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Contesting the New Populisms:
The Rise and Fall of Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party as Counter-Hegemonic
Forces

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Essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson popularized the quote, “March without the people, and you march into the night.” Suggested here is a tragedy of governance and fragmenting social harmony: when those in the privilege of power no longer lead with a foundation of popular consent, the descent into struggle becomes only a matter of time and provocation. The economic crisis of 2008 triggered a broad cultural, social, and political upheaval that incited both conservative and progressive movements composed of people who felt politically powerless and marginalized. The dominant institutions, these groups believed, could offer neither material benefits, nor an attractive ideological vision. Thus, these movements posited their own alternative political visions and mobilized their reform efforts under the banner of populism, often hinging on an interpretation of the producerist ethic. The central claim of my thesis is that while both the Tea Party and Occupy movements rose out of the economic crisis of 2008 and reflected widespread public grievances with the current political and economic order (e.g. the dominant political parties and corporatism), both movements failed to garner enough political and popular traction to enact the kinds of reformations that each movement sought. The Occupy movement is scattered, and while the Tea Party succeeded in witnessing some of its ideological visions advanced, its future remains uncertain. Thus, the lifespan and trajectories of these two movements reveal not only some of the critical deficiencies in populism as a mechanism for political change, but also illustrating instances in which dominant hegemonies can sustain themselves during periods of turmoil.

In a nation of growing inequality and concentrated wealth, the new populisms have targeted the power elite, whether of the corporate or government spheres. In the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, these movements have responded to actual crises in our political economy, and are deserving of attention and critique. They attempt to offer solutions, often through mobilizing people to enact political change. And more importantly, they emphasize issues that citizens are deeply concerned about, and they remind us that we are capable of changing our society, laws, policies, and culture. The new populisms have shown to strongly resonate with large sections of the public, and to ignore the commentary these groups are making would be to undermine the seriousness of the socio-economic problems that pervade our nation today, and the possible avenues for reform.

This paper analyzes and critiques these new populisms through the lens of Marxism, especially the work of Antonio Gramsci. Therefore, this paper interprets the populist responses and the recent social, economic, and political upheavals as manifest struggles of class power and contested ideologies. Those interested in class politics, as well as the ability (or inability) of the political process to enact reforms will find a Marxist analysis useful. Marxist thought critiques

the intrinsically inevitable imbalances of wealth and power within a capitalist system. When these imbalances between classes become too great, they may prompt subdominant groups to attempt to resist or reform the dominant ideologies and institutions of power in society.

This paper begins with a description of the Gramscian and Marxist philosophical foundations with which I will later use to interpret the new populist movements. Then I will make a brief explanation about the economic, political, and social ramifications of the 2008 economic crisis, and the populist responses that proceeded from them. The latter half of this paper will dissect the values and visions of the Tea Party and Occupy movements, and will critique how successful –if at all –they have been in carrying out their own political projects. In conclusion, I will assess how effectively the Tea Party and Occupy movements managed to challenge the dominant hegemonic order, revealing the possible merits and deficiencies of populism as both an ideology and means of political mobilization, and what implications this holds for the future of the American political landscape.

Literature Review

This paper attempts to bring populism and Marxism into a dialogue. I hope to show how populist themes are often suggestive of imbalances in class power and equality. Therefore, it is significant how scholars understand the two as separate or complimentary.

In tracing the history of populism throughout American history, Michael Kazin, in his book *The Populist Persuasion*, catalogues the pattern of tension that populist groups face when vocalizing their messages. Populists could express their frustrations toward social inequality, political marginalization, and anti-elitism using an explicit vocabulary of class, yet often refrain from doing so, as such a discourse discomforts many in the public who view such language as invoking Marxist ideologies. Americans are hesitant to view social differences through the lens of class, and the revolutionary implications of Marxism threaten what Americans consider to be the virtues of the American free-market democracy. Kazin succeeds in highlighting the balancing act that many groups must confront: they must rail against the injustices of class domination and elitism without alienating too many with their rhetoric. While Kazin is able to show the continuous themes of populism that are retooled in every generation, his analysis ends in the mid 1990s. My analysis of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements hopes to show some of the ties that these current uprisings have their historical predecessors.

In their book *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*, Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy eschew a focus on populism in favor a more traditional Marxist analysis of class. Class antagonisms are primarily grounded in socioeconomic inequalities and workplace exploitation. Crucially, however, they note the importance of economic structure in either inciting or suppressing class antagonisms. While the ideology of capitalism often succeeds in masking class inequalities, the economic framework of capitalism nonetheless creates these same inequalities and instabilities that, when rupturing in the form of an economic crisis, sparks the kinds of class revolts that we sometimes observe taking the form of populism. Again, though, their account is confined to the decades before the turn of the 21st century, meaning that their ideas could be applied to a more recent study of the economic crisis in 2008.

Section 1: Foundations in Gramsci

This paper views the recent economic and political upheavals as deriving from antagonisms and struggles among classes. Dominant groups and subdominant groups in society negotiate and feud over power, influence, and material benefit. Thus, this paper offers much of its analysis through the lens of Marxist theory, particularly the work of Antonio Gramsci. The 20th century Italian political theorist and writer Antonio Gramsci contributed some of the most significant advances in Marxist theory. Thus, we must first give a synopsis of Gramsci's most pivotal ideas, how these can be supplemented with Marxist theory, and why it is appropriate to apply them in to our understanding of the current economic crisis, American political culture, and the new populisms.

Cultural hegemony

The most acclaimed of Gramsci's intellectual contributions are his work on *cultural hegemony*. Hegemony (Greek for "leadership," or "rule") concerns the balance of power between groups, and how these social relationships are maintained or altered. Hegemony describes means by which groups exert and maintain their dominant position over others by means other than direct use of force. Gramsci's work contributes to the idea that dominant groups can effectively maintain their position less by force and oppression, and more by controlling and framing the *cultural and ideological norms* of a society to their benefit. This offered a possible answer to a dilemma for many Orthodox Marxists at the time: namely, that by the early 20th century,

socialism had not experienced the global success that many theorized it would (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 1-2).

Classical Marxism asserts the inevitability of socialism as the inherent instabilities and injustices of a matured capitalist society create the conditions of an impoverished working class that will eventually overthrow the capitalist owner-class and establish a socialist society. If history has thus far shown this to be an erroneous assumption, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony illustrates the missing pieces. Looking beyond explanations that relied heavily on economic trajectories, he gave close examination to the role of culture. Gramsci theorized about the critical roles that culture and ideology play in sustaining capitalism and its ruling classes. For a dominant group to maintain power through violent coercion and threat of force is "expensive and dangerous," and there is the greater risk of a resistance or rebellion by subordinate groups that challenge the status quo. Thus, power is held with far greater ease and stability when subordinate groups *actively give their consent* to their relationship with the dominant groups (Artz & Murphy, p. 2-3). Cultural hegemony is about how the ruling class appropriates culture and manipulates common ideologies so that it may obtain the consent of subdominant groups.

To summarize: dominant groups derive the power of their political, economic, and philosophical leadership from the active consent of other groups (Artz & Murphy, p. 1). In the latter part of this paper, we shall see how the 2008 global economic crisis led two subdominant groups (the Tea Party and Occupy movements) to no longer accept their relationship with two key dominant institutions: the mainstream American political system (its two main parties and the electoral process) and the coalition of big business.

Gramsci's Common Sense

First, though, we must understand the roots of hegemony. Which is to say, why did certain individuals become disillusioned with the state of capitalism and the political establishment after the economic crash, and what attracted many of the same people to the messages espoused by the Tea Party and Occupy movements? Here we turn to the Gramscian notion of *common sense*. Gramsci wrote, "all men are philosophers," and for him, common sense describes something more than the usual connotations of the phrase, which is say, practical, everyday wisdom (Simon, p. 29). For Gramsci, common sense is how a person constructs, negotiates, and contests popular ideologies within the context of their surrounding social institutions. People's worldviews are grounded in a social, cultural, and historical reservoir of meanings particular to their society.

The most resonate political messages, then, are those that are crafted within this reservoir- the site of popular common sense. For example, the Tea Party constructs a narrative and imagery around its members as present-day patriots defending a traditional America against a supposedly tyrannical government. That this message is so attractive is only possible because it is a contemporary political message retooled and based upon the nation's deeply historical strains of government skepticism, themselves rooted in mythologies of an early revolutionary America.

Ideology

Here we introduce and elaborate on the concept of *ideology* within the mechanism of cultural hegemony. The term ideology is frequently interpreted as a synonym for a system of beliefs or ideas. But for Gramsci, ideologies played a far more vital role in human action and socialization. As he writes, "...[ideologies] 'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Simon, 1999, p. 66). Ideologies are how people formulate and justify their worldview; ideologies influence with whom a person associates and disassociates; and ideologies affect how individuals reflect upon themselves and their own place within society. Ideologies are far from abstract. As described by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, ideologies are embedded into our daily actions, rituals, speech, and work. Ideologies are *lived* [Italics mine] (Artz & Murphy, p. 65-66).

Indeed, far from being intangible concepts, ideologies have material existence. "They are embodied in the social practices of individuals and in the institutions and organisations within which these social practices take place" (Simon, p. 68). Such institutions and organizations might include businesses, financial institutions, schools, churches, political parties, unions, apparatuses of the state, etc. These entities maintain, elaborate, and disseminate ideologies within civil society. The existence of stratified classes creates conflict: the reigning ideology of a society is that of the ruling class, which proposes its ideology as natural, inevitable, and universally good for all groups. But subordinate classes can form alternative ideologies and so challenge the dominant paradigm of thought. (Schmitt, 1987, p. 77-8). Ideologies matter because they can reveal the larger domain of what values a population deems acceptable and unacceptable. This can have real and tangible consequences: ideologies drive political and social movements, which in turn determine such things as economic and political policies. Ideologies shape the possible horizons for political struggle.

We can now summarize these Gramscian and Marxist concepts into an integrated nexus of theoretical tools with which to analyze the fallout from the economic crisis and the rise of the new populisms. As political organizations, the Tea Party and Occupy movements share a common ideological root of anti-elitism that each group interpreted differently in accordance with their respective ideology. For those in the Occupy movement, the economic crash symbolized a failed ideology of capitalist and free-market individualism perpetuated by what it saw as destructive policies enacted by the greedy corporate elite. Those in the Tea Party viewed the same ideology of free-market individualism as inherently good but in need of restoration. Instead, it was the liberal elites and government bureaucrats that had distorted the virtues of capitalism, leaving it impure.

The dominant groups had failed to protect the material interests of the subdominant groups (seen in the mass financial suffering from the crash). This, consequently, led to subdominant groups losing their faith in the current capitalist ideology. Thus, each of these two subdominant groups –existing outside the political mainstream- offered an alternative political vision (ideology) to challenge the current one and those they saw as maintaining it. Each group interpreted “dominant institutions” differently, and subsequently engaged these dominant institutions (and thus the hegemonic order) through contrasting avenues of action, as I shall later show.

But a crisis of capitalism does not automatically create social change. Crises simply create “a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions” that can shape the “development of national life” (Rupert, 2009, p. 182). Economic crises can be a launch pad for challenging hegemony, inciting people to question the dominant ideology, and so form alternative ideologies and attempt to reform their institutions. Populism is relevant to this because, conceptually, populism has historically been, and remains, an effective means of rallying people in order to question dominant ideologies, to challenge the power of ruling groups, and to instigate institutional reforms- all in the name of “the people.”

Section 2: Economic Collapse and Organic Crisis

What happens when an economy plummets? That depends on how we frame it. The repercussions can be reported in purely financial terms: from the broad categories of Gross Domestic Product and national unemployment rates down to the personal struggles of men and women to balance their checkbooks and pay the bills. Bearing this in mind, another construction

is possible. Conceptualizing the economic crisis in *political* terms allows for a deeper, more structural analysis, one in which the concepts of hegemony and class-consciousness are highlighted. This section discusses the conceptual side of societal crises, followed by a brief empirical examination of the actual economic crash of 2008, and its political fallout. This will provide a possible explanation as to why the Tea Party and Occupy populist movements came to such prominence in wake of an economic, political, and cultural crisis.

Defining an Organic Crisis

A discussion of economic crises would be lacking without Gramsci's concept of *organic crisis*. This term describes the economic, political, and social ruptures from a crisis, and the social repercussions that result. I argue that the 2008 global economic crash originating in America constituted something characteristic of an organic crisis. What, then, is an organic crisis? Recalling our discussion of hegemony, ruling classes can never take their positions of power "for granted" (Simon, p. 42). Periods of intense economic and political turmoil can cause a disintegration of the hegemonic order, resulting in perhaps previously subordinate groups allying or vying for power while the current ruling class struggles to maintain its position. Gramsci's writing implies that an organic crisis involves a restructuring of power that is not "immediate, occasional, or almost accidental," but more indelible and profound (p. 43). According to Roger Simon's interpretation of Gramsci, the opposing forces will persistently attempt to reshape state institutions and form new ideologies if the crisis is deep enough. However, the opposite is also true: as Simon writes, "if the forces of opposition are not strong enough to shift the balance of forces decisively in their direction, the conservative forces will succeed in building a new system of alliances which will *re-establish their hegemony*" [Italics mine] (p. 43).

I argue that there have been two major crises of capitalism in recent American history that approach qualities of an organic crisis: the Great Depression, and the recent economic crash (the "Great Recession"). In his work, Gramsci points to the inherent instabilities within a capitalist economy, which have been symptomatic of the two largest economic crises in the nation's history (*Antonio Gramsci*, 2006, p. 95). The nature of capitalism leaves it subject to collective irrationalities that foster a crisis-prone environment in two critical ways: one, the incentive to increase productivity (and thus, profits) creates incentives for workplaces practices that impoverish workers. When practiced at a large scale, this drives down consumer demand and consumption, weakening the economy (Schmitt, pp. 126-7). Secondly, the drive of capital

accumulation fuels speculative bubbles that inflate prices until the bubble finally bursts, resulting in the capital being wiped out, followed by plummeting wages and mass unemployment.

The Great Depression contained traits of an organic crisis. The bursting of the speculative bubble, coupled with massive overproduction and under-consumption, resulted in unprecedented economic misery. As historian Michael Kazin wrote of the Great Depression: “[it] produced a harvest of human misery, and that misery demanded explanation” (Kazin, 1995, p. 105). Many Americans came to question capitalism, but expressed their support of the New Deal reform promised by Franklin D. Roosevelt. During this era, the nation witnessed the creation of social welfare, unemployment programs and relief, and financial regulation. Capitalism survived, and Americans embraced a new attitude toward government activism that endured for decades.

Expansive and Limited Hegemony

And so, what happens when an economy fails? The dominant hegemony is at risk to dissolve. When the hegemonic relationship is shaken, there are two responses by the dominant groups: one of *expansive* hegemony or one of *limited* hegemony. Both actions express means in which stability is reestablished. Expansive hegemony occurs when dominant groups appease the demands of the dissatisfied subordinate groups by fully incorporating their interests. In a sense, the subdominant groups are absorbed into the ruling position (Jones, p. 52-54). This does not come without cost to the ruling class: in the act of appeasing and incorporating more of the subdominant’s interests and values, dominant groups may be forced to make economic or ideological “concessions” which can transform their compositional or ideological identity (p. 45). As I’ll later write, I believe the rise of the Tea Party, and its subsequent relationship with the Republican Party establishment, represents an instance of expansive hegemony.

Limited hegemony strays more toward marginalization, coercion, and suppression. Essentially, the dominant group fails to incorporate the subdominant’s interests. A crumbling hegemony may resort to using its power and authority to suppress dissent. However, using state military or police forces for coercive means, for example, is risky, as it reflects badly upon the leading groups, and may antagonize further resistance. If not with physical force, then rebellious subdominant groups may be marginalized through “symbolic” violence, in which they are shamed and made to feel alienated, or as outsiders (*Antonio Gramsci*, 2006, p. 50-52). In contrast with the Tea Party, I argue that the Occupy movement reflects more on the side of limited hegemony.

Political and Economic Class Consciousness

Finally, in the eruption of an organic crisis, we must consider how the people themselves respond. The impacts of the economic dysfunction are well known, and well felt. Here, what matters is how people respond to them not merely in *economic* terms, but, crucially, in *political* terms. To this, we are heavily indebted to Marx's writings on class-consciousness and class struggle. Under a classical Marxist definition, one's relation to the means of production determines one's economic class. That is to say, individuals are divided into two camps: the capitalists who own the capital, factories, raw materials, etc., and the workers, who, because they do not own the capital, must labor for a wage (Schmitt, p. 145). For the scope of this paper, when we think of economic class, we consider an individual's economic class as their socioeconomic status and position.

In addition to economic class, there is one's *political* class. Individuals may join organizations, unions, and political parties. Businesses, too, may form pro-business groups (p. 146). In this sense, an individual's political class is an important part of forming his or her political identity. For a person to reflect on his or her class is for the individual to look beyond their occupation and material wealth, considering instead their place of power in society and their ability to fundamentally shape it and its institutions. Such institutions, like political parties and social movements, can be critical in developing political class-consciousness: they unite and support shared ideologies and common material interests, and allow groups to better realize and exert their influence as a united bloc within society.

As noted before, groups struggle within a hegemonic structure to improve their material well-being, develop political power, and shape their society (Artz and Murphy, pp. 228). Unions may strike to improve workplace conditions and raise wages. Interest groups may campaign to change law or policy. Businesses may lobby for tax breaks or subsidies. Returning to our classical definition, these are examples of economic classes fighting to better their economic and material conditions. This is not, however, the same as the struggle of a political class. A political class, with its collective potential more fully developed, may work to fundamentally change the structures and institutions of a society. As political forces, the Tea Party and Occupy populist movements are responsible for cultivating a political identity in their constituents and mobilizing them for political projects.

The 2008 Economic Crisis

We now take an empirical examination of the economic forces that converged to create something akin to the organic crisis necessary to ignite a populist revolt. While the beginning of the crisis itself can be marked by both the economic downturn in 2008 and the election of

President Barack Obama, more sinister underlying forces had been culminating for several decades. In the years between the end of World War 2 and the 1970s, America experienced the “Great Compression,” during which the incomes of the highest and lowest earners became more equal (Noah, 2013, p. 19). And yet the 1940s and 1950s were the beginning of a decades-long dismantling of such progressive economic policies by business elites who viewed the liberal ideology and its policies as a threat to their power and position in society (Phillips-Fein, 2009, x-xi). This league of corporate leaders sought to challenge the apparent consensus of liberalism, Keynesian economics, and value of unions. In response to increasing government regulations and falling corporate profits around the late 1960s, this rising business hegemony sought to step up its lobbying efforts and exert its influence into public policy (Noah, p. 121-122).

These efforts finally hit their stride in the 1980s, which saw the rise of conservative populism and the embrace of supply-side economics (p. 108). The results since the 1970s have been a “Great Divergence,” marked by growing income and wealth inequality, slowing social mobility, weakened labor unions, and productivity rates and profit margins that have far outpaced wage compensation. According to journalist Timothy Noah in his book *The Great Divergence*, “at end of 2010, productivity in non-farm business sector was up 86% since 1978, but real compensation per hour up only 37%” (Noah, 2012, p. 176). Additionally, the share of wealth held by the bottom 90% of Americans has been largely stagnant since the 1980s, while the total income of the top 1% rose from 10% to 23.5% between 1980 and 2007 (Guardino and Snyder, 2012, p. 528). As Noah notes, these are the kinds of economic realities that breed resentment, and eventually the populist uprisings to which we indeed bore witness.

The years leading up to the crash were equally disparaging. As Joseph E. Stiglitz writes in his book “The Price of Inequality,” the top 1 percent of Americans acquired 65 percent of the gains in total national income between 2002 and 2007, while most Americans were worse off. In fact, in the three decades preceding the crash, the wages of middle-class Americans have seen little growth. Even after the crash, in 2010, it was the top 1 percent that captured 93 percent of the additional income generated (Stiglitz, 2012, p. 2-3). It has not been since the years leading up to the Great Depression that income and wealth inequality have been so great in America (p. 5). These long-term economic trends only contributed to and exacerbated the final meltdown in the United States’ housing market in 2008. A deregulated housing market and deteriorating lending standards created a highly speculative –and thus unstable– housing bubble, which eventually burst and caused a massive recession (Henwood, 2012). In the years since the crash, more Americans have slipped down into poverty, while the wealthy have gone largely unscathed (Stiglitz, p. 17). What’s more, Stiglitz notes that the business hegemony has employed its influence to maintain a deregulated financial sector (p. 34).

The economic crisis, then, presents an opportunity. In response to the economic failures, people can come to question the dominant ideology and hegemony. In doing so, they have the potential to engage in class struggle that works to address grievances and fundamentally reform institutions. This, then, leads us to populism. Populism is political outlook that reacts especially strongly to economic injustices and political marginalization. The complex financial policies perpetrated by the elites that have hurt ordinary individuals have incited a deeply resonate foundation of anti-elitism and skepticism of centralized power that spurs populist resistance. Populism can be an effective mechanism for provoking political consciousness across diverse groups, orienting them toward a common political agenda, and then mobilizing them for reform.

Section 3: Themes in Populism

Populism is a brand of political ideology. Populists have historically framed their political campaigns grounded in a dichotomy of conflict: one that pits “the people” against “the elites.” Returning to our Gramscian vocabulary, this worldview is a manifestation of *common sense*, the way persons perceive the world, make sense of it, and either associate or disassociate with others depending on their own interpretations of populism. Thus, as an ideology, populism can act as the “cement” that binds diverse demographics together to in common interest (Simon, 1982, p. 68). The most salient trait of populism is its inherent ambiguity. Neither “the people” nor “the elites” are defined. Thus, they are contestable terms, and can be framed and defined to suit political agendas of the parties involved in various contexts.

Populism is antagonistic by nature. The populist narrative regularly paints a portrait of average, hard-working individuals that are preyed upon by the intrusive, menacing acts of a selfish few elites. In time, and after suffering these injustices too long, these common people must band together and restore the rightful vision of a society grounded in their values. Often this requires removing and replacing the elites from their perches of power. This Manichean “us versus them” mentality creates political and social climates for hegemonic and counter-hegemonic groups to contest power.

At its best, populism is the impassioned call for ordinary men and women to rise up and fight for a simple, yet noble demand: to better their lot in life through the empowerment of democratic rule by the common people. At its worst, populism can reveal human tendencies to plunge waywardly into demagoguery and caricature, inciting subsurface antagonisms along lines

of class, race, etc.. The great irony of populism is that however grand the coalitions are that unite around a vaguely inclusive notion of “the people,” lines are inevitably drawn, and some groups may not partake in the noble fight. Populism necessarily creates partitions around class and ideology, or of race and ethnicity, despite even the best efforts to generously define just who may qualify as the ordinary person. Not everyone can be of “the people.”

Finally, populism is a kind of discourse. As Artz and Murphy write, “Language is based on shared meanings created through common cultural and historical experiences” (Artz & Murphy, p. 31-2). Language reflects social relationships and shared ideologies. For example, what does it mean early populist language was cast in terms of “producers” and “parasites,” and today, framed as “makers” and “takers”? Or how the “economic royalists” of the Great Depression era are now re-branded as “job creators”? Such linguistic battles between groups would seem to be receptive to the Marxist language of class and class struggle. However, as we shall see, American populist organizations and their leaders have often rejected this vocabulary, whether out of ideological convictions, or more strategic reasons.

Elements of American Populism

The qualities and tendencies of populism become particularly intense when embellished upon the historical tapestry of the United States. There is a deep vein of populism in America, and groups from every corner of the political spectrum have repeatedly extracted and refitted these same populist values and narratives to best suit their goals (Kazin, 1995, p. 2-3). Here, we will see how modern populist movements (the Tea Party and Occupy movements) are grounded in many shared populist values of early America, and yet they have interpreted them in ways radically distinct from each other.

The central pillars of America’s fiery brand of populism were built with the very foundation of the nation itself. The first are the legacies of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. The former was centered in an unmediated connection to God, instilling into the citizens a duty to protect the spiritual purity and health of the nation, and to cleanse it of sinful behavior, particularly when such was tied to the scheming of proud elites (Kazin, 10-11). The latter was the legacy of secularism and rationality from the Enlightenment. The gift of this era, as Kazin writes, was “the belief that ordinary people could think and act rationally, more rationally, in fact, than their ancestral overlords” (p. 11). The plain goodness of the common man was as self-evident as the tyrant’s lust for authority.

With the bedrock established, the three pillars of American populism could begin to take shape. The first component –and arguably the gem –was the notion of *Americanism*, the very creed by which many Americans understand as the genesis of their political identities. The creed attempts to summon a variety of grand values. Each person is created equal, and thrust into the world under the presumption of equal opportunity, fated to rise and fall by his or her own individual merit. But the privilege of liberty does not come without cost: Americans are citizens of virtue, ready and eager to safeguard their land from the misdeeds of haughty elites and cunning officeholders, whom they treat with an unyielding sense of suspicion.

The both severely defensive and passionately idealistic tones unite to form the central tenet of Americanism: the people rule, and that it is imperative that their righteousness and their decency are to be known, and always heeded. Americanism is two strands of thought existing in tension: the classical liberal doctrine of individual self-interest, and the republican demands for a virtuous commonwealth ready to uphold its cherished values (Kazin, p. 12). Tea Party that will side more with the values individual self-interest, and embrace a conception of negative liberty that bolsters their brand of market populism and conservative producerism. Hence, small businesses must be unrestrained by the stifling hand of government so that they may be fully validated within the realm of the free market. Occupy promotes a community of a more engaged, cooperative-thinking citizenry. Here the notion of positive liberty is more pronounced: citizens must have the abilities and resources to more fully develop their own potential. In this case, it means citizens that can freely and actively participate in the democratic process. This enhances Occupy's own flavor of progressive producerism, Occupy is critical of corporate power, which, when it begins to exert a disproportionate influence within the institutions of governance, crowds out average citizens and muffles their voices, diminishing their ability to equally engage in the democratic process.

It is perhaps not at all surprising, then, that American populism crowns “producerism” as its second hallmark. This persuasion declares the industrious worker as the true hero. Those who, by the sweat of their own individual hard work and labor, created tangible wealth were esteemed with moral worth. Toiling for a wage was no longer considered “necessary but dishonorable” (p. 13). This was decidedly *not* the same strain of Marxist class-consciousness found in Europe. Eschewing a strict definition class, the American producer ethic only asks that one is willing to live by the ideology of faith in individual hard work and merit, often regardless of socioeconomic status (p. 13-14). For the new populisms, this has led to divergent hostilities as to who fails this producer ethic, and is so labeled a “parasite.” For the Tea Party, these are the dependent, unproductive welfare recipients, government officials, and intellectuals; for

Occupiers, it is the wealthy financiers who create no tangible wealth or products, only using others' money to simply make more money.

The final badge of populism is the unrelenting suspicion of elites. In the eyes of each populist, these manipulators of the public often collude to leech off the hard work of others. In a word, they are the “antithesis” to every populist principle: intellectual instead of practical thinking; artificial rather than authentic; and condescending, in contrast with the humble dignity of the masses. Elites occupy places that accord with their penchant for centralized power: financial institutions, government bureaucracies, halls of academia, or the offices of media enterprises (Kazin, p. 15-16). The Tea Party condemns bureaucratic government officials and politicians for ruining the ideological promise of a free-market system, while those in the Occupy camps see these same officials as having failed to reign in on the injustices of such a free-market system, having been corrupted by the influence of their corporate peers in the private sector.

Section 4: The Tea Party

Those in the Tea Party firmly carry the ideological torches of limited government and free market principles. Hence, individualism is the shining principle of the Tea Party. The acronym T.E.A. itself stands for “taxed enough already,” sending a clear message of a discontent and aggrieved people. Their demands are firm and uncompromising: limit the power and reach of the federal government (and similarly, empower local and state governments), shrink the national debt, reduce government spending, and lower taxes (Formisano, 2012, p. 1). Compared to the general public, supporters of the Tea Party tend to be Republican, male, white, wealthier, older than forty-five years, and more conservative on economic and social issues compared their typical Republican counterparts (Formisano, p. 51). The political, economic, and cultural characteristics of Tea Partiers are no accident though. Much of the Tea Party ideology is a carry-over from the rise of conservative populism that began to surge during the presidencies of Nixon and Reagan. This conservative market populism is rooted in an even deeper interpretation of *classical liberalism*. Pioneered by Adam Smith, this political theory stresses the primacy of the individual, which, when applied to the realm of political economy, promotes policies of limited government and unrestrained markets.

Roots of the Tea Party

To understand the Tea Party, one must first examine the era from which many of its members hail. The late 1960s was a period of intense political and cultural upheaval, as the nation was torn over the handling of the Vietnam War. It also marked a point in which both the modern Democratic and Republican parties saw shifts not only in the demographics of their bases, but also the values and stigmas that each party came to be associated with- legacies that each party bear (and wrestle with) to this day. Perhaps as an unintended consequence of the fervent pacifism and socially permissive, inclusive, and progressive views of many of its members, the Democratic Party was beginning to become stigmatized with associations of weakness, elitism, irresponsibility, idealism, and anarchy, and saw a large exodus from its white working-class constituency (Kazin, p. 246).

For the Republican Party, the 1960s was the start of a period of strategic re-branding. In its transformation, the GOP crafted an ideological message designed to provide a home for all those who were hostile, skeptical, or alienated by such new waves as that of secularism, feminism, and welfarism. The new conservative appeal lay in its melding of populism with “middle-class *values*.” Squeezed in the middle was the “Silent Majority,” composed of diligent, reserved, patriotic, morally pious Americans; a coalition of “producers and consumers- taxpayers, white ethnics, housewives, ‘Middle Americans’ who felt scorned by the New Left and besieged by powerful liberals” (p. 246). Above them on the social hierarchy of power and privilege were the liberal elites, who occupied the highest offices of government, the media, and academia. This condescending and intrusive clique was perceived as allowing the nation to sink into moral corruption as it permitted socially tolerant views on atheism, gay rights, and feminism (p. 247). Below the Silent Majority on the social ladder were the lazy, dependent welfare recipients, who leached off the taxed income of hard-working Americans, made possible by handouts from big-government, liberal bureaucrats (p. 250). Evidently, the conservative populism of the 1970s and 1980s was a brilliant re-expression of the biblical producerism not seen in such prominence since the People’s Party of the 1890s.

The Tea Party, then, is the Silent Majority reawakened. It continues the advancement of the neoliberal ideology, which posits the existence of free-markets as a necessity of individual freedom. A legacy of Ronald Reagan’s presidency was his ability to make conservatism sound like common sense, presenting a new creed to “plainspeaking, industrious citizens who were capable of improving their lot without government assistance” (p. 262). The Tea Party also maintains the cultural and social resentments that climaxed in the 1960s. The older, predominately white, socially conservative constituency of the Tea Party has expressed a reaction of anxiety and hostility to the shifting demographics of the nation, symbolized in the election of Barack Obama. As it was in the decades past, the distinctive conservative middle-

class producerism lashes out at welfare recipients (often a coded language for minorities) and immigrants. The melding of fiscal and social conservative lives on in the Tea Party.

Values and Populist Themes

The historical values of producerism, anti-elitism, and proud individualism are once again made fresh with the Tea Party movement. The Tea Party's conservative strain of populism stems from a bedrock of classical liberal theory. Classical liberalism stresses the rationality of the individual, claiming that individuals (and thus societies as a whole) flourish best when individuals are given maximum freedom to pursue their own self-interest. Implanted into the American political culture, this liberal tradition has vast consequences. The belief in both equal opportunity and meritocracy under a capitalist tradition has produced an "American egalitarianism." This brand of egalitarianism does not hold collectivism in high regard. Vast majorities of Tea Party supporters reject an activist government, believing that more should be left to individuals and businesses (p. 12). In one 2010 Gallup poll, 61 percent of Tea Party supporters viewed the federal debt as the most serious threat. In the same poll, they ranked the size and power of the federal government (51 percent) as nearly as great a threat as terrorism (49 percent) (p. 11-12). In his book "Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto," Tea Party leader Dick Armey declares that, "Tea Partiers value equality of opportunity, not equality of outcomes. For us, it is all about the rights of the individual over the collective" (Armey, 2010, p. 68). Thus, a great weight is placed upon the initiative of the individual, particularly within the economic sphere.

Furthermore, as Robert P. Formisano notes, the concept of American egalitarianism produces a "scramble for wealth and status, with the end result being not resentment but envy and legitimizing of the rich" (Formisano, p. 106). Indeed, this is partially why many Tea Partiers blame the economic downturn less on the financiers on Wall Street, and more on the government. Public opinion surveys reveal that, compared to all Americans, Tea Party supporters are less concerned about matters of corporate welfare and the misdeeds of big business. "...in general, Tea Parties must be described as not hostile but rather as ambivalent or favorable toward big business" (p. 63). Still, the relationship is not without its tensions. A few prominent Tea Party leaders, such as Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky or former Representative Dick Armey, have been vocal critics of "corporate welfare" and bank bailouts. Tax credits and subsidies are simply a different kind of handout: one paid for with taxes that the government awards to "special interests," another violation of free-market principles. (Paul, 2011, p. 176, 225). Tired of the greed and corruption within both government and big business, some Tea

Partiers have been receptive to libertarian ideologies, and consequentially are critical of what they perceive to be a collusion between these two institutions of centralized power.

While matters of government and economics are primary drivers of the Tea Party's momentum, they cannot be understood independently from the cultural makeup and spiritual core of the movement. A 2010 American Values Survey showed that a little over half consider the United States to still be a Christian nation today, and that it always has been so. The party pulls wide margins of support from religious evangelicals, and nearly half of Americans that identify with the Tea Party also identify with the Christian conservative movement (p. 54-55). And so, when placing the Tea Party's religious fundamentalism alongside its strict, individualistic political-economic views, we come to a kind of "evangelical antistatism" that marks a crucial property of the movement. (p. 52-53). The Constitution and Christian Bible both become sacred, revered documents. By interpreting these texts through a lens of *originalism*, its supporters believe they can identify and reestablish the unadulterated values found therein. Bringing the nation back to these founding principles can then return the current landscape rampant with political corruption and spiritual disarray to the more perfect Eden of earlier times.

This is how the Tea Party retools classical liberal theory for its populist ideology. The government imposes undue burdens upon free individuals within the economic sphere (i.e. via welfare, regulation, taxes). These acts pose a threat to the equal-opportunity individualism that conservative populism cherishes. These injustices are enacted by government elites who fail the ethical test of producerism, who are selfish and greedy, and who don't heed the needs or wants of the people. This combines to produce an association with the freedom and health of the common people with necessarily anti-government feelings (Formisano, p. 104).

That the Tea Party captures not only the support of big business, but of small business too, is particularly revealing about the Tea Party's conception of Americanism. The free-market system is hailed as natural and intrinsically good, creating a moral component to market populism that allows an overlap to exist between these two groups. A business's success within a free-market landscape becomes a moral validation of independence and hard work, while government intervention and welfarism are condemned as lazy and parasitic. Without this common ideological bond that hails small-businesses as heroes within the capitalist society, the top-down element of the Tea Party would likely undermine itself. The funding and ideological vision provided by corporate leaders (such as the Koch brothers of Koch Industries) have shaped the movement so that small businesses (that might otherwise resent their corporate counterparts for receiving favorable treatment from the government) are willing to join the hegemonic bloc of business interests and further the neoliberal agenda (Frank, 2012, p. 93-95; Guardino and Snyder, 2012, p. 529-530)

Tea Partiers' stance on welfare exemplifies its melding of classical liberal thought with American populism. The movement uses the producer ethic as a means of condemning what they consider to be the most unproductive group in society: the poor welfare recipients. These are the non-producers of society, the parasites. The recipients of welfare have failed the creed of equal opportunity and individual initiative, and now survive off the hard work (and thus, taxes) of others. This also explains Tea Partiers' lack of support to extend unemployment benefits (p. 20-21). While producerists have historically given equal condemnation to what they perceive as the artificial wealthy elite and the dependent poor, the Tea Party has shown to ease some of their hostility toward the corporate elite, if only because the rich exemplify the triumphs of the free-market ideology.

Initial Success and Possible Decline within the Hegemonic Structure

With the financial crisis, bank bailouts, and election of Barack Obama acting as catalysts, the Tea Party did, in the short term, represent a minor counter-hegemonic force. The Tea Party sought an electoral strategy of placing their own members into the very system, many of whom considered themselves "citizen-politicians" (Formisano, p. 39-41). In line with most conservative political thought, the Tea Party views American institutions as inherently good yet corrupted by those who run them. Therefore, the movement's primary objective lay in replacing the elites in office with "plain people." After introducing primary challenges and consequently winning a large number of congressional seats in the 2010 midterm elections, the Tea Party altered the ideological character of the Republican Party. Specifically, it shifted the Republican Party further toward the political right, and its presence within the party both encouraged and demanded an uncompromising stance in governance.

In Gramscian terms, this is an instance in which a dominant group was forced to make ideological concessions in order to salvage alliances and maintain its hegemony. The result of this ideological shift was intense bipartisan gridlock, as the Tea Party would not settle for anything less than to see their ideological and material visions enacted without dilution. By the end of the 2010 midterm elections, the Tea Party had proven itself to be an influential pressure group (Formisano, p. 6). Fearing absorption into the mainstream conservative establishment, they forced primary challenges, compelling a sharp rightward shift for aspiring conservative candidates for office (p. 10). Surveys revealed the intense dissatisfaction with the conservative establishment at the time: half of all Tea Party activists held an unfavorable view of the Republican Party (p. 11). Thus began an effort to purge the party of moderate conservatives, labeled as RINOs (Republicans In Name Only).

As a movement, the Tea Party was a vehicle that channeled the concerns of many. It provided a mouthpiece for many Americans who felt that they were becoming overshadowed. By early 2011, a majority of Americans (67%) were either somewhat (29%) or very (38%) dissatisfied with the size and power of the federal government (Formisano, p. 14). Majorities also believed there was too much power concentrated in the hands of lobbyists, corporations, and financial institutions. Thus, as Formisano writes, the Tea Party was a “political awakening as well as a sense of fulfillment” for many Americans (p. 9). The movement gave millions the hope that their voices would be heard in a political arena where, previously, ordinary citizens were beginning to sense that their concerns were being outright ignored or drowned out by more powerful and wealthy forces.

Over time, though, the Tea Party’s high standard for ideological purity illustrated a complex grappling amongst other hegemonic forces. The movement’s penchant for not compromising put it in conflict with not only the larger Republican Party establishment, but also the business community and the rest of the American public. In early 2011, public opinion polls revealed that self-identified “main-street Republicans” began withdrawing their support for the Tea Party (p. 98). By that summer, the movement’s disapproval ratings grew higher when the public became weary of the party’s unwillingness to compromise (p. 99). These unbending stances within Congress (and against the Obama administration) also alienated the business establishment. The Tea Party opposed government favors (subsidies and tax breaks) to businesses, as well as raising the national debt ceiling, a vital determinant for the nation’s global credit rating. This tension was compounded by the movement’s intense economic nationalism (e.g. resistance to free trade). The business community –once an important funding apparatus in establishing the early momentum of the party– became displeased with some of the possible consequences to their profits if the Tea Party had its way (p. 74-78).

Once the Tea Party gained access to positions of power, it was able to “test out” its ideology. But the Tea Party’s rigidly conservative populist ideology may prove unsustainable. For example, regardless of the mutual dissatisfaction toward the government, huge majorities of Americans favored retaining government social safety net programs like Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. Indeed, most Americans do not favor cutting these programs in order to achieve a different goal: reducing the budget (Formisano, p. 14). The American public no longer seeing prospects of material benefits to come of the party’s intractable stance, undermining the assertive advancements of the neoliberal agenda and its corresponding hegemonic bloc.

Conclusions

The vision that the Tea Party movement provided was an ideologically powerful one that resonated with millions of individuals who previously felt politically voiceless and marginalized. By putting ordinary people with traditional values in charge of the government, the Tea Party would cleanse and restore it. It offered a government that looked more like the people it governed. It also placed a high premium on the privacy and personal initiative of the individual. As Dick Armey notes, “The Tea Party movement is asking to simply be left alone” (Armey, 2010, p. 67). Despite its initial momentum, the Tea Party failed to amass a coalition diverse enough to maintain its impetus. It was chronically decentralized and did not achieve much electoral success in urban centers and populous states (Formisano, p. 98).

The eventual dissolution of the movement may be attributed to some of the uglier sides of populism. The Tea Party was a highly antagonistic movement, armed with absolutist rhetoric that reduced the political landscape to Manichean skirmishes of “us versus them” and “good against evil.” Its members constructed a mythological narrative around themselves, imagining themselves like their ancestors of the American Revolution battling a tyrannical government (Guardino and Snyder, 2012, p. 531). This bombastic stance may appeal to those vehemently devoted to advancing the neoliberal agenda, but it leaves a sour taste for a public craving to see more efficiency and compromise in governance. Liberals, public employees, and minorities are only a few of the groups that are left feeling unwelcome and demonized.

Finally, the Tea Party may eventually be eclipsed by the more progressive and socially tolerant views of younger generations, as well as a more racially diverse America (p. 114). As conservative author and commentator Andrew Sullivan writes that, “One part of the Tea Party’s appeal is its ethnic solidarity, wrapped in nostalgia, paranoia, and fear. It makes a powerful package, but a doomed one” (p. 98). However, we can’t forget that demographics do not guarantee outcomes. Political struggle is the core of any movement. The Tea Party is unique in that it is an ideologically insular movement with narrow objectives, and acts as a pressure group on only one political party. If the Tea Party’s goal was to advance the neoliberal agenda, and to force the Republican Party to make an ideological concession to the right, it may well leave a legacy as a somewhat successful counter-hegemonic movement. The producerist appeal has shown to have a strong cultural resonance, but political obstructionism threatens other social values and estranges many constituencies. The Tea Party’s uncompromising stance on market-populism may have been its greatest asset, but it may also be the source of its downfall, as the movement continues to diminish its own appeal and relevance.

Section 5: The Occupy Movement

Born of the same calamity, the Occupy movement resolved to take a radically different interpretation to the circumstances. The older and more conservative constituents of the Tea Party witnessed the corruption of the economic and political landscape and argued that such institutions needed to be reclaimed with the sacred creeds of market populism. On the other side of the political spectrum, a different segment of the population was looking on at the same debacle and proposing a radically alternative solution. These groups, many young, unemployed (or quite often, both), rallied to the disruptive, yet utopian prospect of the Occupy protests. The movement's progressive ethos has been dictated not only from the plight of its main demographics, but also from its digging up the ideological remains of leftist factions of the past (such as anarchism). The Occupiers have also embodied the rhetoric and ideals of Marxism, moving towards a conceptualization of Species Being. What has resulted is a renewed vocabulary of social justice, participatory democracy, and collectivism being brought to the forefront of the national political discourse.

Historical Context

At first glance, the tactics and messages of the Occupy movement may seem peculiar, brash, or circumstantial. But in fact the movement seems to attempt to demonstrate once again some of the strategies and modes of thinking that were fundamental to the progressive populism of the 1960s New Left. Emerging out of the halls of academia, young, white leftists were responding to what they saw as the failings of a liberal state. The young leftists supported a strong welfare state, ending racial discrimination, bolstering unions, and social equality. To them, however, the government was unrecognizable. It was run by the "power elite," who were instituting a new era of "corporate liberalism." Government became a partner to big business, more interested in promoting consumerism and profitability than in addressing racism and poverty (Kazin, p. 196-197). As Kazin writes, "The New Leftists found the very forms of modern politics frustrating, alienating, and inauthentic." Cynical about the electoral process and the efficiency of governance, these leftists turned inward, embracing participatory democracy instead. Leftist groups, such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), embarked on a campaign into impoverished neighborhoods. Here, they sought to create communities that "would be run like a New England town meeting or an agrarian cooperative," models for how a society could function (p. 198). The New Left was wary of distant, representative institutions, preferring forms of direct democracy instead. The emphasis was placed on the democratic *process*, not the end product (p. 202). Although criticized as overly

utopian, these progressives felt that if ordinary people were truly empowered in the decision-making process, they would naturally pursue tolerance and egalitarianism. As populists, this was the best way to “reclaim their society from an exploitative, self-seeking minority” (p. 201).

Despite its best intentions, the New Left populists could not sustain their momentum and create a larger movement, something thematic of populist uprisings. The young leftist intellectuals could not transcend their own middle-class backgrounds, and so appeared inauthentic and intrusive to the poor blacks and poor whites that they sought to help. The New Left had also rejected the producer narrative of diligent, patriotic people, which further alienated some from their cause, and left the New Left vulnerable to criticisms from conservatives, who accused them of harboring “welfare bums” and condescending intellectuals (p. 217-218). As we shall see, the Occupy movement has wrestled with many of the same problems. It has carried on the tradition of participatory democracy in the form of General Assemblies (GAs). The Occupy movement has renounced the electoral process and attempted to provide a model of direct, participatory democracy. Its members have also bore many of the same criticisms, accused of being parasitic, radical, and aimless.

Finally, the Occupy movement was not wholly spontaneous. Several seasoned veterans of leftist social movements, as well as Adbusters, a progressive anti-consumerist organization, strategically orchestrated the occupation of Zuccotti Park on September 17th, 2011, in New York City. The movement also drew inspiration from the populist uprisings of the Arab Spring, anti-austerity protests in Greece, the Spanish indignados, and the pro-union rallies in Madison, Wisconsin. By mid-October, the Occupy movement went global (Lewis, Luce, Milkman, 2013, p. 1, 6). Also noteworthy is influence of anarchism within the movement. Although it may have been scattered with the rest of the New Left coalition by the early 1970s, anarchist principles have seen revitalization with the rise of anti-globalization movements of the 1990s, and have critically shaped the ideological content and tactics of the Occupy movement, as we shall see (Epstein, 2001, p. 7-12).

Values and Populist Themes

In their extensive study of the Occupy Wall Street movement, Lewis et al. discovered two distinct age groups: the Millennials (those under 30), who were likely to be students or recent graduates facing high youth unemployment, underemployment, and student debt. Those over 30 were often seasoned veterans of past social movements who acted as informal mentors to others (Lewis et al., p. 7-8). A profile of the movement found that the typical protester was young, white, better educated, and more affluent than the typical resident of New York City. Nearly one in four were students, and the most actively involved protesters were

disproportionately youthful. People of color were underrepresented, though the movement did become more diverse as it grew (p. 9-11).

Although many in the movement were educated professionals, many carried substantial student debt, or had experienced recent job loss. Nearly a quarter reported working less than full time, suggesting “precarious employment.” Many also struggled with underemployment and feeling apathetic toward their jobs (p. 11-13). Despite this –or perhaps because of it– many had the time and energy to commit to activism. As anthropologist and activist David Graeber wrote, the movement was composed of “young people bursting with energy, with plenty of time on their hands, every reason to be angry, and access to the entire history of radical thought” (p. 13-14).

Politically, most (57 percent) in the Occupy camp leaned Democrat. There were virtually no Republicans, and 42 percent identified as Independents, favoring third parties or adhering to no parties at all. While many voted for Obama hoping he represented a fundamental reform for the mainstream political process, many experienced disappointment and disillusionment when he failed to accomplish this in their eyes. However, many older protesters were disillusioned well before 2008 (p. 16-18).

Those in the Occupy movement are experiencing two potent sentiments: powerlessness and disillusionment. In an economy marked by stagnant wages, precarious unemployment, dead-end jobs, and crushing personal debt, many believe the system as failed them. Compounding this, they see no recourse in government, finding that it only lives for the corporate good. Thus, like their predecessors of the New Left, many still believe in the possibility in the welfare and aid of the state. However, a sizable number of others have chosen to move beyond the mainstream political process and re-embrace the merits of direct democracy.

As opposed to the Tea Party, which has expressed an ambivalence or even acceptance of wealth inequality and corporate hegemony, these issues have inflamed Occupy. Wielding the same anti-elitists passions as the Tea Party, Occupy nonetheless aimed its criticism toward different dominant groups. They have targeted the corporate elite, accusing them of selfish, hollow pursuits of profit that have decimated the wages and working conditions of workers since the 1970s. But the government is not spared either, which Occupy condemns as having failed the promises of the liberal state. The government, run by disinterested bureaucratic elites, has become more entwined with the private financiers of big business, and now this poisonous relationship has left the public officials more apt to appease corporate interests than those of the people. Keenly aware of the high levels of unemployment (particularly among the youth) and the decades-long stagnation in real wages, occupiers saw frightening evidence of the rising work-place power of corporations (Gitlin, 2012, p. 67). And worse, a government that was too weak or too beholden to remedy these injustices.

The Occupiers lament the social corrosion that is symptomatic of rising wealth inequalities (van Gelder, 2011, p. 53). The most frequently cited concerns of those in the movement were inequality and “the 1%.” These were followed by concerns of “money in politics,” “corporate greed,” student debt, and access to education (Lewis et al., p. 23). As sociologist and political writer Todd Gitlin writes, “They could see that the point of the movement was to resist the grotesque inequalities that have become normal in American life...” (Gitlin, p. 33). This came in tandem with denouncing the financial and corporate elite, symbolized by Wall Street. The financial practices and profit-driven motives have created an economy prone to crashes, run by a corporate-government collusion outfitted with a “revolving door” between the public and private sectors. Worse still, they argue, is a “larger public panicky about failing behind and convinced, more or less, that its own interests would be served too if capital were unleashed” (p. 11).

Occupy, then, demands a reversal of this power structure. It asks that Wall Street financial transactions are taxed more; that the Glass-Steagall Act be restored; dissolving the Federal Reserve System; and public funding for elections (p. 26). The General Assembly of the New York City encampment released a list of grievances against corporate power on their web site, citing them as responsible for, among others: nation-wide home foreclosures, bank bailouts with CEO bonuses, workplace inequality and discrimination, agrarian monopolies, labor outsourcing while cutting pay and benefits, massive student debt, cyclical economic instability, the influence of money in elections, and resistance to clean energy in favor of oil and fossil fuels (“Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” 2011).

The making of demands was not uncontroversial, though. As David Graeber explains, anarchism has long been suspicious of appeals to the power of the state. To submit grievances to the state’s authority would recognize it as a legitimate recourse for reform- something anarchists reject. This is the tension between traditional Marxists and anarchists. Marxists believe that the state is a means for social change: seizing the bureaucracies of the state, nullify its monopoly of violence, and use its power for social transformation. Anarchists do not accept the legitimacy of existing political institutions, and are deeply averse to the creation of hierarchical structures, preferring instead “consensus-based direct democracy” (Graeber, 2011, p. 1-4). Hence Occupy has been unwilling to engage in the electoral process or establish a formal leadership. Marxists rebuttal by saying that the anarchists’ “absolute hostility to the state, and its tendency to adopt a stance of moral purity, limit its usefulness as a basis for a broad movement for egalitarian social change...” (Epstein, p. 2).

Hence, Occupy movement teeters between these two solutions: either abandon the traditional political process of electoral strategy and legislative reforms, which they deem

corrupting and hopeless, or attempt to revive the merits of a strong liberal state, capable of protecting the welfare of its most downtrodden citizens from the injustices of a free-market system. Participatory democracy is the heart of the Occupy doctrine. I believe that this is both a reflection of Occupy's anarchist roots, but also a manifestation of the Marxist concept of freedom and *Species Being*. *Species Being* describes the way in which we, as humans, can consciously and collectively shape the society we choose to live in. Such socially productive activity must be democratic and deliberate. For Marx, political processes that are inclusive, direct, and participatory are the ultimate expression of human freedom (Schmitt, p. 17-21). Thus, those in the Occupy movement are making a statement about conscious self-determination amid a society they perceive as too deeply beholden with an embedded capitalist ideology. The movement's adherents embrace collective decision-making as a means of empowerment through participation and public engagement (Gitlin, 2012, p. 74).

This is manifested in several ways. On a larger scale, the niche of participatory democracy supports a more communal society, with greater emphasis on localized economies, local banks, and cooperatively-owned businesses (van Gelder, p. 64-65). The hope, then, is to strengthen the work-place power of employees and limit the exploitive power of owners. Within the Occupy camps themselves are the General Assemblies (GAs). Designed for inclusion, these decision-making bodies allow anyone to voice his or her opinion about the tactics, philosophies, and demands of the respective camp. Individuals are given equal standing to suggest policies, as well as "block" proposals they disagree with (p. 94). The use of the human microphone illustrated another "ritual of inclusion". Because use of actual megaphones is often banned, a protester would announce that he or she has something to say, at which point his or her fellow protesters would repeat the protesters remarks in a unified, and thus amplified shout (p. 76-77).

The structure and organization of the camps also marks notable achievements in communal living. Occupiers established living spaces, served regular meals out of a make-shift kitchens, provided medical care, gave press releases, held group discussions and lectures, and engaged in online media strategies (p. 25). Many of the camp's activities were divided into and carried out by "Working Groups," which included groups dedicated to public relations, finances, environmentalism, legal help, education and awareness, technical fields, and electoral reform, to name a few (p. 60). The Occupy Wall Street encampment represented, as one activist noted, "...a non-commodified space in the heart of global capital..." (Lewis et al., p. 26). The camps simultaneously rejected the need for the corporate or political classes, offering instead a vision of collective empowerment and participation (p. 28). For the anarchists, this was the creation of autonomous spaces of free, cooperating individuals who refused the legitimacy of coercive state power. All of this embodies Occupy's own conception of Americanism: for those who engage in the democratic process, it should be the people who are most valued, not the corporations. The

democratic process is weakened when corporate financial policies that lessen people's ability to attain their full potential, and when their political influence keeps the average citizen from having an equal voice in the political process.

Success and Dissolution within the Hegemonic Structure

Since the time of its conception, the Occupy movement has largely become scattered. Its successes though, were notable. As Todd Gitlin notes, Occupy quickly elevated inequality to the forefront of national discourse (Gitlin, p. 47). Although some polls were mixed or came to contradictory conclusions, Occupy was riding a wave of public support for progressive taxation, reducing wealth inequality and corporate favoritism, and prioritizing unemployment over deficit-cutting (p. 37). Lewis et al. suggests that the movement provided momentum for several policies implemented, including extending New York's progressive "millionaire's tax," halting some home foreclosures, and reversing Bank of America's plan to impose new fees on its customers (Lewis et al., p. 37).

Optimistically, Gitlin writes, "Surely an economic collapse creates circumstances so special as to rope majorities into a collective and conceivably progressive consciousness" (p. 36). The slogan of Occupy movement itself -"We are the 99%"- serves several functions. First, it alludes to the vast holdings of wealth and income by the top 1 percent of Americans. Secondly, it suggests a society that is once again sharply divided by traditional notions of economic class: the small band of Americans who own the investments and capital, and the vast majority who do not. For Marxists, this is the inevitable concentration of wealth into the hands of the few (the capitalist owning class) while all others must sell their labor for a wage under conditions dictated by the owning class. Finally, the slogan is a unifying rallying cry, displaying the potential power of inclusion and collective power.

However, this has not developed as planned. While trying to provide a model of participatory democracy for the rest of the nation, some of its shortcomings became evident. The General Assemblies could be either chaotic or debilitating slow and inefficient (p. 77-78). As Lewis et al. observed, the commitment to intensely horizontal political structures nonetheless left many minorities marginalized within this brand of "hyper-democracy" (Lewis et al., p. 29). For months, no specific demands came out of these process-obsessed political bodies, which invited criticisms that the movement was aimless and not serious (Gitlin, p. 109).

Nor could the Occupy movement capture widespread support. According to Gallup, most Americans have a neutral opinion about the goals of the movement and its tactics,

often because they don't know enough about it. Democrats are more supportive than Republicans of the movement, yet majorities within each party (including independents) remain neutral (Gallup, 2011). The Occupy movement, according to Gitlin, was "deeply committed to a radical departure from political norms (Gitlin, p. 142). Its members were placed in a possibly unworkable position of wanting to achieve political reforms, and yet stay out of conventional electoral politics (p. 141). As Bernard E. Harcourt writes, "The Occupy movement rejected conventional political rationality, discourse, and strategies. It did not lobby Congress. It defied the party system. It refused to align or identify itself along traditional lines" (Harcourt, 2012).

On November 15th, 2011, police forcibly evicted the Zuccotti encampment. After that, the movement fragmented. Marxist theory contains the claim that the state upholds the ideologies of the ruling class. In this case, the capitalist state will use its coercive authority (such as police) to suppress challenges to the capitalist system, if it must (Schmitt, 175, 182). As Harcourt observed, "City governments cracked down on the Occupy movement across the country, and some municipalities, like Chicago, enacted draconian antiprotest laws to quiet dissent" (Harcourt, 2012). Lewis et al. notes that the widespread crackdown of Occupy protests reflects a historical pattern of government responses to protests (Lewis et al., p. 29). Gitlin himself describes Occupy as more disruptive and utopian (Gitlin, p. 41). Still, I argue that the Occupy movement had become so disrupted and scattered that it classified as an example of a kind of limited hegemony. With the camps and protests broken apart, it is unlikely the Occupy movement will be restored to its former strength. Looking ahead, the movement is likely to keep its distance from legislative action, choosing to instead focus on developing the localized GAs and worker-owned cooperatives that it launched post-Zuccotti (Lewis et al., p. 35, 41).

Conclusions

The Occupy movement is likely the closest a recent populist movement has come in cultivating a political class-consciousness in its members. As Occupy activist Marisa Holmes said, "Occupy has awakened this popular consciousness that the existing political and economic institutions are illegitimate, that they don't actually represent or reflect people, that another kind of democracy is needed and possible. People have felt really empowered by that" (Lewis et al., p. 39). However, if the movement ever hopes to broaden its future coalition, it may have to focus less narrowly on class, and more so on linking class inequalities with other social divisions, such as race, gender, and immigrant status (p. 41).

Occupy symbolized a reawakened call for collective action in the United States, fighting to empower individuals through new political structures and relationships, while simultaneously

stating an explicit rejection of the dominant ideology and institutions (p. 42). The Occupy movement, however, illustrated some of the challenges to building effective counter-hegemonies. While forgoing specific demands and goals was meant to invite broad participation, it also left the movement appearing aimless, and subjected it to criticisms. Embracing a leaderless formation led to some individuals emerging as leaders who did not always fully represent the diversity of their peers in the movement. Finally, by distancing itself from the mainstream political process, Occupy may have provided a passionate model for direct democracy, but it also alienated and marginalized itself from the public, as well as from possible avenues of legislative reform.

However, mainstream paths to reform were likely never to have been Occupy's ambitions in the first place. The influence of anarchism within Occupy may prove to refocus the moral perspective of future progressive and democratic movements. Anarchists' fervent—nearly absolutist—commitment to achieving egalitarianism and resisting power may be too rigid for broad political coalitions of change, but it could serve as a necessary reminder to their liberal peers about the deficiencies and even hazards of relying too much on the traditional institutions of the left, which are more prone to becoming beholden to corporate and monetary influence, and whose hierarchical structures of power leave many marginalized. So long as class inequality and corporate influence remain, so too will there be left-wing populists to critique this. Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Occupy movement is in showing that a common moral and ideological bond is possible across the admittedly scattered left, and that a commitment to egalitarianism and direct democracy are possible without the trappings of relying on hierarchical bodies of power.

Section 6: Lessons and Conclusions

The historian Alan Brinkley wrote, “What defines a political movement is not just the intellectual currents it vaguely absorbs, but how it translates those currents into a message of immediate importance to its constituency” (Kazin, p. 130). Both the Tea Party and Occupy movements harnessed their impetus from a common pool of realities: a citizenry that is increasingly distrustful about the integrity, efficiency, and efficacy of government; a public that is feeling ever more powerless in the wake of growing corporate power and government presence; one that looks at the political process with cynicism and apathy; a nation where large swaths of the population are materially suffering while those on top have an economic system skewed for their benefit; and many Americans who are fearful of the cultural and demographic

shifts underway in this country. This essay tries to show how populism is often inflamed by, and can effectively call attention to, many of the issues that are central to hegemonic struggle.

In their work on cultural hegemony in the United States, Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy write that successful counter-hegemonies must accomplish several things. They must “emphasize the shared experiences, current social positions and future capacities of collective, democratic leadership” (Artz & Murphy, p. 300). They must also develop their own cultural, political, social, and ideological practices completely independent of dominant institutions (p. 302). The Tea Party and Occupy have shown different outcomes here. Both have done well in developing a distinct political culture and ideology based around their respective left- and right-leaning interpretations of populist theory. They have passionately mobilized their constituents in expressing these ideologies in the form of political projects. For the Tea Party, this meant replacing their scorned political adversaries with their own people through electoral victories. For Occupy, it meant demonstrating the capabilities of direct democracy through the camps. In their relatively short lives, both of these groups garnered massive attention, affected politics and policy, and shaped the national political discourse.

Artz and Murphy argue that the strength of counter-hegemonies lie in cultivating an “alternative leadership and political program based on the solidarity and collectivity” of their subordinate group (p. 302). Counter-hegemonies must also break with the traditional two-party system, create their own independent political institutions, and “create an ideological and cultural movement based on the values of participatory democracy, solidarity, and community” (p. 304). If this is true, then the Occupy Wall Street movement proved much closer to an authentic counter-hegemony. And yet the degree to which the Occupy was marginalized from the mainstream forces us to wonder if the movement’s tactics of self-isolation are viable in the present day political landscape. The success of the Tea Party may also put these guidelines into question. The Tea Party has clearly shown feats of solidarity, yet it has decided to actually place itself within the dominant institutions in order to then change them, and thus alter the dominant ideology. I would note, though, that in fighting for an even extremer version of free-market capitalism and individualism, the Tea Party may invite criticisms from those on the left that see it as a subdominant group that is working to only reinforce the interests and ideologies of a dominant capitalist class.

Furthermore, in matters of coalition building, counter-hegemonies must attract broad appeal and public support of the masses. Promoting the interests of minorities and the working class is an integral part of building a diverse bloc of allies. The Tea Party and the Occupy movement have both stumbled in this area. Too often it appeared that affluent, educated

white males were directing the movements, and leaving minorities unrepresented or totally alienated. This is troubling, as it not only questions the motives and authenticity of any populist movement, but it speaks to a larger reality about the exclusion of the working poor and minorities from the political process. These groups, who arguably suffer the most and hold the most legitimate grievances, often lack the time, energy, and resources to participate in social reform movements, leaving them continuously voiceless in the political arena. Furthermore, in crafting such distinct interpretations of populist ideology, both movements appeared to alienate many from their cause. Such ideologies often appeared radical, narrow, or antagonistic to the general public. Neither the Tea Party nor the Occupy movement maintained high levels of public support in their lifetimes. Without broad appeal and diverse coalitions, neither could hope to mount a lasting campaign to accomplish their political projects.

I would also note that a Marxist analysis is not without its limits. Even in the early 1900s, the heyday of American socialism, leaders of socialist groups and labor unions had to avoid coloring their causes with Marxist language (Kazin, p. 53-66). Since the 1970s, Democrats bringing attention to socioeconomic inequalities have often been scolded for igniting “class warfare” (p. 227). Such invocations of class have often discomforted or offended Americans, who have historically adhered to a worldview that avoids the lens of class. Despite this, rhetoric of class is indicative of the workplace exploitation and inequalities that social movements have always sought to address (Kazin, p. 162).

However, one treads a delicate line when fusing populist rhetoric with that of class. While Tea Party never showed fondness for class language, Occupy’s struggle lay in promoting social justice and participatory politics without alienating other skeptical Americans with explicit and incendiary notions of class. As Michael Kazin writes, “[Populism’s] assertion of resentments based on class and status may be a barrier to constructing a new type of universalism” (Kazin, p. 289). Furthermore, in an increasingly global world, it is becoming more difficult to reduce conflicts between neatly packed categories like race, class, or gender, or into dichotomous conflicts of “the people” against “the elites” (p. 288). While Occupy succeeded in bringing some light to the growing wealth inequality in America, the era in which populist groups can confidently wield a narrow vocabulary of class may be drawing to a close.

However short-lived their political lives may be, the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements both tread the well-worn path of populist ideology, a narrative that traces back to the foundations of the nation’s roots. So long as America faces economic instability, wealth inequality, and political marginalization, there will be populist uprisings that seek to correct these ailments. The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street groups are not flash movements or simply

people seeking material gain. Their ideological content and mass mobilization are gauges of economic and political discontent that those who occupy positions of power in this country should listen and respond to.

Future political movements, whether they be populist or not, can always learn from the shortcomings of their predecessors. They must be wary of fear mongers and fringe extremists, and not allow, as Michael Kazin writes, for the “malicious to overshadow the hopeful” (Kazin, p. 288). Instead, they may find more traction in compromise and mutual dialogue. Future political movements must also avoid grounding themselves in ideologies that are too specific or extreme to attract only but a narrow demographic of followers. Instead, they should strive to build inclusive coalitions that attempt to address grievances that are common to a diverse stratum of society. Accomplishing this may require a continued retooling in the language of class, as well as dropping the bombastic rhetoric that is thematic of populism. The new populisms may fade, but more will emerge, for they are expressions of an impassioned and alert citizenry, which is the heart of any democratic process.

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