THESIS


THE CHALLENGES OF POPULISM: AN ANALYSIS OF TEA

PARTY STRUCTURING NARRATIVES



Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2011

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ABSTRACT

THE CHALLENGES OF POPULISM: AN ANALYSIS OF TEA

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The lead up to the 2010 midterm elections saw the rise of a new face in American

domestic politics: the Tea Party. Riding a wave of conservative dissent following 2009's

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and Patient Protection and Affordable Care

Act, the Tea Party exploded onto the political scene and helped to Republicans to score

680 legislative seats. This study compared the structuring narratives of the Tea Party to

uncover the way the movement identifies its political aims, goals and actors. More

specifically, this study analyzed the narratives of the Tea Party on *teaparty.org* and

*teapartypatriots.org* as well as in editorials and op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* and

*Washington Times* from April 15 through November 15, 2010. Furthermore, because of

frequent claims of the Tea Party's populist nature, this project further examined the

movement's use of populist rhetoric.

The goal of this project was to further understand the competing understandings

of the Tea Party and the mode in which the movement used themes of populist rhetoric.

This study incorporated theories of narrative analysis to determine common methods of

the Tea Party's structuring of protagonists, antagonists, plot, climax, and other important

identifying factors. These characteristics were then compared to the rhetorical tactics and themes of past American populist movements.

The findings indicated that the Tea Party was identified with a concise structuring narrative in the *Washington Times* and on *teaparty.org* and *teapartypatriots.org,* but this identity was questioned and problematized by the *New York Times*.  The author further suggests the Tea Party's use of populist rhetoric was effective, but will pose problems in the future as questions of authenticity will surround populist rhetorical themes and their campaign fundraising. The author's hope is that studying the rhetorical tactics of the Tea Party will add to the discussion of American sociopolitical movements and the way they communicate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their supreme intelligence, leadership and patience. To Dr. Leah Sprain, your infinite fortitude and ability to get excellent feedback to me quickly has allowed me to focus and work continually over the last year. You have been an ideal advisor and I have been lucky to work with you. Dr. Greg Dickinson, I cannot say enough how much I respect your professionalism. Every task you undertake at CSU is done with careful consideration about the profound impact you have to students and the broader community. Dr. Kyle Saunders has also been a great guide along my journey into political scholarship, and provided some excellent angles from which to approach this project. I would also like to thank my classmates and friends who have fingerprints all over this thesis. They include: the loyal Aaron Keel, wise Emily Sauter, passionate Emily Moreland and a cast of hundreds thinkers I have been lucky enough to encounter in Fort Collins like Dr. Cindy Griffin and  Dr. Jon Lupo.


Thank you for all your time, patience and wisdom.

Sincerely,

*Alex T. Coughlin*

CHAPTER ONE

Structuring Narratives in Discourse:

Examining the Tea Party Movement[1]


The impetuses for the Tea Party movement are excessive government

spending and taxation. Our mission is to attract, educate, organize, and

mobilize our fellow citizens to secure public policy consistent with our three core

values of Fiscal Responsibility, Constitutionally Limited Government and Free

Markets.

-Mission Statement, *teapartypatriots.org*

After a party takes congressional majorities and controls the White House, waves

of popular dissent towards legislators and the president are common amongst American

voters. Traditionally, the president's party takes losses at the midterm election, which

usually function as a broad referendum on the governing party (Babb n.p.). In 1994, for

example, Democratic incumbents lost thirty-four seats in the House of Representative,

allowing Republicans to re-take the majority after they demonstrated vulnerabilities the

Democratic agenda (Salvanto and Gersh n.p.). Commentators (Zuma 30, Zeiler n.p.)

argue the same took place in the 2010 midterms with Republicans taking sixty seats from

Democrats, a signal of rebuke of the 2008 election.

During the 2008-2010 election cycle we witnessed the birth and evolution of a new American political movement and discourse. The Tea Party movement has distinguished itself as more than a frustrated voting bloc. Rather, the Tea Party is a complex, multi-faceted political movement that has demonstrated its significance in the 2010 midterm elections, and looks to be a participant in American politics for the foreseeable future.

Since their inception and subsequent progression into the American political spotlight, heated debate has embroiled the Tea Party. Since the Tea Party is an evolving sociopolitical movement, the fluidity of its stances on specific policies and demographic makeup are difficult to solidify. The plurality Tea Party membership and diversity of coalitions make the movement a somewhat unknown commodity. As *New York Times* columnist Alan Brinkley states "Trying to describe the ideas of the Tea Party movement is a bit like a blind man trying to describe the elephant. The movement, like the elephant, exists. But no one, not even the Tea Partiers themselves, can seem to get hands around the whole of it" (n.p.).

There has also been extensive questioning about the grassroots nature of the movement. Detractors have called the funding and organization of the movement into question, claiming it is driven by the G.O.P and conservative political action committees (PACs) rather than a slew a concerned citizens. Many of the attacks focus on large contributions from conservative PACs like FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity (Leviathal n.p.). *New Yorker* columnist Jane Mayer blasted the Tea Party's funding from

oil and gas barons David and Charles Koch (Mayer n.p.).

Some pundits point to the Tea Party's lack of a clear leader as another factor that makes the movement difficult to quantify. Ben McGrath points to the internet and ease of communication through Tea Party websites which allows the movement to avoid any definitive leader. McGrath notes that:

Because of the internet, it's become really easy for people to organize on local levels and then communicate with other people who are organizing all the way across the country…that sort of chaotic, disorganized nature is very important to them, to feel that they're not being steered by one particular person, whether it be really Glenn Beck or Dick Armey or whomever (n.p.).

Polls and interviews of self-identified Tea Partiers indicate that they are disgusted with both dominant political parties (Brinkley n.p.). *New Yorker* columnist McGrath argues that there is frustration amongst Tea Partiers, and the majority of it is directed at President Barack Obama and Washington Democrats. Republican strategist and former Ross Perot campaign manager Ed Rollins echoed these statements. "Well, I think there's some frustration among a lot of these people that the government in Washington is not focusing on issue that mattered to them…I think this movement (Tea Party) is focused very much on incumbents who are in Congress and elsewhere who may not be related to what ordinary people are concerned about" (Collins n.p.).

Demographically speaking, the Tea Party is a diverse group, but it is closely allied with conservative economic and social concerns of the Republican establishment

according to a poll by *The Atlantic.* Forty-seven percent of self-identified Tea Partiers indicate they are part of the religious right or conservative Christian movement. They are mostly social conservatives, not libertarians on social issues. Nearly two-thirds (63%) say abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, and only eighteen percent support allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry (Sullivan n.p.). An April 2010 *New York Times* poll indicated eighty-nine percent Tea Partiers identify themselves as white, married and older than 45. While most Republicans classified themselves as "dissatisfied" with Washington, Tea Party supporters are more likely to identify themselves as "angry" (Zernike and Thee-Brenan n.p.). It seems anger is one of the uniting factors of Tea Party supporters.

The disputed nature of the Tea Party's origins, goals, and concerns as well as the discourses that surround it make it difficult to comprehend exactly what the movement is and how it functions. The plurality of Tea Party members and lack of a clear leader — combined with divergent media portrayals—only work to compound the murky picture of the Tea Party. But this project will demonstrate contested nature of the movement can be traced back to varying, competing narratives about who the Tea Party is and what they are trying to accomplish. I contented that the narratives available in these texts problematize and counteract on another in terms of the manner they identify the Tea Party.

My study investigates and evaluates the structuring narratives[2] that surround the Tea Party. Attention to structuring narratives allows us to understand the discourse that

assigns roles to political actors, provides political aims, and justifies the goals of the movement. Given the potential of competing narratives about the Tea Party, I analyze structuring narratives in two different locations: Tea Party web sites and mainstream media coverage.

I employ four research questions to guide my study. These questions compile and expose the structuring narratives about Tea Party and allow for comparison to past populist movements. The first two research questions focus on the construction of the Tea Party: (1) How is the Tea Party constructed in the *Washington Times* and *New York Times*? (2) How is the Tea Party constructed on *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org*? To answer these questions, I focus on structuring narratives as a means to analyze the construction of the Tea Party in each of these texts. As Jasinski (392) notes "narratives are a way through which people make sense of various elements of their lives, a vehicle for ordering and organizing experiences, and a mechanism for both comprehending and constituting the social world." Compiling and analyzing structuring narratives provides insight into the manner the movement's identity and goal are constructed in mediated texts.

Given the contested nature of the Tea Party, these first two research questions point me to different possible sources of structuring narratives about who the Tea Party is and what they are trying to accomplish. This analysis sets up my next question: (3) What are the differences between how the Tea Party is constructed in the *Washington Times*, *New York Times*, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org*? These texts provide varying

perspectives of the movement in terms of the manner the Tea Party is constructed to millions of political actors. Furthermore, while the *Washington Times* and *New York Times* offer a mediated construction of the Tea Party, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* off a self-constructed perspective.  This question compares the different structuring narratives and provide insight into the controversial and disputed nature of the Tea Party through the manner these narratives interact and respond to one another. I will demonstrate disputed nature of the Tea Party can be traced back to varying and competing structuring narratives of the movement.

Building upon my identification of structuring narratives of the Tea Party: (4) how does the Tea Party rhetoric compare to strategies used by past American populist movements? The Tea Party has drawn frequent comparisons to various populist movements in American history, specifically in terms of narrative themes such as "ordinary folks" opposing the out-of-touch Washington elite (Kazin n.p.). I contented that the Tea Party applies common tactics of Populist rhetoric as part of their disocurse, specifically rhetorial tactics common to past conservative populist movements.

A comparison between the structuring narratives of the Tea Party contrasted to populist rhetorical scholarship provides two opportunities. First, a comparison furthers insight into the rhetorical choices of past populist movement versus those of the Tea Party. Past populist movements provide a series of rhetorical tactics available to the Tea Party, and noting if the same choices were made allows insight into the questions of the Tea Party's populist nature. Secondly, this question contributes to broader study of the

rhetoric of sociopolitical movements in American political history. Studying the rhetoric of the Tea Party in its early stages and contrasting it to past movements can help categorize and define the nature of what is unfolding before us.

In less than two years, the Tea Party has become an important factor in policy formation, media attention, and the perhaps the future of domestic politics. My analysis of the content of *teaparty.org, teapartypatriots.org,* and the *Washington Times* identifies a structuring narrative of the Tea Party. Through discourse, this narrative constructs the movement's heroes, villains, and mission using common themes of populist rhetoric. The identification of the Tea Party in *teaparty.org, teapartypatriots.org* and the *Washington Times* is highly invested in notions of the movement's authenticity. The counternarrative of the *New York Times* problematizes notions of the Tea Party's identity, specifically its grassroots ethos. The *New York Times* demonstrates the manner in which populist rhetoric can be countered with attacks on authenticity, and further illustrates the challenge future populist movements and the Tea Party will face in terms of balancing claims of grassroots authenticity and the necessity of special interests contributions.

The remaining sections of this chapter will cover two areas. First, I will present a brief historical overview of the Tea Party movement. This will conceptualize the situation in which the Tea Party came to prominence as well as the situation in which this study is taking place. Second, various scholarly perspectives of the narrative paradigm will be offered in order to provide theoretical insight into narrative's role in identity formation, constitutive rhetoric and critical perspectives on narrative. As a whole, this section

provides a historical and theoretical overview of the Tea Party and narrative analysis.

*History of the Tea Party*

The fluidity of the Tea Party movement's membership and political agenda make it somewhat difficult to trace its history, but there is a clear timeline of key events that lead the Tea Party to its current position. A seminal moment of the Tea Party movement occurred on December 16, 2007 when supporters of noted libertarian Senator Ron Paul (R-Texas) staged a "money bomb" fundraising event in Boston, Massachusetts to coincide with the 234 anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. Paul followers then planned on gathering at Boston's Faneuil Hall to hear speeches from Paul's son, Dr. Rand Paul, and Carla Howell, a libertarian who ran unsuccessfully for governor of Massachusetts in 2002. Followers then planned on dumping boxes labeled "tea" into nearby Boston harbor (Levenson n.p.). The timing and choice to dump tea by Paul supporters indicates an effort to symbolically connect themselves with the Boston Tea Party, whose organizers dumped valuable tea off British ships into Boston harbor to protest the Tea Act and other objections to British tax policies on colonial America (Knollenberg 80-91).

Paul's Boston fundraising event caught the attention of several conservative bloggers, including Keli Carender. Using the her *Liberty Belle* blog, Carender began railing against the Obama administration and the impending passage of $787 billion stimulus plan and on February 16, 2009 staged the "porkulus"[3] protest in Seattle, Washington. This first protest drew only 120 people, but after employing the help of fellow conservative blogger and pundit Michelle Malkin, rallies began to draw larger and

larger crowds, and the movement was subsequently promoted by conservative media sources (Zernike, "Unlikely Activist" n.p.).

Three days after Obama's signing of the economic stimulus package, CNBC analyst Rick Santelli went into an on-air "rant" against the impending mortgage bailout. While on the Chicago Stock Exchange floor, Santelli claimed "the government is promoting bad behavior… This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbors' mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills ... President Obama, are you listening?" (Rosenthal n.p. ). Throughout the clip, traders on the floor in Santelli's vicinity can be heard cheering and applauding in response. Santelli culminated the clip by saying, "We're thinking of having a Chicago tea party in July, all you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan I'm organizing it." Shortly after, the video went viral, making Santelli an instant face to the growing anti-government intervention sentiment (Rosenthal n.p.).

April 15, 2009 proved to be the most significant day of the Tea Party movement yet. In coordination with the due date for federal income taxes, Tea Party protest rallies occurred throughout the country. Crowds turned out to protest in Green Bay, Cincinnati, and Anchorage amongst other locations. By this point, conservative leaders had begun aligning themselves with the movement. Texas governor Rick Perry (R) rallied in front of about one thousand in Austin, while former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich  urged New Yorkers to tell their lawmakers "we're going to fire you" unless they vote against

big spending (Robbins n.p.). The protests received extensive press, including live coverage from Fox News' Sean Hannity and Malkin at a protest in Atlanta (Robbins n.p.).

Tea Party rallies continued throughout the summer of 2009, including over two thousand protesters at the national capital on the 4 of July (Stretfield n.p.). It is noteworthy that around this time town hall style meetings were held by Democratic legislators throughout the country in an effort to better explain the impending health care reform authored by the Obama administration and Democratically-controlled Congress. On multiple occasions, the town hall meetings grew heated and occasionally violent as liberals and conservatives clashed over the specifics of the bill and broader ideology (Saul n.p.). Although the Tea Party was not the sole driving force behind the events, newly minted Tea Party websites publicized the protests, including *teapartypatriots.org* posting a headline that read "IMPORTANT - Tea Party Patriots is Fighting Government Take Over of Our Health Care" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).  The website also included a link to a Talking Points Memo which provided responses to pro-health care reform claims for use at town hall meetings (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).

The summer culminated for the Tea Party on September 12, 2009 when tens of thousands of Tea Party protesters gathered on National Mall in Washington D.C. The rally was partially organized by former House Majority leader Dick Armey (R-Texas) and his organization FreedomWorks (Zeleny n.p.). At this point in the Tea Party's history, it was clear that the movement had captured the attention of thousands of

Americans, the national media, as well as the conservative political establishment.

The Tea Party had not yet had an opportunity to influence candidates in an election at this point. That changed, however, with the race for a Massachusetts senatorial seats following the 2009 death of Edward Kennedy. On January 19, 2010, former Massachusetts state senator Scott Brown (R) handily defeated heavily favored Democrat Martha Coakley to fill Kennedy's vacant position (Cooper n.p.). Brown was supported by the Boston chapter of the Tea Party Express, who purchased national television advertisement time for his campaign (*teapartyexpress.org* n.p.). Brown's affiliation with the Tea Party in greater Boston proved to be significant, specifically in terms of fundraising. The Tea Party Express PAC poured in $285,000 on e-mail and Internet newsletters, and media space (Murphy n.p.). *New York Times* columnist Michael Cooper stated "the election of a man (Brown) supported by the Tea Party movement also represented an unexpected reproach by many voters to President Obama after his first year in office, and struck fear into the hearts of Democratic lawmakers" (n.p.).

The Tea Party held its first national convention in February of 2010 in Nashville, Tennessee. The convention was organized by Judson Phillips, the founder of Tea Party Nation, a social networking site that coordinates Tea Party rallies (Zernike, "Notes From the Tea Party Convention" n.p.). Speakers included conservative newsman Andrew Breitbart, former Colorado State Representative Tom Tancredo, and former Alaska governor and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The convention received extensive news coverage for Tancredo's fierce attacks on Obama, including calling him "a

committed socialist ideologue." Palin was scrutinized for a reported speaking fee of

$100,000, which she pledged to "give back to the cause" (Fies n.p.). Suffice to say, the

convention drew significant media attention and scrutiny from the right and left.

In July of 2010, Michelle Bachmann (R-Minnesota) organized the Tea Party

Caucus in the U.S House of Representatives. This allotted an opportunity for

Congressional conservatives to align themselves with Tea Party ideals and enthusiasm.

The formation of the Tea Party Caucus also demonstrated a new level of legitimacy for

the movement. However, Bachmann deflected focus of the Tea Party towards its

members rather than its leaders: "we're not the mouthpiece. We are not taking the Tea

Party and controlling it from Washington, D.C. We are also not here to vouch for the Tea

Party or to vouch for any Tea Party organizations or to vouch for any individual people or

actions, or billboards or signs or anything of the Tea Party. We are the receptacle"

(Lorber n.p.). Leading into the 2010 election cycle, the Tea Party continued to finance

campaigns of conservatives that spoke to the group's ideological concerns. Some

Republican state primaries saw splits amongst conservative votes and resources. In many

state primaries, Tea Party backed candidates were able to edge out established GOP

members for the spot on the Republican ticket. For example Sharron Angle in Nevada

and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware rode a wave Tea Party support to win a spot on

ballot for their respective senatorial races over established Republicans. O'Donnell noted,

"There's a tidal wave that is coming to Delaware, and we're riding in it and he's [primary

opponent Mike Castle] drowning in it" after she was endorsed by Tea Party Express (Karl

n.p.). Despite schism amongst conservatives during the primaries, the Republican caucus gained nine governorships and picked up some 680 legislative seats (CNN n.p.). The enthusiasm and resources sparked by the Tea Party from 2008-2010 have proven to be the greatly impact the American political system.

### *Studies in Narrative and Identity*

Political theorist Maureen Whitebrook points out how narratives construct identity in political discourse, claiming "persons understand their own lives as stories" (10). The narration, voice, point of view, who is telling the story, plot and, climax are all relevant to an interest in the narrative construction of identity (11). Whitebrook insists that the group identity and the policy aims of political actors are heavily rooted in the application of narratives. She states "identity narratives are weapons in the struggle for power, and can also (therefore) be instruments for constructing an imagined community" (129).

Perhaps the strongest tenet of narrative's application to political identity is its ability to connect loose strands of affiliation behind one political objective. Often, political actors find themselves with varying, splintered identities. A broad narrative can serve to unite varied political identities behind a common goal. For example, 1960s and 70s politician George Wallace was noted for uniting individuals from broad social and economic conditions (Rohler 319). Whitebrook notes (131) that often both individuals and political bodies construct narratives to explain themselves and their motivations for action "for both person and political group, state, regime, or other political entity may

12

depend on mutually understandable narratives, on giving an account, telling a coherent story" (140). Furthermore, the media (amongst others) can help to author the narrative that serves to create a collective identity for disparate political voices (133).

Whitebrook is quick to make note of narrative as an essential aspect of assigning both political identity to individuals, but also granting them agency. "If the establishment of identity—the ability to tell a coherent story about the self—is a necessary prerequisite for political agency, then such storytelling and its implications, the necessary conditions of acting, are the conditions for *political* identity" (Whitebrook 141). Often, a plurality of justifications and concerns drive a political movement, but a common narrative can recruit individuals under one banner of coherency which tells their story. Whitebrook argues narrative is not simply a captivating story that can unite once disjointed political actors, but it is also a weapon that can assign power to some identities and inferiority to others supremacy or inferiority (133).

There are multiple perspectives of the narrative paradigm and its role within rhetoric and public discourse, but likely the most influential narrative scholar is Walter R. Fisher and his seminal piece "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of the Public Moral Argument" (240-257). Fisher argued for the need to understand an often overlooked format of rhetoric based on story, which he called the narrative paradigm. According to Fisher, argument and persuasion were essentialzed to mean good reasons. The essential tenet of all rhetorical competence is the logic of good reasons which "mastery of…insures that one has the minimal, perhaps the optimal, kind of

knowledge that must inform the composition, presentation and criticism of rhetorical

messages and interactions" ("Rationality and the Logic of Good Reasons"122). But these

reasons "may be discovered in all sorts of symbolic action-nondiscursive as well as

discursive" ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 240). Drawing on

MacIntyre's argument that narrative is the "basic and essential genre for the

characterization of human actions" (194), Fisher defined narrative as "theory of symbolic

actions-words and/or deeds- that have sequence and meaning to those who live, create, or

interpret them" ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 240-241). Fisher

argued that a skilled rhetor can manipulate history, culture, biography and character to a

line of persuasive discourse through narrative. He states:

> Neither "the facts," nor our "experience" come to us in discrete and
>
> disconnected packets which simply await the appropriate moral principle to be
>
> applied. Rather, they stand in need of some narrative which can bind the facts of
>
> our experience together in a coherent pattern and it is thus in virtue of that
>
> narrative that our abstracted rules, principles and notions gain their full
>
> intelligibility. ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 242)

Fisher supplements his design of narrative persuasion by juxtaposing two paradigms: the

rational and narrative. Tracing its roots back the Aristotle, Fisher explains five essential

tenets to the rational world paradigm. First, humans are essentially rational beings. Next,

humans make decisions based in clear-cut inferential structures. Third, legal, scientific

legislative and other similar situations dictate the conduct of argument. Next, rationality

is defined by subject matter knowledge, argumentative ability and skills in employing rules of advocacy. Finally, the world is made of logical puzzles that can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as argumentative construct ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 243).

Fisher then outlines five essential aspects to the narrative paradigm: First, humans are essentially storytelling animals; they have relied upon narratives to convey ideas for tens of thousands of years. Secondly, human decisions making is based off the good reason paradigm. But, good reasons come in various communication situations, genres and media. Next, the production and practice of good reasons is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character. Fourthly, rationality is determined by the nature of people as narrative beings. The awareness of narrative probability, what makes a lucid story, and their constant testing narrative fidelity, whether the story the audience is hearing is similar in comparison to their own experiences. Finally, the world is a series of stories that must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation. Essentially, good reasons derive from stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reason-valuing animals ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 247).

Fisher's explanation of narrative's role in public discourse has proven an essential tool of rhetorical critics. Highlighting the veracity of narrative, Fisher states "the narrative paradigm is meant to reflect an existing set of ideas shared in the whole or it in part by scholars from diverse disciplines" ("The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration"

347).  Narrative's role in literature had long since been studied, but Fisher's application to public discourse is seminal. It is important to note Fisher's contrast between the rational and narrative paradigms. As he mentions, much of rhetoric had been studied from a perspective that was highly invested in rational understanding to persuasion, drawing from modernism ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 243).  This hierarchical system justifies some persuasive discourse, but leaves much of effective rhetoric unaccounted for. But Fisher's narrative paradigm suggests that individuals are persuaded by good reasons, and such reasons can originate from a number of sources including stories. He argues that good reason is "an essential property of rhetorical competence" ("Rationality and the Logic of Good Reasons" 122). Formerly relegated to literature, Fisher highlighted a narrative's ability to act not as a strong supplement to persuasion, but the basis for persuasion itself.

Fisher is credited as the origination of the Narrative Paradigm of rhetoric, but William F. Lewis is noted for expanding narrative study to different forms discourses and storytelling. Drawing from Fisher, Lewis reconceptualized where and how narratives operated as tools of persuasion. But for this project, Lewis analysis of narratives within political discourse is especially useful.

In his essay "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency" Lewis operates under the paradigm that the application of story is an essential rhetorical tool; however, he expands it with further observations on myth and anecdote as well as audience and rhetor roles within discourse. Describing narrative

Lewis states "it is a simple and familiar story that is widely taught and widely believed. It is not exactly a true story in the sense that academic historians would want their descriptions and explanations to be true, but it is not exactly fiction either" (264).

One of Lewis's most significant contributions to rhetorical scholarhsip is his commentary on narrative's role in assigning audience roles in political discourse. Drawing from former President Ronald Reagan's use of narrative rhetoric, Lewis claims that part of the appeal of narrative is the "special kind of identification" between audience and speaker. He states "each auditor is encouraged to see himself or herself as a central actor in America's quest for freedom. To accept Regan's story is not just to understand the course of an American history that is enacted in other places by other people, it is to know that the direction and outcome of the story depend on you" (262).

Whereas Fisher uses moral argument to pinpoint the public argument best for narrative, Lewis expands this concept of the "moral frame" of a story (272). He argues that the moral aspect of narrative is its ability to make situations intelligible by creating temporal order. This serves to define the moral frame for the story, which allows the nature of the characters and events in the story to be defined with reference to that purpose (272). Lewis also adds an element of rationality to the narrative paradigm. He argues that narrative truth operates under a different type of knowledge than allowed by rational argument. This "common" brand of knowledge allows narrative to reach larger audiences. Lewis argues that narratives make sense because they draw from experience. Describing narrative in more colloquial terms, Lewis notes that simple, familiar stories

17

based a common sense drive rhetorical narratives (264). To resist or deny such common sense that appears obvious would make one seem "irrelevant, impractical or unintelligible" (274). Lewis's expanded attention to the function of myth, and the significance of creating rhetorical identities offers insight into the manner in which narrative(s) persuade and create a role for the audience

Lewis argues that narratives within discourse help individuals to assign roles to political actors, inform political aims and work as a general sense-making tool for reality. It is worth noting that perspectives of constitutive rhetoric offer a similar viewpoint. However, constitutive rhetoric scholarship works to expose discourse's role in creating new identities for individuals. Building off work by Kenneth Burke and Maurice Charland, constitutive rhetoric posits that the creation and response of subject positions can create a collective identity.

Burke's *Grammar of Motives* provides understanding of rhetoric, specifically its role in identity formation. He argues the first step to identification is the existence of division, in this sense identification is "compensatory to division. If men [sic] were not apart from one another, there would be no need for a rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men [sic] were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence" (22). To Burke, language is inherently divisive. Through audience member A is not identical to audience member B, the two are identified together in that their interests are joined. With A and B identified together, they are "substantially one"

with one another (a collective), yet they remain unique with individual motives. Two people are often identified by a trait they share in common. Burke calls this unification process transubstantiation. Although Burke's scholarship informs language's role in creating division amongst subjects, rhetoric as a means to constitute and identity is driven by Charland's work.

Drawing on Marixism, Charland (141-142) explains, "What is significant in constitutive rhetoric is that it positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in that positioning of subjects as historical actors becomes significant." Charland (142) claims constitutive rhetoric serves to co-opt alienated or fragmented identities within the state by working to dissolve difference by focusing on commonality and collectivity. Charland demonstrates that language within political discourse can do more than motivate individuals. The rhetorical tactics work to create a collective identity and meaning to groups.

Charland echoes this assertion (142) stating: "The process by which an audience member enters into a new subject position is therefore not one of persuasion. It is akin more to one of conversion that ultimately results in an act of recognition of the 'rightness' of a discourse and of one's identity with its reconfigured subject position." The key tenet to grasp from Charland is the formal and informal rhetorical process(es) which provide meaning and collective identity to individuals. "At particular historical moments, political rhetorics can reposition or rearticulate subjects by performing ideological work upon the texts in which social actors are inscribed" (147). Furthermore,

19

because a constitutive rhetoric defines the boundaries of a subject's motives and experiences a truly ideological rhetoric must rework or transform subjects.

Drawing from Fisher's narrative paradigm, Charland argues that the constitutive rhetoric can be taken from a narrative itself, providing stories that effectively renegotiate the subject position. Narrative and constitutive rhetoric both support the assertion that persuasion can provide meaning and identity to political actors. Existing scholarship points to narrative as an important factor in structuring the world around individuals.

### *Critical Perspectives of the Narrative Paradigm*

Scholars such as Warnick, Condit and Lucaites offer some critical perspectives and limitations of the narrative paradigm. Rhetorical scholar Barbra Warnick is quick to point out that Fisher subordinates traditional rationality to narrative rationality without taking into account the multiple forms that traditional rationality argues from (175). Furthermore, Fisher's paradigm makes the assumption that "one does not have to be taught narrative probability and narrative fidelity; one culturally acquires them through a universal faculty an experience" ("Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" 247). But Warnick problematizes this notion, noting that narrativity is not always more comprehensible and accessible to the public and thus should not always be valued over rationality. Furthermore, people do not always prefer the true and just as Fisher asserts (Warnick 176). Warnick's counterexample, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, employed narrative as a form of rhetoric but was still an effective propaganda tool despite its message. Warnick states:

A narrative such as Hitler's is invidiously persuasive precisely because of its

narrative  fidelity… by providing a convenient and easily recognizable

scapegoat…*Mein Kampf* provided a unified explanation for conditions and facts

which the German people could not reconcile in the absence of the narrative it

offered (176).

The argument that narratives are more potent than traditional rationality is worth looking

into for this project. The narratives within the Tea Party's discourse provide a way to

make sense of the political landscape and work to (at the very least) supplement what

informs some within the Tea Party.

While Warnick's critique focuses upon specifics of Fisher's narrative rationality,

Lucaites and Condit assess the narrative paradigm more broadly. Examining common

tenets of literary narrative, Condit and Lucaites argue that the cotemporary theory of

narrative draws almost exclusively on poetic models of discourse (90). The authors note

that the rhetorical function of narrative (rather than the poetic or dialectic functions) is

what the persuasion achieves: the enactment of interest and wielding of power. Stemming

from the Roman tradition, this narrative function "serves as an interpretive lens through

which the audience is asked to view and understand the verisimilitude of the propositions

and proof before it" (94).

Through outlining these specific narrative functions, Lucaites and Condit

advocate for more attention to be paid to the persuasive goals and the situation that

surrounds the discourse of the narrative. My adaptation of the narrative paradigm for this

project is highly invested in the persuasive function of narratives and the assignment of roles to political actors through the process(es) of discourse.

Scholarship has demonstrated narrative's influence on the field of rhetoric through a number of different functions, and critical perspectives have informed the limitations of the narrative paradigm and its application to rhetoric. It is also worth noting that existing scholarship can work to better inform the methodology and execution of this project. With this in mind, Herbert Simons applies a narrative approach to analyzing political discourse and this scholarship informs my method and serves as a model.

In his 2008 article "From Post 9/11 Melodrama to Quagmire in Iraq: A Rhetorical History," Simons analyzes the common narratives employed by former President George W. Bush in his addresses and the subsequent media and public response. According to Simons, although the 9/11 attacks were tragic they also offered a situation for neoconservatives to drum a vitriolic response (183). Simons argues that the Bush administration leveraged the rhetorical situation after the 9/11 attacks and "chose to evade the hard questions of motivation for the attacks and to respond instead with a sanitized, melodramatic framing of the crisis, coupled with the launch of a vaguely defined, seemingly unlimited 'war on terror'" (184).

Simons is quick to jump beyond common rhetorical artifacts to better analyze the Bush administration's discursive tactics after 9/11. He points to Bush's September 20, 2001 speech that "framed the 9/11 attacks as an assault on America's sacred virtues of freedom and democracy and launched his 'war on terror'" (185). Simons also mentions

the media's role in the moment claiming that "in the wake of 9/11, the news media spoke as one in their condemnation of the attacks and in support of the president, helping send his approval ratings from below 50% before 9/11 to nearly 90%, a record high, after September 20" (185-186). This garnered strong public support for Bush's future military aims as they were considered necessary in the war on terror. Simons's work demonstrates both the importance of a narrative's creation and the significance of the media's response.

The driving force behind the rhetorical situation, according to Simons, is the critical atmosphere that created the exigence post-9/11. Threat-induced crisis rhetoric "enabled American presidents (in the past) to show leadership, grab headlines, exhibit toughness, and demand unity. It also gains them policy support on unrelated issues, increases their party's electoral power, accrues symbolic reserves, and helps them weather untidy endings" (185). In response, Bush employs a cross-cultural and transhistorical narrative that polarizes the situation: the United States and its God-given virtues were attacked by pure evil. "The two-dimensional characters of fictional melodrama and the use of exaggeration and polarization for dramatic effect find their way into political crisis rhetoric by way of a valorized 'us 'and a dehumanized or demonized 'them'" (185).

However, as time wore on in the war in Iraq, Americans grew uncertain and disenchanted with the "good versus evil" narrative the Bush administration promulgated after the September 11 attacks. According to Simons, the American public had once bought into the rhetorical polarization that they represented the virtuous while Bush's

Axis of Evil represented all that was wrong. But "the United States continued to be incapable of reconciling its ongoing mythic crisis narrative with real-world constraints" (189).

There are two important scholarly tactics to gain from Simons. First, he draws from a wide variety of texts in order to piece together the underlying narrative of President Bush and the subsequent events after 9/11. In order to identify the underlying narrative and its actors, Simons had to take into account Bush's discourse, the media's reaction and America's response. Furthermore, these texts were not inherently narrative. But pieced together they create a coherent narrative. This pursuit informs my methodology for this project by providing an example by which to analyze narratives within discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology of the Thesis


In order to identify how the Tea Party is constructed by others and how the it

constructs itself, I will employ a narrative analysis of two official Tea Party websites as

well as Tea Party related editorials and op-ed pieces in two major newspapers. It is

noteworthy that these texts are not inherently narratives, but I will search for and compile

these structuring narratives from the websites *teaparty.org* and *teapartypatriots.org* as

well as the *New York Times* and *Washington Times.* The target of this analysis is

structuring narratives, stories that are told through various discursive texts that assign

roles to actors, outline political aims and provide justification for a collective—in this

case the Tea Party. They are stories that help to make sense of and provide a structure to

a collective.  The Tea Party is a vast, fluid coalition of voters and organization with

perspectives from many different sources. My goal in this project is to examine the

discourse around the Tea Party and uncover the narratives that help to define their place

in the political landscape.

There are three essential tenets that I focus on through the each of the texts as a

means of uncovering narratives: common modes of identification, the appeals to common American myth as well as ideologies and values that are emphasized. First, when searching for common modes of identification I look to find consistent portrayals of the stakeholders, political actors, protagonists and antagonists in the narratives which structure the Tea Party.  Jasinski notes (395) narratives instruct audience members how to act, and furthermore who is good and bad within the application of a story. Searching for common themes and characterizations within the narratives that surrounds the Tea Party can further the understanding how roles are assigned to political actors. An analysis of the structuring narratives provides identification of the narrative's protagonists and antagonists. Secondly, common American narratives and myths are strong rhetorical forces. Hughes (2) claims that narratives are able to create meaning and purpose for many individuals, and serve to define much of their understanding of the world around them. Analysis of the mythical allusions found in the structuring narratives within Tea Party discourse will better conceptualizes the identity of the movement. The final focus is the emphasis of values and ideologies in the narrative around the Tea Party. Searching for common values and concerns within Tea Party discourse allows an opportunity to understand the motivation political aims of the movement as applied to narratives.

This study will analyze coverage in two major America newspapers, the *New York Times* and *Washington Times*, with special attention paid to structuring narratives and their role in constructing the identity of the Tea Party. Within the United States, the media is a leading force in the construction of the political identity. Analysis of the Tea

Party's structuring narratives will provide insight into the manner millions of Americans are informed of identity through mainstream media outlets. Finally, investigating the self-construction of Tea Party identity by the websites allows for an opportunity to compare and contrast the manner the Tea Party constructs itself, versus the way it is constructed in the media.

I will then compare the rhetorical tactics of the Tea Party to scholarship of past American populist movements. Historically there have been many political movements similar to the Tea Party in form, content, and context. By examining rhetorical themes from past populist movements and comparing them to those used by the Tea Party, a much clearer historical perspective can be gained in terms of situating the Tea Party as an American sociopolitical movement.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Times* were chosen as analyze for two reasons. First, the selected periodicals reach a high volume of voters across the electorate. The Audit Bureau of Circulations indicates that the *New York Times* and *Washington Times* are the third and fifth most circulated periodicals respectively. Combined, they reach over 2.5 million copies circulated daily (n.p.). Secondly, research indicates the two newspapers are biased. D'Alessio and Allen conducted a meta-analysis of major U.S. newspapers from 1948 forward in search of bias in political coverage surrounding presidential elections. Their research concluded that *Washington Times* "documents an enormous bias" in terms of the news stories which were chosen to be printed (148). Also, the *Washington Times* is endorsed by many conservative websites (*conservativeusa.org,*

27

*conservapedia.com* n.p.). Meanwhile, the *New York Times* is hailed as one of the most liberal biased news sources available. Research by Tan and Weaver support this claim, indicating that from 1946 forward no other newspaper cited as many think tanks also cited by Democratic politicians (423-424). Also, the *New York Times* is hailed by liberals as one of the top sources for progressive news (Shea n.p.). The large circulation of these periodicals and their documented opposition in terms of bias make them ideal to draw on for examining the manner in which the Tea Party is constructed to millions of voters because they provide polar portrayals of the movement.

Websites and correspondence over the Internet have been an essential part of the Tea Party's initiation, organization and subsequent growth (McGrath n.p.). *Teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* were chosen for their popularity and extensive content. First, when the term "tea party" is put into search engines, the first two Tea Party websites to be listed are *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* (the Wikipedia page for Tea Party is the only other site listed in the top three). This indicates that not only *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* are popular, but closely related to the way millions of political actors experience the Tea Party. Secondly, both websites have lengthy sections explaining their missions and goals. These self-explanatory sections allow for opportunities to uncover how the Tea Party self-constructs its identity. That is, through the discourse available on *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* Tea Party members present exactly how they see themselves, their political aims, and the broader Tea Party image. The high popularity of *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* in conjunction with

their lengthy sections on identity self-construction provide an excellent chance to see how Tea Party identity is self-synthesized.

Because of the fluidity and plurality of the Tea Party it is essential to set specific time frames in which to study the Tea Party and their construction in the media. I have chosen to focus on the discourse that surrounds the Tea Party from April 1, 2010 to November 1, 2010. There are two justifications for examining the Tea Party's construction in the *Washington Times* and *New York Times* in this time period. First, April 1 allows for two weeks of lead up coverage to the second instance of the Tea Party organizing large rallies in response to filing of taxes. By this point, the movement had been in existence for well over a year and had solidified itself in the national political consciousness. Secondly, the time period from April to November of 2010 was essential in the Tea Party's effect of American politics. Since its inception through the midterm elections of 2010, the Tea Party grew from a handful of bloggers and small protesters to an influential national political entity. The period of time leading up to the midterm elections allows for the most up to date interpretations of the Tea Party and their discourse. Using LexisNexis, the term "Tea Party" was searched within the *New York Times* and *Washington Times* databases foe editorial and op-ed pieces as primary sources and news articles as secondary sources.  The time frame was from April 1, 2010 to November 1, 2010. The search netted 687 pieces from the *New York Times*, one hundred of them being editorial or op-ed in nature and 436 articles from the *Washington Times* with thirty-five editorials and op-eds.

CHAPTER THREE

Scholarly Perspectives of Populist Rhetoric

Clearly, the Tea Party movement is the latest in a series of conservative

movements. Most would argue there was no mass conservative movement until

the 1950s...The Tea Party is just the latest installment: patriotic, anti-tax, mostly

Libertarians, and using rhetoric in a way very similar to that of the 1964

Goldwater campaign. The movement is a problem for Democrats, and for

Republicans, too, who have to channel the discontent to their benefit and not be

consumed by it.

-Michael Kazin (Talk of the Nation n.p.)

Throughout its brief existence, politicians, columnists, and pundits have explored the Tea

Party's association to populism. Although these comparisons add some insight into the

populist nature of the Tea Party, the movement must be compared to established

rhetorical tents of populism. Drawing on scholarship of American social movements, this

section overviews the rhetorical tactics of populist sociopolitical movements. By

investigating past populist movements a rhetorical vocabulary can be established and sets

up a concise comparison to the Tea Party. In order to further understand the Tea Party's

adaptation of past populist rhetorical tactics, I will overview the established

communication scholarship as well as a historical summary of American populist

movements.

### *Common Themes the Populist Rhetoric*

Past figures of American political discourse from Ignatius Donnelly to Ross Perot

have created an excellent niche for scholars to study common rhetorical themes and

narratives applied in populist rhetoric. Although populist movements in the United States

have advocated a wide array of political objectives, the rhetorical tactics that were

employed share numerous elements. According to Michael J. Lee, there are four essential

themes to populist rhetoric: a definable "people," an "enemy," a malfunctioning

"system," and a final conflict (M. Lee 355-365). These four themes, manifested in

different ways, are the core of the populist rhetorical strategy and combine to create the

structuring narratives by which movements have identified themselves.

Lee submits that the first key theme of populist rhetoric is the relationship between

a definable "people" who are portrayed as heroic defenders of 'traditional' values versus

an elite, out-of-touch "enemy" (358). Key within the populist rhetorical narrative is an

emphasis on current politicians, business leaders and intellectuals as being out-of-touch

in with the concerns and values to the "everyday" Americans. The disassociation of the

elite with the "average" American serves to supplement populist grassroots ethos.

Notions of authentic, grassroots movement are an essential tenet of populist rhetoric, and

proves important to the (counter)narratives of the Tea Party.

The construction of the ''people'' shares several characteristics in populist structuring narratives. They are rendered as ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans. Common characteristics among these ordinary folks is evident in their similar ways of life (M. Lee 359). The narrative of the virtuous, "average Joe" citizen standing up against the political machine manifests itself in multiple ways in populist rhetoric. Ryfe notes that populist rhetoric "share[s] an 'anti-elitis[m]' that exalts the people and stresses the pathos of the 'little man.' The core of the populist vocabulary [is] the notion that political actors should be 'real' people" (144). While the members of the movement are portrayed as good, hardworking, value-driven Americans, the Washington politician or academic is out-of-touch with the needs of the people.

Through the history of populist movements, the image of the "people" has been emphasized hand in hand with strong elements of Christianity. The "God-fearing" construction of the "people' create the opportunity to add Christian idiom, metaphor and trope as cornerstones of their structuring narrative. Williams and Alexander (5) note "by using biblical and other religious allusions in parables, illustrations, and anecdotes, populists situated themselves within the common vocabularies of American religious and political culture."

The application of biblical language and tropes to the populist rhetorical narrative transforms issues of public policy into profound questions of good and evil. The adaptation of biblical language and narratives also serve to conjoin splintered social and

33

economic groups under the banner of Christianity. For example, Ignatius Donnelly used biblical language while leading the People's Party, effectively uniting interests of rural farmers and urban laborers (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 28-30). In a culture as thoroughly religious as America, few things can bind so many individuals together so effectively. "Populism's religious language provided common ground for what otherwise might have remained factions separated by cultural differences. The movement's success, as well as its failures, were rooted in Evangelical culture" (Williams and Alexander 3).

The construction of the "enemy" in populist rhetoric portrays politicians, bureaucrats, corporations, bankers and academics as the narrative's antagonists. M. Lee (359) notes, "The 'people's' collective fantasy is a narrative of unseating an enemy that has an unyielding commitment to hoarding power and to the destruction of 'traditional' values." Gilded Age populist movements representing farmers from the plains and west argued "Eastern capitalists" were focused on hoarding wealth through political, financial, and railroad interests (M. Lee 360). This facet of the populist rhetorical narrative calls the "people" to action. Not only are the populists "…working against political experts who just don't 'get it'" (Rohler 317), but those in charge are often deemed to have negative intentions. Kazin notes that populists "view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic" ("The Populist Persuasion" 1). Terms like "Washington elites," "fat cats," and "radical academics" often are used to characterize antagonists in populist rhetorical narrative. The "enemy's" corruption of a once fair and democratic political and economic system creates a specific crisis that necessitates "the people's" action (M. Lee 360). The

rhetorical themes of the "people" and "enemy" establish the conflicting rhetorical actors in a populist movement. But the narrative of populist movements also provides the image of the "system," which must be cleansed through a climatic "conflict."

According to M. Lee the "system" is an amalgamation of numerous actors within the national political and economic order who distribute, govern, and manage. Within the populist structuring narrative, the system has been altered almost irreparably because of court-packing, gerrymandering, ballot stuffing, bribery, moral decay, and political chicanery. Because the system has degenerated, radical means are necessary to prevent the enemy's impending victory (360-361).

As defined by populists, the "system" once represented the founders' conception of pure justice but has since been sullied (M. Lee 360). A common tenet of the "system" element of populist rhetoric is a strong emphasis on and connection to the founders and America's primary documents. By harkening to the founding fathers as well as the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, other framing documents the populist movement is engaged in a fight for the very soul of America rather than issues of policy. Subsequently, the "enemy" of the populist movement often references as having no respect for the founders and the documents they authored. For example, George Wallace argued his Washington opponents had no concern for minority rights nor the niceties of Constitution and its procedures (Rohler, 318). Williams and Alexander (4) note that the founding fathers and their documents are often deified as part of an American civil religion, a discourse that connects Christian religious concepts to the values of the United

States in an effort to assign meaning and destiny. A restorative movement toward the "first principles" of America is amplified within populist rhetoric and drives the Tea Party.

In conjunction with the emphasis on the founding fathers and documents, populist rhetoric also places special detail on concepts America was founded on like liberty, freedom, and equality. These terms strongly associate the movement with the concepts behind the nation's founding. Populist rhetoric often appeals notions of self-reliance and freedom amongst other natural rights in their rhetorical tactics. Williams and Alexander (11) argue that the populist perspective frames "the state of the nation as an affront to natural order, and populists understand God's will as a mandate to recreate the Eden-like conditions where abundance was distributed according to the 'inaliable rights' attached to all persons." The sacred origin narrative within populist rhetoric serves to deify the framers and founding documents, as well as the abstract principles that were sponsored at America's inception.

The final element of the populist rhetorical narrative is a final "conflict." As M. Lee notes "Populism is not a political language of negotiation and compromise" (362). Populist rhetoric often alludes to an "end of days" trope if changes are not made. This serves to supplement the exigency to movent's situation. The apocalyptic confrontation also allows for a clear chosen people to have a decisive enemy, which must be defeated in the name of good (362). The Christian element of populist rhetoric helps inform this narrative. Within Christian tradition a final battle for the Earth, between good and evil is

a fundamental belief. The final conflict serves as the climax of populist structuring

narrative and represents the final step of revolutionary change the movement is seeking.

My analysis of the discursive construction of the Tea Party will demonstrate the

movement uses common themes of populist rhetoric.

***American Populism: Post-Civil War to Present***

Populism in America has taken many forms and pursued various political goals in

American history. As a testament to the power of its persuasive power and complexity,

populist movements have served the political right and left. Kazin describes "populism as

a flexible mode of persuasion" co-opted by interests that are not tidy and neat, but instead

often fraught with contradiction. Due to this complexity, special attention must be

brought to historical concerns, but patterns can be gleaned about the application of

populist modes of rhetoric and those that supplement understanding of American political

discourse ("The Populist Persuasion" 3).  A historical analysis of the last 150 years of

sociopolitical movements in the United States suggests that American populist

movements are fluid and complex.

Populism was present in various forms as far back as the 1830s, but finds its roots

within political discourse following the Civil War. At that point, both major political

parties were plagued with corruption from the top-down, specifically from wealth gained

during reconstruction. Disgusted with party leaders and their "ill-gotten" wealth, Georgia

native Thomas Watson railed against Republicans and the "system" which produced

"boodlers, monopolists, gamblers, gigantic corporations, bondholders and bankers"

("Populist Persuasion" 10).  Mixed in with attacks against the ruling elite, Watson also

reached back to the founding fathers and their intentions. He asked "Did [Jefferson]

dream that in 100 years or less *his* party would be prostituted to the vilest purposes of

monopoly […] and that the liberty and prosperity of the country would be…constantly

and corruptly sacrifices the Plutocratic greed in the name of Jeffersonian Democracy?"

("Populist Persuasion"11).

Populist scholar Lawrence Goodwyn argues that Thomas's rhetorical tactics set

the tone for "people's" movements in the future. Watson "understood that reform

movements require tactics and strategy…to foment a proper audience" (160). Watson's

attacks against elitist foes and focus on the intentions of the founders set precedent for

future populist movements' persuasive tactics.

By the turn of the twentieth century, more complete populist movements came

into being. The People's Party represented the first well-organized populist political

movement of the gilded age. Lead by Ignatius Donnelly, the People's Party railed against

the unequal distribution of wealth and government's disassociation with "plain people"

("Populist Persuasion"29). Donnelly and the People's Party are significant for setting the

agenda of populist rhetoric for decades (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 27).  Many

radical agrarians cite Donnelly's preamble and keynote at the People's Party convention

in 1892 as an expression of their deepest drives (Goodwyn 167). Donnelly paid careful

attention toward Biblical idiom and his Christian audience by quoting St. Paul (Ridge

184). The People's Party outlined specific policy concerns and beliefs that would remain

in the populist agenda for the next half-century. Donnelly argued for a graduated income tax, unlimited coinage of alternate tender, and government ownership of railroads (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 27-30, Ridge 185). As populism in America unfolded and evolved, Donnelly's political objectives eventually faded away. But, the rhetorical tactics demonstrated by Donnelly and the structuring narratives around the People's Party would be used time and time again in future populist movements.

The two decades following the election of 1896 were a springtime of social movements. Following Williams Jennings Bryan's electoral defeat, African-Americans, women, farmers, laborers, prohibitionists, and socialists all began to organize with definitive political goals in mind (Postel 21-22). In terms of populism, emphasis shifted toward corporate banks and railroads and was supplemented with support from a handful of vocal figures of the day. Journalism magantes like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst helped usher in the era of muckraking journalism, which proved to be a vocal populist mode of persuasion. Meanwhile, politician William La Follette railed against "big businesses, corrupt bosses and subservient courts" (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 49-52). However, the most powerful and cohesive group through the progressive era were the one hundred or more unions which populated the American Federation of Labor (ALFL). During this time Samuel Gompers, a British born socialist, headed the ALFL. Once a radical, by the time Gompers took charge of the ALFL he had muffled extreme views and adopted a steady anti-elite agenda that was true to populist form.

Gompers and the ALFL represent an interesting case in terms of the history of American populist rhetoric. While past and future populist rhetoric worked to point out inequity, Gompers argued in a much more inclusive manner that "sought to straddle the line between workers' movement and peoples' movement, hoping to avoid the repression and scorn visited on those who continued to wave a Marxist banner" (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 56). Factors which stemmed from an evolving, industrializing United States were significant in terms of the populist rhetoric of the early twentieth century. First, the evocation of the "plain man" had a very different connotation than the years following the Civil War. African-American, women and immigrants had taken significant strides upward in society, becoming wage earners and climbing toward the middle class. In this sense, the "average" American was no longer white and male as was the case a half-century before. Rather, he *or* she came from many different backgrounds and ethnicities. This diversity of membership in the ALFL lead Gompers and other labor leaders to avoid the explicit, Pentecostal-brand of biblical rhetoric that was so common in nineteenth-century populism and future movements. Progressive movements easily splintered and Gompers recruited mostly craft unions and avoided venturing into industrial organization (Goodwyn 174-175). Gompers also worried that a Christian emphasis would isolate and divide the diverse population within the ALFL's membership. Gompers's primary concern was unification of labor and was careful to avoid any Christian language that could prove divisive. Kazin ("The Populist Persuasion" 54) outlines Gompers's rhetoric and audience:

Neither did the ALFL mobilize the language of Christian deliverance that had come so naturally to grassroots activists in the late ninetieth century. The heterogeneous composition of the labor movement and the personal beliefs of most leaders warned against it. Rank and filers followed a variety of creeds; Catholics may have been in the majority. Gompers himself was born a Jew but, as an adult, adhered to no ritual save freemasonry, and his circle included few churchgoers from evangelical denominations. Most important, resorting to an idiom closely associated with Protestantism could have destroyed the often-fragile bond between people who had nothing in common but their work.

Gompers and the ALFL became important actors in the terms of a populist agenda at the commencement of the twentieth century. But the First World War divided the AFL's membership. By the time the war concluded in 1917, a new social movement had begun to take hold.  Prohibitionists were an unknown quantity when they began advocating for the abolition of liquor sales. Although such movements concerning the banishment of alcohol can be traced back to 1826, the Prohibition movement's rhetoric took up a distinctly populist tone. Although not invested in traditional populist concerns, the prohibition movement demonstrates common populist structuring narratives and rhetorical tactics(Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 80).

The face of the prohibition movement was the Anti-Saloon League. The factor that set the prohibitionist movement apart from other social movements was their explicit assumption that cleansing the nation meant bringing it back to Christ. Howard Russell,

the ASL's founder noted "the Anti-Saloon League movement was begun by Almighty God." Although evangelical Christianity was at the forefront of the prohibition movement, it worked in concert with common populist rhetorical tactics (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 80).

Essential to the populist structuring narrative of the Prohibitionist movement was the association of the liquor trade with the ruling class. The very name of the Anti-Saloon League promoted the idea that the evils of drink could be traced directly to the urban elite, whose public meeting place was the corner bar. Emphasizing the rural nature of the movement, prohibitionist periodical *The Voice* noted "the prohibition movement has no more outspoken and consistent friend than the National Farmers' Alliance" (Postel 93). Furthermore, the ASL eagerly published the fact the large brewing corporations owned many saloons, and muckraking publications were quick to point out collusion between the liquor business and corrupt politicians. Stories of paid-off law enforcement turning a blind eye to liquor licensing laws and other malfeasance from the highest levels down only served to bolster the Prohibitionist anti-elite sentiment (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 80).

In an effort to further associate the ASL with the "everyday" American, prohibitionists went beyond highlighting cooperation between saloons and big liquor companies to demonizing aristocracy and immigrants. The ASL used two distinct images on many of their posters and campaign materials which carried specific rhetorical consequences. The first was that of tycoon Mark Hanna with a champagne bottle in one

hand and buxom lady of the night in the other, illustrating the American elite as an enemy. Methodist bishop James Cannon Jr., a vocal ASL supporter, noted "the emintely respectable 'high society' element" had helped him to draw support amongst working class for prohibition. The second image worked to associate the ASL with the "'everyday' American in a different way by connecting the liquor industry to immigrants. The image depicted a "paunchy, mustachioed saloon keeper with a long cigar in the corner of his mouth and a malevolent look in his recessed, beady eyes. Of obvious Central-European lineage, this urban potentate was an alien Mephistopheles who had no natural roots in the nation he was despoiling" (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 90-91). Within the prohibitionist movement, immigrants made an easy target to in an effort to appeal to the "average American."

An essential element of populist structuring narrative is the evocation of the system. The ASL however, did not co-opt the message of one of the founding fathers. Rather they turned to a different iconic American statesman who sufficed to tap into American idealism, Abraham Lincoln. As an Illinois politician, Lincoln had joined the Washingtonian movement and written an abstentionist pledge and urged fellow young men to sign it. With Lincoln, the prohibitionist movement had a patriotic icon that mirrored the ASL's concern for the abolition of alcohol sales (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 92).

With the ratification of the Volstead act in 1920, the ASL and prohibitionists had their victory. The structuring narrative around the ASL falls in line with the common

elements of populist rhetoric: Christian language, an out-of-touch elite, and fidelity to the system's founding principles. However, the manner in which the populist tones of the ASL were executed differ from past and future movements in that special tactics. In this case the jusxtapositng imagery of immigrants and "average" Americans as well as the invocation of Lincoln, were adopted according the social, political, and economic situation in which the movement took place.

The Great Depression reformatted American discourse and opinion, specifically about issues traditionally invested in populism: worker's rights, money-hungry elite, and the nations' moral compass. The rhetorical situation spawned a new type of populist rhetoric. Using the Catholic Church as a platform, Father Charles Coughlin and his followers readjusted the political leanings of populism from left leaning to right-winged.

Coughlin began recording radio lectures from his Michigan parish in 1923. By the time the Great Depression was in its throngs, he had some thirty million weekly listeners. During this time, Catholic priests had overtaken Protestant ministers as the most vocal advocates of populism, and like the Protestant ministers of the 1890s Catholic advocates like Coughlin wanted to pull down the rich and raise the spiritual state of the country. Invested in Catholic social justice and the plight of the wage earner, Coughlin was able to garner strong support amongst Irish-Catholics, many of whom had climbed into the middle class over the previous generations. Coughlin formed  the National Union for Social Justice with mission of  battling finance capital and Marxist socialism, or as

Coughlin termed them the "twin faces of a secular Satan" (Kazin "The Populist

Persuasion" 112).

During the first half of the 1930s, Coughlin's message mirrored that of populist

leaders before him. Kazin ("The Populist Persuasion" 114) explains:

 He (Coughlin) enthusiastically translated papal encyclicals about labor and

poverty into the American vernacular. He unraveled the complexities of banking

transaction…ridiculed pompous men of wealth like J.P. Morgan…He invoked

both Christian morality and the secular republicanism of the founding fathers. He

advised Americans to follow wise, altruistic leaders while being suspicious of

anyone who held national and political power.

Coughlin used explicitly Christian idiom to rail against the elite. He called those in the

world baking industry "money-changers," in reference to the Book of Mathew. Coughlin

argued that such institutions were utterly amoral and unpatriotic; they moved capital

around the globe with no concern for resulting unemployment, business failure and lost

sovereignty. By blasting the morally-ill rich, Coughlin was taping into a line of populist

discontent common since Andrew Jackson, specifically the conspiratorial acts of the

wealthy (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 120). Of course, Coughlin's rhetoric was

compounded by the worsening economic outlook since the stock market crash of 1929. In

1932, Coughlin found a protagonist in presidential candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

After vigorously supporting Roosevelt in 1932, Coughlin even began referring to

Roosevelt's New Deal program as "Christ's Deal." But Coughlin's support for Roosevelt

quickly soured; some argue that Coughlin felt FDR did not give him credit for his

election (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.p.). Coughlin cited the president

with serving only corporate moguls and Communist revolutionaries. With the support of

the NUSJ, Coughlin created a triumvirate of unlikely foes: the New Deal, the Soviets,

and modern capitalism. All three, Coughlin reasoned, were invested in placing the power

of many into the hands of few and destroying traditional American values (Kazin "The

Populist Persuasion" 123).

In 1936 Coughlin ran for president against Roosevelt on his Union Party ticket.

Although FDR himself applied aspects of populist rhetoric to his campaign (attacking

"economic royalists" and lauding the "common man"), Coughlin looked to associate

Roosevelt's progressive economic policies with the hoarding of wealth at the top of

society. In one campaign speech Coughlin called the president a "liar" and in another

swore: "so help me God, I will be the instrument in taking a Communist from the chair

once occupied by Washington." Unaware of fascism's impending global havoc, Coughlin

associated Roosevelt's progressive economics with an agenda to pull the United States

into a war against European fascism. Despite his vitriol toward Roosevelt and extensive

public support, Coughlin fell well short of the ten percent of popular vote he promised

(Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 123-125).

By the late 1930s the war in Europe became imminent. Coughlin, eager to

recapture the popularity he lost during his presidential bid, began shifting his attacks

away from the "money-changers" to the powerful few who had the power to bring

America into an anti-fascist war with the Germans and Italians. Drawing on popular opposition to America's involvement in European turmoil, Coughlin became an apologist for the European right-wing engaged in combat with liberals and Communists. In 1940, Coughlin became an ardent supporter of France's Vichy government, recently installed by the occupying Nazis. He argued "Fascist France, in the days to come will afford better opportunities for the mental, spiritual, and social development of its people than did France when it was by the spirit of the Atheist Voltaire" (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 130). With these claims came anti-Semitic barbs. Coughlin railed against the "Soviet-loving Jews" and announced Alexander Hamilton was a "Jew who had established the nation's banking system in the interest of the rich and well born." These tactics gained Coughlin some traction, but by 1941 he was off the air and out of the public eye (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 130).

Truly, until the 1930s conservative populism was an oxymoron. But, analysis of Coughlin's rhetoric offers insight into how zeitgeist can reshape a message. Nugent (8) notes that Coughlin demonstrates a special nativism often embedded in populist sentiment evoking the "people." Coughlin's rhetoric maintained a populist tone: attacks on the elite, investment in the virtues of the commoner, and harkening to the founding principles. But the most important aspect of Coughlin and the NUSJ is the ability to rebrand populist rhetoric and structuring narratives to argue for the political right rather than against it. Coughlin showed that with a few tweaks and dedicated understanding of the audience, populist rhetoric could be a powerful tool to argue from a different political

perspective. From Coughlin forward, populist rhetoric and structuring narratives common

to populism were no longer property of the left, but rather could be adapted with respect

to the situation.

Following the anti-fascist brand of populist rhetoric perused by Coughlin and the

NUSJ, the events of the Second World War dominated the minds, hearts and political

discourse of America. But the political right had another opportunity to rouse populist

sentiment with the United State's entrance into the Cold War, specifically the growing

threat of global and local Communism. Lead by Senator Joseph McCarthy, the right was

once again able to adapt the common populist structuring narrative to advance

conservatism.

The context of the Cold War supplied conservatives with two impulses that had

never been connected: Jacksonian concern of high government officials who would

sacrifice country loyalty for deals and friendship with foreign government, and the

evangelical concern for the country's moral decay caused by the cosmopolitan elite

(Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 166). Conservative "red hunters" began to pop up from

Catholic and Protestant churches, veterans' groups, Republicans, and professional

organizations. Stirred up by McCarthy's vitriol, the average American's largest concern

became infiltration from godless Communist aliens. Kazin summarizes the scene ("The

Populist Persuasion" 167):

> Conservatives thus found in the storehouse of populist language a potent weapon
>
> for their anti-statist crusade. A conspiratorial elite organized both inside

government and in the wider culture was forcing Americans into a regimented

system that would destroy their livelihood and tear down their values. The power

of big business, implied by the Right, looked puny compared to that of the new

leviathan. Liberal intellectuals, from the booming universities allegedly hatched

the dangerous ideas, and wealthy celebrities from radio and screen shrewdly

translated those into alluring images. A free people had to fight back or lose its

freedom all together.

McCarthyism was not itself a mass movement, but maintained traction amongst the

American public for some time. The Army-McCarthy hearings lead to the senator's

eventual downfall in 1954 (Reeves n.p.), but once again it was demonstrated that populist

structuring narratives can be co-opted by the political left and right. Populist rhetoric can

be harnessed by rhetors who grasp the exigency of the moment in American history

where the "average" individual seems threatened and the status quo requires change.

The strongest example of a populist movement in the last half-century belongs to

politician George Wallace and American right during the 1960s and 1970s. Wallace's

brand of populist rhetoric drew off the vestiges of Jacksonian anti-government sentiment

mixed with vitriol against the rapidly progressing civil rights movement. After becoming

governor of Alabama in 1962, Wallace quickly became America's best known

segregationist. Wallace's "simple man" persona supplemented his anti-elite narratives,

accusations of conspiratorial acts by the system and racially-driven invocations toward

the "average" America. Wallace went on to run for president four times and serve as

governor of Alabama on three occasions, earning support over decades with his populist

message (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 220-231).

Coming from humble origins, Wallace emphasized his "average" American roots.

By contrasting the American worker with overpaid Washington bureaucrats and

intellectuals, Wallace demonstrated the ordinary citizen's role within a broken system.

Wallace frequently targeted the Supreme Court. Between their lifelong appointments and

disregard for the Constitution by upholding the Civil Rights Act, Wallace narrated a story

of a Washington elite that had no regard for the system or hardworking Americans,

arguing the Supreme Court needed to be "saved from itself" (Kazin "The Populist

Persuasion" 232)

Wallace's rhetoric against the system expanded when he began playing up white

resentment against burdensome taxes that provided welfare for the lazy. Although he

never mentioned the term "black," it was clear whom Wallace was referring. The passage

of the Civil Rights Act allowed Wallace to prey on the white working class resentment of

African-American's newfound advancement. Wallace was able to gain support on the

strength of his popularity amongst white southerners by calling for a restoration to pre-

Civil Rights movement conditions (Rohler 316-322). Without a doubt, Wallace's greatest

strength as a politician and populist rhetor was the ethos he had amongst average

Americans. By playing on the fear of the social change sweeping the nation in the 1960s,

Wallace was able apply populist rhetoric to propel himself to marked political success.

Following Wallace, elements of populism can be seen in many politicians on both the left and right. The fluidity of different constituencies and issues allows politicians to adopt populist themes. While conservatives in the 1980s co-opted the Christian right and connected to traditional American values, Democrats have successfully attacked Republicans' close ties to corporate banks and large oil companies. Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton (Kazin "The Populist Persuasion" 245-266, R. Lee 39-60) have all been known to apply elements of commonly identified populist rhetoric. History has shown that populist sentiment can be used effectively by any political motivation, independent from political leaning. As Kazin notes, the language of populism in the United States expresses an idealistic content that often does not follow demographic borders. Populist rhetors often cut to the core of Americanism itself ("The Populist Persuasion" 2).

***Understandings of Populist Rhetoric***

The rhetoric of American populism is complex. Michael Lee asserts four main themes bind populist rhetoric: the creation of a virtuous "people," an "enemy" usually politicians, academics and business leaders, a corrupted "system" which must be reconciled by means of a final "conflict." Often, elements of Christian language and emphasis on America's founders are applied to these narrative constructions to strengthen them. These themes and structuring narratives are found throughout the length of American populism, and work to create a narrative for the movement by which good and bad are clearly identified. The ebb and flow of history indicates that populist rhetoric can

be adopted by the political left or right, a testament to its persuasive power. With special attention paid to historical situation and audience sentiment, sociopolitical movements have been able to apply populist rhetorical themes with great proficiency and effect.

A scholarly and historical overview of populist movements in the United States in respect to this project has informed of the possible rhetorical tactics available to the Tea Party. With a strong grasp on the narratives, language, and tactics used by past populist movements, the discourse around the Tea Party can be examined with a fuller understanding. Past populist movements provide a series of rhetorical tactics available to the Tea Party, and this allows for a concise comparison between the rhetoric of the Tea Party and past populist movements. Furthermore, with consideration to the history of American populist movements, this project can add greater understanding to history and rhetoric of twenty-first century political movements. Studying the rhetoric of the Tea Party in its early stages and contrasting it to past movements can help categorize and define the nature of what is unfolding before us.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Structuring Narratives: Tea Party

Identification in Mainstream American Media

Mediated discourse is a crucial tool in creating an identity modern political movements and the Tea Party is no exception. Content from *teaparty.org, teapartypatriots.org, Washington Times* and *New York Times* present narratives which inform the movement's identity, opposition, and political aims. Scholarship from Whitebrooke, Fisher, and Lewis have posited narrative's role in creating identity and millions of potential voters and political actors consume content from the four texts of analysis. This chapter will analyze the structuring narrative (self) identities within the content on *teaparty.org* and *teapartypatriots.org* as well as those available within editorial and op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* and *Washington Times*. I argue much of the Tea Party's disputed nature can be traced back to the manner in which these narratives problematize and counter one another.

***Teaparty.org***

Scholars have noted narratives as essential components within the process in which individuals understand and identify the world around them. As Whitebrooke argues (129), narratives are tools of power that provide direction to political actors in terms of the construction and continuity of a community identity. Narratives work as a vehicle for ordering, organizing and comprehending the social world (Jasinski 392). Within the context of a political movement, narratives can assign roles to political actors, provide political aims and justify the goals of the movement.

While the structuring narratives available in the *Washington* and *New York Times* offer distinct constructions of the Tea Party, no source provides a more robust identity than texts from the Tea Party itself. Narratives that inform Tea Party identity are available in the self-descriptive ("about us" and "mission statement and core values" respectively) sections of *teaparty.org* and *teapartypatriots.org*. The "about us" section on *teaparty.org* is broken into three sections. First, a brief section titled "what is the Tea Party?" which describes the origin and mission of the Tea Party. Next, the website notes "non-negotiable core beliefs" which features sixteen economic and cultural polices the Tea Party stands for. Finally, the website's founder Dale Robertson has placed a 1,500 word memorandum titled "a word from out founder" that the essential tenets of the movement.

The "about us" section on *teaparty.org* offers a structuring narrative of the Tea Party, which includes protagonists, antagonists, plotline, and climax. The text identifies Tea Party and their members as "true owners of the United States" (*teaparty.org* n.p.).

54

The narrative's "average" American protagonists are juxtaposed to the distant, ever expanding federal government, as well as non-English speakers and immigrants. This identifies big government and illegal immigrants as threats to the Tea Party's mission, characterizing them the narrative's antagonists. The plot of the narrative is structured as the struggle to "return" the country back toward the intentions of the founders. Decisively, the text claims, "By joining the Tea Party you are taking a stand for our nation. You will be upholding the grand principles set forth by U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). The climax of the story is presented as the "taking back" of the United States by Tea Partiers from an unconstitutionally intrusive federal government.

The narrative construction of the Tea Party as protagonists on *teaparty.org* is brief, but productive in demonstrating the movement as the heroes of the story. The text places strong emphasis on the spontaneous, grassroots driven founding of the Tea Party. The website decisively claims "the Tea Party is a Grass Roots movement" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). The term grassroots carries with it connotations of "regular" Americans who were spontaneously inspired to join together, constructing an authentically independent identity of the Tea Party. The spontaneous, grassroots identification of the Tea Party continues in Robert's "word from our founder" section. He notes, "From this humble beginning a movement was born. The Tea Party movement, born from obscurity, without funding, without planning, a spontaneous force is shaking the very glass foundation of the oligarchy who rules in our name, but without our blessing" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This

claim constructs the Tea Party's authentic, spontaneous origin and also begins to allude to the overarching identity of the movement: a spontaneous joining together of "true" Americans to battle the unconstitutional governmental overreach in an effort to "return" the country back ideals of the founders.

The website later identifies the Tea Party as the "true owners of America: we the people" (*teaparty.org* n.p.).  The claim of "true owners of America" is a clear indication of how the Tea Party self-identifies through this text.  Assertion of "true" ownership of America connotes that there is a definition/identity of what it means to be a "true" American and furthermore someone/thing else is currently claiming possession of America who does not identify as "true." *Teaparty.org* continues to emphasize its acceptance of all "true" owners of American, posing it as the protagonist of the structuring narrative. The text notes:

> Tea Party dream includes all who possess a strong belief in the foundational Judaic/Christian values embedded in our great founding documents. He [Roberts] believes the responsibility of our beloved nation is entrenched within the hearts of true American Patriots from all walks of life, every race, religion and national origin, all sharing a common belief in the values which made and keep our beloved nation great. This belief led to the creation of the Modern Day Tea party. Many Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Green and Independent Citizens identify with the premises set forth by the newly founded Tea Party movement, striking a chord and ringing true with the American Spirit.

This section characterizes the Tea Party as an inclusive group, but with expectations of how one identifies. Statements like "responsibility of our beloved nation is entrenched… from all walks of life, every race, religion and national origin" and later noting, "Many Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Green and Independent Citizens identify with the premises (of the Tea Party)" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). Statements like these construct the Tea Party as an inclusive movement. However, the next sentence of the same section notes, "Tea Party dream includes…strong belief in the foundational Judaic/Christian values" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This claim characterizes those of Judeo-Christian faith as within ideal identity of the Tea Party, but marginalizes those of any other faith or those who are not religious. This binary distinction creates both a Judeo-Christian identity of the Tea Party, but also characterizes those who are non-Judeo-Christian as outside the bounds of the movement's identity. Claims like this violate the text's identification of the Tea Party as an inclusive movement.

The structuring narrative on *teaparty.org* constructs the movement's two types of antagonists: political and social. The text identifies current politicians as out-of-touch and as proprietors of an unconstitutionally overreaching federal government. But along with the synthesis of political antagonists, *teaparty.org* also characterizes non-English speakers and illegal immigrants as threats to the Tea Party's mission.

*Teaparty.org*'s litany of "non-negotiable core beliefs" includes a handful of policy issues that establish political antagonists. These "core beliefs" are presented in such a way to criticize the current political leaders and the size and scope of the

government. A core belief is "political offices available to average citizens" (*teaparty.org* n.p ). This political claim implies that current politicians are not "average" as opposed to the "everyday," "average" Americans who are constructed as the core members of the Tea Party. The website later describes Washington as "befuddled politicians gathering votes on the floor of the Senate and then on the floor of the House of Representatives" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). While these claims construct the whole Washington political machine as antagonistic, the identification of the stimulus and bailout as unconstitutional further illustrates the overreaching federal government as the antagonists of the narrative.

There are a number of claims and criticisms within "non-negotiable core beliefs" that entrench the expanded government as the narrative's villains. The text begins its assault on Washington by first focusing on the bailout and stimulus packages of 2008. The website claims "bailout and stimulus plans are illegal" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This is compounded by Robertson's narrative about his role in the Tea Party. Referring to the passing of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act in 2009 he notes, "Their sightless determination to force an Unconstitutional Stimulus package through the Senate and then the House of Representatives, to me, was a death pill to all I hold dear, and I knew millions of Americans felt the same way" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). These references towards the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's illegality characterize those who designed and voted for it villainous, characterizing federal government in Washington as a whole as antagonists. Claims that the "government must be downsized" and that "intrusive government is stopped" within *teaparty.org's* "non-negotiable core beliefs"

argue that the current model of government has gone too far and need to be "stopped." These assertions further isolate large government and accompanying programs as the Tea Party's enemy, and assert the political aims of the movement in very clear manner.

The structuring narrative available on *teaparty.org* antagonizes Washington politicians and their push for a larger role of government, but by addressing social issues the text characterizes some cultural and racial identities as threatening to the Tea Party. Although the text notes Tea Partiers are "from all walks of life, every race, religion and national origin" (*teaparty.org* n.p.) the text also characterizes non-English speakers and immigrants as antagonistic. The text's "non-negotiable core beliefs" include stipulations that "English As A Core Language Is Required" and "Illegal Aliens Are Here illegally [sic.]" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). These assertions characterize non-English speakers and illegal immigrants as problematic to the Tea Party and thus construct them as antagonists within the narrative. Although it is not clear why these identities are addressed by the *teaparty.org*, non-English speakers and illegal immigrants are antagonists in the Tea Party's structuring narrative.

*Teaparty.org* places much of its emphasis on creating a distinction between the "average" citizen that makes up the movement's membership opposed the "befuddled politicians" and "illegal bailouts" of Washington (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This narrative structures Washington politicians and the ever-expanding federal government as antagonists opposed to the values identified by the Tea Party. Delving into social issues,

the text goes on to address non-English speakers and illegal immigrants as threatening to the movement and its goals, thus constructing them as antagonists as well.

The plotline of the structuring narrative available on *teaparty.org* places heavy emphasis on the movement's struggle to restore America to the concepts of the founding fathers and documents. The founding of America and the accompanying documents have reached mythical status of symbolic importance in the United States, and this devotion is exercised in Tea Party rhetoric. The narrative available on *teaparty.org* insists joining the Tea Party movement as essential in the fight for America's future as the founders had envisioned it.

Succinctly, the website proclaims, "By joining the Tea Party you are taking a stand for our nation. You will be upholding the grand principles set forth by U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This assertion summarizes the plot of the structuring narrative available on *teaparty.org*. Within this narrative, the Tea Party takes on more than policies of a large federal government.  Rather, it is the only thing stopping the collapse of the vision of the America the founders set out to design. That leads the narrative to the proverbial climatic events which will save American from itself.

Within the text, there are multiple references to the importance of the founding fathers and documents. The text notes, "Our American heritage held the key to unleashing the American Spirit" and claims, "The true founders of the Tea Party were the brave Patriots who dared challenge the status quo in 1773, we are merely their beneficiaries" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This claims structures the modern day Tea Party as

members of the same ideological lineage as the Tea Party protesters of 1773. Another example of this devotion to the founders appears under the heading "what is the Tea Party?" where the text notes the, "Tea Party is the voice of the true owners of the United States, WE THE PEOPLE" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). The invocation of "we the people" emphasizes the bottom-up, grassroots identity of the movement, but also closely associates it with America's mythic founding by drawing directly from the preamble of the Constitution. The founders are further summoned by Roberts noting, "Being frustrated by 'Politics As Usual' this brave man decided to create a new voice, a voice that echoed from the pages of history… he was what the founding fathers envisioned over 200 years before as a true Patriot of courage and valor" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). Clearly these claims closely associate the identity and mission of the Tea Party movement with America's founders and the documents they authored.

Fidelity to the founding fathers and documents drives the structuring narrative on *teaparty.org* and further informs the story's climax. The movement identifies itself as molded in the images of the founding, its membership and goals are the embodiment of the founder's ideals, and the "taking back" of country toward the father's ideals serves as the climax to the text's structuring narrative. Arguing the unconstitutionality of recent Washington policy, the movement's mission becomes the dismantling of the "intrusive government" to "return" the country to what the founders had envisioned. The stage is set for the narrative's climax: the "taking back" of America.

*Teaparty.org* identifies itself as one in the same with the original Boston Tea Party in 1773. The text notes "Many claim to be the founders of this movement — however, it was the brave souls of the men and women in 1773, known today as the Boston Tea Party" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This assertion not only illustrates the manner the movement identifies itself, but also how it structures as the climax of its story. The author goes on to note the bravery of the Boston Tea Party who "dared defy the greatest military might on earth" (*teaparty.org* n.p.)This characterization submits the Tea Party's climactic conflict will be similar to the revolutionary implications of the Boston Tea Party, who only reached their goals after taking aggressive action against an oppressive state. Claims like these further inform the climactic "taking back" of America.

The structuring narrative available on *teaparty.org* thematically characterizes a story in which the patriotic, "everyday" Americans of the Tea Party take on the illegality of growing federal government and non-English speakers in a battle to reconnect the country with the founding fathers. But this narrative also presents a climactic conclusion of the narrative with the seizure the country by Tea Partiers. The text argues "we must take back our nation" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). This statement infers that the goals of the Tea Party and the "return" to the principles of the founders are only accomplished when control is captured from an oppressive power. When the "bravery of the original Tea Party" to "defy the greatest military on earth" is invoked and combined with claims of the federal governments unconstitutional expansion, it becomes clear that the climax of the narrative is "taking back our nation" (*teaparty.org* n.p.).

Although brief, websites can serve as important texts for the construction the identities of political actors. *Teaparty.org* offers a complete structuring narrative identity of the Tea Party movement by assigning thematic elements including protagonists, antagonists, plotline, and climax. Self-identification as "grassroots" and noting the country's "true owners are WE THE PEOPLE" insists the *teapary.org* construction of protagonist is rooted in the "average" citizen. The construction of antagonists in the narrative identifies the current, expanding government as an enemy via claims about the illegality of bailouts and size of government, further suggesting these policies have forced the Tea Party protagonist into action. The focus on immigration and the implementation of English as the national language implies a construction of minorities as threatening to the movement as well. The plot submitted by the *teaparty.org* narrative is explicit, constructing a quest to save America and the ideals of the founders. The website states succinctly, "By joining the Tea Party you are taking a stand for our nation. You will be upholding the grand principles set forth by U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights" (*teaparty.org* n.p.). Finally, the climactic goal of the movement is the "taking back of our nation" (*teaparty.org* n.p.) just as the Tea Partiers of 1773 had done.

**Teapartypatriots.org**

The structuring narrative available on *teapartypatriots.org* is a story that characterizes the Tea Party as a grassroots, bottom-up collective of Americans that are forced to do battle the gross overspending of the current administration. Similar to its counterpart at *teaparty.org,* the narrative further insists that stopping government

expansion is directly in line with the founding fathers' intentions of America. The narrative structures the climactic conclusion of the story as "taking action" against what is "now seen in Washington D.C." (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).

The "Tea Party Patriots Mission Statement and Core Values" page on *teaparty.org* places strong emphasis on the grassroots, "average" American ethos of those who identify with the movement. Structuring the Tea Party as coming from the "everyday" Americans is essential to the way the Tea Party identifies itself. Within the introduction of the Core Values, the Mission Statement declares the Tea Party's "mission is to attract, educate, organize, and mobilize our fellow citizens" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). This statement is important to identity formation in two ways. First, the invocation of term citizen is very specific; it refers to an individual political operative with rights, living within a state. "Citizen" emphasizes the bottom-up nature of the Tea Party and further illustrates their negotiation of rights under the state. Secondly, using the term "fellow" citizens denotes that the Tea Party's leadership as well as its followers identify with one another.

*Teapartypatriots.org* closely identifies itself and the Tea Party movement with the America's founding fathers and documents. This fidelity to the founding informs the movement's identity, the formation of their antagonists, and the plotline of the narrative. The text claims fierce devotion to the founding, noting the Tea Party believes the "founding documents and regard the Constitution of the United States to be the supreme law of the land" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The text goes as far to ground the whole of

the Tea Party in the founding fathers and documents, stating "our core values derived

from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States of America,

the Bill Of Rights as explained in the Federalist Papers" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).

Teapartypatriots.org's investment in the founding fathers and documents informs nearly

every perspective of the movement what the Tea Party stands for, its identity, and

mission.

Teapartypatriots.org further identifies itself as a bottom-up movement, citing

their investment in "grassroots organization," and noting the importance of activism on

an individual scale by stating, "We recognize and support the strength of grassroots

organization powered by activism and civic responsibility at a local level"

(*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). Furthermore, this construction builds a gulf between the

narrative's protagonists and antagonists; the dichotomy between the grassroots Tea

Partiers and out-of-touch, over-spending federal government.

The text constructs the Tea Party's antagonist as the "interventionist", runaway

federal government. One of the key elements of the construction of the narrative's

antagonist on teapartypatriots.org is the references to the unconstitutionality of the

current federal government and their policies. The text makes several references to the

importance of "constitutionally limited government" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.), once

again grounding the movement in the founders and the original documents. The website

goes onto claim, "Our current government's interference distorts the free market and

inhibits the pursuit of individual and economic liberty" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). These

claims argue that the federal government and is overstepping the boundaries of the Constitution and divorcing the country from the intentions of the founders.

The construction of the expanding federal government as antagonists in the narrative moves beyond issues of constitutionality to overspending. The text supplies various characterizations of federal government's gross wastefulness. Speaking in the present, the text notes "runaway deficit spending as we now see in Washington D.C compels us to take action (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The text goes on to target the federal government, arguing "increasing national debt is a grave threat to our national sovereignty and the personal and economic liberty of future generations" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The text antagonizes large government and Obama administration by emphasizing the "runaway spending" of the current Washington political climate, and claiming such actions prove to be "grave threat" to America's "sovereignty" and "future (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).

The driving plot of the structuring narrative available in the text emphasizes the unconstitutionality of the Obama administration and the need to reduce their power.  Two of the political aims mentioned on *teapartypatriots.org* are "fiscal responsibility" and "free markets," and it is implied that the Obama administration is to blame for conditions that stifle them. The text notes, "Fiscal Responsibility by government honors and respects the freedom of the individual… runaway deficit spending as we now see in Washington D.C. compels us to take action as the increasing national debt is a grave threat" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The necessity to "take action" at what "we now see in

66

Washington D.C." dictates that those who identify with the Tea Party need to join in and confront the Obama administration. The text also places much of its plot as a "return"[4] to the founding fathers and their intentions; a fidelity to America's founding informs the "core values' of the Tea Party's identity including the plot that drives the movement's structuring narrative. It is important to note the text argues that the Tea Party addresses the concepts behind America's founding in a way they feel is accurate to what the founding fathers intended. The text claims, "We believe that it is possible to know the original intent of the government our founders set forth" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). With such confidence in their mission, it is the drive of the movement is to implement these "original intent[ions]." With the claims "unconstitutionality" and "distortion" in current Washington politics, it becomes clear that in Obama administration is standing in the way of the founder's intentions and must be removed.

With a narrative set of the "grassroots" Tea Partiers opposed the over-sized federal government and its enablers in the Obama administration in a battle to return fiscal sanity and the intentions of the founders, the climax is structures as the call to "take action" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). Assertions, like the necessity to "take action…against what we now see in Washington D.C" are structured as the only way to stop the expansion of the government and the Obama administration. In order to "return...to the principles on which this nation was founded" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.), the narrative suggests Tea Partiers need to act in opposition to the expansion of the government and the Obama administration.

Tepartypatriots.org fits within the same realm of many of its counterparts in terms of narrative identification: "average" Americans collecting in a grassroots manner, poised to battle the out-of-touch, over-spending big government and Obama administration in an effort to "return" the country back to what the founding fathers had designed. The climax of the narrative is triumphant action against the oppressor, proving fidelity to the founders and the documents they authored.

The construction of the expanding federal government as antagonists in the narrative moves beyond issues of constitutionality to the specifics of overspending. The text supplies various characterizations of federal government's gross overspending. Speaking in the present tense, the text notes that "runaway deficit spending as we now see in Washington D.C compels us to take action (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The text goes on to target the federal government, arguing "increasing national debt is a grave threat to our national sovereignty and the personal and economic liberty of future generations" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The text antagonizes large government and Obama administration by emphasizing the "runaway spending" of the current Washington political climate, and claiming such actions prove to be "grave threat" to America's "sovereignty" and "future" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). These claims, and the fact that they are contextualized as ongoing, isolate the Obama administration as the narrative's antagonist. The story insists continuing destruction of the founder's ideals can only be stopped by the noble Tea Partiers.

Much of the plot of the structuring narrative of the Tea Party available in the text

focuses on the unconstitutionality of the expansion of the scope of federal government, the Obama administration, and the need to reduce their power. Two of the "missions" of *teapartypatriots.org* are "fiscal responsibility" and "free markets", and it is implied that the Obama administration is to blame for conditions which stifled these. The text notes, "Fiscal Responsibility by government honors and respects the freedom of the individual… runaway deficit spending as we now see in Washington D.C. compels us to take action as the increasing national debt is a grave threat" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). The necessity to "take action" at what "we now see in Washington D.C." dictates that the those who identify with the Tea Party need to join in and confront the Obama administration. A similar claim is made when addressing the mission of fiscal responsibility noting, "Our current government's interference distorts the free market and inhibits the pursuit of individual and economic liberty. Therefore, we support a return to the free market principles" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). This again asserts that the Obama administration is standing in the way of the movement's mission and action must be undertaken.

The second important element of plot available on *teapartypatriots.org* is a "return" to the founding fathers and their intentions. A fidelity to America's founding informs the "core values' of the Tea Party's identity including the plot that drives the movement's structuring narrative. It is important to note the text argues that the Tea Party addresses the concepts behind America's founding in a way they feel is accurate to what the founding fathers intended. The text claims, "We believe that it is possible to know the

original intent of the government our founders set forth" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). With such confidence in their mission, it is the drive of the movement is to implement these "original intent[ions]"  The text goes on to note, "The Tea Party Patriots stand with our founders, as heirs to the republic, to claim our rights and duties which preserve their legacy and our own" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). With the claims "unconstitutionality" and "distortion" in current Washington politics, it becomes clear that in Obama administration is standing in the way of the founder's intentions and must be removed.

With a narrative set of the "grassroots" Tea Partiers opposed the over-sized federal government and its enablers in the Obama administration in a battle to return fiscal sanity and the intentions of the founders, the climax is structures as the call to "take action" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.). Assertions, like the necessity to "take action…against what we now see in Washington D.C.," are structured as the only way to stop the expansion of the government and the Obama administration. In order to "return...to the principles on which this nation was founded" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.), the narrative suggests Tea Partiers need to act in opposition to the expansion of the government, and the Obama administration. Although "taking action" can come in many different forms, it is clear that the structuring narrative available on *teapartypatriots.org* characterizes a necessity to do something in the face of the unconstitutional expansion of government. In this narrative, the call to action is the climax of the story.

*Tepartypatriots.org* fits within the same mold of its counterparts in terms of narrative identification: "average" Americans collecting in a grassroots manner, poised to

battle the out-of-touch, over-spending big government and Obama administration in an effort to return the country back to what the founding fathers had designed. The climax of the narrative is triumphant action against the oppressor, proving fidelity to the founders and the documents they authored.

### Washington Times

Editorial and op-ed pieces from the *Washington Times* from April 15 through November 1, 2010 amalgamate to create a rich narrative that structures and inform the Tea Party identity. The movement's protagonists, enemies, political mission, and mode of participation are structured throughout the content of the text. In this way, the structuring narrative works to provide political characters, plot, and means of conclusion for the story of the unfolding Tea Party movement.

Throughout this period, the structuring narrative of the Tea Party displayed in the *Washington Times* evolves to follow the exigencies which  faced the movement. Furthermore, different narrative elements are emphasized more or less depending upon the contingent factors which the Tea Party faced from April 15 to November 1, 2011. I argue that the narrative constructs a clear image of the Tea Party as the narratives noble protagonists and associates their motivations with the ideals of the founding fathers and the Constitution. At the conclusion of the primary season, the Tea Party's constructed enemy shifted from all incumbents and "Washington insiders" more specifically to Democrats and the left. During the weeks leading up to the election, there was increasing emphasis on a climax to Tea Party's structuring narrative, using terms like "revolution"

and "turning point" to spurn anticipation and participation in the ensuing general election as a form of narrative closure. In order to identify the structuring narratives of the Tea Party through this time period, I will examine the construction four key structural narrative elements (protagonists, antagonists, plot and, climax) chronologically, noting how situational and contingent changes impact the narrative in the *Washington Times*.

The structuring narrative of the Tea Party in the *Washington Times* casts tea party supporters as protagonists, and further identifies Tea Party members as hardworking, common sense, middle of the road Americans who are "fed-up" with the current political climate. This broad construction allows for a various identities to identify with some element of the Tea Party narrative.

Throughout the text, Tea Party members are identified by terms like "main street" (Mainwaring "Great Awakening" 1) and "middle Americans" (Kuhner 3) who maintain their "grassroots" ethos. There is a consistent construction of Tea Partiers as simple, "common" folk who just care about their country. Decker describes them as "just energized citizens who want to throw the bums out" (3). Columnist Susan Fields, who identifies herself as a Tea Party member, notes, "We are just ordinary hardworking Americans who love our country but are mad as hell" (Fields 4). In a piece by Lengell, Tea Party Caucus leader Michelle Bachmann is quoted extensively, arguing the movement "represents mainstream American people who have decided to get up off the couch and get their country back" (5). These terms identify an amorphous, but positively-constructed swath of Americans who are the protagonists within the Tea Party

72

story. As Lee notes, in populist movements ''the 'people' are rendered as ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans" (358). The Tea Party structuring narrative builds on this tradition identifying the movement's members as the working-class backbone of America.

Early in the period of analysis, the Tea Party faced fierce accusations of racism and radicalism from detractors, including left-leaning media and the NAACP. The Tea Party was rapidly being identified as the extreme-right of the Republican Party, and in response the narrative emphasizes a disassociation of the movement with extremism. Subsequent pieces continued to emphasize the "main street" American identity. Content defended the Tea Party against claims of violent outbursts at rallies, instead accusing the mainstream media of covering up attacks by liberals (Mainwaring "Defined by Principles" 1). The structuring narrative in the *Washington Times* protected the Tea Party's claims of authenticity by distancing itself from claims of extremism, and accused on overly-liberal media and the Obama administration of being the ones who were truly prejudiced.

The invocation of historical figures, politicians, and media figures can be an asset in the rhetoric of social movements. By associating a movement with historically important figure, all of that individual's characteristics and qualities are bestowed on the movement's identity. Whitebrook argues that the narrative formation of an identity, specifically collective identities, can often draw from various sources. That is to say not only politicians, but journalists, historical figures and, other mythic or symbolically

significant political actors contribute to the formation of collective identity (Whitebrooke 133).

In the case of the Tea Party's structuring narrative, the movement is associated with past American political figures, most often the founders.  Throughout the period of analysis, the movement is frequently identified with American historical founding fathers (Kibbe 3), Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, revolutionary Minutemen, Abraham Lincoln (Shirley 1), the original Boston Tea Party (Mainwaring "Tea Party's Inception" 1) and Ronald Reagan (Maggiano 1). By drawing similarities between these individuals and movements with the Tea Party, they become representative of the Tea Party identity. For example, Mainwaring ("Tea Party's Inception" 1) notes:

> The very tyranny our forefathers departed their home shores to escape we find confronting us today. In 1773, it was the imposition of taxes and regulation without representation that provided the tipping point that produced the Boston Tea Party, a prelude to the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. Just as that Tea Party was a stirring, a preview of the will and strength of the resolve of the American people against the tyranny of the British Crown, so, too, is our current Tea Party a stirring, a preview of that which is to come.

Close associations like these construct the movement as much greater than a political movement and begin to inform the larger Tea Party narrative. When compared closely to the original Tea Party and participants in America's founding, the movement becomes a

brave continuation of the struggle against obtrusive government, just as Tea Partiers had

joined over two centuries before. The Tea Party's devotion to the founders proves to be

an essential element of their construction in the *Washington Times.*

While the structuring narrative in the *Washington Times* creates and identifies a

clear protagonist, the formation of the antagonists within the narrative shifts throughout

the course of the 2010 election cycle. During the primary season, the structuring narrative

of the Tea Party railed against both political parties, claiming Democrats and Republicans

shared the blame for a ballooning the federal debt, expansion of government's reach, and

disconnect with the "main street" Americans they were elected to serve. Much of the Tea

Party's identity early in their movement came from their ethos as independent voters

disgusted with both parties and the "Washington elite" ( Hackett 4, Weber 1)  and

furthered the point that they refused to be "beholden to one political party" (Mainwaring

"The Power of Positive Partisanship" 3). Until July and August, strong emphasis was put

on the political independence of the movement (Editorial "Obama Threatened" 2). Some

early attacks even focused on Republicans and their hand in the political events of the last

two years (Sheffield 3). Paul Crespo (1) notes

> As I travel… I am reminded that voters are angry not just at Democrats, but at
>
> the entire political establishment…Republicans should not get too comfortable or
>
> assume that victory will be automation or easy. The American people are weary
>
> and cynical… many voters still recall how the previous GOP majority also failed

to control Washington's free-spending ways. This frustration if fuelling the Tea

Party movement…to pump new blood into the system.

At this point in the narrative, Democrats and Republicans are constructed as responsible

for the policy which sparked the Tea Party. However, as primary season concluded late in

the summer of 2010, the constructed enemy shifted. As the Tea Party claimed victory in

several Republican primaries across the nation, the movement's antagonist altered from

"Washington insiders" to a much stronger focus on Democrats and the left. Starting in

late July and early August, the tone of the narrative shifts its antagonistic portrayal

towards President Obama, his legislation, key Democratic legislators, academics, and the

left in general. Within social movement rhetorical scholarship, especially susceptible or

controversial policies and individuals are known as "flag issues" and "flag individuals"

(Bowers, Ochs and Jensen 34-35). Focus on especially divisive legislation and

individuals often serves to polarize movements and their supporters. In the case of the

2010 election, the expansion of government under the Obama administration, Speaker of

the House Nancy Pelosi and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care act (healthcare

reform, or "Obamacare") were woven into the structuring narrative of the Tea Party.

The shift in antagonism is clear in a July editorial where the *Washington Times*

argued "incumbents are not the problem. Americans are rejecting the hard-left policies,

programs and legislation pushed by the Obama administration and the Democratic

congress" ("Obama Threatened" 2). The editorial goes on to antagonize the left by

questioning its belief in America, noting "levels of patriotism are generally on the rise in

America but are declining among liberals and Democrats" ("Obama Threatened" 2).

Claims about the declining patriotism of liberals and Democrats construct the antagonists

of the narrative as not only wrong about policy, but also having nefarious intentions. This

is especially notable because of the consistent construct of Tea Partiers as highly

patriotic. The *New York Times* then goes on to identify the antagonistic Obama

admistration as racists, redirecting claims of the Tea Party's racism.

Shortly after, the NAACP and "racist-left" policies are brought into the narrative.

A July editorial notes "Saying the Tea Party movement contains 'racist elements that are

a threat to democracy' is a shameful slap at the millions of Americans untainted by

bigotry who oppose Mr. Obama's radical leftist policies regardless of his color" (*"Kill the

Crackers"* 2). The editorial goes on to assail the "tired racial rhetoric" of NAACP as a

way to extend their hard-left agenda and that of the Obama administration (*"Kill the

Crackers"* 2). The structuring narrative of the *Washington Times* disassociates the Tea

Party with any racially-motivated intentions or members, noting instead that it is Obama

and the left who are racist rather than Tea Partiers.

The Obama administration and the left are further characterized as antagonist in

the *Washington Times* structuring narrative by illustrating their detachment from the

"everyday" Americans who represent the Tea Party.  In a July 20 op-ed Mainwaring calls

the current Washington Democrats the "ruling political elites" and argues "our

progressive leaders don't get it, and what's even worse, they don't care. They don't

understand how starkly different, how irrational and just how unhinged they appear to

folks outside the Beltway" ("A Tale of Two Tea Parties" 1). Crouse uses the oft-cited term "fat cat politicians" to describe Vice President Joe Biden and his son Beau (3). Claims like these antagonize Obama and the left by characterizing a gulf that exists between out-of-touch Washington and the grassroots, locally-invested concerns of the Tea Party.

As the general elections grew nearer, the enemy expanded from "the governing elite" to "their enablers in the academy, Big Business, Big Labor, and Big Media" (Shirley 1). The academy and citizens on the east and west coasts were common targets. A late October op-ed piece by Suzanne Fields takes an especially harsh look a conference at the University of California on the rise of the Tea Party, criticizing the scholarship and accusing academia of being narrow minded (4). Although Republicans were occasionally mentioned negatively and the structuring narrative argued the movement refused to "be co-opted neatly by the Republican Party" (Mainwaring "Great Awakening" 1) they are not structured as the narrative' antagonists. Rather, the structuring narrative identifies Obama, Democrats, and the left as the true villains. This trend would continue through the general elections in November.

The Tea Party's narrative evolved throughout the summer of 2010, tailored to the needs of the movement. Early in the period of analysis, the narrative demonized every legislator perched near the Potomac and the Tea Party refused to be co-opted by the "Rockefeller Republicans" who served while George W. Bush and ballooned the deficit (Crouse 3). However, once primary season concluded, the enemy of the narrative became

Obama, congressional Democrats, and the left. With a clear characterization of the narrative's antagonists, the plot is the next element to analyze.

The return to fiscal conservatism is a central plot element in the Tea Party narrative. From the Liberty Belle protests of 2009 forward, Tea Party supporters have crusaded to reduce the influence of the federal government. A commonly stated mantra throughout the narrative is the Tea Party's "core" or "finite goals of fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets" (Mainwaring "Defined By Principles" 1), and this can only be achieved by removing the "enemy" from their seats in Washington. Although editorials and op-ed pieces brush up against social issues, the narrative stays focused upon its fiscal agenda. But, the financial concerns which drive the Tea Party become much more rhetorically potent when symbolically associated with the America's founders and the documents they wrote.

The Tea Party's relationship with America's founding began with the symbolic nature of the movement's title (a tribute to the pre-American revolution Boston Tea Party as well as the acronym Taxed Enough Already). But, what truly drives the narrative of the Tea Party in the *Washington Times* is not just the policy goals of fiscal conservatism, rather a broader necessity to "return" to the country the founders envisioned. The narrative constructs a situation in which the Tea Party is not simply fighting for policy reforms, but rather the intentions of the founding fathers and the Constitution. The structuring narrative submits the Obama administration and current congress have bastardized the ideals of the founders, and the country must "return" to these original

intentions. In this sense, the association the narrative creates to the founders provides special symbolic importance. Within the structuring narrative, fiscal conservatism is not just a political intention of the movement, but part of the battle to "return" America back to what the founders envisioned. The country must be "taken back" from the left.  The introductory paragraph to J.T. Young's op-ed column illustrates the narrative relationship between the Tea Party, their political goals and the founder's intentions (3):

> The left is aghast at today's Tea Party movement. How could Americans of stripe be so appalled at the exercise of the constitutional right to speak out against big, intrusive - yet unresponsive - government? Our founders would no doubt be amused at the irony. It was after all, those same issues that provoked them in the first place. Of course, today's liberals would have hated that Tea Party, too…The left would have hated the first Tea Party - why wouldn't they hate this one as well? The original aims were against higher taxes and intrusive government. Its ultimate outcome was an independent American government that was founded on the severe restriction of government's authority - the Constitution. Now, well over two hundred years later, the left still doesn't get it.

This section does two things which are hallmarks of the Tea Party's structuring narrative in the *Washington Times*. First, the Tea Party is closely associated with the ideals of America's founders. In this identity construction by the *Washington Times,* the Tea Party and founders share synonymous political aims, goals, and ideals. Secondly, this passage constructs the Obama administration and the left as opposed to the Tea Party, and thus

the ideals and beliefs of the founders. Obama and the left are identified as losing touch with the sacred vision the founders have for American.  The narrative is thus transformed into a battle to restore the ideals of the founders and Tea Party against the out-of-touch, intrusive Obama government. At this point in the narrative, something must be done by the Tea Party to avert disaster. The *Washington Times* narrative indicates the Tea Party is called to "return" the country to the ideals of the founders, but also provides a climax to solidify the impact of the movement.

The last notable element of the structuring narrative in the *Washington Times* is the strong emphasis on a final conflict in the lead up to the election. The majority of the narrative focuses on the construction of the main actors and issues. However, approximately two months prior to the general election there is sharp increase in confrontational and climactic rhetoric. The strong emphasis on climax works to depict the general election as the final goal of the virtuous Tea Party's "main street" American protagonists is victory over the nefarious Obama adminstration in Washington.

As Lewis argues (262-266) much of the potency of political narratives is their ability to cast the audience as participants in the story they are witnessing. The expansion of climactic rhetoric within the narrative indicates to the movement's protagonists that they must participate in the story by supporting Tea Party and its causes. For the actors in the narrative, references like these serve as a call to action. The narrative constructs this moment as their chance to stand up and save America.

The increase in climactic rhetoric can be traced back to Craig Shirley's September 13 op-ed column which he noted the current situation was a "turning point" and the states "creative revolt is spreading, and with the rise of the Tea Party movement, we are witnessing new history being made" (1). Shirley goes on to note, "We have reached a critical moment. Whoever wins this struggle, pitting centralized authority against the private American citizen, will dominate American politics and culture for a generation… the stakes are far higher …the battle has been joined" (1). Claims like these highlight the necessity for Tea Partiers to participate in the upcoming election. The narrative insists that voting is the only way to stop the continued assaults of the left on the ideals of the founders.

This pattern continues with an October 11 op-ed piece which prefaced the upcoming elections noting "a second American revolution" (Kendall 4). The Tea Party and its ideals are referred to as "revolutionary" at multiple times in the text.  The symbolic meaning behind "revolution" is emphasized throughout months leading to the election, as is the use of "rebellion" (Kuhner 3). Thus those who associate themselves with the Tea Party's constructed identity see the November elections as their chance to save America rather than simply cast their vote. As a whole, the narrative culminates with the Tea Partiers joining in the "revolution" and "rebellion" just as their namesakes had. The whole of the narrative which structures the Tea Party within the *Washington Times* claims that the movement's purpose was to "return" the country to the intentions of the founders, and claims of a "revolution" and "rebellion" indicate that the time for action

has come.

The structuring narrative of the Tea Party is an important tool for those who identify with the movement. All the essential tenets of a story are there: the main street American heroes, villains from Washington, the quest to "return" the country back to what the founding fathers had in mind and epic climax in the voting booth. The narrative constructs a clear image of the Tea Party protagonists and associates their political goals with that of the founding fathers and Constitution to create a plotline of the movement. Following the conclusion of the primary season, the Tea Party's construction of an enemy shifted from all incumbents and "Washington insiders" more specifically to Democrats and the left. The weeks leading up to the election demonstrate much more emphasis on a climax to Tea Party's structuring narrative using terms like "revolution" and "turning point" to spurn participation in the ensuing general election.

### New York Times

Editorial and op-ed columns in the *New York Times* offer a problematized identity of the Tea Party. The narrative within the text of the *New York Times* questions, problematizes, and contradicts the linchpins of the Tea Party's credibility, identity, and motivation. Accounts of the movement classify the Tea Party as the megaphone of America's radical right-wing with close corporate ties and an eye to strip government services. The structuring narrative made available on the *New York Times* opinion pages differs in the manner it approaches the movement compared its *Washington Times* counterpart. While the *Washington Times* presents thematic elements of protagonists,

antagonists, plotline, and climax to reader, the structuring narrative available in the *New York Times* focuses on the identity construction of the Tea Party and its supporters. This counternarrative identifies the Tea Party as a collective of racists, fundamentalists, and extremists and further classifies the movement as a mechanism for big business and conservative interests. This counternarrative attacks the authenticity of the Tea Party, questioning its prejudices, ideological independence, and corporate ties.

Within the structuring narrative of the Tea Party available within the *New York Times* editortials and op-ed pages, the Tea Party's motives are called into question. The narrative identifies the movement in ways that antagonize its members, associations, and goals (just as the *Washington Times* did). The Tea Party's grassroots, every-American nature has been an essential tenet of the movement in *teaparty.org, teapartypatriots.org,* and the *Washington Times*. The credibility and symbolism available in the ethos of the "everyday" Joe runs deep in the American myth and has been crucial to the Tea Party's mandate. But by emphasizing the radical nature of the movement, the structuring narrative available the *New York Times* constructs a more problematic, antagonistic take on the Tea Party's every-American identity. Within the *New York Times* Tea Partiers are classified as racist, radical, and closely allied with Republicans and business interests.

The *New York Times* categorizes the Tea Party, its ideology, and members as racist and followers of a political ideology that is racially-biased. During the 2010 summer sessions of Congress, a slew of racially-divisive signs were spotted at Tea Party rallies. Shortly after Representatives John Lewis (D-Georgia) and Emanuel Cleaver (D-

Missouri) claimed they were the target of bigoted slurs from Tea Partiers, the NAACP responded with a call for the Tea Party to retract its racist elements (Khan n.p.). Many editorial and op-ed samples, particularly those early in the window of analysis, focus on elements of racism within the Tea Party's membership. Stressing the erratic, racially-motivated nature of the movement, Blow states, "The Tea Party is a Frankenstein movement…including some who've openly expressed their dark racial prejudices…a University of Washington survey released last month, has found that large swaths among those who show strong support for the Tea Party also hold the most extreme views on a range of racial issues" ("Trying to Outrun Race" 21).  Rich goes on to note statistical evidence of the Tea Party's racism and extremity. He cites a Times/CSB poll which found "52 percent of Tea Party followers feel 'too much' has been made of the problems facing black people — nearly twice the national average. And that's just those who admit to it. Whatever their number, those who are threatened and enraged by the new Obama order are volatile" ("Confederate History" 10). Claims like these go beyond anecdotal evidence of the Tea Party's racism. Using statistical evidence further identifies the Tea Party as the narrative's antagonists within the *New York Times*.

Arizona's controversial immigration reform bill of 2010 served as a backdrop for the *New York Times* construction of the Tea Party's racially-divisive identity. Analyzing the Republican Senatorial primary, Rich notes:

> [John] McCain, like other mainstream conservative Republicans facing primaries
> this year, is now fighting for his political life against a Tea Party-supported

radical. His opponent, the former congressman and radio shock jock J. D.

Hayworth, is an unabashed birther who frames the immigration debate as an

opportunity to "stand up for our culture," presumably against all immigrants, legal

and illegal alike ("If Only Arizona" 10).

 The construction of the Tea Party allied with racism continued with an op-ed piece

which mentions South Carolina Lieutenant Governor Andre Bauer opposed

Representative Nikki Haley (of India-American decent) for the Tea Party nomination

because "we already have one rag-head in the White House, we don't need another one in

the governor's mansion" (Collins 21).  An August editorial argues that race is what fuels

the Tea Party, noting "much of the GOP's fervid populist energy has been churned up by

playing on some people's fears on Hispanics and Muslims…far too many Republican

leaders have eagerly fed that destructive anger" ("The Wrong Kind of Enthusiasm" 26).

Claims of the Tea Party's racial bias are consistent throughout the period of analysis. In

the structuring narrative made available by the *New York Times*, the Tea Party becomes

synonymous with racism. Seemingly everything the Tea Party does, at some level, is

negotiated by their racist views. It is through this nearly constant association of the Tea

Party and racism that the movement is constructed as the narrative's antagonist.

By citing frequent examples of the Tea Party's racially-divisive members and

moments, the structuring narrative submitted by the *New York Times* characterizes the

movement as highly racially-motivated. Throughout the period of analysis, the Tea Party

is constructed as embroiled in racially-divisive issues. As Blow ("Dog Days" 19) notes

the Tea Party "just can't seem to beat the racism rap" they have been associated with. This so-called "racism rap" is perpetuated in the *New York Times* structuring narrative. The consistent association of the Tea Party with racism works to dampen the credibility of the Tea Party and further polarizes the movement as extreme.

The *New York Times* structures an antagonistic identity of the Tea Party by focusing on the movement's racial divisiveness, but also characterizes a broad, unfocused anger within the movement. In an October op-ed piece, Frank Rich associated several New York hate crimes with the rise of Tea Party candidate gubernatorial Carl Paladino. The piece culminates with Frank noting "the radical right's anger is becoming less focused, more free-floating…The anger is also more likely to claim minorities like gays, Latinos and Muslims as collateral damage" ("The Rage Won't End" 10). Paladino, a "Tea Party activist," is later noted for his belief that gay pride parades are "disgusting," and he proposed to send welfare recipients to state-run work camps where they would receive "life lesson [and instruction] in personal hygiene" (Liberman and Pizarro 12). These claims served to create a narrative element which the Tea Party is defined by anger; the blinding fury that drives the movement goes far beyond fiscal policy.

The *New York Times* further classifies the Tea Party's membership as the most extreme of the right-wing in terms of political ideology. A May op-ed column by Rich notes "It's also hard to maintain that the Tea Party's nuttier elements are merely a fringe of a fringe (rather than mainstream Americans with commonly head)…In this Alice in Wonderland inversion of reality…" ("If Only Arizona" 10). Krugman stated the Tea

Party is the effective "takeover of the Republican Party by right-wing extremists" ("Going to Extreme" 23). Maureen Dowd wrote an op-ed which noted some of the most radical Tea Party arguments made to date, including Sharron Angle's disbelief in autism, Christine O'Donnell's skepticism of human evolution noting "evolution is a myth…why aren't monkey's still turning into humans?" and Joe Miller's belief that Social Security is not constitutional because it is not mentioned directly in the Constitution (13). These editorials and op-ed pieces identify the Tea Party as a collective of extremists rather than serious politicians. The construction of the Tea Party as representative of the far-right fringe is essential to antagonization of the movement in the structuring narrative within the *New York Times;* they are identified as the furthest of the conservative fringe.

Along with characterizing the Tea Party as extreme-right antagonists, the *New York Times* identifies the movement as a mechanism of Republicans, conservative political action committees, and corporate interests. The narrative characterizes the Tea Party as the vocal foot soldiers of Republicans and corporate interests who harnessed the racially-fueled anger of millions of Americans on a crusade against government regulation, minorities, and common sense.

The *New York Times* suggests the Tea Party's anger-driven enthusiasm is controlled and directed by Republicans. Rich argues "those who are threatened and enraged by the new Obama order are volatile. Conservative politicians are taking a walk on the wild side by coddling and encouraging them (Tea Partiers), whatever the short-term political gain" ("Confederate History" 10). Editorials and op-ed

columns throughout April and May explored the manner in which the Tea Party, Republicans, and traditional GOP interests were closely related. These editorials and op-ed pieces problematize the movement's claims of independence, instead constructing it as repackaged conservatism under the control of the far-right. In one of Rich's summer opinion pieces, he succinctly explains:

> For sure, the Republican elites found the Tea Party invaluable on the way to this Election Day. And not merely, as (Mike) Huckabee has it, because they wanted its foot soldiers. What made the Tea Party most useful was that its loud populist message gave the GOP just the cover it needed both to camouflage its corporate patrons and to rebrand itself ("Grand Old Plot" 8).

Blow expanded this notion by stating, "Their…strategy is to repress, deny and redefine" the image of the Republican Party ("Trying to Outrun" 21), characterizing the Tea Party as a way for Republicans to change their image.  Rich ("The Grand Old Plot" 8) later expressed that the views of the Tea Party "reside in the aging white base of the Republican Party and wants to purge that party of leaders who veer from their dogma." The text constructs the Tea Party as the a Republican lead rebranding campaign rather than a serious political movement. Within this structuring narrative, the Tea Party is little more than a PAC-funded mechanism for the G.O.P to better serve their corporate interests.

The Tea Party has often been classified—by itself and others—as a leaderless movement. While clearly there are powerful figures associated with the movement, no

one individual has come forth to claim formal leadership. The *New York Times* does not

identify the movement as leaderless; rather it counters this claim by highlighting the Tea

Party's relationship with the world's wealthiest conservatives. In an August op-ed titled

"The Billionaires Bankrolling the Tea Party," Rich directly problematizes the

movement's grassroots inception. He notes:

> There's just one element missing from these snapshots of America's ostensibly
>
> spontaneous and leaderless populist uprising: the sugar daddies who are
>
> bankrolling it… Three heavy hitters rule… Rupert Murdoch… the brothers David
>
> and Charles Koch…with a combined wealth exceeded only by that of Bill Gates
>
> and Warren Buffett among Americans (8).

Rich's exposing op-ed goes on to mention is Dick Armey's FreedomWorks, which

received twelve million dollars from the Koch brothers. Tax records indicate "that Koch-

controlled foundations gave out $196 million from 1998 to 2008, much of it to

conservative causes and institutions. That figure doesn't include $50 million in Koch

Industries lobbying and $4.8 million in campaign contributions by its political action

committee" ("Grand Old Plot" 8). A September op-ed piece argued the Tea Party was

likely the recipient of huge amounts of corporate money from 501(c)(4) groups, which

have been allowed to contribute anonymously following 2010's *Citizens United v*

*Federal Election Commission.* This made 2010 the "most secretive election cycle since

the Watergate years… the battle for Congress is largely being financed by a small corps

of wealthy individuals and corporations whose names may never be known to the public"

("The Grand Old Plot" 8). Rich also noted, "The Tea Party Express fronted by (Mark) Williams (of the Tea Party Express) is an indisputable Republican subsidiary. It was created by prominent GOP political consultants in California and raises money for GOP candidates, including Sharron Angle" ("The Grand Old Plot" 8). Detailing the Tea Party's close ties with powerful conservative PACs problematize the Tea Party's identity of independence. Rather, the narrative of the Tea Party in the *New York Times* identifies the movement as a mechanism that serves G.O.P and corporate interests.

Opinion content in the *New York Times* continued to problematize the Tea Party's relationship to corporate interests. A September op-ed piece, highlighting the movement's deep-pocketed backers, identified the Tea Party as a "well-financed coalition of right-wing ideologues, out-of-state oil and gas companies and climate-change skeptics…The money men include Charles and David Koch, the Kansas oil and gas billionaires who have played a prominent role in financing the Tea Party movement" ("The Brothers Koch" 30).  In a similar October opinion piece, the movement's identity is addressed:

> In earthbound reality, many of the people pulling the Tea Party's strings are
> establishment Republican operatives and lobbyists. Some have made money off
> the party for years…Sal Russo established the Tea Party Express to support
> candidates in the midterm elections and raise cash …the group has spent nearly
> $1 million in an effort to replace Harry Reid of Nevada…It spent nearly $350,000
> to elect Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts. It is pouring money into Alaska to

support Joe Miller's Senate bid.  In all, Mr. Russo and his group have raised $5.2

million" ("Tea Party's Big Money" 28).

The *New York Times* constructs the movement as a puppet of corporate America. Rand

Paul's noted hard-line libertarian policies became a frequent target following his

Kentucky primary victory in May. Krugman described Paul's empathy for

conglomerates, writing "the Tea Party darling… declared that the president's criticism of

BP over the disastrous oil spill in the gulf is 'un-American,' that 'sometimes accidents

happen'" ("The Old Enemies" 25). Editorial and op-ed content like this further structures

the Tea Party as a mechanism for Republicans and corporate interests rather than a viable

political movement. The structuring identity of the Tea Party available in the *New York*

*Times* characterizes the movement as a tool for Republican rebranding and corporate

interests. Linking the Tea Party to conservative lobbying firms, deep-pocket corporate

donors, and Republican elites problematizes the movement's authentic identity.

The *New York Times* identifies multiple political consequences of the Tea Party

agenda, which serve as cautions of future Tea Party influence. The *New York Times* cites

the ongoing political impact of the Tea Party, and foreshadows what will take place of the

movement continues forward. This constructs a situation where further political influence

from the Tea Party will result in cataclysmic results on environmental, financial, and

legal institutions thus must be stopped.  Stalwarts of American liberal ideology, the Tea

Party's march toward degradation of federal regulation and state-run social programs

serve as the cautionary tale to the ongoing progression of the Tea Party identity.

Columnist Bob Hebert submits a consequence of the Tea Party's continued

impact. He claims the "counterattack from the right, with its assaults on labor, its

outlandishly regressive tax policies, its slavish devotion to corporate power and its

divide-and-conquer strategies on racial and ethnic issues all combined to halt the

remarkable advances of ordinary working people" (19).  This invocation of such dire

consequences serves to illustrate the cataclysmic results of continued Tea Party influence.

Rich echoed these statements arguing the Tea Party is "a fringe agenda that tilts

completely toward big business, whether on Wall Street or in the Gulf of Mexico, while

dismantling fundamental government safety nets designed to protect the unemployed,

public health, workplace safety and the subsistence of the elderly" ("The Billionaires" 8).

These claims do more than exemplify the fringe of the Tea Party, but demonstrate what

the future holds if the movement continues to be influential. By citing these destructive

policy examples, the *New York Times* structuring narrative outlines the consequences if

the Tea Party is not derailed. The Tea Party is characterized as an apparatus that serves

corporate America; providing examples about the movement's possible effects on the

elderly, unemployed and workplace safety demonstrate the realities of what the future

holds if the movement is not halted.

A strong cautionary narrative element submitted by the *New York Times* is the

environmental consequences of the movement's agenda.  Rich noted, "Koch-supported

lobbyists, foundations and political operatives are at the center of climate-science denial

— a cause that forestalls threats to Koch Industries' vast fossil fuel business" ("The

Billionaires" 8). The Koch's association to Tea Party drives this claim, but Frank later mentions "Koch Industries has been lobbying to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from classifying another product important to its bottom line, formaldehyde, as a 'known carcinogen' in humans" ("Billionaires Bankrolling the Tea Party" 8). Issues of environmental protection are an institution of liberal ideology, and their degradation is a cautionary outcome of the Tea Party's continued political traction within *New York Time's* structuring narrative.

Similar regulatory concerns are echoed in the narrative as implication of Tea Party policy. A late summer editorial noted the designs of Tea Party to repeal the seventieth amendment, stating the movement was "all about repeal of 17th amendment" ("The Republicans and the Constitution" 22). The clause has been the legal basis for any number of statutes which have been an "enormous benefit to society…the Clean Air Act. The Clean Water Act. The Endangered Species Act. The Fair Labor Standards Act, setting a minimum wage and limiting child labor. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing segregation in the workplace and in public accommodations" ("The Republicans and the Constitution" 22). These claims serve to illustrate what the *New York Times* identity of the Tea Party will do if they gain power. Examples of deregulation serve to further demonstrate the extremity of the Tea Party, and identify them as racially-biased, corporately-controlled antagonists.

The identity of the Tea Party structured within the text of the *New York Times* problematizes the nearly every aspect of the movement. Accounts of the movement

classify the Tea Party as racially-biased rather than mainstream. The counternarrative within the *New York Times* characterizes the Tea Party as the megaphone of America's radical right-wing with close GOP and corporate ties, rather than an independent grassroots movement. This text constructs a vastly different identity of the Tea Party than its counterparts.

### *The Mediated Tea Party Identity*

The *New York Times* structuring narrative of the Tea Party submits an identity that is quite dissimilar from its *Washington Post* counterpart. Certainly one crucial difference between the two texts are the mechanism in which the Tea Party identity is structured. As noted earlier, the *Washington Times* presents a discursive narrative of the Tea Party "story" which serves to help the movement identify its members, enemies and goals. Similarly, the *New York Times* synthesizes a Tea Party identity, but does so through a counternarrative which focuses on a problematic, delegitimizing construction of who the Tea Party is and what it stands for.

The structuring narrative presented of the Tea Party in the *Washington Times* identifies the moment's membership as the story's protagonists. Tea Partiers are constructed as salt of the earth, regular Americans who are simply concerned about the increase in government size and spending, a reasonable group. But the construction of the Tea Party identity attacks and counters this characterization within the *New York Times,* characterizing the movement as radical, zealous, and racially-motivated. The right-wing

fringe the *New York Times* counternarrative constructs is a far cry from the main street

Americans identified in the *Washington Times* narrative.

Furthermore, part of the Tea Party's appeal, as submitted by the *Washington Times*, is the movement's ethos as a truly grassroots movement formed by Americans all over the country. The structuring narrative of the Tea Party presented by the *Washington Times* celebrates the movement's leaderless status as mark of the widespread concern by simple, "everyday" Americans. No leader was needed, the narrative insisted, because the concern was nearly unanimous amongst American's who wanted to "take their country back." But *New York Times* characterizes the movement as much less independent and spontaneous. Rather, the Tea Party is identified as a repackaging of the Republican Party, financed by some of America's wealthiest conservatives. The *New York Times* constructs the movement as a tool for the far-right and those who benefit from their policy to gin up enthusiasm and popular support, quite distant from the noble crusade constructed in the *Washington Times*.

Scholarship of sociopolitical movements has noted the marginalization and alienation of a group and their beliefs as a productive of counterpersuasion. Bowers, Oachs, and Jensen note that movements and their leadership can be effectively suppressed if their ideology and intentions are questioned. In a process the authors call "harassment," sociopolitical movements face broad criticism which "weakens and dilutes the solidarity…of the movement" (54-55). Often, this harassment draws on the ideology, members, and stakeholders serving to delegitimize the movement as a whole.

The identity of the Tea Party as a grassroots, every-American movement is indispensable to the collective's political ideology. The counternarrative identity in the *New York Times* disrupts the foundational notions of the Tea Party's membership, supporters, and intentions. Editorials and op-ed columns in the *New York Times* identify the Tea Party as overrun by radicals and racists, hardly how most common Americans would describe themselves. Furthermore, the Tea Party is structured in the *New York Times* to be in close association with traditional GOP politicians and corporate interests, two of the movement's largest enemies in the narrative provided by the *Washington Times*. Clearly the structuring identity available in the editorials and op-ed pieces of the *New York Times* contrasts its counterpart in the *Washington Times* and subsequently the way in which millions of potential voters may make sense of the Tea Party.

Modern American democracy is heavily reliant on periodicals, websites, and other similar sources to inform political actors about the choices they make in the voting booth. Analysis of the identification of the Tea Party through the four texts of this project demonstrate the vastly different ways the movement is presented to citizens. Understanding the way these texts differ and problematize one another's identification of the Tea Party provides some insight into the disputed nature of the movement. Nearly every factor of identification of the Tea Party in the *Washington Times, teaparty.org and teapartypatriots.org* is questioned and problematized in the *New York Times* counternarrative, and because of this interaction it becomes clear why the Tea Party is so disputed.

***The Interaction of the Structuring Narratives of the Tea Party***

The current American political discourse is full of voices trying to shout louder than each other, a constant battle of polarization. The manner in which the Tea Party is constructed in the *Washington Times*, *New York Times*, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* is no less divisive. The editorial and op-ed pieces from the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* construct the Tea Party as a movement of Americans wrestling the country back to the vision of the founders, from the expansive government and the left. In contrast, the *New York Times* editorials and op-ed pieces antagonize the Tea Party as the furthest political fringe, characterizing them as servants of the Republican Party and corporate interests.

These narratives offer oppositional characterizations of the Tea Party and its supporters. The identifying characteristics of the Tea Party in the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* are questioned and problematized in the *New York Times*. I argue that the disputed nature of the Tea Party plays out in the competing structuring narratives of the movement.

The *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* have several commonalities in the manner that they structure the Tea Party's membership and mission. All three texts share common modes of constructing an identity of the Tea Party, which in turn inform the way millions of political actors make sense of the movement. There are three common features throughout the texts: its grassroots origin via its "everyday" American membership, crusade against big government, and fidelity to the founding

fathers and their ideals. These themes are also the core tenets of populist rhetoric Although there are some minor discrepancies in the construction of the Tea Party between the three texts, they share terms, identities and precepts of what the Tea Party is and what it stands for.

Within The *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* the Tea Party's identity is closely to the movement's "grassroots," origin. All three texts construct the Tea Party as a spontaneously formed sociopolitical movement, divorced from the support of either political party or external interest. This commonly emphasized factor of identification suggests to political actors that the basis for the Tea Party is invested in the concerns of the local community, driven by "common" Americans. The grassroots origin is significant to the Tea Party identity as it encapsulates the independent nature of the movement while grounding it the concerns of the "average" citizen. A "common," "everyday," blue collar American identity is also a common thread throughout the structuring narrative of *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org.* Each text takes steps to highlight the "common man" credibility of the Tea Party's membership, structuring the movement as an amplifier for the voices of mainstream Americans, providing examples of Tea Partiers from across the country and from "every walk of life" (*teaparty.org*).

One noteworthy discrepancy amongst these three texts is the use of biblical idiom and trope. The *Washington Times* and *teaparty.org* employs explicit Christian language and metaphor, while *teapartypatriots.org* is mostly devoid of Christian reference, on

referring to a "creator" (*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).  The use of biblical trope and

connection to the framers and founding documents within the narrative associates the Tea

Party that which is good. But as Ivie and Giner note, this structuring narrative of one side

as good and the other as evil has its own set of assumptions and consequences. Analyzing

the rhetoric of President George W. Bush following the 9/11 attacks, the authors note the

strong application of good versus evil dichotomies. Within Bush's narrative America, its

people and intentions are identified as good, while the terrorists who lead the attack and

all those who associate with them are evil. Similar to the constructing narratives around

the Tea Party, those who associate with the movement are heroic, thus making the

opposition villainous. Ivie and Giner note (595) "by branding others as *evil*—cruel and

inhumane though they may be—we position ourselves as *good."* But this false dichotomy

does not allow for debate or compromise in the spirit of democracy. Rather, it sets the

stage for a symbolic battle between good and evil for the future of America in the spirit

of the apocalyptic narrative. But as the authors note (595) the identity distinction presents

the necessity for good to triumph over evil. The hero must kill the villain not negotiate or

compromise with her.

The construction of a Tea Party identity is closely tied to the ethos of the

"everyday" American, this then serves illustrate the battle against an out-of-touch,

overspending government. Broadly, all three texts target the wasteful spending and

unconstitutional expansion of large government and distant politicians which control it as

their enemy. But the identification of the any enemy is executed in different ways

throughout each text. The *Washington Times* begins the period of analysis with strong

criticism of both political parties and their role in the increase in the scope of

government. However, as the election neared, the *Washington Times* shifted its criticism

specifically toward congressional Democrats and the Obama administration. In contrast,

*teaparty.org* and *teapartypatriots.org* are more broad in whom they define as a foe,

arguing against "befuddled politicians" (*teaparty.org* n.p.) and the unconstitutional

expansion of government as the movement's antagonist. However, while it is noteworthy

that the two websites do not mention Obama or Democrats by name, there is a strong

criticism toward the current government or "what we now see in Washington D.C."

(*teapartypatriots.org* n.p.).

Although there are some areas of identity construction that vary from text to text,

all three locations structure the Tea Party very closely with the founding fathers. Scholars

have noted symbols and beliefs that become highly incorporated in the rituals of a nation

or collective carry immense symbolic importance. The concept of civil religion traces

back to political theorist Jean Jacques Rousseau and his influential treatise "The Social

Contract." Within America, Bellah notes (2):

> "from the earliest years of the republic is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and
>
> rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity. This
>
> religion-there seems no other word for it-while not antithetical to and indeed
>
> sharing much in common…The words and acts of the founding fathers, especially

the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has been

maintained ever since."

 The founders and the documents they drafted have reached mythic levels of symbolic

importance within American tradition. The structuring narrative of the Tea Party closely

allies their fiscal goals to the sacred, symbolic stature of the founding fathers and

Constitution.

A "return" to the founding principles drives the Tea Party's structuring narrative.

By associating the conservative fiscal policies with the founding fathers and documents,

the narrative becomes a battle for the fate of American rather than mere policy

differences. Illustrating a situation as a crisis, the conflict is turned into a very binary

distinction of right and wrong (Simons 185).

The structuring narrative submitted by *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and

*teaparty.org* constructs the current structure of government as destroyers of the sacred

principles of America's founding who must be stopped. With the construction of the

relationship between the Tea Party's fiscal agenda and the founding fathers, the

structuring narrative of the Tea Party calls the "average" Americans to act, or risk losing

sight of what the country intended to be.

### Competing Narratives: A Case in Contradiction

The narrative presented by the *New York Times* counternarrative questions,

problematizes, and attacks the authenticity of the Tea Party identity constructed on

*Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org.* Where the Tea Partiers cast

themselves as "average" Americans, the *New York Times* insist they are racist and extremists. Where Tea Partiers claim their grassroots independence, the *New York Times* cites their Republican ties. Finally, where Tea Partiers assert their mission of "returning" the country to the intentions of the founding fathers, the *New York Times* affirms they are placing the country in the hands of the Koch brothers and American corporate interests.

The *New York Times* identifies Tea Party members in a far different way than its counterparts. While the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* focus on the Tea Party's everyday, "average" American ethos, the *New York Times* emphasizes the movement's racially-divisive moments, far-right political claims, and anger-driven membership. The structuring narrative in the *New York Times* identifies the Tea Party as a vocal swath of angry, right-wing extremists with a vendetta against the Obama administration. Following the verbal assaults of African American House Representatives John Lewis (D-Georgia) and Emanuel Cleaver (D-Missouri), the *New York Times* counternarrative never allowed the Tea Party to disassociate itself from racist identity. Claims of racism were compounded with far-right comments from Tea Party candidates like Sharon Angle and Christine O'Donnell. By structuring the Tea Party as collective of racists and fundamentalists, the identity of average, "everyday" Americans is problematized to millions of potential voters.

While the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* structure the Tea Party as an independent, grassroots organization while the *New York Times* problematizes this characterization by closely identifying the Tea Party with the

traditional Republican establishment. In the structuring narrative available from the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* the movement claims itself "beholden to no political party" (Mainwaring "Defined By Principles" 3), concerned about the interests of the "average" American rather than fat cat politicians. This identity, *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* claimed, allowed the Tea Party to toss out all the "Washington elite" (Hackett 4, Weber 1) who had ballooned the debt and signed off on the 2008 stimulus regardless of party affiliation.

The *New York Times* complicates these claims of independence, by identifying the Tea Party as repackaged conservatism under the control of the far-right. The narrative characterizes the Tea Party as the vocal foot soldiers of Republicans and corporate interests who harnessed the racially-fueled anger of millions of Americans on a crusade against government regulation, minorities, and common sense. Rather than a mission to oust distant politicians, the counternarrative available in the *New York Times* identifies the Tea Party as a Republican rebranding campaign, serving to direct the anger of their constituents to a productive outcome for the GOP

The final portion of the *New York Times* structuring narrative that decisively contrasts its counterparts in is the Tea Party's mission. While *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org* and *teaparty.org* place structure the Tea Party's mission to "return" the country to the intentions of the founding fathers, the *New York Times* identifies the Tea Party's mission as the expansion of corporate interests and government deregulation. The *New York Times* empahsizes close ties between the Tea Party and the Koch brothers

and other wealthy conservatives, and goes on to note how the Tea Party agenda will greatly serve their interests. In this text, the Tea Party is not identified as serving the interests of the founding fathers, but "dismantling fundamental government safety nets designed to protect the unemployed, public health, workplace safety and the subsistence of the elderly" (Rich "The Billionaires" 8) all for the corporate gain of the movement's benefactors. The *New York Times* structuring narrative submits the Tea Party's fidelity to corporations rather than the founding fathers.

The contradictory structuring narratives of *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* versus the *New York Times* are illustrative of why the Tea Party is such a contended, divergent political movement. The above comparisons have demonstrated the polarizing way in which the Tea Party is identified to different political actors. The narratives are contradictory to one another.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections on the Tea Party:

Comparing Structuring Narratives and the Tea Party's Role in Populism

Maureen Whitebrook submits "persons understand their own lives as stories" (10). The structuring narratives which identify the Tea Party throughout the *Washington Times*, *New York Times, teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* provide the "instruments for constructing an imagined community" (129) amongst the movement. These structuring narratives are found in the discourse around the Tea Party, and assign roles to political actors, provide political aims, and justify the goals of the movement.  This analysis identified two distinct structuring narratives that challenge, problematize, and oppose one another. This gainsay of the Tea Party's identity is indicative of the contested nature of the movement. This chapter will explore the effectiveness of the Tea Party's populist rhetoric, the counternarratives *New York Times,* and the challenges populism and the Tea Party face in modern politics.

### *The Tea Party As an American Populist Movement*

The Tea Party has been identified by many journalists and pundits as a populist movement; its narrative themes such as "ordinary folks" opposing the out-of-touch Washington elite sparked such comparisons. The Tea Party fits in a long, diverse lineage of American populist movements. History has shown that the themes of populist rhetoric can be effectively used for sociopolitical movements of the left and right, and the structuring narratives available in the *Washington Times, teaparty.org,* and *teapartypatriots.org* that identify the Tea Party are common to populist rhetoric. Themes of a common, but heroic people, struggling to uphold traditional values against the out-of-touch ruling elite are essential to the rhetoric of the Tea Party and are crucial elements

of populist rhetoric. But beyond this project's analysis of the Tea Party's populist rhetoric, understanding can be garnered about modern populism as well the manner in which the populist rhetoric is countered.

As I noted earlier, it is important to understand populist rhetoric is spread across many political objectives. Populist rhetoric has been effectively employed by movements on the left and right. For example, both progressive era leader Samuel Gompers and 1930s conservative activist Father Charles Coughlin lauded ideals of the "common man" despite heading movements which were completely oppositional. Populism is not a political ideology partial to the left or right. Rather, populism is best understood as the employment rhetorical themes of a common peoples struggle against the out-of-touch elite with the aim of "saving" America. These arguments are available to various American sociopolitical aims, and the Tea Party is an example of a movement which employs populist rhetoric.

Past populist movements provide a series of rhetorical tactics available which were subsequently employed by the Tea Party. Lee (355-365) and Ryfe (142-144) note that the populist movements identify their followers as ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans. The structuring narratives in the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* identify these same characteristics in the Tea Party's followers. For example, *teaparty.org* (n.p.) notes that the Tea Party is made of "true American Patriots from all walks of life, every race, religion and national origin, all sharing a common belief in the values that made and keep our beloved nation great."

This description is very similar to characteristics of populist movements Lee outlines. He states, "The 'people' are rendered as ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans…This collectivization is the first step…of populist politics" (358).  The narratives in *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* are focused on the Tea Party's down-to-earth, simple, hard-working identity, and these characteristics have been observed by other scholars of populist rhetoric. This construction includes elements of Christian idiom and anecdotes, common vocabularies of American religious and political culture.

Rohler (317), Kazin ("The Populist Persuasion"1-4), and Lee (358-362) all note that the construction of an elite, out-of-touch, ill-intentioned enemy is a cornerstone of populist rhetoric. Populist movements often argue their oppositions' corrupt a once fair and democratic political and economic system that creates a specific crisis that necessitates the people's action; this is the exact case of the Tea Party's structuring narrative. Whether focusing on the whole of out-of-touch Washington or the unconstitutionality of the Obama administration, the structuring narratives of the Tea Party throughout the texts construct a gulf between the "average" Americans who identify as part of the Tea Party and the Washington establishment. The illustration of a dichotomy between a virtuous people and an out-of-touch elite is central to populist rhetoric, and the Tea Party continues this trend.

The final element of essential populist rhetoric employed by the Tea Party is the sullying of a ''system,'' in this case the ideals of the founders, which must be rectified.

Lee (360-361) notes the system is an amalgamation of numerous actors within the national political and economic order who distribute, govern, and manage. Within the populist structuring narrative, the system has been bastardized because of the moral decay and political chicanery of the movement's foes. The Tea Party demonstrates the need to rectify the system via the movement's devotion to the founding fathers. According to the Tea Party's structuring narrative, the system which the founding fathers had envisioned for America has been defiled by the depravity of the remote Washington insiders who now control the country. In response, action must be taken by Tea Partiers.

With the groundswell of popular and financial support the Tea Party received leading up to the 2010 midterm elections and the subsequent wave of legislative seats gained by Republicans, it is clear that the populist rhetorical narratives which structured the Tea Party's identity were effective. Certainty, the rapid growth and ensuing political impact of the Tea Party indicate the movement applied effective persuasion to some members of their audience. The Tea Party's successful use of populist rhetoric is telling about the durability of the themes of populism in American discourse. Analysis indicates the Tea Party employs populist rhetoric, but the construction of a crusade of "average" Americans against the out-of-touch elite remains an effective form of argument in modern political discourse. Although individual elements of populist rhetoric are commonplace in politics, the Tea Party's rapid political ascension illustrates that rhetorical themes of populist rhetoric continue to resonate amongst Americans. The twentieth century saw multiple populist movements, sometimes so common they

overlapped one another. But not since the likes of George Wallace has a there been a significant American populist movement until the Tea Party. The rise of the Tea Party indicates that, amongst some audiences, populist rhetoric remains a potent tool for sociopolitical movements.

There is no doubt that the Tea Party effectively employs elements of populist rhetoric. This suggests that the narratives propagated from populist rhetoric continue to resonate amongst the American people. My analysis further posits "average" American authenticity is a key tenet to populist sociopolitical movements, and I submit this theme is what allows populism to remain a potent rhetorical force. America has a long history of lauding the common individual, community, and family. Indeed, Hughes (25-35) asserts that since the arrival of the Puritans commonality and the humbleness of community has been a pivotal point of the American identity. Populism's emphasis on the "average" American strikes a chord that has been a fundamental part of the manner Americans identify.

Since the political aims of populist movements are varied, truly the rhetoric of these sociopolitical movements is the only commonality amongst them. With this in mind, it is clear that the Tea Party falls in line with other conservative populist movements of the twentieth century like the Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice and Senator Joseph McCarthy's red hunters, but further posits that the themes of populist rhetoric continue to have currency in American discourse. Along with adding to understandings of modern populism, this project also provides further understandings of

populist rhetoric by studying the narratives which identify the movement as well as counternarratives which problematize and question that identity.

***Tea Party Narratives and American Politics***

It is clear that the structuring narratives that identify the Tea Party in the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* are questioned and problematized by the *New York Times*.  It should be reiterated that the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* all provided very similar stories about the Tea Party. Key characteristics like the movement's grassroots origin, crusade against big government, and fidelity to the founding fathers are essential to manner the Tea Party is constructed and identifies itself. The common identification amongst the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* allowed the Tea Party to be consumed by many political actors in a uniform way, but also provides a concise target for  the counternarrative of the *New York Times*.

With universal structuring narratives submitted through these three texts, the Tea Party is able to identify common protagonists, antagonists, plot, and climax of the movement across sources. Some factors of the movement, such as investment in social issues, were not common amongst all the texts, and this would go on to be a point of contention amongst some Tea Partiers (Steinhauser n.p.) and the manner they are identified. But perhaps even more notable than the consistent Tea Party identity in the *Washington Times*, *teapartypatriots.org,* and *teaparty.org* is the direct and decisive

manner in which the *New York Times* structuring narrative attacked it, specifically tenets of authenticity.

Although one of this project's essential aims was to understand the Tea Party's populist nature, further insight about populist rhetoric is also gained from the manner the *New York Times* responds rhetorically to the Tea Party, specifically its attacks on the grassroots nature of the movement.  As my analysis chapter demonstrates, the structuring narrative of the *New York Times* blasted the most essential tenets of the Tea Party's authentic identity. The *New York Times* did not simply attack the Tea Party; rather it assailed the authentic grassroots identity, which is perhaps the most defining element of the movement. Rhetorically, claims of corporate ties, racist membership, and close Republican affiliation undercut the Tea Party's credibility and thus (amongst some audiences) their ability persuade. Within the *New York Times*, the key tenets of the Tea Party identity are overtly and directly addressed in a manner which problematizes the authenticity of the movement. For example, the Tea Party's notions of independence are questioned by the *New York Time's* association with the Koch brothers and FreedomWorks.

The manner the *New York Times* identifies the Tea Party works to weaken it rhetorically by problematizing the movement's grassroots authenticity. This project's comparison of competing narratives has provided insight into the manner these characterizations counteract one another. Throughout American history, populist movements have been galvanized by constructing a struggle between the "average"

American and the elite. But the *New York Times* assaults this ethos in the Tea Party by

telling a story about a movement beholden to corporate donors and the Republican party.

Furthermore, this counternarrative not only problematizes the Tea Party, but also accuses

the movement of serving the very elites they rail against. This contradiction undermines

the Tea Part's narrative by claiming their donors and political aims will provide more

power to corporate elites and Washington insiders they demonize rather than take it

away. The *New York Times* counternarrative problematizes the Tea Party in a compound

manner, assaulting the authenticity of the movement, and aligning it with the corporate

powerbrokers and beltway insiders they claim to assail.

    Attacks on the Tea Party's authenticity as a grassroots movement were the

backbone of the *New York Times* maligning identification. This indicates that attacking

the grassroots credibility of a populist movement is a possible response to such brands of

rhetoric. The counternarratives of the *New York Times* point to the most essential tenet of

the Tea Party's identity and problematize it. In this sense the analysis not only provides

understanding how the Tea Party applies populist rhetoric, but also the manner in which

these strategies are countered.

    The final element of insight this project provides involves the limits of populist

rhetoric, specifically over extended periods of time in the modern domestic politics. The

length of analysis provides an examination of the manner the Tea Party's structuring

narrative evolves during the period leading up to the 2010 elections. As the movement

progressed into the summer months, the *New York Times* was able to strike blows on the

movement's grassroots authenticity by associating the Tea Party with the corporations and Washington insiders they had demonized.

The current American political system demands tremendous sums of money be raised in order for a competitive, let alone successful political campaign. For example, some pundits estimate incumbent president Barack Obama will raise one billion dollars for the 2012 election (Richards n.p.), and the average campaign for a seat in the House of Representatives spent $574,064 in 2010 (opensecrets.org n.p.). Often, these funds come from influential special interests groups and large corporations who stand to gain from the politicians they have supported. This occurs regardless of political party or policy aim, it is simply a facet of modern American democracy. Indeed, this phenomenon has been compounded by Federal Election Committee regulations which state individuals may only donate $2,500 per individual candidate (FEC.gov), and the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission allows for unlimited, anonymous corporate campaign contributions (Liptak n.p.). The influence of corporations, political action committees, and special interest groups has become a significant portion of modern politics, and this poses a marked problem to the key tenets of populist rhetoric.

In order for populist movements to raise the type of capital they need to compete in large-scale elections, they are bound to accept donations from the same special interests and corporations they beset. The dynamics of modern American politics presents a challenge to the grassroots authenticity of populist movements. For populist rhetoric to

continue to be an influential tool of American sociopolitical movements it must addresses the paradox it faces between receiving large contributions and characterizing itself as a grassroots movement. While Democrats and Republicans have adapted to the exigencies of the modern American political climate, the Tea Party faces a challenging decision: identify as the true voice of the commoner and risk being vastly out-contributed or accept much needed campaign finance and become beholden to the power institution the movement claims to counter. Perhaps the next evolution of populist rhetorical strategy will bridge this divide. Indeed the core tenets of populist rhetoric have vast potential to persuade, but future populists will be forced to address this relationship.

The Tea Party represents several interesting trends in modern American political discourse. Only time will tell if this movement proves to be a lasting force within conservative ideology or an afterthought out long-lost ideals of the nineteenth century. Suffice to say the movement has demonstrated the continued validity of populist rhetoric, the counternarratives that challenge those rhetorical themes face, and the difficulties of populism faces in twentieth century politics.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a great plurality amongst the Tea Party movement with different factions,
groups and collations. But this project focuses solely on the construction of the Tea Party
identity via the media, rather than analyzing more specific instances of the movement.

<sup>2</sup> Structuring narratives (see: Foust and Murphy "Revealing and Reframing Apocolyptic
Tragedy in Global Warming Discourse," as well as Fisher and Goblirsch "Biographical
Structuring: Narrating and  Reconstructing the Self in Research and Professional
Practice") refer to the stories that are told through various discursive texts that assign
roles to actors, outline political aims and provide justification for a collective, in this case
the Tea Party. They are stories that help to make sense and provide structure to reality for
a collective.

<sup>3</sup> "Porkulus" combines stimulus with pork, a term often used to describe non-essential
government spending.

<sup>4</sup> I place "return" in quotations because of the Tea Party assumption that the movement is
solely in line with the ideals of the founders, rather than having what is understood as an
American Constitutionalist view. I also put other similar terms on quotations which can

be understood as opinion. I.E. the Tea Party claims to be "saving" America, but of course this is only one view of many.