

2012

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Recommended Citation

Lundskow, George, "Authoritarianism and Destructiveness in the Tea Party Movement" (2012). *Peer Reviewed Articles*. 9.
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Authoritarianism and Destructiveness in the Tea Party Movement

Critical Sociology
38(4) 529–547
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0896920511434218
crs.sagepub.com


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Abstract

The contemporary lower middle class, as constituted in the Tea Party movement, holds increasingly unfavorable views of government, especially among exurban whites, based on imagined and preferred versions of reality. This imagined reality valorizes the ingroup as the hegemonic standard even as their actual status and class opportunities decline. At its center, the Tea Party movement relies on moralism (conservative values), essentialistic fantasy (racism and religiosity), and Manichean categorization (good/evil) to explain the reality of job loss, rising prices, and severe real estate decline. Rather than interrogate finance capital and deregulation, the Tea Party movement instead indulges in spectacle as both individual gratification and to herald renewed white privilege. However, the simultaneous rejection of the established institutions of power, simplistic policy formulation, and condemnation of outgroups suggests a racially motivated authoritarianism and destructiveness rather than any particular political commitment.

Keywords

Tea Party, political movements, authoritarianism, destructiveness, right-wing populism, class

Introduction

If all communities beyond face to face experience are imagined, then we need to understand what people imagine. It may be one's own extended community. It may be practical, professional, religious, founded in a moment of sudden sorrow, unbounded joy, or any of the vicissitudes in between as people go through life. In any case, the community beyond one's own experience can only be imagined. Our thoughts, images, and feelings about the community may be grounded in empirical fact, or in ideology, in the pit of our fears or the summit of our aspirations. Often, the imagined community is a complex combination of verifiable fact, perceptions, misperceptions, and plain honest wonder. Still, communities beyond experience can only be imagined, whether informed or misinformed. They are quite real to other people, the ones who live in other communities with different cultures and history. Until we join them, however, they are only imagined.

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The imagined community need not take on unreal and impossible chimerical attributes. It need not be fantasy, whether a dream or a nightmare. It need not be real, either. In the case of the Tea Party movement, we are dealing with what is variously conceptualized as carnival reality (DeBord, 1994 [1967]; Langman and Braun, 2011), postmodern simulation (Best and Kellner, 1997, 2001; Jameson, 1991), simulacra (Baudrillard, 1995), or perhaps best termed “bullshit” by Harry Frankfurt (2005). What does the Tea Party imagine, and why?

Like all political rhetoric, Tea Party rhetoric is speech intended to convey images and emotions that inspire a particular constituency, to join together and pursue their interests whether material, ideational, or emotional, usually over and against the interests of others. In this sense, political rhetoric (Tea Party or otherwise) is not a matter of truth or falsehood, but something else entirely. As Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009 [1953]) argued, the ‘stage setting’, or social context, provides the framework through which understanding occurs. Meaning depends less on what the speaker says, or even how she says it, and more on the social context of agendas the listeners bring. Consequently, what is not said is often more important than what the speaker actually utters, but meaning does not depend entirely on individual perception either. Rather, a rapport develops between the speaker and the listeners, or the various participants with each other, who collectively and actively construct the *real* message within the overt statements and participatory theater. Similar to Roland Barthes (1972 [1957]), Tea Party rhetoric consists of free-floating signifiers (images and utterances with no consistent social meaning beyond the ingroup) that convey their true meaning in the minds of the ingroup enthusiasts, not in the literal denotation.

For example, I can mask malicious intent by denying racist sentiments, but simultaneously reassure the audience that ‘some people just don’t want to work and would rather suck up free welfare money’. Racism becomes implicit, but in the context of angry white people, nevertheless clear and powerful. Following Christian Smith (2010), this is dependent subjective reality, a reality that depends on the perception and beliefs of the individual, and which is not institutionalized or widely shared (2010: 185–186). However, I contend that it can be shared by people of similar social class, status group, and personality, the impact of stage setting.

In the case of the Tea Party then, what appears on the surface as nothing more than middle-aged men and some women dressing up in three-pointed hats and 18th century garb and singing patriotic songs to drum, fife, and banjo in fact carries significant meaning for those who truly understand that the public spectacle is really about expressing patriotism and authentic American identity. The festival celebrations are more than lighthearted tomfoolery. ‘Look at me’ it says to the world with great conviction. ‘Behold the true American Patriots!’

Their patriotism is not a matter of truth or falsehood, but of carnival. The carnival (e.g. political rallies, rock concerts, online forums) occurs within a bounded space or context which stands as its own self-contained reality with rules independent of the truth beyond its boundaries. Carnival is not a lie, but rather follows the logic of bullshit. As Frankfurt argues, bullshit and lies are fundamentally different things. A lie “is designed to insert a particular falsehood at a specific point ... in order to avoid the consequences of having that point occupied by the truth” (Frankfurt, 2005: 51). In order to replace the truth with a lie, the liar must necessarily know the truth, and thus, the liar is always concerned with the truth. In contrast, the bullshitter has no concern with the truth, but neither does bullshit require lying. Indeed, the truth is irrelevant, and the bullshitter therefore makes no distinction between truth and lie.

Consciously or not, however, bullshit is deceptive. It hides the real enterprise of the situation, which is to manipulate perception. But of what? A liar wants the audience to believe that the lies are true. In contrast, the bullshitter cares nothing for verifiable facts, but rather, wants the audience to gather something above and beyond the overt subject matter of the discourse. The rock concert,

for example, is not only or even primarily about music (given the lousy sound quality), but about 'having a good time'. The real purpose is about something other than the apparent topic. In other words, when a bullshitter talks about the United States, for example, the real discourse is not about the actual affairs of the United States as a nation, but about something pertaining to the speaker, such as the speaker's patriotism, and often equally about the lack of it in others. Or when the discourse is superficially about preserving and creating jobs, the real discourse is often an attack on those maleficari who allegedly want to take away the livelihood of real Americans. Bullshit is thus an expression of imagination. Sometimes it consists of facts, but just as often not. Either way, factual truth is irrelevant.

Yet imagination does not necessitate the unreality of carnival. To the extent people feel deprived of opportunities, their futures pitilessly blocked by seemingly mysterious economic forces, their lives disempowered, their status stripped, and hope for the future faded, then alienation from the world increases. The feelings are real, as are the social conditions that inspire them. Quite simply, Tea Partiers feel like strangers in a world that no longer offers a place to live and work. Yet their understanding strays into carnival. They imagine their nation overrun by people wholly different from themselves, by lazy, immoral, and criminal immigrants who work for lazy and sexually immoral intellectuals who idle away the hours in pointless chatter – a bunch of sissies afraid to take action.

The great catalyst that turned inchoate fear into embodied reality was the election of Barack Obama to the Office of the President. The 2008 election was more racially polarized than any other, which Tesler and Sears (2010) conclude was the decisive factor – those willing to accept a black President and those opposed to Obama because of his race. Although Obama won a majority in urban areas, his greatest strength was in the higher income and more highly educated suburbs, where he ran 51 to 45 percent. He won just under half of the vote among the white wage-earning working class, and generally ran mid-30s among the exurban and rural white population (*New York Times*, 2008). While Obama's strongest support was among college-educated suburbanites, McCain's strongest support was among manufacturing workers, the traditional working class. Given a shift of manufacturing into the South, as well as the collapse of working class community almost everywhere, only traditional and unionized segments of the working class retain any liberal or pluralistic sentiments (Fiorito, 2007; Lundskow et al., 2009). Other than a few union enclaves, the new working class is politically and culturally conservative, anti-union, indifferent to education and diverse experiences, and fearful towards the larger world.

Exurbanites overwhelmingly, Tea Partiers imagine everything sinister in Obama – an allegedly foreign-born Muslim intellectual, totalitarian socialist, and friend to terrorists. More than anything else, he is also black. Why imagine such an outlandish vision? Even though he has produced a Hawaiian birth certificate, has attended only Christian churches, and boldly sent a Seal team into Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden, he will always be black. Racism is the center of the Tea Party.

But why racism? It is not simple ignorance. It is moreover a collision of class, status, and personality, an historical event within particular economic and cultural conditions which Tea Party enthusiasts perceive, as Freud argued, as something uncanny, "when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we previously regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality" (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 122). All the fears about takeover, racial and sexual pollution, corruption, and weakness, previously envisioned as a mythical evil Black Man or homosexual, became an uncanny reality in the person of President Obama.

Altogether then, this article argues that the two main dimensions of the Tea Party are authoritarian submission, and secondly, destructiveness. Authoritarian personalities crave submission to anyone perceived as superior, and domination over anyone perceived as inferior. They embrace clear hierarchies, love power, and enjoy enforcing normalcy. This leads them to highly conventional

attitudes, a fear of complexity and uncertainty, and hostility towards people who are different, gentle, or thoughtful (see Adorno et al., 1993 [1950]; Altemeyer, 1996, 2007; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Under the canopy of righteous authority, an authoritarian finds emotional security in submission. If the righteous authority is challenged or overthrown (in the mind of the authoritarian), authoritarians become angry and aggressive towards what they believe is illegitimate authority, and consequently, Tea Party activism takes the form of negation, a desire to destroy those who have achieved what they themselves desire (or feel they have lost).

The destructive personality derives fulfillment by negating the emotions, opportunities, livelihood, status, or in severe cases, the lives of others, specifically those who have achieved what the destructive person most desires. As Erich Fromm conceptualizes it, this is a form of malignant aggression, one that seeks satisfaction of inner unhappiness, not the correction of external social or political injustice. This is decisive, because it means that the primary Tea Party motivation is personal and emotional. Although he uses Freudian terminology, Fromm's concepts and logic are fundamentally sociological, in that destructiveness arises from a lack of relatedness, especially when the world seems strange and occupied by strange people. Intensified by narcissistic insecurity, destructiveness is thus the extreme manifestation of control – if I cannot have what I want, then no one should have it. It is not coincidence that Tea Partiers consist of two particular demographics (examined below) – older and retired people, for whom life is nearing an end, and younger independent business owners and contractors, for whom life seems thwarted. For the destructive personality, 'their aim is to transform all that is alive into dead matter; they want to destroy everything and everybody, often even themselves; their enemy is life itself' (Fromm, 1992 [1973]: 387). While the Tea Partiers are not murderers, they attack programs and policies that offer life to others – civil rights, affirmative action, access to education, and pluralistic diversity. Typically joyless, the destructive person attacks happiness in any form, but especially the spontaneous enjoyment of life. At the same time, the destructive person appears publicly with the veneer of amiability and joy (Fromm, 1992 [1973]: 470) as we see with the fife and drum, three-cornered hats, free hot dogs, and so on at Tea Party rallies, as well as a blended perception of reality, 'a blend between reality and phantasy in which nothing is entirely real and nothing is entirely unreal' (Fromm, 1992 [1973]: 476). Hence, they have a propensity to accept ridiculous and contradictory claims, for example, that Obama is a foreign-born, Muslim atheist liberal fascist anti-military warmonger. As we will see more closely, Tea Partiers realize that structural factors have diminished their lives, but they care little to discover the full reality, and instead, embrace the mythologies of racism and foreign invasion.

Although the Tea Party has organizational structure at both the grass-roots and national level, and has impacted elections, their unity depends not on what they support, but what they oppose. As we will see, they 'support' smaller government by dismantling broadly representative, deliberative democracy. They 'support' lower taxes by opposing programs that help people other than themselves. Their agenda is negative, not constructive. In this way, they are part of a rightist continuum that differs only in tactics, not in ideology or sentiment (Department of Homeland Security, 2009). Moreover, they are part of a historical continuum of right-wing authoritarianism and destructiveness that manifests during times of economic and status uncertainty.

Tea Party Constituents

In the various manifestations of the Tea Party, the constituents are overwhelmingly white. While financially successful overall, the Tea Party is bifurcated by class. Most polls measure 'class' simply by income, and call nearly everyone 'middle-class', as for example in the otherwise useful *New York Times* poll of the Tea Party that appeared on 14 April 2010. Historical-comparative and ethnographic

research shows more specifically that those Tea Partiers with a college degree and professional careers, mostly in business or technical fields, are over 60. Those under 60 are typically independent trade sub-contractors (e.g. electrician, plumber, carpenter) or non-union wage workers (Lepore, 2010) who have either lost a job or face declining work through contraction of the construction industry and transfer of low skill jobs abroad (Zernicke, 2010). Self-employed sub-contractors nearly all depend on the construction industry and get paid by the job (Street and DiMaggio, 2011). Often earning upwards of \$65,000/year in good times, their earnings since 2008 have declined by nearly half overall (Bunch, 2010). Lower middle class matters, because their personality type develops from an alienated life, the rugged individualist who faces the world alone – no employer healthcare, no retirement benefits, few consistent co-workers, and unpredictable work that often requires frequent moves or a lot of time away from home. As housing and commercial construction plummeted when artificial wealth from Wall Street disappeared, they felt it immediately, and the sector has yet to recover. Similarly, non-union working class also matters, because their pay, benefits, job security, and working conditions fall far below unionized counterparts (Mishel and Bernstein, 2009).

Thus, the Tea Party consists of small business owners, tradespeople, independent contractors, franchisees, and non-union wage workers, from exurbs and rural areas (Zernicke and Thee-Brenan, 2010). Union membership among private sector wage workers is only 6.9 percent, and 36.2 percent for the public sector (United States Department of Labor, 2011). Given low public sector employment in exurbs and rural areas, such jobs, overwhelmingly located in urban areas, confer better benefits and security (Mishel and Bernstein, 2009), and thus appear ‘elite’ and ‘remote’ to Tea Partiers.

Removed from the world of professionals and government employees in a diverse urban social environment, Tea Party enthusiasts live in overwhelmingly white enclaves. As the latest manifestation of conservative populism, such people typically hold very conservative political views and embrace the notion of white heritage and white privilege, associating ‘real America’ with white culture, of ‘hard-working’ physical laborers, self-employment, or highly routinized office work (McGirr, 2001; Phillips-Fein, 2009). In other words, people who live to fulfill the expectations of authority, stick with what they know, do not take chances, and do not complain. The exurbs in particular have become enclaves of authoritarianism (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009; Mondak, 2010).

Class, culture, and personality thus interact to create a white authoritarian individualist worldview that imagines hard work and self-reliance as the only real path to success. Above all else, the white American authoritarian sees the work/laziness dichotomy as the decisive measure that determines true Americans from the others (Theiss-Morse, 2009), a divide which they also believe follows racial lines (Kinder and Kam, 2010). Failure results only from laziness or, as the Tea Party alleges, from insidious unfairness perpetrated by outsiders, the nefarious ‘others’ from some imagined community that embodies everything vile and corrupt. Crucial to this identity and imagined community, however, is the belief that people of color (and homosexuals) are inherently lazy or reckless and therefore prone to failure in life by their own improper lifestyle and values (Amato and Neiwert, 2010). They cannot achieve successful livelihood without special government programs and hand-outs. Two dichotomies thus define the worldview – hard-working/lazy, and white/non-white.

The Past is Prologue – Nativism in the 1850s and the Collapse of Family Farms in the 1980s

The particular lineage from which the Tea Party arose has a long history in the United States, identified decades ago by Seymour Martin Lipset (1978) and Richard Hofstadter (1964, 1966) in the form of paranoid, anti-intellectual movements during times of decline. In *Prophets of Deceit* (1970 [1949]), Lowenthal and Guterman delineated the techniques of right-wing agitators which betray their true

intent – agitation. Like Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and others today, the demagogues of the past like Father Coughlin (promoted anti-Semitism and fascism), Carrie Nation (preached the evils of alcohol and vandalized bars with a hatchet), Gerald L.K. Smith (founded the Christian Nationalist Crusade), and the Know Nothings (see below) never really wanted actual political power. Such would require accountability, and agitators avoid accountability for their pronouncements, devoted instead to emotional and usually religious rhetoric against the insidious infiltration of immorality and weakness centered on a fear of racial and/or sexual contamination.

The Know Nothings are the most direct predecessor to the Tea Party. Founded as the Organization of the Star Spangled Banner by Charles B. Allen in New York City in 1850, members were instructed to say they 'know nothing' of the organization, should anyone ask. The name applied to the movement generally after journalist Horace Greeley, in a series of articles in the *New York Tribune* in 1853, changed the context of the name and applied 'Know Nothings' pejoratively and literally, concluding that 'they ought to say and do nothing since they know nothing' (in Bennett, 1988: 110). Ironically, the movement embraced the new meaning as a proud medal of anti-intellectualism. They held their first national Know Nothing convention in New York City in the Spring of 1854. Far from the unifying event that organizers sought, it proved how diverse and fractious the Nativist movement was (Bennett, 1988: 110–114).

Constituted initially of middle class businessmen, mostly tradesmen and shopkeepers in New York City who resented the large numbers of foreign-born competitors arriving from poor areas of Europe (Beckert, 2001). By 1854, the movement included abolitionists and fervent Protestants from the North, but also Catholic Creoles from the South who staunchly supported slavery alongside their Protestant counterparts. Often at cross-purposes, Nativism provided only superficial, and consequently short-lived, unity. Specifically, Northerners opposed the Catholic German and Irish immigrants yet supported the emancipation of slaves. Southerners rejected emancipation, and opposed Northern support for a unified federal banking system that supported the interests of industrialization and family-owned farms, both of which diminished the viability of Southern plantation and tenant farming agriculture. Both culturally and economically, the North and the South represented irreconcilable differences. Electoral success between 1852 and 1856 in both the North and the South meant the end of Nativism as a unifying theme, because it highlighted the differences behind the facade. Once in office, the elected representatives needed to formulate actual policy, not just gratifying rhetoric. Their substantive goals quickly diverged. Consequently, the Know Nothings ceased to exist as a coherent movement by the end of 1856 (Bennett, 1988: 127).

During their heyday, the Know Nothings never fielded their own candidates as part of an independent political party. Like the Tea Parties of today, they endorsed candidates from existing parties – primarily Whigs in the North and Democrats in the South, but also members of smaller parties such as the People's Party, Anti-Alien, Free Soil, and Fusion Party. This brought widespread success, but of a type that also led to their demise – assimilation. So although nativism resonated with the various and diverse constituents of the Know Nothings, it did not resonate in the same way among the many different groups. Consequently, the movement at the grass-roots level disbanded.

Crucially, behind the ethno-cultural conflict stood economic conflict within and between the North and the South. Industrialization and the beginnings of finance encouraged immigration and independent ownership in the North. The expansion of capital promoted wage growth, which squeezed urban shopkeepers. Immigrants also filled the ranks of factory and other wage jobs, opened shops of their own, and collectively created a more diverse culture in major Northern cities – most explicitly in New York City where the Know Nothings began. The Know Nothings attempted to confront economic change with the politics of ethnic identity, and failed. After the Civil War, central banking, the ascent of finance capital, and the expansion of family farms all contributed to the success of the North both

in urban and rural areas. The Know Nothings arose from the urban shopkeeper class because they were the class most threatened by the social change of the day. Southern planters joined them as they also faced economic threats, primarily agricultural competition abroad.

Southern plantations and slave labor died with defeat in the Civil War, and the Northern family farm model expanded. Until the late 1970s, the family farm was still viable in the Midwest and parts of the Great Plains regions of the United States. Nowhere else did the family farm have any established tradition. The Southern states, once dominated by large plantations, transformed into large agribusiness, which also came to dominate the Western states.

By the early 1980s, economic forces closed in, a kind of 20th century enclosure that doomed the small farmers. Like their Know Nothing predecessors, white rural America embraced the longstanding tradition of rugged individualism and hard-working whiteness we see today in the Tea Party movement. With stoic fortitude, the farmers stood by peacefully as the banks possessed their land and sold it to agribusiness corporations or to real estate developers, and auctioneers sold any other property to the highest bidder (Dudley, 2002). As similar economic forces threatened family farmers in France during the same period, French farmers became highly militant, and blocked major roadways with piles of burning railroad ties and assorted rubbish. They set up roadblocks and stopped trucks carrying agricultural goods at gunpoint (Barlett, 1993).

Such open defiance of banks and corporations was not the way of the American family farmer. In contrast to the French, they deferred to the claimed legitimacy of financial institutions, who, after all, were merely enforcing a contract the farmers had willingly signed during a period of sustained growth in the agricultural sector for at least 20 years, as a result of substantially increased global demand and government subsidies for cotton and grain in the 1970s that greatly increased family farm revenue (Friedberger, 1988).

As the Reagan administration removed federal subsidies and as produce from the Western states – an area of the country with almost no tradition of family farming – flooded the market, the market value of agricultural produce declined rapidly from 1980 to 1984. In a series of legislation after 1984, the Reagan-Bush era removed regulations on agricultural speculation (as well as for other commodities, notably, oil and gas) such that speculation exerted more influence on prices than supply and demand (Westhoff, 2010). Most of the buyers were purely speculative, bought entire crops, then flooded the market to drive down prices below production costs for farmers (as farmers now had no choice of buyers), then bought their farms as they went out of business and resold the land to large agro-corporations and developers (Davidson, 1996). Together, removal of subsidies and deregulation facilitated price collapse of agricultural products at the farm level (Longworth, 2008). In short, the Reagan (and Bush) governments removed protections for family farmers, a removal that big capital agribusiness and financial corporations exploited to dominate agricultural markets and eliminate family farms.

Family farms in the Midwest could not compete against the large scale, heavily automated, monocrop methods in the Western states that also exploited illegal immigrant labor (Wood, 2010). This new competition in conjunction with price collapse quickly bankrupted once prosperous family farms now loaded with debt (Conkin, 2008). Unable to obtain reasonable market prices or secure new loans (FDIC, 1997), failure became widespread in the Midwest.

Charity events such as Farm-aid by Willie Nelson and John Cougar Mellencamp, along with patriotic songs about American freedom by Lee Greenwood and others, helped to redirect the feelings of anger away from the Reagan administration and banks. Filled with good feelings, popular songs, and patriotic fervor, Midwestern farmers moved quietly from independent business owners to dependent wage workers. The banks that had dispossessed them of their land and business now provided offers of housing loans and credit cards to maintain a life through debt the farmers and other workers displaced by the first wave of off-shoring could no longer afford directly.

Throughout the 1990s, household debt increased dramatically, finally peaking in 2008 (Bivens, 2011), just as the housing market collapsed as the result of financial games that created the illusion of wealth through massive expansion of debt, the result of deregulation in the 1980s. The decline of family farms was the first pillar to fall in a long series of events from 1984 to 2008 that shifted massive amounts of wealth away from middle-income families and into the wallets of a few rich individuals, investment megabanks, and insurance companies.

Finance and Real Estate Collapse and The Emergence of the Tea Parties

Small-business failures intensified as economic collapse in two sectors of the economy that started in 2006 and ended in early 2009 was a direct result of three major Congressional acts that deregulated both finance and real estate – see Acharya et al. (2011) for a detailed discussion.

First, the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act (DIDMCA) of 1980 removed many controls in place since the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, which had created financial stability following the Great Depression. DIDMCA allowed banks to set their own interest rates, and to freely merge without federal approval.

Second, the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982 allowed both banks and savings and loans to issue adjustable rate mortgages, and to issue mortgages without regard to assets, income, or other typical means of assessing repayment probability.

Third, the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, also known as the Financial Services Modernization Act of 1999, allowed commercial and investment banks, securities firms, and insurance companies to consolidate. This act also allowed the rating of packaged assets by only the highest investment grade assets, even if the majority of the package consisted of high-risk junk bonds and sub-prime mortgages. This undid the final regulations of Glass-Steagall.

Overall, these three measures, which passed with overwhelming support from both Democrats and Republicans, allowed finance capital to conduct any transaction, under any terms they wished. Oversight of such transactions passed from government regulators to the financial corporations themselves. With no regulation or supervision, sub-prime loans and adjustable rate mortgages from the housing sector became the basis of more mysterious artifices such as credit default swaps, collateralized debt obligations, and derivatives (McLean and Nocera, 2010). Now rated only by the best assets in a package, these devices concealed the sub-prime mortgages and other high-risk debt. Banks, pension funds, and nearly any entity with money to invest bought portfolios rated AAA (the best) but in fact loaded with high risk, practically hopeless debt. The most dangerous debt were the so-called NINJA (No Income, No Job or Assets) mortgages, which Countrywide originated and other lenders quickly copied (Michaelson, 2009; Muolo and Padilla, 2010). Backed by policies from AIG and other insurers, they seemed like high profit, no risk investments. Of course, the risky debt did fail, and it wiped out billions in artificial wealth, but also billions more through insurance claims, all of which cumulatively bankrupted the financial sector in the USA and abroad (Morgenson and Rosner, 2011).

The mortgages, bundled with other toxic assets in the form of collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), derivatives, credit default swaps, and other financial artifices allowed banks to generate wealth on paper with no corresponding material reality. In other words, the wealth was purely illusory, and knowingly so (Johnson and Kwak, 2011; Lewis, 2011). The key was always to keep selling the paper and not get stuck holding it when the whole scheme collapsed. The bubble broke in mid-2008, and real estate values plummeted. In conjunction with vastly overextended debt, over US\$1t of false wealth disappeared (Bivens, 2011). This caused local businesses, especially those connected to retail and construction, to lose substantial income within a few months time, which

resulted in widespread failure. This triggered widespread consumer collapse and significant job loss. The catastrophe spread to Europe and wreaked similar havoc, especially in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Britain.

The key trendsetter and most successful player in bundling toxic assets as high quality debt was Goldman Sachs (Cohan, 2011), although all the major banks actively participated, including Citibank, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, Citibank, Credit Suisse-First Boston, Deutsche Bank, hedge funds such as Bear-Stearns, financial arms of General Motors (GMAC mortgages) and General Electric, and the insurance giant American Insurance Group (AIG). Regional banks also jumped on board as the financial chicanery proved lucrative. All suffered massive losses in 2008, but only Goldman Sachs' major competitor Lehman Brothers was allowed to fail, an event that also revealed the immense magnitude and broad pervasiveness of the losses. Subsequent government intervention approved in the final weeks of the Bush administration was designed to save the remaining companies, and not to minimize losses which had, of course, already occurred.

Whether in the form of free money or money to purchase other failed financial institutions, such as merging Bear Stearns with JP Morgan Chase and Wachovia with Wells Fargo, the Bush administration rushed \$700b into service (\$500b actually given out), with little attention to terms, especially, if ever, repayment (Farrell, 2010). Although suffering massive losses as well, Goldman Sachs enjoyed much greater political influence in both the Bush and Obama administrations, with many former executives in important government posts, and this placed them first in line to receive bailout money. The current Secretary of the Treasury, Timothy Geithner, is a protégé of Henry Paulson and Robert Rubin, both former Treasury Secretaries and former CEOs of Goldman Sachs (McGee, 2010). Altogether, the government paid out roughly \$100b in free money, and another \$400b in loans to the financial and insurance industry, all started during the last days of the Bush administration and managed by the Obama administration.

This assured that speculation, once restricted to certain sectors and closely regulated, would decisively dominate the economy (see *Financial Crisis Report*, 2011). The direct result of massive liquid capital, speculation currently accounts for 88 percent of all energy and materials (e.g. timber, iron, cotton, wool) and 90 percent of all food produce (e.g. wheat, milk) contracts (Wallace, 2011). This means that speculation – not supply and demand – controls the prices of vital necessities. By bidding prices artificially high, food prices have risen 80 percent since 2005, and oil peaked at \$147/barrel in 2008, precisely when supplies were stable and demand was the lowest in at least 10 years (Wallace, 2011). When the necessities become exorbitant, it leaves little discretionary money for other consumer goods and services. Consequently, individuals suffer financial hardship and the economy continues to sputter.

Although some local banks failed, all the major banks (except Lehman Brothers), insurance companies, and hedge funds remained intact or merged, and all the senior executives responsible for the financial devastation continued to receive massive bonuses (Morgenson and Rosner, 2011). At the same time, many family-owned businesses failed, and innumerable private contractors found themselves without work as nearly all housing construction ceased and, with significant loss of equity value, homeowners found themselves without the means to meet payments on exotic mortgages with complex terms, the true purpose of which now became apparent – the transfer of wealth to speculative capital, which had already taken over the commodities markets (Lambert, 2010) and now sought to take over real estate and anything else it can force into a speculative, rather than supply and demand market (McGee, 2010).

This sent a backlash through manufacturing as well. As homeowners drastically reduced spending on upgrades, production of building materials declined, as well as manufacturing of appliances. Job loss in manufacturing further reduced discretionary spending, so that cumulatively, wage jobs

disappeared rapidly. With credit maxed out, decline occurred on big-ticket items as well, such that the domestic auto industry, the plight of which was not initially connected to financial markets, eventually felt its impact as purchase and lease financing disappeared and all three domestic makers faced immense debt (Rattner, 2010). General Motors and Chrysler entered bankruptcy. Arising from assorted problems that accumulated over several decades, the problems of the auto industry thus intersected with the financial sector, and they became part of the bailout as well, including government management of bankruptcy proceedings and ownership of the companies.

Small business at the local level, whether fully independent or locally owned chainstore franchises, faced ever declining margins, and in conjunction with large scale debt, especially real estate improvement debt, either closed shop or sold out to midsize management companies that held conglomerations of clothing, gas, and restaurant businesses and franchises (Francis et al., 2007; Sharp, 2007). Independent contractors failed as well, such as plumbing (Faloon, 2007) and heating and cooling (Murphy, 2006). This consolidation meant job loss, or greatly reduced earnings, especially for independent contractors and sales representatives (Ray and Gordon, 2006) – people who would become key younger constituents in the Tea Party who see their futures stolen by the undeserving. As construction collapsed following the financial collapse, trades workers (almost all of whom are independent contractors) similarly lost work, and found themselves standing alone without healthcare, retirement, income, or a home (Hardaway, 2011). John McCain made a folk hero out of Samuel Joseph “Joe the Plumber” Wurzelbacher, an unemployed contract worker from Holland, Ohio, a 98 percent white suburb of Toledo. A Tea Party archetype, Wurzelbacher’s case allegedly proved the presence of sinister forces at work, where a hard-working white American male loses his job for no apparent reason, at least for those unfamiliar with the relationship between speculative capital and political power.

Overall then, the working and middle classes class suffered the brunt of major mistakes, intense greed, and outright fraud in the financial sector that nearly brought down the entire global economy. As wage earners and private contractors lost work and nearly all homeowners saw their equity vanish and many move into negative equity territory, big business recovered quickly with government intervention in financial markets and direct giveaways to particular corporations. By mid-2009, the financial sector, led by Goldman Sachs, reported profits far beyond expectations, mainly by passing debt to the government. Although Goldman paid back \$10b in TARP loans in June 2009, they did so by issuing \$28b in new debt, all backed by the government’s Temporary Liquidity Guarantee Program, a government subsidy of Goldman and other financial companies (Puente, 2009). Goldman paid the government \$10b while receiving a net increase of 18b in government insured debt.

Given the immense scope of the risk, fraud, and corruption, one might expect Tea Party anger would be directed at the financial barons who manipulated regulations and profited from the cataclysm. Yet economic facts do not constitute the worldview of the Tea Partiers. Instead, we must understand their social psychology. For them, the mysterious economic forces would remain in the shadows, replaced by manifest specters of the authoritarian imagination.

Transposition of Economic Forces and Cultural Prejudice

The mysterious forces of change became manifest in the new black President. In the minds of Tea Partiers, this transposition turned economic forces into fantasies of racial pollution. Viewed as a foreign-born Muslim, this black upstart further amplified the invasion and corruption sentiments – Nativist sentiments in other words – that the country was being taken over at every level. In contrast to the faceless domination of the 1980s, mitigated by the alleged champion of common folk and true Americans – Ronald Reagan – the 21st century brought an ‘uncanny’ phantasm to the White House.

In 2008, Barack Obama won the presidential election, and the Tea Party appeared shortly thereafter. Conjured from the folklore of high school history, they also drew upon a comparable understanding of the US Constitution and economics. Rather than consider the complexities of contemporary financial capital, they relied on high school rhetoric about the land of freedom and opportunity and the invisible hand of the market, and concluded that the financial disaster resulted not from deregulation and severe corporate mismanagement, but rather from a communist-fascist totalitarianism that had taken over the free market, suppressed individual freedoms, and elevated an unqualified, foreign-born, Muslim liberal extremist to President. The rhetoric intensified through 2009, the year following Obama's election as well as the collapse of the housing and financial markets, all of which transpired during the election season of 2008.

Although the Obama administration stimulus included some benefits across the board, the impact proved too little and too late to save equity and spark capital investments. The Tea Party adamantly opposed the stimulus, and instead rallied for a tax holiday, despite the fact that US corporations enjoyed a 65 percent increase in profits since the previous record set in 2007, as the result of massive layoffs, off-shoring, and cash hoarding (Donmoyer, 2010). As of this writing, American business sits on nearly \$2t in cash, preferring instead to buy back stock and thus raise its value, and issue bonuses and dividends rather than invest in physical assets or create jobs (Kumar, 2010). History shows that the current call for a tax holiday (under the pretense that corporations will repatriate billions in foreign-held capital) will not generate jobs or investment, and instead only free up cash for corporations to spend on further bonuses and stock buy backs (Weise et al., 2011). An in-depth study by Dharmapala et al. (2011) confirms that the 2005 Homeland Investment Act 'did not increase domestic investment, employment, or R&D' because taxes never caused a cash shortage. US corporate taxes are already the lowest among the OECD nations (Bivens, 2011).

Lastly, not a single executive faced any criminal charges nor even an investigation, except for obvious con artists such as Bernie Madoff, who used an old-fashioned ponzi scheme to defraud investors of somewhere between US\$15b and US\$20b (Arvedlund, 2009). Even though JP Morgan Chase made several billion dollars in service fees from business with Madoff Investments (on top of their role in the broader financial crisis), the government conducted no investigation (McLean and Nocera, 2010). For Tea Partiers, the whole thing stinks of injustice, but of a sort that frames economic meltdown in emotional and moral terms. To understand the Tea Party understanding of the economic crisis, we must understand the predilections of the authoritarian personality, for whom only the rise of sinister forces could explain the ongoing chaos and decline.

Effervescence and Fracture

Obama's perceived blackness and foreignness makes him the ideal target of authoritarian paranoia and class-cultural resentment, common among the lower middle class and some segments of the working class (Altemeyer, 2007; Hetherington and Weiler, 2009). Obama allegedly enjoys unearned wealth, prestige, and power, and is the beneficiary of government affirmative action programs, black ethnic organizing, and even more sinister conspiratorial forces from foreign lands, especially the anti-Christian Middle East where we are allegedly locked in eternal war against the forces of evil in the form of Islam.

The rallies are not celebrations of life, but of submission and death. In the context of economic collapse and cultural change, the destructive personality hopes to save the sacred office of President by fumigating the polluted pretender. As authoritarians, the Tea Parties seek the valorization of rural whites and others who live a hard-working (conservative and prosaic) lifestyle which they see as the true essence of American life, the hegemonic standard by which all should submit and be judged.

Like all spectacles, however, the carnivalized reality they create is fleeting, and never endures beyond the boundaries of the spectacle.

Like the Know Nothings of the 1850s, the Tea Party is doomed by its own success. While Tea Party popularity in the Southwest, for example, draws on fears of invasion by Mexican criminals and drug runners, the Tea Parties in the Northeast and Midwest play on fears of socialist totalitarianism and unions. Various other currents run around more generally, such as fear of death panels and Muslim terrorists, a fear now revived and given credibility by Homeland Security Committee hearings in the US House of Representatives, orchestrated by a right-wing Congressman from suburban New York, Peter King. Designed to inflame anti-Muslim hysteria, the hearings play to Nativist fears of his 94 percent white base, centered in the middle class towns of Massapequa, Seaford, Wantagh, Levittown, Bethpage, and Farmingdale, which are surrounded by much wealthier and generally Democratic communities.

Overall, they oppose anyone unlike themselves – foreigners, non-whites, intellectuals, liberals, urbanites. They oppose all taxes. They oppose all government except the military (and the parts that provide their own benefits, namely social security and Medicare). Thus, the actual motivation behind the Tea Party carnival – restoration of rugged whiteness to cultural hegemony – derives from negation (psychological destructiveness). This is not so much new as the current manifestation of a longstanding obsession with otherness.

Consequently, to conclude that the Tea Party movement opposes taxes and big government is misleading. Specifically, they want to end the pluralistic, deliberative aspect of government and replace it with a totalitarian authority run by the right kind of people, that is, white people who wield power without hesitation. Given their devotion to unapologetic strength and simultaneous fascination with alleged perversity infiltrating the nation, a Department of Homeland Security report from 7 April 2009, concludes that right-wing movements differ only on tactics, not sentiment. Their resentment is based on two essential factors:

- (1) economic hardship, and
- (2) the historical election of the first black president.

For authoritarians, this reduces their own status, as the authority to which they identify declines and prompts a lashing out. At a rally in Washington, DC, Tea Party activists protesting against national healthcare shouted racial slurs and threats of lynching at black lawmakers, including Representatives André Carson of Indiana, Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, and John Lewis of Georgia, all Democrats, as well as anti-gay slurs against Barney Frank, an openly gay representative from Massachusetts (Pear, 2010).

So, the protest against government is really a protest against a broadly representative government led by allegedly illegitimate usurpers, and similarly the protest against taxes is really a protest against anything that might help people other than the ingroup, which in this case is anyone other than white and hard-working – the ‘real’ America.

Consequently, in addition to authoritarianism, I contend that the core of the Tea Party is also destructiveness.

Destructiveness

As mentioned earlier, destructiveness arises from resentment and hatred of life in a broad sense as a reaction to real declines in status and livelihood. Thus, wealth, power, and status are not real possibilities for Tea Partiers, but neither can an authoritarian accept change or reconciliation. Instead, they seek both a new ‘legitimate’ authority and an enemy to destroy.

So, they oppose a government they see as illegitimate, and gladly embrace the corporate sector as legitimate authority. Originally founded by Dick Armey to lower taxes on high incomes and eliminate public funding for education, as well as play to fears of illegal immigrants in his home state of Texas, Freedomworks guided the Tea Party movement by funding attacks against Obama, calling for an end to taxes and public services, and fomenting the birther groups that challenge Obama's citizenship. Further funding in this latter regard comes from Glen Beck's 9–12 Project, as well as from billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch, channeled through various charitable organizations. Building an inheritance they received from their father Fred C. Koch, the brothers draw upon their multi-billion personal fortune from the oil, gas, and petrochemical industry to attack environmental regulations, estate taxes, and capital gains taxes. Moving more forcefully into social issues with the rise of the Tea Party movements, they aligned themselves with Freedomworks to oppose public funding for education and increase efforts against illegal immigration, such that the anti-tax, anti-regulation, anti-immigrant agendas fit comfortably with the grass-roots Tea Party sentiment of negation.

While most grass-roots Tea Partiers support social security and Medicare, they oppose any services or support that benefit somebody else, especially public education and welfare. Still, better that everyone suffers than any supposedly undeserving person receives even the least morsel. This destructive tendency arises from a nihilistic awareness that the restoration they seek is not really possible, and from authoritarian desires to punish the weak and wicked. Consequently, might makes right, power is the only truth, and nothing demonstrates any greater or more effective power than destruction. In all its forms, whether harassing immigrants, liberal reporters, and black people in Congress, talk of seceding from (and thus destroying) the union, destroying regulation and social programs (which only benefit the weak), or bombing people in foreign lands, destructiveness provides its own satisfaction. By association, it makes impotent people feel omnipotent. On the popular level, the Tea Partiers do not want to remake the country which in their nihilistic perception is already lost. They want to destroy it.

On the elite level, the Koch brothers, Freedomworks, Donald Trump, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase, and the others want to stay in power in the current America. While we may conclude that they are essentially soulless people and institutions that worship money and power above all else, they are not nihilistic or destructive. They pursue very concrete and consistent goals of ever increasing wealth, a program that includes eliminating all regulations, social programs, and unions – anything that might in any way infringe on the accumulation of wealth. At the same time, they seek an end to taxation on their vast estates, corporations, and personal income in the form of capital gains, typically dividends on shares of preferred stock. In this way, they can ignore the issue of payroll taxes, since they have minimal payroll earnings, and social security and Medicare taxes are already capped at a low \$190,000. They have significant control, but not total control. There is always more money and power to seize.

Resentment is the key element that unites the dispossessed whites with super-wealthy elites. As the exurban and rural whites both love and hate their idols for the same reasons – their immense wealth inspires reverential awe and simultaneously inspires hatred for their own lack of wealth and the autonomy and authority wealth brings – their rage turns against the Other, the elites whose wealth and authority is perceived as unearned and malicious. Rather than reverence and awe, they deserve scorn and should be punished. They must be brought down as a form of justice, as one's own life and own people fade into oblivion. It is a destructiveness born of desperation, and takes the form of striking one last blow, so to speak, on the way out.

For example, shortly after the first Tea Party convention (4–6 February 2010) Andrew Joseph Stack III crashed his airplane into an IRS building in Austin, Texas on 18 February 2010, with the hope that his actions would inspire others to rise up and overthrow the government. In his suicide manifesto, he states:

I know I'm hardly the first one to decide I have had all I can stand. It has always been a myth that people have stopped dying for their freedom in this country, and it isn't limited to the blacks, and poor immigrants. I know there have been countless before me and there are sure to be as many after. But I also know that by not adding my body to the count, I insure nothing will change. I choose to not keep looking over my shoulder at 'big brother' while he strips my carcass, I choose not to ignore what is going on all around me, I choose not to pretend that business as usual won't continue; I have just had enough.

I can only hope that the numbers quickly get too big to be white washed and ignored that the American zombies wake up and revolt; it will take nothing less. I would only hope that by striking a nerve that stimulates the inevitable double standard, knee-jerk government reaction that results in more stupid draconian restrictions people wake up and begin to see the pompous political thugs and their mindless minions for what they are. (Cited in Brick, 2010: A1, A10).

The examples of all the wrongs are vague, the language is abstract. He assumes that all real people, that is, white people, feel exactly as he does, and will devote their bodies, their lives, to the cause for which he does not even have a name, against an enemy that has no name and no face. Partly a coded language to conceal his bigotry, and partly because he does not understand how the world really works, his hatred becomes generalized and inchoate, yet always searching for a target, a scapegoat. He allows the reader to see their own chimera, their own uncanny others and act accordingly. He does not call for violence and death overtly, but all who read his words accurately (those of the same imagined subjective community), he assumes, will understand. His destructiveness becomes apparent even in his moment of murder and suicide; he does not really know why he hates life so much.

Stack is not alone. In books such as Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004), Joe Bageant's *Deer Hunting with Jesus* (2007), or Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Snarling Citizen* (1997), we see wage-earning people fed up with the system, damn mad, and they are not going to take it anymore. They do not know exactly what they are not going to take anymore, or even why they are mad exactly. Unwilling to understand global economic forces and the multiple dimensions of politics, they embrace familiar folk explanations, in particular, notions of the 'evil other.' If only there were not so many of *those* people around – liberals, feminists, pagans, terrorist sympathizers, gays, Hispanics, blacks, and a black President. Why and how these people are to blame for their unhappiness is irrelevant. What matters is that they are marginalized groups and therefore valid targets for true Americas to vent their discontent and rage on.

For people who distrust reason, intellect, and outsiders, wisdom derives from 'common sense', a kind of self-generated knowledge and insight.

Conclusion

The reliance on so-called common sense, the name which really serves as a cover for a lack of knowledge or semblance of thought, could just as readily be termed reliance on bullshit. Reliance on local folk wisdom, the type of thinking that Dean Manders explores in *The Hegemony of Common Sense* (2006), where he astutely observes, of common-sense sayings and proverbs over the decades, that

the ideological powers of common sense cover a wide range of simple, experienced tensions, ambiguities, frustrations, disappointments, anxieties, and boredom, all of which are generated within daily life. Common sense is employed as soothing, ready made answers, opinions, coping mechanisms, justifications, and rationales [to manage the problems of every life]. (2006: 45)

While ignorance has always been present in human history, not until modern times have people actively dismissed reason and actively embraced knowing nothing. More specifically, movements

like the Tea Party replace reason with some sort of perspective in which knowledge, as in truth and fiction, is irrelevant. Yet they are not liars, for whom the truth is still relevant. A liar knows the truth and through distortion or concealment constructs a position in opposition to the truth.

In contrast to the individual infused with the work ethic of the early capitalist period, the worker of today, whether the wage earner or the salaried professional, lives not within the parameters of family, church, or nation, but instead experiences life as a series of moments, each with no particular past or future. As Langman and Ryan (2009) argue:

This new articulation of 'social character' can be seen as a migration of selfhood from either religion, work or nation that provided compensations and escapes in earlier expressions of 'social character'. The 'carnival character' can thus be seen as a psychic withdrawal from the institutional worlds of work, politics or communities of faith to the pluralities of sites and regions of pleasurable fulfillment in the dream worlds and hyper realities provided by consumer society. (2009: 455).

In our current age, privatized hedonism has become the primary mechanism of escape and the main palliative against anxiety and powerlessness, as Erich Fromm (1990 [1955], 2005 [1976]) and others predicted decades ago. In place of socially provided rights in conjunction with responsibilities that derived from a moral and material framework, we now view rights in terms of radical individualism – I can do whatever I feel like, and can get away with. Typically, this includes making money in any manner possible and consuming whatever provides the most immediate and most intense thrill. While I do not advocate a return to an uptight social morality premised on public shame, I nevertheless maintain that self-regulation, whatever the motivation, is increasingly less likely because no consistent public identity, and therefore no public morality, exists.

The lewd and crude artificial reality of spring break, girls gone wild, mass spectacle events, etc. create a temporary sense of empowerment for those who actively appear in the spectacle of debauchery or collective celebration of an alternative space (such as the music festival) because it makes the nameless individual the center of attention through blatant indulgence in the taboo and forbidden. People not only run towards whatever creates the greatest thrill, but the greatest recognition for consuming the most dramatically. Body painting, tattooing, and a consistent corporate presence: the same beer tents, cell phone companies, music companies, and other consumer-oriented corporations. Thus, the apparent radical behavior of youthful lewdness in fact occurs within strictly defined boundaries, both in terms of time and place, and also within cultural and economic boundaries. Escape from lifeless, meaningless moments is a necessary aspect of life in alienated employment and other social relations. Yet carnival escape exists at all levels, whether by age, income, or personal taste. What matters most, I suggest, is personal gratification, whether in terms of physical pleasure, status acclaim, expressions of emotion, or in terms of the most strongly recognized measure of success – money.

Similarly, the Tea Party results from real dissatisfaction in the real world, with no hope of a permanent real-world improvement. Like their younger counterparts, and in contrast to more monetarily successful professionals, the Tea Partiers seek fulfillment in a carnivalized reality. Unlike the springbreakers, however, the Tea Partiers do not seek the sensual pleasures of the flesh, but rather to revel in the icy power and hardness of hate. They seek a simulated world of tough talk and aggressive posturing that replaces the real world of unfulfilling careers, tax obligations, and uncertain social status, the real world where every day they toil on in the quiet desperation of deferential and stifling wage employment, the uncertainty of contract work, the marginality of small business. In place of impotence, right-wing populism instills omnipotence – but only in the simulation zone of rallies, conventions, and online rhetoric. The sentiments never disappear completely, but only diminish in intensity – not in importance – during better times. For the dispossessed, whose place in the world died with earlier iterations of capitalism, there will be no more truly good times.

While groups of all types and persuasions use slogans to represent their perspective, only some groups contend that the slogans of protest signs and bumper stickers contains all of their wisdom, yet for the carnival personality, no wider knowledge or thought is necessary, or even desirable. Richard Hofstadter back in 1962 explored *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* in detail, and concluded that this force is sustained by several intersecting facets of American culture, chief among which are religious fundamentalism, a revolt against modernity in the form of rational science, the decline of the gentleman, or in general, the decline of civility in personal and public conduct, the rise of business elites as revered intellectual leaders, and radical individualism. A little over a decade later in the 1970s, the conservative intellectual Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1991 [1979]) drew many of the same conclusions, as did Daniel Bell in the *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1996 [1976]). In summary, the argument goes thus: diminishing economic opportunity coupled with radical individualism and consumer culture, that is, commodity fetishism, fuel right-wing resentment not against the real material source of dissatisfaction in life – namely, the outflow of capital and radical speculation, but instead against the enemies that resonate with American cultural sensibilities and xenophobia – racism, sexual immorality, and anti-intellectualism – the outsiders from somewhere else, such that dark skin, homosexuality, and academia seem equally foreign and wholly other. They embody evil that must be forever opposed, and destroyed whenever possible.

Susan Jacoby in *The Age of American Unreason* (2008) follows Hofstadter's work, and writing some 40 years later, finds many of the same forces at work, and perhaps even intensified as the result of NAFTA, 9/11, and a black president. If the flow of global capital is esoteric and abstract, rightists find dark invaders and weirdoes readily understandable as a threat. Jacoby thus identifies some additional features of American public life, namely, 'junk thought' and a culture of aggressive dumbness that ridicules and attacks thoughtful positions as effeminate and a waste of time. Moreover, she sees a culture of distraction, the very essence of carnival culture, conjoined with a preference for immediate and easy answers to life's complexities, or in other words, bumper stickers for the soul.

Many conventional scholars still assume that, however ignorant and misguided people may be, everyone wants to see accurately, everyone wants to understand the world as it really is. Everyone is a rational actor. This is simply not true. As Fromm, Frankfurt, Manders, Jacoby, Bell, Hofstadter, and others argue, irrationality in thought and hatred in emotion bring their own forms of satisfaction. Reality matters less and less as the carnival personality permeates society and seeks satisfaction through constant emotional agitation and physical excitement. For the Tea Party, excitement includes the allure of aggression that smites the enemy in a desperate and heroic 'last stand' of true Americans. While misguided to the extent it blames liberals and ethnic minorities for the offenses of capital, and is futile from a practical standpoint, the Tea Party arouses strong feelings of righteousness in the destructive authoritarian and therefore requires no further justification.

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