DiMaggio 2011, 103-71; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 121-53; Formisano 2012, 27-36).

An article in the *American Thinker* published two days after the election for instance concluded:

> It's difficult to tell how much utterly unchecked leftism America will be willing to endure, or for how long. But one thing for certain is that Obama, in tandem with Pelosi/Reid is the greatest gift the Republicans and conservatives everywhere could have been given. Over the next four years, there will be no political 'moderation' in Obama to muddy the waters, confuse his identity, or cast doubts about who's to blame for what. […] An Obama presidency will certainly mean short-term pain. America is about to learn some very hard lessons, but she will learn them, and conservatives have been handed an unprecedented opportunity to define themselves, regroup, sharpen their ideological knives and come out swinging. (Smithee 2008)

The *National Review* responded similarly to the election with a mix of congratulatory statements, grief, anxiety and a newfound enthusiasm for the spreading of the conservative gospel. On the day after the election, Bill Whittle, for instance, offered his congratulations to the president-elect and his supporters "with the utmost sincerity and genuine goodwill" (Whittle 2008a) in the online edition of the magazine. Two days later, on November 7, Whittle began without further hesitation to discredit Obama as "a man with such overt Marxist ideas and such a history of association with virulent anti-Americans" and declared that conservatives will take up the fight against the Democrats and Obama with full force (Whittle 2008b). The genuine goodwill lasted exactly two days.

Given the centrality of the economic crisis around the time of the 2008 election, it is not surprising that the conservative attack on Obama's public policy agenda focused predominantly on the bailouts. If conservatives were divided about the virtues of TARP and other bailout measures before the election that changed dramatically thereafter. On the day after the election, Obama's "support of a pork-laden bailout package" (Rooney, Jay 2008) became an immediate issue. The *American Thinker* began to argue for a purge of Republicans who supported TARP. The *National Review* wholeheartedly joined the conservative anti-bailout choir in the middle of November, demanding the end spending more TARP funds (Kudlow 2008). With the bailouts, conservatives had found an issue that appealed to Americans beyond the conservative fold.

The potential for conservative mobilisation and media outrage increased steadily throughout the 'interregnum' between the elections and Obama's inauguration in

January 2009. Bush may have still been president and his Treasury Secretary Paulson was still in charge of distributing TARP money throughout the financial sector, but Obama, as president-elect and US senator, increasingly sought to influence the bailout process. By mid-November he and the congressional Democrats began to negotiate with the Bush administration about the use of TARP money to bailout General Motors (GM) and Chrysler (Calmes 2008).[47] The bailout of the auto industry marked a transition in the history of the government's economic crisis management towards a more pronounced Keynesianism: the emphasis changed from emergency measures designed to save the financial system from collapse to measures to prevent job losses, helping people in need, and reinvigorating the economy.[48] GM and Chrysler were not saved because they were "too big to fail." They were bailed out to save American jobs. The government was also more willing to temporarily take over ownership stocks in the companies that received bailout money. Despite Obama's commitment to saving to saving jobs, his implication in the bailout of banks, insurance companies damaged his image as reformer who defended the interests and both working and middle class Americans (Skocpol 2012, 17).

One of the first points on Obama's agenda after his inauguration was the passage of a new economic stimulus bill. Already the language of the new bill signalled a change in the government's approach to economic policy. The year before the language of the EESA and TARP had clearly portrayed them as rescue measures and last resort. The very names featured words such as "emergency,"

[47] The two companies began to receive the first TARP money in later December and early January 2009 (Congressional Budget Office 2009).

[48] According to the Department of the Treasury, the automobile industry bailouts "saved more than 1 million American jobs" (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2011).

"stabilization," "troubled," and "relief," invoking a language of crisis and immanent disaster. This changed with the ARRA of 2009 (later also known as the "Stimulus" or "Recovery Act"), which Obama initiated shortly after assuming the presidency. The language of ARRA began to suggest a more active role for the state in rebuilding the economy.

The ARRA became a crucial landmark in the emergence of the Tea Party movement. It was the ARRA that triggered the first conservative protests and the Santelli rant that gave the movement its name. In many ways, the Recovery Act included various proposals that were made by the progressive groups that had protested against TARP in September and early October 2008. The act provided help for struggling homeowners, low and middle income families, the unemployed, veterans, education, healthcare, and environmental projects. This is a probable reason why many left-wing groups abstained from protesting the bill. At the same time, the ARRA provided tax incentives, tax breaks, and investments in infrastructure projects, agriculture, the military, law enforcement and Homeland Security (*Wall Street Journal* 2009b). Total expenditure amounted to an estimate $787 billion and thus exceeded the costs of TARP. The Recovery Act was also a very different bill from the EESA. Its makeup was deeply indebted to Keynesian economics and had arguably more in common with elements of the New Deal than with the rescue of the financial sector in the previous year.[49]

Despite the Stimulus' important role in the recovery of the American economy, the bill had distinct flaws. The Stimulus was first and foremost a spending bill

[49] The New Deal analogy was not lost on conservatives. Around the time of the ARRA negotiations, conservative writer Ned Barnett for example compares Barack Obama to FDR (Barnett 2009). See also Cary (2009).

which did not include a specific jobs program. Instead, as Skocpol (2012) writes the "prescription" of the bill was to "Calm the bankers, cut taxes, and quickly spend as much as Congress would enact for projects that could be implemented without a lot of corruption or litigation, and then be patient as the economy recovered over the course of 2010 and 2011" (18-9). The bill had to be put together as fast as possible in order show effects on the economy before the next elections. Consequently, the legislative procedures were sped up to such an extent that no member of Congress had actually time to read the bill before voting on it. Instead of a proper process of deliberation, critics held, the bill was negotiated behind closed doors. In order to find the sufficient amount of votes, the stimulus package was amended with an endless amount of pet projects on the wish lists of Congressional representatives (20).

Conservatives had, of course, multiple objections to the ARRA. On the philosophical level, conservatives had always opposed Keynesian economics. Since the 1970s, Milton Friedman and other economists provided conservatives with economical counter-models which privileged "free markets" over government economic interference (Rodger 2012, 47-70). For many conservatives the very idea of the government investing in job growth and underwriting the private sector signalled the US's descent into socialism. It is therefore not surprising that the charge of socialism repeatedly surfaced in the conservative media (e.g. Beck 2009b; O'Rourke 2009). Later on, the Tea Party would make the link between bailouts, Obama and socialism on a regular basis (Parker and Barreto 2013, 196-99; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 54). Tea Party writer John M. O'Hara (2010) for instance saw the bailouts as "solutions reminiscent of communist Russia" (46). With an equal lack of subtlety, Joseph Farah (2010)

wrote that the formation of the Tea Party was "a reaction to Obama's efforts to remake the United States of America in his own image – socialist, utopian, globalist, secular, humanist" (114). The ARRA played a crucial role in the development of this view.

Other conservatives criticised the ARRA for what they perceived as a spending bill that was heavily influenced by lobbyists and channelled large amount of money to businesses and other political stakeholders that had either strongly contributed to Democratic campaign finances or represented Democratic policy priorities. The Recovery Act was perceived as a means to extend the powerbase of the Democratic Party at the expense of taxpayers. The charge of cronyism, corruption and ruthless liberal power politics therefore characterized conservative news coverage on the ARRA (Krauthammer 2009; Shlichta 2009; Wall Street Journal 2009a). Conservative commentators like Charles Krauthammer identified continuities between the cronyist structures of Washington politics that had come to the forefront during the Bush administration and Obama's first major legislative initiative. He consequently challenged the new president's narrative of "change" by writing that the provisions of the stimulus bills were "little more than the back-scratching, special-interest, lobby-driven parochialism that Obama came to Washington to abolish" (Krauthammer 2009).

The ARRA, in short, gave conservatives an opportunity to project the image to their rank-and-file that Obama was, in essence, a new Bush or even worse in terms of government spending and Washington cronyism. For the Tea Party writers Maltsev and Skaskiw (2013), the transition from Bush to Obama signified little more than a modification of the political economy from "crony capitalism" (62) to "crony socialism" (20). Around this time conservative radio celebrity Rush

Limbaugh coined the term “Porkulus,” a combination of “stimulus” and “pork,” a term that came into frequent use to describe special interest-driven Congressional spending (New York Times 2009). The term enjoyed noticeable popularity among early Tea Party organisers (Zernike 2010, 18).

As for the consequences of political mobilisation, history, in some sense, appeared to repeat itself: The modern conservative movement was, as conservative thinker Frank S. Meyer wrote, “a delayed reaction” to the Keynesian crisis management of the New Deal, which he saw as a “revolutionary transformation of America” (Meyer 1965, 3). Economic crisis had led to Keynesian government action, which then led to a conservative backlash. The ensuing Great Recession, which had started in 2007, moved the US government towards a neo-Keynesian response. Accordingly, yet this time without delay, conservative America began to mobilise as the spectre of “revolutionary transformation” returned to haunt the conservative mind.

FreedomWorks Invisible Hands

While institutions at the core of the conservative movement redirected priorities in more libertarian direction and fuse anti-Obama sentiments and anti-bailout elements into a reassertion of hegemonic claims, other groups began to orchestrate the first attempts at grassroots mobilisation. By the time TARP was passed, conservatives had little success in mobilising grassroots conservatives in significant number. This was especially true in terms of street protest. Progressive groups by and large dominated street protests at this point. According to Ron Paul online discussion forums, libertarian Paul supporters at least endorsed or attended the wave of nationwide protest that took place on September 25 (Ron Paul

Forums 2008).[50] Furthermore, small groups of conservative Republican in Merrillville, Indiana and a small number of FreedomWorks supporters in North Carolina protested against the bailouts outside the offices of Democratic representatives (Lueck and Philips 2008). These conservatives, however, were more focused on an immediate impact on electoral politics, rather than on building up mass pressure directly on financial institutions as the protests on Wall Street did.[51] In terms of total numbers, these conservative protests were negligible.

Conservatives had some moderate success in online mobilisation, a form of dissent that had previously played a significant role for the progressive opposition to the Bush administration. The pioneer of conservative online activism against the bailouts was the libertarian advocacy group FreedomWorks. An offspring of Citizens for a Sound Economy, a group bankrolled by the Charles and David Koch, in 2008 FreedomWorks was led by Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe. Both leaders enjoyed considerable influence in conservative elite circles. Armey had been the Republican House Majority Leader during the "Republican Revolution" of the mid-1990s (Davis 2008; Mayer 2010). The group engaged in a variety of activities, ranging from training and connecting potential grassroots to lobbying Congress to prevent or relax business regulations (Pilkington 2009; Kibbe 2014). It shows little interest in social conservative issues and is dedicated exclusively to libertarian ideas. In Fetner and King's (2014) three-layer movement model,

[50] In their pro-Tea Party analysis Maltsev and Skaskiw (2013) claim that activists "associated with Ron Paul's Campaign for Liberty" (56) organised protests as well. The authors, however, do not cite evidence to support that claim.

[51] As the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out, lawmakers were concerned about the "looming election and the possibility that they could be punished for picking the wrong side" and feared future challengers who could "drum up anti-incumbent sentiments" by directing "anger over the bailout plan at incumbents they want to topple" (Lueck and Philips 2008). The Tea Party purges of 2010 confirmed the validity of these concerns.

FreedomWorks clearly fell into the middle segment. It connected core and periphery of the conservative movement and belonged to an "infrastructure of organisations and networks that coordinate activism and mobilize participants" (38).

FreedomWorks recognised the potential of the anti-bailout cause early and sought to capitalise on the resentment many Americans felt for the bailouts in order to expend its influence and make their case for free market capitalism. Already in April 2008, FreedomWorks landed its first coup by setting up a website called AngryRenter.com. The site intentionally looked like the makeshift effort of an actual distressed renter and was credited only to FreedomWorks "on the back pages" (Phillips 2008). It sought to mobilise renters against a proposed bailout bill for struggling subprime mortgage owners and initiated an online petition. Partially due to its genuinely "underdoggy and grass-rootsy" look and content, the site appealed to an ideologically unspecified constituency of renters who were mobilised against 'undeserving' mortgage owners. In that way FreedomWorks received 44,500 online signatures which it afterwards delivered to the Senate (Phillips 2008). This may not have stopped either Congress from eventually passing the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (HERA) or President Bush from signing it into law on July 30 but it clearly demonstrated the potential of online mobilisation against government bailouts in terms of reaching beyond a narrow conservative constituency.

Even more compelling was the way in which FreedomWorks framed its effort in and around AngryRenter.com.[52] The website clearly tapped into a rhetoric of economic and political inequality, dividing the issue of housing bailouts with economically deprived renters on the one side and speculating mortgage owners, Wall Street firms, lobbyists and Washington politicians on the other. In that respect, conservatives diverged from progressive anti-bailout protests, which had counted struggling mortgage owners as victims rather than perpetrators. The website stated:

> It seems like America's renters may NEVER be able to afford a home […] We are millions of renters standing up for our rights! [...] We are the class that has been ignored in this debate[…] Unfortunately, renters aren't as good at politics as the small minority of homeowners (and their bankers) who are in trouble[…] We don't have lobbyists in Washington, DC. We don't get a tax deduction for our rent and we don't get sweetheart government loans. (Phillips 2008)

The populist undertone of the website was hard to miss. The statements on AngryRenter.com skilfully turned a measure designed to stabilise the real estate sector and help struggling homeowners into a discourse about the "rights" of a "class" of "millions" whose interests appear unrepresented. The legislative initiative designed to prevent mass foreclosure was turned into a battle between the well-connected few against the powerless many. It was an interpretative frame that, at least in part, resonated with bailout sceptics across the political spectrum, casting doubts on the government's corrupted capacity to decide who was a deserving recipient of financial aid; a frame continuously utilised throughout the early Tea Party movement.

[52] The website AngryRenter.com's orginial content is not available online any longer. Some of its contents however, were reproduced in Michael M. Phillip's (2008) article in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Even after the website had been exposed as "a fake grass-roots effort […] an AstroTurf campaign" by *Wall Street Journal* writer Michael M. Phillips (2008), FreedomWorks executives prided themselves on their core message and justified their intervention (FreedomWorks 2008; Armey and Kibbe 2010, 43). At the time, FreedomWorks president Matt Kibbe declared the site to be an outreach effort to renters who shared its free-market views, while chairman Dick Armey stated that he wanted to "look out for 'the poor devil' who can't afford to buy a house" (Phillips 2008). In their co-written Tea Party manifesto, Armey and Kibbe (2010) placed the effort in the context of FreedomWorks' alleged fight against "crony capitalism" (45) and the "Bad actors on Wall Street or Main Street [who] should suffer the financial losses produced by their bad bets and carelessness" (44). Such statements not only presented "free-market" ideas as a salvatory dogma against the moral conundrums of bailout politics but also insinuated that subprime mortgage owners were just as much casino capitalists as the finance sector itself. FreedomWorks thus tried to blur the lines between 'people' and 'others' which characterised the progressive anti-bailout cause. This was the very same idea with which business correspondent Rick Santelli (2009) initiated the Tea Party surge against subsidising "the losers' mortgages." The same dogma made Tea Party Patriots' co-founder Jenny Beth Martin –who faced foreclosure herself – declare "It is not right for our neighbors to pay for our house" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 2).

As 'facilitator' of grassroots unrest and coalition building, FreedomWorks' the Angry Renter campaign served as a blueprint for further anti-bailout online activism. As Kibbe and Armey write in their account of the Tea Party movement's founding, activism against TARP was considered a crucial moment. In many

aspects the anti-TARP campaign followed the Angry Renter model: FreedomWorks functioned as a connecting element between conservative online protest communities and influential stakeholders in Beltway politics; a function that the organisation could play due to its contact with both groups. When the plan for TARP was introduced to Congress, FreedomWorks acted quickly, reaching out to its network of grassroots groups, members of Congress and influential conservative and libertarian advocacy groups in order to build a "coalition of the unwilling" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 53). According to FreedomWorks' own account, its "online team worked overtime to build a new grassroots protest site" called NoWallStreetBailouts.com. The website's petition quickly gained momentum and gathered more than 60,000 signatures and activated "hundreds of thousands of activists" throughout the country (59). This "willing Internet army" set up "meetings with their local congresspeople and senators and started phone trees with their local grassroots networks" (59). Though the number of participants may have been exaggerated, the influx of negative citizen responses to TARP, which arrived prior to its ratification, must have been organised at least in part by FreedomWorks.

The group's anti-bailout efforts furthermore relied on aid from a number of well-established advocacy groups, think thanks and websites, most notably the Club for Growth, the National Taxpayers Union, the Cato Institute and Reason.com. Allies in Congress included Republican Senator Jim DeMint and House Republican Jeb Hensarling, then chairman of the ultra-conservative Republican Study Committee (60). Hensarling delivered a so-called "key vote notice," (54), written by Dick Armey, first to the Republican Study Committee and then to the House floor, days

before the first vote on the EESA on September 29.[53] In their Tea Party manifesto, FreedomWorks celebrated this first failed vote on the EESA as a triumph for conservative "Grassroots activism" (61) and "the day the Tea Party movement was reborn in America" (62). For them the initial defeat of the bill marked an individual and collective political awakening of conservative activists whom they imagined saying "On September 29, 2008, I stopped yelling at the TV, got up off the couch, picked a mouse and the phone, and decided it was time to take America back from Washington" (64).

The efforts of the conservative anti-TARP coalition definitely represented a peculiar intersection between similar mobilisation efforts by progressive groups and later Tea Party activism. This is especially the case with regard to tactics and strategy. To some extent this conservative mobilisation constituted a learning process from more recent progressive campaigns, which had relied on strong online mobilisation, large donor bases, Congressional allies and a formalised network of professional organisers (Clementson 2003; Smith 2009; Norfleet 2010; Vanden Heuvel 2012; Meyer and Pullum 2013). Unlike the progressive campaigns and the later Tea Party movement, the conservative anti-TARP coalition remained largely invisible to the public because it largely refrained from actual protest actions on the street. Instead, conservative pressure was generated through online activism and a well-established network of conservative elite organisations and Congressional Republicans. In this regard the conservative anti-TARP efforts foreshadowed what Meyer and Pullum (2014) identified as the Tea

[53] Armey's key vote notice reproduced a number of classic themes of conservative constitutionalism and free market doctrine, including "Armey's Axiom number one: 'The market is rational and the government is dumb'" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 61). Armey's "Axiom" must have seemed an incredible statement at a time when Congress was seeking to stabilise a collapsing of a far from "rational" financial market.

Party movement's most effective political strategy: "the linkage between grassroots activism and well-heeled funders" (75). The fact that FreedomWorks still described anti-TARP mobilisation as a "massive wave of spontaneous grassroots outrage that rose up against the government's proposed actions" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 63) does not necessarily represent a self-deception. Rather, as Meyer and Pullum (2014) claim, underlines the reality that protest in the US has commonly become intertwined with professionalised infrastructures and elite support.

That Armey and Kibbe's (2010, 46-64) account of the anti-TARP mobilisation credited the House of Representative's initial rejection of the plan exclusively to conservative mobilisation while omitting the work of progressive groups represents a gross distortion of events. It was, however, of strategic importance for a conservative strategy that sought to seize the symbolic role of 'the people's' defenders against the powerful alliance of corporate interests and Washington politics. Armey and Kibbe's retelling of the story repeatedly featured elements of anti-Wall Street and anti-Republican rhetoric. It invoked the idea that the GOP's support for bailouts in general and TARP specifically "virtually erased any practical or philosophical distinction between the two parties" (49). The imagined subject of 'the people' was thus constructed against the actual bipartisanship that had enabled the EESA eventually to pass into law. At the same time the anti-TARP effort articulated an alternative version of social justice, based on free market ideology, far from the ideas of social justice of the political Left and the more straightforward pro-business republicanism that had characterised the Bush era.

Following the initiation of TARP, other forms of online activism, though not primarily directed against the bailouts, proved instrumental to the emergence of the Tea Party movement. Among them were a tight network of conservative and libertarian organisations in the Chicago area, efforts coordinated by Resistnet.com and Grassfire.org and the campaign initiated through the Twitter hashtag #TCOT.

Eric Odom and the New 'Chicago Boys'

The chapter has so far outlined how institutions and groups at the core of movement conservatism sought to reinvigorate its hegemonic claim to represent 'the people' by appropriating the anti-bailout cause and launched a purposeful attack on the incoming President in order to unite the, then, disoriented and dispersed conservative forces. While this project started at the centre of conservative influence, it started to gradually radiate to the periphery. The conservative media and advocacy groups like FreedomWorks played a crucial role in getting the word out. This section argues that a mediating role between centre and periphery was also played by conservative/libertarian networks. The role networks played in collective action has been discussed extensively in social movement scholarship (e.g. Diani and McAdam 2003). Rather than discussing the contents of conservatives' adapted populist message, this section focuses on how this message travelled from the centre to the periphery. It shows how networks of organisations and individuals began to shift their attention on conservative resurgence and the bailout issue, organised, and founded new institutions and websites that were directly involved with the foundation of the Tea Party movement. To show the efficacy of conservative networks in the making of the Tea Party this section focuses on the Chicago area and Eric Odom.

Mobilisation in and around Chicago demonstrated the ease with which networks within the conservative movement could come together to promote ideas and mobilise people when the time was right. The Chicago area, traditionally dominated by Democratic Party and liberal politics, had hosted some centres of libertarian and conservative thinking throughout the last few decades of the 20th century. They included the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago, in which libertarian economist Milton Friedman taught the notorious "Chicago Boys," and the Heartland Institute, a prominent free market public policy think tank that currently employs 35 full time staffers and hosts a network of a few hundred academics and elected officials (Heartland Institute 2015). During the years leading up to the financial crisis these older institutions were joined by a number of potent newer ones specialising, in the broadest sense, in the dissemination of conservative-libertarian ideas and online mobilisation.[54] The Chicago area in 2008 was characterised by a high degree of networking, interaction and transfer of staffers and members. Many of its associates were veterans in organising the conservative cause and had relationships to the Libertarian Party of Illinois (LIP) and the state Republican Party (Libit 2010).[55]

[54] According to an article published in the *New York Times*, these groupings included the the Sam Adams Alliance, American Thinker, the Heatland Institute, the Libertarian Party and the Republican Party of Illinois (Libit 2010). Other sources further draw connections to Blogivists (chaired by Eric Odom), a website that sought to publish libertarian-minded bloggers, the advocacy organisation Americans for Limited Government (formerly chaired by the Sam Adams Alliance's executive Eric O'Keffe), the conservative think tank Illinois Policy Institute and groups close to Republican primary contender Ron Paul (Sam Adams Alliance 2009; Burghart and Zeskind 2010,7; Brand-Zawadzki and Teo 2010a; Americans for Limited Government 2015).

[55] Among the key players were for instance: Eric O'Keefe, chief executive of the short-lived free market advocacy group Sam Adams Alliance; Eric Odom co-founder of the grassroots-oriented American Liberty Alliance; and Ed Lasky and Richard Baehr, co-founders of American Thinker (Libit 2010).

One central figure was the tech-savvy Eric Odom. Odom represented almost the ideal type of what Meyer and Pullum (2014) have identified as the professional organiser: someone who understood political organising as a full-time job. Having moved to Chicago in 2007 to work for the Sam Adams Alliance, Odom quickly adapted to his new 'liberal' political environment, making it part of his personal narrative. He once said "I live and breathe in a city where you can actually feel the taxation and the regulation. […] So for me it gives me a really great perspective and storyline" (Libit 2010). Describing himself as "very libertarian" (Libit 2010), Odom, in 2008, was an affiliate of the LPI (Brady 2009). By that summer Odom, in his role as social media coordinator for the Sam Adams Alliance, made a name for himself not by mobilising against banking bailouts but by launching the DontGo Movement on Twitter, a campaign mobilising against a proposed ban on offshore drilling (Libit 2010; Lo 2012, 100). The campaign was an immediate success. It quickly gained momentum –thanks to Odom's programming skills – generating within a few days an e-mail list of 40,000 supporters and drawing the "attention of federal lawmakers and the national media" (Libit 2010). Though unrelated to the bailouts, the DontGo Movement underlined Odom's skills in online mass mobilisation. His e-mail list later served as an important starting point for nationwide mobilisation under the Tea Party label.

During the second half of 2008 Odom moved increasingly towards conservative mobilisation efforts against the bailouts and the incoming Obama government. According to the chairman of the LPI, Dave Brady, Odom and others in the libertarian movement played a significant in popularising the Tea Party concept at that time:

> In December of 2008 the LP Illinois formulated the Boston Tea Party Chicago concept and advertised it through the LPI yahoo and meetup groups, Ron Paul Meetup groups, Campaign for Liberty groups, national tax groups as well as other various peace groups and local / national new sources. […] Santelli got wind of this and went public on the floor of Chicago stock exchange. (Brady 2009)

Though the claim that these efforts were the actual inspiration for the Tea Party movement's founding moment – the Santelli rant – is contested by other sources (Pilkington 2010).

Odom's role as a connector and organiser can hardly be overstated. Particularly after the election of Obama he showed a keen awareness of the resurgence of conservative online activism, connecting him with virtually all key players and mobilisation efforts of the early Tea Party movement (Brand-Zawadzki and Teo 2010b). Among them were two mobilisation schemes that were active before the Tea Party's 'official' launch in February 2009. The first was Top Conservatives on Twitter (#TCOT), initiated by the Tennessee-based author, journalist and activist Michael Patrick Leahy on November 28, 2009 (Leahy 2015). The main goal of the Twitter campaign was to rally conservative forces in the aftermath of the Republican electoral defeat and organise opposition against the incoming Obama administration (Leahy 2012, 223). Though #TCOT only had about one to two thousand participants, Leahy was nonetheless able to gain the attention of notable conservative institutions such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute (Leahy 2012, 223-4). In late 2008 Leahy used his Twitter following to mobilise against the appropriation of TARP funds for bailouts of the car industry. Using free conference call technology, Leahy connected his activists to Heritage Foundation's James Gattuso, the institution's leading expert in the field of automobile industry bailouts (Leahy 2012, 223, Meckler and Martin 2012, 16).

By early 2009, Leahy and his allies at the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation had moved on to reassert the meaning of conservatism after the eclipse of the Bush administration's "compassionate conservatism" in a way that would appeal to the still disoriented conservative rank and file. They agreed on four concepts: "(1) limited government (2) free markets (3) individual liberty (4) a strong national defense" (Leahy 2012, 224). A fifth element, "traditional values," which the Heritage Foundation sought to include in the list, was deliberately discarded (224). At the time, this could be clearly seen as part of the reorientation of conservatism, which moved away from neo-conservative, culture wars themes towards a more libertarian, fiscally conservative direction. While the first three elements were libertarian in nature, only the insistence on a strong military remained as a remnant of the neoconservative era. The Tea Party movement, at least in some of its rhetoric, would get rid of this element as well (Meckler and Martin 2012, 22).

Around the same time, Odom contacted Leahy in an effort to join forces (Zernike 2010, 26). Immediately following the rallying call of Rick Santelli on February 19, Odom and Leahy found themselves at the vanguard of a new movement. Both were instrumental in promoting Santelli's rant on websites and social media platforms and they set up conference calls between local activist leaders and conservative elite institutions with the goal of coordinating nationwide tea party protest actions (Lo 2012, 100; Meckler and Martin 2012, 17; Leahy 2015). The institutional frame within which Odom and Leahy coordinated these efforts was the short-lived Nationwide Tea Party Coalition (Lo 2012, 100), which is discussed in chapter five in greater detail.

It is probable that during this initial stage of the Tea Party movement, Odom also established contacts with Steve Elliott, another conservative online mobiliser who was active in the final months of 2008. Elliott represented a distinctive form of online mobilisation, which justifies characterising him as a movement entrepreneur: someone who conducts the mobilisation of political dissent essentially as a business. Already in 2000, Elliott had launched Grassfire (Grassfire Solutions Lab 2015), a for-profit venture for "Internet activism services" (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 29). During the years of the Bush administration, when culture wars topics promised to energize the conservative base into action (e.g. Frank 2005), his websites largely promoted socially conservative issues.[56] According to Burghart and Zeskind (2010), the growth of Grassfire's contact database, was fuelled by the use of "Internet petition campaigns," (29) an idea earlier employed by the progressive MoveOn.org.[57] Soon after the election of Obama, in December 2008, Elliott began to acknowledge the changing mood of contemporary conservatives and the anti-bailout fervour. He launched ResistNet (later renamed Patriot Action Network), a website that describes itself as

> THE premier liberty movement alternative to Facebook. Our social network brings all the necessary traditional social networking components together to provide an environment where people can communicate, collaborate and build online in ways that translate into offline political success. (Patriot Action Network 2015)

[56] Elliott's sense of 'customer orientation' was truly astonishing. During the first years of the Bush administration, which had repeatedly cultivated socially divisive wedge issues to mobilise the Republican base, petitions were launched in favour of the Boy Scout's anti-gay stance, "saving traditional marriage," "stand for the unborn," opposition to partial birth abortion, stopping internet porn, make God Bless America the National Hymn, supporting the Pledge of Allegiance, and support for Judge Roy Moore's fight to place the Ten Commandments in his Alabama courtroom" (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 29). With the growth of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiments in the later years of the Bush administration, Grassfire increasing launched petitions opposing comprehensive immigration reform (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 29).

[57] As of June 2010 Grassfire's contact database encompassed more than 3,700,000 people (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 29).

As a conservative social media platform, ResistNet became a crucial player in early Tea Party mobilisation. Describing itself further as the "Home of Patriotic Resistance" that "will create newfound unity among conservatives" (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 29-30), ResistNet anticipated the Americanist, Revolutionary-era tone that the Tea Party movement would take up thereafter. ResistNet was, however, only one part of the network of organisations and websites in which Odom and Elliott collaborated. This network encompasses the conservative news website Liberty News Network, the activist service website Grassfire, Grassfire Solutions Lab (geared towards political campaign consulting) and the "get-out-the-vote operation" Patriot Caucus (Libit 2010).

FIGURE 2: GRASSFIRE

Grassfire MEMBERS™

GRASSFIRE HOME | MEMBERS HOME | MEMBER BENEFITS | MEMBER OFFERS | JOIN/FAQ | MY ACCOUNT | LOGIN/ LOGOUT

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY AND RECEIVE A SIGNED COPY OF THE GRASSFIRE EFFECT!

GRASSFIRE MEMBER SELECT	GRASSFIRE MEMBER PREMIER (MOST POPULAR)	GRASSFIRE MEMBER ELITE
Includes "Fax My Congress Now," Quarterly Grassfire Books, Semi-Weekly Briefing and Steve Elliott's Report.	Includes All Select Benefits, FREE "Level One" FaxFires, Monthly Conference Calls and a 20% Discount on Grassfire Products.	Includes All Premier Benefits PLUS Every New Grassfire Resource Offered Free, and a Signed Copy of The Grassfire Effect.
$9.99/MONTH	$19.99/MONTH	$29.99/MONTH
$99/YEAR	$199/YEAR	$299/YEAR

MEMBER BENEFITS	SELECT	PREMIER	ELITE
Semi-Weekly "Members Only Briefing"	✓	✓	✓
Weekly Exclusive "Steve Elliott Report"	✓	✓	✓
"Fax My Congress Now"	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly Grassfire Book Resources	✓	✓	✓
Free LEVEL ONE "FaxFires"		✓	✓
Monthly Exclusive Conference/Video Calls		✓	✓
25% Discount on Grassfire Products		✓	✓
Free LEVEL TWO "FaxFires"			✓
Select Grassfire Resources Offered FREE			✓
Signed Copy of The Grassfire Effect			✓

A Screenshot take from the Grassfire website on July15, 2015. The image shows different levels membership fees with accompanying benefits. Source: (http://members.grassfire.com/)

The profit-oriented nature of political activism and organising that had taken shape in conservative mobilisation at the birth of the Tea Party must be understood as part of a larger trend in political mobilisation. The sociologist Clarence Lo, for instance, writes with regard to the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition:

> The marketing activities of the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition typify a long-standing trend in which social movements become professionalized mobilizers of resources for public relation campaigns. Social movement scholars John McCarthy and Mayer Zald theorize that social movements in the United States have become national interest groups, led by entrepreneurs who seek to expand their organizations by developing new agendas that appeal to a mass audience. Social movement organizations have evolved into enterprises, using the latest advertising techniques to sell memberships and solicit donations. (Lo 2012, 101)

The activities of people like Odom and Elliott at the onset of the Tea Party movement and thereafter demonstrate that resentment against bailouts and the new Democratic administration tapped into network of organisations that specialised in the commodification of collective political action. In defence of the Tea Party with regard to this tendency, which turned movement leaders into entrepreneurs, organising into a service, and protesters into consumers, it should be acknowledged that they are at least consistent with the movement's own free-market creed. The Tea Party's constructing of 'the people' in opposition to perceived government transgressions was at least in part a business. This is surely one of the distinctive features of Tea Party populism. And people like Eric Odom were among the first to understand this.

Odom, however, was more than an entrepreneur. He was also a gifted organiser and strategist who proved nearly indispensable for the early Tea Party movement. After the Santelli rant he acted as a key organiser for the nationwide protest rallies on February 27 and the Tax Day protests on April 15 (Clarence 2012, 100-1). Apart from setting up the websites such as OfficialChicagoTeaParty.com (to coordinate the nationwide February protests) and TaxDayTeaParty.com (to coordinate the nationwide April protests), Odom also launched his own, short-lived activist platform called American Liberty Alliance (ALA) in March 2009 (Brand-Zawadzki and Teo 2010b, 2010c). According to the *New York Times*, the

ALA functioned as a grassroots coordination platform and political action committee (Libit 2010). Like the Tea Party movement as a whole, Odom and his ALA turned their attention to opposing Obama's health care reform in the summer of 2009. Following the same tactic as for the protest days in February and April, Odom launched a website called RecessRally.com that sought to coordinate grassroots groups and the host of organisations (among them Americans for Limited Government, Americans for Prosperity, Nationwide Tea Party Coalition, RedState blog, Sam Adams Alliance and Tea Party Patriots) for the campaign of disrupting Congressional town hall meetings, which were arranged to discuss the healthcare reform plans.

In the course of Tea Party activism, Odom helped to determine the movement's self-imagined and strategic stance as a non-partisan, grassroots-driven mass movement. In preparation for the Tax Day protest, for instance, Odom denied Michael Steele, chairman of the Republican National Committee the opportunity to address the protesters in Chicago; a gesture of high symbolic value though representatives of the GOP spoke at other protest venues (Leahy 2012, 233; Lo 2012, 114). When Odom did campaign for Republican candidates, as he did for Scott Brown during the special elections for the Senatorial seat of Massachusetts in early 2010, he was quick to justify his intervention as acting for the greater good of the movement saying "This is not so much about Scott Brown as it is about the idea that if we really collaborate as a mass movement, we can take any seat in the country" (Zernike 2010, 92).

The example of Odom demonstrates how individual organisers could navigate within a close-knit network of individuals and organisations dedicated to spreading libertarian and/or conservative ideas. As the chart below illustrates, this

network, which would become the organisational backbone of the Tea Party movement during its initial phase, was at least in part already taking shape between the ratification of the EESA and the ARRA. At that time, however, many of these institutions pursued the anti-bailout cause only half-heartedly and focused instead more generally on the regrouping of the conservative movement in the wake of electoral defeat, as was the case with #TCOT and ResistNet.

FIGURE 3: NETWORK OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS DEDICATED TO SPREADING LIBERTARIAN AND/OR CONSERVATIVE IDEAS

Source: Self-elaboration, 2015

This explains in part why conservative mobilisation against the ARRA was initially even less successful than against the EESA. An online petition in opposition to the Stimulus, promoted by *American Thinker*, for instance, acquired a mere 333 signatures, only a fraction of the 1,000,000 signatures the organisers hoped to obtain (Citizens for Common Sense and Accountability 2009). Such a poor showing reflects the initial acceptance of the Stimulus among the general public.[58] This is not to say that conservative online mobilisation and media commentary after the election of Obama and the TARP bailouts were of no consequence. Prior to the emergence of the Tea Party movement, the conservative infrastructure orchestrated a collective effort to muster the conservative base for an aggressive opposition to the incoming Obama administration. It tried to undermine the credibility of Obama as a person and a politician. At the same time it was able to point out certain injustices in the government bailout policies and marshal conservative free market faith as a seemingly viable alternative.

With regard to the bailouts, which were to become the first major protest issue of the movement, conservative dissent only gradually became articulate. In the conservative media the bailouts were increasingly portrayed as "socialist" and as an expression of federal level cronyism. Contrary to many Tea Party accounts, however, the Right was far less united against the bailout policies when the EESA passed through Congress. Rather the EESA was a result of a bipartisan effort to save the US economy from collapse. The united conservative front against the bailouts became only gradually a reality after Obama's electoral victory. By the

[58] According to a poll of USA TODAY/Gallup Poll, two-thirds of the public believed "that Obama's package of tax cuts and new spending would boost the nation's economy, at least by a little" (Page 2009). Scepticism, however, grew throughout January and February 2009. According to Rasmussen polls, support steadily declined. By early February, a majority of Americans opposed the ARRA (Rasmussen Report 2009).

time the Recovery Act passed Congress, the fragile bipartisan consensus between Bush Republicans and congressional Democrats had largely disappeared. Only three Senate Republicans voted for ARRA. In the House it was passed exclusively with Democratic votes (Wall Street Journal 2009b). This shifted the responsibility for the bailout policies entirely towards the Democrats and Obama and opened the door for conservative anti-bailout protests.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the close relationship between populism, social mobilisation, ideology, electoral politics and public policy. The gradual appropriation of anti-bailout cause between September 2008 and February 2009 was a crucial step towards the founding the Tea Party movement and construction of its populist collective identity. It provided the movement with some of its most important signifiers, which allowed them to construct their identity of 'the people' against a corrupt and unequal political system while, at the same time, vindicate conservative ideology and the free market capitalism. All this happened a time when conservatism experienced one of its most essential crises in recent decades.

During the second half of 2008 conservative elites gradually recognised the symbolic importance of bailout opposition for the renewal of their own hegemonic project. They thus began to sharply turn against a set of policies that they themselves had championed throughout the year. What allowed them to oppose the bailouts was the transition of power at the federal level, which freed conservatives from taking responsibility for the government's economic relief efforts (cf. Skocpol 2012; Meyer and Pullum 2014). As the Republican Party began to oppose the bailouts and any other forms of government intervention in the economy they also underwent a significant course correction: away from Bush

“compassionate” business Republicanism and toward a stricter anti-statist, libertarian fiscal conservatism. In the process the GOP became the home of all those who opposed the bailouts and what they stood.

The populist division between ‘people’ and ‘others’ that resulted from these considerations equalled the one between the ‘victims’ and beneficiaries of bailout cronyism. The expressed antagonism between ‘people’ and ‘others’ furthermore had a very relevant corollary in the political economy. While the Keynesian consensus that had influenced the Bush and Obama administration’s relief efforts was dismissed as cronyism and incompatible with the ‘American’ experience, free market economics were presented as the only acceptable reaction to the economic downturn. Not only would free market principles have ensured a ‘just’ punishment of corporate malpractice, in the eyes of its proponents they would also have recognised some form of political equality and equal treatment.

As this chapter shows, the appropriation of the anti-bailout cause and this redirection of the conservative outlook on politics was a process that started in the centres of power in the conservative movement: Republicans in Congress, the conservative media, advocacy groups and think tanks. From there it radiated to periphery of conservative influence. The Tea Party movement was quick to pick up sentiment and translate it into its own political alternative to what both progressive and conservative groups considered the rigged dynamics of Washington cronyism. This alternative vision was based on free market fundamentalism, the near-utopian, quasi-religious faith that the benevolent indifference of capitalism was the only way to provide for the equality of opportunity and that market-based solutions in every field of social interaction

would usher in a free and equal society.[59] Consequently, the Tea Party's 'people's' crusade had to be directed against anyone who sought to limit the extent of free market capitalism. This made free market advocacy groups like FreedomWorks and diehard free market Republicans the movement's natural allies in the same way as it made more moderate Republicans and Democrats 'the people's' declared adversaries.

[59] The idea of market fundamentalism derived from the Karl Polanyi's (2001) thinking about the utopian nature of some elements of economic liberalism and was coined as a term by George Soros (1998) in the late 1990s (Somers and Block 2005). According to Somers and Block (2005) at market fundamentalism's core stands "the idea that society as a whole should be subordinated to a system of self-regulating markets" (261).

Part II: Populism and Movement Foundation

Chapter Four – Proto-Tea Party Protests and the Beginnings of a New Collective Identity

Introduction

As Obama's inauguration approached during the early weeks of 2009, many Americans felt relieved, hoping that his entry into the White House would signal a new beginning for the nation. Many expected that Obama would heal the wounds of excessive partisan conflict, end the wars oversees and take decisive action to end the Great Recession. Whilst the proposed Recovery Act was, on the whole, eagerly anticipated, there was hardly unanimous support for the government's handling of the economic crisis. Critical voices disapproved of Obama's continuation of the bailouts of large banks and corporations and they considered the Recovery Act as yet another and even bigger bailout. As the last chapter has shown, various groups at the centre of conservative power supported such views and warned that Obama's politics would subvert American values and transform the country along socialist lines.

By the time Congress discussed the new stimulus package, its members began to receive tea bags, sent from concerned Americans across the country. The message these tea bags were meant to express was that people opposed the spending of taxpayers' money to help large industries, symbolising that the government had stopped listening to the people that it was meant to represent (Pilkington 2010). The tea bag campaign was soon followed by a number of smaller street protests in

Florida, Washington, Colorado and Arizona. Unlike the protests against TARP in September, these new protests were not organised by progressive groups but by people who identified in most cases as staunch conservatives and Republicans. The protests against the Stimulus were not only dispersed all over the country, they were also organised by a variety of groups and individuals. As the previous chapter demonstrated, many conservative mobilisation efforts were grounded in online protest communities or tapped into pre-existing networks of libertarian-conservative organisations. What initiated the Stimulus protests in particular were a number of seemingly insignificant events: rumblings in online forums and the efforts of a few individuals new to the field of collective action. Many of the emerging protest groups, though usually connected in some way to the conservative organisational infrastructure, were not yet linked to each other and organised their protests independently, often even without knowing of the others' existence. What they shared was the conviction that there was something wrong with the bailout/stimulus politics which they considered indicative of a larger trend in politics that directed economic favours unjustly towards well-connected economic elites.

This chapter seeks to explore these protest actions and explain what motivated the people who joined them. What makes the first Stimulus protests particularly relevant is the fact that they represented a crucial link between the progressive bailout protests of 2008 and the nationwide Tea Party protests that followed thereafter. This chapter argues that their transitional nature offers a variety of relevant insights for the evaluation of the early Tea Party and helps to locate them politically. Being a transitory phenomenon between two ideologically opposed mobilisation efforts, the Stimulus protests both appropriated elements of the

inequality discourse of their progressive predecessors and foreshadowed many of the tactics and identity-building gestures of their Tea Party successors. Given their decentralised character, it is perhaps not surprising that Stimulus protests differed, at times significantly, in their outlook on national politics and the solutions they offered to correct the system.

This chapter argues that by the time the Stimulus was discussed in Congress, the reorientation at the core of the conservative movement towards an economic populism had breached the periphery and began to translate into first street protests. As this chapter shows, these people willingly embraced this new populist identity and began to see their opposition against the Stimulus as a cause that represented a struggle of the American people against the power of entrenched political elites. The appropriation of the anti-bailout cause as an empty signifier that represented this populist struggle played a crucial role in this emerging protest culture and enabled conservatives to reach out to people who opposed the bailouts and stimulus spending but were in some cases not otherwise committed to the conservative cause. Binding these people to conservative politics became a crucial strategy towards ending the current crisis of American conservatism and enabling conservatives to renew their hegemonic claims. These street protests fostered the idea that American conservatism was a bottom-up phenomenon that represented the political struggle of 'the people' against an unaccountable political system.[60]

[60] Tea Party literature and Tea Party friendly studies affirm this interpretation of the proto-Tea Party protests (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 121; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 53-75) and highlight the ordinariness and bravery that turned these early "unlikely" heroes into political activists (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 11).

Scholarship and media commentary on these proto-Tea Party protests against the Stimulus are relatively scarce and usually do not provide an in-depth analysis of individual organisers and the circumstances that drew them into the world of political activism.[61] One of the objectives of this chapter is to re-examine the proto-Tea Party protests and thus close a gap in the historiography of the Tea Party. It employs a variety of sources including blogs, videos, photos, websites, newspaper articles, Tea Party writings and secondary literature to revisit the three protest actions that have each been claimed to have been the first Tea Party actions: the Market Ticker Tea Bag campaign, the anti-Stimulus protest in Fort Myers, Florida and the "Porkulus" protest in Seattle (Hamsher 2009; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 120; Armey and Kibbe 2010, 11). The analysis of these three protests focuses in particular on their main organisers, the organisational process and the protests, arguing that the construction of an antagonism between 'the people' and their enemies played a central role in mobilising Americans to become politically active. In the process of organising and protesting, the Tea Party was thus inextricably linked to a conception of populism even before the movement was 'officially' launched in the aftermath of the Santelli rant. Indeed, the logic of populism permeated to the level of protest contents, applied tactics, strategic outlook and the nature of the emerging 'popular' coalition. A common narrative was shared among the protests: that the Stimulus and bailout policies exposed the workings of a political class (though it may be defined differently) and economic elites against American democracy and capitalism. The protesters consciously appropriated parts of the inequality discourse and mobilisation tactics

[61] Works mentioning these protests include Trost and Rosenthal 2012, 10; Lo 2012; Formisano 2012, 25-27; Zernike 2010, 13-9; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 70-5; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 120; and Meyer and Pullum 2014, 73-4.

that characterised the progressive anti-bailout protests of the previous year and integrated them into a new political project that was largely driven by conservative ideology. In each case, forms of capitalism began to emerge as the only path to recover freedom, democracy and American identity.

The chapter is divided into three parts. Each of these parts focuses on different aspects of the relationship between protest and populism. The first section analyses the activism of Karl Denninger's groups FedUpUSA and Market Ticker. It centres on how participants constructed an antagonism between people and power as a central legitimising aspect of political activism. It additionally demonstrates how people who were otherwise uncommitted to conservatism temporarily supported the conservative cause. The second section focuses on Mary Rakovich's protest in Florida, analysing the complex relationship between elite organisations and the conservative grassroots and the role of affect in mobilisation. The "Porkulus" protest in Seattle is the subject of the third section. This last section focuses mainly on the changing tactical and strategic outlook at the grassroots level and the emergence of a popular coalition of conservatives under the banner of fiscally conservative issues. Though each of the sections highlights different aspects of the relationship between Tea Party protest and populism, remarkable communalities appear to connect the three protests, namely that organisers and participants often appeared as political loners, who saw their mission as 'educating' the American public about the underlying social mechanisms of power that they identified in American politics. For each protest, political activism functioned as a cathartic action with which protestors sought to break through their personal isolation and become part of a larger movement.

What happened on an individual level in the first three protest actions would transform into a mass conservative awaking in the early Tea Party movement.

A Bankers' Revolt for Democracy? FedUpUSA Defines the People and their Enemies

During the early days of February, only a few weeks after Obama took office, Stephanie Jasky, a Detroit-based paralegal working in the real estate business, bought an economy box of tea bags and sent one tea bag to each member of Congress. During the troublesome times after the real estate sector began crumble, her and her husband's business found themselves in financial trouble. "I was looking for answers – I wanted to know what happened," she later told a reporter, "The more I looked the more it became clear to me that the problem was our government, that the government had become the criminal" (Pilkington 2010). Jasky had heard of the tea bag campaign from Market Ticker, an online forum popular among financial sector workers. Discussions about the government crisis management had been going on in the Ticker forum for quite some time before the tea bag idea materialised. Views on the bailouts and the upcoming stimulus package were far from favourable. "All these bailouts and stimulus packages, that was taking our money and spending it without our permission" Jasky summarised the mood on the online forum, "Taxation without representation. We thought, didn't that happen to us in the Revolutionary wars? Hello! Anyone remember King George?" (Pilkington 2010). Views that conflated the bailouts of the financial sector and the Stimulus were not uncommon in early 2009. The idea that the government was somehow responsible for the economic crisis and had become "criminal," unrepresentative and undemocratic had circulated for a while and became especially popular in the conservative media after Obama' election victory (e.g. Krauthammer 2009).

Market Ticker was both run by and targeted at Americans who were working in the financial sector. Essentially an online forum where people working in the financial sector could exchange mostly libertarian-minded ideas, Market Ticker was headed by Karl Denninger, an entrepreneur who had built his fortune in the communications sector in the 1990s, which allowed him to retire at an early age and settle in Niceville, Florida, where he dedicated his life to "diving, fishing and pursuing political activism, including family law reform and children's rights" (Chicago Sun-Times 2003).

When the financial crisis started to escalate in 2008, Denninger decided to channel his interest in political activism towards anti-bailout protest and financial market reform. As a result he and other Market Ticker participants created the grassroots advocacy group FedUpUSA (FedUpUSA 2014a). The group began to protest the Bush administration's bailout policies relatively early. In April 2008 a small group of FedUpUSA members gathered in New York City to protest the government-sponsored "Bear Stearns 'merger' with JPMorgan" (FedUpUSA 2014a) and to inform the public about the dangers of the developing bailout frenzy of 2008. The protests reflected indignation with the bailouts of the corporate financial sector and an urge for a partial return to the regulatory regime of the pre-Clinton era. It was both libertarian and progressive reform-oriented at the same time. Protesters identified as a "group of concerned citizens." Their protest signs read "BEN [Bernanke], STOP CUTTING AND START REGULATING," "FED UP WITH THE FED," "SOCIALISM FOR WALL STREET & CAPITALISM FOR MAIN STREET" (Fed U. 2013a). On the surface these signs insinuated a certain kinship to the protests of progressive groups that accompanied the ratification of the EESA the following September.

When several months later the negotiations over TARP approached their showdown in Congress, Denninger opposed the measure and instead spoke out in favour of tightened banking supervision and a partial reversal of the deregulation of the financial sector, which had taken place during the Clinton and Bush administration (Denis 2008). Denninger did not seem to care with whom he had to ally himself in order to get his message across. During the summer he was interviewed by ultra-conservative Glenn Beck on his CNN show. Both agreed that the bailouts for both banks and struggling homeowners set a bad example and unjustly shifted the costs of speculation on those who played a according the rules (Fed U. 2013b).

An examination of the group's claims reveals a complex picture of the group's ideological direction. The demands and grievances of FedUpUSA were reminiscent of a number of different political projects that emerged around the time of the financial crisis. For one thing, the group's attacks on the Federal Reserve System were clearly reminiscent of the Ron Paul campaign, which was gaining headlines at the same time. For many years, hostility towards the Federal Reserve had been one of the trademark issues of Ron Paul's political career (Paul 2009). The group's very name indicates that FedUpUSA shared Paul's obsession with the destructive character of the Federal Reserve System. FedUpUSA, however, parted ways with Paul on the subject of regulations, which Paul condemned and the FedUpUSA desired. The group held the government accountable for the economic crisis but their where no signs that indicated a wish for a more activist government beyond strengthening regulations on the financial sector. There were no signs demanding a bailout of those most affected by the economic crisis. Whether the protester who held up the sign that read

"SOCIALISM FOR WALL STREET & CAPITALISM FOR MAIN STREET" actually demanded to have capitalism for Wall Street or socialism for Main Street is not entirely certain. Most probably, the group longed for a regulated free market system that would penalise financial giants for malpractice and establish some form of equality. The regulated free market served as a blueprint for competitiveness, equality and fairness. It was the answer that financial sector workers gave to the pathology of crony capitalism.

Ideologically FedUpUSA was thus located somewhere between the September protests and the early Tea Party movement. Above all, FedUpUSA shared both movements' desire to inform and educate the public about the general injustice of the government bailouts and the 'rigged' political system that made them possible. The group's website indicates an ideological direction that might be best described as free market populism. The group's concerns were mainly driven by the recognition "that there was something terribly wrong with our financial system" (FedUpUSA 2014a). Its main targets were "Wall Street bankers" and the informal network these bankers had built up with lobbyists and Washington politicians. This network was nothing less than a direct assault on the country's democracy and a corporate conspiracy against the American people:

> FedUpUSA was borne out of a need to get our information out to the American public, so that they could know the truth and be encouraged to stand up and have a voice. The American People cannot be heard until they truly understand how they're being robbed blind by the Wall Street bankers who continue to pay for the campaigns for election and re-election of those who will ensure legislation to facilitate their thievery. [...]Huge corporations, international banks, power brokers on Wall Street, foreign governments, media giants — the real self-appointed ruling class — their lobbyists write the bills, the congressmen work as scripted front men for tainted legislation and then they vote as they're told. This country was founded as a representative republic, but We The People are no longer represented. (FedUpUSA 2014a)

Linking the problems of cronyism, lobbyism, bailouts, and politics to the representational claims of the American people within the political system, FedUpUSA entered an ideological territory that would be populated by both the Tea Party and Occupy movement over the following few years. It is telling that Denninger, at different times, would speak out in favour of both groups (RT 2011). What remained consistent, however, was the populist core of the political project. FedUpUSA made a clear distinction between economic, cultural and political elites who had monopolised power and a disenfranchised 'people,' which the economic crisis had marginalised to an extent that it made a mockery of the country's democratic creed. These 'people's' path to a restoration of their democratic power depended on a sequence of actions: informing and mobilising the public, protesting, and the breaking up the power monopoly of politicians, bankers, corporations, lobbyists, foreign governments, and a complicit media. As for the progressive protests of September and for the case for free market capitalism that conservatism made in the aftermaths of the elections, the bailout opposition functioned as signifier that represented 'the people's' fight for political voice against a political system that had become unaccountable.

By January 2009 Market Ticker and FedUpUSA found themselves at the forefront of the right-wing struggle against Obama's Stimulus bill. At the end of the month, two of Market Ticker's bloggers popularised the idea of "mailing a tea bag" to members of Congress to protest the bill (Tencer 2010). According to an article in the *Guardian*, the idea became quite popular among people working in the financial sector and continued throughout February. "The practice," the article states, "spread so much so that by the time that CNBC reporter Rick Santelli made his famous rant on 19 February 2009, he did so standing in front of Chicago

traders who all had tea bags stuck to their computer screens and phone banks" (Pilkington 2010). The irony that the bailouts had saved at least some of these traders' jobs was apparently lost on them. Regardless, the tea bag campaign of Market Ticker activists became the first incident of protest that linked anti-bailout protests to the Boston Tea Party metaphor, arguably inspiring Santelli's "rant". As such, it was a crucial moment for the development of the Tea Party movement.

If the rallying call of FedUpUSA bore significant similarities to political projects of the progressive Left, how was it that the group came to prominence as a proto-Tea Party group (Hamsher 2009)? After all, the tone of their self-description is progressive, reform-oriented and emancipatory. The group's main goal seemed to be to restore American democracy and ensure the 'people's' representation. Little in the "About us" section of their websites betrays the degree to which FedUpUSA is linked to the political mobilisation efforts of the libertarian Right. These connections only come to the surface when looking at the links and web resources the group is recommending to its supporters. There one can find endorsements of right wing groups such as the National Center for Constitutional Studies, an 'information' platform dedicated to the distribution of Far-Right political literature, the Ludwig von Mises Institute, a group dedicated to Austrian Economics, or Americans for Prosperity, the libertarian-conservative political advocacy group that is financed by the Koch brothers (FedUpUSA 2014b). The "Tools and Resources" section features a PowerPoint presentation for a meeting of the Tea Party Patriots in Placer County, California (FedUpUSA 2014c). However, in contrast to the right-wing media framing discussed earlier, Denninger's financial-sector activists did not resort to diatribes against Barack Obama. Their "non-partisan" stance appears credible as the website recommends

to back "a 3rd party candidate" and to use web resources to discover for themselves which companies were financing the campaigns of competing candidates (FedUpUSA 2014a). Supporters, in other words, were left to decide on their own what they did with the information FedUpUSA and other watchdog organisations disseminated. People were not overtly driven into the Republican camp. Such a position demonstrated a firm belief in the rationality of the 'people' to make educated decisions once their eyes were opened to the 'truth'.

It is difficult to estimate what exactly led the group to embrace right-wing libertarianism and the Tea Party movement. In 2008 and 2009 the group clearly believed that a 'people's' movement against Wall Street bankers and Washington cronyism was possible. At the height of the financial crisis, these hopes, presumably, did not appear far-fetched. However, Denninger's urge for a reversal of deregulation, the return of a stricter government oversight of the financial markets and his embrace of libertarian economics represented just one of the many contradictions of both his and FedUpUSA's thinking. For Americans like Denninger, the Tea Party movement of 2009 must have appeared to be the grassroots movement he was hoping for when he launched FedUpUSA: authentically voicing 'the people's' concerns, sceptical of the political establishment, and fiercely non-partisan. It seemed, initially, like a movement that would simply disband like the progressive anti-TARP campaign.

Indications of this hope were still evident in the group's involvement in the Tea Party movement throughout 2009. An event, which FedUpUSA prepared for a meeting of the Tea Party Patriots in Placer County, California on December 17, 2009, still attacked the undemocratic practices of the Federal Reserve Bank and was wrought with attacks on the corporate financial sector. For the most part, the

message was delivered with macroeconomic arguments about monetary policies, debts and multiple graphs and statistics. There were no indications that FedUpUSA cared much about Obama, healthcare, or any socially conservative issues. Judging from this presentation, the group still considered itself to have a place in a Tea Party movement which had by and large already changed its focus away from bailouts and Stimulus opposition towards a tighter focus on healthcare reform under the Affordable Care Act (FedUpUSA 2014c).

Denninger and his group did not see the limitations of the Tea Party movement and underestimated the influence that Republican operatives and the decades-old conservative infrastructure of think tanks, advocacy groups and media outlets was to have on movement members. Towards the end of 2010, Denninger realised angrily his misconceptions about the movement, calling movement celebrities like Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin "a joke" and the Tea Party Patriots a "douchebag" group (Tencer 2010). About the movement itself he writes:

> Tea Party my ass. This was nothing other than the Republican Party stealing the anger of a population that was fed up with the Republican Party's own theft of their tax money at gunpoint to bail out the robbers of Wall Street and fraudulently redirecting it back toward electing the very people who stole all the ****ing money! (Tencer 2010)

Whilst it is hard not to see Denninger's misconceptions about the early Tea Party as tragic, they have to be considered in context. In 2008 and 2009 Denninger and FedUpUSA represented a sentiment in American society that identified the relationship between corporate money and politics as threatening to democracy. The bailouts in their different forms were the most obvious manifestation of this relationship.

In the later development of the Tea Party, however, Denninger and his fellow financial sector activists failed to leave a significant footprint. People like Denninger, who saw the main opponent of this 'people's' movement as the corporate-political partnership, never launched a sustained effort to change the 'rules of the game'. Getting out the information to the American people and mobilising them to protest was not enough to lead to feasible democratic 'revolution' and Denninger's idea of reformed capitalism died a silent death as the Tea Party movement moved on to other issues. It is, however, revealing that the first protest actions that related the Stimulus to the Tea Party metaphor came from a group that showed, at best, a limited commitment to the dogma of movement conservatism. The group's presence in the early Tea Party shows the effects of conservative's appropriation of the anti-bailout cause. By early 2009 people who opposed the bailouts and stimulus spending had no other place to go than the Republican Party and movement conservatives. The anti-bailout cause had allowed conservatives to build alliances with people beyond their rank-and-file supporters, vindicate free market capitalism as the only viable alternative to cronyism and the perceived loss of sovereignty and rearticulate their hegemonic project.

Rakovich, FreedomWorks and Fox News: Manufacturing Dissent in Fort Myers, Florida

FedUpUSA and the Market Ticker campaign had been organised by Americans with a limited commitment to conservatism. Although they shared conservatives' new opposition to both government bailouts and stimulus measures, they were rather their allies in a common cause than firm believers of conservative dogma. At the beginning of 2009 proper grassroots conservatives found it difficult to oppose the incoming Obama administration, especially on economic issues. In the

2008 elections American voters had passed their judgement on Republican economic policies, which many held responsible for the economic crisis. Opposing the Recovery Act meant to go against the current of public opinion, which had swung into a more liberal, Keynesian direction. Many grassroots conservatives felt isolated from the American mainstream, although they were frustrated about the bailouts and the Recovery Act. Following Market Ticker's campaign, the first opportunity for a street protest against the Stimulus offered itself on February 10 in Fort Myers, Florida where the newly elected President Obama was scheduled to hold a town hall meeting to promote the Recovery Act. Along with Obama, the event featured Republican Governor Charlie Crist, who had come out in support of the Stimulus.

The protest's principal organiser and spokesperson was Mary Rakovich, a woman in her early 50s who had only recently moved to Florida with her husband Ron to take care of his parents. According to the *Washington Post*, Rakovich was "an unemployed automotive engineer, an anti-abortion vegetarian with nine cats and a dog and a fierce concern about where this country is heading. She has two bad hips and so attends demonstrations with a walker." She was also a registered Republican (Montgomery 2010). What led Rakovich into the world of political activism was essentially loneliness. Having only recently moved to Florida she had few friends. Due to hip problems she spent much of her time on the computer reading about the unfolding economic crisis and upcoming 2008 elections. Rakovich seems to have read a wide range of conservative news websites, which were increasingly targeting Obama and the Bush bailouts (Travis 2011). Political activism was a way for her to keep busy and to meet like-minded people. She

volunteered for the McCain campaign although she considered him not conservative enough and disagreed with his support for TARP (Bennett 2010).

In January 2009 she and her husband participated in an activist training seminar in nearby Tampa. The seminar took about three hours and taught its eighty participants the basics of community organising: "writing letters to the editors, calling talk radio shows and preparing press releases" (Bennett 2010). Perhaps most importantly, the seminar explained how to organise street protests. It was hosted and sponsored by FreedomWorks. Part of the group's declared mission was to foster grassroots activism by identifying, educating, and activating "citizens who are enthused about showing up to support free enterprise and constitutionally limited government" (Kibbe 2014). The group's activities were about transforming angry, conservative news consumers into political activists.

For Rakovich the opportunity to put her knowledge and enthusiasm to active use came when White House officials announced Obama's visit to Fort Myers on February 10. According to FreedomWorks' directors, Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, the Rakovichs thought about organising a protest on their own, but they were encouraged by a follow-up call from Brandon Steinhauser, director of FreedomWorks' state and federal campaigns. Steinhauser told Mary and Ron Rakovich to go through with the protest: "You only need the two of you and a few signs to make your voices heard" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 13). Concerned about the media image of the protest – FreedomWorks usually tried to avoid making their protesters look like the far-right fringe – he advised them to "focus on policy rather than Obama" (Bennett 2010).[62] In order to organise and promote the

[62] In the case of Rakovich, as well as during later Tea Party protests, FreedomWorks failed to keep overt Obama-phobia away from protest rallies. Although the employees of FreedomWorks

protest, Rakovich dutifully "sent out some e-mails, tweets and Facebook messages, and [...] called a conservative radio program" (Montgomery 2010). The night before Obama's visit to Fort Myers, she prepared hand-made signs that read "REAL JOBS NOT PORK," "STOP SELLING OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE," "NOT PORK? $850 MILLION FOR AMTRAK," "$650.000.000 FOR DTV COUPONS," and "TAX CUTS = REAL STIMULUS" (News Press 2009; Bennett 2010; Montgomery 2010).

The slogans reveal significant differences between the Fort Myers protest and the protests mounted by FedUpUSA. While the protests of FedUpUSA were preoccupied with the financial crisis, big banks and the Federal Reserve, the political convictions articulated by Rakovich came a lot closer to the criticism found in the right-wing media, outlined in the previous chapter. They were also close to the Tea Party movement criticism at the government's spending agenda. In this sense, her protest was largely picking up arguments of fiscal conservatism, a strand that had held limited sway during the Bush administration, at least when it came to government spending and balancing budgets. Rakovich focused on the ideas of excessive government spending, the federal debt's burden for future generations and allegations of cronyism generated by the Stimulus' commitment to companies (such as Amtrak) which they saw as closely affiliated with the Democrats (cf. Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 58-61). The smear term "pork" appeared to be central in this regard.

Rakovich's views on the Stimulus disregarded the fact that the bill actually included provisions that accommodated Republican strategies for economic

---

successfully discouraged her from attacking Obama on her signs, at the day of the protest Rakovich accused the President of socialism when confronted by a reporter (News Press 2009).

reinvigoration. For instance, the planned enactment of tax cuts as economic stimulus – which actually accounted for a large part of the Recovery Act's expenditures (Wall Street Journal 2009b) – were in line with conservatives' economic dogma since the days of Reagan; a fact that enjoyed little coverage in the analysis of the bill in conservative news outlets. The sign that read "TAX CUTS = REAL STIMULUS" indicates that Rakovich was either unaware of the consensual character of the Recovery Act or purposefully ignored it in order to forward a hostile reading of the government proposal.

This reading fed a narrative of government waste that saw the informal, lobbyist-driven network of policy makers and economic elites as the root cause. Its message was: just as Bush and Congress helped out their 'buddies' on Wall Street with TARP, the Obama administration will use taxpayers' money to strengthen the relationship between Democrats and supporting economic interests and thus fomented a 'liberal' power grab. Obama was no better than Bush, probably even worse. The Recovery Act delivered as much 'pork' to the business lobby as TARP did. The underlying cynicism was striking. It presumed that presidents might change but the corrupting influence of corporate money on politics remained.

On the day of the protest Rakovich and her husband arrived early to secure a prime spot in front of the Harborside Event Center, where President Obama and Florida Governor Crist were to hold their town hall meeting later that day. Initially there was little to suggest the significance Rakovich's protest was to have for the mobilisation of the later Tea Party constituency, which would make her one of the movement's early activist heroines. Most locals were simply excited to see the newly elected president. Many came out to support the president and the Recovery Act he initiated. In a climate of continuing economic insecurity and

financial turbulence, the act promised relief for a broad section of the population (News Press 2009). In an effort to ensure that the President's visit ran smoothly, the police moved Rakovich's protest to a nearby parking lot. Her protest was poorly attended. The number of participants varied, according to different sources, between three and ten people (Montgomery 2010; Bennett 2010). Some sympathisers passed by but proved reluctant to hold up the signs Rakovich had brought along for the occasion. She was not just vastly outnumbered by Obama and Stimulus supporters but also by anti-abortion protesters who came to protest the Freedom of Choice Act which Obama had promised to sign once elected.

In pure numbers, therefore, Rakovich's protest was insignificant. What gave it importance was the conservative Fox News Channel. In search for a critical angle on the event, Fox contacted Rakovich in the afternoon and convinced her to express her opinion on Obama and the Recovery Act live on television. Most likely the contact was established by FreedomWorks. Her Fox appearance turned a failed attempt to mobilise conservatives against the Recovery Act into a resounding success. The news channel enabled her to reach an audience of millions. For a few minutes she entered the national spotlight.

The protest at Fort Myers demonstrated how organisations at the centre of power in the conservative movement began to reach the grassroots. It exemplified the initial difficulties FreedomWorks and other conservative advocacy groups had in actually getting people to take the street in favour of libertarian policies. It took FreedomWorks multiple training seminars throughout the country and personal assistance to get just a handful of people to protest against the Recovery Act. However, conservative power brokers needed grassroots activism in order to reaffirm their hegemonic project. As the previous chapter argued, conservative

elites played a central role in appropriating the anti-bailout cause and using it as signifier of a new conservative populism; a populism that framed conservatism as a 'people's' struggle for free market capitalism against the un-American, cronyism of contemporary liberalism. Yet without people actually taking to the streets for the conservative cause, its claim to represent 'the people' did not seem credible. Conservatism had to become an authentic bottom-up experience.

Grassroots activism thus gave these conservative claims legitimacy. At a time when conservative elites had been thoroughly discredited by the failures of Bush administration and the subsequent electoral defeat, this activism was more important than ever. The beginning was the hardest part. According to Tom Gaiten, a political organiser on the payroll of FreedomWorks, the "size [of the protest] was never as important as being there. The reality is, if no one shows up, people believe it's a 100 percent approval. If a handful of protesters show up, then there's a juxtaposition of one side versus another" (Bennett 2010). Little did it matter that support had been unevenly distributed. Rakovich's inexperience gave her interview with Fox News an air of authenticity, something far removed from the mistrusted professionalism of national politics. Predictably FreedomWorks assigned great significance to it:

> The effect was remarkable. Mary's honest sincerity and obvious lack of preparation charmed and intrigued viewers. They listened to what she said and realized they agreed. The millions who were just as outraged as Mary but unsure of how to make a difference, a role model had been found. (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 15)

Overnight Rakovich had become a symbol of dissent to the Obama administration's rescue plan. FreedomWorks did their best to elevate their "*unlikely hero*" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 11) to the status of a folk hero and prototype of a conservative activist. Her stand against the Stimulus represented

the populist struggle of ordinary Americans against powerful politicians and their macro-economic programs. It seemed like the struggle of David against Goliath.

The Rakovich episode reveals the complex relationship between the conservative infrastructure and rank-and-file conservatives. Organisations such as FreedomWorks and Fox News laid the ground work for this nascent populist fervour of the Tea Party movement. They channelled the grievances of conservatives and those who were disenchanted with national politics effectively against the Obama administration. The resurgence of conservative populism was built on the anti-elitist mood and distrust of government, which had flourished in American public. "The fire's already there" Gaiten told the *Palm Beach Post*, "We just help provide some direction to the flames" (Bennett 2010). While FreedomWorks sought to translate discontent into collective action and give the conservative grassroots the tools to become politically active, the conservative media nurtured even the frailest articulations of dissent by mediating it to national audiences. Fetner and King (2014) write that such an abundance of resources constituted an immeasurable advantage for the Tea Party movement. This has led many scholars and pundits to conclude that the Tea Party movement was entirely manufactured by conservative and business elites (e.g. DiMaggio 2011).

However, claims about elite control need to be relativized. In most cases, organisations such as FreedomWorks and Fox News were 'preaching to the converted.' Rakovich was a Republican and a conservative before she started organising. She was opposed to the bailouts long before she took action. Protesters and organisers in the Tea Party viewed conservative institutions as natural allies of their cause and part of the same 'popular' coalition, rather than institutions of direct control. The relationship between activists and organisations

was characterised by bonds of mutual trust and solidarity. These bonds were based initially on a shared ideology and shared goals and only strengthened over time through the common experience of protest in the Tea Party movement (cf. Jasper 1998). They all represented different levels of the same hegemonic formation. Towards that end, scholars convincingly argue that organisations like FreedomWorks and Fox News were in essence *part* of the movement rather than outside supporters (Burghart 2012; Formisano 2012; Lo 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). In the Tea Party movement, this often blurred the lines between movement facilitators and participants, between 'people' and elites.

The process of turning Rakovich into a model activist also highlights the role emotions played in the process of creating the Tea Party movement. Emotions in protest have been the subject of a variety social movement studies (e.g. Japser 1998; Protevi 2011). James M. Jasper highlights the crucial role emotions play for organisers to "appeal to, arouse, manipulate, and sustain to recruit and retain members" (1998, 405). FreedomWorks' commitment to mobilising individuals such as Rakovich clearly functioned on an affective level, as the organisation sought to mediate a sense of enjoyment and empowerment in political activism. The training seminars that the organisation offered were thus not simply geared towards teaching specific capabilities but also served to bring liked-minded people together in an attempt to convert emotions like loathing, distrust and anger towards government policies into a sense of defiance, hope, enthusiasm and solidarity through political action. The seminar's message was to "*Have fun with it*" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 14). Lonely, conservative, and politically committed, Mary Rakovich was the perfect target for FreedomWorks. She would later declare, that the "training gave me hope, and I left energized. I saw that others

were as concerned as I was. I could see that I was not alone" (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 13).

Rakovich for her part demonstrates the role of affect played in mobilising the early proto-Tea Party activists. A laid-off automobile worker, furthermore displaced to a different state, Rakovich represented a segment of white, working class Republicans that saw itself a victim of the ongoing economic crisis. The transitions that took place in the US in the 2008/9 seemed to have triggered what social movement scholars have called "Moral shocks" (Jasper 1998, 409). Jasper defines moral shocks as situations in which "an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action" 409). They are "often the first step toward recruitment into social movements" (409). Jasper writes that organisers "work hard to create moral outrage and to provide a target against which these can be vented. Inchoate anxieties and fears must be transformed into moral indignation and outrage toward concrete policies and decisionmakers" (1998, 409). Just as thousands of people lost their jobs, stock markets plummeted and the government spent vast amounts of money to 'bail out' the banking system and other sectors of the economy, FreedomWorks seized on people's anxieties and fears and provided easy answers as to who was to blame. When Gaitens talked about providing "some direction to the flames", he expressed the same rationale.

Protests also provided grassroots conservatives with a sense of community and solidarity and a sense of personal empowerment and hope. Having organised a rally, Rakovich left empowered and was encouraged to join the Tea Party ranks and organise further rallies for the movement. The perception of having made a difference and directly changed something on her own left her feeling amazed and

proud. “I was just a person. I wasn’t doing it for any other reason than to be heard,” Rakovich told the *Washington Post*, “If I inspired one other person, who could inspire one other person, and show that you didn’t have to be anybody special to do this, yes I feel good about that” (Montgomery 2010). The grassroots experience suggested that everyone could do their part to end “pork” spending, government privileges and special interest politics and eventually topple the political class that had entrenched itself in the capital. Rakovich’s sense of fulfilment from collective political action foreshadowed many stories of Tea Party supporters who were new to political organising. At a time when the government spent billions to rescue failing banks and businesses, these feelings of individual self-worth and agency carried particular weight.

Her protest already foreshowed much of the early Tea Party. The fiscal conservatism that FreedomWorks encouraged Rakovich to defend at the rally revealed a transformation of contemporary conservatism. FreedomWorks’ Steinhauser called the rally, “a paradigm shift among fiscal conservatives” (Bennett 2010). It indicated that in the immediate context of the Republican-conservative crisis, conservatives could be mobilised for libertarian and fiscally conservative protests. The Harborside Event Center protest captured the ongoing transitions that recent events had triggered within American conservatism and the public at large. Three distinct gatherings of people were present: Obama supporters, anti-abortion activists, and Rakovich’s group. While Obama supporters seemed united, conservatives were divided. On that day anti-abortion protesters still outnumbered fiscal conservatives. The fact that Rakovich, herself a pro-lifer, did not join the anti-abortionist crowd signified the shift of conservatives from the culture wars of the Bush era to a narrower economic agenda.

Rethinking Populism and Hegemony at the Conservative Grassroots: The Anti-Porkulus Protest in Seattle

Following the tea bag campaign of Market Ticker and the protest at Fort Myers, the ratification and the signing of the Stimulus remained the main contentious issue that encouraged conservative activists to make the step towards political activism and organise street protests throughout the second half of February. President Obama was scheduled to sign the bill into law on February 17, 2009. As the day approached, the protests against it, which would later be identified as the first Tea Party protests, became more frequent and the number of participants increased. One of the most notable of these proto-Tea Party gatherings took place in Seattle. Unlike the earlier efforts of Market Ticker and Rakovich, the protest in Seattle on February 16 actually drew a decent crowd. This circumstance has led journalists and scholars to conclude that the Seattle protest was the first true Tea Party protest.[63]

The Seattle protests were significant in several ways. They demonstrate how the changes at the core of the conservative hegemonic project radiated to the conservative grassroots. Organisers and participants were clearly influenced by conservative opinion makers and the gradual return of the Republican Party to free market orthodoxy. They understood the significance of the anti-bailout cause and opposition to the Recovery Act for reuniting a disorientated and defeated conservative movement. By championing this cause, conservatives could overcome their political isolation and reach out to Americans who saw these policies as betrayal of American principles and make the case that conservatism

[63] The claim that the protest in Seattle was among the first Tea Party protest was initially popularised in the work of Kate Zernike (2010a, 2010b). From Zernike's account it found its way into a number of academic publications as a contender for having been the first Tea Party protest (Trost and Rosenthal 2012; Lo 2012; Formisano 2012).

commitment to capitalism was the only valid alternative to a culture of corruption and cronyism. What came to the surface during the planning process was a renewed interest in conservative protest and populism; a populism that constructed 'the people' against the oppressive and un-American ideas of political liberalism.

Prime organiser of the protest was Keli Carender, a young adult education professional. Like Rakovich, Carender was quickly badged by the media, which referred to her as the "unlikely activist" (Zernike 2010b) or "most unlikely heroine" (Beason 2010). In Carender's case this stemmed as much from her 'liberal' surroundings in Seattle as from her appearance. Her biography and her path to becoming a conservative activist stands representative for that of many others who joined the Tea Party ranks during the following months. Carender grew up in a Democratic family. In the 1980s her father supported Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson and took the young Carender along to one of his campaign events (Beason 2010). Starting in the 1990s however, her parents turned away from the Democrats out of frustration about the party's support of abortion rights. Carender would hear stories of government waste from her mother, who was working as State Department of Labor claims examiner (Zernike 2010a, 14-5). The family's move towards the Right impacted Carender's own political orientation.

During her early adult life, Carender struggled to live out her conservative disposition in a liberal, left-leaning environment and started to live her life as 'closet conservative.' While she studied at the Western Washington University, which she described as a "hippie school," and later at Oxford University, she was "more interested in making friends" than in confronting her friends with her

conservative viewpoints (Zernike 2010a, 15). As a young adult, Carender had learned to blend into the progressive environment of Seattle. She started working at a non-profit organisation, teaching math to welfare recipients while performing with an improv comedy group on weekends (Zernike 2010a, 14). As a "Half-Mexican, with a pierced nose" (Zernike 2010a, 14) and a "slacker wardrobe" (Beason 2010), her looks did not betray her conservative convictions. When criticism against President Bush increased, Carender suffered in silence; as she said herself, out of fear to "lose friends and be ostracized" (Zernike 2010b).

The circumstances under which Carender decided to overcome her fear of social isolation and become a conservative activist can be clearly related to the changing socio-political environment of 2008 and 2009. They were a response to the political reactions to the intensifying economic crisis, the declining electoral appeal of Republican candidates, their electoral defeat and the prospects of the Obama presidency. Her political epiphany happened during the summer months of 2008, when President Bush and a number of Congressional Republicans supported TARP and revealed their abandonment of the free market. Having formerly supported Bush, Carender now began to doubt her President's conservative credentials and decided to join the Young Republicans (Zernike 2010a, 15-6). Though such a move appears contradictory at first, it made sense to Carender. First and foremost, as she pointed out, the Young Republicans was "the only place to find conservatives in Seattle" (Zernike 2010a, 15). The group thus enabled her to break through the political isolation she felt in her social environment.

Yet joining the conservative camp within the Republican Party was about more than finding likeminded people. Carender sought to join the conservative ranks

with the hope of restoring the party to its principles, which she described as "the free market, fiscal conservatism, individual freedom and liberty, self-responsibility, and the importance of family" (Carender 2009a). Apparently in reaction to their support for TARP, Carender scrutinised recent Republican domestic policies more generally and came to the conclusion that the GOP had lost its ways and therefore deserved recent electoral defeats (Beason 2010; Zernike 2010a, 15). The party's betrayal of fiscal conservatism triggered her resistance to the current leadership. The idea of "compassionate conservatism" with its expansion of government programs and deficit spending seemed as un-Republican to her as the banking bailouts under TARP. Carender increasingly immersed herself in the conservative economics of the *National Review* and the libertarian economist Thomas Sowell (Zernike 2010a, 15-6) in order to find "free market solutions" (Carender 2009a) to current problems.

Carender felt uneasy about the upcoming presidential elections. She was not impressed by Republican contenders and the more moderate, conciliatory tone of the McCain campaign. In this, she echoed the sentiments of many conservatives during the campaign. In her view, none of the Republican contenders "seemed to understand what conservatives didn't like about Bush [...] that it was the spending" (Zernike 2010a, 16). What made her care about the election was the looming prospect of an Obama presidency. Carender considered Barack Obama a "threat to our liberty" (Carender 2009b) and the Democrats more generally as "socialists and communists" (Carender 2009c). This is not surprising considering that she learned her economics from *National Review* and libertarians and took information about the upcoming elections from *American Thinker*, a source of

conspiracist defamations about Obama throughout the campaign season (Carender 2009c).

The election of Obama as President led Carender to believe that joining Young Republicans was not enough. On the day of Obama's inauguration she cried in despair (Beason 2010). A few days later she started her blog "Redistributing Knowledge" under the pen name "Liberty Belle" (Carender 2014). This blog significantly informs us about Carender's political views, the rationale of her activism and the organisation process of her protest on February 17, 2009 in great detail.

Several aspects of her early entries are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, like FedUpUSA and, to a lesser extent, Mary Rakovich, Carender recognised in her blog that educating the public about a secret truth behind US politics and economics was a crucial goal. That she called her blog "Redistributing Knowledge" highlights the missionary zeal that animated her political activism. The content and form of this 'education' are both significant. In the self description of her blog Carender states "that the people of the USA are in dire need of a basic Economics lesson as well as a review on individual rights and freedom" (Carender 2014). That this education was clearly influenced by her libertarian, conservative views should not come as a surprise. In a video called "The Truth About The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act", which she created and posted on her blog (Carender 2009d), Carender highlighted that the national debt problem was "creating a new generation of indentured servants" in order to "spend on wasteful programs" (LiberTBelle 2009). In order to highlight the generational theft motif, the video is accompanied by a slideshow of photographs of young infants and melancholic guitar music.

Carender, however, did not stop at these "basic Economics" lessons. Her views on contemporary politics revealed her strong commitment to the kind of conservative, anti-liberal populism that the conservative media had disseminated throughout the last few months. They showed a strong fear of liberal subversion and conspiracy against the American 'people'. In early 2009 her blog targeted "politicians" and "special interests," specifically Democrats and liberals (LiberTBelle 2009). In one entry, Carender charges that Democrats and "Lefties" were deliberately planning to subvert the political system "to stay in power forever" (Carender 2009e). The alleged "plan" included White House control of the US census and thus the control of the redistricting process and the Electoral College as well as a reversal of the 22nd Amendment which limited presidencies to two terms. In other words Obama and his "Democratic Party minions in congress" were determined to "perpetuate its hold on political power" (Carender 2009e) and practically end party competition. The same entry further charges that the ratification of Recovery Act was "bypassing the normal channels of debate and Constitutional processes," which in Carender's opinion only proved that Democrats and the new president showed little respect for democratic procedures. Anger at the legislative procedures that led to the Recovery Act was not limited to this entry. Another piece spoke of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's "fascist denial of Republican input" on the bill which "has disenfranchised the entire Republican electorate" (Carender 2009f). For Carender government conspiracies against democracy were everywhere: driven by socialists and communists in the White House and the Democratic Congress.

The fear of conspiracy and subversion were nothing new in conservative discourse and were also a central theme in Denninger's grassroots outfits Market

Ticker and FedUpUSA.[64] The essential difference between Carender's and Denninger's 'education,' however, became obvious when identifying the agents of this conspiracy. While the latter proposed that American democracy was undermined by the financial industry, corporate business and the duopoly of the Republican and Democratic Party, Carender singled out the Obama administration and the Democrats as agents. For Denninger the problem was cronyism, for Carender it was 'socialism'. It was this belief – in its worst instances reminiscent of the Red Scare of the 1950s – that would eventually drive Carender to organise her protest. The blog identified Obama, Democrats and the Left more generally as enemies of American democracy and the people. It identified this conflated and seemingly monolithic Left, as the nation's power bloc that would use its electoral victory to implement a 'radical' agenda and perpetuate its political power. Logically, the political Right had the role of people's champions and defender of American democracy in Carender's thinking. These two distinct versions of populism only came together in the Tea Party because both found themselves on the same side of both the anti-bailout and anti-stimulus causes.

The construction of 'the people' in Carender's writing was just as compelling. Laclau has argued that populist discourse needed to construct the idea of 'the people' as "oppressed underdog" (2007, 87) in order to make the claim that a given political project truly represents their interests against the oppressors. Carender assigns this role of the underdog to American conservatives. In a basic sense, Carender recast conservatives not as a powerful political group that had won the White House several times in preceding decades, but as a persecuted group at the margins. In one entry she stated that "many Republicans and

[64] Berlet and Lyons (2000) identified these fears a characteristic of right-wing populism.

Conservatives live in the shadow" because they had "bought into the Democrats and mainstream media's lies that we are somehow alone in our opinions, or strange, or dinosaurs who need to progress" (Carender 2009b). This description of conservatives as victims of liberal oppression was to a large extent drawn from her own experience in Seattle (Carender 2009b). However, it also reflected the position of conservatives after the recent electoral defeats. It reflected a time in which political liberalism seemed to have replaced conservatism as the dominant political philosophy in the US.

Carender urged that conservatives should come "out of the closet" together, in order to break what she perceived as a repressive isolation and show strength in numbers and solidarity. Her call essentially foreshadowed what would happen in the Tea Party movement over the next couple of months:

> There are tens of millions of us, if not more. I think if we chose a day to show the world, scary coworkers be damned, that we exist and we are just as passionate about the direction of our country, that we could maybe finally find each other. We need to find our voices, and we need to use them!! [...] How would you feel if you were walking down the street in your normally liberal city and you saw a whole lot of conservatives? Imagine how much stronger you would feel, immediately! [...]It is just one idea to try to bring us together as a cohesive group, and to stand up against those that use our silence to spread lies. (Carender 2009b)

The notions of personal liberation and overcoming voicelessness that Carender developed in her writing created a narrative of personal and collective political awakening that is a common thread in the individual stories of Tea Party supporters (cf. Ference 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012). In this way it resonated with the readership of her blog and demonstrates the affective power even the mere suggestion of political action had on Carender's readers. In response to Carender's call to arms, one reader, a "reformed liberal" who had recently learned to embrace "conservative ideals," commented that "I feel like I'm awake for the

first time" (Carender 2009b). Another reader, who had unsuccessfully tried to rally people against Obama and the Stimulus thanked Carender "for the re-motivataion [sic] and making me feel I won't be alone" (Carender 2009h). Apparently Carender had found a constituency of frustrated, lonely people in need of an awaking.

In her early blog entries, Carender's idea of a resistance coalition was as imprecise as her idea of the country's supposedly leftist power-grabbing elite. Certainly her 'popular' coalition against "blatant Socialism and consolidation of power" (Carender 2009g) was clearly partisan. She imagined a coalition of "Conservatives, Libertarians, Republicans" (Carender 2009g) who can agree on "a smaller, less intrusive federal government" as "common ground" (Carender 2009g). The anti-Stimulus cause functioned in this context as the empty signifier that united these elements. At the same time this new imagined coalition also expressed the paradigm shift in conservative politics. The focus on anti-statism highlighted that social conservatism, though welcome in this coalition, was in a subordinate role. With considerable faith in states' rights and local autonomy, Carender suggested that "other [social] issues could be resolved at state and local levels, where they should be resolved anyway" (Carender 2009g).

However, Carender's 'popular' coalition occasionally transcended conservative partisan lines. She concluded from her experience of teaching welfare recipients, who in her view "are typically puppets of the Democratic Party," they could be mobilized against it if Republican libertarian economics were properly explained to them (Carender 2009a). Many of them, she wrote, were "more socially conservative" and for that reason, could be recruited (Carender 2009a). As Carender moved on to organise her own protest against the Recovery Act, she

noted in response to one reader, a registered Democrat who "believes in some Republican ideals like smaller government," that "this bill is an AMERICAN issue, not a left or right issue" (Carender 2009i). In this context she wrote that she lived in a "post-partisan time" where a "true variety of people" opposed the Recovery Act (Carender 2009i). The restoration of conservative hegemony could only work if conservatives could reach out to people uncommitted to the conservative cause. Opposition to the Stimulus provided conservatives with the means to do just that.

Carender's re-articulation of conservative hegemony relied strongly on her concept of conservative Americanism, which was at odds with the proposed stimulus bill and above ideological and partisan lines. Since the very nature of the American way of life was allegedly at stake, Carender perceived conservatives as only the vanguard of a much more diverse coalition. Her perception of a threatened 'American' value system, which Paul Taggart identifies as the American "heartland" (Taggart 2000, 91-98), was apparently shared by her readers. A reader identified as "Rick (4)" responded to Carender's call for action by writing that it was "time for us to speak up to save America" (Carender 2009h). The reader who identified as a "registered Democrat" feared that with the Recovery Act "America is changing for the worst" and, like Carender, affirmed the post-partisan nature of the issue by writing "I AM AN AMERICAN first" (Carender 2009j). What Carender and her readers affirmed was the American and conservative values were identical. The restoration of American principles could only be realised through a restoration of conservatism.

As would later be commonplace in Tea Party rhetoric (Lepore 2010), at least some of Carender's readers found their role models in the pre-partisan era of the

American Revolution. Readers suggested calling the new movement "Sons of Liberty II" or "Classical Liberal" because its "core principles," like those of the "founding fathers" were based on classical liberal ideas (Carender 2009k). Such conservative appropriations of the Revolutionary era were hardly new (Lepore 2010; Wilentz 2010, Zernike 2010a), but floated around in the conservative blogosphere before the business correspondent Rick Santelli popularised them in his call to arms on national television a few days after Carender's protest.

Beyond the question of identity which had clearly preoccupied Carender and her readers at the onset of the Obama administration, their thoughts on tactics and strategy seemed to foreshadow and represent those the Tea Party movement would use. The main argument of Carender's ideas on tactics was based on the recognition that representing 'the people' could not be left to conservative elites or the leaders of the Republican Party. Conservatism had to become yet again a bottom-up movement with opportunities for citizen participation. Inspiration came clearly from the activism of the Left. Carender was willing to take lessons on protesting from the Left and use them for conservative purposes. Surely the fact that she lived in Seattle, the site of a massive protest against the WTO in 1999 and the war in Iraq in subsequent years, gave Carender vivid examples of progressive organising. Already in her very first blog entry, Carender showed a keen interest in community organising, an approach that had often been shunned by conservatives as a dangerous strategy of leftwing radicalism (e.g. Stranhan 2012). Enthusiastic as well as tech-savvy, Carender suggested an entire ground operation, modelled after its progressive predecessors, to distribute conservative "solutions [...] on every website, talk show, hold press conferences, send email alerts, pamphlets, calls, door to door, send out groups of 'educators' into communities to

have meetings where we describe and discuss our SOLUTIONS" (Carender 2009a). She proposed "community workshops (free, given by GOP volunteers/experts) to actually teach, to actually explain basic economics to people, or any other issue" (Carender 2009a).

Though Carender firmly believed in the effectiveness of community organising, her ideas would take time and resources to implement. Her most immediate target was to protest against the Stimulus, which played a crucial role in her blog. She had tried to contact the two Democratic senators who represented Washington State but to no avail. Her Senators "were like a brick wall" Carender would remark later, saying that she had made a "call every day and the mailboxes would be full" (Zernike 2010a, 16). On February 10, 2009 Carender decided to announce that she "would like to stage a Porkulus Protest" (Carender 2009l) in Seattle on February 16, the day before the President signed the Stimulus into law.[65] Carender's idea of a street protest was, as she freely admitted, directly inspired by the activism of the Left; specifically by the recent anti-war protests: "Anti-war protests went on for 5 years, and still do today" Carender wrote two days before the protest. "That movement probably gave Bush quite the headache. Let's be Obama's headache. I want to be his persistent, relentless, grating, temple-pounding headache for the next four years" (Carender 2009i).

Her posts constantly reminded readers to learn from their alleged political opponents and adapt their tactics to create a genuine conservative grassroots resistance. In this mould she remarked that "Unlike the melodramatic lefties, I do

[65] The idea of the "Porkulus" originated from the conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh from a show in late January 2009. It essentially fused the words "Stimulus" and "Pork" into one. It expressed the widely circulated idea that the Recovery Act was an extreme continuation of "pork spending" channelling tax payer money to powerful interest groups and businesses (New York Times 2009).

not want to get arrested. I do however want to take a page from their playbook and be loud, obnoxious, and in their faces" (Carender 2009l). Carender did not want to copy exactly the Left's model of activism, but instead build upon recent protest patterns and twist them so as to appeal to a section of the nation that Nixon had famously called the "silent majority" of law abiding citizens. Her contempt for progressive activism was quite obvious, even as she encouraged her readers to emulate the tactics of the "melodramatic lefties." "Just imagine" she wrote "that you are a left-wing college student with nothing else to do that should help you get started" (Carender 2009h). Judging by responses from her readers, her message was well received: "It's high time conservatives use the tactics of the Left against them" wrote one anonymous commenter (Carender 2009h). None of Carender's readers disagreed.

Carender's blog gives us sufficient clues about the identity of her supporters. As mentioned above, readers essentially agreed with her populist reading of politics and her ideas on tactics. Endorsement of her street protest came not only from individuals but also from parts of the conservative infrastructure, especially the conservative media. Like Rakovich, she had easy access to powerful allies, many of them anxious to promote any kind of anti-Obama activism. Carender's protest was, for instance, promoted by the Seattle-based, conservative radio host Kirby Wilbur, a man with strong ties to the Republican Party of Washington state.[66] More promotion came from the conservative celebrity blogger Michelle Malkin. Malkin had made a name for herself in conservative circles through her books in which she argued in favour of racial profiling and internment of terrorism suspects, a tough stand against illegal immigration, popularised through her anti-

[66] Wilbur was voted state GOP chairman in 2011 (Brunner 2011).

liberal rants. Malkin posted Carender's call to protest the Stimulus on her blog and supported the rally by having pulled pork (a reference to the alleged 'pork spending' of the Recovery Act) delivered to the protest site (Zernike 2010a, 18; Malkin 2009a).

Endorsement, however, also came from other directions that, at first sight, had little to do with the Stimulus but rather with an amorphous blend of Islamophobia and Christian evangelicalism. The strong presence of these currents should be seen in the context of their time. Former President George W. Bush's had nurtured the evangelical vote with his faith-based community initiatives and his opposition to issues such as same sex marriage. Islamophobia had emerged on the political Right with full force after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and remained a constant theme on the Right up until 2009 when the Tea Party emerged.[67]

One of these endorsers was the online radio station No Compromise Radio. From its website, No Compromise can clearly be identified as Christian fundamentalist, choosing to embrace activism against FOCA (the Freedom of Choice Act) and featuring Islamophobic content, far right theology and conspiracy theories surrounding Obama's citizenship status and birth certificate (No Compromise 2014). The small internet radio station briefly promoted Carender's protest on their show on February 12. More important than the promotion itself was the context in which it took place. It was preceded by an approximately 90 minute

[67] Around the time of Carender's protest, controversy flared up because of a screening of the film Fitna by the Dutch, Islam critic Geert Wilders in Congress. The screening of controversial film that was made up of "video clips of violence and bloodshed committed by Muslims [that] are interspersed with verses from the Koran," took place on February 26, 2009 and demonstrated that to what extent Islamophobic ideas had yielded influence up until the highest circles of political discourse and decision making (O'Connor 2009).

interview with Craig Winn, who "discussed the [biblical] end time events and how Islam plays into those events" (No Compromise 2009), as it appeared in his most recent book *Yada Yahweh* (Winn 2014). The former-businessman-turned-religious-scholar Winn's claim to fame was the publication of *Prophet of Doom* (2014), in which he, like Wilders in the Netherlands, argued that terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism were intrinsically linked to the religion's dogma and writing of the Prophet Mohammed.[68] The segment on Carender's event was followed by praise for the book *The Real Lincoln* (2004) by Thomas DiLorenzo. The book is a piece of libertarian, pseudo-historical revisionism that argued that Lincoln was an "obsessive white supremacist" as well as a "dictator and a tyrant who shredded the Constitution, fiendishly orchestrated the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of fellow citizens, and did it all for the economic benefit of the special interests who funded the Republican Party" (DiLorenzo 2013). Lincoln appears, therefore, as some sort of forefather for what the makers of the show, as well as many of Carender's readers, saw in contemporary Democrats: ruthless, hypocritical, power-hungry, tyrannical cronies.

Hegemony expressed itself here in a coalition of diverse demand groups, united by a common cause (cf. Laclau 2007, 95). Mentioning Carender's protest between a discussion of pseudo-theological, anti-Islamic ideas and conservative revisionist history reveals the heterodox nature of support that already characterised these early Tea Party protests. Carender's coalition of conservative factions was certainly united by the idea of a "smaller, less intrusive federal government."

[68] *Yada Yahweh* and *Prophet of Doom* appear to be both published online and are available for free. This circumstance probably bespeaks their limited standing in the world of scholarship and publishing. While Winn clearly belonged to the right-wing fringe in 2009, variations of his Islamophobic views were shared by prominent conservatives such as Glenn Beck, who published the book *It Is about Islam* in 2015.

Carender's imagination, however, differed from the actual composition this coalition. While the idea of a popular front against Obama-style liberalism was described by Carender in such abstract terms as "Conservatives, Libertarians, Republicans" and the occasional 'reformed' Democrat, the historical reality was much starker. It was instead a coalition of the right-wing media, well-connected local Republicans, religious fundamentalists, Islamophobes, followers of conspiracy theories and libertarian historical revisionists, all of them rotating around the spirit of anti-statism, fiscal conservatism, and bailout resentment. Most of them seemed to be culture wars veterans, new to field of economics.

Considering the heterogeneous character of the various constituencies that had been set in motion by Carender's dream of a grassroots opposition, the rally's speaker Steven Beren appeared to be a perfect choice. His political biography was characterised by his gradual conversion to the conservative cause. Beren grew up "in a not-so-religious Jewish family in the South Bronx" (Ramsey 2006). As a teenager he joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Vietnam antiwar movement. During the 1970s and 1980s, he worked in different jobs but remained active as a "revolutionary political organiser" (Beren 1014). He "defended the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, Cuban Communism, and the Palestine Liberation Organization [...] and participated in the SWP's intervention into the trade union movement" (Beren 1014). By that time he was a staunch atheist (Ramsey 2006). In 1990 he left the SWP and became an evangelical Christian in 1995. The 1990s, however, were still a time of conformity in which he largely abstained from activism. As he told a local newspaper, he voted twice for Clinton and for Gore (Ramsey 2006). His return to activism came about after 9/11 when he "felt he had a responsibility to do what he could (as a private citizen activist) to help win the

war against terrorism" (Beren 2014). Considering his background as an antiwar protester, this turnaround seems surprising. His embrace of war had begun during the Clinton years, when he "felt a surge of patriotism" during the United States' intervention in Bosnia (Ramsey 2006). The War on Terror, however, pulled Beren significantly to the Right and convinced him that there was "great 'moral value' in waging a war against Islamic fascism" (Beren 2005a).

The Bush years, then, marked the era in which the former socialist Beren reinvented himself as a "Five Star Conservative," a "pro-liberty conservative citizen activist doing all he can to support the U.S.-led war against terror" (Beren 2014). As a modern-day Whitaker Chambers, Beren now claimed "a special insight" into the radical Left and "the fallacies of their arguments" and made a name for himself in the Republican Party (Beren 2014). In 2006 and 2008 he even ran two unsuccessful campaigns against "far left Democrat Jim McDermott" for a seat in the US Congress (Beren 2014). By then Beren saw far Left conspiracies wherever he looked: in the mainstream media, the Democratic Party, Hollywood, the judiciary, the National Council of Churches and the nation's campuses where "leftist professors [...] monopolize the ideas presented to our youth" (Beren 2005a, 2005b). By 2008 the nation had moved away from the War on Terror and towards economic issues. Capitalism's free market system stood on trial and the election of Obama marked a potential return of the state into economic affairs. By the time Carender invited him to speak at her rally Beren was eager to unite conservatives against the Stimulus and any other plots his former "far left" companions sought to implement. The next decisive battle between conservatives and liberals would take place, not over the question of war or moral values but economic policies.

The day of the protest showed Carender's ideas put into action. Little of Beren's speech at Carender's rally has been preserved. But from a variety of sources, much of the day can be reconstructed. The rally took place on Presidents Day on Monday, February 16 at Westlake Park in downtown Seattle (Carender 2009h). Westlake Park, a concrete square surrounded by office buildings, had a small platform from which Carender and Beren gave their speeches. According to most sources, a crowd of 100 people showed up (Kissel 2009). Contrary to Zernike's account of the event, the rally did not draw "mostly older people, along with a few in their twenties who had supported Ron Paul" (Zernike 2010a, 19). Photos instead show a relatively diverse crowd of mostly white people in attendance (Dazey 2009).

Like in many American protests since the 1960s, Americanism played a significant role (cf. Hall 2011). The protesters deliberately invoked a sense of Americanism in order to align the anti-Stimulus cause with American political traditions and stigmatise their opponents as un-American. The scene was dominated by American flags and hats in the national colours. Others drew on the American Revolutionary heritage, foreshadowing the later Tea Party movement. An older man brought along a sign that read "Sons of Liberty" in honour to the secret society of 18th-century Revolutionaries. Another pinned a tea bag to his placard that read "GOT TEA?" (Dazey 2009). Additionally, Carender, who had brought a rudimentary sound system, fed the crowd with an odd kind of Reagan Americanism, which consisted of clips from Reagan speeches and Lee Greenwood's "God bless you USA," a song played at the Republican National

Convention of 1984 (Kissel 2009).[69] As Hall (2011) has argued, these alignments with Americanist symbols and claims to the Revolutionary past serve as a source of legitimacy. But they were also community and identity-building rituals (Braunstein 2014) that helped protesters to align themselves with two distinct historical referents that resonated with contemporary conservative sensibilities: Reaganism and the American Revolution.[70] Conversely, the highlighting of the other side's un-American character sought to delegitimize the Recovery Act, in particular the association of the Stimulus and the Democratic Party with socialism. Protesters brought along signs that read "ENJOY THE CHANGE" (decorated with a red star, hammer and sickle), "MORE SOCIALISM LESS FREEDOM", "OBAMA is a MARXIST Abraham Lincoln was a Republican" and "THE SPENDULUS BILL IS A BILL FOR SOCIALISM" (Dazey 2009). These signs suggest that the anti-Obama slur of the conservative media had reached many of the protesters.

Considering the ideological diversity of groups and individuals that had endorsed the rally beforehand, it is striking that a significant share of the crowd stayed close to the Stimulus issue. This proved how well it functioned as empty signifiers. Criticism of the Recovery Act, however poorly informed it occasionally was, fell into several distinct categories. Some of it was directed at the lack of the transparency within the legislative process while others targeted the lack of immediate help for struggling families and the alarming national deficit that would be a consequence of the Stimulus. One sign demanded "NO MORE

[69] The almost forgotten patriotic country song had been successfully re-released after 9/11 attacks and served as an acoustic reminder of the patriotic cause the protesters' allegedly pursued.

[70] In Tea Party literature, Reagan represented an idealised American past, when conservatism was the dominant political philosophy of the country, the Republican Party was united and its leaders still committed to free market principles (e.g. Farah 2010; O'Hara 2010; Hennen 2011).

BAILOUTS" (Dezey 2009). This criticism, arguably, voiced legitimate concerns about the government's crisis management. The leitmotif on that day, however, was clearly the idea of "pork spending." The protest was called the Anti-Porkulus protest, Michelle Malkin's symbolic pulled pork was served to the attendees and the idea of "pork" spending dominated the majority of signs. As aforementioned, the idea that this "spending bill" channelled tax payer money to industries with close ties to the Washington political establishment (especially its Democrat bloc), had been popularised in the rightwing media for weeks, if not months. Like in Fort Myers, these allegations reaped rewards and proved the capacity of conservative leaders to set the political agenda at the grassroots.

The significance of "pork," however, lies deeper than the mere discrediting of Democratic, 'liberal' politics. Pork spending, the practice by which political decision makers amend bills to distribute tax money through government contracts among businesses in exchange for the financial support during election campaigns, gave conservatives a chance to address the issue of political, and economic, inequality and conceive of their activism in essentially populist terms. This was a complex manoeuvre, considering the elitist tendencies that resulted from conservatives' pro-business position and the widespread acceptance of unequal economic outcomes as a hallmark of the American system. Taking free market ideology as a starting point, it was only logical that neither calls for corporate tax hikes nor for tighter regulations were visible at the rally in Seattle. The only argument against political and economic inequality was made with reference to the Stimulus' 'pork.' It was expressed in signs like "SOME PIGS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS" or "PORKULUS GIVES ONLY $13

PER FAMILY WHERE'S THE STIMULUS?" (Dazey 2009). According to this reasoning, the Stimulus was "pork" and pork rewarded political privilege.

Notably the rally framed the anti-big business sentiment, inherent in opposition to "pork," only implicitly not explicitly, as it shifted the blame from the lobbying of the corporate and financial sector to the political class, especially the Democrats. Signs that read "OBAMAS TRILLION DOLLAR HEIST" [sic], "D.C. Crooks" or "HOPE 4 Change A PORK FREE PRESIDENCY and Let's TAKE The CON OUT OF CONGRESS" clearly illustrate whom the protesters considered responsible. A young girl held up a sign that read "POLITICIANS LOVE PORK & POWER", as though the same would not apply to well-funded business interests (Dazey 2009). The internal frontier, as Laclau (2005, 37) has noted, between 'people' and 'elites,' was one that identified the people's enemies almost exclusively among the ranks of political class. Business elites, beneficiaries of pork spending, were let entirely off the hook, while the anti-politics sentiments among the protesters prevailed. These protesters, by and large conservative Republicans, saw an erosion of their economic fortunes in a system in which tax payers, as collective and individuals, paid for relief efforts whose dimensions could only be understood in macroeconomic terms. Little did it matter that the Recovery Act sought to limit the effects of the crisis on American workers and families. Opposition to macroeconomic planning along neo-Keynesian lines had been a central feature of conservative economic thinking at least since the days of the early Cold War (Rodgers 2011, 41-76; Williams 2006). In a political climate in which inequality, earmarks and cronyism had, in different forms, become features of the political vocabulary of both the Left *and* Right, macroeconomic

interventions such as the Recovery Act were easily interpreted as a sell-out of the popular interest.

This 'easiness,' of course, indicates both the intellectual weakness and potential of the "pork" discourse: On the one hand, any kind of legalisation produces beneficiaries, who profit financially or otherwise. This is particularly the case for 'spending bills' such as the EESA and ARRA. On the other hand, American pluralism allows almost any kind of organised interest to engage financially in election campaigns and represent their political interest via lobbing. The suspicion that a piece of legislation then has been decisively shaped by organised interests at the cost of the common good is recurrent and not specific to the Recovery Act. Following the same logic of 'pork', it can be argued that a bill to protect the environment is a triumph for the green industry lobby, a bill to protect collective bargaining rights a victory for organised labour, or the bailouts of the financial sector a payback for Wall Street campaign donations.[71]

In the case of the Stimulus, as the protesters argued, the money of taxpayers went into the pockets of Democratic key constituencies, an accusation which became a standard judgement of the bill in Tea Party literature (cf. O'Hara 2010, 105-110; Meckler and Martin 2012, 8; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 58-62). This idea was most directly expressed by a sign reading "The Stimulus package is Obama's payout to the people who helped him get elected" (Dazey 2009). The wide applicability of the pork argument, which conservative opinion makers like Rush Limbaugh had used around the time of the Seattle protest, made it effective; it could be directed against any policy initiated by the newly elected Democratic

[71] This dismissal of pluralism and interest group politics in favour of a form of politics directly responsive to the will of 'the people' has severed as a point of criticism of populist politics (cf. Riker 1988).

majority. “Pork” then, in the conservative discourse at the time, functioned as argumentative glue sticking the charges against TARP onto the Recovery Act.

Unlike Rakovich’s mobilisation effort, Carender’s protest was a minor success in itself and attracted a decent amount of people at a time when conservatism’s reputation was at a low point. Carender, without previously attending a training seminar, proved to be a more capable organiser than Rakovich. Unlike the latter, she was firmly embedded in local conservative circles and proved in her blog to be a lucid writer, capable of convincing people to support her. Her collective ‘coming out’ of local conservatives showed the cathartic character of protest. As for some of her readers, the step into the world of political activism felt liberating and empowering: “People kept saying what’s next, what’s next? […] We’d all been sitting around our dinner table with our families and just talking to each other. It was like this awakening. Everyone was just like, Oh my gosh, this feels so good to be doing something about how frustrated I am” (Zernike 2010a, 19).

Carender’s blog and the protest in Seattle give a clearer picture of how Tea Party populism created new fault lines between ‘people’ and others. The idea of ‘the people’ was articulated in complex and often contradictory ways throughout the organisation process and the protest itself. To a large extent, the process resembled the one Braunstein (2014) has identified in her work on the Tea Party movement’s collective identity work: ‘the people’ simultaneously had two referents, which in turn produced two sets of antagonists. In the first mode, ‘the people’ were clearly defined as a conservatives and Republicans in opposition to Obama, the Democratic Party and liberalism. Neither Carender’s blog nor

protesters' signs left this in any doubt.[72] Steve Beren and Carender were Republicans. This construction placed the protest in the context of an intended Republican resurgence after the 2008 elections. In the second mode, 'the people' were constructed as a democratic subject in rebellion against the political class and the politics of cronyism that found their most persistent expressions in the 'pork' motif and the opposition to bailouts. From protest signs and Carender's blog it can be concluded that participants viewed their activism also as an "American" issue that transcended partisan conflict and thus embodied the 'people'.

Carender was also quick to understand that this dual concept of 'the people' had to find expression in a re-orientation of conservative tactics and strategy. The most immediate model for this re-orientation was the activism of the Left and included an appropriation tactics like community organising, online activism and street protests. Through proper "education," Carender was convinced, even some Democrats could be won over to a conservative crusade against 'the system.' Liberal 'converts' like Beren and some of Carender's readers seemed to confirm that such a rightwards realignment among the American public was possible. The basis of Carender's new popular coalition were not only these converts but also a reunited and expanded Right that came together in opposition to the politics of 'pork.' Endorsement of the protest by local Republicans, the conservative media, the Christian Right, and foreign policy hawks like Beren throughout the planning stages showed the potential willingness of the contemporary Right to unite under the banner of fiscally conservative politics.

[72] Party affiliation and support was expressed at the rally in signs that read "Republicans Rock" or "COMMUNISM 2008 (D) FREEDOM 2012 (R)" (Dazey 2009).

For Carender, the Seattle protest was only the beginning of her commitment to the Tea Party cause. She did not miss any major Tea Party initiative and became one of its most visible figures when she joined the leadership team of the Tea Party Patriots (Zernike 2010b; Lo 2012, 110-1).

Conclusion

The protest actions of Market Ticker/FedUpUSA, in Fort Myers and Seattle, reached different degrees of popularity due to claims of having been the first Tea Party protests or the protests that started the movement. And indeed each of them foreshadowed elements of the later movement in the fields of discourse, populism, tactics and strategy. Two of the three protagonists of the protest efforts were based in Florida, in Niceville and Fort Myers respectively. The other was a resident of Seattle. Yet despite this geographic disparity, the stories of the activism and their protests share a number of similarities. One of these similarities lies in certain sense of loneliness the surrounded each of them for different reasons: Rakovich was a laid off automotive worker, who moved from Detroit to Florida in 2006 and used political action as a way to meet people in her new environment (Montgomery 2010). Denninger, also just a recent resident of Florida, reached out to online communities from his home office. Carender did the same thing in Seattle, where she felt politically isolated with her conservative views.

What motivated them to engage in political activism, appears to have been a "moral shock" triggered by various overlapping factors: the economic crisis, the government bailout policies and its cronyist connotations, the skyrocketing national debt, the crisis of contemporary American conservatism, and the election of 'liberal,' 'socialist' president as well as the Democratic takeover of Congress.

Denninger, Rakovich and Carender all considered political responses to the crisis as misguided and the public as misinformed by the mainstream media. This explains why each of the three organisers responded to this new political environment with an educational zeal and an urge to 'inform' the public about the new 'reality' of things.

The content of their 'education' however varied significantly: Denniger and FedUpUSA identified a form of mass disenfranchisement by a coalition of economic, political and cultural elites as the main problem. Rakovich's protest sought to expose the continuity of cronyism between the Bush and Obama administration in her opposition to the Recovery Act, whereas Carender wanted to teach her followers the superiority of libertarian economics and Republicanism, while warning them from the anti-democratic takeover of government by "socialists" and "communists." As different as these ideas might have been, variations of their message became commonplace in Tea Party literature (e.g. Beck 2009b; O'Hara 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012). The same was true for their proposed solution that some form of free market capitalism was capable of levelling the playing field of politics and economy, end cronyism and restore American democracy. Whether path to 'liberation' led through a resurgence of conservative Republicanism (as Rakovich seemed to believe), the political actions of an 'enlightened' and 'well-informed' American public (as FedUpUSA suggested) or mixture of both (as Carender believed) was uncertain. The Tea Party movement would subsequently pursue all of these pathways (Braunstein 2014).

The three protest groups also foreshadowed many of the elements of populism that would characterise the Tea Party movement. This analysis shows that the

social division between ‘people’ and ‘power’ was a muddled process that was directly related to different events in the present and the immediate past, which produced a number of antagonisms: the American public vs. bi-partisan elites, ‘American’ conservatism vs. ‘un-American’ liberalism, free market politics vs. bailout cronyism etc. As Braunstein (2014) explains in her work on of the multi-dimensional identity construction of the Tea Party’s ‘people’ the result of these multiple antagonisms were two distinct yet overlapping concepts, which defined ‘the people’ either as a subject of conservative politics or as one of a disenfranchised multitude that fought for “representation” and democratic rights.[73]

This analysis also shows that this nascent conception of ‘the people’ was constructed during the organisational process and the protests themselves. Though this aspect is being discussed in greater detail in the following chapter it is worth taking note of some of the preliminary findings from the three case studies of this chapter. The process of organising protests in all three cases began to unite what participants perceived as an emerging popular coalition made up of Democratic converts, advocacy groups, the conservative media, Christian Right groups, different strands of conservatism and local Republicans. During the protests against the Recovery Act, these groups united under the banner for a certain form of fiscal conservatism. The protests themselves were sites that gave these groups a place of appearance and a way to express solidarity towards each other, identify their presumed common enemy and perform the idea of ‘the people’ through a number of identity building rituals that relied on the display of conservative Americanism. The protest crowd itself became a visible manifestation of this new

[73] The idea that conservatives framed their protests through discourse of “rights” was not a new occurrence and has been an identifiable characteristic of right-wing protests since the 1960s (Hall 2011, 141).

‘people’. The affective impact of the protests appeared to have been considerable and left participants and organisers with sense of personal empowerment. These observations allow the conclusion that the protests and their organisational process were indeed central to the construction this new popular subjectivity and Tea Party populism.

The Seattle protesters began to fill a countercultural void which the activist Left had led behind in the aftermath of the 2008 elections. Protesting against the bailouts and the politics of cronyism had become a cause of the American Right. In the two days after the Seattle protest, conservatives in Denver and Mesa, Arizona accompanied the president’s promotional events for the Stimulus (Hamsher 2009). Different from the three case studies, the events’ sponsors were more directly sponsored by local conservative elites, financed by corporate money. The Denver event was sponsored by local conservative state Republicans, the Colorado branch of Americans for Prosperity, funded by the Koch Industries and Independence Institute, a ‘free market’ think tank funded by the Coors family (Hamsher 2009; Malkin 2009d; Right Web 2015). The event in Mesa, which resulted in a standoff between conservatives, Obama supporters and anti-war protesters, was sponsored by the conservative talk radio KFYI (Yousse 2009). Both events showed again how interlocked conservative elites and base had become when mobilising against Obama and the Stimulus. Seemingly no one appeared troubled by the presence of groups that represented the interest of concentrated wealth. The solidarity displayed between influential conservatives and grassroots laid the foundation for the ‘popular’ coalition of the Tea Party movement. The main element that was missing was a coordination structure and a symbolic language capable of uniting these protests into a single movement.

Chapter Five – The Sleeping Giant Has Awoken: Foundation and Protest of the Tea Party Movement

Introduction

After a time of defeat and disarray American conservatives officially launched the counteroffensive against the Obama administration in February 2009. In the House of Representatives the Republicans who had survived the 2008 elections united against the Recovery Act. During the last days of the month the annual CPAC took place in Washington DC. At the event conservatives disavowed their support of previous year's presidential candidate John McCain because of his support for TARP and his willingness to seek bipartisan compromise. Having known that conservatives had turned against him as soon as the elections were over, McCain did not even attend the conference (Falcone 2009). Those who did attend sought to reunite the dispersed conservative forces against the "socialist" policies of the Obama administration. They vowed to take their country back. "Socialism" became a key word at CPAC and replaced "liberalism" as a reference term for their political opponents (Leibovich 2009).

Among the participants was Scott Hennen, a conservative radio host from North Dakota. Hennen, the "Rush Limbaugh of the Prairie," had come to Washington DC to interview some of "the movers and shakers in the conservative movement" (Hennen 2011, 12). On February 27, he interviewed Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform. When asked by Hennen how Obama could be stopped, Norquist answered "We need to bring all of the outside groups together. [...] Whether you care about the Second Amendment or traditional values, or

taxes, everybody is threatened by this administration" (12). According to Hennen's account of the incident, he replied to Norquist: "what we need are massive protests – call them 'tea parties' after the Boston Tea Party – a huge national uprising to tell the government 'No more taxing. No more spending. No more deficits. Stop taking away our freedoms, stop piling debt onto our children" (12).

What Hennen did not know at the time was that this happened in another part of the capital. According to the organisers about 300 people – some dressed in Revolutionary era garb – gathered in a small park near the White House to protest against recent government actions (O'Hara 2010, 11-2). They were part of a nationwide series of rallies that officially launched the Tea Party movement. On February 27, exactly one year after the death of movement icon William F. Buckley Jr. had symbolically marked the onset of a profound conservative identity crisis, the elites at CPAC and the grassroots protesters at the rallies initiated the resurgence of American conservatism as a hegemonic force in American politics. The Tea Party was an integral part of this resurgence. During the following year the Tea Party movement hurried from one mobilisation success to the next and steered the GOP in an uncompromising, libertarian direction. At the CPAC in 2010, the movement's efforts were acknowledged with the Ronald Reagan Award.

This chapter focuses on the founding of the Tea Party movement, analysing the events between the Santelli rant to the first nationwide protest rallies that the movement organised on February 27, 2009. The argument of this chapter is that the collective identity of the Tea Party movement, which was based on the logic of populism, was developed and negotiated between a variety of actors on all

levels of the conservative movement, including organisers, advocacy groups, protesters and local Republicans. In this process the Tea Party metaphor functioned as an "empty signifier" (Laclau 2005, 2007) that united disaffected Americans – especially conservative Republicans – into a new collective identity of 'the people'. Within this collaborative effort the movement found its name and produced a number of uniting political symbols. It invented and articulated its concept of 'the people' along the lines of conservative Americanism. Constructing 'the people' was not a simple, straightforward process. Instead the movement moved constantly back and forth between two overlapping identity assumptions. The Tea Party saw itself simultaneously as a movement of conservative resurgence and a movement of democratic renewal. This double identity, as Braunstein (2014) argued, affected the movement's concepts of 'the people' and their enemies.

Furthermore, this chapter highlights the importance of protests as a form of political action in relation to populist identity construction. Participants and organisers developed and coded their newly-found identity throughout the organisation process. At the protests signs, speeches, and rituals manifested the idea of 'the people.' The protests also represented a conservative hegemonic project through the participation of various free market advocacy groups and self-styled 'insurgent' Republicans. Together with disenchanted voters, bailout opponents and rank-and-file conservatives the Tea Party formed a new 'popular' coalition that embodied a new "popular will" (Butler 2011). By appearing as defenders of the Constitution and American values the protesters not only sought to delegitimise government policies but also to re-establish fiscal conservatism

and conservatism in general as a bottom-up phenomenon that represented average Americans against the country's entrenched elites.

The protests' prime audience, however, was to a large extent the protesters themselves (cf. Graeber 2009, 367-8). Drawing on the literature on collective identities in social movements (e.g. Schwalbe and Schrock 1996; Polletta and Jasper 2001), this chapter analyses the effect of this identity making process had on individual protesters. It thus seeks to explain why people became active in the Tea Party movement. As this chapter demonstrates populist identity construction functioned as a mobilisation factor and movement participation gave protesters a sense of personal empowerment and belonging.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is dedicated to the Santelli rant and discusses how the rant functioned as an affective moment that gave the movement its name, the outlines of its fault lines between 'people' and elites, and functioned as a rallying call for disoriented conservatives and bailout opponents. The next section focuses on the organising process of Nationwide Tea Party Coalition and how it sought to translate the Santelli rant into a political project that tried to vindicate conservatism and restore democratic 'rights' along presumably constitutionalist lines. The third section revisits the protest rallies of February 27 to show how the protesters integrated the anti-bailout cause into a new political project that upheld fiscal conservative and anti-statist principles. How the 'people' and their imagined enemies were constructed at the protests is discussed in the fourth section. The final section is dedicated to the Tea Party's attempts to historicise the protests in narrative forms. Of particular importance are narratives of awakenings, which suggest that movement members often understood themselves as a community of believers. The awakening phenomenon,

as this section argues is closely connected to the experience of protesting and organising and gave participants a strong sense of empowerment, catharsis and community.

From the Santelli Rant to the February Protest Day: Affect and the Creation of a New Collective Identity

The last chapter covered three protest events, each of which journalistic and academic literature have identified as the first actual Tea Party events (Hamsher 2009; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 120; Armey and Kibbe 2010, 11). None of the protest groups, however, used the term Tea Party itself as a self-description, nor understood their own actions as part of a cohesive nationwide movement. Instead organisers considered themselves as taking an isolated stand against a political system that they thought was selling out the public interest. Organisers such as Carender understood themselves to be the vanguards of a reorganised conservative movement that had been shattered through electoral defeat. Whether encouraged in their views by FreedomWorks or other conservative organisations or not, these first organisers shared the idea that American conservatism had to be rebuilt not via the Republican Party but from the bottom up, through protest and local organising.

Each of these protests opposed the Stimulus bill which had been passed by Congress in early February 2009. To some extent they represented the conservative equivalent of the progressive protests against TARP. Both protest waves, at least initially, resembled campaigns, with protests at various locations seeking the narrowly defined goal of mobilising the public to defeat a specific piece of legislation. The similarities did not end there. Both campaigns tapped into pre-existing networks of organisations, politicians and media outlets that served as

an organising core or lent their support to mobilisation. Both campaigns organised against government bailouts, which they perceived as corrupt deals that breached political equality and social justice, though here they differed significantly. Each mobilised supporters utilising populist themes, claiming to represent 'the people' against an unaccountable political system. The progressive bailout protests, however, at least at the beginning, attracted more participants, due to superior organisation.

Conservative protests, however, picked up momentum after the Santelli rant on February 19, 2009. When CNBC news reporter Rick Santelli uttered the words "This is America," on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, he was in the middle of a rant that proved a crucial moment for the emergence of the Tea Party. Convention has it that emotional outbursts have no place in business news broadcasting. So clearly something profoundly 'un-American' must have happened to explain Santelli's rage. Two days earlier, on February 17, 2009, President Obama had announced the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan, designed to help homeowners who could not keep up with their mortgage payments. The plan was part of the Stimulus. In Santelli's opinion, the administration had crossed the line. "The government is promoting bad behavior" he said. What it should do is reward the "people that could carry the water instead of drink the water." With this phrase Santelli invoked the rhetoric of producerism that scholars have repeatedly seen as a hallmark of American populism (Kazin 1998; Berlet and Lyons 2000). "If you read our Founding Fathers," Santelli continued, "people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson; what we are doing in this country now is making them roll over in their graves" (Santelli 2009). The government, Santelli claimed, had lost sight of basic American values. It had,

according to him, betrayed the tenets of free-market capitalism, individualism and self-reliance. It had curbed a fundamental right of American entrepreneurship: the right to fail and suffer the consequences.

It was no coincidence that Santelli's televised call to organise a "Chicago Tea Party" resonated with conservative-leaning bailout opponents. Unlike the anti-TARP protests which had rallied against a Republican President and the corporate financial sector, Santelli shifted the anger about the bailouts completely towards "low-income home buyer" (Formisano 2012, 26), and President Obama and his "Washington economists" (Santelli 2009). Santelli, himself a "former trader and financial executive" (Amato and Neiwert 2010, 117), found little fault in the financial sector, whose business practices were responsible for the housing market collapse and subsequent recession (Ritholtz 2009). Unlike the progressive anti-bailout coalition, Santelli did not demand a bailout for public schools, veterans or health care. His rant instead advocated an anti-governmentalism and a faith in the free market with which conservatives could identify.

Santelli's invocation of the Boston Tea Party and the Revolutionary era resonated with an American constituency which reached beyond conservatives and had become a habitual feature of American protest throughout the last few decades (Lepore 2010; Hall 2011). Like other Tea Party events, the rant oscillated in its identity-constructing gestures between those that sought to construct 'the people' as consensual subject (opposition to bailouts, anti-elitist sentiment, American founding history) and those that appealed specifically to a conservative audience (opposition to the Obama administration, advocating free market ideology). As Braunstein (2014) put it, the people were constructed in two distinct "identity fields": one which claimed to represent the people against the power of elite

domination and another that pursued a number of specific policy goals (notably opposition to redistributive policy) that located Santelli clearly on the Right of the political spectrum. The ‘people’ who emerged during his rant and thereafter were a flexible, relational identity that included and excluded different actors in different contexts. It was this blend of identity fields that became distinctive to Tea Party populism and mobilised a predominantly conservative crowd in a political movement that saw itself as the American people at large.

The Santelli rant demonstrated the crucial role of affect in the emergence of the Tea Party movement. The transformation of the CNBC broadcast at the Chicago Board of Trade into a rant demonstrated to viewers that the bailout-dominated course of economic crisis management, conducted by Bush and Obama, was so abhorrent that it ‘forced’ the reporter Santelli to abandon normal practices and lose his professional demeanour. His break with convention during a live broadcast resembled that of the fictional character Howard Beale in the film *Network*; a parallel that was noted by various observers (e.g. Amato and Neiwert 2010, 118; Formisano 2012, 26). Like Santelli, Beale lost control in front of the live television audience and uttered the sentence “I’m mad as hell and I’m not gonna take it anymore!” (quoted in Amato and Neiwert 2010, 118). The “mad as hell” mood that initiated the Tea Party movement quickly became one of its defining features.

Historian Ronald Formisano called the Santelli rant the “Rosa Parks moment” (24) of the Tea Party movement; a moment in which the “impulsive [action of] a single individual who seemingly out of nowhere suddenly made a huge difference” (24-5). Though mocked by his CNBC co-hosts as a “revolutionary leader” (Santelli 2009) Santelli’s call to organise “all you capitalists that want to

show up" resonated with his national audience, which was expanded due to the rant's rapid dissemination and endless repetition through social media platforms and, mostly, conservative media outlets (Zernike 2010a, 21; Amato and Neiwert 2010, 119; Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 121; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 25-6).

The impact of this Rosa Parks moment can be traced in the accounts of a number of Tea Party protesters and organisers and played a key role in how they remembered the founding of the movement. In the direct aftermath of the rant Keli Carender, who had organised a protest against the Stimulus in Seattle a few days earlier, called Santelli "the leader of the revolution" (Carender 2009m). Unlike Santelli's CNBC colleagues, Carender used the term without the slightest mockery noting that "Rick Santelli made the most beautifully frustrated statements" (Carender 2009n). For Carender "he may just be one of my new heroes. I was screaming, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! You tell'em Rick'" (Carender 2009n). Tea Party Patriots' co-founder Mark Meckler claimed "the words would change our lives forever" and recalled its immediate impact: "The next day, I started organising, too" (Martin and Meckler 2012, 3). With Jenny Beth Martin, his co-founder, Meckler wrote that "[t]hose of us who saw the rant in our living rooms, or heard the broadcast in our cars, knew one thing: there was at least one other person in the world who believed the same thing we did" (Martin and Meckler 2012, 15).

The Santelli rant itself was an act of protest that gave to an ensemble of minor and dispersed street protests in early February 2009 a name ("Tea Party") and an initial leader (Santelli); a face people could identify. In that sense, the rant determined the new collective identity. According to a *Weekly Standard* article, within hours "dozens of Santelli groups formed, ranging from fan clubs to draft-

president movements to tea party plans for Chicago, Texas, New York, and Los Angeles" (Last 2009). The name stuck instantly. Within two days Michelle Malkin, an early Tea Party supporter, began to refer to "the growing, grass-roots movement against porkulus/spending binges/the entitlement culture" she had covered in her blog as the "Tea Party" (Malkin 2009b). Santelli had named the nameless.

How important this naming was for the emergence of Tea Party populism becomes clearer through the theoretical considerations of Laclau and Panizza. Panizza (2005b) and Laclau clarify that the constitution of populism depends to a significant degree on the "performative dimension of naming" (Laclau 2007, 103). Naming, here, is performative because it is through the act of naming that the political antagonism between people and power, which lies at the heart of populist identity construction, comes into existence. As Panizza pointedly states, the meaning of 'the people' "is constituted by the very process of naming" (2005b, 5). In other words Santelli's call to organise a "Tea Party" constituted 'the people' out of a conglomeration of dispersed small-scale protests and a widely shared sense of indignation over government bailouts that might have otherwise subsided without leaving any significant impact.

Laclau insists that naming fulfils this performative function of constituting 'the people' when it is understood as an affective act that convinces people to adapt a populist understanding of a given political conflict: "the emergence of the 'people'" he writes, "requires a passage [...] from isolated, heterogeneous demands to a 'global' demand which involves the formation of political frontiers and the discursive construction of power as an antagonistic force" (Laclau 2007, 110). This "passage" in turn requires, what Laclau called "radical investment"

(110), a term that essentially coincides with what Formisano called the "Rosa Parks moment":

> The object of the investment can be contingent, but is most certainly not indifferent – it cannot be changed at will. With this we reach a full explanation of what radical investment means: making an object the embodiment of a mythical fullness. Affect (that is, enjoyment) is the very essence of investment, while its contingent character accounts for the 'radical' component of the formula. (Laclau 2007, 115)

In the case of the Santelli rant, which under other circumstances would be passed as a minor news event, these objects were the proposed bailout plan for indebted homeowners, the name "Tea Party" and Santelli himself.

In the context of government bailouts totalling several trillion dollars, the homeowner assistance plan represented a mere 1 percent of the overall sum (Amato and Neiwert 2010, 119). Viewers, however, came to see Santelli's rant not only as a stand against bailouts in general but as the beginning of popular resistance by the American people against the power of government and the political status quo. It is undeniable that the rant was for many the affective object of investment that brought this new subjectivity into being. Meckler and Martin (2012) articulated this very directly in their recollection of the Tea Party movement's beginning:

> Threatened, angry, helpless, and alone, we wondered why no one else seemed to share our feelings. Why did America seem like a "sleeping giant"? Then one man, Rick Santelli, spoke out. From his heart. Without fear. Without a plan. With no idea what his words would unleash. His words spread across the country. Millions of Americans heard his call: a call for a new American Tea Party. And the sleeping giant woke up. (14-5)

As previous chapters have demonstrated, bailout opposition had the potential to mobilise people across ideological and demographic boundaries and attracted a diverse set of interest groups. Furthermore the bailout opposition, even before the

Santelli event, took the form of a populist struggle, of people against governmental and economic power; first against the Bush administration and the bipartisan consensus in Congress as was the case with TARP and later against Democrats and Obama when it came to the Stimulus. The name "Tea Party" melded the opposition to bailouts and the unfolding 'popular' struggle into a single "object." At the same time the name "Tea Party" was ambiguous enough to incorporate other (mostly conservative) political struggles. It was an empty signifier *par excellence*.

What Santelli did was to interpret the bailouts as a breach of American political values. He thus charged the struggle of people and government with a notion of Americanism that identified bailout opposition as a defence of America's founding values. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) note about the effect of the rant:

> Across the country, disgruntled conservatives perked up. The "Tea Party" symbolism was a perfect rallying point since it brings to mind the original American colonial rebels opposing tyranny by tossing chests of tea in Boston Harbor. It signifies authentic patriotism, and has visceral meaning to people who feel that the United States as they have known it is slipping away [...]. (7)

After the rant the Tea Party came into being in terms of movement organising in both a physical and a philosophical sense. The video of the Santelli went viral through a variety of media outlets, and reached a national audience within hours. According to a number of accounts Tea Party organising started the day after the Santelli rant on Friday February 20, 2009 (Lo 2012, 98-9; Leahy 2012, 226-8; Meckler and Martin 2012, 16-19).

Organising the Revolution: The Nationwide Tea Party Coalition

The speed with which protests under the Tea Party label took shape demonstrates the effectiveness of conservative/libertarian networks of activists, advocacy

groups, think tanks, online platforms and media. At the forefront were the founders of Top Conservatives on Twitter (#tcot) Michael Patrick Leahy, Eric Odom of the dontgo online campaign and Stacy Mott of the online forum Smart Girl Politics (SGP).[74] All three had gained, with their respective groups, a decent-sized online followership and would constitute to the "leadership team" of what they called the "Nationwide Tea Party Coalition" (Leahy 2012, 227). Though perhaps not "conservative leaders" as Lo claimed in his analysis of early Tea Party mobilisation, all three had important connections to parts of the conservative infrastructure. Odom was deeply embedded in the Chicago-based conservative circles, including FreedomWorks and the Sam Adams Alliance. And at least since the end of 2008, Leahy had collaborated with two inside-the-beltway libertarian/conservative heavyweights: The Heritage Foundation and the CATO Institute (Leahy 2012 223-4).

Leahy was also in touch with J.P. Freire, then managing editor of the *American Spectator* (Leahy 2012, 226). Apparently Freire was the first to organise a Tea Party protest in Washington DC on February 27 and contacted Leahy to promote the event (Leahy 2012, 226). Instead Leahy organised a conference call with Odom and Mott and a number of prospective local organisers. According to different accounts the first conference call featured between 22 to 50 participants (Meckler and Martin 2012, 17; Leahy 2012, 226). Leahy's goal was to transform Freire's single protest in the capital into a series of simultaneous, nationwide protest events. In the initial phase of Tea Party organising these conference calls were certainly a key element and took place daily until February 27 and twice

[74] SGP was founded by Stacy Mott and Teri Christoph, who describe themselves as "two stay-at-home moms turned activists" (Smart Girl Politics 2015). According to their website, the original mission of the groups was "to engage, educate, and empower conservative women to get involved in the political process" Smart Girl Politics 2015).

weekly thereafter until the Tax Day rally of April 15. The calls, according to Leahy's account, were "online versions of a New England town meeting." Their primary functions were to coordinate the timing of the protests, familiarize protest beginners with basic principles of organising and offer "very specific and focused messaging" (Leahy 2012, 227).

The calls also served to connect activists with powerful conservative organisations and opinion makers. It was thus not a coincidence that FreedomWorks and Michelle Malkin were involved in the organising and promotion of the February 27 protests from the outset. Unlike some accounts which described the involvement of FreedomWorks as a stealth operation (e.g. Mayer 2010), the organisation's support was quite overt and it took considerable pride in its early involvement:

> It was no coincidence that FreedomWorks was at the center of the activism that followed Rick Santelli's rant. Indeed, FreedomWorks had facilitated some of the most impactful events just prior to Santelli's call to action and was standing at the forefront of that first wave of political participation from the previously silent majority. (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 27).

Such statements shed light on FreedomWorks' self-understanding as an integral part of a nascent anti-statist popular coalition, rather than as backroom conspirators. In their own retelling of the Tea Party beginnings, the makers of FreedomWorks facilitated the Tea Party organisers with support ranging from setting up websites to giving "new activists access to basic tools and information" (27), coordinating local groups and social media organising.[75]

[75] The importance of resource abundance at the beginning of the Tea Party movement is discussed in detail in Fetner and King (2014).

By the time of the Santelli rant, the Tea Party label was an "empty signifier" that had the potential to mobilise a variety of interest groups under its banner. Lepore details in her book *The Whites of Their Eyes* (2010, 79-85) that Tea Party symbolism has served progressive as well as conservative purposes at different times in the past. The Tea Party protests of February 27 had a definite conservative ideological direction. Much of the content and the type of participants that would show up at the protest sites were indeed predetermined by the organisers, the dissemination of the Tea Party idea and the context in which the nationwide protests took place. The adoption of the Tea Party label had already begun before Santelli. He connected the label to his resentment of the Obama administration, objection to the housing bailouts (and the Stimulus more generally) and a defence of free market capitalism. This was why conservative-leaning groups and individuals responded in such great numbers. According to Lo (2012), the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition consisted of "mainly fiscal and business conservatives" (100) and it is safe to assume that there was not a single progressive-minded local organiser among the few dozen participants in the first few rounds of conference calls. The February protests, Lo notes, mainly served as a form of "test marketing" (a term borrowed from the world of economics) "to see if [the Tea Party label] would take hold in a variety of localities" (Lo 2012, 100).

How organisers and promoters of the protests marketed and contextualised the protests becomes evident when looking at the source material. One important aspect of early organising revolved around the idea of messaging. What was this new Tea Party standing for? Leahy who clearly saw himself as the leading organiser at the time – calling himself a "moderator" – insisted the Tea Parties of February 27 should be focused on "key points" (Leahy 2012, 227). The motto he

and the other early leaders decided on was the theme of "Repeal the Pork or Retire" (227) and provided "practical information on how to hold a rally" which included "a list of about forty ideas of signs, many of which would show up in later press coverage"(228).

Though the website the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition is no longer available online, some of its messaging and the manner in which it framed the protests can be retrieved from Leahy's blog and other sources. In a blog post, published on the day of the first conference call on February 20, only one day after the Santelli rant, Leahy deliberately took up the CNBC reporter's stance and suggested that "all *conservatives* move quickly" (Leahy 2009a, italics added) and use the momentum of the rant. The poster and flyer drafts that Leahy posted shortly thereafter emphasise the protests' focus on bailouts, government spending, federal deficit and national debt (Leahy 2009b, 2009c). The housing bailouts are mentioned alongside TARP, the Stimulus and other bailout liabilities. One of the flyers labelled the Stimulus the "GENERATIONAL THEFT ACT" (Leahy 2009c), a common theme in the conservative mediasphere at the time.[76] Another poster warned about the threat of socialism (Leahy 2009d). Overall these themes reflected, according to Lo (2012), the tight grip on agenda setting which fiscal conservatives had over early Tea Party mobilisation. Leahy himself later described this fiscally conservative focus as an "ethos of limited government – cut taxes, cut spending, limit the size of government, and respect the Constitution" (Leahy 2012, 227-8).

[76] By doing so, the organisers seemed to highlight the apparent sameness of these measures, which distinguished them from their progressive counterparts of the previous year, who had differentiated between corporate handouts (TARP) and government relief for the more vulnerable sectors of society.

In poster designs, these fiscal conservative issues were – as was the case in Santelli's rant – framed in a way that presented the new Tea Party cause as a continuation (or repetition of) the American Revolution. One poster listed a number of dates, including those of the Boston Tea Party, the Declaration of Independence and the signing of US constitution followed by the date of the February protests (Leahy 2009e). Others quoted Thomas Jefferson (Leahy 2009c), displayed images of the country's founders with the caption "TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION" followed by the question "WHAT WOULD THE FOUNDING FATHERS DO?" (Leahy 2009b). All of the poster designs displayed the phrase "Revolution is Brewing".

One relevant point is notable in regards to the framing of the early Tea Party leadership team: Leahy's #tcot campaign, as well as Carender's protest in Seattle, sought to marshal the remnants of the shattered conservative movement in the aftermath of electoral defeat. In his blog, Leahy had mentioned conservatism as the driving force of the Tea Party. However, the term "conservative" does not surface in the poster designs that were meant for communication with the wider public. Instead the immediate political goals of the protests – repealing the Stimulus and other government expenditures – draw their legitimacy by their allusions to the Revolutionary era, the alleged American founding ideals and their presumed constitutionality. This discursive construction of sameness of the Tea Party movement's political engagements and the founding history has been a recurring subject of scholarly attention:

> From the start, the Tea Party's chief political asset was its name: the echo of the Revolution conferred upon a scattered, diffuse, and confused movement a degree of legitimacy and the appearance, almost, of coherence. Aside from the name and the costume, the Tea Party offered an analogy: rejecting the bailout is like dumping the tea; health care reform is the Tea Act; our struggle is like theirs. (Lepore 2010, 14).

The work of Braunstein (2014) interprets the presence of this 'revolutionary' discourse as integral to the movement's "multidimensional identity work" as constructing its collective identity as 'the people.' She warns of "interpreting their collective actions as a straightforward expression of conservative ideology" (150). Instead identity-constructing gestures such as those of the early movement organisers were much more complex, making the idea of 'the people' a constantly shifting concept that at different times includes and excludes different groups. On the one hand, when "advocating for particular policies" 'the people' coincides with movement conservatives in their struggle against progressive politics and the 'undeserving' recipients of redistributive policies (169). The people's enemies in these instances were primarily the Obama administration, Congressional Democrats and the political Left more generally for their 'un-American' policies. The antagonism also extended to their beneficiaries, most prominently diverse minority groups, which gave the Tea Party a reputation of bigotry and racism (Burghart and Zeskind 2010; Parker and Barretto 2013). This side of Tea Party identity appealed to those who saw the movement as an expression of conservative unity and rebirth.

On the other hand, the movement also presented itself as the "vanguard of a 'small but growing movement' against elite domination, which had the potential to one day include *all* of 'the people'" (Braunstein 2014, 159). In these instances the idea of 'the people' potentially extended to all Americans and identified its enemies in the corrupt alliance of both major parties and even the corporate business sector.[77] This second concept was much more democratic in nature as it

[77] FreedomWorks in particular seems to present politically conservative or libertarian goals as a 'people's' causes and did not shy away from antagonising corporate business in the mobilisation drives. FreedomWorks staffer Brendan Steinhauser for instance circulated a letter with basic

was as much about political and economic inequality (the fight against bailouts and government support for corporate business) as it was about "asserting their voices as citizens" (Braunstein 2014, 151). It constructed its identity as a democratic reform movement that empowered Americans to challenge the political status quo (Meyer and Pullum 2014). Naturally, this more populist side of Tea Party identity sought to reach out to people beyond the traditional conservative fold and build a new conservative hegemonic coalition. It sought to appeal to sentiments of resentment and anti-elitism, to all those who thought that political institutions had become unaccountable to the people.

The constant back and forth between these two collective identity concepts caused a number of internal contradictions and tensions. From the start and later in the movement's development there were a host of practical problems whenever, for instance, activists claimed to oppose both Democrats and Republicans yet overwhelmingly lent their support to conservative Republican candidates and policy initiatives. According to Braunstein (2014), aligning themselves with the country's founders and a much older tradition of American protest and revolutionary change functioned as an overarching narrative in which "these identities are not contradictory, but mutually reinforcing" (168). In this way conservative activists could claim an identity akin to the 'democratic' revolutionaries of the founding era while presenting conservative policy goals. Protecting the democratic core of the American political experience was thus only possible by adhering to 'truly' conservative politics.

---

information on how to organise street protests in which he urged participants to "put an end to this madness on Wall Street and Pennsylvania Avenue" (Steinhauer 2009).

The multidimensionality of nascent Tea Party identity permeated the grassroots level while the February protest wave was in the making. Keli Carender's blog, for instance, is indicative in this regard. Having gained some popularity in conservative circles for her February 16 protest, Carender had been among the first to link up with the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition.[78] She had been active setting up a "Seattle Action Network" called "Seattle Sons and Daughters of Liberty" and putting together a small organising committee (Carender 2009o). Through her blog entries in the second half of February, Carender clearly positioned the Tea Parties across diverse conservative issues, ranging from opposition to "universal healthcare" and gun control, to support for stricter immigration control and pro-Israel foreign policy stands (Carender 2009p). She advised prospective protest participants to bring "signs that convey the immorality of this tax and spend mentality" (Carender 2009q). In another post she recommended "signs with economic messages" saying that the "main thrust of this protest is to claim our rights as taxpayer" (Carender 2009r).

Several issues are striking about her ideas on mobilisation. In her blog Carender highlights the sameness of a variety of conservative issues and opposition to the Stimulus. All are somehow "assaults on our CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS" by an 'oppressive' government (Carender 2009p).[79] The Stimulus, in a sense, has become merely a privileged signifier that represented these other issues.[80]

[78] The first time she mentioned the planned nationwide protests is on February 21, 2009, one day after the first conference call of the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition (Carender 2009s).

[79] Hall (2011) argues that the frequent demand of 'rights' was a discursive strategy – formerly cultivated by the civil rights movement – which conservatives appropriated from the 1970s onwards. The Tea Party movement clearly stands in this conservative strategy.

[80] The idea that a given conservative issue symbolised a range of other stances was by no means new and is connected to Laclau' concept of hegemony (2007, 70). Studies of 1970s conservative movements provide ample empirical evidence of conservative single issue movements that saw

Furthermore, the protests, while still often framed as anti-bailout protests, had begun to focus on taxation, thus moving away from a critique of the banking sector and towards a direction much closer to the tenets of fiscal conservatism. Though the protests still addressed questions of "rights" and representation, 'the people' had now become "taxpayers."

Carender continued to move back and forth between identifying the protest and protesters as "Republicans or Conservatives or Libertarians" (Carender 2009s) and as 'the people' in a broader sense. Addressing the latter she highlighted what she thought was at stake and who were the friends and enemies of the people:

> This event is open to everyone, regardless of political party affiliation. Politicians of both major parties seem to have forgotten that they work for us, and that their duty is to use our tax dollars honestly and efficiently. Do not let a label keep you from demanding integrity from our elected officials. (Carender 2009r)

Carender's writings confirm Braunstein's research that claims that the constant back and forth in defining and redefining 'the people' and their adversaries is a defining characteristic of the Tea Party movement. Within a few days of the Santelli rant Carender had internalised ways to reconcile the contractions of multidimensional identity construction invoking the Revolutionary era. "Americans," she wrote "will once again throw a tea party to revolt against her government's excessive taxation, not only without representation, but also without deliberation" (Carender 2009r).

---

themselves connected to other conservative causes of their time (Diamond 1995, 127-38; Kazin 1998, 245-66; Schulman 2002; Schulman and Zelizer 2008, 1-10; Hall 2011). Individual conservative movements understood and articulated their specific demands in connection with others. The anti-busing movement in Boston in its statements, for instance, reached out to other conservative groups, recognising the "importance and necessity of addressing other inter-related problems (e.g. ERA, Textbooks, Gun Control, Pornography, Abortion, Communism, Prayer in Schools et al.)" (anti-busing leaflet quoted in Hall 2011, 90). Similar gestures of inter-group solidarity can be found in other movements as well. The very idea to see demands, which are at face value entirely different, as "inter-related," was grounded in negativity; they are related in their rejection of liberalism, understood as a cultural and political phenomenon.

The nascent movement was still uncertain whether it wanted to be a renewed reincarnation of the conservative movement or a people's movement that reclaimed the political voice of average Americans in what appeared to be an era of elite domination. As Braunstein (2014) convincingly argues, it wanted to be both. Neither at the beginning, when organisers focused on fiscally conservative issues, nor later during the movement's history, when more and more demands were expressed under the Tea Party banner, did activists substantially diverge from contemporary conservative orthodoxy. In fact many of the organisations and groups who rallied to the Tea Party or supported its activities existed before the movement came into existence. This was the case with FreedomWorks, Americans for Tax Reform, the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation.

The Tea Party, however, heralded a new self understanding among conservatives as well as a new public image. By February 2009 (fiscal) conservatism was no longer exclusively advocated by the conservative side of a highly polarised media landscape, Republican leadership and a host of organisations that constituted the conservative intellectual infrastructure, as had been the case during the Bush years. The Tea Parties gave the impression of a bottom-up mediation of conservative ideology. Fiscal conservatism had become an issue of the streets, a cause of 'the people'. This new prominence of libertarianism and fiscal conservatism in the movement was relatively surprising and owed to a historical context that was determined by the bailout controversies and the accompanying financial obligations that the government had taken on since the escalation of the economic crisis. On the eve of Obama administration and its progressive reform agenda, it became the common ground for a variety of conservative strands.

The reason why this often elite driven aspect of conservative orthodoxy now became a basis for mass mobilisation at the grassroots level lies, at least in part, in its connection to the issues of constitutionality and the history of the American Revolution. When Tea Partiers began to take the street and protest the bailouts and government spending they did so, in their own view, not exclusively as Republicans or conservatives but also as a new generation of American revolutionaries who defended what they considerate to be American founding values and their constitutional rights. They continued the founders fight against government 'tyranny.' Such conservative Americanism became a badge of Tea Party identity and gave protesters the sense of a higher purpose and solemn responsibility, as they saw themselves engaged in a populist struggle of the people against powerful elites. In their own eyes, they were more than merely conservative protesters, they were revolutionaries. In this sense, populism functioned as mobilisation strategy.

Most Tea Party manifestos have embraced this new identity wholeheartedly (Beck 2009b; Farah 2010; O'Hara 2010; Paul, Rand 2010; Foley 2012, Meckler and Martin 2012; Wakefield 2012). And though most of them move constantly back and forth between identifying as conservatives and revolutionaries, they challenged or rejected the right-wing and Republican label.[81]

Fiscal Conservative Dominance: Scenes from the February 27 Protests

The nationwide protests on February 27 showed this new identity at work. According to the organisers, protests took place in 18 localities attracting about

[81] Joseph Farah, for instance, writes specifically that the Tea Party is not "a right-wing phenomenon" (Farah 2010, 33) and makes the point that its philosophy is "actually a centrist position on the political" (36). He consequently prefers the term "patriot" rather than "conservative" when referring to himself (91).

thirty thousand participants (Lo 2012, 101).[82] Among the protesters were Mary Rakovich in Fort Myers (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 73) and Keli Carender in Seattle (Carender 2009t). The Nationwide Tea Party Coalition's goal to maintain the focus on fiscal conservatism was a success, thus confirming Lo's assumption that the movement, especially in its early phase, was strongly influenced and controlled by fiscally conservative organisations and elites (Lo 2012). The signs, suggestions and talking points which the organisers disseminated beforehand found their way into the protests.[83] As a result the message and appearance of the protesters were quite consistent with the goals the organisers set for themselves.

Fiscal conservatism, which dominated the protests, covered three distinct issues: government spending initiatives, 'excessive' taxation, and the looming debt disaster. On the spending side protesters took particular offense to the bailouts and the Stimulus bill. This was expressed by speakers at the events and protest signs. In San Diego people held up signs that read "Stop the Spending," "Stop Bankrupting America" (Johndoereport 2009a), signs in Chicago read "No more Bailouts," "Stop Spending our Money," or "Repeal the Pork" (Pixelverse 2009). Other Chicago placards read "See what happens when you give a Jr Senator a

[82] Sources used in this analysis include video recordings of protest participants, blog entries, news coverage and online photo albums. These sources cover 11 of 18 protest locations and reflect a representative variety in terms of geography and protest size. In general protests were relatively even in their geographic distribution, though the Northeast was under and the South overrepresented. Participation of in New England would catch up in the following months. When the following analysis will make generalising observations no specific citation will be given because they often apply to virtually all sources. The sites and sources are: Houston, Texas (Bryanxt 2009); Atlanta Georgia (Dennis317 2009); Chicago, Illinois (Pixelverse 2009; Thoughts from a Texan 2009; Jacobsen 2009; SurgeUSA 2011), Asheville, North Carolina (America Speaks 2009); St. Louis, Missouri (Koen 2009); Washington DC (Ccubedblogger 2009a, 2009b; Educational Revolution 2009; Malkin 2009c); San Diego, California (Johndoereport 2009a, 2009b); Lansing Michigan (Detroit Free Press 2009); Nashville, Tennessee (Associated Press 2009); Denver, Colorado (Gelner 2009); and Greenville, South Carolina (WYFF4 2009).

[83] Signs that appeared frequently said "Don't Mortgage my Future, ""Repeal or Retire," "220 Years to Build the Republic, and One Month to Destroy it," "No more bailouts," "Atlas Shrugs," or "Free Markets not Freeloaders."

Credit card?" (Thoughts from a Texan 2009) and "Bailouts Chains you Can Believe In" (Pixelverse 2009), showing the protesters' willingness to tie bailouts and the deficit specifically to Obama. While the bailouts were generally criticised at the protests, anti-corporate and anti-banking sentiments were articulated less frequently. In Chicago chants like "Wall Street sucks" and "no more bailouts," mixed with others that demanded "Don't tread on me" "start a revolution" "freedom" (Jacobsen 2009), "USA" and "socialism sucks" (Thoughts from a Texan 2009). People asked why they were protesting usually declared that the Stimulus package and government spending were the reasons (Jacobsen 2009). This is not to say that the protesters' anti-bailout sentiments were insincere, however, they were merely part of a more general opposition to government spending, government interference in the economy and the redistribution of wealth.

Some secondary sources have claimed that people objected more to corporate and banking bailouts than to those aimed at struggling mortgage payers (Lo 2012, 101-2; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 74). Most of the available evidence, however, indicates the opposite to be true. In fact most protests displayed various signs directed against mortgage bailouts either directly or indirectly.[84] The strong animosity against mortgage bailouts is difficult to explain. Being the main subject of the Santelli rant, they had triggered the mobilisation effort in the first place. People seemed opposed to the mortgage bailouts because it revealed the presumed arbitrariness of government intervention and related to them on a personal level.

[84] Directly referencing were signs like "Forced by Law to Pay Someone Else's Mortgage" (Educational Revolution 2009), "Honk If You Want to Pay My Mortgage" (Detroit Free Press 2009), "Your Mortgage Is Not My Problem" (Ccubedblogger 2009a,). Indirect reference was expressed in signs that read "Free Markets not Freeloaders," "Stop Subsidizing Stupidity" (Bryanxt 2009), "Self Reliance Not Hand Outs!" (Pixelverse 2009), "Reward Responsibility Not Irresponsibility" (America Speaks 2009).

The bailouts of the finance sector had seemed outrageous but they took place closer to the realm of macroeconomics. Assisting people with their mortgage payments, however, was more tangible as protesters imagined paying personally for their 'irresponsible,' 'freeloading' neighbour who wanted, as Santelli had put it, "an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills" (Santelli 2009). A sign held up by an older protester in Denver read "I Worked All My Life To Pay My Own Mortgage + Health Ins. Costs + I Sure Don't Want To Pay For Someone Elses Now" (Gelner 2009). It exemplifies the individualised resentment that animated a variety of protesters at the February 27 protest.

Such individualisation of government policies was not an invention of the first Tea Parties. As noted earlier, FreedomWorks had already mobilised the outrage against mortgage relief when they set up a website called "angry renter" to mobilise resentment against homeowner bailouts on an individual level. For the protesters in any case, distressed homeowners seemed to fall into the same category as the financial institutions that had originally profited from the real estate bubble. Both, according to the protesters, now had to bear the consequences for their bad choices. Reliance on capitalism, which was frequently expressed in the protests, was the remedy against the 'unfair' privileges of government assistance.

As much as protesters might have been upset about government spending on the 'unworthy,' for many the issue of taxation was even more objectionable. This was perhaps the single biggest difference to the progressive anti-bailout protests of the previous year. Resistance to taxation – the other side of fiscal conservatism – appeared in many forms at the different protests. In Atlanta supporters of the Fair

Tax movement attended (Dennis317 2009).[85] Anti-tax sentiments were expressed throughout the protests. In Chicago one sign read "Lower Property Taxes" (Pixelverse 2009), commemorating the California tax revolt of the 1970s. The protest in Houston was perhaps most dramatically opposed to taxation. Signs here read "We Are Human Beings Not Revenue Objects," "Attention Congress! Get Your Hands Out Of Our Pockets!," "Your Wallet: The Only Place That Democrats Want To Drill!," "Government Healthcare Is Like British Tea Tax." Furthermore the anti-tax message in Houston was constantly reinforced by the event's speakers, who claimed that taxation was a form of government coercion that essentially equalled "tyranny" and ran counter to American freedom (Bryanxt 2009). This idea was taken up in other locations as well. In Asheville, South Carolina, a protester compared taxation to slavery (America Speaks 2009), while in Chicago a sign read "We're All Serfs Now!" (pixelverse 2009). The equation of taxation and tyranny at the protests turned the 'people' into taxpayers, whose 'rights' had been infringed by a supposedly unresponsive new government.

On the surface the fixation with taxes may come as a surprise considering that the Stimulus included a number of tax breaks, thus lowering the tax burden. However, protesters anticipated tax increases for a number of reasons. For one thing, Obama had already declared during his campaign that he sought to increase taxes on corporations and high income groups. His election thus indicated imminent tax hikes for this section of the population in the near future. The repeated tax resentments in signs and speeches furthermore suggest that taxation was a crucial

[85] The Fairtax movement seeks to replace the income tax and some other forms of taxation with a national sales tax of 23 per cent. The group identifies as non-partisan. According to proponents, this would simplify the current taxation system and render the IRS unnecessary (Fairtax 2015). It goes without saying that working and middle class families who spend a larger of their disposable income, would end up paying a large share of the eventual total tax revenue than high income earners.

talking point with which the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition had prepared the protesters. The probable reason for the fear of higher taxation was the historical deficit that the administration had announced the day before the protests took place (Sahadi 2009). Taxation, the protesters deduced, was the logical consequence of the government spending measures and a skyrocketing debt.

Already at this point, during the first round of nationwide protests, the national debt surfaced as a central preoccupation of the Tea Party. At the February 27 rallies, the idea of "generational theft," which posited that the current spending programs would ruin government finances for the next decades to come, struck a chord with many participants. The consistency with which this idea circulated throughout the different protest sites suggests that the generational theft idea had been highlighted as an important talking point by the organisers. Especially parents who brought along children and grandparents had signs with this theme. Signs such as "Obama stop stealing from kids", "Sorry Daddy, I Don't Have 1 $ Trillion To Loan You!", "Stop Borrowing Against Our Future" or "Don't Mortgage My Future" (Thoughts from a Texan 2009) were often held up by children.

The message of this trinity of fiscal conservatism – spending, taxation, debt – could not have been timelier. The day before the protests the administration had published its budget plan and legislative priorities. Numbers must have looked gloomy for people no matter on which side of the partisan divide they stood. The projected budget deficit for 2009 was an estimated $ 1.75 trillion and $ 1.25 trillion for 2010 (Sahadi 2009). Though he inherited a large part of the deficit of 2009 from his predecessor – together with an economic crisis that was also partly of Bush's making and a fiscal imbalance that was completely of his making – Tea

Partiers were inclined to pin the fiscal disaster firmly to Obama alone. Such readings were encouraged by the protest organisers and conservative opinion makers.

What further enraged conservative Americans was the redistributive agenda that the administration announced as it presented the budget plan. This agenda included healthcare reform, which at that point was still aimed towards "universality of coverage", renewable energy investment, the reversal of the Bush tax cuts for high income earners and capital gains and the closing of corporate tax loop holes (Sahadi 2009). The Bush tax cuts for working and middle class Americans, on the other hand, were to be made permanent. To a large extent the proposed measures only corrected the worst excesses of the Bush administration. The agenda was not radical in the least, though it marked a decisive course correction in American politics (Skocpol 2012a, 10). President Obama furthermore merely sought to fulfil his campaign promises, for which he had won a democratic mandate.

To conservatives, however, this change in national politics represented a radical break with American political traditions and constitutional principles and a transformation of the country towards "socialism" (Skocpol 2012a, 11-2). The fiscal conservatism of the protests was coupled with a form of libertarianism that challenged any redistributive role for government. This challenge addressed upward as well as downward redistribution. It criticised corporate bailouts as well as initiatives to support distressed mortgage owners and the extension of the healthcare coverage. In the minds of many protesters, the conservative idea of "corporate welfare" (e.g. Slivinski 2006) was essentially the same as the

expansion of the welfare state beyond its current reach. Both were identified as forms of "socialism."

Constructing Antagonisms in Protest: The 'People' and their Enemies

Until February 27, there was no Tea Party movement. As this thesis has argued so far, the conservative movement was amidst an existential crisis. Institutions at the centre of conservatism's hegemonic project realised that in order to regain its political leadership it had to reach out to the periphery at the grassroots and present conservatism as the only valid alternative to the politics of cronyism. Conservatives recognised that in order to survive they needed to reinvent themselves as a populist movement that led the fight of the American people against an unaccountable political system. Conservatism needed to reach to section of the population that harboured anti-elitist sentiments and resentment towards the current political system. The appropriation of the anti-bailout cause allowed conservatives to achieve just that.

The Tea Party movement was the ultimate expression of this populist rebirth. The proto-Tea Party protests against the Stimulus had already begun to convey populist sentiments. Then came Santelli, who was the first to promote the idea of the "Tea Party" as an empty signifier of a new collective identity of 'the people,' which the leaders of the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition put to the test when they organised the first wave of nationwide protests. The protest sites on February 27, however, became the multiple birthplaces of this new collective identity.

Collective identity matters to social movements. Social movement scholarship stresses the importance of collective identities as an alternative explanation for the emergence and endurance of social movements (e.g. Schwalbe and Schrock 1996; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Polleta and Jasper (2001) write that collective identity

can explain "why people participate" (283) in social movements. Similarly Somers writes "'I act because of who I *am*,' not because of a rational interest or set of learned values" (1994, 608). According to Polleta and Jasper (2001) collective identities play an important role in the timing of movements' emergence, recruitment of new members and the development of movement claims. They also had important repercussions for tactics, strategy and even movement outcomes (284).

Their expression can take different forms. "Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials – names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on" (285). Given their importance it is not surprising that organisers pay particular attention to how movement identity is being framed (291). As we have seen, already during the organising process of the February 27 protests, the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition and local organisers had taken considerable care to frame the protests in a way that they thought would appeal to people beyond conservative constituencies. Organisers, however, are usually unable to fully control the exact forms that make up a collective identity. According to Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) "identity work" is a "group process" (113) that requires constant negotiation between the involved actors (121). Identity making must be understood as the "joint creation of [...] symbolic resources" (115) upon which a collective identity is built. Collective identities are never 'finished products' but rather ever-shifting outcomes of continuous negations within a given group and its surroundings. Applied to the Tea Party this means that the protests in February – though important for the formation of movement identity – were just the beginning of a process of shaping the idea of 'the people' that

continued throughout the movement's existence. The process permitted a considerable degree of agency for organisers as well as protesters.

Yet constructing the collective identity of 'the people' in populist discourse is to some extent distinct. The aforementioned social movement scholarship typically describes movements based around the concepts of race, gender and, occasionally, class. 'The people' are a more amorphous, imprecise subjects that often cut through these distinctions. In fact, in populism 'people' can only be defined in relation to its enemy, to an 'other' (Laclau 2007, 98). The creation of this 'other' is consequently as important as the creation of the collective self of the protesters.[86] Populism furthermore assigns specific characteristics to both groups. While 'the people' are being portrayed as powerless underdogs, struggling for political recognition and (democratic) rights, the 'other' is identified with power, oppression and the political, cultural or economic status quo (Panizza 2005b; Laclau 2005, 47).[87] Tracing the populist elements in the February protests reveals the complexity of this process. The rest of this section shows how protesters sought to signify 'the people' in multiple ways and turn the bailout/Stimulus issue into an all-out struggle between 'the people' and 'the system.'

In the most basic sense, the idea of 'the people' was signified through the rallies themselves. As the thesis has discussed at various points, conservatives at all levels were aware that their leadership claims could only be expressed through grassroots support. 'The people' had to be loud and visible. The work of Judith

[86] In this point the work of Laclau (2007) coincides with the observations of Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996), who considered the imposition of "devaluated identities on their antagonists" (138) a part of group identity-making, especially when this process takes the form of "cultural struggle" (138).

[87] In social movement scholarship this conflict is covered in the conception of "injustice frames" (Gamson 2013).

Butler (2011a) highlights the importance of protest sites as physical spaces that forge collective identity. Protesters "in their plurality lay a claim to the public, find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the material environment." In doing so, acts of protest directed towards the perceived power structure are gestures of refusal and "acts of delegitimation of the state" that construct a "popular will." The act of appearing in public is charged with meaning. The February protest did exactly that. They were meant to show that conservative policies had the support of ordinary Americans across the country. They were meant to show that Americans opposed the privilege of elites and the erosion of national values which they identified with Obama's reform agenda. The protests were a popular act of refusal of 'the people.'

The nationwide protests also showed the efficacy of the Tea Party metaphor. Organisers had encouraged the formation of an identity that identified protesters with the country's political founding generation. However, they could not be sure that the Tea Party idea would play a significant role in mobilising participants. As it turned out the Tea Party identity was happily embraced by most participants. The protests gave an instant opportunity to perform this newfound collective identity of the people as 'constitutionalist patriots.'

At the protests this identity was constructed through signs, speeches, clothes and costumes and rituals. A campaign to distribute tea bags among the protesters, on which they could write their grievances and send them of Washington, was evident at several protest sites. This idea, presumably copied from the Market Ticker tea bag campaign, seems to have been initiated by the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition. Other invocations of the Revolutionary heritage seemed to have been organised by participants individually. In Houston one speaker produced a

pocket Constitution during his speech in order to suggest that his political views were grounded in the document. Another Houston participant held up a sign that read "The Constitution Still Matters" (Bryanxt 2009). At several protests people wore 18th-century costumes. In Chicago a man called Nic Hall, dressed up as Samuel Adams and addressed the crowd comparing contemporary politics to those of the founding era. Fittingly, Hall worked at the Sam Adams Alliance, the Chicago-based conservative/libertarian advocacy group (SurgeUSA 2009). People waved the American and the Gadsden flags, recited the Pledge of Allegiance and sang the national anthem. In Greenville, South Carolina, people re-enacted the Boston Tea Party, dumping Tea into the nearby Reedy River (WYFF4 2009). Many of the gestures which these early protesters established lived on in the Tea Party movement as enduring identity rituals (e.g. Braustein 2014).

The rituals and patriotic symbolism functioned as a group practice that sought to strengthen inner-group solidarity and provided the Tea Party with a new collective identity that gave protesters the opportunity of seeing themselves as more than just conservatives (Braunstein 2014). Instead participants saw themselves as representatives of America in a fight for constitutional and democratic rights. They were thus symbolically stepping out of an increasingly polarised political landscape, of which they were a factional part, and positioned themselves as the nation's re-imagined, unrepresented political centre. What started as a simple reference to the Revolutionary era in the Santelli rant gradually began to take over the movement's identity.

'The people' were imagined as a disfranchised multitude that opposed the government's intervention on behalf of "freeloaders" from above and below. These 'people' saw themselves as the legitimate political heirs of the 'founding

fathers,' defenders of the 'original' constitutional order and basic national values (cf. Lepore 2010; Braunstein 2014). This assumed political lineage was present in various forms at the rallies. Taking political demands (based largely on fiscal conservatism) and identity-constructing gestures into account, the best term to describe this identity of 'the people' is as a form of conservative Americanism.[88] The core values of this Americanism were addressed by event speakers and in signs and included distinctively conservative notions of freedom, self-reliance, capitalism, responsibility and work ethics. To be a part of these 'people' was to accept these core values and participate in the protests or, at least, support their message.

'The people' were furthermore expressed in the demographic realities of the protesters. Scholars have repeatedly portrayed the typical Tea Party supporter on the basis of empirical data as a middle-aged or older, better-off and better-educated white male (Zernike 2010a; Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Parker and Barreto 2013). The visual sources of the protests, to a large extent, confirm such a characterisation. This does not mean that there were no women or non-whites at the protests. While the vast majority of participants were white, African Americans and of other minorities were present. In Houston several of the speakers were African Americans (Bryanxt 2009). Carender, who was later hailed as one of the movement's founders, proudly identifies as Hispanic (Carender 2009t).

As Joseph Lowndes (2012) claims, the role of race and racism, and the movement's apparent whiteness represented one of the most avidly debated

[88] The importance of Americanism in US populism is, for instance, highlighted in the work of Kazin (1998).

subjects in Tea Party scholarship.[89] Lepore (2010), for instance, argues that the appropriation of the Revolutionary heritage for Tea Party identity focuses excessively on the contribution of whites thus also specifically inviting the identification of white Americans. From an ideological/partisan point of view the overrepresentation of whites seems little surprising: Republican voters and self-identifying conservatives tend to be white (Davis 2013; Parker and Barreto 2013). Considering the fiscal conservative focus of the protests, a large turnout among whites seems only logical.

The role of gender is equally important when considering 'the people's' composition. Women were not only a large group at the rallies but also heavily involved in the organisation process. Stacy Mott of Smart Girl Politics was part of the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition leadership team. Christina Botteri managed the Coalition's social media efforts (Leahy 2012, 227). Carender, who represented not only the Hispanic but also the female Tea Party cohort, along with Mary Rakovich were among the organisers of the first Tea Party protests. In Carender's Seattle protest an African American women called Jennifer Burke was among the participants. Proud of her own early involvement, Burke later defended the Tea Party movement against charges of racism and became part of the growing Tea Party mediascape (Politistick 2015). Furthermore, Amy Kremer and Jenny Beth

[89] There is little agreement on the extent to which racial resentment or outright racism played a role in motivating white turnout and movement participation. Movement advocates argue that its goals and activism are colour-blind and appeal to a race-transcending constituency (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010; Price Foley 2012). Overt racism, according to them, is usually a marginal phenomenon. Some more moderate commentators agree that racism does constitute a serious problem within the movement, while not constituting the main factor behind Tea Party mobilisation (Zernike 2010a; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). The basis for many works that highlight racism in the movement is Burghart and Zeskind's study *Tea Party Nationalism* (2010), which traces racist and Islamophobic elements in the movement; though the authors concede that movement leaders seek to marginalise them. Parker and Barreto (2013) use Hoftstadter's concept of status anxiety to argue that for Tea Party sympathisers racial resentment towards Obama and minorities plays a crucial role in generating support.

Martin (both future leaders of the Tea Party national groups) organised the rally in Atlanta (Meckler and Martin 2012, 4; Leahy 2012, 227). According to Leahy (2012), other women organisers planned protests in this first national wave in cities all over the country. Asian American conservative pundit Michelle Malkin spoke at the rally in Washington DC. This notable involvement of women at the movement's beginning foreshadowed their important role within the Tea Party throughout its existence.[90]

The prominent role of women in the Tea Party movement continued a trend that had been visible throughout the rise of modern conservatism (McGirr 2001; Brennan 2009; Deckman 2012). The February protests confirmed their spot at the movement's forefront. As Deckman (2012) argues, based on empirical data, in the later development of the Tea Party these women slightly differed from Tea Party men in their political preferences and views: they tended to be more religious than Tea Party men. They therefore were more likely to be invested in socially conservative issues and to care somewhat less about the economic conservatism. At the February 27 protests, however, virtually everyone followed the fiscal conservative themes organisers had highlighted.

Taking race and gender as visible demographics into account, the first nationwide protests enacted 'the people' as a diverse group of concerned or angry Americans, albeit whites were overrepresented. The mobilisation effort showed a modern conservatism that, at least in the eyes of participants and supporters, overcame a long history of race baiting and gender divisions (Deckman 2012; Lowndes 2012).

[90] Women like Kremer, Martin, Carender and Mott would later take on leadership positions and become, alongside House Representative Michelle Bachman and former Vice President Candidate Sarah Palin, the most visible faces of the movement. Other women playing an important symbolic role in electoral politics in the 2010 mid-term elections included Sharron Angle in Nevada and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware (Deckman 2012, 171).

These ‘people’ in their diversity represented, to those who were favourably inclined, a mirror image of a contemporary America, united in its rejection of government actions and affirmation of ‘American’ principles.[91] Such a reading appears when, for instance, Elizabeth Price Foley discusses the movement’s demographics and mission (Foley 2012, 16-9). “Given the wide range of demographic characteristics of those who self-identify as part of the Tea Party movement,” Foley asks “what, if anything, anything, binds this group together?” Her answer brings us back to conservative Americanism: “core principles shared by all of them, which are unique and essential to American identity” (19).

The identity of ‘the people’ also took shape as a ‘popular’ coalition through the support and participation of organisations and the Republican Party. This coalition entered the national spotlight in different forms on February 27 and signalled the rebirth of the conservatism’s hegemonic project. While in Washington DC conservative elites vowed to oppose the bailouts, the Stimulus and any other kind of ‘socialism’ at the annual CPAC (Leibovich 2009), Tea Partiers did the same throughout the country. It was a symbolic moment in which centre and periphery of the conservative movement united in a common struggle, exactly one year after the death of William F. Buckley.

This new coalition was signified in different ways at the protests. In some cases it was represented through the appearance of organisation members who identified as such through clothes and signs. The FairTax movement appeared in such a

[91] Such a reading appears when, for instance, Elizabeth Price Foley discusses the movement’s demographics and mission (Foley 2012, 16-9). “Given the wide range of demographic characteristics of those who self-identify as part of the Tea Party movement,” Foley asks “what, if anything, anything, binds this group together?” Her answer brings us back to conservative Americanism: “core principles shared by all of them, which are unique and essential to American identity” (19).

manner in Atlanta. An elderly man, also in Atlanta, brought along a sign with the logo of Americans for Prosperity that read "I am We the People I am AFP" (Dennis317 2009).[92] In Washington DC a single Ron Paul supporter held up a sign reading "Ron Paul Hope For America Be A Part Of It" (Educational Revolution 2009). In other instances organisations appeared at the rallies in a more direct form through actual representatives. The protests in Lansing, Michigan were directly sponsored by Americans for Prosperity (Detroit Free Press 2009). In Washington DC, the event's main speaker was Andrew Langer, President of the Institute for Liberty, a free market advocacy group. Among the organisers/participants was also Brendan Steinhauser, coordinator of FreedomWorks (Ccubedblogger 2009a). In Chicago where a larger network of libertarian-conservative organisations had sought to steer anti-government sentiment for some time, Eric Odom of the dontgo 'movement' and Nic Hall of the Sam Adams alliance were among the protesters (Jacobsen 2009; Pixelverse 2009). The mingling of elite organisations with regular protesters developed an almost egalitarian image of movement conservatism. At the protests the movement seemed to have a more horizontal structure than at any point during the Bush administration.

The protest in Chicago was particularly interesting because of the central role local Republican Party officials were playing as the event's speakers. Among them were Republican County Commissioner Anthony Peraica and Joseph "Tex" Dozier of the UChicago College Republicans (Pixelverse 2009; Thoughts from a

[92] Free market advocacy group Americans for Prosperity (part of the Kochs' political network) was no stranger to grassroots political action in the name of fiscally conservative, libertarian causes. In fact, similar to FreedomWorks, the group's declared objective is to nurture or incite libertarian-conservative activism on the local level which it does through a network of chapter across the US. The group was closely linked to Tea Party activism (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 104-6; Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013 88-9).

Texan 2009). Despite the fact that in many Tea Party manifestos the Republican Party was considered almost as misguided as the Democrats and equally blamed for the bailouts (e.g. Farah 2010; O'Hara 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012), party representatives were generally well received by the protesters. When a protester shouted "Screw the Republicans," during Peraica's speech, he was quickly silenced by the people nearby (Pixelverse 2009). During the February protests the movement had not yet adopted their symbolic stance as "non-partisan." Instead many still understood their cause as conservative-Republican resurgence after the party's fall from power. Organisers like Leahy and Carender expressed this rather explicitly in their respective online activities. How well the Republican spokesmen were integrated into the protest crowd was visualized by Eric Odom, the Chicago protest's organiser, who stood next to them as they delivered their speeches.

Such an embrace of Republicans, however, usually extended only to local representatives and not national figures. Skocpol and Williamson stated that "early Tea Party protests were *not* launched or controlled by the institutional Republican Party, and local Tea Parties were not deferential to establishment GOP ideas about candidates or policy priorities" (2012, 89). Tea Partiers seemed content to welcome those in their midst, who shared their political sentiments, like Joseph Dozier who fired up the crowd in Chicago when he spoke against the government's "corporate favouritism and special interests" (Thoughts from a Texan 2009) and preached fiscal prudence. The February protests foreshadowed a continuous back and forth between overt Republican endorsement and a stance of hostility.[93] Only a few weeks later, as the Tea Party groups prepared their Tax

[93] Some of the political engagements of the movement with the Republican Party are described from a Tea Party perspective in Meckler and Martin's *Tea Party Patriots* (2012, 63-80). Here the

Day protests, the idea of the non-partisanship of the movement became more pronounced. The very same Eric Odom, who had so kindly received local Republicans at the February protests, denied Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele the opportunity to speak at the Chicago Tax Day rally (Leahy 2012, 233). The first nationwide rallies of the Tea Party offer a good example of how organising and protesting works as a complex form of discourse between organisations, individuals, and groups and thereby creates a populist collective identity.

The opposition to bailouts now constituted a demand within a political project directed against contemporary American liberalism. As protesters collectively chanted "don't tread on me," "start a revolution," "no more bailouts," "freedom," "Wall Street sucks," "USA" and "socialism sucks" (Jacobsen 2009; Thought from a Texan 2009), they created what Laclau (2005, 2007) calls a chain of equivalent demands, that connected bailout opposition to a political project that wanted to be emancipatory, revolutionary, conservative, anti-corporate, capitalist, anti-liberal and profoundly American at the same time. By doing so, the conservative plurality of the protesters sought to transform the hegemonic project of American conservatism into a zealous, grassroots revolt that was connected to the uncompromising traditions of Goldwater Republicanism and the conservative grassroots movements of the 1970s (Zernike 2010a, 49-63).

Constructing 'the people', however, also depended on constructing their enemy. This proved to be a muddled endeavour, wrought with contradictions and imprecision. Signs such as "The Government Has Been Hijacked By Wall Street

---

Patriots detail their stand on partisanship and justify their involvement on behalf of the GOP, while describing the "Republican Beltway establishment" (64) as their principal foe in a number of political confrontations.

& Socialist Terrorists" (Bryanxt 2009) illustrate the contradictory impulses and political ambiguities with which the protesters shored up the concept of 'the people' against 'others.' Braunstein's (2014) multidimensional construction of 'the people' holds that collective identity of 'the people' was situational: 'people' were constructed either as a 'revolutionary' subject that sought to restore American democracy by disempowering economic and political elites or as a 'conservative' subject that fought Democrats, unworthy Republicans, and liberalism as well as their 'dependent' supporters among the American poor. The protests affirmed this framework to an extent. The Tea Party 'people' were from the beginning enmeshed in two distinct – though overlapping – political struggles: one against 'power' from above and one against 'parasites' from below. The movement presented itself as representative of a beleaguered American middle class that had lost its grip on American politics (Berlet 2012b). Both of these battle lines helped to identify who was part of 'the people' and who was not.

Protesters expressed the first struggle as one against a 'rigged' system. Many Tea Partiers did not differ that much in their diagnosis of the problem from their progressive counterparts: Wall Street and corporate money had "hijacked" national politics and the banking bailouts seemed to prove it. Economic inequality and political inequality seemed to be mutually reinforcing each other. Signs and chants that opposed bailouts, 'pork,' Wall Street, 'politicians' and Congress thus formed part of an anti-status quo discourse that addressed a problem in the US political system (e.g. Hacker and Pierson 2011; Gilens 2012) and seemed to transcended ideological lines. The second struggle of the February protests specifically targeted "socialists" in government and "freeloaders." Being decidedly conservative, this struggle opposed 'un-American' Keynesian

economics, redistributive and regulatory policies and taxation. Though both struggles were distinct, the sign that claimed the government was taken over by Wall Street and socialists demonstrates that many protesters saw these struggles as one and the same.[94]

The division between 'people' and 'others' branched out into a number of antagonisms: free markets versus bailouts, capitalism versus socialism, freedom versus tyranny, common people versus elites, Main Street versus Wall Street, self-reliance versus dependency, taxpayers versus 'pork', conservative Republicans versus Democrats, grassroots activism versus formalised politics, 'producers' versus 'freeloaders', voters versus Congress, American versus Un-American, Constitutionalism versus lawlessness and government overreach and so on. While the populist division of 'people' and 'others,' as Laclau writes, constitutes in essence a simplification of political space (2007, 18), both constructs in themselves were relatively complex as they operated on the levels of ideology, culture, national identity, politics and socio-economic distinctions.

The protests, however, not only constructed the identities of 'people' and 'other' but delineated also how they imagined the political struggle between both groups. Frequently this struggle took on dystopian, apocalyptic proportions, envisioning the end of democracy, American values, and the imminent collapse of the economy. Signs that portrayed Obama or his policies as socialist or communist reflected many protesters' fear of communist subversion and an authoritarian

[94] In Atlanta signs portrayed President Obama, House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader as the three Stooges (Dennis 317 2009). Signs in Chicago read "Impeach Obama Pelosi" or likened Obama to Hitler (Pixelverse 2009). Some signs in San Diego read "Tyranny!!! Crooks Congress Socialism," "Wake Up America Smash Socialism No Bailouts No NAFTA Give Me My Liberty This Is My Country" or "Wake Up! Obama Is A Socialist" (Johndoereport 2009a, 2009b).

takeover of government. Signs, for instance, read “200 Years To Build The Republic And One Month To Destroy It,” “Stop Communism And Impeach Obama,” “I Want My Children To Be Born In The USA Not In The USSA” (bryanxt 2009) or “Corporation U.S.A. Bankrupt By The Fed” (Educational Revolution 2009). At several sites protest signs made reference to the dystopian novel *Atlas Shrugged* by the libertarian writer Ayn Rand, which describes the social collapse of the US after business leaders leaves the country in protest at unfavourable government policies. The novel’s premise reflected the economic doomsday fears among Tea Party protesters.

Describing the confrontation of ‘the people’ and ‘others’ as the ultimate struggle for the survival of the democracy, capitalism and the American identity certainly had a longer history in American conservatism. In fact since the Right realigned in opposition to New Deal politics, conservatives have persistently defined themselves against the alleged totalitarian tendencies of liberal politics (Himmelstein 1990; Nash 1996). The works of Kazin (1998) and Berlet and Lyons (2000) reveal how these ideas have figured prominently in the populism of the modern Right. According to Berlet and Lyons rightwing populism has frequently employed “apocalyptic narratives and millennial visions” (2000, 11), “antielite conspiracism” (10) and fears of subversion to frame its political engagements. This is not to say that all protest participants shared these ideas to the same extent. In February, many protesters did nothing more than state their discontent with the bailout politics, the explosion of the national debt or their distrust of Keynesian interventionism. Yet the abundance of signs that expressed fears of socialist subversion and collapse indicate a prominent strand in Tea Party thinking.

Such fears were not derived solely from the intellectual and political traditions of American Right and rightwing populism.[95] As discussed earlier, publications like *American Thinker* and *National Review* frequently described the incoming Obama administration as overtly Marxist and in cahoots with conspiracies to overthrow the government. These conspiracist analyses were taken up by organisers like Carender, who had claimed in her blog that Congressional Democrats and the White House planned a permanent takeover of the federal government. Like Carender, FedUpUSA also positioned their opposition to the bailouts in conspiratorial frames. The agent of FedUpUSA's conspiracy, however, was an alliance of bankers, business elites, and Washington politicians. Variations of these ideas finally ended up at the protest sites as well, where protesters reproduced them in their signs. Describing the confrontation between 'people' and 'others' as a near-apocalyptic struggle was thus often a creation of the conservative institutions that reached the rank and file of the movement with the help of early organisers.

As Berlet (2012b) remarks, this framing had an instrumental function: "The blame for economic, political, and social tensions is transferred away from free market capitalism to mythical conspiracies of collectivists, communists, labor bosses, and other scapegoated subversives" (565). As the cases of Carender and FedUpUSA show, it is worth noting the distinction between those conspiracy frames that claim socialist subversion and those that assume an illegitimate alliance of business elites and the US government. While the former mainly served, as Berlet argues, to distract from the conspicuous role that unregulated capitalism played in

[95] The most detailed analyses of the Tea Party movement's conspiracy and apocalyptic elements can be found in Sean Wilentz's essay *Confounding Fathers* published in *The New Yorker* in 2010 and in the work of Chip Berlet (2010; 2011; 2012a; 2012b).

generating the current economic crisis, the latter addressed worries that were shared by American progressives.

Though politically very different from the protests of the progressive, anti-TARP alliance, the Tea Party clearly shared certain concerns with of their 'predecessors.' Tea Partiers, however, parted ways with their progressive counterparts when it came to addressing the solutions to cronyism and political inequality. The proposed solutions and the negative impact of corporate wealth on political decision making exposed the limitations of newly founded Tea Party movement. At no point during the protests did participants come out in support of financial sector reform or campaign finance reform. Instead protesters confined themselves to the political limits of conservative orthodoxy. Wall Street may very well "suck," as marchers in Chicago chanted, yet grievances were directed almost unanimously towards the political system.

But what was the political system meant to do? Paradoxically the answers given by protesters seemed to suggest: nothing at all, or at least, less. Limiting the power of politicians or the influence of politics surfaced as an answer regularly given in the protests. A protester in Houston, for instance, held up a sign reading "Term Limits For All Politicians" (bryanxt 2009). Calls for government inaction were also reflected in the multitude of signs and speeches directed against taxation, regulations and various forms of government spending. The rationale was simple enough and perfectly in line with conservative thinking: government action should be replaced with freedom, free markets and capitalism.[96] The Tea Party's 'democratic revolution', as indicated in the February protests, placed

[96] The three "core principles" of the Tea Party Patriots essentially make this idea the centre of Tea Party ideology (Meckler and Martin 2012, 22).

much of its hope in the end of politics. The call for the retreat of politics, reflected on the one hand, a widespread disenchantment with politics-as-usual and on the other hand, the libertarian, anti-statist preferences that linked the Tea Party movement back to the ideals of Goldwater and Reagan Republicanism (Zernike 2010a, 49-63; Postel 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 48-59). The Tea Party reiterated the free market fundamentalist belief that a society largely shaped by market mechanisms was the only viable remedy for contemporary democratic pathologies (Somers and Block 2005).

At this point in the movement's development, fixing 'the system' had more to do with a return to 'American' values and traditions than with institutional reforms. With signs that read "Fire Congress" (pixelverse 2009) protesters instead articulated a deep-seated scepticism towards politics, especially in the current mechanisms of political representation. Scholarship on populism has identified this aspect as "the politics of anti-politics" (Panizza 2005, 12).

The protests in February give an idea who 'the people' were and what they demanded. Yet, who was their actual audience? In his study on direct action activism, David Graeber writes that protests usually address politicians, the mass media and the general public. Though an even more important audience can be the protesters themselves:

> organizers will often be the first to admit, the audience is actually the protesters themselves, who – especially if they are not longtime veterans – almost invariably go home renewed and inspired by the mere experience of being among so many people who agree with them, full of new ideas, information, literature, friends and personal contacts, and renewed in their commitment to political mobilization in all its forms" (367-8).

This seems to be the case for the first nationwide Tea Party protests. They neither prevented the passage of the Recovery Act nor attracted immediate mass media

attention. What protest did instead was engage newcomers in political activism. The protests created a new collective identity and invited people to identify with it. They created a sense of community and a feeling of empowerment.

Narratives, Awakening and the Protests

In the years following the founding of the Tea Party, the movements' origins quickly became a romanticised myth. It was a myth about a political class that had become unaccountable and had abandoned American principles. It was also a heroic tale about ordinary Americans who united, and took their fate into their own hands and began to resist government oppression. The bailouts, the Stimulus, the Santelli rant, and the protest in February and thereafter became key elements of this myth about the "awakening" of the 'people'. Tea Party writer John M. O'Hara remembered a scene of the protest in Washington DC on February 27:

> Off to the side of the protest, a family was dressed in Revolutionary War garb playing the era's music on fiddle, drum, and pipe. The participants consisted of men, women, teens, and families. Democrats, Republicans, and Libertarians waved Gadsden flags and signs decrying bailouts and pork or calling for the Fed to be audited. It was beautiful, it was real, and it was entirely unscripted. It couldn't have gone better. (O'Hara 2010, 12)

Narratives have played a role in the scholarship on social movements since at least the 1990s and are closely linked to the study of "new social movements" and the heightened interest in "identity politics" (Somers 1994). Margaret Somers (1994) summarises the positions of these scholars:

> Their research is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that "experience" is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on

> the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives. (614)

Narratives are thus essential for our understanding of social life and provide a rationale for the identities we choose to embrace and the actions we take. The implications of this for the analysis of the populism in the emerging Tea Party movement are manifold. On an abstract level populism theory itself has elements of narrative form: it assigns distinct properties to a set of 'actors' (people, elites, 'others' etc.) and discusses the preconditions, emergence, mechanisms, development and the eventual demise of populist projects in a temporal sequence (e.g. Laclau 2005; 2007).

Most Tea Party founding narratives seek to explain the movement's place in American political and intellectual traditions, make sense of the movement's identity and justify its political actions. In order to explain its origins Tea Party writers place the movement in the context of a political struggle against the bipartisan bailout/Stimulus politics (Armey and Kibbe 2010, 37-74; O'Hara 2010, 41-50) or frame it as a response to a gradual abandonment of 'truly' conservative values by the GOP since the end of the Reagan presidency (O'Hara 2010, 21-40). O'Hara also embeds the story of the movement into a larger narrative of misguided government intervention into the economy, which he identifies as the root cause of the ongoing economic crisis (2010, 42-8).

Within these stories, the Tea Party either appears as a reaction to a system of political elites that ignored 'the people's' aversion to bailouts and government overreach or as a restorative force for American conservatism and traditional American values (Braunstein 2014, 167-8). Crucially these narratives describe the Tea Party's founding as a triumph of grassroots activism. They tell these stories as

a confrontation between alleged system outsiders and average citizens on the one side and well-entrenched elites in the Democratic and Republican establishment and the organised interests of the corporate sector on the other. These narratives inform readers about the movement's presumed identity: non-partisan, anti-elitist and a bottom-up phenomenon of the American 'people'. They also convey an important political message: that an unregulated capitalism, in which impartial market mechanisms punish 'bad behaviour' and reward those who are working hard, was not only blameless in the financial crisis but indeed a noble cause worth fighting for.

Even grander narratives seek to place the movement into a "long line of American patriots who have protected the country and foundational values from destruction" (Braunstein 2014, 167). One of the most striking works in Tea Party literature is *Covenant of Liberty: The Ideological Origins of the Tea Party Movement* (2012) written by Nationwide Tea Party Coalition leader Michael Patrick Leahy. "The story of civilization" Leahy writes, "can be told in the conflict between the individual's desire for liberty and the state's need to establish social order" (1). Starting out on the premise of this basic confrontation between the individual and the state, he continues to map out how this struggle plays out in American history, from its roots of 17th-century liberalism and contractualism in England, through the American Revolution, to the beginnings of the Obama administration. The struggle between the 'people' and government is revealed as one over the protection of individual rights granted by the "secular covenant" (3) of the Constitution. The "battle lines", he argues, "are drawn between the faithful defenders of that covenant and those who seek to corrupt it" (1). What unfolds thereafter in the book is a history of confrontations between (mostly conservative)

defenders and (mostly progressive-minded) opponents of constitutional freedoms and limited government. Negative in its judgement on American history the book sees a continuous erosion of (especially economic) "liberty" since the founding era and culminates in the emergence of the Tea Party movement and the part Leahy himself played in it.

The frequent presence of these narratives in Tea Party literature proves the organisers' desires to make sense of their own actions. In most cases they are retrospective exercises that look back at an incredibly rapid mobilisation process in 2009 and 2010. They then try to straighten out the movement's inherent contradictions and ambiguities by embedding them in immediate political and larger philosophical and historical contexts. In the case of Leahy's book, the Tea Party is clearly linked to the ideology of libertarianism and classical liberalism, constructed through a lineage between the Anglo-Saxon liberal tradition and the founding of Tea Party movement.[97] In Tea Party literature, the questions of what the Tea Party movement is and what it does links back to the story of its own beginning.

The movement's most prevalent narratives, however, are those of "awakenings." The idea of the awakening has circulated in Tea Party circles since its inception. The term evokes religious, spiritual connotations given its historical referent of the 18th century "Great Awakening" in the American colonies. The Great

[97] Claims of kinship with classical liberalism are, of course, far from new in the history of the modern conservatism. As Paul Gottfried (1993, 5-29) and George H. Nash (1996, 1-30) write, during the realignment of the post-War American Right, especially libertarians sought to reclaim the heritage of classical liberalism. The most fervent advocates of these views were Austrian school economists (Gottfried 1993, 9), libertarian intellectuals and the Foundation for Economic Education (Nash 1996, 17-19). Himmelstein (1990) also notes that within these circles self-labels such as "true liberal," "individualist" or "traditional liberal" (26) were in frequent use before their ideas were eventually incorporated into the political ensemble of post-war conservatism.

Awakening certainly has a prominent place in defining the American experience.[98] The idea of awakening in the Tea Party context can point out some of the spiritual or quasi-religious elements of the movement experience. Jim DeMint, the former Republican senator and an "early leader of the tea party movement" (Palmer and Raju 2013), for instance, directly likened the movement's emergence to such a historical experience in his book *The Great American Awakening* (2013). "I really think a lot of the motivation behind these Tea Party crowds is a spiritual component" he stated in an interview, "I think it's very akin to the Great Awakening before the American Revolution" (Carter 2010).

Studies of movement members confirm DeMint's analysis to an extent. A survey among early Tea Partiers, conducted by the Sam Adams Alliance, observed that "While they reiterated time and again their disavowal of all 'social' issues, there was an undercurrent of an unspecific but omnipresent spirituality" (Sorock 2010). Braustein's (2014) and Lepore's (2010) work indicate the treatment of both the founding documents and the 'founding fathers' by Tea Party members displayed certain "civil religious" (Bellah 1967) elements among movement members. While the former writes that "Tea Partiers often speak of the Constitution as an inerrant text akin to a fundamentalist's Bible" (Braustein 2014, 163), the latter claims that the movement merged constitutional originalism and evangelicalism into a form of "historical fundamentalism" (Lepore 2010, 16). Parker and Barreto (2013) call Tea Party supporters "true believers" (74), as though the movement constituted a quasi-religious community. That the concept of awakening resonated with many was partly due to the over-representation of born-again Christians

[98] Michael Kazin argued that "'great awakenings' that featured vivid emotional oratory [and] camp meetings" bred parts of the "embryonic populist rhetoric of antebellum America" (Kazin 1998, 10)

among the movement's rank and file (Zernike 2010, 225; Parker and Barreto 2013, 80) and the significant membership overlap between the Religious Right and the Tea Party (Oregon Faith Report 2010).

Despite its omnipresence, the awakening concept in the Tea Party movement is somewhat elusive. Awakenings in the Tea Party go beyond a religious experience. It can refer to secular or quasi-religious beliefs and to an individual or collective experience. It can be triggered as a result of 'education' or through the experience of protest. Awakenings appear as narratives in Tea Party literature and as actual events, felt by individual participants. Most relevant to this chapter is the link between awakenings and participation in organising, protesting and other forms of political action. Like the protests in February, Tea Party protests in general seemed to have functioned as an awakening for many participants. As discussed earlier, awakenings happened at different points and could be understood as personal as well as collective events. FreedomWorks' Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, claim that the American people awoke during the online mobilisation against TARP (2010, 64), while Martin and Meckler claimed that the "sleeping giant" (2012, 14) America awoke after the Santelli rant.

At the individual level awakenings could mean two things: the recognition of a political 'reality' or the discovery of personal empowerment that derives from collective political action. In this first sense, awakenings correspond to Laclau's idea of "radical investment," (2007, 110) the idea that the fight against the Stimulus and bailouts really represented a much larger struggle of 'the people' against the political elites. People, in other words, awake as they begin to accept the populist division between 'the people' and 'others' as the primary conflict in

contemporary politics and the rationale for the Tea Party. This idea of awakening thus describes an ultimate moment of recognition.[99]

In movement circles this moment is frequently described with reference to the movie *The Matrix*, which functions as a kind of meta-narrative for the conversion of people into Tea Party believers. The film tells the story of a small resistance movement against a reign of machines that has enslaved the rest of mankind, by creating a fictional reality (the "Matrix"), which corresponds to our own present day reality. In order to recognise the actual reality behind the smoke-screen of machine description, people have to take a certain pill. It thus implies making a deliberate decision to confront reality. In one of the key scenes of the movie, the protagonist "Neo" is confronted with the decision to either take a blue pill, which allows him to keep living in the fake reality created by the machines or take a red pill that allows him to see reality proper. Neo, it goes without saying, decides to take the red pill and becomes the saviour of mankind. It is this key scene that circulated widely among Tea Party supporters as a metaphor of conversion to the movement's belief system. The Tea Party website *Renew America* explains how this applies to the movement:

> Insert tea party supporters for those like Neo. They, too, believe truth is being ignored and that life is worth fighting for even when it requires self sacrifice, turmoil and contending with unusually difficult conditions in its defense. Today, the United States has become *the Matrix* of sorts with a good portion of the population oblivious to the dramatic changes to culture and governance by eradication of principles that have held the fabric of this country together for more than 234 years. Those who

[99] In that sense this recognition of the movement's populist logic has to be differentiated from changing ideological preference. As this thesis and a number of quantitative studies show, conservatives constituted the core of Tea Party supporters and members. Statistics about Tea Partiers' partisan and ideological preferences can be found in the work Parker and Barreto (2013, 84) and Zernike (2010a, 226). According the quantitative studies, conducted in 2010 and 2011, movement supporters and member overwhelmingly (and far more often than the national average) declare themselves conservative or very conservatives and supporters of the Republican Party.

> have come out of the matrix and have chosen to take the bitter blue [sic] pill of liberty have only the hope of renewed freedom and a return to what should be — not what is. (Lohmann 2010)[100]

The use of *The Matrix* as conversion metaphor surfaces repeatedly within the Tea Party movement (24th State 2011; Poh 2013; Braunstein 2014, 159). In an article by the editorial board of the conservative news website *24th State* the story is linked the "great awakening of the producers" (24th State 2011). Taking the red pill, according to the authors leads to the recognition that the Tea Party represents 'the people' in a struggle against powerful system run by "progressive" elites.[101] As in Lohmann's article in *Renew America*, the article likens the protagonist to Tea Party supporters and "the Matrix" to a system of exploitation and deception by mainstream media and contemporary politics.

The concept of education appears crucial to this concept of awakening. As discussed in the previous chapter, similar ideas to the *Matrix* metaphor drove groups like FedUpUSA and individuals like Carender to start their own 'educational' projects. The underlying logic was essentially the same: the mainstream media landscape and political elites provide the American public with false information a while plotting to usurp or perpetuate their power and disenfranchise the electorate. "Taking a Red Pill" *24th State* writes, "means first

[100] The author of the article Stella Lohmann ironically mistakes the effect of the blue and the red pill. Apologies for any confusion this might cause.

[101] The article states: "Red Pill questions lead you to conclusions. 1) Politicians aren't smarter than the general population. 2) The elite takes care of itself, no matter what party it claims as its label. 3) A government that can take care of everything for you, can take everything from you. 4) If following the rules demands a bigger price than cheating, only cowards will follow the rules. 5) A small group in a far-off capital does not know what is better for you, and can never be trusted with unchecked power. 6) There aren't that many of them. 7) This isn't a game. The lives and welfare of our children and countrymen are at stake 8) Large bills written in the dead of the night are never written with good intentions. 9) The people who claim politics is about fairness aren't the ones being screwed. 10) In the end, the progressives will resort to force, as all utopians eventually do. This is a battle to prevent them from ever getting close enough to power to turn against us" (24th State 2011).

educating yourself as to how the system works, [...] and if necessary, working together to restore, renew, or replace the system as the public sees fit" (24th State 2011). The idea of awakening thus comes with the responsibility to educate yourself and take political action to achieve – potentially revolutionary or radical – systemic change.

The idea of a responsibility to take political action leads us to an exploration of a second sense of the concept of awakening: awakening through the empowering experience and enjoyment of collective political actions. Studies on social movement dynamics find that protests affect protesters in different ways. This can happen on an emotional level, in the sense that participants develop "affective ties of friendship, love, solidarity, and loyalty" (Jasper 1998, 417) towards each other. According to Jasper (1998, 418) and Protevi (2011) collective rituals – such as the common recital of the pledge of allegiance or the dumping of tea into a nearby river at the February Tea Party protests – as well as singing and chanting triggered a sense of "we-ness" (Jasper 1998, 418) and belonging. Participation thus strengthened collective identity-making and inner-group cohesion. These assumptions are confirmed in the interviews that the Sam Adams Alliance conducted among early Tea Party "adopters":

> Once surrounded by others with the same commitment to transparency, fiscal responsibility, and a greater appreciation for American exceptionalism, the Tea Party people felt something they hadn't up till then: hope. This is reinforced by the strong community Tea Parties provide. Some wrote that the most rewarding aspect of their involvement was 'above all, the friendships.' Others wrote of the 'great people,' 'fellowship,' and how they appreciated 'realizing many others share my beliefs.'" (Sorock 2010, 7).

Feelings of belonging to the Tea Party's collective identity of 'the people' were further accompanied by a sense of political self-worth as participants. As the

protests' contents and rituals suggested to participants that they were defending America itself, their participation was understood as a noble cause. With regard to this sense of empowerment the Sam Adams Alliance's report writes:

> A taste of the empowerment that comes with a political voice left its impact on all of the interviewees. The barriers to entry to involvement, even in a leadership position, were much less pronounced within the nascent Tea Party structure than in the traditional bureaucracy of the Republican Party. Because of this, the Tea Party newcomers were able to take action swiftly – and see the results of their activism. One Tea Party leader described her empowerment with glee as an 'emotional high.' 'Imagine,' she said, "I had never put it together that THEY work for ME.' This connection to the movement was one of the most strongly felt by all, something they all said would be truly wrenching for them to give up, once attained. (Sorock 2010, 7).

The Tea Party, in other words, not only provided participants with a strong sense of community but also with an easy accessible parallel structure to the Republican Party. This parallel structure apparently offered participants a new, less hierarchical, seemingly grassroots-driven experience of a conservatism that in their own view had been controlled by the Republican Party establishment in the most recent past. This idea of a do-it-yourself conservatism might very well be the single most significant success of the movement.

Organisers like Denninger, Rakovich and Carender experienced protest as a means of breaking through individual isolation and as a form of catharsis. Carender described her first Tea Party protest "like this awakening" saying that it felt "so good to be doing something about how frustrated I am" (Zernike 2010a, 19). Being part of the nationwide protests in February and other major Tea Party events in April and September 2009 and thereafter thus signified something to the protesters themselves: that their fears for the future were not delusional but an urgent matter shared by a multitude of likeminded people across the country.

Awakening in the context of these protests went hand in hand with the experience of being able to affect national politics via contribution to a collective project.

Whether triggered by recognising the 'truth' or through the experience of collective political action, the process of awakening constitutes in itself one of the Tea Party movement's key narratives. These Tea Party awakenings were also understood as key moments in people's political lives. They were moments in which they began to recognize the struggle of conservatism as one between true 'people' and political elites and began to implement political change seemingly outside partisan and electoral politics through community organising and collective political action. Due to their importance to mobilisation, narratives of personal awakenings feature regularly in Tea Party literature.[102]

Conclusion

The founding process of the Tea Party movement created a new collective identity. It invented many of the movement's rituals and language, and framed the movement's political struggle along populist lines. As this chapter shows, this founding was a collaborative between organisers, conservative organisations, local Republicans and protesters. Furthermore, constructing 'the people' as Revolutionary patriots resonated with many of the participants. Some scholars go as far to as to call the movement's name its most important political asset (e.g. Lepore 2010, 14; Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 7). During the subsequent months, the Tea Party symbolism and language of founding principles and

[102] In *Tea Party Patriots* (2012), Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin open the book with accounts of their own awakening (1-11). FreedomWorks' Armey and Kibbe use the awakening of Mary Rakovich as the guiding thread throughout their Tea Party "Manifesto" *Give Us Liberty* (2010). Steven Ference's *Voices of the Tea Party* (2010) essentially retells the awakenings of seven moderately prominent Tea Party activists.

constitutionality also proved flexible enough to accommodate other conservative groups, most notably the Christian Right and nativist, anti-immigrant groups (Burghart and Zeskind 2010).

At the same time the Tea Party gave (mostly) disoriented and disillusioned conservatives a new home and a platform from which to express their discontent with the political system and liberal politics. Framing conservative politics in a language of constitutionalism, founding principles and rights gave protesters the opportunity to put a distance between themselves and the then highly unpopular GOP and a toxic Bush legacy that was still fresh in people's minds. Using the language of constitutionalism and American values left the biggest impression on the Tea Party protesters and supporters themselves. According to a poll conducted in April 2010 by *New York Times* and CBS, 84 per cent of Tea Party supporters believed that the views of the Tea Party reflected the views of "most Americans" (Zernike 2010a, 218).

The Tea Party protests also had a number of effects that were in other ways connected to the movement's identity. The protests gave people a sense of purpose, empowerment and community. Organising and staging protests also contributed to forging new alliances and connecting the movement with other groups and organisations who saw an advantage in being associated with the Tea Party's grassroots fervour. People who joined the Tea Party's community of believers through the protests were also more likely to engage in the movement's further political actions, building local networks and contributing to electoral campaigns (Madestam et. al. 2013). The Tea Party protests' grassroots support also delegitimized Obama's reform agenda and provided the GOP with new, desperately needed political momentum (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 160). For

a while the Tea Party movement's protests were thus able to reinvent American conservatism as a bottom-up phenomenon, as a cause of the American people.

Given these multiple effects of protest, it is only logical that the movement chose to express itself primarily through protests during the first year of its existence. Other protests followed soon after the February 27 rallies, on April 15 and July 4, drawing ever more people into the movement. The Tea Party's march on Washington on September 12, 2009 became the single biggest conservative protest in American history. Tea Party literature emphasised the symbolic value of the movement's protests and retrospectively recounted the early protest phase of the movement as a heroic tale of Americans' awakening to the tyranny of government (Armey and Kibbe 2010; O'Hara 2010; Meckler and Martin 2012).

Chapter Six – Conclusion: The Tea Party's Populist Revolution

Vindicating the Right explains the origins and the emergence of the Tea Party movement through the analytical lens of populism. In constructing this explanation this thesis pursued two guiding hypotheses. The following pages demonstrate how this thesis validates these hypotheses and describe how the Tea Party movement's populist origins influenced its further development.

The first hypothesis states that the Tea Party movement can be classified alongside other recent right-wing populist movements that have occurred in other liberal democracies. Existing scholarship claims that populism is a response to a sense of crisis (e.g. Taggard 2000; Lalcau 2007). In liberal democracies this sense of crisis is often caused by a democratic malaise and disillusion with political representation. The causes of this malaise are often linked to the inability of established parties to respond sufficiently to the preferences of a country's citizens and declining trust in democratic institutions (Meny and Surel 2002b). Panizza terms this kind of crisis a "crisis of representation" (2005, 11). Populist movements and parties exploit the simmering resentment toward political elites resulting from this sense of crisis and offer simplistic solutions by constructing politics as a struggle between a virtuous 'people' and an undemocratic 'elite.' Whether the policies through which populist movements propose to reinstate the will of 'the people' can be associated with the Left or the Right of the political spectrum depends on the specific political context out of which these movements emerge. Chapters two and five address this assumption and confirm the populist nature of the Tea Party movement. These chapters, furthermore, explain why in

the case of the Tea Party movement the populist response to an American crisis of representation originated in the political Right.

Chapter two argues that the Tea Party movement emerged out of a complex constellation of crises. An increasingly polarised and hostile political climate had shattered many Americans' faith in the federal government's ability and willingness to solve the pressing problems facing them in their day to day lives. Rising inequality – economic and political – represented an increasing threat to social cohesion. In this already unstable environment a number of corruption scandals further eroded popular trust in government. Costly and increasingly unpopular foreign wars and tax cuts had transformed the budget surplus inherited by the Bush administration into a huge deficit. By the end of Bush's time in office an overheated real estate market had collapsed and dragged the American economy down with it, leading the country into a serious recession. As a result, anti-elitist, anti-government sentiments became an omnipresent feature of American political culture of the early 2000s.

Throughout 2008 the hapless Bush administration, whose deregulation of the financial sector had substantially contributed to the financial crisis, relied on a bipartisan coalition in Congress to 'bail out' troubled banks, causing outrage across the political spectrum. For many people, the bailouts were nothing more than a form of corporate welfare and only seemed to confirm the suspicion that the government exclusively responded to elite corporate interests. While people on the Left saw bailouts as the epitome of inequality and injustice, critics on the Right saw them as a betrayal of conservative principles. The near collapse of the American economy, however, signified more than a threat to the livelihood of

millions of Americans. The validity of capitalism and conservative economics was thrown into question for many Americans.

The multi-layered crisis of the US affected conservatives more profoundly than other political groups. By the time of the 2008 elections, conservatism itself stood on trial. Republican candidates sought to respond to the rising feelings of resentment and anti-elitism among voters by employing a variety of populist, anti-elitist campaign strategies. While most candidates sought to present themselves as Washington outsiders, maverick reformers and Wall Street sceptics, the most notable candidacy was Ron Paul's. Paul iconoclastic campaign platform not only represented an attempt to redirect the GOP towards the principles of "the founding fathers", it also showed the potential for mass mobilisation of a conservative populism based on libertarian ideas. His conception of populism – "The only us-versus-them thinking in which we might indulge is the people […] versus the government" (Paul 2008, 66) – anticipated a key component of the Tea Party's own populism. Yet neither Paul's libertarianism, Palin's cultural anti-liberalism nor McCain's moderate conservatism could win over the American electorate. The election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States was the culmination of a series of crises in American conservatism and left the conservative cause without direction or an identifiable leader.

As this thesis argues, the emergence of the Tea Party and its distinct form of populism must be seen within the context of this complex crisis scenario. The culture of resentment toward the elites, democratic dissatisfaction and conservative crisis created an opening in the social fabric of the Republican Party for a populist discourse that addressed these underlying issues. The Tea Party did exactly that. It did so by arguing that restoring faith in the country's democratic

institutions and recuperating a 'true' capitalism and conservatism were inextricably linked. While "real" capitalism was presented as the only viable alternative to cronyism and perceived political inequality, a conservatism based on presumed constitutional or founding principles, assumed the role of a centrist consensus capable of uniting people at a time of high political polarization within Tea Party discourse.

The true strength of the Tea Party movement was that it expressed to its supporters something important and real. As chapter two shows, academic literature published during the Bush era argued that American democracy was indeed in a state of crisis and that this crisis was related to the diminishing power of citizens to influence national politics. Colin Crouch's *Post-Democracy* (2004), for instance, argued that proper democratic processes had deteriorated to the point that they had become mere formalities, reduced to election cycles managed by specialists and financed by powerful economic interests. Before the emergence of the Occupy movement, the Tea Party was the only recent form of mass mobilisation in America that sought to address this issue, no matter how inadequate its proposed solutions.

The popularity of the Tea Party movement, however, was also based on its capability to appeal to two relatively large constituencies: the first was the disoriented conservative base that felt betrayed by the Republican establishment but who had remained loyal to conservative principles. The second constituency was a section of the American population that resented the establishments of both major parties, felt voiceless, and feared the erosion of popular sovereignty caused by an alliance between corporate elites and the political class. Both of these constituencies opposed the 2008 bailout of the financial sector and the Obama

administration's stimulus spending and longed for a restoration of 'truly' democratic governance. These voters saw in the Tea Party a movement that simultaneously promised the democratic restoration they longed for and a return to conservative principles (cf. Braunstein 2014; Meyer and Pullum 2014).

Chapter five explains how organisers recast the Tea Party movement's conflicting impulses into a new and populist collective identity. The starting point for this consolidation was little more than a chance event: Santelli's 2009 rant on the CME trading floor in Chicago. Santelli's rant, which was carried live by CNBC, saw the journalist rail against the bailouts, the "government," "Washington economists," and "President Obama" in the name of the "silent majority" of "capitalists" and the "founding fathers" (Santelli 2009). This broadcast resonated immediately with thousands of disoriented conservatives across the country. His call for a "Chicago Tea Party" gave bailout opponents and conservative grassroots organisers a name and a common rallying point. Laclau (2007) highlighted the importance of such seemingly random events for the creation of populist identities in his concept of "radical investment" (110), while Formisano (2012) argues that that the Santelli rant functioned as the "Rosa Parks moment" (24) of the Tea Party.

The day after Santelli's intervention a group of minor conservative organisers with access to a number of leading conservative institutions began to capitalise on the popularity of the Tea Party metaphor and founded the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition, the first hub of local organisers. This coalition was central to the organisation of the first Tea Party protests on February 27, 2009, significant events in the history of the burgeoning movement. Conservative organisers made a deliberate effort to integrate the bailout and Stimulus issue into the larger

political current of (fiscal) conservatism, framing the protests as a struggle for rights, representation, constitutionalism, and American founding principles. The Tea Party idea was used to connect these otherwise diverse elements of conservative politics and democratic claims.

The protests on February 27 provided a platform for all those who opposed government bailouts and stimulus measures, disoriented conservatives, and those who wanted to express their dissatisfaction with national politics and their resentment towards political and economic elites. Messages of fiscal conservatism that focussed on spending, taxation and debt mingled with resentment of Wall Street, the Obama administration, and the political class. The protests also showed that the nascent Tea Party identity was a collaborative effort between organisers, conservative organisations and protesters. All these groups proved resourceful in their claims to represent 'the people' in various forms, including speeches, signs, and rituals. The extent to which the idea of the Tea Party took hold at these protests must have been surprising even for the organisers. Defending conservative principles in the name of American values and constitutional principles proved immensely popular. It gave conservatives the chance to promote their views while maintaining a symbolic distance between themselves and the troubled state of mainstream conservatism and the Republican Party. Conservatism itself, however, remained legitimate because it represented American values, the founders' intentions for the Constitution and, above all, the will of the people. For participants the protests constructed an articulation of popular will and delegitimised government policies.

For them the 2009 protests also marked a collective "awakening" of Americans to the 'reality' of 21st century governance. This 'reality' held that a socialist

conspiracy – primarily orchestrated by the Democratic Party but tolerated by a complacent GOP – had taken hold of national politics; that the government had become unresponsive to the presumed will of the American people and pursued policies that privileged corporate interests and undeserving 'free loaders' over hardworking Americans. The Tea Party movement presented a 'pure' capitalism as a viable alternative to what they perceived as blatant government cronyism and the un-democratic imposition of contemporary liberalism.

The second hypothesis of this thesis states that the Tea Party movement was an integral part of American conservatism's hegemonic project. As discussed in the introduction, the concepts of hegemony and populism are closely linked (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1989; Laclau 2007) in the sense that populism functions a means to express conservatism's hegemonic claims (cf. Kazin 1998). Populism was used to persuade Americans to join the conservative cause by claiming that the conservative ideology represented 'the people' in their struggle against the un-American policies of American liberalism.

The conservative crisis of 2008, however, had put the survival of conservatism as a hegemonic force into question. The Democratic takeover of Congress and the White House seemed to signal a genuinely progressive moment or even a new political realignment that would permanently displace conservatism as a political force in US politics. At the time analysts took the "broad, cross-regional, and multiracial coalition" (Skocpol 2012, 3) that supported Obama and the Democrats in 2008 as a sign of a new, lasting majority consensus in favour of an activist government and policies that favoured the economic interests of lower and middle income Americans. At the same time even sympathetic voices saw American conservatism as "outmoded" and "disconnected from the realities now besetting

America" (Tanenhaus 2009, 4). It seemed hardly the time to vindicate traditional conservatism or capitalism.

A central element that helped to renew conservatism's hegemonic claims was the gradual takeover of the anti-bailout cause by the Tea Party movement. Chapter three argues that bailout opposition functioned during the early days of the Tea Party movement as an "empty signifier" that expressed a larger populist struggle of the American people against the power of unaccountable economic and political elites. Among the first to realise the potential of the bailout issue for the construction of a new conservative populism were libertarian organisations like FreedomWorks. FreedomWorks understood that the anti-bailout sentiment could be used to mobilise Americans, regardless of their previous ideological commitments, in defence of free market capitalism. The appropriation of the anti-bailout cause started at the centres of power of the growing conservative movement. Opposition was expressed by Republicans in Congress, conservative media organisations, think tanks and advocacy groups. Through the conservative media, libertarian-conservative networks and conservative movement entrepreneurs the conservative anti-bailout cause reached the periphery of grassroots level conservatism.

This process also marked a paradigmatic shift away from Bush's "compassionate" establishment conservatism towards a more libertarian fiscal conservatism. As the study conducted by the *National Review* and *American Thinker* shows, in the second half of 2008 conservatives began to argue that the bailouts were incompatible with 'true' capitalism and conservatism. Rather, Obama's commitment to continue the bailouts suggested that the bailouts and, by extension, the whole Stimulus Package were a natural part of 'the Left's' neo-Keynesian,

macro-economic thinking. The anti-bailout cause thus became a central part of conservatism's new populist crusade against the supposed inherent cronyism of American liberalism. The context of the economic crisis, a fiscal crisis (caused to a large extent by the GOP itself) and the bailouts of corporate businesses paved the way for a temporary shift of priorities within the Republican Party, a shift away from social issues and towards a reaffirmation of fiscal conservatism and the gospel of the libertarian free market.

Chapter four analyses three anti-Stimulus protest actions from February 2008 which are some of the very earliest Tea Party protests. This chapter shows the link between the hegemonic project of the mainstream American Right and Tea Party populism. These proto-Tea Party protests, which took place before the movement was 'officially' launched, document a number of important facets of the transition from predominantly elite-driven dissent to actual grassroots activism as well as the formation of a new populist collective identity. The stories of Tea Party organisers Karl Denninger, Mary Rakovich and Keli Carender are in many respects revealing. To different degrees all three were drawn into the world of political action by their outrage at government bailout policies which they considered the ultimate representations of cronyism and political inequality. Based on these assumptions they constructed a populist view on politics, describing the prime political confrontation of their time as one of disenfranchised American 'people' and a power elite conspiracy against the public interest. Interestingly all three considered themselves to be isolated, marginal figures whose primary task was to 'educate' the American people about the true extent of their own disenfranchisement and how the elite have hijacked the democratic

process. In organising and protesting they sought to break through this perceived isolation and connect with people who shared their convictions.

The case studies in this chapter also demonstrate how people with very different levels of commitment to movement conservatism became early supporters and organisers of the Tea Party. While Rakovich and Carender were dedicated Republicans who saw their efforts as the beginning of conservative grassroots resurgence, Denninger and his group FedUpUSA took a more non-partisan position. This had repercussions for how each of them constructed 'the people' and their adversaries. Rakovich's and Carender's populism incorporated a strong anti-liberal element. And, despite their insistence that championed a popular cause that affected everyone, their struggle between 'people' and 'elites' coincided largely with a struggle of 'true' conservatives against Democratic governance. Denninger, on the other hand, saw a far-reaching conspiracy of economic, political and media elites that functioned independently of party politics. His populism featured progressive elements which were absent from the other two case studies. However, he was willing to cooperate with whoever opposed those he saw as the enemies of American democracy.

The story of the Tea Party's founding is also a story that illustrates the social reproduction of ideology. The movement was inextricably linked to the hegemonic project of conservatism. The growth and development of the Tea Party demonstrates American conservatism's ability to survive as an ideology, even under adverse circumstances. Conservatism survived the era of the New Deal, the end of the Cold War, and the economic crisis of 2008. This capacity for survival depended on its ability to redefine itself and to use populism to connect with large sections of the American population. The Tea Party united powerful conservative

organisations, the conservative grassroots and people who resented the power of elites of any kind. What initially connected these disparate groups was the paradoxical idea that capitalism's impartial nature would put an end to both cronyism and the undue influence of economic interests on politics in order to restore American democracy.

The Tea Party, however, was more than a tool of conservative elites. As chapter five demonstrates, the movement's protests and grassroots organising forged a close community of believers that embraced the idea that they were doing nothing less than representing the will of the American people. They "awoke" and began to recognise that 'the people' needed to unite in order to reinstate democratic rule. While for many conservative elites this was mere rhetoric to convince these activists to support their policies, for many Tea Partiers this idea of a 'revolution' became a central part of political life. Populism's idea of 'the people' began to manifest itself at the level tactics and strategy. To an extent we can thus understand the Tea Party's further actions as attempts to represent 'the people' in American politics.

These efforts often reflected the decentralised nature of the Tea Party movement. Within the first months of the movement's existence, Tea Party organisers formed a number of different national organisations: FreedomWorks Tea Party, ResistNet Tea Party, Tea Party Nation, Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Express, 1776 Tea Party and Glenn Beck's 9/12 Project (Burghart and Zeskind 2010). The movement's rapid growth began to attract the attention of the national media (Boykoff and Eulalie 2011; DiMaggio 2011). This was especially true of conservative media organisations, which began to openly support the Tea Party and to promote its events. At the Tax Day Tea Party, popular Fox News hosts

feature among the biggest events' speakers (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 127-38). What was striking about these first few months was that the Tea Party metaphor proved flexible enough to incorporate a variety of groups that had little to do with fiscal conservatism. According to Berlet, the Tea Party soon provided a home to Christian Right activists, anti-taxation groups, Second Amendment Gun Rights activists, "nationalistic ultra-patriot" armed citizen militias, and xenophobic anti-immigrant white nationalists (Berlet 2011, 15). Though some of these groups only operated at the margins of the movement, all of them identified with the idea of defending the nation's founding values; they nominally supported the fiscal focus of the movement; and they resented Obama's reform agenda. As Carender's blog indicates this extension of Tea Party priorities was visible from the beginning.

The early organisers' educational zeal became central part of the movement's activities. Local organisers wrote info mails to group members. Group members distributed self-made newspapers to the public (Braunstein 2014). Other activists handed out pocket Constitutions at events or invited guest speaker who explained the 'real' meaning of the Constitution (Zernike 2010a, 67, 73-80). Many groups spread information on social media platforms and created countless websites (Rohlinger and Klein 2014). This education was often directed at movement members themselves. In other instances Tea Partiers sought to inform the public about the supposedly unconstitutional acts committed by the government. Many Tea Party members were convinced that once people recognised 'truth' - that 'the people' were oppressed by powerful interests - they would rise up and join the movement's ranks (Braunstein 2014). The Tea Party's activities constituted what

Goodwyn (1978) calls “movement culture” (xix): the creation of autonomous institutions, recruitment, education and political action (xviii).

By 2010 the Tea Party had grown into a powerful nationwide movement that had changed the political dynamics in favour of conservatism and the Republican Party. According to a poll conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS News in April 2010, around seventy per cent of Americans had heard about the movement and around twenty per cent held favourable views of the movement or considered themselves supporters (Zernike 2010a, 217-8). The varying degrees of movement support bespoke the immense growth the Tea Party experienced during its first two years: according to estimates by the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights from 2010, the core membership of the Tea Party consisted of around 250,000 people and a “couple of million activists who go to meetings, buy the literature and attend the many local and national protests” (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 8). The wider circle of “Tea Party sympathizers” (Parker and Barreto 2013, 14), included about 45 million Americans.

The Tea Party’s political impact reflected this numerical strength and organisational density. Tea Partiers entered the political system and the structure of the Republican Party structure at all levels from the local precincts to the national arena (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 157-68; Zernike 2010a, 99-119). In the midterm Congressional elections in November 2010, 85 out of 135 Tea Party-endorsed candidates won seats in the House and ten Tea Party favourites entered the Senate (Burghart 2011). By early 2011 dozens of Congressmen and women joined the newly founded Tea Party caucuses in the House of Representatives and the Senate. There is little doubt that the Tea Party movement played a significant role in delivering crucial victories in congressional races, state legislatures and the

governorships across the country (Skocpol 2014). Perhaps the movement's biggest contribution to the GOP success in the midterm elections of 2010 was to change public attitudes towards Obama and the Democrats and its ability to impact the public debate. Skocpol and Williamson concluded that

> the huge media coverage for Tea Party complaints about 'big government' spending and bailouts—not to mention the coverage of dramatic protests about ObamaCare and cap and trade legislation—helped Republicans and conservatives to reset national agendas of debate. People stopped talking about Obama and 'change we can believe in' and started talking about government tyranny. (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 160)

As striking as the Tea Party movement's influence on public opinion might have been, its impact on public policy was even greater. Aided by highly ideological right-wing advocacy groups and power brokers such as the Club for Growth, Americans for Tax Reform and FreedomWorks, the newly elected Tea Party representatives and senators implemented their agenda and style of politics in the 112th Congress (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 171-4). In contrast to conservatives elected before the movement's rise, the Congressional Tea Party class of 2010 had even less taste for compromise. Policed by Tea Party-affiliated advocacy and grassroots groups, this new group of Republicans was set on obstructing or reversing Obama's reform agenda. They not only sought to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) but also attempted to slash government spending and engaged in constant battles against raising the debt ceiling, which culminated in a prolonged government shutdown in the closing months of 2013 (Burghart 2014).

At the state and local level, Tea Party groups and their representatives in state legislatures became active on a variety of issues. What was most notable in many cases was that these local groups and networks expanded their appetite for

political change to include a number of conservative pet issues that had little to do with the movement's self-professed, anti-statist "core values of Fiscal Responsibility, Constitutionally Limited Government and Free Markets" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 21). When, in 2010, the state of Arizona passed the controversial anti-immigration law SB 1070 which provided, among other things, for racial profiling to identify and detain illegal immigrants, Tea Party groups all over the state organised in support (Burghart and Zeskind 2010, 70-1). In Wisconsin in 2011, Tea Party groups came out in support of the newly elected governor Scott Walker, who had begun to wage a furious war against public sector unions and funding for public education. In other states lawmakers and conservative opinion makers revived the idea of "nullification" in order to challenge the implementation of federal laws that contradicted their understanding of constitutionally granted states' rights (Maltsev and Skaskiw 2013, 123-50). Since then, as Meyer and Pullum (2014) write, the "Tea Party label has become an all purpose designation for mobilized opposition to President Obama's political agenda" (2014, 87).

What, however, became of the Tea Party movement's democratic revolution? Seven years after the Tea Party's dramatic founding, the results are meagre. In *Tea Party Patriots* (2012) Mecker and Martin outline a "Forty-Year Plan" to restore the country to its founding principles. This plan includes reforms in economics, the political system, education, judiciary, and culture. Fixing the 'system' appears to mean little more than the rigorous application of free market principles and the transfer of power from the national to the state level. Instead of fighting cronyism and reforming the 'system', the movement became involved in a prolonged civil war between moderate and far-right elements in the Republican Party

(Kabaservice 2012, 390-4). By 2015 the Tea Party movement seemed exhausted. Many Tea Partiers' support for Donald Trump during the primary campaign for the presidential election of 2016 suggests that for many in the movement the uncompromising support for free market capitalism was just a vehicle to express resentment with the political establishment (Lind 2015). Trump, far from being a conservative ideologue, channelled this resentment at the political elite in a nativist direction. In 2009, on the day the Tea Party movement held its first nationwide protests, Michelle Malkin wrote "Fiscal responsibility is the new counterculture" (2009e). In the end, perhaps the Tea Party's commitment to fiscal conservatism was nothing more than this; a temporary political focus that expressed 'the people's' endless fight against the power of the elites.

References

24th State. 2011. "Taking the Red Pill: The Tea Party Outside The Matrix." http://goo.gl/vJXJlW. Accessed: 12.11.2015.

Abramowitz, Alan I. 2012. "Grand Old Tea Party: Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement." In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 195-211. Berkley: University of the California Press.

Amato, John and David Neiwert. 2010. *Over the Cliff: How Obama's Election Drove the American Right Insane.* Sausalito, California: PoliPointPress.

Amenta, Edwin and Yvonne Zylan. 1995. "It Happened Here: Political Opportunity, the New Institutionalism and the Townsend Movement." In *Social Movements: Critiques, Concepts, Case-Studies*, edited by Stanford M. Lyman, 199-233. New York: New York University Press.

Americans for Limited Government. 2015. "About Us." http://goo.gl/vRzvww. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

America Speaks. 2009. "Asheville NC Tea Party." https://goo.gl/BUJK6t. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Armey, Dick and Matt Kibbe. 2010. *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Associated Press. 2009. “Protesters Bemoan Stimulus Funds at Tenn. Capitol.” https://goo.gl/A4RXoy. Accessed: 27.09.2015.

Barnett, Ned. 2009. “Is Obama another FDR?” http://goo.gl/TsAupH. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Bartels, Larry M., Hugh Heclo, Rodney E. Hero and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2005. “Inequality and American Governance.” In *Inequality and American Democracy*, edited by Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Theda Skocpol, 19-87. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

——. 2008. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age.* New York: Princeton University Press.

Beck, Glenn. 2008. “Glenn Beck: Obama’s ties to Ayers.” http://goo.gl/qz5uYy. Accessed: 30.04.2014.

Beck, Glenn. 2009a. “Obama Stimulus Package Really Socialism?” http://goo.gl/f2WnlN. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

——. 2009b. *Glenn Beck’s Common Sense: The Case against an Out-Of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

——. 2015. *It Is about Islam: Exposing the Truth about Isis, Al Qaeda, Iran, and the Caliphate*. New York: Threshold Editions.

Beason, Tyrone. 2010. “Keli Carender Takes Tea Party’s Mixed Messages to the Streets.” http://goo.gl/1a59W7. Accessed: 29.11.2014.

Bedard, Paul. 2010. “Tea Party Wants Palin in 2012.” http://goo.gl/NBOQ8p. Accessed: 17.11. 2013.

Bellah, Robert N. 1967. “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus* 96 (1): 1-21.

Benjamin, Matthew. 2008. “Americans Oppose Bailouts, Favor Obama to Handle Market Crisis.” http://goo.gl/gvHXjg. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

Bennett, George. 2010. “Woman's Year-Ago Protest Launched Tea Party Movement in Florida.” http://goo.gl/GQGwCi. Accessed: 26.07.2014.

Beren, Steve. 2005a. “The Liberal Elite, Paranoia, Moral Values, and the War Against Terrorism (Part 1 of 2).” http://steveberen.com/mv1.html. Accessed: 21.10.2014.

——. 2005b. “The Liberal Elite, Paranoia, Moral Values, and the War Against Terrorism (Part 2 of 2).” http://goo.gl/wU9wHW. Accessed: 21.10.2014.

——. 2014. “Steve Beren – Biography.” http://goo.gl/jhnmsX. Accessed: 21.10.2014.

Berlet, Chip. 2010. “The Roots of Anti-Obama Rhetoric.” *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations* 79(1): 301-19.

——. 2011. “Taking Tea Parties Seriously: Corporate Globalization, Populism, and Resentment.” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 10(1): 11-29.

——. 2012a. “Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement.” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal, and Christine Trost, 47-66. Berkley: University of California Press.

——. 2012b. “Collectivists, Communists, Labor Bosses, and Treason: The Tea Parties as Right Wing Populist Counter-Subversive Panic.” *Critical Sociology* 38(1): 565-87.

Berlet, Chip and Matthew N. Lyons. 2000. *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*. New York: Guilford Press.

Betz, Hans-Georg. 1994. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

Bottari, Mary. 2011. "The Sale of Wisconsin." In *It Started in Wisconsin*, edited by Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, 35-45. London: Verso.

Bowie, Blair and Adam Lioz. 2012. "Auctioning Democracy: The Rise of Super PACs & the 2012Elections." http://goo.gl/t03qAM. Accessed: 12.11.2013.

Boykoff, Jules and Eulalie Laschever. 2011. "The Tea Party Movement, Framing, and the US Media." *Social Movement Studies* 10 (4): 341-366.

Brady, Dave. 2009. "Libertarian Party of Illinois: We Gave Rick Santelli the Idea for the Tax Day Tea Parties." http://goo.gl/d4u31w. Accessed: 12.07.2015.

Brand-Zawadzki, Alex and Dawn Teo. 2010a. "Anatomy of the Tea Party Movement: Sam Adams Alliance." http://goo.gl/i366jk. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

——. 2010b. "Anatomy of the Tea Party Movement: American Liberty Alliance." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alex-brantzawadzki/anatomy-of-the-tea party_b_380626.html. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

——. 2010c. "Anatomy of the Tea Party Movement: RecessRally.com." http://goo.gl/inTbvo. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

Braunstein, Ruth. 2014. "Who are 'We the People'? Multidimensional Identity Work in the Tea Party." In *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*, edited by

Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, 149-73. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Brennan, Mary C. 2008a. *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism.* Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press. Brooks, David. 2000. *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How they Got there.* NewYork: Simon and Schuster.

——. 2008b. "The Palin Rebound." http://goo.gl/Jk7bfP. Accessed: 28.04.2014.

Brunner, Jim. 2011. "Wilbur Unseats Esser as State GOP Chairman." http://goo.gl/qFJDuS. Accessed: 09.12.2014.

Bryanxt. 2009. "Houston Tea Party, February 27, 2009." https://goo.gl/txKfwo. Accessed 30.09.2015.

Buchanan. James M. 2005. *Why I, too, Am not a Conservative: The Normative Vision of Classical Liberalism.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Buchanan, Patrick J. 2004. *Where the Right Went Wrong: How Neoconservatives Subverted the Reagan Revolution and Hijacked the Bush Presidency*. New York: St.Martin's Press.

Buckley, William Jr. 2007. "The Waning of the GOP." *Nation Review* 28(1): 54-5.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2014." Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey." http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Burghart, Devin. 2012. "View from the Top: Report on Six National Tea Party Organisations." In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by

Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 67-97. Berkley: University of the California Press.

Burghart, Devin. 2011. "Mapping the Tea Party Caucus in the 112th Congress". http://goo.gl/FMu8qd. Accessed: 15.01.2016.

——. 2014. "Special Report: The Status of the Tea Party Movement – Part One." http://goo.gl/uBWf6E. Acessed: 15.01.2016.

Burghart, Devin and Leonard Zeskind. 2010. "Tea Party Nationalism: A Critical Examination of the Tea Party Movement and the Size, Scope, and Focus its National Factions." *Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights* (Special Report Fall 2010).

Butler, Judith. 2011. "For and Against Precarity." *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 1(1): 12-13.

Butler, Judith. 2011a. "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street." http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en. Accessed: 12.04.2013.

——. 2011b. "Bodies in Public: Remarks at Zuccotti Park, Okobter 23." In *Occupy! Scenes from Occupied America*, edited by Astra Talyor, Keith Cessen et.al., 192-3. London, UK: Verso.

Calmes, Jackie. 2008. "Obama Asks Bush to Provide Help for Automakers." http://goo.gl/9QQHnr. Accessed: 23.07.2014. Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*. London: Junction Books.

——. 2005. *The People.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Carender, Keli. 2009a. “Solution Revolution.” http://redistributingknowledge.blogspot.com.es/2009/01/solution-revolution.html. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

——. 2009b. “Conservatives Coming out of the Closet – So to Speak.” http://goo.gl/lOaQbh. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009c. “ ‘Odacity’.” http://goo.gl/XFaFb5. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

——. 2009d. “Video to Stop the Porkulus (a.k.a. Stimulus) Bill.” http://goo.gl/scQFJw. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

——. 2009e. “Holy Perpetuation of Power Batman!” http://goo.gl/GxL5J5. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009f. “Let’s Sue Pelosi!! Read On.” http://goo.gl/CTe9ZQ. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009g. “Conservatives, Libertarians, Republicans:” http://goo.gl/SJ49fv. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009h. “IT'S ON!! PRESIDENT'S DAY PROTEST AT WESTLAKE PARK IN SEATTLE!” http://goo.gl/fA0JUl. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009i. “More Reasons to Attend the Protest on Monday.” http://goo.gl/EBjq6F. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

——. 2009j. “Protest Update – New!” http://goo.gl/zchLMb. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009k. “Conservatives + Republican + Libertarian =?” http://goo.gl/fIVjvy. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

——. 2009l. “Seattleites Out There?” http://goo.gl/Si9N2i. Accessed 04.07.2014.

——. 2009m. “More from Rick Santelli.” http://goo.gl/2TrjKh. Accessed: 29.01.2015.

——. 2009n. “Economics 101.” http://goo.gl/Up0GKg. Accessed: 29.01.2015.

——. 2009o. “Tidying Up.” http://goo.gl/3ZcU47. Accessed: 12.09. 2015.

——. 2009p. “Alerts: Universal Healthcare, Gun Bans, Immigration, and Jew-HatingAcademics!” http://goo.gl/eAn8DQ. Accessed: 12.09. 2015.

——. 2009q. “Calm Before the Storm: Tea Paaaarrttyyyyy!” http://goo.gl/SaZbkA. Accessed: 12.09. 2015.

——. 2009r. “Seattle Tea Party Details – Updated.” http://goo.gl/ysjJl4. Accessed: 12.09. 2015.

——. 2009s. “Seattle Tea Party on 2/27” http://goo.gl/6jMdIU. Accessed: 29.01.2015.

——. 2009t. “Glaring Mistakes: Intentional or Accidental? You Decide.” http://goo.gl/B3pnKy. Accessed: 12.09. 2015.

——. 2014. “Redistributing Knowledge.” http://goo.gl/wWj1FL. Accessed: 04.07.2014.

Carey, George W., ed. 2004. *Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*. Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

Carter, Dan T. 1995. *The Politics of Race: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Carter, Joe. 2010. “Is the Tea Party the Next Great Awakening?” http://goo.gl/b4jdlC. Accessed: 22.11.2015.

Cary, Lee. 2008a. “Obama’s Friends and Chicago's New Slums.” http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2008/09/obama_and_south_chicago_slum_d_1.html. Accessed: 09.07.2014.

——. 2008b. “Obama and Daley’s Public Housing Plan.” http://goo.gl/LAFVHe. Accessed: 09.07.2014.

——. 2009. “Awaiting the Awakening of the Forgotten Man.” http://goo.gl/psu4YE. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Cassidy, John. “Anatomy of a Meltdown: Ben Bernanke and the Financial Crisis.” http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/12/01/anatomy-of-a-meltdown. Accessed: 29.01.2016.

Ccubedblogger. 2009a. “Washington Tea Party 2009.” https://goo.gl/2u7vZS. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

——. 2009b. “More from the Washington Tea Party.” https://goo.gl/dSHnVD. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Chicago Sun-Times 2003. “The Movers and Shakers who Brought Chicago into the Internet Age.” http://goo.gl/ROFJqt. Accessed: 26.07.2014.

Christie, Isham. 2011. “Possibility, Universality & Radicality: A Universal Chorus for Emancipation.” *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 1: 19-21.

CIMC. 2008. “Anti Wall Street Bailout Protest / Demonstration Chicago.” https://goo.gl/dbkeBo. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

Citizens for Common Sense and Accountability. 2009. “Stop the Stimulus Madness!” http://goo.gl/E4Ud9A. Accessed: 24.07.2014.

Clementson, Lynette (2003). “Protest Groups Using Updated Tactics to Spread Antiwar Message.” http://goo.gl/9k755m. Accessed: 21.03.2016.

Clerk, United States House of Representatives. 2008. “Final Vote Results for Roll Call 674.” http://goo.gl/ojY6RL. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Coe, Kevin and Michael Reitzes. 2010. “Obama on the Stump: Determinants of a Rhetorical Approach.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40(3): 391-413.

Congressional Budget Office. 2009. “The Troubled Asset Relief Program: Report on Transactions Through December 31, 2008.” http://goo.gl/7v9xY9. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Cooper, Sharon and Chuck Asay. 2009. *Taxpayer’s Tea Party: How to Become Politically Active – and Why*. Riverdale, NY: Baen Publishing Enterprises.

Cowie, Jefferson R. 2010. *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* New York: The New Press.

Cragun, Ryan and Deborah Cragun, et al. 2008. *Introduction to Sociology*. Online Publication: Blacksleet River.

Critchlow, Donald T. 2007. *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Crouch, Colin. 2004. *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Davis, Mike. 2013. “The Last White Elections?” *New Left Review* 79(1): 5-52.

Davis, Susan. 2008. “Anti-Bailout Sentiment Builds Online.” http://goo.gl/6D4kEF. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

Dazey, Byron. 2009. “Anti-Porkulus Protest in Seattle Feb 16, 2009.” http://goo.gl/ILg7l6. Accessed: 12.03.2013.

Decker, Frank, ed. 2006. *Populismus: Gefahr für die Demokratie oder Nützliches Korrektiv?* Wiesbaden, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Dees Illustration Art Work. 2008. “Ron Paul Tea Party.” https://goo.gl/r6OVLE. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

DeMint, Jim. 2011. *The Great American Awakening: Two Years that Changed America, Washington, and Me.* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

Denis, Alex. 2008. “Niceville Man Gets National Attention.” http://www.wjhg.com/home/headlines/29712844.html. Accessed: 26.07.2014.

Dennis317. 2009. “Atlanta Tea Party Feb 27 2009.” https://goo.gl/FpD9tn. Accessed 30.09.2015.

Detroit Free Press. 2009. “Lively Crowd Protests Obama in Lansing.” http://archive.wzzm13.com/print.aspx?storyid=106159. Accessed 27.09.2015.

Diamond, Sara. 1995. *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Diani, Mario and Dough McAdams, eds. 2003. *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DiLorenzo, Thomas. 2013. “The Real Lincoln in His Own Words.” http://archive.lewrockwell.com/dilorenzo/dilorenzo257.html. Accessed: 11.12.2014.

——. 2004. *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda and an Unnecessary War*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

DiMaggio, Anthony. 2011. *The Rise of the Tea Party: Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Dionne, Jr., E.J. 1992. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Dish, Lisa. 2012. “The Tea Party: A ‘White Citizenship’ Movement?” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 133-51. Berkley: University of California Press.

Doherty, Brian. 2007. Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement. Cambridge, Mass.: Public Affairs.

——. 2012. Ron Paul’s Revolution: The Man and the Movement He Inspired. New York: Broadside Books.

Educational Revolution. 2009. “Washington DC New American Tea Party 02-27-09.” https://goo.gl/jyoWiK. Accessed: 30.09.2009.

Factor, Mallory. 2008. “Big Labor’s Billion Dollar Bet on Obama.” http://goo.gl/NzdI4S. Accessed: 09.07.2014.

Fairtax. 2015. “How FAIRtax Works.” https://goo.gl/pNQatS. Accessed: 02.10.2015.

Falcone, Michael. 2009. “The Ghost of John McCain at CPAC.” http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/the-ghost-of-john-mccain-at-cpac/?_r=0. Accessed: 03.12.2015.

——. 2011. “Ron Paul Wins 2011 CPAC Straw Poll, Sarah Palin Finishes a Distant 9th Place.” http://goo.gl/7IaXmC. Accessed: 28.03.2014.

Farah, Joseph. 2003. *Taking America Back: A Radical Plan to Revive Freedom, Morality, and Justice.* Nashville, TN: WDN Books.

——. 2008. “Where was Obama Born?” http://www.wnd.com/2008/11/81964/. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

——. 2010. *The Tea Party Manifesto: A Vision for an American Rebirth.* Washington DC: WND Books.

FedUpUSA. 2014a. “About Us.” http://goo.gl/hksu6i. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

——. 2014b. “Links.” http://goo.gl/K0yX51. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

——. 2024c. “Tools and Resources.” http://goo.gl/lIlvue. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

Fed U. 2013. “FedUpUSA Protest New York City April 25, 2008.” https://goo.gl/hfkDsS. Accessed: 25.07.2014

Ference, Steve. 2010. *Voices of the Tea Party Movement.* No place name given: Lulu.com.

Fetner, Tina and Brayden G. King. 2014. “Three-Layer Movements, Resources, and the Tea Party.” In *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*, edited by Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, 35-54. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Fiorina, Morris P. and Matthew S. Levendusky. 2006. “Disconnected: The Political Class versus the People.” In *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America’s Polarized Politics*, edited by Pietro S. Nivola and David S. Brady, 48-71. Baltimore, MD: Brookings Institution Press.

Foley, Elizabeth Price. 2012. *The Tea Party: Three Principles.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth A. 1994. *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60.* Urbana, Il: University of Illinois Press.

Formisano, Ronald P. 2008. *For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

——. 2010. “Populist Currents in the 2008 Presidential Campaign.” *Journal of Policy History* 22(2): 237-255.

——. 2012. *The Tea Party*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Frank, Thomas. 2005. *What’s the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.

FreedomWorks 2008. “Are you an Angry Renter?”. http://goo.gl/s5xcmh. Accessed: 05.07.2014.

Fuller, Mac. 2008. “Obama Dollars.” http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/09/obama_dollars.html. Accessed: 09.07.2014.

Gallup. 2009. “Presidential Approval Ratings: George W. Bush.” http://goo.gl/yEDxIV. Accessed: 02.01. 2016.

——. 2016. “Government.” http://goo.gl/qjT1uy. Accessed: 03.01.2016.

Galston, William A. And Pietro S. Nivola. “Delineating the Problem.” In *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America’s Polarized Politics*, edited by Pietro S. Nivola and David S. Brady, 1-48. Baltimore, MD: Brookings Institution Press.

Gamson, William A. 2013. “Injustice Frames.” In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam, 607-8. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gates, Jeff. 2001. *Democracy at Risk: Rescuing Main Street from Wall Street, A Populist Vision for the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Gay Stolberg, Sheryl. 2008. “Constituents Make their Bailout Views Known.” http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/25/business/25voices.html. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

Gelner, Kendall. 2009. “Denver Tea Party Feb27 2009: The Denver Chapter of the Protest Against the Stimulus Bill and Spending.” https://goo.gl/3MFff5. Accessed: 01.10.2015.

Gerring, John. 2001. *Party Ideologies in America: 1828-1996*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gilens, Martin. 2012. *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Goldwater, Barry M. 2007 (1960). *The Conscience of a Conservative.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goodwyn, Lawrence. 1978. *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gottfried, Paul. 1993. *The Conservative Movement: Revised Edition.* New York: Twayne Publishers.

Graeber, David. 2009. *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.

Grassfire Solutions Lab. 2015. "Our People." http://grassfirelab.com/us/. Accessed: 16.07.2015.

Graves, Lisa. 2011. "ALEC Exposed: The Koch Connection." http://www.thenation.com/article/alec-exposed-koch-connection/. Accessed: 02.01.2016.

Green, Joshua. 2010. "The Tea Party's Brain." http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/the-tea-partys-brain/308280/. Accessed: 17.07.2013.

Grunwald, Michael. 2012a. *The New New Deal: The Hidden Story of Change in the Obama Era.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

——. 2012b. "The Party of No: New Details on the GOP Plot to Obstruct Obama." http://swampland.time.com/2012/08/23/the-party-of-no-new-details-on-the-gop-plot-to-obstruct-obama/. Accessed: 16.07.2015.

Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2005. *Off Center: The Republican Revolution & the Erosion of American Democracy.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

——. 2011. *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class.* New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.

Hall, Simon. 2011. *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hamsher, Jane. 2009. "A Teabagger Timeline: Koch, Coors, Newt, Dick Armey there from the Start." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jane-hamsher/a-teabagger-timeline-koch_b_187312.html. Accessed: 21.01.2013.

Heartland Institute. 2015. "About." https://www.heartland.org/about. Accessed: 14.07.2015.

Hennen, Scott. 2011. *Grass Roots: A Commonsense Action Agenda for America.* New York: Threshold Editions.

Henry, Devin. 2008. "Ron Paul, Supporters Rally at Target Center." http://www.mndaily.com/2008/09/03/ron-paul-supporters-rally-target-center. Accessed: 27.03.2014

Henry, Ed and Mark Preston. 2005. "Congressman Resigns after Bribery Plea." http://edition.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/11/28/cunningham/. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Hernandez, Raymond and David W. Chen. 2007. "Now a Lobbyist, an Ex-Senator Uses Campaign Money." http://goo.gl/Vb5UmT. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Himmelstein, Jerome L. 1990. *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1964. “The Paranoid Style in American Politics.” http://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/. Accessed: 01.10.2014.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1969. “North America.” In *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, edited by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, 9-27. London: Weiderfeld and Nicolson.

Himmelstein, Jermone L. 1990. *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Hirschfeld Davis, Julie. 2008. “Bailout Bill Slapped aside; Record Stock Plunge.” http://goo.gl/nAmtcn. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Holmes, Steven A. 1992. “The 1992 Campaign: Ross Perot; Perot Plan to Attack Deficit Thrusts Issue at Opponents.” http://goo.gl/ThgqV2. Accessed: 19.11.2013.

Ibbitson, John. 2008. “McCain Invokes 'Joe the Plumber' to Heap Scorn on Obama.” http://goo.gl/1e7nth. Accessed: 02.05.2014.

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Theda Skocpol. 2005. *Inequality and American Democracy*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Jacobsen, Brian. 2009. “Chicago Tea Party.” https://goo.gl/csOxw1. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Jasper, James M. 1998. “The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movement.” *Sociological Forum* 13(3): 397-424.

Johndoereport. 2009a. “Tea Party San Diego 02/27/2009 Part 1.” https://goo.gl/Pxsev7. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Johndoereport. 2009b.“Tea Party San Diego 02/27/2009 Part 2.” https://goo.gl/zjgNGl. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Kabaservice, Geoffrey. 2012. *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kazin, Michael. 1998. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Kazin, Michael. 2010. “From Hubris to Despair: George W. Bush and the Conservative Movement.” In *The Presidency of George W. Bush: A First Historical Assessment*, edited by Julian E. Zelizer, 282-302. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kazin, Michael. 2011. *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Keller, Bill. 2013. “The Right Gets Its ‘60s.” http://goo.gl/DweRMt. Accessed: 30.09.2013.

Kibbe, Matt. 2012. *Hostile Takeover: Resisting Centralized Government’s Stronghold on America.* New York: William Morrow.

Kibbe, Matt. 2014. “About Us.” http://www.freedomworks.org/about/about-freedomworks. Accessed: 27.07.2014

Kirsch, Richard. 2011. “We Are the 99%: A Progressive Narrative in One Powerful Phrase.” http://usaction.org/2011/10/we-are-the-99-a-progressive-narrative-in-one-powerful-phrase/. Accessed: 24.06.2015.

Kissel, Chris. 2009. “Republicans Gather in Westlake to Protest Stimulus Package.” http://goo.gl/omHcF5. Accessed: 10.12.2014.

Kitchelt, Herbert. 2002. “Popular Dissatisfaction with Democracy: Populism and Party System.” In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Meny, and Yves Surel, 179-96. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

Koen, Bryan. 2009. “St. Louis Tea Party.” https://goo.gl/yj5uIZ. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Krauthammer, Charles. 2009. “The Fierce Urgency of Pork.” http://goo.gl/MdAgJN. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Kristol, Irving. 1995 (1975a). “Business and the ‘New Class’.” In *Neoconservatism: The Autobiograpphy of an Idea*, edited by Irving Krisol, 205-210. New York: The Free Press.

——.1995 (1975b). “Corporate Capitalism in America.” In *Neoconservatism: The Autobiograpphy of an Idea*, edited by Irving Krisol, 205-210. New York: The Free Press.

——. 1995 (1976). “The Republican Future.” In *Neoconservatism: The Autobiograpphy of an Idea*, edited by Irving Krisol, 205-210. New York: The Free Press.

——. 2003. “The Neoconservative Persuasion.” http://goo.gl/Vi4rAi. Accessed: 21.09.2013.

Kudlow, Larry. 2008. “Tarp the TARP.” http://goo.gl/hPsVTW. Accessed: 07.07.2014.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. 1989. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. “Populism: What’s in a Name?.” In *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Francisco Panizza, 32-49. London: Verso.

——. 2007. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Last, Jonathan V. 2009. “A Growing ‘Tea Party’ Movement?” http://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-growing-tea-party-movement/. Accessed: 14.09.2015.

Leahy, Michael Patrick. 2015. “Biography.” http://www.michaelpatrickleahy.com/biompl.html. Accessed: 16.07.2015.

Leahy, Michael Patrick. 2009a. “#TCOT and online Conservatives Launch Nationwide Chicago Tea Party Friday February 27 at Noon.” http://michaelpatrickleahy.blogspot.com.es/2009/02/tcot-and-online-conservatives-launch.html. Accessed: 17.09.2015.

——. 2009b. “Nationwide Chicago Tea Party Flyer with the Founding Fathers.” http://goo.gl/2lu6Fh. Accessed: 17.09.2015.

——. 2009c. “Nationwide Chicago Tea Party Flyer.” http://goo.gl/uEtFF5. Accessed: 17.09.2015.

——. 2009d. “Nationwide Chicago Tea Party Anti-Socialism Poster from the #TCOT Creative Wizard.” http://goo.gl/QiQ96S. Accessed: 17.09.2015.

——. 2009e. “Nationwide Chicago Tea Party Poster with Important Dates from the TCOT Creative Wizard.” http://goo.gl/yOzifW. Accessed: 17.09.2015.

Leahy, Michael Patrick. 2012. *Covenant of Liberty: The Ideological Origins of the Tea Party Movement*. New York: Broadside Books.

Lehman Schlozman, Kay, Benjamin I. Page, Sidney Verba and Morris P. Fiorina. 2005. “Inequalities of Political Voice.” In *Inequality and American Democracy*, edited by Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Theda Skocpol, 88-155. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Leibovich, Mark. 2009. “‘Socialism!’ Boo, Hiss, Repeat.” http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/01/weekinreview/01leibovich.html Accessed: 23.11.2015.

Lepore, Jill. 2010. *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party’s Revolution and the Battle over American History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

LiberTBelle. 2009. The Truth about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.” http://goo.gl/l8iGCN. Accessed: 07.07.2014.

Libit, Daniel. 2010. “For the Tea Party Movement, Sturdy Roots in the Chicago Area.” http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/us/19cncodom.html. Accessed: 05.07.2014.

Lind, Michael. 2012. “The Conservative Welfare State” http://www.salon.com/2012/07/17/the_conservative_welfare_state/. Accessed: 16.09. 2013.

——. 2015. “How Trump Exposed the Tea Party.” http://goo.gl/aIt6ii. Accessed: 12.10.2015.

Lo, Clarence. Y. H. 2012. “Astroturf versus Grass Roots: Scenes from Early Tea Party Mobilization.” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal, and Christine Trost, 98-129. Berkley: University of California Press.

Lohmann, Stella. “Tea Party Movement: Coming out of the ‘Matrix’.” http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/lohmann/100405. Accessed: 12.11.2015.

Lowndes, Joseph. 2005. “From Founding Violence to Political Hegemony: The Conservative Populism of George Wallace.” In *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Francisco Panizza, 144-71. London: Verso.

——. 2008. *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

——. 2012. “The Past and Future of Race in the Tea Party Movement.” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal, and Christine Trost, 152-70. Berkley: University of California Press.

Lueck, Sarah and Michael Phillips. “Lawmakers Weigh Political Risks of Stance on Bailout Plan.” http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122240070857178281. Accessed: 01.08.2015.

MacGillis, Alec. 2014. “Tea Party Populism Is Dead: The GOP Is back in Bed with Wall Street.” https://newrepublic.com/article/120065/midterms-are-exploding-myths-anti-wall-street-tea-party-republicans Accessed: 10.01.2016.

Madestam Andreas, Daniel Shoag, Stan Veuger, and David Yanagizawa-Drott. 2013. "Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128(4): 1633-85.

Mair, Peter. 2002. "Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy." In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Meny, and Yves Surel, 81-98. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

Malkin, Michelle. 2009a. "Taxpayer Revolt: Porkulus Protest in Seattle, Obama to Sign Theft Act in Denver." http://michellemalkin.com/2009/02/15/taxpayer-revolt-porkulus-protest-in-seattle/. Accessed: 16.07.2014.

——. 2009b. "Rebel Yell: Taxpayers Revolt Against Gimme-Mania." http://goo.gl/EBY81x. Accessed: 16.07.2014.

——. 2009c. "Scenes from the D.C. Tea Party; Updated, Vid Added." http://goo.gl/eQ3Whc. Accessed: 24.09.2015.

——. 2009d. "'Yes, we Care!' Porkulus Protesters Holler back Updated." http://goo.gl/4ZHwo5. Accessed: 16.07.2014.

——. 2009e. "Tea Party Photo Album: Fiscal Responsibility Is the New Counterculture."http://michellemalkin.com/2009/02/27/fiscal-responsibility-is-the-new-counterculture/. Accessed: 16.07.2014.

Maltsev, Yuri and Roman Skaskiw. 2013. *The Tea Party Explained: From Crisis to Crusade*. Chicago: Open Court.

Mamudi, Sam. 2008. "Lehman Folds with Record $613 Billion Debt." http://www.marketwatch.com/story/lehman-folds-with-record-613-billion-debt. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Mann, Lucas. 2008. “Main Street Marches on Wall Street.” http://www.thenation.com/article/main-street-marches-wall-street#. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Marcus, Ruth. 2008. “Pivoting to Populism.” http://goo.gl/wxSGp3. Accessed: 24.03.2014

Mayer, Jane. 2010. “Covert Operations: The Billionaire Brothers who are Waging a War against Obama.” http://goo.gl/vJYR2s. Accessed: 14.09 2011.

McAdams, Doug and Sidney Tarrow. 2010. “Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal relationship between Elections and Social Movements.” *Perspectives on Politics* 8(2): 529-42.

McGirr, Lisa. 2001. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right.* Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

McKinley, James. 2010. “DeLay Is Convicted in Texas Donation Case” http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/25/us/politics/25delay.html. Accessed: 21.11.2012.

McLane, David. 2008. “America Says ‘No’ to Bush Bailouts.” http://goo.gl/jrngFx. Accessed: 01.08.2015.

McVeigh, Rory. 2014. “What’s New about the Tea Party Movement.” In *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*, edited by Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, 15-34. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Mead, Walter Russell. 2011. “The Tea Party and American Foreign Policy: What Populism Means for Globalism.” *Foreign Affairs* 90(2): 28-44.

Meckler, Mark and Jenny Beth Martin. 2012. *Tea Party Patriots: The Second American Revolution.* New York: Henry Hold and Company.

Meny, Yves and Yves Surel, eds. 2002a. *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

——. 2002b. "The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism." In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Meny, and Yves Surel, 1-21. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

Merchant, Norman. 2009. "Ex-Congressman Traficant Freed." http://goo.gl/yYUYtf. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and Political Opportunities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30(4): 125-45. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110545.

—— and Amanda Pullum. 2014. "The Tea Party and the Dilemmas of Conservative Populism." In *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*, edited by Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, 73-95. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

—— and Sidney Tarrow, eds. 1998. *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

miccinelli1. 2008. "Anti Wall Street Bailout Protest, Syracuse, NY." https://goo.gl/4Zo88k. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Milbank, Dana. 2010. *Tears of a Clown: Glenn Beck and the Tea Bagging of America*. New York: Doubleday.

—— and Jim Vandehei. 2004. “From Bush, Unprecedented Negativity.” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A3222-2004May30.html. Accessed: 22.11. 2012.

Montgomery, Peter. 2012. “The Tea Party Movement and the Religious Right Movements: Frenemies with Benfits.” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 242-74. Berkley: University of California Press.

Moore, Stephen. 2004. “Defend the Bush Economy, Stupid!” *National Review* 5(1): 12-4.

Moreno, Sylvia. 2004. “3 DeLay Workers Indicted in Texas.” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39563-2004Sep21.html. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Moran, Rick. 2008. “'It's not your Money' GOP Rep. Says of Bailout Cash.” http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2008/11/its_not_your_money_gop_rep_say.html. Accessed: 11.07.2014.

Mudde, Cas. 2004. “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39(4): 542–63.

——. 2015. “The Problem with Populism.” http://goo.gl/FLSYrs. Accessed: 12.03.2016.

Nader, Ralph. 2000. “Statement of Ralph Nader, Announcing His Candidacy for the Green Party’s Nomination for President.” https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/n/nader-reader.html. Accessed: 30.09.2014.

Nash, George H. 1996. *The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945.* Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

Newport, Frank. 2012. "Congress Approval Ties All-Time Low at 10%." http://www.gallup.com/poll/156662/congress-approval-ties-time-low.aspx. Accessed: 13.11. 2012.

News Press. 2009. "REACTION: Gateway Charter students' letters delivered to Obama." http://goo.gl/dGIfXh. Accessed: 26.07.2014.

New York Times. 2009. "'Porkulus'." http://goo.gl/WfRAJk. Accessed: 10.07.2014.

Nivola, Pietro S. and David W. Brady. 2006. *Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics.* Baltimore, MD: Brookings Institution Press.

No Compromise. 2014. "No Compromise When You're Right!" https://gto7.wordpress.com/. Accessed: 19.07.2014.

——. 2009. "Craig Winn from Prophet of Doom Is My Guest Tonight." http://goo.gl/s6jquM. Accessed: 19.07.2014.

Noonan, Peggy. 2008. "Breaking up Is Hard to Do." http://goo.gl/U5tu0S. Accessed: 07.03.2014

Norfleet, Nicole. 2010. "Thousands Rally to Support Health-Care Reform in Downtown Washington." http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/09/AR2010030903877.html. Accessed: 24.06.2015.

O'Beirne, Kate. 2007. "Wars Budgetary and Military." *Nation Review* 22(2): 18-20.

Ociepka, Beata, ed. 2005. *Populism and Media Democracy.* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego: Wroclaw.

O'Connor, Anahad. 2009. "Mr. Wilders Goes to Washington." http://goo.gl/PbIP84. Accessed: 18.07. 2014.

O'Hara, John M. 2010. *A New American Tea Party: The Counterrevolution against Bailouts, Handouts, Reckless Spending, and More Taxes.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Oregon Faith Report. 2010. "Poll Examines Tea Party Faith Values." http://goo.gl/CPEIJy. Accessed: 25.11.2013.

O'Rourke, P.J. 2009. "The Next Big Stink." http://goo.gl/TEf4Xn. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Ostrowski, James. 2010. *Direct Citizen Action: How We Can Win the Second American Revolution without Firing a Shot.* Buffalo, NY: Cazenovia Books.

O'Sullivan, John. 2003. "Where We Stand: the Situation in Iraq, and how to Go forward." *Nation Review* 29(2): 18-20.

——. 2006. "Bush's New Conservatism." *Nation Review* 27(1): 18-20.

Oulette, Laurie. 2012. "Branding the Right: The Affective Economy of Sarah Palin." *Cinema Journal* 51(4): 185-91.

Page, Susan. 2009. "Public Mixed on Stimulus Package." http://goo.gl/7mCPol. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Palin, Sarah. 2009. *Going Rogue: An American Life.* New York: Harper Collins.

Palmer, Anna and Manu Raju. 2010. "Jim DeMint Back at War with Republicans." http://goo.gl/cD6FWr. Accessed: 19.07.2013.

Panizza, Francisco, ed. 2005a. *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso.

——. 2005b. "Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy." In *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Francisco Panizza, 1-31. London: Verso.

Parker, Christopher S. and Matt A. Barreto. 2013. *Change they Can't Believe in: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Patterson, James T. 2010. "Transformative Economic Policies: Tax Cutting, Stimuli, and Bailouts." In *The Presidency of George W. Bush: A First Historical Assessment*, edited by Zelizer, Julian E, 114-38. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Paul, Rand. 2011. *The Tea Party Goes to Washington.* Nashville: Center Street.

Paul, Ron. 2008. *The Revolution: A Manifesto.* New York: Grand Central Publishing.

——. 2009. *End the Fed*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

Paul, Ron. 2003. "The Truth about Neoconservatism." http://goo.gl/3doDyo. Accessed: 27.03.2014.

Patriot Action Network. 2015. “About/Contact.” http://goo.gl/F2etrV. Accessed: 16.07.2015.

Perlstein, Rick. 2009. *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus.* New York: Nation Books.

Pew Research Center. 2008. “57% of Public Favors Wall Street Bailout.” http://goo.gl/abuKch. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

——. 2010. “Was TARP Passed Under Bush or Obama?” http://goo.gl/iXJzZb /. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Phillips, Michael M. 2008. “Mortgage Bailout Infuriates Tenants (And Steve Forbes)”. http://goo.gl/5jgajy. Accessed: 05.07.2015.

Philips-Fein, Kim. 2009. *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Pilkington, Ed. 2009. “Republicans Steal Barack Obama's Internet Campaigning Tricks.” http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/18/republicans-internet-barack-obama. Accessed: 05.03.2014

Pilkington, Ed. 2010. “How the Tea Party Movement Began.” http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/05/us-midterm-elections-2010-tea-partymovement. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

Pixelverse. 2009. “Chicago Tea Party 2-27-2009.” https://goo.gl/FTB3cp. Accessed 30.09.2015

Poh, Rob. 2013. “Don’t Take the Blue Pill.” https://www.teapartycommunity.com/blog/3454/don-039-t-take-the-blue-pill/. Accessed: 12.11.2015.

Polanyi, Karl. (1944) 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Politistick. 2015. “The Team.” http://politistick.com/our-team/. Accessed: 07.10. 2015.

Polletta, Francesca and James M. Jasper. 2001. “Collective Identity and Social Movements.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1): 283-305.

Ponnuru, Ramesh. 2005. “Spendaholics.” *Nation Review* 24(3): 32-4.

Postel, Charles. 2012. “The Tea Party in Historical Perspective: A Conservative Response to a Crisis of Political Economy.” In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 23-46. Berkley: University of California Press.

Priester, Karin. 2007. *Populismus: Historische und Aktuelle Erscheinungsformen*. Frankfurt, Germany: Campus Verlag.

Protevi, John. 2011. “Semantic, Pragmatic, and Affective Enactments at OWS.” *Theory and Event* 14(4): Supplement. DOI: 10.1353/tae.2011.0061.

Ramsey, Bruce. 2006. “McDermott Challenger Knows a Little Something about the Left” http://goo.gl/HWiYEh. Accessed: 11.12.2014.

Rasmussen Report. 2009. “Support for Stimulus Package Falls to 37%.” http://goo.gl/MVe2Bw. Accessed: 24.07.2014.

Rasmussen, Scott and Douglas Schoen. 2010. *Mad as Hell: How the Tea Party Movement Is Fundamentally Remaking Our Two-Party System.* New York: HarperCollins Publisher.

Reeve, Elspeth. 2011. "Why Doesn't the Tea Party Love Ron Paul?" http://www.thewire.com/politics/2011/12/why-doesnt-tea-party-love-ron-paul/46393/. Accessed: 27.03.2014.

Reitman, Janet. 2014. "The Stealth War on Abortion." http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-stealth-war-on-abortion-20140115. Accessed: 02.01.2016.

Right Web. 2015. "Castle Rock Foundation." http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Castle_Rock_Foundation. Accessed: 24.10. 2015.

Riker, William H. 1988. *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice.* Prospect Heights, Il: Waveland Press, Inc.

Rink, Jason. 2011. *Ron Paul: Father of the Tea Party.* Canada: Variant Press.

Rira. 2011. "Matrix as the Core Element." *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 1(1): 17-18.

Ritzholtz, Barry. 2009. *Bailout Nation: How Greed and Easy Money Corrupted Wall Street and Shook the World Economy*. Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Son.

Rodgers, Daniel T. 1998. *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

——. 2011. *Age of Fracture*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Rohlinger, Deana A. and Jesse Klein. 2014. "From Fervor to Fear: ICT and Emotions in the Tea Party Movement." In *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*, edited by Nella van Dyke and David S. Meyer, 125-48. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Ron Paul Forums. 2008. "Huge Anti Bailout Protest on Wall Street Subject to Mainstream Media BLACKOUT!" http://goo.gl/5vjh9i. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

Rooney, Ben. 2008. "Bailout Foes Hold Day of Protests." http://money.cnn.com/2008/09/25/news/economy/bailout_protests/?postversion=2008092517. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

Rooney, Jay. 2008. "The American Eagle Needs Two Wings to Soar." http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/11/the_american_eagle_needs_two_w.html. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

Rother, Larry. 2008. "Plumber from Ohio Is Thrust into Spotlight." http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/16/us/politics/16plumber.html?_r=0. Accessed: 01.05.2014

RT. 2011. "Tea Party Founder Backs Occupy Wall Street." http://rt.com/usa/tea-occupydenninger-wall-819/. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

Sahadi, Jeanne. 2009. "Obama Unveils First Budget Plan." http://money.cnn.es/2009/02/26/news/economy/obama_budget_outline/index.htm?postversion=2009022619. Accessed: 01.10. 2015.

Sam Adams Alliance. 2009. “Blogivists Moving on.” http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2009-12-05-images-BlogivistsMovingOn.jpg. Accessed: 05.07.2014.

Sandbrook, Dominic. 2011. *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Santelli, Rick. 2009. “Rant for the Ages: CNBC's Rick Santelli Goes Off; Studio Hosts Invoke 'Mob Rule' to Downplay.” http://goo.gl/jbhH8e. Accessed: 10.02.2011.

Savage, Ritchie. 2010. “Populist Elements in Contemporary American Political Discourse.” *The Sociological Review* 58(2): 167-88.

Schmidt, Susan and James V. Grimaldi. 2005. “Lawmakers Under Scrutiny in Probe of Lobbyist.” http://goo.gl/FzHYANl. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Schulman, Bruce J. 2002. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics.* Cambridge MA: Da Capo Press.

—— and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. 2008. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schuparra, Kurt. 1998. *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966.* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Schwalbe, Michael L. and Douglas Mason Schrock. 1996. “Identity Work as Group Process.” *Advances in Group Processes* 13(1): 113-47.

Shlichta, Paul. 2008. “The Stimulus Bill Smells of Turpentine.” http://www.americanthinker.com/2009/02/the_stimulus_bill_smells_of_tu.html. Accessed: Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Silkenat, David. 2015. "From Fusionists to Moral Mondays: The Populist Tradition in North Carolina Politics." *49th Parallel* 37: 1-13.

Simpson, James. 2008. "Barack Obama and the Strategy of Manufactured Crisis." http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/09/barack_obama_and_the_strategy.html. Accessed: 09.07.2014.

Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson. 2012b. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 2012. "Obama's New Deal, Tea Party Reaction, and America's Political Future." In *Obama and America's Political Future*, edited by Theda Skocpol, 1-89. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 2014. "Why the Tea Party's Hold Persists." *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas* 31(1): 9-29.

Skousen, W. Cleon. 2007 (1981). *The 5000 Year Leap: Principles of Freedom 101*. USA (no further place name given): National Center for Constitutional Studies.

Slivinski, Stephen. 2006. *Buck Wild: How Republicans Broke the Bank and Became the Party of Big Government.* Nashville, TN: Nelson Current.

——. 2007. "The Corporate Welfare State: How the Federal Government Subsidizes U.S. Businesses." *The Cato Institute Policy Analysis* 492(1): 1-24.

Smart Girl Politics. 2015. "About." http://www.smartgirlpolitics.com/about/. Accessed: 16.09.2015.

Smith, Ben. 2009. "'Common Purpose'." http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0409/Common_Purpose.html. Accessed: 24.06.2015.

Smithee, Dave. 2008. "Opportunities of an Obama Presidency." http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/11/opportunities_of_an_obama_pres.html. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

Somers, Margaret R. 1994. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23(5): 605-49.

Somers, Margaret R. and Fred Block. 2005. "From Poverty to Perversity: Ideas, Markets, and Institutions over 200 Years of Welfare Debate." *American Sociological Review* 70(1): 260-87.

Sorock, Anne. 2010. "The Early Adopters: Reading the Tea Leaves." *Sam Adams Alliance.*

Soros, George. 1998. *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered*. New York: Public Affairs.

Steinhauser, Brendan. 2009. "How to Organize Your Own 'Tea Party' Protest. http://www.actionisbrewing.com/why_teaparty.html. Accessed: 02.09.2015.

Stelter, Brian. 2011. "In Trying to Debunk a Theory, the News Media Extended Its Life." http://goo.gl/LtnIc0. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

Stewart, Martina. 2008. "Palin Hits Obama for 'Terrorist' Connection." http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/04/palin.obama/. Accessed: 30.04.2014.

Stout, David. 2009. “Ex-Rep. Jefferson Convicted in Bribery Scheme.” http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/06/us/06jefferson.html?_r=0. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Stranahan, Lee. 2012. “The Community-Organizer-in-Chief, Part One: The Alinsky Ethics.” http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Government/2012/07/31/The-Community-Organizer-In-Chief-Part-One-The-Alinsky-Ethics. Accessed: 01.12.2014.

SurgeUSA. 2011. “Photos and videos from the Chicago Tea Party Protest, February 27, 2009.” http://www.surgeusa.org/actions/chicago.htm#video. Accessed: 27.09.2015.

Taggart, Paul. 2000. *Populism*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

——. 2002. “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics.” In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Meny, and Yves Surel, 62-80. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

Taibbi, Matt. 2008. *The Great Derangement: A Terrifying True Story of War, Politics, and Religion at the Twilight of the American Empire.*

——. 2010. “The Truth about the Tea Party.” http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/matt-taibbi-on-the-tea-party-20100928. Accessed: 05.06. 2012.

Tanenhaus, Sam. 2009. *The Death of Conservatism.* New York: Random House.

Taylor, Robert. 2012. “Ron Paul Liberty Movement Will Outlast the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street.” http://www.policymic.com/articles/10787/ron-

paul-liberty-movement-will-outlast-the-tea-party-and-occupy-wall-street. Accessed: 1.07.2013.

Tea Party Patriots. 2011. "Presidential Tele Forum Result." http://www.teapartypatriots.org/presidential-tele-forum-results/. Accessed: 28.03.2014.

Tencer, Daniel. 2010. "Tea Party 'Founder': Palin, Gingrich a 'Joke'." http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2010/10/20/tea-party-founder-slams-tea-party/. Accessed: 25.07.2014.

Thoughts from a Texan. 2009. "The Epic Chicago Tea Party Protest!!! Raise Your Voices!!!" https://goo.gl/UasOxX. Accessed: 30.09.2015

Tilly, Charles. 1975. "Revolutions and Collective Violence." In *The Handbook of Political Science*, edited by Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, 483-555. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

——. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Tindall, George Brown, ed. 1966. "The Omaha Platform: Launching the Populist Party." In *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist* Leaders, 90–96. New York: Harper & Row.

Travis, Shannon. 2011. "Tea Party 'Godmother' Stood Alone at the Beginning." http://goo.gl/nLO13F. Accessed: 26.07.2014.

Trost, Christine and Lawrence Rosenthal. 2012. "Introduction: The Rise of the Tea Party Movement." In *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, edited by Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost, 1-22. Berkley: University of California Press.

Tumulty and Newton-Small. 2008. “Can Congress Build a Better Bailout?” http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1845092,00.html. Accessed: 20.07.2014.

USAction. 2015. “History & Achievements.” http://usaction.org/about-us/history-achievements/. Accessed: 24.06.2015.

U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2011. “Chrysler Repays Outstanding TARP Loans.” http://goo.gl/dehejG. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Vanden Heuvel, Katrina. 2012. “Time to Run for Office, 99 Percenters.” http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/time-to-run-for-office-99-percenters/2012/01/30/gIQAdnHweQ_story.html. Accessed: 24.06.2015.

Van Dyke, Nella and David S. Meyer. 2014. *Understanding the Tea Party Movement*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Viguerie, Richard A. (1981) *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead.* Falls Church, VA: The Viguerie Company.

——. (1984). *The Establishment vs. the People: Is a New Populist Revolt on the Way?* Chicago: Regnery Gateway.

Wagner, Dennis. 2013. “Arizona's ex-Rep. Rick Renzi Gets 3-Year Prison Term.” http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/10/28/rick-renzi-arizona-prison -sentence/3288937/. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Wakefield, Jonathan. 2012. *Saving America: A Christian Perspective of the Tea Party*. Mississippi: Crossover Publications LLC.

Wall Street Journal. 2009a. “A 40-Year Wish List.” http://goo.gl/LGkNaz. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

——.2009b. “Getting to $787 Billion.” http://goo.gl/xvbejM. Accessed: 23.07.2014.

Ware, Alan. 2002. “The United States: Populism as Political Strategy.” In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Meny, and Yves Surel, 101-119. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.

Warner, Michael. 2002. “Publics and Counterpublics (Abbreviated Version).” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88(4): 413-25.

Washington Post. 2010. “An up-close Look at the Tea Party and its Role in the Midterm Elections.” http://goo.gl/pUqxTd. Accessed: 24.04.2012.

Weiner, Rachel. 2012. “How ALEC Became a Political Liability.” https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/how-alec-became-a-political-liability/2012/04/24/gIQA3QnyeT_blog.html. Accessed: 16.01.2016.

Welch, Matt. 2008. “I've Abandoned Free-Market Principles to Save the Free-Market System.” http://goo.gl/xAWzEh. Accessed: 21.07.2014.

Whittle, Bill. 2008a. “Historic.” http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/226250/historic/bill-whittle. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

——. 2008b. “A Flag, on a Hill.” http://goo.gl/61CHvY. Accessed: 22.07.2014.

Wiessner, Christian. 2008. “Labor Unions Protest in NY against Bailout.” http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/26/us-financial-protestidUSTRE48O8KJ20080926. Accessed: 01.08.2015

Wilber, Del Quentin and Carrie Johnson. 2008. “Abramoff Gets Reduced Sentence of Four Years in Prison.” http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/04/AR2008090402321.html?hpid=topnews. Accessed: 28.02.2014

Wilentz, Sean. “Confounding Fathers: The Tea Party’s Cold War Roots.” http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/18/confounding-fathers. Accessed: 05.12. 2012.

Williams, Juliet. 2006. “The Road Less Travelled: Reconsidering the Political Writings of Friedrich von Hayek.” In *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Nelson Lichtenstein, 213-27. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Winn, Craig. 2014a. *Yada Yahweh*. http://yadayah.com/Yada_Yahweh-Genesis-Bare'syth-Beginning.YHWH. Accessed: 03.07.2014.

World Public Opinion. 2008. “World Publics Say Governments Should Be More Responsive to the Will of the People” http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may08/WPO_Governance_May08_pr.pdf. Accessed: 15.12. 2015.

WYFF4 (2009) “Protesters Stage Greenville Tea Party: Thousands Protest Government Spending.” http://goo.gl/SCzwNB. Accessed: 30.09.2015.

Yousse, Andrew. 2009. “Bruce Jacobs and JD Hayworth: KFYI Obama Protest.” https://goo.gl/Ih0keW. Accessed: 24.10.2015.

——. 2014b. *Prophet of Doom*. http://prophetofdoom.net/. Accessed: 03.07.2014.

Zelizer, Julian E., ed. 2010. *The Presidency of George W. Bush: A First Historical Assessment.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, Julian E. 2010. "Establishment Conservative: The Presidency of George W. Bush." In The Presidency of George W. Bush: A First Historical Assessment, edited by Julian E. Zelizer, 1-14. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zernike, Kate. 2010a. *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America*. New York: Times Books.

——. 2005b. "Populism: What's in a Name?" In *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Francisco Panizza, 32-49. London: Verso.

——. 2010b. "Unlikely Activist Who Got the Tea Party Early." http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/us/politics/28keli.html?_r=0. Accessed: 14.04.2012.