POLITICAL CULTURE, EVERYDAY ACTIVISTS AND THE STRUGGLE TO RESTORE AMERICA: LOCAL TEA PARTY GROUPS IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PIEDMONT.

William Howard Westermeyer

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Approved by:
Dorothy Holland
Donald Nonini
Christopher Nelson
Charles Price
Jean Dennison
ABSTRACT

William H. Westermeyer: Political Culture, Everyday Activists and the Struggle to Restore America: Local Tea Party Groups in the North Carolina Piedmont
(Under the direction of Dorothy Holland)

This dissertation examines the significance of Local Tea Party Groups (LTPGs) in the success of the wider Tea Party Movement. I challenge a common description of the Tea Party as an elite-driven, pseudo-movement, maintaining it is best conceptualized as a movement network encompassing conservative, elite advocacy organizations, conservative media and hundreds of autonomous groups of “everyday” people (non-professional political actors). Extended ethnographic research reveals that LTPGs are vibrant, independent, local organizations, which, while they do constantly draw on nationally disseminated cultural images and discourses, are far from simple agents of the larger organizations and the media. I argue that the LTPGs create submerged spaces (Melucci 1989) where everyday Tea Party participants fashion powerful, action-oriented collective and personal political identities. These identities are forged in the context of cultural or figured worlds, “socially produced, culturally constituted activities” (Holland et al 1998) in which people develop new understandings of self and others. As an interpretive frame, the Tea Party movement’s figured world allows people to establish meaningful links between their own lives and concerns and the movement’s goals and narratives, as well as develop outlooks on a variety of political issues. Collectively, the production and circulation of the figured world within LTPGs provides the basis for subjectivities that often support political activism. As sites of cultural production, LTPG memberships develop varied and innovative tactics and goals, while choosing different settings to engage in political contention. These activists often have dramatic effects upon
their local political cultures—an arena frequently overlooked in national media coverage. My research consisted of 18 months of fieldwork among eight county-level Tea Party groups located in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. I conducted 59 semi-structured interviews and observed some 75 meetings and events. I monitored internet social networks and other websites, was a regular audience member of conservative talk radio and Fox News. I conclude that personal and internet-based social networks, media and elite organizations are co-creating new political subjects and demonstrate the importance of local, face-to-face political organizations in cultivating and animating these subjects. I suggest that localized political groups are important for enduring political transformations.
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As I began discovering anthropology well into my 30s, two people specifically motivated my interest and directed me toward graduate school. Dr. Bethel Nagy taught the first classes that truly motivated my interest. And though those classes were in biological anthropology and New World archaeology-- to areas of anthropology I nonetheless didn't pursue, the classes rekindled a love of school that had laid dormant for nearly 20 years. The second person was Dr. Nora Haenn. Nora’s classes showed me ways to study politics and social movements made possible by anthropology that were so different from my political science education and so tuned to the type of political work I did. It was my good fortune that Nora took a position at North Carolina State University at the same time that I was entering the graduate program at UNC Chapel Hill. Since entering the graduate program, Nora has continued to be a steady, encouraging mentor and a very good friend.

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While visiting graduate programs around the country, my trip to UNC was the most exhilarating. My first meeting with Dottie would be similar to countless meetings I would have in the following years. Sitting in her office discussing my interests, Dottie asked the right questions prompting me to expand my ideas, think in different directions and all the while showing patience and encouragement. In many ways Dottie was as interested in my research as I was and that we both were living a profound learning experience in the production of this dissertation. Yet beyond the academics, there were many wonderful learning experiences shared with Dottie, whether it was dinner and conversation with her and the wonderfully kind, now-departed Bill Lachicotte or the many political protests and rallies that Dottie and I attended together. Simply, I do not know how this graduate school experience would've ended up without Dottie.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Local Tea Party Groups through a Social Movement Lens

In mid-2009 as I was planning dissertation research on American political culture, a profound conflict and a vibrant new social movement emerged across the nation. The Tea Party Movement (TPM) had been growing over the prior few months, characterized by large and small protests and rallies across the nation. Media were avidly portraying their protests against the policies and person of Barak Obama and the economic recovery legislation passed in response to what would subsequently become known as the Great Recession. Tea Party events were characterized by older, middle-class and typically conservative protesters emulating the founding fathers and demanding strict adherence to a literal interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. My first actual exposure to the Tea Party Movement came during August as lawmakers in “town hall meetings” around the nation were confronted by angry groups of constituents opposed to the recently drafted healthcare reform. The typically mundane and sparsely attended constituent town hall meetings were transformed that August into well attended, dramatic, and contentious political theater (Isenstadt 2009). The excitement of some that the United States would finally pass comprehensive health care reform, was tempered by this groundswell of opposition to creeping “statism.” Political conflict can indicate crucial periods of transformation and these constituent meetings seemed to be events that Gluckman termed "situations" (1940) or that Victor Turner termed “dramas" (Turner 1974), or Holland, Nonini et al (2007), “dramas of contention.” Americans were in the midst of a period characterized by Kapferer (2005) as “a particular tension or turning, a point of potentiality and multiple possibility,” where the political
culture was undergoing a dramatic shift characterized by the emergence of an aggressive conservative populist backlash.

Viewed from the sidelines, these town halls were puzzling to me. The people speaking (or rather, yelling) in opposition to health care reform seemed to be neither experienced citizen-activists nor professional advocates expressing policy positions. The statements were often accompanied by highly emotional displays and more often evoked symbolic concerns and moral panics with charges of "un-American" or "socialism" or "fascism." At the same time the sheer number of people was remarkable. During my earlier thirteen-year career in political work I had organized protests and street theater and knew that getting large numbers of people to an event was no easy task. Yet, these events and dozens of others across the nation, were standing room only. Furthermore, despite the wide dispersion of the town halls across the country, the messages conveyed by the protesters were unusually consistent.

**Spontaneous or contrived? Elite driven or emergent grassroots?** I was leaning toward elite and contrived given the large numbers of people in attendance, the consistent discourses and my knowledge that the Republican Party, conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, and the US Chamber of Commerce were all opposed to the Affordable Care Act. Was this simply a better-organized repeat of fifteen years earlier, when those same groups successfully defeated the Clinton-era health care reform? The early media coverage of the movement was of little help in dispelling my opinion. Although there was some excellent work being written by journalists (Gardner 2010; McGrath 2010; Zernike 2010; Zernike and Thee-Brenan 2010) attempting to understand the Tea Party phenomenon, there was a greater amount of ink being spilled in arguing that the TPM was “astroturf” organized by the GOP, or the billionaire industrialists, Charles and David Koch. The protesters, they argued, were an example
Nonetheless, as I began ethnographic research in the Piedmont of North Carolina that following year, I found that “Tea Partyists” were organizing locally, meeting in small, typically county-level, face to face groups that assembled regularly in restaurants or American Legion halls. Journalists and a few academics (e.g. Abramowitz 2010, Parker 2010) meanwhile were attempting to figure out what the Tea Party “wanted” by focusing upon aggregates of Tea Party public opinion surveys. They overlooked how everyday participants were organizing themselves at the grassroots level. Welcomed as a researcher into what I term “local Tea Party groups” (LTPGs), I was struck by how the groups created spaces for political discussion, political action, and the fashioning of political identities as Tea Partyists. These groups became the focus of my research. I wanted to understand the actions and understandings of the everyday Tea Party participants and to investigate the role that these small yet multiple, widely dispersed groups were playing in the success of the movement.

Those journalists and researchers who maintained that elites such as the Koch brothers were behind the TPM were not entirely wrong; their picture was simply incomplete and grossly oversimplified. The movement was constituted from elite and grassroots actors. Established organizations such as the Koch-supported Americans for Prosperity were organizing protests and adapting their outreach to the emergent grassroots movement. At the same time, new national level Tea Party groups (NTPOs), such as Tea Party Patriots were compiling massive memberships and building networks linking LTPGs. Furthermore, conservative broadcast media—mainly Fox News and syndicated conservative talk radio—were not simply reporting on the new
movement, but actively helping to organize it (Zernike 2010; Williamson et al. 2011). Fox News, Glenn Beck and Tea Party Patriots were present in the small local groups in the form of discourses circulating through and between them. Yet, the great majority of these groups, in the area of my study, were spontaneous and autonomous without formal links to the national level groups. Each created a particular political organization with its own priorities, actions and characteristics. The following description of a meeting of the Hamilton County Tea Party\textsuperscript{1} \textsuperscript{2} gives a feel for the complexity of the local groups and sets the stage for describing the central questions of the dissertation. On this occasion, the Hamilton group meeting took place in a crowded private dining room of a local restaurant.

The meeting included approximately 50 people. The members were primarily middle-aged with some retirees, upper and upper middle class and white. When I arrived, Sandy, the cofounder of the group and facilitator of the meeting, was identifying leaders of different projects and asking them to provide updates. She began by announcing that the planning for the April 15 “Tax Day Tea Party Rally” at the county courthouse plaza was well underway. The updates began with John, an aspiring writer and lifelong reader of conservative philosophy. He reported that he had been in contact with schools asking them to publicize an essay contest that the HCTP was sponsoring for schoolchildren on the importance of the U.S. Constitution in their lives. Next, Gloria, a mother of four and a former volunteer coordinator for the Tea Party Patriots mentioned that the John Locke Foundation, a North Carolina think tank and advocacy organization similar to the Heritage Foundation, was offering workshops on understanding the

\textsuperscript{1} I utilize pseudonyms for research consultants and the locations of local Tea Party groups.

\textsuperscript{2} All but one of the eight groups I participated with used their respective county in their name. The counties in North Carolina are typically small. The average population in 2014 was 99,000, yet the median population was 56,000. Since counties often contained a few small towns, referring to the groups by county indicated a realistic geographic orientation.
US Constitution. For a fee, the organization would send a representative to any locale in North Carolina to conduct a full day class on the details and historical bases of the document’s contents. Another woman rose next to give a report on “disaster planning.” Echoing recent forebodings by Fox News personality Glenn Beck, she warned of societal disruptions from unforeseen natural calamities, electro-magnetic pulse and the current financial crises in Greece and Iceland. She had compiled information on how to set up a survival plan, stockpile food and seed banks and recommended that members read the book, *Patriots: Surviving the Coming Collapse* (Rawles 2009).

Several members reported on the “budget team,” a project to evaluate and research the Hamilton County government’s budget with the goal of identifying wasteful spending they wanted the Democrat-controlled board of commissioners to cut. A subset of members divided up into working groups to address a different budget category-transportation, human resources, etc. They were planning on presenting an alternative budget to the county board of commissioners in three months.

Closing the evening, Dan related the story of attending a talk by Van Jones, a liberal, former “green jobs czar” in Barack Obama's administration who Glenn Beck had fashioned into a tangible symbol of “progressives’” plan to destroy America. At that event, after being asked by an audience member to define "social justice," and with Dan’s video camera running, Jones replied, "Would you be willing to take your life, write it on a card, throw it in a big pot with everybody else’s, reach in and pull out another life with total confidence that it would be a good life? No? Then you have some work to do [to make everyone’s life a good life].” After inserting text reading "ISN’T THIS COMMUNISM?” at the end of the video clip, Dan posted it to the group’s Facebook page and YouTube channel. Members of the Hamilton County group also sent
a link to the video to Glenn Beck’s and Bill O’Reilly’s email accounts. (It was broadcasted during their shows later that month.) As Dan concluded, he said, displaying a combination of purpose and exuberance, that he felt like the Old Testament figure Nehemiah with his sword and trowel rebuilding Jerusalem and purifying the faith--only that his sword was a video camera.

In that one fast-paced hour of the Hamilton County meeting, a snapshot of the priorities and practices of a local Tea Party group emerges providing a clue to the role these groups fill in the wider movement. The participants stressed familiar Tea Party themes of fiscal austerity and reverence for the Constitution. Additionally, though the group was autonomous, it was nonetheless drawing upon packaged printed information from regional and national organizations such as the John Locke Foundation and circulating discourses from conservative popular, nationally distributed media-most notably here, Glenn Beck.

Yet, despite the overlap of its content with familiar images of the Tea Party Movement, the Hamilton County Tea Party demonstrates how local TP groups constitute an important component of the movement. Noteworthy was the local focus of their activism, which in their case, was the county board of commissioners. Secondly, the group was developing their own tactics--rewriting their county budget and using video and YouTube in innovative ways. Through the internet this group like others that I studied, was able to feed these and other “cultural resources” they had produced back into the trans-local Tea Party and conservative universe. As I argue in more detail in later chapters, they formed a semi-independent, component vital to the circulation and production of the symbolic and discursive components of the movement. Some of the tactics of the HCTP were different from the other seven groups I observed, reflecting the backgrounds of the participants and the particular political culture developed within the group.
While most Tea Party organizations focused their attention on protesting policies and legislation, this Tea Party group felt qualified to actually draft policy.

As exemplified by the Hamilton group, LTPGs created social spaces where the nationally circulating symbolic themes of the Tea Party gained expression in local political activities. In these spaces, participants were reproducing and repurposing discourses, symbols and practices circulating via broadcast media, new media and social media. As time went by, I also began to realize that these groups were not only sites of local performance of these nationally circulating discourses, they were also sites of innovative local application of the cultural resources, and sites of cultural production for the broader community. They were, in some cases, producing new symbolic and discursive components that fed the wider Tea Party universe of media, political personalities and elite advocacy groups. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these local groups were also facilitating the development of many everyday citizens as informed and effective political actors eager to impact the local, as well as the national, political landscape.

As my research continued into 2011 the local groups continued to be ignored by the emerging body of scholarly writings on the movement. Those writings, authored mainly by political scientists, sociologists and historians, focused on mapping the TPM’s broader themes (Rosenthal and Trost 2011), including its effect upon statewide US Senate races (Miller and Walling 2012); put emphasis on the large well-funded conservative advocacy organizations that played a significant role in the movement (DiMaggio 2011, Formisano 2012,); analyzed the role of broadcast media framing in the movement’s emergence (Boykoff and Laschever 2011, Williamson et al 2011); and examined the TPMs populism in the context of historically conservative movements (Berlet 2012a, 2012b; Postel 2011). Most of these writings, significant though they were and continue to be, give little to no attention to everyday Tea Party participants.
and the local organizations they have formed. Skocpol and Williamson (2011) and Van Dyke and Meyer (2014) are exceptions in that they contain some ethnographic work. This lacuna, I argue, blocks understanding of the depth of the political transformation the movement is achieving and obscures the new insights that study of the Tea Party, especially its grassroots components can contribute to political anthropology and social movement studies.

**THE TEA PARTY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY**

The Tea Party Movement presents a special challenge in the application of social movement theory. Part of this is due to the relative dearth of scholarly work on right-wing movements. In a review article, Edelman (2001) writes that there is strong reticence on the part of many social scientists to study right-wing movements because the scholars often do not share the movements’ values. This lack of engagement may leave some possible questions in the study of conservative or reactionary social movements, especially the most difficult and unpleasant questions, to be overlooked. Furthermore, right wing groups are sometimes dismissed as “extremists” and “irrational” which overlooks the “rational” decisions and legitimate grievances which foster their growth (Berlet and Lyons 2000). Theoretically, one of the biggest differences between some right wing movements and left wing movements in the current historical period is the incorporation of elite and mass media components in a populist movement. The TPM is essentially an *elite-grassroots-media network*. Beginning 45 years ago, Gerlach and Hine (1970) described what would later be called “New Social Movements” as “segmented, acephalous and reticulate,” or simply networks containing no true center. The idea of network organization--“social movement networks,” grew as an important paradigm in the study of social movements (Castells 2000; Melucci et al. 1989, Melucci 1996). The paradigm was used by McAdam (1982) and Morris (1984) in studies of the civil rights movement, Diani (1995) in the Environmental
movement and Juris (2008) in the alter-globalization movement. The TPM is a type of social movement network composed of commercial broadcast media, everyday citizens and elite advocacy groups. Nonetheless, the network model is rarely applied to the TPM because to many, the presence of elite organizations implies *ipso facto* orchestration by elite organizations. This is a position my ethnographic material disputes.

Because the multiplicity of the TPM’s distinctive spaces and connections are often overlooked, conceptualizations of the structure of the movement are usually incomplete. Political power today is often contested through movements constituted by communication networks (Castells 2007) and thus the newer organizational forms are characterized by some as "connective action" (Bennet and Segerberg 2012) in which the “resources” consist of information shared through networks. Flanigan et al. (2006) organize a 2-dimensional classification system for this proliferation of forms. One axis of the model represents the degree of face-to-face contact organization members have which may vary from organized local chapters such as Amnesty International which meet regularly, to primarily internet-based organizations such as MoveOn.org, in which members rarely meet, if at all. The other axis represents the degree of individual autonomy that member units have, varying from strong hierarchical control such as the National Rifle Association to wide individual autonomy and responsibility as exhibited in the Occupy movement. The authors acknowledge that some political organizations are "hybrid", characterized by multiple forms. The Howard Dean presidential campaign of 2003 - 2004 is an example of a central campaign organization complemented by relatively autonomous individuals and small local groups scattered across the nation (Kreiss 2009). The TPM is similarly a hybrid characterized by local groups with
unrestricted individual and local-group latitude and a collection of national, formal organizations which are connected to only a few local groups, and then only loosely.

New technologies are another feature of changes in social movements, and most likely one that is driving transformations. The social movement network model took new form through, among other information technologies, social networking computer applications like Twitter in the Arab Spring (Khondker 2011) and the Occupy Movement (Juris 2012). LTPGs and NTPOs use digital social networks, such as Facebook to share information, coordinate actions and construct meaning. However, the Tea Party is somewhat unique, in that conservative broadcast media, such as corporate powerhouses Fox News and talk radio syndicator Premier Networks play an important role sending the cultural resources of the movement over the nation’s airwaves and cable networks (see also Boykoff and Laschever 2011, Skocpol and Williamson 2011, Williamson et al 2011). Today, since the proliferation of 24-hour cable news, corporate media consolidation and the dismantling of the Fairness Doctrine which mandated equal time for opposing viewpoints on federally licensed media outlets, conservatives and others pursuing a particular ideological bent are able to easily and effectively circumscribe their media exposure to one, consistent perspective across multiple media sources (Jamieson and Cappella 2008). The extensiveness of this possibility in the US has only come about recently. This role that the commercial media play was much less feasible when much of the classical social movement literature was created. At this point in time, the Tea Party is a truly a different sort of movement network.

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3 Because of the equal time principle of the Fairness Doctrine, the 24hr programing of conservative talk radio programs (i.e. Glenn Beck followed by Rush Limbaugh, followed by Sean Hannity etc.) would not be legal without the programing of competing liberal views. This doctrine was rescinded in 1987.
MEANING MAKING AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL TEA PARTY GROUPS

My study of the local Tea Party groups reflects an approach to social movements that emphasizes meaning making. Many conventional studies of social movements, including the TPM (e.g. Van Dyke and Meyer 2014, Skocpol and Williamson 2011) rely on resource mobilization theories (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1977) with their focus on the material resources, organizational capacities (including skills and networks), and tactics that enable organizations to mobilize support to address grievances (Smith and Fetner 2010). Yet, that approach offers little for understanding the role of the LTPGs in the wider success of the movement, which I claim rests with the transformation of the participants. As Shapira (2013) has written, “In the process of focusing on the organizational dimensions of movements, resource mobilization scholars have mostly abandoned the project of understanding movements through understanding their participants.” Directing attention to the role of LTPGs and everyday citizens in the wider movement requires a different approach. Anthropologists of social movements, along with other social movement scholars involved in the “cultural turn” (Kurzman 2008), are more helpful in understanding the centrality of LTPGs as these scholars tend to focus on the construction of meanings and identities (e.g. Allen 2007; Escobar 2008; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Price 2009; Satterfield 2002). More particularly, social practice theory, which I employ throughout this work, utilizes a Vygotskian notion of the importance of collectively generated symbols in providing human actors and groups the ability to organize their own efforts toward ends they desire and thus a degree of agency (Holland et al 1998). By assigning collectively constructed meanings and symbolic values to objects, in the current case political actions and events, humans make the political thinkable, political actions voluntarily manageable, and even
the idea of types of political actors constituent in the formation of intimate and collective identities (Cain 1991).

Social movements are important sources of cultural production for change, and in the case of the Tea Party, the conservative media is playing a crucial role in circulating and articulating symbols and discourses for change. The network configuration of the TPM favors some multivocality as will be shown, however the broadcast and social media connections are important contributors to the remarkable discursive and symbolic consistency of the movement. Given the complexity presented by multiple actors, these media maintain a type of subtle discipline upon the movement through the constant circulation and re-circulation of consistent right-wing messages. At the same time, the local Tea Party groups are crucial in the uptake, deployment and productivity of these symbols for everyday citizens in their political activities.

While these approaches will be discussed in more detail later, the participants in the Hamilton County Tea Party meeting provide a good entry point for thinking about actors forming in the spaces created by the TPM. For example, everyday people were forming a relationship between their own intimate (personal) sense of themselves as political actors and the meanings circulated by the Tea Party-supportive media. Participants were using these political discourses to identify themselves and just as importantly to try to change others as political actors. John, for example, used his love of writing to help the next generation appreciate and understand the Constitution. The shift in participants’ politics were not simply in regard to understanding the meanings of issues and symbols, but in how people actually practiced their political personhood. The Hamilton County participants were taking on new political activities and positions such as researching budgets, speaking at county meetings and planning rallies. Involvement in vibrant spaces of cultural production such as the LTPGs is energizing. Local groups were circulating the
resources, yet also appropriating, recombining and contextualizing them within local-historical particularities. Their work creates conditions for a powerful transformation of members’ political identities, and for the emergence on the local political scene of spirited new political actors.

By personal or intimate “political identity,” I refer to senses of self as political actors that individuals and groups construct using cultural resources. By collective “political identity,” I refer to the senses of ones group as a political actor. Identities, political and otherwise, are fashioned around shared cultural resources, practices and emotional investments. They are negotiated, performed and sometimes opposed in social practice, often becoming self-defining (e.g. Holland et al. 2008; Melucci 1995). The social practice theories of identity that I draw on provide an effective means for conceptualizing an important aspect of people’s relationship to politics. Politics requires individuals to confront and make sense of multiple, often abstract and sometimes unfamiliar concepts and discourses. How they do so is mediated to a significant degree by their identities: Social actors form emotionally invested senses of self, which inform how they plan and evaluate their own action and performance and that of others (Holland et al. 1998). A portion of the dissertation is addressed to my analysis of the collective political identities that are forming in the Tea Party, to the intimate (personal) identities as Tea Partyists that some participants form, and to the social identities constructed in the Tea Party that are assigned to others. My ethnographic material allows me insight into identity processes and so go beyond common uses of “identity” in political analyses. Indeed one key drawback of a popular form of political analysis that I aim to address is the attribution of uniformity to large,

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4 Politics, as defined by Stephen Gregory (1998) "refers to a diverse range of social practices through which people negotiate power relations. The practices of politics involve both the production and exercise of social relationships and the cultural construction of social meanings that support or undermine those relationships.”

5 It’s important to note that collective, social and personal (intimate) identities draw on many sources and are always in process (Escobar 2008; Hall 1985, 1996; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Holland et al 1998).
demographically-defined categories of individuals such as white, male southerners that are often neither collectively symbolized, unified agentive groups nor necessarily aggregates with empirically shared interests significant to motivate them to common political action.

Identities are important to consider in relation to the TPM in another respect: Senses of self are always in process and may be destabilized by socio-cultural change resulting for some in ill-defined senses of anger, fear and confusion. Social movements may anchor "unfixed" identities by supplying a logic of articulation, which Escobar (2008) sees as constructing nodal points around which meaning and identities can be fixed. "For this to happen," Escobar continues, “the existing relations of subordination must come to be seen as relations of oppression and this can happen only under certain discursive conditions that make possible collective action" (Escobar 2008:206). While it seems inappropriate to describe nascent Tea Partyists as "oppressed," one must consider the subjective position of conservative Americans in early 2009. The Republican Party had been thoroughly routed in the elections of 2006 and 2008. Prior to that, the budget deficit and national debt had increased sharply during the presidency of George W. Bush--trends which alarmed many of his conservative supporters. As 2009 began, the nation witnessed the inauguration of a president who conservative media had portrayed as a dangerous leftist with values outside American sensibilities. A February 2009 Newsweek magazine cover heralded a new era where "We are all socialists now" as Democrats, holding the presidency and both houses of Congress, pursued economic stimulus legislation that added trillions of dollars to the national debt. These conservatives rightfully felt that their power to influence policy through institutional means had seriously declined (McVeigh 2014). Media, NTPOs and personal networks of everyday Tea Partyists provided a stream of stories, news clips, and commentators using interpretive frames, key symbols and emblematic practices that
reinforced this sense of danger and oppression and offered a compelling narrative and avenue for action. These resources crystalized, or, in Escobar’s terms, "fixed" a collective subject and motivated action.

Entering the meetings and activities of local Tea Party groups, one is struck by the presence of submerged spaces (Melucci 1989)\(^6\) where the distinctive cultural resources of the movement are used in the performance of cultural or “figured worlds” (Holland et al. 1998), horizons of meaning against which events, developments, self and others are interpreted. The LTPGs, in short, created the possibility for everyday citizens to produce, materialize, and perform practices and activities understood in terms of the Tea Party’s political vision.

From my research and data analysis a perspective on the TPM emerged that I describe in this dissertation. I build the argument that the role of everyday citizens and the LTPGs they form are crucial to understanding the effectiveness of the Tea Party Movement. The movement’s emerging discourses produced and circulated by elite conservative groups, media and everyday citizens, were put into the making of a cultural world that not only gave meaning to many people’s concerns over the direction of the country early in the Obama presidency, but established connections between those concerns and more long-term, ongoing anxieties about sociohistorical change in America. The local Tea Party groups were and continue to be central to the movement’s success by providing the space for collective political identities to be developed, lived and performed. The results are vibrant local spaces of cultural production and effective political activism.

**Methods**

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\(^6\) Melucci writes that contemporary social movements are characterized by both visible action, such as political confrontation, and latent action conducted in less visible or "submerged" spaces. These submerged spaces, which are "dispersed and fragmented... act as cultural laboratories," in which participants produce new meanings, relationships and perceptions (Melucci 1989:60).
Given that I was observing variation across the first few LTPGs I observed, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography in order to better investigate different characteristics of the groups and to see whether my observation of local group autonomy was widespread. And, though my choice of the American South was to a large degree dictated by research funding, it proved to be a good decision. As more scholarly work on the movement emerged in 2011, I found very little reference to Tea Party groups in the American South and no focus whatsoever on how local TP groups may reflect the regions of the country in which they are situated. Southern conservatism is characterized by a close association with evangelical Christianity, yet NTPOs such as Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks take pains to avoid faith-based and social issues including abortion and same-sex marriage. Christianity was a prominent theme in several LTPG I studied, which allowed me to experience this prominent example of how local groups, and national groups differ.

For 18 months beginning in July 2010 and ending in January 2012, I conducted participant observation with eight LTPG's in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The Piedmont is an economically and culturally diverse region of medium-size cities and small towns on picturesque rural settings. The region includes a range of rural and urban landscapes from the glittering southern banking capital of Charlotte to small towns, some still reeling from the departure of textile and furniture manufacturing and the decline of tobacco cultivation. I chose LTPG's with which to conduct participant observation on the basis of the different landscapes they occupy. Hamilton and Revere County Tea Parties were located in counties anchored by relatively large cities of 100,000 or more. Hawthorne, Franklin and Pierce County Tea Parties were located in primarily rural counties anchored by small cities of less than 30,000 people. Adams and Greene County Tea Parties were located in rural counties abutting the Appalachian
Mountains with no nearby municipalities larger than a small town. Finally the Burgoyne County Tea Party was located in a region which had become a haven for middle and upper middle-class retirees. As will be seen, this combination of LTPGs produced a good variation of group characteristics, activities and memberships.

My primary participant observation was conducted in regularly held meetings of the local Tea Party groups and in their groups’ events such as candidate forums and talks by invited speakers. During these meetings I observed the dialogue and interaction between members, the dynamic between leaders and non-leaders as well as the airing of members own concerns, and even open-ended discussions. When I completed my fieldwork I had attended 75 different meetings and events including large rallies outside of the regular meetings. From these events I recruited consultants for semi-structured interviews. I conducted 59 semi structured interviews which included the one or two primary organizers and several members of each group. I approached most of the interviews as political autobiographies (Holland, Nonini et al. 2007), which being shorter than life histories, had people relate their history of political involvement and political awakening. Although I did want to understand some of the ideological positions of Tea Partyists, understanding the path my consultants took to the Tea Party movement was of greater interest to me. I agree with Harel Shapira (2013) who in his ethnography of the anti-undocumented immigrant movement, The Minutemen, argues that understanding ideology only gets one so far in understanding movement participation. His consultants and as I will show, Tea Partyists as well, were committing themselves to a cultural world of practices and emotions, which is best captured by probing into activities, experiences and relationships.

Finally, I also immersed myself in the Tea Party information network. I created a Facebook profile so that I could observe and participate in the social network of the groups and
the wider Tea Party universe. Finally I joined most of the listservs of NTPOs such as Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks, and Heritage Action in order to receive the same organizational messages as my consultants.

I presented myself in the research as a graduate student from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill working on a dissertation about the meaning of the Tea Party for people at the grassroots. Whereas militant and activist research (Hale 2006; Juris 2008) position the researcher within the struggle, I worked at pains to remove myself from it as much as possible. I told consultants up front that I would prefer not to discuss my own views on issues because I did not want people to feel that they needed to defend theirs’. I spent at least six months simply observing meetings and rallies and getting to know participants before ever sitting down for an interview. My purpose in these early months was to demonstrate my true desire to understand a fascinating political phenomenon, which regardless of the political implications, was driven by people who, like most other Americans, were trying to grasp and respond to dramatic social and economic change. I told them I disagreed with some of their beliefs and agreed with some; for example, I said I believed that government has a role in public life yet I was fearful of many actions of the state such as NSA wiretapping. My interests also came out in my interviewing where I spent less time on the details of specific issues (which I was less interested in) and more time discussing biography, the meaning of experiences and political activity. My consultants were satisfied with my explanation I believe, because the desire for their movement to be understood outweighed their concern that I might, as one consultant said, “make us look like a bunch of idiots.” When I left the field, it was apparent that many of my consultants, some of whom I had built friendships with, placed strong trust in me to describe their movement to a
wider audience not as a partisan, but as a social scientist. This is the goal I believe is apparent in this work.

With respect to my own political sentiments, the research was decidedly a challenge for me. At times it was difficult to quietly study conservative Americans at a point in history when many conservative ideas I vehemently disagreed with were becoming policy. Nonetheless, I am sure that conducting research with consultants whose views I often (though not always) disagreed with was made easier by the non-partisan political organizing I had done for over a decade before graduate school. Saul Alinsky (1971), in Rules for Radicals, a book that many young political organizers like myself read (and thanks to Glenn Beck, many Tea Partyists as well), writes that organizers must overcome "psychological barriers to communication" (Alinsky 1971:xix) by subverting personal preferences that may run counter to the community with which one is organizing. When campaigning for ballot initiatives, which address singular topics, I learned and taught other campaign workers to focus on gaining support for the topic at hand regardless of whether a potential supporter held views on unrelated issues that one found distasteful. This disposition translated well to anthropological research conducted with conservatives and I am certain that my previous experience with political campaigns aided my effort to set aside my own political sensibilities in order to understand those animating local Tea Party participants.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THE STUDY OF POLITICAL CULTURE

Although I put aside my political sensibilities as best I could, my experience with political work is what brought me to study anthropology. After a long graduate school experience, my understanding of my discipline and many parts of the world in general have changed. But throughout this intellectual journey the initial motivation for my research, which
emerged from doing political work, is still intact and pertinent: How can ethnographic research and methods contribute to a better understanding of what motivates people to mobilize and act politically? The actual style of political work I did, person to person, “parking lot politics,” was often very similar to the type of political research I now do.

In the years I spent as a political organizer and operative on ballot initiative and candidate campaigns, most of my time was spent recruiting for, managing, and operating the "field" component of the campaigns. This is the component which interacts directly and face to face with the public. The field component operates alongside the media component, which produces television and radio ads and mailings. In smaller and less well-funded campaigns, the media component is small and may consist of one or two targeted mailings. In larger campaigns, the media is the primary component. On such campaigns, the field is typically starved in favor of the media and polling. However, as anyone who was ever walked precincts during an election can attest, campaign fieldwork involves semi-structured and free-flowing conversations. The “canvassers’” goal is attempting to match agendas with the voter by understanding their underlying concerns and perspective. These canvassers, through their conversations with voters are learning a great deal more about voters than what is garnered through polling. Provided the staff are properly versed in the issues, sufficiently motivated, and exist in sufficient numbers to contact many voters, canvassing is an extremely effective campaign strategy and data gathering strategy.

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7 There is often an accepted clash of incentives with strategy in political campaigns. Political consultants are typically paid a commission on every single airing of a television ad they produce. These premiums can add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The field, on the other hand does not produce such a windfall for the consultant. As a result many campaigns will rely upon media even if it is not the best strategy, while the precinct operations play a greatly diminished role.
My sense of the effectiveness of on-the-ground political canvassing in contrast to polling relates to one of my goals for this project: showing the advantages of qualitative research in political analysis and advocacy. Like canvassing, ethnographic research grasps a richer picture of voter concerns. Political and other advocacy campaigns strongly favor quantitative methods for targeting voters primarily out of habit and cost effectiveness. Yet I will show that qualitative methods have an important contribution to understanding political culture even for the purposes of political campaigns.

The limitations of polling and survey instruments were apparent in the early research on the Tea Party Movement. These quantitative methods often do not provide enough data for deeper analysis and in fact may have provided a false picture of the Tea Party. For instance, the 2009 CBS/New York Times poll found that 78% of Tea Party supporters had neither attended a rally or meeting nor donated money to the movement. In this portrayal, without any associated effort to understand the meanings associated with participation, a “supporter” was broadly defined to included activist, members of a Tea Party “issue public” (Converse 1964), as well as sympathetic observers. This lack of probing into forms of participation calls into question how precisely pollsters are conceptualizing and thus constructing the movement for the public. Unfortunately, in the early months of the movement, the definition of the “Tea Party” was thus muddled just at the moment when pollsters and surveyors could have been delineating the TPM’s political reach, level of grassroots participation, and ideological scope.

Public opinion polling aims to capture an aggregate of opinions at a given place and time (Herbst 1993). Some would argue that measuring public opinion in that manner does not in fact capture true public sentiment. Blumer (1948) argued that true public opinion emerges through the individuals’ affiliation with groups not by voicing their thoughts in isolation. Pierre Bourdieu
(1979; See also Herbst 1992) argues that public opinion polling assumes that issues have equal importance to interviewees, that people see a political question in the same context as the pollster and that all respondents have adequate information to make an educated decision.

Polling also assumes that the appropriate questions are in fact being asked, ones that will capture the beliefs and opinions that are the essence of what is being measured. Sometimes survey questions or the possible multiple-choice answers fail to provide the correct options for voters. Second, polling fails to capture the path that one takes to arrive at his or her opinion. How do people interpret issues, politicians and even elections? Bourdieu argued that depending upon different class positions, people may interpret poll questions from a political standpoint or from a moral/ethical standpoint, resulting in incommensurate responses.

Responses may also seem contradictory on the surface. For example, Strauss (1997) discussing apparent contradictions in political ideology, argues that sometimes political positions seem odd when weighed against established collectively-generated political frameworks such as fiscal conservative or social liberal. When considered in light of the paths by which individuals construct their personal political understandings, consistency was more easily identified. For instance Strauss references a woman who experienced an oppressive, abusive upbringing who articulated a consistent theme of being “hurt by people on top.” This personal history contributed to a political subjectivity that was pro-feminist, pro-life, and anti-welfare. In customary analysis, this is a contradiction to conventional political categories, yet consistent to someone equally concerned about protecting women, unborn children and the children of unwed mothers on public assistance.

Political scientist, Edward Schatz (2009) argues for the importance of "immersion" in political data collection and analysis and celebrates the small, yet growing number of political
ethnographies being produced by sociologists and political scientists (e.g. Cramer-Walsh 2004, Eliasoph 1998, Shapira 2013). He argues, as will most anthropologists, that ethnography produces data that may call into question generalizations, such as those produced in polling and surveys. Moreover he believes that ethnographic methods contribute "empirical soundness" by asking similar questions in different ways thus eliciting more meaningful responses. Finally, he argues that ethnography frees the researcher from abstract concepts and methodological technicalities and keeps them grounded in engagement with real people.

The ethnography of everyday Tea Partyists presented in this dissertation, in its most simple sense, adds answers to the “why” and the “how” that should accompany the primary question, “what do participants in this movement believe and/or why are they behaving this way?” These questions and answers together provide data that political professionals and non-profits need in order to adequately understand constituents and stakeholders. Although I have no illusions that political campaigns often do not have the resources or time to engage in ethnographic research, my hope is that this dissertation will reveal important perspectives on issue formation, political mobilization and subjectivity that often goes unnoticed by political professionals and by some of those who research political culture.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In the following pages I describe the emergence of the Tea Party, its prominence on the American political landscape and how it provides a space for every day citizens to realize a sense of political agency and activism. I then direct attention to the local Tea Party groups, showing their importance to the success of the movement and their role as influential actors on the local political landscape. In order to capture the importance of the movement in these different regards, the chapters shift from a wide perspective of the Tea Party in the context of American
political culture; a more narrow focus on individuals’ personal histories and their paths to the TPM; and finally settling on a longer analysis of the local groups, their members and actions.

The body of this dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 describes the Tea Party’s rise within the social, political and economic context of the United States in 2008 and 2009. Chapter 3 lays out an analysis of the different components of the movement and the movement’s construction of a figured world or meaning system that resonated with a large number of conservative citizens.

Chapter 4 discusses how my Tea Party consultants found or constructed a meaningful relationship between their personal lives and the movement. The chapter, employing data from the political autobiography interviews, underscores the personally significant connections between their lives and the figured world of the Tea Party Movement. Providing a more people-centered perspective on the dynamics mentioned in Chapter 2, the chapter illustrates how everyday citizens easily built “equivalences” between their own grievances and concerns and the perceived goals of the movement, an indicator of a successful movement as argued by Laclau (2005).

Chapter 5 discusses how the interpretive frame of the Tea Party figured world and their attendant collective political identities were used to make sense of a particular ongoing political struggle. Racism was and continues to be a consistent charge made against Tea Partyists and was the source of great frustration for those in my study. This chapter describes how Tea Partyists come to understand racial difference and inequality and how that understanding reflects how race is conceptualized in contemporary conservative and mainstream American politics.

Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to a description of the local Tea Party groups and their significance in the wider Tea Party movement. Chapter 6 describes some typical Tea Party
meetings and some of the activities within the LTPGs. I build upon theories of submerged social movement spaces (e.g. Hetherington 1998; Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1999) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) to show how LTPGs provide the basis for figured worlds performed in these spaces and fashion collective political identities.

Chapter 7 discusses the considerable variation across groups, including the different types of political activism practiced by local Tea Party groups. I explore in this chapter the different characteristics of LTPGs and how these characteristics relate to the types and fields of political activity. The chapter shows that Tea Party organizing and protest focused upon local political bodies and policies is one crucial and often overlooked aspect of the Tea Party’s success.

The dissertation concludes with what I see as the importance of linking social movement studies, political anthropology and mainstream electoral politics. I will also draw attention to what the study of contemporary conservative political movements and projects can contribute to anthropology and social movement.
Chapter 2  
The Emergence of the Tea Party

The first step in discussing the success of the Tea Party Movement is a description of the distinctive “cultural world” that the Tea Party has created, the sources of that world, and the historical conditions under which it emerged. Conservative media, conservative organizations and everyday citizens all contributed to the creation of a horizon of meaning which was consistent across space. Yet it allowed people from different backgrounds and histories to find varying personal relevance in the complex of meanings. Accordingly, I maintain that the key to understanding the Tea Party’s emergence, attraction, and spread must be couched in its combination of messages and practices that provided participants with meaningful interpretations of socio-political struggles, and, as accounted for in later chapters, spaces for everyday citizens to perform those meanings through practice in local Tea Party groups. In the following two chapters I trace out the broader socio-historical processes and the circulation and distribution of symbols and discourses that constitute the Tea Party’s distinctive cultural world.

EMERGENCE OF THE TEA PARTY INTERPRETIVE FRAME

Early developments of the TPM produced a collection of interpretive frames, constituted by symbols, images, and narratives, and set of practices that attached meaning to the sense of fear and apprehension that surrounded the economic downturn of 2008-2009. To a large degree, the Tea Party Movement emerged as a product of the unique historical circumstances during that time. Employing "political opportunity" social movement theory (e.g. McAdams 1982; McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1994), which attributes movement mobilization to the socio-political
environment, Meyer and Pullum (2014) describe the emergence of the Tea Party as a "response to bad news, that is, their perceived exclusion [from power] and the threat of unwanted policy initiatives" (Meyer and Pullum 2014:80) The perceived exclusion came from the devastating defeats suffered by the Republican Party in 2006 and 2008 and the disliked policy emanating from the new Democratic congress and Obama Administration. Similarly, McVeigh (2014), employing his theory of “power devaluation” (see McVeigh 2009), argues that people join social movements when their existing access to institutional power is blocked. These perspectives contribute to an understanding of the emergence of the Tea Party Movement, yet one must not ignore the fear and anger towards Barak Obama himself that was generated through conservative media such as Fox News and conservative talk radio.

Prelude

In the first months of 2009, the United States was at a unique point in its history. Through the final months of 2008 the economy had continued to deteriorate to a point where the crisis was being compared to the Great Depression. In January Barak Obama was inaugurated as the first Democratic president in eight years and the nation’s first African American to assume the office. To many Americans, the time was electric. There was a sense that America was in a place it had never been before, yet one that was slightly familiar. There were comparisons to Franklin Roosevelt such as the Time magazine cover for November 24, 2008 showing Obama with cigarette holder and pince nez glasses and crumpled Fedora under the headline “The New New Deal.”

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8 Political opportunity theory or political process theory directs “systematic attention to the political and institutional environment in which social movements operate” (Della Porta and Diani 2006:16). It shares a “rational” perspective with resource mobilization theory, which leads to them sometimes being considered as unified concepts.
Many conservative Americans also saw the nation entering a new era. But to many of them it was unsettling for reasons most non-conservatives did not share. For months the conservative media had been ringing the alarm regarding the danger of Barack Obama. The media driven discourses employed throughout the campaign acted to “other” the future president, portraying him as foreign and possessing beliefs that were out of sync with mainstream America. Videos began circulating of the pastor at Barack Obama’s home church in Chicago. The Rev. Jeremiah Wright was reported to practice a religious perspective termed "black liberation theology," portrayed as Marxist, violent and anti-white, and harking back to the 1960s and its forms of racial conflict. There were also reports of Obama sitting on an educational oversight board that included William Ayers, a professor of education at the University of Chicago and a former member of the violent antiwar organization, the Weather Underground. After living as a fugitive for several years, Ayers was cleared with the revelation of government suppression of leftist organizations in the 60s. Several of my consultants and multiple conservative websites claim (but I’ve been unable to confirm) that when acquitted, he said “guilty as sin and free as a bird. What a country, America!”

Stories such as these and countless references on talk radio had created alarm among conservatives and many others regarding Barack Obama. In his book on the rise of neo-racism and neo-nationalism in Denmark in the late 1990s, Peter Hervik (2011) discusses the active role the media assumed in creating widely shared understandings about the incompatibility of recent middle-eastern immigrants with Danish life. I will follow Hervik’s argument that understanding the emergence of new outlooks requires the researcher to consider not only the socio-political landscape, but also the media messages available to consumers for making sense of the new developments. Media, in other words, reshape, amplify, and circulate cultural resources that
their consumers may take up to understand political events and issues. My Tea Party consultants
vary greatly in how they processed the messages circulated by the media in 2008. At one
extreme were those, such as Betty, who questioned whether the President was an American.

I knew Obama was bad news. I don't know who this man is. I'm not convinced he's a
citizen. Morally and politically there are too many holes in his story. How could he
at one point not have any money for an apartment and then be in Indonesia? I just
can't believe we elected somebody named Barack Hussein Obama. I have no
problem with him being black, that's not my issue. My issue is who this man is. He
has socialist leanings. I think he's probably a Muslim and I think he's all these
horrible things. I was asking myself how I'm going to endure for four years.

Others like Peter became convinced that Barak Obama simply didn't hold the same
values as he and his fellow Tea Partyists did.

Peter: I liked Barack Obama. He's a good speaker. Then I started hearing things
about him. And I started doing the fact checks. And heck, he doesn't represent
anything I believe in and what America is and everything like that.
WW: Such as?
Peter: I don't think you should take from somebody that's working his butt off and
give it to someone who's just sitting around the house. I know people on welfare that
have better cars than I do. I work my butt off. Give a man a fish....

There were also
some of his acquaintances such as Bill Ayers and (Ayers’ wife and fellow Weather
Underground member) Bernadine Dohrn [who had different values than we did].

It is possible that Peter’s reference to people who do and do not work is related to a
moment of the 2008 presidential campaign that was very prominent among my Tea Party
consultants. On October 12, 2008, Joe Wurzelbacher, a.k.a. “Joe the Plumber” encountered
Barack Obama at a campaign event. Wurzelbacher said to the candidate that he was thinking of
buying a company and that the candidate’s tax policies were going to cost him money and they
conflicted with the "American dream". The president gave him a long answer about specifically
how his tax policies would influence a business like his, but then ended with the sentence "right

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9 Peter is referencing a proverb attributed to the Jewish philosopher Maimonides that stresses the importance of self-
reliance and the importance of people having opportunity instead of “handouts.” The entire proverb reads, “Give a
man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”
now everybody's so pinched that business is bad for everybody and I think when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody.” A small media storm ensued. Republican presidential nominee John McCain raised Joe the Plumber in the final presidential debate two days later, which led to each candidate having what could be described as an imaginary conversation with Joe the Plumber. The notoriety given the issue made it a prominent example of the fear and distrust conservatives held regarding Barak Obama. Sandy in Hamilton County said “I think that the defining moment was Joe the Plumber. ‘We want to spread the wealth around.’ I was wondering whether anybody else was listening to this. It was at that point when I really started paying attention.”

By Election Day many conservatives saw Barak Obama as someone foreign to American sensibilities. Not only was he considered a Marxist, but he also seemed to harken back to the conflict and turmoil of the 1960s, an era that many of these Americans would just as soon not revisit. To those who would make up the primarily older and white demographic of the TPM, these themes were frightening.

The main concern that alarmed future Tea Partyists was spending and debt. During the 2008 crisis, large government expenditures, mainly to prevent the collapse of the banking sector, began before the November election with TARP (the Troubled Asset Relief Program), initiated under George W. Bush. As Barak Obama took office this program was extended (the total expenditure would actually be reduced later) and a flurry of new programs begun; an 800 billion dollar stimulus package was passed. The government began a program to give people cash incentives to trade in older gas guzzling automobiles. The Federal Reserve became the primary shareholder of General Motors and the insurance company AIG10 and orchestrated the

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10 AIG or American International Group insured many of the mortgage backed securities that were defaulting as the housing crisis intensified in 2008.
bankruptcy of Chrysler Corporation. Finally the Federal Reserve began its first round of buying toxic bank securities in a program called “quantitative easing.” By March of 2009, The U.S. Treasury held $1.75 trillion in bank debt.

Many Tea Partyists, in local meetings and in my interviews, said these concerns over spending and debt intensified with Barack Obama, but many also made clear that out-of-control spending had been growing for some time. Many Tea Partyists would trace out unbridled spending much further back in history. One member of the Greene County Tea Party said in a meeting,

Congress has been out of control for decades; we could go all the way back to Roosevelt. The progressives have slowly been getting into power and people like myself have been blind to what's going on. Liberties are deteriorating and spending is getting out of control. Even Reagan, who did some good things, allowed our country to go down this progressive road, the socialist road.

This concern was also expressed by people regarding the recently-concluded George W. Bush Administration. Hirsch (2011) writes that the disaffected Republicans who would eventually become Tea Partyists, became disillusioned by the actions of George W. Bush. Many conservatives in fact felt a sense of betrayal throughout the Bush administration as he vetoed few spending bills and actively supported education reform, No Child Left Behind and an expanded prescription drug benefit for Medicare. Many of my consultants raised their disappointment with George W. Bush. As Richard put it,

Obama is dreadful. I don’t believe in the Communist conspiracy angle of some Tea Partiers but I feel Obama has a view of the world where the United States is a platform for some type of international global culture or global structure. But Obama was not my impetus for getting involved in the Tea Party. George W. Bush and Obama were both on the same track. Speaking with Robert, I learned of the build-up to his political activism.

There is a discomfort with what is happening in our country. In that fall, we have the financial bailout, crisis, TARP-this was all George Bush. In January is when Obama
took office, but all this was happening in the fall--our country moving from a representative democracy to some kind of socialist type-something.

WW: George Bush also?
Robert: Yes! Two years before, we were complaining about George Bush. My gosh, the deficit is growing, the budget keeps growing!

However, though the Bush Administration had increased debt during the post-9/11 wars, and the responsibilities of government in general had been growing since the Progressive era, it is not difficult to understand that the 2009 level of spending and debt along with a collapsing financial system was especially disconcerting to fiscal conservatives.

Moderate and liberal Americans tended to see the 2009 increase in spending and debt as troubling, yet a necessary or even inadequate government reaction to the economic crisis. To many conservatives, in contrast, it seemed to shift the world as they knew it. Perrin et al (2014), using a term coined by Anthony Giddens (1991), found, in his survey of Tea Partyists a high degree of “ontological insecurity” which Giddens defines as “instability of social life--when people’s sense of who they are and what they should do is disrupted by external events.” Most Americans had not witnessed such massive and sudden deficit spending on domestic and social programs and job creation in their lifetime. The most recent instance of spending increases of that magnitude not spent on tax cuts or defense, was during the Great Society programs of Lyndon Baines Johnson and the creation of Medicare, half a century before. One mentioned Johnson explicitly comparing the spending and the reasons behind them.

But with LBJ, we were not going off a cliff. In Vietnam, we were standing for what was right. We had a balanced budget. What got my attention was the bailing out of everybody like GM. Cash for clunkers was ridiculous. Paying everybody's mortgage, ridiculous. Lenders have been giving money to people they knew would never be able to pay it back.”

Darrell represented a fairly common outlook.

Darrell: Then after he was elected I said, oh boy, this is not good, but I will give the guy a chance. Let's see, maybe it'll be okay. Then within just a few months I saw the
spending and the spending and trillions and trillions of dollars that was going to—it was bizarre.

WW: where did you see that money going?
Darrell: I didn't know exactly where it was going. But it was just to like -- to spend your way out of something seemed wrong. To spend all that money. Then to borrow money. He’s spending money and we’re already in a hole, it's like digging the hole deeper.

During another meeting of the Greene County Tea Party, another member expressed his fear of the spending and debt, speaking in terms that give an indication of how Tea Partyists were viewing the increased debt and spending as a constricting obligation for years to come.

I'm very concerned about this country. Very simple to me: if you have $10 you don't spend $12. And we're doing that. We have put a burden on our grandchildren and their children that we will never get out of. The standard of living for them is going to be embarrassing. Last year I went to Greensboro to hear Dr. David Jeremiah try to put it in perspective. When we were kids we talked about $1 million. We couldn't fathom the million dollars. Then it went to $1 billion. Now were talking trillions. To put it in perspective if you have 1 million seconds, it's 2 1/2 years. 1 billion seconds is 12 years. 1 trillion seconds is 32,000 years. Let that sink in just a minute. We just raised our national debt limit by $2.4 trillion. On the first day they raised our debt by $2.39 trillion.

Simply, in the months leading up to late winter 2009, there were numerous sources contributing to a general unease and fear on the part of conservative Americans.

*Santelli’s “Rant”*

According to Kate Zernike (2010), shortly after President’s Obama’s inauguration, some citizens had already planned protests in opposition to the increased spending on economic stimulus. In early January 2009, a young woman named Keli Carender began blogging under the handle “Liberty Belle” calling for conservatives to come out and oppose Barak Obama’s policies (Meyer and Pullum 2014). On January 16th, she organized a rally in Seattle with a modest attendance that had been promoted by conservative columnist, Michelle Malkin (Zernike 2010).

These early rumblings from everyday citizens drew little attention but was closely followed by a large media episode in which people’s immediate concerns were given material
expression and linked to more general socio-cultural concerns. The Tea Party Movement was sparked by the media circulation of an emotional outburst of CNBC reporter Rick Santelli broadcast live from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on February 19th, 2009. With palpable emotions of indignation and anger, Santelli directed his ire at federal legislation that would provide federal subsidies to homeowners needing to renegotiate mortgage terms. This program was designed to slow the high foreclosure rates reached during the economic downturn. Santelli’s statement, laying the onus of the mortgage crisis at the feet of irresponsible “losers,” was wrapped in themes of personal responsibility, fairness, misplaced entitlement, ill-conceived government priorities, patriotism and a less-than-serious call for a “tea party” on the shores of Lake Michigan. These themes, which I will analyze below, raise some of the important discourses and other cultural resources that will enable the imagination and performance of the Tea Party’s complex of meaning or figured world I will discuss below.

The CNBC anchors in the studio were discussing the new legislation when the anchors went to Santelli for his comment. His response took the anchors by surprise.

How about this, President and new administration -- Why don't you put up a web site to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages, or would we like to, at least, buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people who might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water, instead of drinking the water.

In this statement, a primary theme emerges. Santelli enunciated a moral claim wrapped in everyday economic issues—those who (are likely to) do the work should be the ones to receive support and the rewards. Then turning to a group of floor traders behind him, he asks, "How many of you want to pay someone else's mortgage?" He then focused that statement by saying "how would you like to pay the mortgage for someone who bought a bigger house than they could afford?" To Santelli, the economic crisis was not caused by loose regulation of the
financial industry and lax underwriting standard for mortgages, but by the personal choices of individuals not living within their means. And, the government through their bailouts was enabling this bad behavior. Santelli is employing a discourse that conveys “populist producerism” (Kazin 1995). In Kazin’s account, populists construct enemies of those whom they see as “not producing anything,” such as the 19th century banking and railroad elites. In conservative populism today those not producing are the “losers” who require bailing out and are enabled in their follies by Democratic politicians. Neither the losers nor the enablers are like the floor traders behind Santelli, who he describes as “pretty straightforward [and] a pretty good statistical cross-section of America, the silent majority.”¹¹

A second theme was patriotism and the link to historical narratives of the founding fathers. Although Santelli’s use of the Boston Tea Party as an organizing symbol was not new in America politics (Lapore 2010), he did link it to new policies coming from Washington and managed to define actions to stop the policies as patriotism. “We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm going to start organizing.” Then just before the viewers were returned to the anchors in the studio, Santelli drew in one more historical referent. “I'll tell you what, if you read our Founding Fathers, people like Benjamin Franklin and Jefferson, what we're doing in this country now is making them roll over in their graves.” Simply, in Santelli’s portrayal, the founders practiced and instilled in the nation-both its people and its government-a set of values that have been betrayed by contemporary Americans and their government.

¹¹The “silent majority” is a term made famous by Richard Nixon during the Vietnam War describing virtuous moderate Americans who quietly went about their lives which he contrasted to the many loud Americans protesting the Vietnam War and civil and women’s rights.
Noteworthy is Santelli’s effective move in the ongoing cultural politics over the meaning of fiscal policy (Alvarez et al. 1998). Sandra Morgen (2011) describes a major effort that has gone on for years that she terms “taxpayer identity politics,” a historical process of identification begun during the New Deal and driven by conservative and corporate interests. The taxpayer is cast as an overburdened producer of funding for irresponsible and insatiable government spending which is invariably spent on an undeserving “other” such as welfare recipients and more recently, public employees. I maintain that Santelli and the emerging Tea Party discourse, tapped into the resentment that taxpayer identity politics has helped to foment, yet enunciated a more deep-seated cultural anxiety. Santelli reflected what Cohen and Arato (1984) term “the cultural politics of neo-conservatism,” where the root of the national crisis is figured as a worsening culture of dependency at the expense of historic and defining American values such as achievement and self-reliance and “principles of order” such as private property. Some of my consultants would use the term “American exceptionalism” in this context, while others would phrase the problem as a rejection of founding “principles.” Columnist Shelby Steele described it memorably as “trading the burdens of greatness for the relief of mediocrity” (Steele 2011).

Santelli and the emerging Tea Party combined the decades-old cultural politics with constitutional literalism and compelling patriotic images. In short, the diffuse confusion, fear and anger over seemingly out of control government, negligent politicians, and faulty citizenship was clearly framed for many conservative Americans as an outcome of a government that was not being held in check by the firm boundaries specified in the Constitution. These boundaries are supposed to be upheld by citizens motivated by patriotism, responsibility, and morality as

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12 Alvarez et al (1998) define cultural politics as “the processes enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other.”
extolled in the revolutionary era and personified in the moral examples set by George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and other of the nation's founders.

The widely and repetitively circulated clip of Santelli’s rant set in motion an articulation linking different symbolic elements into a new single discourse (Hall et al. 1996; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) encompassing patriotism, history, capitalism and emotions of indignation, fear and a sense of betrayal of history and the country’s greatness. None of these separate elements were necessarily new as conservative themes (Berlet 2012, Diamond 1995, Phillips-Fein 2009), but they were merged at a unique historical conjuncture (Grossberg 2006) where new meanings emerge in particular arrangements of social forces and events. The importance of this articulation was that it brought together a “package” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989) of symbolic devices, moral appeals, metaphors etc. that form interpretive frames of an issue which had resonance (Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson 1992) with many and motivating them to seek out the emerging movement.

I asked Janine about her initial involvement with the TPM, she began with Santelli.

I actually saw that excerpt and as soon as he said, ‘this is a Tea Party’, you know, it’s time for us to have an old fashioned Tea Party. I can’t remember exactly what he said and I thought, ‘that makes sense. That’s exactly-. It’s time for us to stand up and say we’re out of control here. We’re really out of control and someone needs to stand up.

Santelli’s rant effectively forged an interpretation of events that was meaningful and emotionally appropriate for a large number of Americans. The episode could very easily have disappeared as the news cycle moved on to something else. However the discourses were quickly picked up by different political actors who would supplement the frames with new concerns, visions, emotions and imagined worlds and lay a foundation for the forging of a distinctive collective political identity.
THE THREE COMPONENTS OF THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

Santelli’s rant was a dominant story on that news day and it also set in motion concerted organizing strategies by what would become the important components of the movement. These components were: 1) national-level conservative advocacy organizations—some existing; some emerging—that would become closely associated with the Tea Party Movement as national Tea Party organizations (NTPO); 2) conservative media primarily Fox News and conservative talk radio that would supply the movement with a constant stream of relevant images and material; and 3) local groups of everyday citizens many of whom would form local tea party groups (LTPGs).13

Shortly after Santelli’s outburst, approximately 50 small protests occurred on February 27, 2009. These were organized by a group of activist conservatives who came together shortly after Barack Obama’s inauguration under the twitter handle #TopConservativesOnTwitter (Lo 2012). Jenny Beth Martin, a former conservative political consultant, began a social network on the Ning platform to organize like-minded conservatives that within months would become Tea Party Patriots, an organization that developed into one of the primary NTPOs (Zernike 2010).

The other primary NTPO, FreedomWorks, which would provide assistance to Tea Party Patriots (Fetner and King 2014), also began organizing within hours of Santelli’s rant.

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13When first developing the concept of three components, I considered including Tea Party-aligned politicians in the structure. I decided to not include them because I did not think that my consultants would have considered them part of the movement, I did not see nearly the same activity by them as compared to NTPOs and because the anti-politician sentiment was so strong among members of the movement. There was a Tea Party Caucus in the United States House of Representatives at that point, yet it seemed short on action and results. Furthermore, when the Tea Party Caucus was formed some Tea Partyists believed it was an attempt by the Republican Party to co-opt the emerging movement (Vogel 2010).

Although the Tea Party Caucus has been inactive since late 2012 (Newhauser 2013), at this point I would consider Tea Party aligned politicians as a component of the movement. Unlike 2011, I believe that there are several very strong political actors in the United States Congress that clearly understand and circulate the Tea Party figured world. For example, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, and the 42 members of the House Freedom Caucus wield some influence on policymaking, strong influence on discourse and, as indicated by the resignation of House Speaker John Boehner, influence on the actual functioning of the institution.
FreedomWorks had attempted to use the tea party symbolism years before in an unsuccessful attempt at tax reform. Soon after Santelli’s rant, FreedomWorks had established a website at the address IamWithRick.com where people were encouraged to plan protest for April 15 and where they could also receive tips and guidelines for organizing a protest, making signs, writing press releases and giving soundbites. FreedomWorks, an established libertarian-leaning advocacy organization that was once affiliated with the Koch brothers, also created a Google map in which people could register their protest or find protests in their areas. Brendan Steinhauser, FreedomWorks national campaign director, followed the map closely and attempted to offer some type of coordination. For instance if he found more than one protest in one city he would contact the organizers to convince them to consolidate their protest to achieve a greater audience (Zernike 2010). But for the most part, the on-the-ground organizers were newly minted, nonprofessional, Tea Party enthusiasts.

Later in 2009, a third major NTPO would also emerge. Americans for Prosperity emerged from the 2004 breakup of the libertarian-leaning advocacy group Citizens for a Sound Economy founded by Charles and David Koch. CSE became FreedomWorks under the direction of Dick Armey and CSE Foundation became Americans for Prosperity that remained under the control of David Koch. Both FreedomWorks and AFP would play a large role in the movement, providing issue information, grassroots trainings and subsidized charter busses to large events.

In addition to what would become national Tea Party organizations, conservative media also begin to organize around Tea Party themes soon after the Santelli episode. Fox News alongside conservative talk radio, was the primary media-based organizer of the nascent Tea Party movement. Fox News, a division of News Corporation was formed by Roger Ailes, a former conservative media consultant for Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Herbert
Walker Bush. In his first meeting with News Corporation chairman, Rupert Murdoch, they both agreed that the liberal media perspective was becoming the dominant perspective. Both saw the need for a conservative alternative to what they saw as the “liberal” CNN (Auletta 2003). By the early 2000's, Fox News along with talk radio were propelling a consistent conservative narrative that preserved the legacy of Ronald Reagan and cultivated mistrust and outrage toward mainstream media, Democrats and the power of government (Jamieson and Cappella 2008). Williamson et al. (2010) conclude that Fox News is an actual social movement organization and in their analysis of news coverage of the Tea Party movement in 2009, found that there was a much greater amount and duration of coverage by Fox compared to that of CNN.

But beyond simply heavy news coverage of the emerging Tea Party, Fox News was actively cultivating the movement. Fox News host Sean Hannity aired the Santelli clip on the same day and like FreedomWorks, the Fox News Channel would also create a website and actively promote April 15 tax day tea parties. Fox produced its own map showing events around the country directing viewers to its own website. The network also sent anchors to several of the events and advocated the views of the nascent movement (Hananoki 2009).

The most significant media component was the Glenn Beck Show (both on Fox at the time and as a syndicated talk radio show) which more than any other source created and/or circulated many of the important cultural resources, e.g., the “12 Principles of the Founding Fathers,” that became important in the collective construction of the Tea Party figured world. I will discuss more of the religious aspects of the Tea Party in the next chapter, but early in March, Glenn Beck launched his “9-12 Project”, named for his belief in the powerful sense of solidarity he felt among Americans on the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The 9-12 project, heavily promoted on his television show revolved around 12 often-religious principles and nine distinct
values which he claimed were possessed and practiced by the founding fathers and that characterize American greatness. If employed today, they would fuel America’s return to its previous greatness. He urged people to form small 9-12 groups to discuss and practice these values. Beck spotlighted the emerging TPM often on his shows and helped organize one of the largest Tea Party rallies, “the 9-12 rally” on September 12, 2009 on the National Mall, officially named the Taxpayer March on Washington.

Working through these networks and others were thousands of every day citizens inspired by Santelli or other broadcast media who organized rallies and or sought them out in their areas. Most of my consultants made spontaneous statements indicating they quickly identified with the people they were seeing on television and were inspired by the images. In an interview, Paul and his wife describe their first impression of the Tea Party. "When we first saw the Tea Party on television, we understood exactly what they were trying to do. They wanted to make a change in this country at the grassroots. They were just pissed off at both sides just like we were. And I thought, “Wow, there's people out there like me.” In a sense these images provided a kind of relief for many, seeing other people displaying their deep patriotism and willingness to stand up to what they saw as an out of control government. As Trey put it, "I felt that the people were speaking for me. The people were echoing my sentiments that…. I think it was a sense of comfort. I felt comfortable knowing that other people saw what I saw." Wendell had spent years as a local Republican Party official, watching the grassroots party structure slowly decline. "When I saw that many people who were moved politically and they had decided to stop griping and be active, I thought ‘at last there is hope for this country’.”

Several of my consultants stated that soon after hearing Santelli’s outburst and seeing reports of the emergence of protests, they searched online for demonstrations in their areas.
Some drove miles to stand tentatively on the sidewalk in front of a post office or federal courthouse with hand-made signs along with others, mostly strangers, similarly unsure of what precisely to do, but confident because of media images that there were others like them marching and chanting and holding signs.

"STOP THE BAILOUTS-that was my first Tea Party sign", said Darrell, a retired machinist who before the Tea Party, had never considered protesting anything-"except maybe if they had run out of beer or something.” Seeing the protests on television, "I felt like I wanted to do something. I didn't want to just be a bystander. I wanted to at least carry a sign. I would feel like I was doing something. The first protest I went to was in Fayetteville I drove all the way down there. There were only about 25 of us and we marched around for a while with our signs at the federal courthouse.” Marshall, in the adjacent county to Darrell but unacquainted with him, searched online for “anything Tea Party” after seeing Santelli. He also headed to the Fayetteville protest. Marshall would later meet local Tea Party organizers in his own county at one of the Tax Day protests and become a leader in the group, the Burgoyne County Tea Party. Further west another of my consultants, Peter, was also motivated by Santelli and the burgeoning movement.

I was listening to one of the [conservative talk radio] shows and I heard Rick Santelli’s rant. Then I saw the video. He's right, the government is overspending. Our government is doing this to the people and then all of a sudden these little Tea Party groups start popping up. I started googling ‘tea party groups’ and came upon Tea Party Patriots. Right around March, the Charlotte Tea Party had a rally regarding spending. I went to Charlotte and made a sign. I was hearing people speaking that were pretty good. The people around me were pretty like-minded.

Peter later founded the Franklin County Tea Party that I will revisit in Chapter 6.

These three components operating in those early months of 2009, provided an important beginning of the movement and illustrates its networked architecture. The components were separate and were made up of multiple separate actors within them. Yet like many other
contemporary social movements there was no hierarchical structure, it was “reticulated” (Gerlach and Hine 1970), having connections through different networks (e.g. Castells 2012). Radio and TV, social media, listservs and the personal networks of everyday citizens were all able to circulate strikingly similar cultural resources including symbols, narratives and emotional displays focused on similar grievances.

CONCLUSION

In the early months of 2009, conservative Americans’ unease about the direction of the nation increased. Their fears of Barack Obama had already been stoked before the election, yet in the first months of the administration, these fears were further inflamed by the activist, deficit-funded recovery legislation proposed and passed by the new President and the 111th Congress. These fears were given form by the effective interpretive frame presented by Rick Santelli and then expanded and circulated by conservative media, elite organizations like FreedomWorks and everyday citizens. I maintain that this effective framing was not, however, the key to the Tea Party Movement’s success. Something much more profound was occurring in which a powerful collection of cultural resources and much wider concerns were coalescing into a unique political style, signaling a shift in many conservatives’ political identity.
Chapter 3
Fashioning a Figured World of Tea Party Politics

THE LIMITATIONS OF FRAMING THEORY

Santelli’s rant functioned as an effective collective action frame (Benford and Snow 1988, Gamson 1992) that resonated with the concerns of many nascent Tea Partyists and motivated them to seek out the emerging movement. Framing theory is employed in social movement studies to account for aspects of meaning-making by social movements through appeals that situate the movement’s discourse and symbols within a target group’s cultural understandings (Snow and Benford 2000). And while framing effectively provides a language for capturing these first moments of the TPM, the theory proves limited for appreciating what developed after those initial moments. The movement grew into a dynamic, polycephalous, multi-vocal formation of shifting components each involved in the cultural production of new meanings, practices and identities. It produced a figured world that people lived. People were not just hearing descriptions and interpretations of Tea Party grievances on television and radio; they were also hearing and seeing rallies and protests portraying everyday citizens developing, performing and displaying dispositions characterized by emotional displays and colorful practices and sentiments. Popular media can provide resources for interpreting events and even fashioning subjectivities (e.g. Abu-Lughold 2002, Anderson 1984), but the Tea Partyists, drawing upon these media images, were together creating productive social spaces and relations in connection with these resources. They were forging, performing and expressing collective identities. They themselves became generative. They added new cultural resources such as dressing in Revolutionary era garb and drew in additional historical props such as the Gadsden
flag’s “DON’T TREAD ON ME”. This dynamic and productive quality also resulted in meanings unwelcome by many in the Tea Party, such as the display of Confederate flags and overtly racist images and references to the President.

Therefore, much more than simply providing interpretations, all three components were involved in the production of a widespread collective political identity that fore-fronted action and reinforced basic themes applicable across a wide variety of political concerns. In its most basic sense a collective identity is based on the sharing of cognitive, moral and emotional connections (Polletta and Jasper 2001). More specifically people fashion collective identities under specific historical circumstances using cultural resources at hand in response to changing circumstances (Holland et al. 2008). These cultural resources may become especially potent when articulated in relation to a “figured world” and the identities relevant to that world–a horizon of meaning against which activities, acts and actors are read (Holland et al 1998). The concept of figured worlds is part of the theoretical perspective of social practice theory. A social practice theory of identity (see for example Escobar 2008, Holland et al. 1998, Holland and Lave 2001, Satterfield 2002, Urietta 2010) builds on the school of identity theory developed by G.H. Mead (1912, 1934) as modified by the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky. Individuals are conceived as forming, performing, and inhabiting collectively constructed worlds where specific characters, symbols, practices and discourses are recognized and differentially valued. In the spaces where these figured worlds are performed, selves, people and their actions are interpreted against these horizons of meaning and often form sensibilities and dispositions recognized in these worlds.

In her ethnography of the northwest logging disputes of the 1990s, Terre Satterfield (2002) found that the collective identities of pro-logging and anti-logging activists were
characterized by distinct figured worlds associated with different practices, narratives and symbolic meanings. As the different sides of the dispute interacted indirectly through the media and sometimes directly in spaces of local practice such as demonstrations, hearings and debates, intimate and collective identities developed and shifted. Both sides of the dispute were constituted by cohesive solidarities that valued the forest and nature, though in different ways. Different ways of dress characterized these solidarities which were also marked by different emotional practices and content, such as loggers’ sense of stigma as the public rejected their occupations, and by opposing narratives of the conflict. Furthermore, from the perspectives associated with the different identities, the past differed, as did visions and commitments to the future. These different cultural worlds indicated a different way of interpreting the conflict and certain aspects of the world in general. Satterfield referred to the two sides as "talking past each other yet sounding similar" because each side often claimed ownership over some of the same artifacts – what I have been referring to as cultural resources- though investing those resources with their own meanings. For example, the Northern Spotted Owl, an endangered species whose presence sparked the entire conflict, evoked different, yet equally strong meanings depending on whether one was an environmentalist or a pro-logger activist.14

"Figured worlds are evinced in practice through the artifacts employed by people in their performance" (Holland et al 1998:61). One of the most vivid illustrations of artifacts and face to face recruitment of neophytes into a figured world, is a description of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) by Carol Cain (1991, 1998). Those who come to Alcoholics Anonymous by choice15 are

14I attended a union-organized rally on the North Carolina capitol grounds in Raleigh in 2011 at which Tea Party groups counter-demonstrated. Toward the end of the rally as each body of protesters eyed the other across the street, the union protesters began singing “God Bless America.” Tea Partyists seeing themselves as the true patriots of the two groups, began singing the same song. Each group attempted to sing louder in an attempt to successfully possess this mantle of true patriotism.

15Attending a certain number AA meetings is often included in the sentence handed down for alcohol related arrests.
seeking to change the un-manageable life of a "practicing alcoholic." She writes that as one proceeds through AA, one is drawn into a new figured world of the sober alcoholic. This figured world is created and reproduced in the individual AA meetings, an alternative world of socially produced and culturally constructed activities that the "newcomer" learns to participate in as part of their new sober identity. The figured world is also populated by cultural resources or artifacts which are symbolically marked objects that become a link to and a materialization of the figured world. These include the tokens (poker chips in Cain’s study) which mark milestones of sobriety (24 hours, one month, five years, etc.), texts such as the book Alcoholics Anonymous, called the "big book", emotional accounts and the ritualized practices of telling stories about one's path to sobriety. “These objects originate outside the performers and are imposed upon people through the current institutional treatments and within interaction to the point that they are self-administered” (Holland et al. 1998:62).

Anyone observing the Tea Party can easily discern a distinctive cultural world. The Tea Party has created a set of identities, a set of practices, emotions and symbols that constitute what it means to be a Tea Party member. In the case of the TPM, cultural resources are objects such as the Constitution, historical figures such as the founding fathers, social identities such as “liberals” and “patriots,” discourses such as those that construe government spending as out of control, historical narratives such as the America’s Judeo-Christian moral foundation, and emotional expressions such as defiant anger. These elements make up the collective identity of the Tea Party. Tea party members perform their version of the collective identity in a range of activities and practices including organizing political rallies, counter protesting, making and displaying signs, dressing in colonial era outfits and telling stories of outrage at meetings of LTPGs. Their grievances and claims are framed in expressions of indignation, assertions of
patriotism and a sense of felt danger. They share visions and symbols with other Americans, such as freedom and the Constitution, but they have invested specific meanings in and made claims of their own over those symbols.

Figured worlds may be remarkably consistent across space as different actors, developing similar outlooks, are connected through networks (Niesz and Krishnamurthy 2014). Consistency is most commonly achieved through mass communication where media discourses have been shown to be appropriated and used as artifacts to constitute shared cultural worlds (Anderson 1984, Spitulnik 1997). Hervik (2011) traced how news media and politicians problematized immigration in Denmark in the 1990s. Tracing the deployments of these discourses through interviews with regular Danes, he describes the development of a figured world of cultural racism in the 1990s which opened a space for the election of far-right, anti-immigrant parties such as the Danish People’s Party. The figured world of the TPM is also characterized by the circulation of a distinctive set of cultural resources.

THE FIGURED WORLD OF THE TEA PARTY

At the heart of the Tea Party figured world is a core narrative that committed patriots can end the tyranny of bailouts, excessive taxes, dependency and dishonest politicians by reconnecting Americans to the historical legacy of the nation’s founding, by restoring the founding principles of personal freedom and responsibility, and by reinstating firm constraints upon government. This narrative undergirds the valorization and championing of three broad and overlapping sets of practices and dispositions evident in gatherings of Tea Party groups. The three, which I will expand upon in the next section, are: patriotism (the demonstration of patriotism in public office and in everyday practice including the forthright honoring of heroic and virtuous episodes from American history and the willingness to stand for fiscal restraint and
other principles no matter what); fundamentalism (an insistence on cultural, political and economic fundamentalism most vividly displayed in adherence to the literal meaning of the constitution and the rejection of “RINOs” (Republican in Name Only) in favor of all but the most inflexible conservatives.), and emotional expression (the emotional display of indignation and resolve). In Chapter 6, I describe the performance of this figured world in the local Tea Party groups. However, prior to that, it is first useful to discuss these three sets of dispositions in more depth.

The Washington D.C. sky was clear and a bright sun was shining that first week of April, 2011. I was emerging from a chartered bus at the west front of the United States Capitol with a couple dozen members of the Burgoyne County Tea Party. We had left the county that morning at 5 AM on one of several busses on the eastern seaboard chartered by the NTPO Americans for Prosperity (AFP) to ferry people to the "Stop Spending Now" rally. The rally was organized by AFP to show support for conservative Republicans Congressmen who were blocking an increase in the United States debt ceiling, the periodic resolution passed by Congress to maintain the federal government's borrowing authority. Empowered by many newly elected "Tea Party conservatives", these Republicans had been holding up the resolution threatening to allow the federal government to continue to function only in exchange for broad and deep spending cuts of $100 billion.

During the six hour bus ride, I had met several members of the Burgoyne County Tea Party. According to Sue, the co-founder of this chapter, those present were seasoned activists who had been involved in 17 protests and grassroots lobbying events since the chapter was formed two years before. As we walked along the path from the West front to the East front where the rally was to be held, I surveyed the group. Most of the members were of retirement
age. Most wore red T-shirts emblazoned with the Burgoyne Tea Party logo over their button-down shirts and blouses. Two of our group were dressed in colonial attire. John had on a navy blue coat with gold trim which reminded me of an officer in the Continental Army. Travis wore a coat of a much brighter blue, cream-colored breeches and high socks and white wig--more the looks of a noncombatant. John, the more outgoing of the two, carried a hand drawn sign which said "SHUT ‘ER DOWN", signifying the demand that Republicans should risk a government shutdown and the accompanying fiscal chaos, in order to get the spending cuts they desired. Also in our group were a couple of younger women and a 16-year-old high school student who would later dash between the House and the Senate office buildings (beyond the opposite ends of the capitol-no short distance) in order to meet both of his heroes, Congressman Ron Paul and his son Senator Rand Paul, before the buses departed again for North Carolina.

As we came around to the east side of capital, there was a crowd of 600 or 700 people, which though large, was dwarfed by the vast expanse of lawn and trees between the House of Representatives side of Capitol and the Library of Congress. In the center of the group was a podium where speakers would address the rally. People milled about some carrying 16 x 24 cardboard signs distributed by the AFP that read "CUT SPENDING NOW". Others carried their own handmade signs with such slogans as "WE WANT LIBERTY, NOT TYRANNY-NO OBAMACARE!"; Several more signs which simply stated "SHUT IT DOWN" and one with a cartoon drawing of a sinister looking Barack Obama with the caption which read "LIAR, LIAR, AMERICA ON FIRE.".

The rally included remarks from several conservative officeholders popular with Tea Partyists. Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana announced "The Debt Stops Here! If liberals in the Senate

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16 The opposite side of the sign read “I am AFP,” an attempt to show that the organization, largely founded and funded by the billionaire industrialists, Charles and David Koch, had a grassroots component.
would rather play political games than accept a modest down-payment on fiscal discipline and reform, then I say 'SHUT IT DOWN!' The crowd responded with a chant of "SHUT IT DOWN!  SHUT IT DOWN!"

Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio warned, "This spending fight is the central fight of our time. This is why we need patriots like you to step forward and say that this matters for our country and for our kids and for our grandkids." He then evoked the biblical story of David and Goliath encouraging them as underdogs.

AFP leader, Tim Phillips in just two sentences was able to associate President Barack Obama with criminality, racial discord and elitism in his remarks. "President Obama told Republican leaders to act like adults. You know where he is today? He's in New York having lunch with [civil rights activist] Al Sharpton, who owes the government $1.8 million in back taxes..... Tell President Obama to put the golf clubs away and stop hanging out with tax cheats and start acting like an adult himself!"

The highlight of the rally was a speech by Tea Party favorite, Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota.

You came here because you care more about your government and your country than your own comfort and enjoyment. You are reasonable, fair-minded people who are fed up with government spending and who are saying to Congress: 'be principled, be practical, be reform-minded, and do these 3 things: One, Don't tax us anymore. We are taxed enough already; Two, stop spending. Stop spending more money than you have; and three, start operating within the limits of the Constitution.

The rally was finished by 2 PM and by four o'clock we were back on the bus arriving at our starting point at 10 PM, 17 hours after departing.

This is a scene that most Americans observing a televised Tea Party protest in 2011 would have been familiar with: a large rally of primarily white, conservative citizens carrying hand-written signs, the Stars & Stripes and a few yellow Gadsden flags. Some are dressed in
colonial garb, but all advocating uncompromising positions justified by their patriotism and the words of the Constitution. Those who thought of Tea Party local groups as “Astroturf” would have focused on the placards supplied by the AFP. Those who knew that the local groups were independently organized and operated would have known the groups were a hybrid of grassroots and NTPO organizing.

This description provides a glimpse of how the themes of the core narrative of the figured world were performed. The speakers addressed the existential danger of national debt and runaway spending using carefully chosen words that match the symbols and convictions of the attendees. Michelle Bachmann stressed the constitution as the ultimate test of legislation. She mentioned reasonable people who have a duty to save the republic; Tim Phillips evoked the “otherness” of President Obama. And finally Mike Pence evoked an uncompromising stance: sending the nation into a fiscal crisis overweighs any compromise. Patriotism, fundamentalism and emotional displays of indignation were each present in the protest there in Washington creating a bricolage understandable to any Tea Partyist. Less obvious in this scene, was the way in which these discrete qualities, were interwoven and imbricated into a complex political style.

**Patriotism**

In my analysis of the figured world constructed by the Tea Party Movement, patriotism stands out as a quality and disposition central to many of the cultural resources used in the movement. The meanings of “patriot” are complex. It is a term used by many of my Tea Party consultants and is in the names of many of the LTPG’s. The anthropological literature suggests that patriotism is likely tied to nationalism.

Bruce Kapferer (1988) begins his book on Australian and Sinhalese nationalism with the sentence "Nationalism makes the political religious and places the nation above politics." As I
will discuss, though his book describes more violent forms of nationalism, I find his discussion of nationalism very useful in the analysis of the Tea Party. In many ways, the manner in which he describes nationalism more resembles my idea of patriotism in the Tea Party than the nationalism I learned from Benedict Anderson (1983). 17

Viroli (1995), comparing nationalism and patriotism, argues that nationalism emerged from patriotism adding new meanings such as ethnic unity and purity, which was not necessarily an aspect of patriotism prior to the rise of the nation-state. Patriotism he argues "acts at resuscitating, strengthening and directing the passions of a particular people with a specific shared cultural/historical identity" (Viroli 1995:8). He describes nationalism as the language of oneness, uniqueness and homogeneity. I found both designations present in Kapferer’s discussion of nationalism and both useful when discussing the Tea Party. The first reflects the TPM’s aim to resuscitate a shared primordial American culture including its honored narratives heroes and texts. The second voice, of homogeneity, reflects the single-minded embrace of that identity as the key to American renewal. 18

Viroli uses the term “resuscitating” as an aspect of patriotism. I have stressed the desire by Tea Partyists to rejuvenate a declining American cultural identity. Part of the Tea Party’s version of American cultural identity is the open demonstration of pride and patriotism, which is

17I have also decided to use the term "patriot" because not only is it the language of my consultants, but also the language of their models, the founders of the country. According to the Oxford English dictionary, Revolutionary Americans considered themselves “patriots,” as opposed to say, nationalists. Finally when discussing the American right, nationalism is easily associated with far right nationalism or what is called “white nationalism,” a nebulous term which is characterized by white supremacy, neo-Nazi ideology, anti-Semitism etc. In fact an early study on the Tea Party attempted to make this connection (I critique their approach in Chapter 5), entitling their document "Tea Party Nationalism” in order to make that link.

18Homogeneity is also reflected in many Tea Partyists’ ideas of American cultural identity (which I discuss in later in this chapter and their performance of whiteness, which I will discuss further in Chapter 5.
seen by many as no longer socially acceptable in America. As Roberta, an upper middle class retiree put it:

People are not as patriotic as they used to be. I think there is a reawakening of patriotism because we are getting ready to lose our country and our freedom. But when I grew up, we put your hand over your heart for the Pledge of Allegiance. We sang “God Bless America” and we sang religious songs. I learned all the armed services songs. Today it is considered poor taste. Are you going to step on somebody's toes? Well, you are going to step on people's toes anyway. Step on them for the right reasons.

The nationalist voice of homogeneity is also apparent in this utterance as the consultant is in essence saying that there is one interpretation of America and that that interpretation must be enunciated regardless of others who may hold different interpretations.

But the most evident of patriotic practices in the Tea Party figured world involves emulating, learning and evoking particular interpretations of revolutionary era American history. In fact, in many cases when I asked consultants about their patriotism, the response centered upon the sacrifices of the founding fathers. Kapferer, like Viroli, employs the term nationalism to describe a form of worship of things defined as “the founding myths and legends of the nation and the customs and traditions and language of the nation” (Kapferer 1988:1). Many political movements have used American history as “a tool for battle…and a source of inspiration and social identity” (Skocpol and Williamson 2011), and historical accounts are considered foundational by the Tea Party. For my Tea Party consultants, understanding American history provides the necessary lens for grasping the grave condition of American cultural identity. As Darrell put it, “You want to go to [County] commissioners meetings, that's nice. But I don't really care that much about it. Because I care if our country is going back to the Constitution and our leaders are going to bring pride back our country. And that we get back to our founding fathers’ great experiment. All this other stuff doesn't matter anyway.” Implicit in Darrell's
description is the sense that reconnecting with the historical roots of American greatness is a key to renewal. Glenn Beck, especially his previous television show on the Fox News Channel, was a primary source expressing a sense of urgency wrapped in history.

During the summer of 2010, Beck spent much of this time on the theme of the final words of the Declaration of Independence. The closing sentence of the document reads, “With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” In addition to Beck stressing the spiritual content of this phrase, the willingness to commit their lives, fortunes and sacred honor were stressed by Beck as foundational characteristics of the founders and a model for a person’s own personal spiritual renewal. These episodes were extremely significant for Tea Party members I maintain, because he effectively sutured the founding fathers to the moral themes of the figured world through a practice of patriotism that people could follow and that would lead to a personal transformation into "better" Americans.

The use in everyday life of “our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor” would prove to hold strong meaning among Tea Party members as indicated in several discussions I had with them. As will be discussed below, words from the founding fathers are often given literal and near-divine meaning, however here, in three simple words and in the context that most every one of the Tea Partyists knew from school, the founders are shown to have extraordinary qualities. The founders were aware that their signature on the Declaration of Independence could, if they were captured, lead to their execution. They also expected to lose their material comfort and well-being in what was expected to be a difficult war for independence against the world's preeminent power. But above the more tangible qualities of life and possessions, was a pledge of honor to the other signers. In essence, the signers were committed to a cause that in Kapferer’s
words, is above politics - the good of the new nation and the protection of its patriots were above any political differences and conflicts that might have been apparent as members of the Continental Congress.

The words "honor" and "sacrifice" were used by those I interviewed several times with some using the exact phrase "sacred honor." This sense of sacrifice and commitment was brought out as people engaged in the activities of the Tea Party. Robert alludes to this meaning while describing how his Tea Party organizing was interfering with his home and work life.

My wife asked me before the event (A rally he was organizing)-it was the busiest time of year and here I was applying energy and time away from my family and business to do this. Someone had called me at like 9:30 at night and she asked me when this was going to stop. I told her that I didn't think it was ever going to stop. I loved it [before] when I just lived my life without any intrusion and not worry about stuff.

Richard, an officer in the United States Navy Reserve, was torn by his duty to uphold the Constitution and his sense that his loyalty to the Constitution may someday conflict with orders from leaders who he may feel are not adhering to the document.

I'm still in the Navy Reserve. I took the same oath as congressmen and senators take. My oath is not to elected officials. It is to the Constitution. I sit around on reserve weekends and asked [myself] what our responsibilities are under that oath when elected officials are not following the Constitution. That led me to thoughts that I didn't want to think about. I have had these conversations with other officers. Joining the Tea Party was another way for me to support and defend the Constitution.

The NTPOs and the media components of the Tea Party movement were also committed to highlighting what Viroli terms the “myths and heroes” of America’s founding. One of Beck's most famous activities was "Founders Fridays", in which he would spotlight a specific founder on the Friday show. More locally in North Carolina, a conservative group, the John Locke Foundation, found new audiences for its dramatized debates between actors playing Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on the topic of "the future of America."
Historian Jill Lapore, maintains that the Tea Party movement, Glenn Beck, Hannity, and Santelli, for that matter, are practicing "anti-history", where time is erased. "Either we are there 200 years ago or they are here among us." (Lapore 2010:8) The founders and their ideas are contemporaneous with say the debate over healthcare. And by claiming the founders would hold a conservative interpretation of the reform, the founding fathers are described as "rolling over in their graves". Lapore sees this as a type of anti-intellectualism, holding a specific, inaccurate view of the relationship between the past and present because it ignores, as no good historian would, the context under which past acts and developments occurred. I experienced this “antihistory” firsthand in the presentation by a founding father impersonator that I saw several times during my research.

Ernest spends a busy retirement running a Tea Party group and giving presentations as his alter ego, Benjamin Franklin. I watched Ernest appear as Ben Franklin three times and learned that a large majority of my consultants, across central and western North Carolina, had seen his portrayal at least once. He dressed in colonial attire, wore wire-rimmed glasses and used a cane. Portraying Franklin, he claimed he had come to our time on a type of sacred mission to "bring the truth of the founders and the original documents they signed,” adding “not what you have been taught,” employing the familiar theme of uncovering truths that secular and liberal society have hidden. In another presentation he said “I was in a school recently and was asked by a young man, ‘Dr. Franklin, how did you get here? And why did you come?’ To tell you what it was like over 200 years ago. To tell you what we did and why we did it and to help educate you in the arena of truth.”

Ernest’s portrayal employed understandings about Franklin that many Tea Party members have come to know from watching Glenn Beck. Discussing the Declaration of Independence,
Ernest as Ben stated with authority that “happiness,” as in the pursuit of happiness "means property. It means that the government shouldn't take it. It means that you have the right to the just rewards of your hard work. And the thing that breaks my heart, you are not getting all of your just rewards from your hard work.”

In another instance Franklin confessed "though in my younger years I was an atheist and a deist, I have concluded that God governs in the affairs of the state and intervenes in the lives of those who believe,” Whether Franklin took these positions has been argued over and sometimes dismissed by historians, but to Tea Party members what Ernest as Ben said is more than plausible especially when considered in light of what they consider the secularization of society and government and the leftist bias of the educational institutions and academics that are the keepers of that history. The Tea Party cultural world revolves around a core narrative of a decaying America. To them, there is no doubt that if Ben Franklin (or Washington or Adams) could come to our time, they would scold us for straying far from the ideals that the founders outlined. And that in order to return to those days we must embrace the words, lives and texts as they were written at that time.

The past is often used as a medium for articulating and assigning meaning to these broader discourses. But it also demands a particular and narrow reading of America’s revolutionary-era history in what Lepore terms, "historical fundamentalism.” History and texts are seen as sacred, ageless and need to be understood with the same original intent as Christian fundamentalists understand much of the Bible. This historical fundamentalism reflects a more general fundamentalist approach by Tea Partyists which entails political, cultural and religious fundamentalism.
Fundamentalism

“Fundamentalism” is a broad term used in several contexts typically to describe a commitment to the essence of some traditional way, and often, a desire to return to a period in the past considered to represent the pure form. An early instance of a movement for fundamentalism in the US arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries within American Protestantism. It was a reaction against “modernist” theology and biblical criticism as well as changes in the nation’s cultural and social scene. It takes its name from The Fundamentals (1910-1915), a twelve-volume set of essays designed to combat Liberal theology (Eskridge 2012). Anthropologist Judith Nagata (2001) defines fundamentalism as “entailing special forms of identity politics, meaning and labeling characterized by a quest for certainty, exclusiveness and unambiguous boundaries.” This broad definition effectively describes a central disposition of the Tea Party's approach to the world and politics. The concept of "cultural fundamentalism" is especially useful for thinking about the TPM’s notions of American cultural identity and as I will discuss later, the stance of the TPM in the cultural politics over immigration. Anthropologist Verena Stolcke (1995) uses “cultural fundamentalism” to describe the right wing, anti-immigrant rhetoric emerging in Europe in the 1990s. She describes a rhetoric that “reifies culture conceived as a compact, bounded, localized, and historically rooted set of traditions and values transmitted through the generations…” This definition is applicable to many aspects of the Tea Party already discussed such as harking back to an idealized time, which is often the era shortly after the close of the Revolutionary war. In an interview, Janine and her husband saw this theme as so important that they considered it as their LTPG’s motto.

We need to go back to basics. As a matter of fact we were toying with that as a slogan or motto for the website. ‘Back to the basics.’ We feel like we should get back to a time when the Tea Parties were going on. A smaller government. A
government for the people, by the people. It’s not that anymore. It’s seems like a
government for the government by the government.

Many also believe fundamental truths lie in the simplicity of mid-20th century America, seen as
a time one of my consultants describes as when “people did not need to lock doors and children
could play outdoors unsupervised.”

This fundamentalist type of rhetoric Stolcke describes was apparent in many utterances of
Tea Partyists when discussing undocumented immigrants. While the issue of undocumented
workers came up frequently in my research, the nature of the concerns were quite varied and
sometimes contradictory. Teasing out the degree to which race and ethnicity are mixed with what
Tea Partyists assumed to be cultural traits is difficult. Yet, when considered in the context of the
Tea Party figured world and the ideal of American cultural identity, many of the Tea Partyists’
perspectives are understandable. (Chapter 5 takes up this issue in more depth.)

This varied and conflicted outlook on the part of many Tea Partyists to undocumented
workers, primarily Latinos, for example, is summed up by a quote from Cheryl from the Revere
County Tea Party.

There is an innate love for America and its culture. When we see it being co-opted
by people that want to come to this country - not to become part of it, but to take the
resources that we have… Nobody is against legal immigration. We encourage and
want people to come to this country and love it like we do. We want to maintain our
unique identity as a people, which of course is a mishmash, but with a common goal.
But we see people come here illegally who have no desire to integrate in our culture.
They're breaking our laws…coming into this country. They also have dramatic fiscal
effects on grade-schools and hospitals [and] most do not want to become American,
but to just use the resources. If someone comes [illegally] from Canada I would be
just as angry. [However], unless they come from Québec, I can at least understand
them.

In this statement three perceptions, which were also voiced by my other Tea Party consultants,
become apparent. Each relates to the wider idea of a bounded, homogenous and ideal American
cultural identity.
The first perception was about assimilation. Many believed that Latino immigrants are not interested in assimilating to the dominant American culture. Many of my consultants believed, contrary to recent research showing that current immigrants assimilate as fast as previous ones (Preston 2015), that Latino immigrants actively refuse to assimilate to American culture. Furthermore they also indicated that “progressives’” ideology of multiculturalism has allowed people to not need to assimilate.

The second conviction was that the undocumented workers are gaining benefits—whether "food stamps" or public education—by breaking the law. This was the most common perception and as I will discuss in Chapter 5, makes sense when thought of in relation to foundational belief in strict adherence to the Constitution. In short, the argument went: one shouldn't reap the benefits of the Constitution by violating the laws that emerged from it.

The third was the perception that undocumented immigrants are a drain on public finances. This concern was associated with some of the more outlandish claims such as the belief that 25% of Hawthorne County school budget is used to educate undocumented children or that immigrants often do not contribute taxes yet receive government benefits. This perspective in some cases reflected the argument that economic restructuring has fueled resentment toward immigrants by white Americans (Hardesty 1999). Many white Americans are convinced that they have "played by the rules," while immigrants who have not, are given, as one consultant described them, “freebies.”

Brad of the Hamilton County Tea Party said that the founders did not anticipate the ease of immigration made possible by globalization and advances in modern transportation. He felt that the great distance required to immigrate to America in the 18th and 19th century created a high threshold which people had to overcome. In his interpretation, immigrants were
automatically "vetted" by showing the wherewithal and commitment to overcome that threshold of distance and expense

However an opposite interpretation of undocumented workers emerges from some Tea Partyists relating to the Tea Party figured world’s ideal citizen who is independent, successful and conscientious. HoSang (2010) paraphrasing Honig (2001) writes that

Nativist political projects must be examined in connection to (rather than as an aberration from) the familiar and celebrated claims that the United States is a nation founded by immigrants. These accounts of xenophobia are continually being rehearsed in representations of immigrants as redemptive and idealized economic, civil and familial subjects… who contribute to the national economy, and who obey conservative, often patriarchic social norms… The good immigrant thus affirms foundational narratives of exceptionalism and choice worthiness in a moment when such ideals and practices seem increasingly out of reach for much of the populace (HoSang 2010:140).

Instead of resentment, immigrants are viewed with grudging admiration. As Honig writes, some immigrants are “super-citizens…the object of neither American hostility nor charity but of outright adoration” (Honig 2001:77). Dale of the Pierce County Tea Party often used the term “Mexi-cans,” meaning that Latino immigrants have a “can-do” attitude and work ethic that is no longer valued by white Americans. Mike of the Hamilton County Tea Party and a restaurant manager, spoke with admiration of one of his dishwashers who he claimed had a professional degree in accounting from a university in Mexico. Even though his dishwasher was trained as a professional, he is in America starting at the bottom, one of the lowest status jobs in America, in order to provide for his family and to build a life in the United States. Tea Partyists outlook toward undocumented immigrants is often based in a cultural fundamentalism regarding recurring theme of the decline in the value of foundational principles of American citizenship such as hard work, self-reliance and achievement. In some cases, the undocumented immigrant is seen as extolling those values.
The strongest areas of fundamentalism in the TPM are in political arrangements and economic management. Tea Partyists express inflexible certainty on foundational principles such as low taxes and little or no budget deficit as I described at the “Stop Spending Now Rally” with the chant “shut it down.” Their fundamentalist outlook is most apparent in Tea Party members’ approach to the Constitution. Adherence to the literal meanings of the Constitution in itself becomes an interpretive frame against which policy and people are measured.

Vincent Crapanzano (2000), writing about constitutional and religious “literalism” in American life, argues that dramatic social and economic change may lead to a sense of a loss of values and one's “bearings.” Though some see these changes as openings for new interpretations of the world, for others it leads to a desire for “closure” and reaffirming of traditional values, views and frames. Tea Partyists see the Constitution as part of tradition, as a guidebook for restoring American exceptionalism, and a guarantor of personal liberty enumerating the rights of the individual and unambiguously circumscribing limits on federal power. And, in words written by Crapanzano at the turn of the millennium, but which could have been transcribed from a Tea Party meeting during my fieldwork, reinterpretation of such a sacred text, as liberals and RINOs attempt to do, “betrays the intention of the Framers of the Constitution and mutilates the polity they created. It affronts nation, national pride, and tradition” (Crapanzano 2000).

In 2010 and 2011 it became widespread among Tea Party members and some Tea Party aligned politicians to identify as "constitutional conservatives.” The term emerged in 2009 in an article by Peter Berkowitz from the conservative Hoover Institute. He writes

The constitution [constitutional conservatism] seeks to conserve government's proper responsibilities while providing it with the incentives and tools to perform them effectively; draws legitimacy from democratic consent while protecting individual rights from invasion by popular majorities; assumes the primacy of self-interest but also the capacity on occasion to rise above it through the exercise of virtue…(Berkowitz 2009).
The label became popular because it easily allowed Tea Partyists and politicians to be a
different type of conservative than simply a Republican. Michele Bachmann, founder and first
chair of the Congressional Tea Party Caucus built upon the imagery of the constitutional
conservative on her presidential campaign website in 2011. “We have to recapture the founders' vision of a constitutionally conservative government, if we are to secure the promise for the future. As a constitutional conservative, I believe in the founding fathers' vision of a limited government that trusts in and perceives the unlimited potential of you, the American people.”

But in order to practice constitutional conservatism, to use the Constitution as a set of principles to guide one’s political and economic stances, one must know the Constitution. Classes on the Constitution were very common among Tea Partyists and their groups. Some members would take classes on their own online or through purchased materials. Sometimes a member would run a series of class sessions during meetings. For example, a member of the Revere County Tea Party who was also a high school social studies teacher, had a fifteen minute block during regular meetings for his constitution lesson.

It was extremely important that the Constitution be understood as intended, which returns us back to Lapore's idea of historical fundamentalism. One of my Tea Party consultants entered the race for his county school board primarily to focus the curriculum on the original intent of the founding documents and also to reinstitute mid-20th century educational simplicity, such as multiplication tables and spelling bees. He felt that the Constitution should be taught in English class rather than social studies in order for students to understand the true intent of the Founders.
One thing I thought about doing is take the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights the Federalist papers-they should all be taught in English class. The reason I say English is because the English teacher can sit down with the words show you how these words have changed meaning.

He felt very strongly that the words in the founding documents no longer were understood as they were written. In other words, even if students are taught the Constitution, they are not truly understanding it as it was written.

If you get an 1828 Webster's dictionary, I promise you that that thing will blow your mind. The words have changed. I mean there's tons of them. So when this kid takes his vocabulary that he has today and he tries to read a document that was written over 200 years ago, those things aren't gonna mean what he thinks they mean.

This original intent was so important that one author who conducted a one-day, four-hour constitutional workshop for the Franklin County Tea Party wrote a book with the wordy title, *Not a Living Breathing Document: Reclaiming our Constitution: An Introduction to the Historic Foundations of American Liberty* (Hall 2011).

Lepore writes that many Tea Partyists share the belief in a narrowly defined past in which the founding documents are "ageless and sacred...These documents are to be read with the same spirit with which religious fundamentalists read for instance the Ten Commandments" (Lapore 2010:16) The most vivid illustration of this outlook was Rev. Wilson who was connected to the Adams County Tea Party. He pastored a Baptist congregation and was working on an advanced degree from Liberty University, founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell. Rev. Wilson saw the need for the use of the same hermeneutic principles as used to interpret the Bible.
The same is true with the Constitution. And people like the Heritage Foundation use hermeneutic principles and criteria. When the Constitution says that individuals are endowed with their Creator, what did that mean to them at the time? If you go back in history, you see that those principles are derived from specific interpretations of individualism that come from the Bible in Judeo-Christian principles.

Rev. Wilson also directs our attention to the link between evangelical Christianity and the Tea Party movement. A discussion of fundamentalism in the Tea Party must also include the role of Christianity in everyday Tea Partyists’ lives and in the figured world of the Tea Party. As I will discuss in later chapters, the role of Christianity in LTPG is contested and varies among the groups I participated with. Yet regardless of the place of religion in the local groups, religion nonetheless was a very powerful component of many of my consultants’ lives and informed their political outlook.

Christianity was given little attention in Skocpol and Williamson's volume on the Tea Party and I assume that much of it is due to my research, unlike theirs being centered in the South where evangelical Christianity is the strongest. On the other hand, I found the relationship between religion and the TPM to be very complex and varied. This is also reflected in national polling, though as with many surveys on the Tea Party it raises more questions than it answers. In one poll 81% of Tea Party participants identified as Christian while 47% said that they are "part of the religious right or Christian conservative movement" (Jones and Cox 2010). Another survey (Liu 2011) found that 46% of Tea Party participants had not heard of or did not support the "conservative Christian movement" while 47% said that they agreed with it. Nonetheless, there were definite Christian fundamentalist themes that were circulated by both local Tea Party groups and conservative mainstream media.

Kapferer makes a strong comparison between nationalism and religious devotion as discrete phenomena, but he also states that nationalism, even a Western secular nationalism, may
nonetheless derive some of its force from its elaboration within the historical and cultural world of Western Christianity. My more nuanced analysis, as opposed to survey findings such as those above, indicate the complex nature of religion within the TPM. For some Tea Partyists, politics may be subsumed by religion, for others the two may be combined as two discrete elements, and for others religion should be left out of politics. Notwithstanding, the Tea Party has effectively emphasized aspects of patriotism and history, which are easy for many of its participants to link to fundamentalist Christianity. Many participants linked important aspects of their intimate (personal) religious identity to the broader symbols and discourses of the TPM.

Montgomery (2012) and Wilson and Burack (2012) discusses the relationship between the Christian Right and the TPM, focusing on the associations between the two movements in the sense of framing and shared discourse. Wilson and Burack (2012) argue that the TPM provides a new opportunity for the re-suturing of fiscal and social conservatives. In their research conducted at large gatherings of Christian Right organizations during the first years of the Tea Party Movement, they found an intentional process of creating ideological overlap between the two entities including the view of present-day government as immoral and the belief in the religious basis of “America [‘s] founding as the ‘providential [spiritual] crucible’ of American exceptionalism” (Wilson and Burack 2012: 174). Montgomery (2012), draws attention to a return to the Christian Right’s 1990s framing process of emphasizing fiscal as well as social concerns in what is believed by the author to be the Christian Right’s effort to find common cause with the emerging Tea Party Movement.

Also, media--both with wide audiences such as Glenn Beck’s program and more obscure radio, internet and print sources--were very important factors in Tea Party participants’ politico-religious connection. The substance of Glenn Beck's books and broadcasts was often driven by
religious, historical references that he would outline on his famous blackboard. His response to
the Obama Administration’s reckless increases in debt, entitlements and spending was a renewed
call for “faith, hope and charity.” Describing them as “essential teachings of Christ” (Beck
2010), Beck represented each word with an image and story of a founding father-- Samuel
Adams, George Washington and Ben Franklin respectively.

This link of faith to American cultural identity was circulated through other media as
well, but best exemplified by the minister and author David Barton and his organization,
Wallbuilders. Through appearances on the Glenn Beck Show, religious broadcasters such as the
700 Club, his website and published books, Barton promoted a revisionist and often inaccurate
(Schuesser 2012) portrayal of the links between the founding fathers and Christianity in books
such as The Bullet Proof George Washington (2009) and videos such as "America's Godly
Heritage"(1995)

Glenn Beck also sparked renewed popularity for the 1981 book, The 5000 Year Leap: A
Miracle that Changed the World (Skousen 1981), written by author and well-known anti-
Communist W. Cleon Skousen. Advocating the broad claim that the U.S. Constitution is based
not in the Enlightenment but in the Bible (Wilentz 2010), the book outlines 28 principles that he
argues were collectively valued by the drafters of the Constitution. These principles, which Beck
consolidated down to 12 for his 9-12 project, are purported to be the basis of American
exceptionalism and to have led to the success of the American republic. Furthermore, because of
the "freedom and prosperity which the American founders turned loose into the spillways of
human progress" (Skousen 1981:4), in just 200 years, human society made a 5000 year leap,
accomplishing the equivalent of all the human progress in the five millennia preceding 1776.
Skousen maintained these principles emerged from the common belief systems of the founders based upon similar ideas of "religious principles, political precepts, economic fundamentals and long-range societal goals" (Skousen 1981: 32). Using selected quotes from the founders’ writings and the record of the constitutional convention, the principles included themes such as "Checks and Balances" (principle 17), "A Virtuous Moral People" (principle 2) and the "Role of the Creator" (principle 5). It also included classical liberal ideology of "Property Rights Essential to Liberty" (principle 14) and "Free-Market Economics" (principle 15) and even Cold War conservative foreign-policy such as "Peace through Strength" (principle 24). The book and Skousen had faded into obscurity at the time of the author's death in 2006. But it was resurrected by Glenn Beck in 2009 calling it "essential to understanding why our founding fathers built this Republic (Wilentz 2010). The book provided a simple and easy to read diagnostic guide which traced current American ills to the rejection or rejection by government of those founding principles. Beck's endorsement boosted sales, briefly putting The 5000 Year Leap at the top of Amazon.com's best-seller list.

The book gained a popularity that eluded its first printing. The messages and themes of the book lay dormant waiting for the unique mix of assumptions, fears and values promoted by the Tea Party Movement to give it new life. If my research is indicative, the book was a popular resource for introducing newcomers to the Tea Party figured world with its focus on the writings of the founding fathers and its strong linkage to faith, morality, history and capitalism. The popularity of the book was not lost on politicians seeking Tea Party support. When asked about his "reading list" by the organizers of the Value Voters Summit, Texas governor Rick Perry replied, “‘I find myself going back to a book called The 5000 Year Leap’ leading to nods and sounds of approval from the audience” (Weigel 2009).
Skousen's successor organization, the National Center for Constitutional Studies, took advantage of the book’s newfound success by selling seminars based on the book led by the organization’s members, and even marketing a do-it-yourself curriculum whereby a facilitator could purchase a text, simple lectures, course plan and quizzes so people could organize their own classes teaching the 28 principles. Several of my consultants bought multiple copies of the book at a volume discount in the hopes of selling them to other members of their Tea Party groups, but often simply gave them away because of the truths they saw the book containing. One of my consultants, who was unsuccessful in establishing an LTPG\textsuperscript{19}, reported spending $49 for the course, $99 for the textbook and six dollars for each of the 10 copies of *The 5000 Year Leap* she purchased.

Among several groups I participated in, the Tea Party figured world was strongly interspersed with religious themes such as those enunciated in *The 5000 Year Leap*. And indeed there definitely have been tensions amongst large national groups as to the place of religion in the movement (Montgomery 2012:249). As for the LTPGs, since, as I will show in Chapter 7 that the groups take on diverse characteristics, they will present differences regarding how faith is performed and utilized within different groups.

The broad theme of fundamentalism is woven throughout the Tea Party figured world in several different textures. Tea Partyists share an underlying concern regarding the decline in American cultural identity which is expressed through a strong opposition to undocumented immigrants. Secondly, America has strayed from the principles laid down by the founders that

\textsuperscript{19}Janine lived in a town located in Pierce County, where an LTPG had already been organized in a different town 10 miles away. However, I don’t believe that was the primary reason she failed in organizing a chapter. I speculate that Janine, a newcomer in the town, did not have a personal network in the town necessary to attract an initial core of people. It is possible also that her timing, in the late summer of 2011, was past the critical time in 2009 and 2010 when enthusiasm for the movement was high and people were seeking out the emerging movement.
were the key to American greatness. American renewal will emerge through the close adherence
to the words and intentions of the Founders as written in those documents. And finally, many
Tea Partyists see the American story strongly tied to themes of Christian morality and a belief
that America, due to its freedom and adherence to Judeo-Christian heritage, is the object of God's
grace.

**Emotional Expression**

The third characteristic of the Tea Party figured world is an emotional tenor that
circulates among the different components of the movement. Lutz and Abu-Lugold (1988) argue
that emotion is a discursive component of culture, which should be interpreted as in and about
social life—a form of social action read and understood by participants. Satterfield shows how
emotion in the northwest logging dispute acts as a “lens through which one can view everyday
moral discourse about what constitutes appropriate human behavior” (Satterfield 2003:136).

Much of the previous discussion of patriotism was based in how it is anchored in emotional
conviction, but I want to develop the concept further in this section.

There is now a vast literature pertaining to emotion in social movement studies, which is
heavily informed by sociology. Since the "cultural turn" in social movement studies scholars
now approach emotion as crucial to understanding social movement mobilization. For
instancing, in framing theory, "injustice frames" (Gamson 1992) channel grievances into specific
interpretations of problems and solutions relying upon emotions to drive the process.

To a large degree, work on the relationship of social movements to emotions emerging
from sociology is focused upon the strategic uses of emotion such as how leaders use, cultivate,
discourage and maintain emotional registers (Jasper 2011, Goodwin et al 2001). Cultivating and
maintaining emotion has been crucial in the rise of the Tea Party Movement. Fear, anger,
indignation are prominent and ongoing emotional registers continually circulating through and between the different components of the TPM. They are employed in anger-inducing communication from Tea Party Patriots or the conservative think tank/advocacy organization Heritage (Foundation) Action, drawing attention to the latest betrayal by government such as the alleged targeting of Tea Party groups by the Internal Revenue Service. And of course today’s 24 hour cable news and talk radio are typically characterized by a consistent repertoire of current political outrages. Much of the writing about the socio-political right focuses on a politics of resentment directed toward the rising influence of ethnic and racial minorities, feminism, greater acceptance of LGBT persons and the more class-based producerism themes I mentioned above (e.g. Diamond 1995; Hardesty 1999; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Stein 2001). The effect of producerist resentment has been present in the Tea Party from its beginning as we saw in Santelli’s rant.

The emotion of fear and sense of betrayal within the Tea Party is accompanied by a strong emotion of indignation or righteous anger. Though other social movements have certainly been characterized by this emotion, it is central to the Tea Party. They understand themselves to be authentic patriots in the face of an increasingly unpatriotic and misguided nation. Moreover, as McVeigh (2014) cited above describes, Tea Partyists’ access to institutional power has been diminished. Whereas many of the “new social movements” were attempting to gain rights that they never had, the Tea Party are trying to retain or regain power they feel they have lost. Accordingly, circulating Tea Party discourses are often characterized by messages such as “take the country back!” “They (politicians) work for us!” However as noted by social movement scholars (e.g. Taylor 1996, Goodwin et al. 2004, Rholinger and Klein 2014), anger and
resentment are typically not enough to maintain a social movement over extended periods of
time. Inspiration is also necessary to keep individuals involved (Rholinger and Klein 2014).

Following Juris (2008b), I am less interested in the strategic or managed applications of
emotions in social movements and more in how they model a vision of the world and provide a
space for those visions to be realized. Juris quotes from Guobin Yang’s (2000) focus on the
empowering, experiential dynamics of activism and mass actions which allow activists to
produce "affective solidarity" by pursuing "emotional achievement", or “the attainment of self-
validating emotional experiences and expressions through active and creative pursuits” (Yang
2000: 596). For example in some ethnographies of the alter-globalization movement (Juris
2008a, 2008b, Graeber 2009), large-scale protests were often organized into different blocs that
were characterized by different emotional tempos. One section of protests was the Revolutionary
Anarchist Clown Army, which focused upon playfulness; another section called black blocs,
were characterized by rage; pink and silver blocs were characterized by festiveness and song.
Juris (2008a), argues that "identities are expressed through distinct bodily techniques and
emotions that are generated through ritualized conflict and the lived experience of prefigured
utopias” (Juris 2008a: 62). These “affinity groups” provided spaces where the people who
wanted to engage in different degrees of protest, or shared similar visions, could act together.
And these blocs were not spontaneous but were ongoing and collectively understood whether the
protest was in Genoa, Prague or Barcelona. Hence emotion in this context was a desired style of
life that was practiced within social spaces given over to the performance of particular figured
worlds.

Returning to Cain and her discussion of the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous,
emotions are considered as a cultural resources. Though she does not elaborate on the point, Cain
argues that since alcoholism dominates all aspects of the person's life, sobriety must also, including "spiritual aspects of... humility, trust, honesty..." These feelings to which I would add the importance of “gratitude,” constantly circulate through AA meetings, and are emphasized as crucial to succeeding at long term sobriety and become an important indicator of how one is to act as a sober alcoholic.

For many Tea Partyists, participation in Tea Party activities allows them to perform the emotional dispositions that characterize the type of citizenship they value. As noted above, a key factor in American decline according to my consultants is a rejection of expression of patriotism. Several consultants mentioned that one of their visions for the future is that people will display the flag and readily express their patriotism freely. In my research, the TPM provided a space where patriotism was freely expressed. This patriotism was often circulated through social and mass media, for example in the emotional displays of Glenn Beck. On the episode of his program where he unveiled his 9-12 project he said "Let us find ourselves and our solutions together again." His eyes welled up with tears, he paused and looked down. He then looked back up with a slightly wrenched face and said "I'm sorry, I just love my country and I fear for it.” Of course Glenn Beck is much too savvy a media personality for us to believe that this utterance was anything but scripted, yet his emotional expression nonetheless opened a space where the emotional aspects of patriotism can be freely displayed. Simply: it’s appropriate to be emotional about America because to Tea Partyists, America is in peril. It is appropriate to pledge your "sacred honor" to America. On two occasions after asking my semi-structured interview question about patriotism and the interviewee’s sense of patriotism the consultants (both male) paused and briefly choked up with damp eyes. Neither verbally acknowledged the episode but I took their damp eyes to indicate a strong emotional connection patriotic feelings about the country lying
just below the surface, and an intensity not necessarily appropriate outside the Tea Party in a conversation with a non-Tea Partyists like myself.

Though displays of resentment, indignation, anger and fear are common recurring meaningful aspects of the TPM’s figured world, I maintain and will further illustrate that the success of the movement was based less on these emotions of anger per se and more on participants’ possibilities for sharing and expressing patriotism socially, and so, to create a positive emotional bond. Tea Partyists see a world in which America is losing claims to a cultural identity they cherish yet they are not able to express the emotions they have about this loss to others in everyday life. Yet, as I will show in Chapter 6, with the Tea Party, they not only can express those emotions, but the experiences are personally transformative.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 and 3 begin a discussion of why the Tea Party Movement emerged as a vibrant, successful movement. In 2008 and 2009, events precipitated an intense sense of unease on the parts of primarily conservative Americans. Ongoing concerns about rampant government spending and the effects on future generations were intensified by the election of a President who had been thoroughly demonized by conservative media and who had instituted policies seen as out of step with American values and sensibilities. And though some sporadic protests occurred within days of Barack Obama's inauguration, it was the forging of a coherent package of interpretive frames articulated and epitomized in Santelli’s rant and the emerging components of the Tea Party that not only gave form to these concerns but contextualize them with in a much longer historical period of American social and cultural decline.

Through social media and mass media networks, different components—both elites such as Fox News and FreedomWorks and grassroots every day citizens—were able to "fill-in" and
expand the interpretive frame into a figured world which allowed people to experience and practice their now cohesive political outlook. And while figured worlds provide the interpretive frame to evaluate issues, history, themselves and others, it also allows people to fashion shared bodily dispositions such as uncompromising firmness, patriotism and indignation and as we will see, activism.

However the processes by which the Tea Party figured world becomes a lived world and an embodied practice have not yet been fully developed. As will be discussed in the following chapter, every day citizens, in the context of the movement, begin to articulate their lives with the figured world and vice versa.
Chapter 4
Making Personal Meaning in the Tea Party Movement

In the prior chapter, I described the historical conditions that stimulated the emergence of the Tea Party movement and how that movement created a figured world of interpretive frames, practices, symbols and dispositions. In the present chapter, I discuss the kind of identity work my consultants did to make the movement personally meaningful by establishing significant connections between their lives and aspects of the figured world of the Tea Party.

Anthropologist Charles Price writes that establishing a connection between the personal and the socio-historical is the first step in collective identity formation (Price 2007:132). In his book on the formation of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica (Price 2007), he builds upon the concept of personal "encounters" (Cross 1971), dramatic personal experiences that help crystallize one's sense of blackness and injustice. These encounters, he argues, drives the fashioning of black collective identities. My research suggest that my Tea Party consultants were making cognitive connections through different processes than Price describes. They did not have to struggle with stigmatization, for example. Nonetheless, Price’s focus on the connections between the intimate self and social movement participation is central to understanding why movements are successful. Simply, Tea Partyists bring their experiences together with meanings from the movement to interpret and react to wider socio-historical processes (Holland and Lave 2001).

A 2008 edition of Anthropology Quarterly was devoted to social movements and how they act as producers of meaning (e.g. Kurzman 2008; Cases Cortes et al 2008; Price et al 2008). Sociologist Charles Kurzman writes in the introduction to the collection that social movements
invest symbols, narratives and ideas with significance that has meaning to its (potential) participants. “At its root is the proposition that humans constantly seek to understand the world around them, and that the imposition of meaning on the world is a goal in itself, a spur to action, and the site of contestation” (Kurzman 2008:5). Social movements are important sites in the search for meaning because participants are often compelled to evaluate and rethink established and taken for granted understandings.

There is no uniform or consistent path of how my consultants established meanings. People participating in the Tea Party are not an undifferentiated collection of individuals echoing a simple yet consistent ideology of fiscal austerity. And as mentioned earlier, correlations of demographic and survey data are not entirely helpful in understanding the concerns and disharmonies that motivate peoples’ openness to the Tea Party. Moreover, survey data often drains everyday political actors of their agency and ignores the different motivations that nonetheless lead to similar ideological positions and activism. As political scientist Edward Schatz (2009) writes on the importance of political ethnography, "if the study of justice, freedom, democracy and order are to mean anything, it must take into account individuals’ lived experiences and how they perceive these abstractions" (Schatz 2009:10). Social movement participation is often a highly personal journey (Teske 1997) in which different aspects of a person’s selfhood will motivate their political participation.

Sociologist Rebecca Klatch (1987) found female conservative activists in the 1980s to be characterized by two distinct conservative identities relative to the primary, historical conservative cleavage of “economic conservative” and “social conservative”. These perspectives were influenced by how the women shaped their conservative identity in light of their own personal histories and beliefs about the role of women in American society. An even more
intimate conception of mobilization emerges through the “procreation stories” told to Faye Ginsburg (1998) in her study of female activists on both sides of a local abortion debate. Women who joined the pro-life movement were often reacting to not only to their impressions of a changing society that glorified permissiveness, materialism and narcissism. Many were undergoing transitions in their personal lives as women and parents, what Ginsburg terms, “life crises.” Abortion became an important component of the historically particular explanatory frames through which activists made sense of different transitions in the female life cycle. The stories, “illuminate how…dimensions of experience considered private--particularly to the self-intersect with particular social and historical conditions that distinguish the membership of each group” (Ginsburg 1998: 134).

The figured world produced and circulated by the wider Tea Party Movement--patriotism, fundamentalism, and the attendant emotions centered on a perceived decline in American exceptionalism--served as important resources that people both learned from and about, but also conferred personal meaning upon. They found resonances with personal experiences and beliefs. In short, people were able to experience a sense of belonging by finding coherence between their own intimate identity and the cultural resources integral to the Tea Party figured world. I argue that due to the nature of fairly general themes, symbols and discourses produced by the Tea Party in its early months, people were easily able to populate them with emotionally resonant meanings drawn from personal experiences and concerns.

Ernesto Laclau (2005) sees the essence of populism, such as Tea Party conservatism, as structuring personal experiences such that individuals see them as “equivalent” to the wider grievances of the movement. In some cases, consultants evoked memories of their local communities where many lived on "welfare" and “food stamps;” or of personal triumphs of
surviving broken homes and finding new lives through perseverance or faith; or family histories of honor and sacrifice, some passed down from the Civil War. In short, the Tea Party allows for the establishment of equivalences between emotionally significant memories, unresolved discontents and disharmonies, and wider socio-historical developments.

The method then is to trace out the places and processes of identification that link the movement to the intimate on the one hand and the wider political processes (Holland and Lave 2001). I discussed in chapter 1 how Holland, Nonini and their co-authors (2007) sought "political autobiographies", semi-structured interviews from their consultants. They asked people to trace their history of political participation. The authors employed the concept popularized by C. Wright Mills (1959), the “sociological imagination,” which highlights the importance of how "people…see their problems as having public solutions" (Holland Nonini et al. 2007:37). Mills employed the concept of “troubles” and “issues.” Troubles are "values cherished to an individual that are threatened.” An issue is a matter that transcend these local, personal spheres and are a "value cherished by publics (that) is felt to be threatened (Mills 2000:8). Holland, Nonini et al. found many people who made the connection between troubles and issues, in turn formed or joined activist groups (and also many who did not). By drawing upon Mills, the authors theorize a chain of participation. Mills discusses the connection of the biographical to wider political processes, while Holland, Nonini et al. add the important aspect of mobilization which sometimes emerges from such a connection.

The political autobiography proves useful for analyzing the Tea Party Movement and tracing out the lines of identification. In some cases Tea Party participants voiced simple ideological connections between their conservative identity and their concerns regarding government debt, expanded government intervention in the economy and the direction that
Barack Obama was taking the country. However, as the following examples will show, many of the interviews with Tea Party participants revealed the movement as a moment of personal meaning-making, where participants made complex connections between personal and family history, long-held social concerns, their understood goals and meanings of America, and the concerns of the movement.

For example, Trey, a web designer in his late 30s and a co-founder of the Hawthorne County Tea Party, linked the moral claims made by the Tea Party to his upbringing in northern Kentucky and his current life as a youth soccer coach.

My family members are Kennedy Democrats. And I've seen them sucking on the nipple of government. I've seen what it does to people—not just financially but what it does to people spiritually. No motivation or inspiration. Absolutely—you have to live in a society like that where it is all around you. The people down the street live like you do. The people across the tracks live like you do. Everybody in your little world lives like you do. You see people you know when you go down to sign up for your WIC card and everybody's waiting on a check at the beginning of the month...It creates the kind of society … I just hate everything about it. I really do. That's an economic picture of it. The social aspect of liberalism is…… a lot of it is detached from morality to some standpoint. I think too much liberalism is a detachment from morality. When I talked earlier about things we need to stay tethered to, morality is one of them. I don't believe in perfect people; I'm not one. But I keep reaching for the bar. I probably will never reach it. But don't lower it. I believe liberalism is the lowering of the bar so that everybody can reach it. Liberalism socially promotes things like—I'm a soccer coach and we give out the same medals to the winners as the losers because we cannot promote a competitive environment. But that is why you do sports to begin with; it is to instill competitive nature in children.

Trey illustrates the deeper moral meaning discussed in Chapter 2 of how the spending and debt concerns of Tea Partyists lie on the surface of what is truly deep-seated cultural concerns regarding the manner in which government has eroded the moral framework of American greatness. Trey’s conservatism is firmly connected to his experiences.

In the following three sections I will describe the kinds of connections my consultants drew between their personal experiences and the meaning they made of the Tea Party
Movement. The first will address how personal memories and life history are used to construct a moral-political justification for participating in the Tea Party. The second section will include the more instrumental motivations stemming from a sense of alienation from formal politics. Finally, I will continue with last chapter’s discussion of Christianity, describing how one evangelical clearly connected the Tea Party to her own complex spiritual life history. Drawing on the experiences of people from most of the groups I participated with, the sources of the variation present across groups also begins to emerge.

EXPLAINING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT BY DRAWING ON ONE’S LIFE HISTORY

As I scheduled interviews with my consultants, I typically mentioned that I was interested in learning how and why they became involved in the Tea Party Movement. I expected people to begin with the widely understood Tea Party discourse of debt, patriotism or the dangers of the Obama Administration. However in many instances I was surprised when people, prior to my first question, initiated the conversation with stories of their upbringing or family history laying out quite vividly how they linked their senses of self to the Tea Party.

Memory is typically evaluated and utilized on the basis of its accuracy in portraying actual events (Thelen 1990). Yet memories are not reproduced but constantly reconstructed in the context of community and social dynamics (Carbonella 1992; Thelen 1990). “People recollect and rework the past through social practice that links meanings of the past to conditions in the present” (Gregory 1998:13). In some case these reconstructed stories, when shared by a group or community, can construct or reproduce a collective “we” (Doukas 2003). Relatedly in what Sandra Morgen (2001) terms “foundational stories”, people joining social movements may identify similar feelings and emotions between their own stories and those of other movement participants. The Tea Party cultural world laments the loss of a certain past, whether it is the
revolutionary-era past characterized by the values of the nation’s founding generation or the idealized mid-20th century communities against which many evaluate contemporary American society. This sense of loss emerges in many of the foundational stories Tea Party activists told.

I met JoAnn on a chartered bus traveling from Winston-Salem to the state capital in Raleigh for a rally and a day of grassroots lobbying of the legislature. This was a yearly event for statewide FreedomWorks activists that was organized by the national organization and included a speech by its President and CEO, Matt Kibbe, an award ceremony for individuals who were particularly active with FreedomWorks and a catered lunch of Carolina barbecue. A slight yet intense woman in her early 60s, JoAnn, in her younger years, had been an especially fast tobacco "stringer," a person who strings recently-harvested tobacco leaves together in bunches in order to flue-cure or dry them in flame-heated barns. Because many of the people who raised tobacco in this region did so on small holdings, most tobacco farmers relied on informal labor from neighbors in order to prepare tobacco for auction. When JoAnn was raising her children at home, she would often help neighbors stringing in exchange for small payments. She related to me one occasion when after helping a neighbor in exchange for payment, a county employee asked her whether, since she was doing small jobs and had children, she would like to “go on welfare.” JoAnn related this story to me as the way that government "captures" people, creating cycles of dependency that undermine individualism and self-responsibility, and ultimately the greatness of America.

JoAnn’s experience with the shared work and subsequent decline of the tobacco small holdings in western North Carolina greatly informs the motivations for her involvement in the Tea Party Movement by filling in abstract conservative discourses with personal experience. Another example is the conservative enmity toward the Environmental Protection Agency
(EPA). As she sees it, "Farmers have been here long before the EPA and they didn't need the
government to tell them what needed to be done [to protect the environment].” In light of both
global and national politics, JoAnn's political position in opposition to government makes sense.
The 1990s tobacco settlement and the 2004 end to tobacco price supports, called the “buyout” in
tobacco-producing states, brought a severe disruption to an already declining industry as a result
of government action. The appropriation of some settlement funds for anti-smoking campaigns
acted as another example how the government undermines personal responsibility. “I don’t see
why the government should be helping those people who can’t quit smoking”, she states,
punctuating her statement with a caustic, “boo-hoo.”

JoAnn articulates how larger national and international processes are made real at the
local level and how individuals draw upon these connections in the construction of their political
identities. JoAnn is articulating fundamental conservative beliefs regarding the role of
government vis-à-vis the individual. I was disappointed when JoAnn canceled our scheduled
later interview that was to be more comprehensive than our brief discussion across the aisle of a
chartered bus. A longer interview would have helped me understand specifically how the TPM
played a role in this personal history. But it provided an important juxtaposition in which to
evaluate the importance of political autobiography in tracing the development of political
identities. It was through the longer semi-structured interviews that I was able to identify how a
Tea Party identity goes beyond the simple conservative identities of many Americans.

The primary difference was how Tea Party members combined conservative discourse in
specific themes from the cultural world produced by the Tea Party network. Like JoAnn,

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20During the same period of time the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented and China
joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), precipitating the irreversible decline of textile and furniture
manufacturing, the other mainstays of the western and central North Carolina economy.
motivations were driven by personal experiences of family, place and previous political involvement. Yet Tea Party participants were actively "working" their identity to make connections between those conservative themes and Tea Party motifs with their emphasis on history and patriotism, political dispossession and political fundamentalism.

David was an active member of the Greene County Tea Party, which while a different rural county than JoAnn’s, was still near the city of Winston-Salem. Many counties in the region once supplied bright-leaf tobacco to the city’s then-flagship employer, RJ Reynolds. David, age 64, grew up in a small house in an agricultural area of the county. After high school, he took an entry-level job at Reynolds Tobacco, where the company, recognizing his potential, subsidized his college education. After many years at Reynolds, he was hired by a major national trucking company, where he eventually rose to CEO. When I met David, he had recently retired, returned to Greene County, and taken over the farm he grew up on as his father’s health declined. I asked him how his community had changed since he had left it and whether he remembered any aspects of the political culture from his earlier residence in the county. He began by saying to me, "Bill, in the community I grew up in, we had a lot of barn-raisings. You're going to have a lot of barn-raisings when you live in a place where wooden barns are used to cure tobacco." He continued, "When I was growing up the three most respected people in the community were the preacher, the schoolteacher and the sheriff". He then raised his eyebrows and looked over the rims of his glasses in a nonverbal invitation for me to consider how those occupations are valued today. David's father was the county’s representative on the Agricultural Stabilization Commission, the government entity that set production levels for tobacco. As the county “Community Committeeman” he was responsible for allocating additional tobacco acreage to be under cultivation each year, an important position that not only influenced the income of many in
the community, but carried immense incentives for graft. He proudly said that in the years that his father was in the position, he never allotted himself any extra acreage. "My father would give you a dollar before he would take a dime."

Along with taking over the farm, David had a strong interest in giving back to the county in which he was born and raised. He began to sit on community boards and even organized a farmers’ market for the county. In the process he became very disillusioned with politics. He began to resist taking on leadership roles in the county because, "once you take a leadership role, they paint a big bull's-eye on your back. They want to tear you down for personal reasons.” From that experience, the seemingly corrupt, self-centered and invisible horse-trading going on in North Carolina's capital began to make a lot more sense to him. The government was not the problem per se, but rather the people in the government. When he encountered the Tea Party, he realized it was something completely different. “The politicians were more supportive of the ones that were doing nothing, drawing a welfare check, than they were for me who was the taxpayer, paying for it. For the first time it wasn't somebody promising something. That's what really drew me to [the Tea Party]. It was nobody saying that if you vote for me I will give you something.”

The Tea Party to him was not "political" because it did not involve itself in the deal-making aspects of politics but rather it stood on the outside, in the "grassroots,” holding politicians accountable. David was valuing a type of government he feels has all but disappeared even in small communities like his. If Tea Party members harken back to earlier times, this includes the loss of earlier forms of government that were personal, local and wrapped up in the moral economy of the community. This distinction is not often made by popular media generated
conservative discourse. But if someone like David was trying to make sense of the moral and social decline in America and especially American politics, he needed look no further than the ways in which government and the priorities of political leaders having changed since the early 1960s, especially when compared to a lionized figure like his father. The TPM’s symbols of revitalization enabled David to connect the meanings in these experiences with a suitable avenue for political expression. During the 2010 election he chose his candidates carefully and volunteered for those he supported. “The ones that I supported are ones I am in constant contact with. There is not a week that goes by that I don't talk to the people that I worked for… I’m now a better citizen. People come up to me and ask me about things because of my involvement.”

Similar to David’s utilization of memories to fashion his Tea Party political identity, Sandra, a retired elementary school teacher, found motivation in her memories around patriotism and corrosive government priorities. Also, as with David, she traced her path to the TPM as not beginning in 2008 but through much earlier, significant memories of her upbringing. She began her interview with an explanation.

I'm going to give you some background first of all. I am an expatriate. I wasn't born in the United States and I wasn't raised here. I was born overseas [in the Panama Canal Zone]. We worked for the US government. And when you live overseas your patriotism, to me, is stronger than when you live in the United States… We had a lot of military bases around us and we were engulfed in the ritual. So even when we were growing up in high school, we were involved in patriotism. The pledge meant so much to us and the flag meant so much to us.

Because of the unique place where Sandra was raised, on U.S. territory outside of the borders of the country and within another nation’s territory, her national identity carried special

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21 This is not meant to say that such beliefs are not anathema to some conservative perspectives. The periodical, The American Conservative often presents a fascinating ideological perspective similar to David’s grounded in a type of traditionalism characterized by localism, equality, proprietorship and democracy.

22 It should also be noted that though David considers himself conservative, those occupations David saw as most important, two, the schoolteacher and sheriff, as well as his father, were agents of the state.
significance. She embedded her family history into the history of the Panama Canal. As part of the American community in a strategically significant territory, where military and civilian roles were interwoven, patriotism was instilled in her by way of rituals more customary of military service.

When you go to a movie theater and you stand up and hear the Star-Spangled Banner before the movie starts, we didn't even think about these things. Things just happened. The whole theater stood up. When you are in school, you gave the Pledge of Allegiance. It was something to be respected... We had a ceremony for raising the flag every morning and taking it down every evening. When you could drive and you were on the military base at five o'clock you stopped your car and you got out and you stood at attention wherever you were and watch that flag come down.

As mentioned, part of the significance of patriotism in the Tea Party figured world was the sense that patriotic performance and sentiment by Americans was waning. What they saw as defining features of American identity and exceptionalism had fallen away in ways similar to the falling away of traditions and small community life discussed by David. In a twist on this concept, Sandra then compares that patriotism to both those back in the United States and younger generations--those complacent with their freedom--who lack the patriotism inculcated as an American living abroad.

When I came to the states and I see how [the American flag] is treated, it just kills me. They leave it up all night. They are tattered. When they get rid of one, they throw it away. You are not supposed to do that. There is a protocol on how you treat the American flag and how you fold it. Kids aren't taught that anymore. Now I understand there's something out now where they're going to ban flying the American flag in front of schools because it is offensive to foreign students. That came along the Internet. I hope it's a hoax. We were engulfed in patriotism. If I grew up here I wouldn't know-. My kids don't even think much about it. When I talk about it, they say I'm an old fogey. No, this is the way we were raised. This is my environment.

Within the paragraph, she mentions a rumor that American flags may be removed from in front of schools because they may be offensive to foreign students. Though Sandra seems to consider the rumor a hoax, it nonetheless supports a belief not simply in the lessening of the importance of
the American flag, but also that government has become overly concerned with political correctness and promoting multiculturalism. That quote also supports one way in which Tea Party participants view themselves as patriots: promoting core American values that even the government no longer protects.

She returned to this theme later in the interview when she described her participation in the “flagpole incident” at Balboa High School in the Panama Canal Zone. The incident sparked the 1964 Panama riots, which left 20 Panamanians and 3 US soldiers dead. Oddly however, the way she presents the story omits the riot, which some argue was the defining event in the decision to return the canal to the Panamanians in 1979.

We had the 1964 flag thing where the Panamanians wanted to take the US flag down and raise their own. The school kids, one of which was me, said no. We drew a line in the sand and said, no, the United States flag will fly over our high school. We didn't care if the Panama flag flew next to it, but it would not fly alone…. Balboa High school. That's where the first beginnings of this started, when we took a stand against the United States government. There are two flagpoles in front of that high school. We took 24 hour shifts around the flagpole so that no one would take that flag down. And we stood them down. In that regard, the US government was putting something against us that we did not want. That we did not think was fair or right. I asked her to explain.

WW: So the US government wanted to put up the Panamanian flag?
Sandra: The US government, Lyndon B Johnson wanted to do that.
WW: Do you know why?
Sandra: He wanted to appease Panama, like Carter always said. Let's appease the foreign nation and give it to them. And the Americans down there felt that it was a sign of weakness. It was a sign of weakness. It was a sign that we were watering down everything. That's basically why all of us in the military took a stand.

Sandra’s recollection of the events of January 9, 1964, centers the conflict on the United States government prohibiting the flying of the American flag at civilian installations in the Canal Zone. While accurate, the real drama of the event, immortalized to this day as Martyrs’ Day in Panama, was the march by Panamanian students to the flagpole surrounded by the
American students and the scuffle that ensued between Panamanian students, American students and Canal Zone police that led to the two days of rioting in the Canal Zone. In Sandra's recollection of the events, it was not the students protecting American sovereignty from the Panamanians, it was protecting American sovereignty from the United States government bent on appeasing the Panamanians-- “watering everything down”-- in a similar fashion to the erosion of respect for flag and country today.

David and Sandra’s stories provide an apt illustration of how Tea Party participants actively connect their experiences and subjective senses of self to the Tea Party Movement’s emphasis on the past and its idealized political and moral underpinnings. Sandra and David’s stories are similar to the "remembered village" constructed by dispossessed Malaysian laborers discussed by James Scott (1985). Because of dramatic social change past arrangements are cast in a positive light. “The past becomes an effective ideological backdrop against which to deplore the present [Yet,] this past in the service of the present, is selective, it focuses on specific things that have been eroded while omitting others” (Scott 1985: 179).

Sandra’s sense of patriotism was partially formed through her presence at a historical event. Evoking American history is one of the practical elements of the Tea Party figured world. Tea Party members will spend hours reading books and listening to speakers talking about the background of key historical events and what they may tell us about today's problems. Different components of the Tea Party network--at Tea Party meetings, on conservative media and through organizations-- the Tea Party produces connections between an idealized past and present American decline.

In the prior chapter, I referenced Jill Lepore (2010) and her term "anti-history" to describe the way the TPM claims ownership over historical persons and events. To many Tea
Partyists, historical themes and images such as the founders and the Boston Tea Party are not seen as past events with vague similarities to the present, but as “more literal than an analogy.” She writes, “It wasn’t the struggle was like theirs. It was ’we are there’ or ’they are here’” (Lapore 2010:15). No historical event is a direct analog to the present because of the unique forces and circumstances present in each. This direct connection to the past was dramatically illustrated to me by Jack, a hard-edged, retired machinist with a visible anger toward politicians especially Democrats. Jack and his ancestors lived in the same general vicinity since before the Civil War. According to Jack, his great uncles were both Republicans--that is, opposed to the Confederacy--yet remained in central North Carolina during the Civil War. Because of their political beliefs, both of these relatives were hanged by the Home Guard, the local paramilitary Confederate constabulary, in 1864 at a spot within 40 miles of Jack's current home. With palpable bitterness, he related the story to me and described those that executed his relatives as “Democrats,” seemingly drawing a direct line to the Democratic party of today. Due to the passage of time and other historical processes that have changed both parties, few would draw those similarities. But Jack, with what seemed to be anger toward liberals just below the surface waiting to explode, had relied upon this connection as a major factor in his conservative identity.

In another example of reworking history, Woody, of the Pierce County Tea Party, also drew upon historical events that gave personal texture to his participation in the Tea Party. Like Jack, he made a direct personal connection to defining periods of American history. As I sat down with Woody, for an interview over breakfast, he told me that he wanted to show me something after the interview. During the interview he told me that his family had settled here before the Revolutionary War and that he was "kin with half the county.” It was apparent that Woody valued American history. After the interview we walked out to the town square, where a
plaque was set in stone. The plaque commemorated the capture on that spot of Benjamin Merrell, a leader of the Regulators, one of several pre-Revolutionary War uprisings against the colonial government; this one fought between 1766 and 1772 (Stock 1996; Whittenburg 1977). The leaders captured at that spot were eventually hanged by the colonial government in Hillsborough, North Carolina in 1772 (Fitch 1989). Woody told me that the story of the Regulators moved him and he believed that over 200 years before his ancestors might have helped launch this early revolt against tyranny. He also saw a significant connection to the Tea Party Movement that emerged nearly 250 years later. Few besides history buffs or long-term North Carolinians are familiar with the Regulators, but Woody having probably passed that plaque a hundred times, had appropriated it as a local manifestation of his political outlook. His outlook gives the TPM historical weight, making the struggle timeless and personal. The concerns and sacrifices of the Regulators were actual demands by patriots fighting for liberty from unresponsive government. To Woody, he is following in the footsteps of his ancestors who took previous stands against tyranny.

CONNECTING THE MOVEMENT WITH FEELINGS OF POLITICAL DISLOCATION AND DISEMPOWERMENT

As with David, many Tea Party participants see the movement as a new approach to politics. Many considered, even before the 2008 election, representative democracy to have failed because of politicians’ distance from the voters. Though many Tea Party participants partially blamed themselves for being complacent or uninformed in prior years, for many, this new approach to politics seemed a fitting response to their own experiences of observing or attempting to participate in formal politics. Though the Tea Party Movement emerged as a response to the policies of the Obama Administration, there was nonetheless a deep sense of political dissatisfaction among Tea Party participants toward politics in general. Furthermore the
Tea Party’s sense of the movement as an insurgency is directed toward politics and politicians in general. Early in the interview with Woody, I asked him what the Tea Party was, expecting to hear about the national debt, President Obama and taxes. Instead he replied,

It's a group of people that has decided that representatives--our elected representatives--have went off on their own course instead of representing the people and they are trying to rein them back in. Get them to follow what the people elected them for and what they campaigned on. It's like Barry Goldwater said,—I didn't understand it when I first heard it the first couple years--but he said of Republicans and Democrats that there's not a dime’s bit of difference between them.

Tea Party participants commonly assert resentment toward the lack of ideological purity on the part of officeholders, including George W. Bush (Formissano 2012; Hirsch 2010; Zernike 2010).

To Woody, Goldwater’s quote took on significance for himself and other conservatives as frustrations with the Bush administration grew and the GOP temporarily collapsed after the 2008 election. Presidents Bush’s policies concerned nascent Tea Partyists. Eileen, a young Army veteran trying to form a local Tea Party group in a small Piedmont town, related her motivation for participation back to George W. Bush.

It goes back to the last or the second term of Bush, President Bush, when I started to see him veer off, I mean completely veer off the track as far as … he went with Medicare part D, and things like that. I was sitting back going ‘wait a minute, what are you doing, that’s not-.  The Republicans don’t stand for that.’ I’m not a diehard Republican. I’d characterize myself as a conservative, very conservative and not always on social issues, just conservative across the board and um, when I saw him taking a track to the left as far as economics went, that really concerned me.

Though Tea Party participants would most likely vote for the Republican candidate in a general election, and in fact many volunteered on Republican campaigns, they were nonetheless on guard for the RINO, or Republican in Name Only, those GOP politicians that support increasing the size of government or are more likely to compromise with Democrats.

This deep mistrust of politicians and politics in general led to new evaluative political categories apart from the typical right-left dichotomy. David’s above description of his father
juxtaposed to having a bulls-eye painted on his back illustrates a common Tea Party grievance that goes beyond customary left and right political divisions, but rather to the perceived nature of politics. David was remembering a much different relationship between the state and the citizen. Similarly, other Tea Party members articulated a feeling of resentment and exclusion from institutional politics. They related the concept of what they referred to as the "ruling class" or "governing class", a separate group of people, both politicians and bureaucrats, cut off from the people that they represent and serve. These politicians act on the whims of power and the preferences of economic, social and cultural elites. Jenny Beth Martin and Mark Meckler, organizers of Tea Party Patriots claim Tea Party supporters’ vision of American greatness “was missing from the values of the political class, who had abandoned the principles that allowed America to create more wealth and freedom than any nation the world had ever seen before” (Martin and Meckler 2012:14).

During an interview I asked a member of the Hamilton County Tea Party, a well-educated and financially prosperous male business consultant, to define “governing class” and why a group of privileged, upper middle-class professionals should feel so dislocated from government. He responded that politicians have never worked, made payroll or generated jobs and as a result want people to stay “in their place and be dictated to.” Oddly, despite his advantages in wealth, education and social capital, he nonetheless considered government to be a separate, insular class made up of powerful people with different and corrosive values.

His position reflects Kazin’s populist theme of producerism raised in the previous chapter regarding the distinction between those who produce and those who do not. Yet, in this case, it is the political class who are the unproductive ones--they do nothing that is valuable (see also Berlet 2012). In Kazin’s cases from the 19th century, the producers were not necessarily workers
and farmers, but the petty bourgeoisie who were also present in such groups as the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. Populism didn’t necessarily adhere to strict class categories; professionals and small business owners, were often welcome as part of a “moral community of self-governing citizens” against monopolies and elites (Kazin 1995:35). In that world, class was not the determinant of being a “producer”, but rather where one’s politics came down on the topic of plutocracy.

Correspondingly, Stanley Aronowitz (2003), argues that class divisions today are separated by formations of power that are not necessarily tied to relations of production. He writes that class should be more broadly considered as the ownership and control of key means of material and immaterial production (Aronowitz 2003:10 emphasis added). Separating himself from those who would use Marxist theory in a deterministic way, he argues class divisions have “historicity” meaning they emerge and change under specific historical conditions. If class is considered as a relation to the "ownership" of politics instead of solely to the means of material production, a different sort of alienation emerges creating a cross-cutting cleavage across class divisions. I argue that this alienation has coalesced into a sense of political disempowerment or dislocation on the parts of those in the Tea Party.

Consistent with the usual assumption that local politics are closest to people’s immediate concerns, the local arena is where the remoteness of politicians from the people was most apparent to many Tea Partyists. County-level GOP organizations have historically been the entry points for conservative citizens to first get involved with politics (Crowder-Meyer 2010). But according to many of my consultants, those organizations had become bureaucratic and hierarchical. In many counties, Tea Party members looked on county GOP committees with disdain as “good old boy networks” whose main activity was the local Lincoln-Reagan fund-
raising dinners held by GOP committees nationwide. Gone were the days when county-level party organizations had a fully operating pyramid of local functionaries down to the neighborhood level. In many of the counties I visited there were few permanent precinct captains at the grassroots level. This left the county party organization in the hands of a small group usually thought of as the local establishment, such as elected officeholders and local businessmen, who were likely to resist change and controversy.

At a town hall meeting held during a Hawthorne County Tea Party meeting, an older Republican office holder marveled at the level of engagement and commitment demonstrated by the group’s members. He said "this is the way the [County] Republican meetings used to be", meaning that at some point earlier the local Republican organization had been one of high participation. Jane, a Hawthorne County member mentioned to me during an interview that when she was young there was an active youth component to the local GOP where social activities were available for local youth to become active in the party. At one group meeting an attendee said, “I've been involved in politics and conservative Republican politics and a lot of battles in the party with the establishment there [in the county]. I pretty much became very disillusioned with Republicans. I'm still registered as a Republican but I'm not happy with the way that things are being conducted.”

More often this sense of political dislocation was expressed through anger at the perception of being ignored or taken for granted by elected officials. Mike, co-founder of the Hawthorne Tea Party discussed his motivation for co-founding the group. “You're telling me that I helped put you in office and that I want to talk to you on the phone and I have to jump through hoops? I have to go through 37 assistants and aides? To only leave a message? For you to not call me back? Because he's busy? …Okay.”
The themes of dislocation were also strongly linked to political fundamentalism and uncompromising ideological firmness that emerged from Tea Party members’ idealizing of American history and their idolization of the founding fathers. Evident in the interviews, constructions of politicians differentiated between inauthentic politicians or RINOs and the ideal, ethical politician who acts sincerely according to conservative values. People's stories of engagement with politics illuminated how North Carolina Tea Party activists referenced ideal politicians as straightforward citizens who do the work of a leader. This became apparent through conversations with Tea Party participants in which they lamented how today's politicians lacked authenticity and candor. Mike continued,

They're not like me. I want to meet the guy like me. Sarah Palin? She might not be electable as a president, but she so impressed me. Because I believe she is absolutely who she says she is. She doesn't care. ‘This is how I see it folks. This is how I see it.’ She went out there and helped get people elected. The left can talk trash about her all they want and the right can be scared of her all they want, I like her. Because I think she's genuine.23

There were clear memories of other idealized politicians and specific instances of their deeds. Many participants referenced Jesse Helms as such an ideal. Diane, who we will meet in the next section, said, “I really don't think that our congressman and our senators have really cared for the most part. I will have to say one thing about Jesse Helms. That man, if he ever told you he was going to do something or wouldn't do something, he was true to his word. Absolutely true to his word...And we need that. Yes we do need that.”24 Woody also evoked Jesse Helms about being direct and true to his word, referencing a candidate forum Helms attended while Woody was in secondary school.

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23One can see the continued salience of this desire for authenticity in support for the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump (Greenberg 2015).

24It should also be noted that Jesse Helms was known for making constituent services a priority of his office. Prior to Helms, US Representatives focused on constituent services, not Senators. According to Link (2008:133) Helms constituent services were “legendary.”
They asked [Helms] questions...they were asking very pointed political questions. He would just say yes or no and not beat around the bush. He told the truth. He told what he wanted. It wasn't put out in grandiose terms making people take a mental jump as to what it meant. Like "conservative values". What does that mean? Family values. That can mean a whole lot of things to a lot of people and a lot of the progressives use those terms-both sides of the aisle do. It's as vague and nonspecific as possible. It sounds good. "Family values and conservative principles". Jesse Helms would say that that means this.

Woody also idolized Jesse Helms directness in another manner, by his willingness to directly confront racial divisions at that same event.

There was a small group maybe 50 people, mostly whites. The older blacks always made the rest of [the African-American students] sit together in a group up front on the side. If somebody tried to sit over there they would run them off. ‘That is our area.’ There were a few blacks that didn't want to sit with the rest of the blacks, but there wasn't very many. And it wasn't animosity. We were not going over there; and they were not coming over here and they didn't want it to be for mixing. The first thing that Jesse Helms said was that we can't have this segregation. And he said "you get up here and go sit over there and you folks come over and sit over here and mix this thing up a little bit. You've got to get how society is supposed to be." He made everybody get up and move around and sit down in different places.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, race is a difficult terrain to navigate for many Americans and especially for Tea Party participants. Conservative concepts of colorblindness and personal responsibility have led to charges that the TPM is racist. Due to this, Tea Party participants I observed had a preoccupation with race because they felt unfairly labeled as racist. Yet Woody, by evoking and articulating this memory, paints Jesse Helms as an agent directly confronting and refusing to ignore racial divisions, forcing groups together like "society is supposed to be.” Woody's memory was of seeing a true conservative and an ideal politician act in a manner that many politicians would fear to do: directly confronting and intervening in one of the defining social divisions of the American South.
DECLINING AMERICA AND THE REJECTION OF CHRISTIANITY

The earliest scholarly writing on the TPM (Skocpol and Williamson 2011; Zernike 2010) makes little reference to the incorporation of faith into the Tea Party movement’s set of beliefs. I found faith as a leitmotif—yet in different degrees of prominence—throughout my research sites. I mentioned in the prior chapter that one aspect of the Tea Party figured world was the linkage of Christian fundamentalism and the movement’s more general fundamentalism of constitutional literalism and intransigence toward compromise. Sometimes when people described their political outlook, it was often labeled as “conservative,” “Christian,” and “Republican,” and typically in that order of priority. Moreover, survey research has found correlations between Tea Party participation and participants’ evangelical faith (Hood et al. 2015; Jones and Cox 2010; Clement and Green 2011). For many individual Tea Party participants, the movement acquires meaning in light of their own religious background. Conversely, their religious identity is sometimes given new meaning by Tea Party participation.

To some, this new Tea Party conservatism gave new meaning to the “culture wars” issues of the 1980s that continue to this day. Paul began his interview with the declaration that “I am a believer. And as a believer I believe we have an enemy, an adversary.” Paul connected the Tea Party Movement to his Christian upbringing and memories of his early initiation into politics in the 1980s. He saw the importance of moral truth through its articulation by Ronald Reagan and he had memories of the Moral Majority and its goal of pursuing these moral truths as public policy. He repeats the theme of normative truths that are apparent in the political fundamentalism of the Tea Party, saying that in the 1980s he began to understand the idea of right and wrong and the dangers of moral relativism. "I don't believe in gray areas. Satan lives in gray areas and those gray areas do a great deal of harm to people.”
He feels that the drive for morally guided public policy, such as that articulated by Jerry Falwell, is even more important today. To Paul, liberals have become more liberal and conservative have also become more liberal. As a result, he is shocked by a society which values for instance the early sexualization of children and what he calls the "culture of death" characterized by euthanasia and abortion. He strongly believes that it was John McCain that provided the initial impetus for the rise of the Tea Party. Paul claims a low point of morality was illustrated by the candidacy of John McCain. "His values were all over the place. We didn't know whether he was with us (Christian Evangelicals) or against us. It was a gray area.”

With other Tea Party members, the connection between Christian principles and classical liberalism emerged from their newfound political activism such as by Sandy, an upper middle-class stay-at-home mother and co-founder of the Hamilton County Tea Party whom we met in Chapter 1. Sandy’s Christian faith predated her political awakening with the Tea Party Movement. Yet she established connections between her identity as a Christian and as a new conservative activist. Sandy, when asked why she was conservative, answered that (left-wing) liberalism did not line up with her religious beliefs. "Christianity is the foundation of decision-making and principles I live by. My conservative beliefs of freedom and personal responsibility align with that."

She continues,

I think when you look at Christ's coming. He came for the individual. He came to set them free. And there is personal responsibility in making those decisions as to who you are as a person; what your life looks like; where you're going; and his plan for you… I enjoy my freedom. I want to make decisions as to where I am going. I want to go where the sky is the limit… With Christ, you're free and as an American you are free…America is the last and greatest place to practice Christianity because of the freedom. As those freedoms get chipped away, the prevalence of Christianity, you can kind of see--. There's something going on where they are diminishing.
Many similarly tried to make the connection between the moral claims of Christianity and conservatism. I mentioned Rev. Wilson in the previous chapter and his hermeneutic reading of the Constitution. He also spoke very strongly about the connection between morality in one’s personal life and morality in fiscally responsible public policy. Rev. Wilson, at the time of our first meeting, was trying to determine whether to become affiliated with the local Tea Party group. He would later become a regular participant, a speaker at regional Tea Party events and in 2012 be elected by a Tea Party constituency to the county’s board of commissioners.

Rev. Wilson, like others, volunteered his family history before I asked my first question, linking his political autobiography to his upbringing among poor rural southerners. He stressed the importance of standing on principles. This was demonstrated by his father, grandfather and even a great-grandfather and great uncle who both fought for the Union during the Civil War despite the threats to the family. To him, the moral decline of America had direct effect not simply on societal wellbeing, but on the nation’s finances. He saw the breakdown of the family, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy as drains on the nation's finances, which in turn drove excessive government spending and debt. “…when you have a moral breakdown in society and in the family, somebody's going to pick up the tab. We’re not going to let kids fall through the cracks; we’re going to help a single mother.” Government intervention to address these issues through social services was hugely expensive. Yet these social problems are a result of the rejection of faith. Restore faith and we eliminate a large amount of government spending. To him, a dichotomy between fiscal and social conservatives doesn’t make sense, the perspectives are linked.

One local group, the Pierce County Tea Party, which will be discussed further in the Chapter 6, attracted many devout Christians who might not have otherwise gotten involved with
a Tea Party group that was less religious. Some found the group an alternative and attractive venue where they could express their own type of faith-based conservatism. Diane was such a person. A tall, 68 year-old Pentecostal, she grew up as the daughter of a sharecropper in the South Carolina low country. Her family moved to Pierce County in the 1950s seeking employment in the furniture industry. As discussed earlier, Ernesto Laclau writes that populism is driven by equivalences between personal experiences and wider shared grievances. He maintains this coherence is strongest when individuals forge “equivalent chains” of multiple experiences. Diane’s political autobiography is a long chain of conflicts she witnessed between church, state, and capitalism such as Roe vs. Wade, the 1963 ban on school prayer and the decline of North Carolina’s textile and furniture industry. Diane's 's political identity is reflective of a fascinating heteroglossia (Strauss 1990, 1997) which integrates faith, class and the influence of mainstream conservative media and obscure eschatological charismatic preachers and authors. As with many others, Diane stresses the moral decline of the nation, situating its origin within the political developments in the 1960s and 70s. She became a Republican because of abortion.

Whenever you are for abortion, you are against the country…period. (God) says we have to do the right thing. That's what he expects us to do. To do the right thing. He tells us ‘innocent blood defileth the earth’ and defileth means he will push you off his land. I knew that in 1973 or whenever they passed that bill of Roe versus Wade. We were in big trouble. I was young, but I know we were in big trouble.

These memories were very clear to her including when "Madalyn Murray O'Hair took the prayer out of school.” Attending public school before the 1963 Abington School District vs. Schempp decision which prohibited school-sponsored Bible reading in public schools, she remembered those readings and how they had a strong effect upon her life.

Saying that a child can't hear somebody pray in school is beyond me. When our tax dollars go to fund this stuff. Tax dollars pay for it yet they say you can't pray to God Almighty?... that made this land? That made the wood that built this building and the products that made the bricks? And the person, that God made the person themselves?
Then you tell me that you can't pray in school and you can't have Bible reading in school? Now, that bothers me.

To her, the government’s authority over education had far-reaching effects on the shaping of moral and responsible citizens. Diane makes a wonderfully concise and culturally specific connection between government subjugation, moral education, the Constitution and her frustration with politicians.

The reason we are losing [our country] is because of what our federal government has implemented into our schools and the authority they have taken away from parents. Parents are scared to death to switch [whip] their kids anymore. [They are] scared [the government] will come and take their kids away. The government says these kids don't belong to you; they are ours. The things they have implemented runs contrary to the Constitution, so there's not a whole lot of defense that you can do against it, unless we get some leaders that will stand up and defend the Constitution. They think that when we do not know our Constitution, they can write anything over on us. You can't do it and expect things to be right and above board and have a good nation because it ain't gonna happen.

The paramount importance of reincorporating prayer in school is part of a wider connection between faith, history and politics that animates her participation with the TPM. To her, the Tea Party is an important new agent to reestablish the Christian basis of America. “[The Tea Party aims] to bring our country back to what it used to be. TO-BRING-OUR-COUNTRY-BACK (rapping her hand on the table with each word). To a realization of God and what our forefathers set forth in this country when they wrote the Constitution.”

As mentioned above, Glenn Beck is the most prominent media personality reinforcing the connection between faith and American history. However, Diane does not subscribe to cable television, which is the only way to watch Fox News. Diane’s political views are partially informed by more obscure media personality such as Chuck Harder, a radio talk show host most popular in the 1990s for his mix of conservative and progressive positions and print media such as the small, mail and online magazine Newswatch, which describes itself as "making today's
news clear in the light of Bible prophecy.” Diane strongly believed in “end times” prophesy, a belief that the earth would soon experience the second coming of Jesus Christ. This outlook emerged out of the “born-again” movement in the late 1970s, and built a moderate following among Christians linking eschatological beliefs and political viewpoints (Harding 2000:80).

Diane applied current politics to different aspects of eschatological religious thinking. She believes that there are forces striving for one world government which according to the Bible’s Book of Revelations is established by the Antichrist before the return of Christ (Revelations 13-21). Many fundamentalists, including Diane, believe the United Nations is an effort to bring about one world government. Diane saw the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as another such example but with a personal and painful meaning. NAFTA, which hastened the demise of textile and furniture manufacturing industries in North Carolina, uprooted the lives of her and many of her relatives, friends and coworkers. Asked why President Clinton would negotiate NAFTA she replied, ”One world government. One world government…” She then adds, “And money-- money for the big man.” When asked why politicians act in their own interest as opposed to the country’s, she states with certainty, “Because they think they can do it and get away. They do it for political purposes and money. God says the love of money--not money, but the love of money--is the root of all evil. Follow the money trail and you will know.”

This last utterance, cloaking end times prophecy in class-based grievances, discloses a resentment of not just politicians, but capitalism as well. As argued in this chapter, people rely upon experiences to fashion their political subjectivity. However in many cases these experiences lead to subjectivities that may not necessarily adhere to typical American left-right categories (Strauss 1990). For many, ideologies are not acquired through learning theories but
through making associations between concepts experienced in daily life. Strauss writes, “emotionally salient life experiences mediate [the] internalization of social discourses and [lead] to a partial cognitive integration of them” (Strauss 1990:314). Some, like Diane, must work through the obvious contradictions of American conservatism, namely the conflict between Christ’s teaching and advocacy for free-market capitalism. Diane spent 31 years working at a furniture plant under demanding physical and often uncomfortable conditions. Though believing herself to be strongly conservative, she has worked out some of the contradictions of capitalism. She found the answer to the contradictions in the moral economy that connects with her own experience of the furniture plant closing and transferring its manufacturing overseas. Diane's experiences with a transitioning economy, political dispossession and strong Christian faith translates into views on capitalism that run counter to typical evangelical conservatives and those associated with much of the Tea Party Movement.

When asked to define capitalism, Diane responded that it is the ability of a person to “start their own business and that government has no right in the business of private enterprise.” But in the next sentence she states that a businessperson must run the business "righteously.” “You must pay people a fair wage. They need to remember that the people that are working in the plant are as important as the CEO. That person that is out there pushing and shoving at a machine or sewing material is just as important as the CEO and they need to share equally.” This, however, is not to say that Diane believes in government intervention. “It has to come from the heart, their heart. They have to decide that they are going to do the right thing because it is what God expects of them.” Regarding the furniture manufacturer that eliminated her job in North Carolina in favor of creating one overseas, she states, “The company left because they could make more money overseas and that is because of greed. When people say they had to
move overseas because of this and this and this… no, no, no. The Bible says in the last days it's
greed and greedy men.”

Diane provides a vivid illustration of how a life of experiences creates the foundation for
political identities. Yet she also linked her political/religious outlooks to a particular
interpretation of the Tea Party movement. This interpretation argued that the words of the
Constitution called for a biblical foundation for public policy. And though this interpretation was
accepted within the Pierce County LTPG, such an outlook would not be embraced by national
Tea Party groups such as FreedomWorks as well as many everyday Tea Party members.
However, I would also argue that hitching her hopes to the Tea Party movement is a reasonable
choice given how the Republican Party has consistently disappointed its evangelical Christian
base.

CONCLUSIONS

Political scientist Kathryn Cramer Walsh has written extensively on how close
engagement with individuals provides important information about political outlooks that often
do not emerge from polling and surveys (Walsh 2004; 2009). She critiques Thomas Frank's
argument in What's the Matter with Kansas?, (Frank 2005) that working-class conservatives act
contrary to their own best interests. She writes "if we listen to the way people understand their
votes or policy preferences we might conclude otherwise. Are they really not making sensible
choices? Or are they just making choices that do not make sense to the perspectives that we
assume are appropriate?" (Walsh 2009:180).

In the prior chapter, I described how the different components of the Tea Party create a
cultural world that provides an interpretive frame for evaluating people, issues and selves. The
interpretive frames typically lead to mobilization by helping people make connections between
the social movement and broader cultural understandings. This chapter has shown how these cultural understandings are greatly infused with intimate, subjective experiences. Political autobiographies help us understand the different perspectives through which people assign meaning to politics, issues and political participation. The figured world constructed by the Tea Party network, with its symbols, discourses, and practices allows individuals to personalize the meanings for a variety of different concerns and discontents that lie much deeper than the generally understood position of the Tea Party as advocating simply for traditionalism and fiscal austerity. The ability of people to easily reorient significant parts of their lives to the meaning of the Tea Party is a major factor in the movement’s success.25

This chapter also begins the description of the agency of social movement participants and the personal transformations that may occur. Here, grievances contextualized by the Tea Party Movement motivate the active reworking and repurposing of participants’ personal histories. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this repurposing and reworking is even more active and effective in the local Tea Party groups, which provide the space for them to fashion activist identities as Tea Party members. But first, in the next chapter, it is important to demonstrate how the Tea Party figured world is a model that helps us understand Tea Partyists’ positions on issues outside of the TPM’s initial grievances.

25At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 and 7, personal and local meanings shape the Tea Party
Chapter 5  
Race in the Figured World of the Tea Party

As shown in the prior chapter, Tea Partyists acquired frames and narratives from the Tea Party figured world through which they named fears and concerns. They also imbued these frames and narratives with personal meanings from their own lives. I have maintained more broadly that the TPM helped citizens not only interpret the changing terrain of American politics, but also act within it. Moreover the figured world of the Tea Party helps explain Tea Partyists’ positions on other issues not initially connected with the movement. The same interpretive frames used to explain government fiscal profligacy were also eventually applied to other issues such as the environment and questions of American racial inequality. This chapter takes up the TP Party stance toward race.

Racism was one of the most frequent charges levelled against the Tea Party, a charge that leaves many Tea Partyists resentful. On a crisp afternoon, three weeks before Christmas in 2010, I was sitting in the bed of a large pickup truck with Mike, cofounder of the Hawthorne County Tea Party. We were participating in the central North Carolina town of Reston’s Christmas parade. Towed behind us on a flatbed trailer, was a homemade parade float assembled by members of that local Tea Party group. Members had made a plywood silhouette of a tea pot-shaped sleigh and reindeer along with the Hawthorne Tea Party logo and placed them on top of the trailer. Three members of the group were standing on the float dressed in colonial style

26 The racial landscape in America is, at the time of this writing in 2014 and 2015 a quickly shifting terrain. The disposition of whiteness and colorblind ideology are more in the spotlight than when the research was conducted. Due to the events in Ferguson, Missouri, the “Blacks Lives Matter” Movement and constant publicized instances of police violence perpetuated on people of color, most Americans, Tea Partyists included, are being led down a new path of racial awareness.
costumes waving to the bystanders. As we proceeded slowly up the town's main street, Mike, his children and I handed out small American flags to people in the audience lining the street. At one point we passed a young black woman who did not reach for a flag. She looked at Mike and said "I don't like the Tea Party because I'm black." Mike looked at me and in a mix of indignation and amusement said, "Did you hear that? She thinks we’re a bunch of freakin’ racists!"

This was not the first nor would it be the last time that I would hear a Tea Partyist express indignation about being labeled as racist. A common perception of the Tea Party Movement (TPM) held by many of its detractors is that it is driven at its very core by racist beliefs, sentiments, and motivations. Some have argued that racist individuals have joined the Tea Party specifically because of the election of a black man as president of the country (Parker and Barreto 2013). Others have seen the Tea Party movement as a reaction to the loss of status on the part of whites as ethnic and racial minorities gain social, political and economic benefits in a multicultural America (DiMaggio and Street 2011). Others have argued that while the Tea Party may not have been formed specifically for racist purposes, it nonetheless is populated by racist organizers providing a new political space for militia members and white supremacists (Burghart and Zeskind 2011). My research suggests that while the antipathy toward Obama is a common rallying theme of the TPM and the current American Right in general, portraying the movement as driven by those who champion white supremacy misses an important aspect of how racial difference is talked about by Tea Party participants. My research with Tea Partyists discloses instead how racialized discourses are actually incorporated into the frames and practices that constitute Tea Partyists’ political identity. In LTPGs where racialized discourses did circulate, my purpose was to trace out those discourses and see how those discourses were processed, used and translated into action in the spaces where Tea Partyists interact.
THE INCONSISTENT APPEARANCE OF THE TEA PARTY AND RACE

My early observations of Tea Partyists showed a conflicted relationship between Tea Party members and race. Tea Partyists often ruminated in their meetings about how to attract more blacks to the movement. Many also actively supported and volunteered for black conservative political candidates. Media personality Glenn Beck, while continually highlighted the unimpeachable values of the nation’s founders, did not restrict these qualities to white founders. Throughout 2010 he spoke of the contributions of black Americans to American history often through the promotion of the book *American History in Black and White* by Christian fundamentalist and pop-historian David Barton (2001). Beck also organized the “Restoring Honor Rally” held on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on the 47th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a Dream” speech. At the same time, many Tea Partyists rejected claims that institutional and individual racism persist in America. They often attributed the rejection of the TPM by most black Americans to longstanding apologetic conservative discourses that link government dependency, dysfunctional black culture and black identity politics.

To illustrate these distinctive and sometimes contradictory views, I relate a conversation with James.

“We have generated problems in this country and we've done it from the original founding. For instance, slavery. If I could do one thing, I would sink every slave ship ... I don't want to kill the people that were being kidnapped but destroy the whole premise that we needed people here to do the work. Think of what that would've done to this country today with all the divisions that we have with blacks now.

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27My consultants used the term “black” as opposed to “African-American” in nearly all of my encounters.

28The theme of racial unity is fairly clear given the timing and place of the event, including the inclusion of Martin Luther King Jr.’s niece Alveda. However, the rally was more focused toward the unity of faith and a celebration of the honor demonstrated by those in the military.
James, like most Americans, rejects slavery. However, I was puzzled by how he was framing slavery more as a misguided means of procuring labor than a human tragedy. His perspective is clarified as he articulates what he sees as the source of needless racial divisions.

If blacks had come here through voluntary immigration, we would probably still have a little racism going on, but we wouldn't have all this crap about the never ending "we've been victimized" thing going on….It (racism) will never be gone until there is some complete intermixing of the races where no one will be able to say they were victimized any more than anyone else.

Though never actually saying that slavery was morally and ethically wrong, David sees the episode as passed. The divisions he sees are the results of the no-longer-valid resentment on the part of blacks to historic wrongs. This resentment would end with the mixing of the races, when no one could claim victimhood.

While I did experience instances of unvarnished bigoted statements regarding blacks, yet more commonly regarding Latinos and Muslims, in most cases I observed Tea Party participants attempting to understand racial difference in the contemporary United States using the frames and narratives of modern conservatism. James was showing a disregard, whether willful or a product of ignorance I don’t know, of a racialized system of inequality and instead applying the foundational conservative discourse of individualism. He articulated an underlying assumption that the troubled race relations in America are more the result of group-based, identity politics which subverts the individualism associated with an *American* cultural identity. In his thought experiment, by “intermixing” races, those born in the US become phenotypically the same, and by extension, make plain for all to see that it is one’s individual talents and resourcefulness that determine success in America. This outlook signals a shift in discourses that is distinct from the discourses and symbols of racial resentment regarding crime and social unrest tapped into by Richard Nixon (Lowndes 2008) or affirmative action by Jesse Helm’s ‘white hands” ad or those
of the inherent danger of blacks in the Willie Horton television advertisements aired during George H W Bush’s presidential campaign (Mandelberg 2001). The Tea Party rhetoric indexes an identity of whiteness and a contemporary “colorblind” race ideology more attuned to neoliberalism and privatization (Omi and Winant 2014).

I observed a dual relationship between Tea Partyists and race that reflects the Tea Partyists’ political identity. On one hand, the Tea Party figured world rests upon taken-for-granted, unrecognized whiteness, a core set of racial interests often obscured by race-neutral words, actions and policies (Hartigan 1997). This is displayed primarily through the Tea Party’s vision of American Exceptionalism and patriotism and in the contemporary white hegemony discourse of colorblindness. Simply, Tea Partyists ignore enduring institutional and interpersonal discrimination in American life while asserting American nationalism and unity across the supposedly disappearing boundaries of race (Omi and Winant 2014). On the other hand, Tea Partyists frame the problems of the black underclass as the tragic result of dependency created and nurtured by government action such as “Great Society” social programs. These concepts are all meaningful within the core frames of Tea Party members’ collective identity, which places significance in the insidious effects of too much government, the moral foundation of individualism and personal achievement and the importance of America’s dominant founding narratives. Moreover this outlook provides for Tea Party participants an explanation of blacks’ unwillingness to join the TPM. Many believe this government-spawned dependency, what some termed modern day “plantation dependency”, creates strong loyalty to the Democratic Party and strong social pressure for conservative blacks to hide their true feelings. Combining theories of whiteness, colorblind racism and collective identity, a picture develops illustrating the relationship between the TPM and racial difference in the United States.
DESCRIPTIONS OF TEA PARTY RACISM IN THE LITERATURE

Parker and Barreto (2013, see also Parker 2010) and Burghart and Zeskind (2010) are two primary sources that are often used to parse racism in the Tea Party Movement. I argue that both works have methodological shortcomings which fail to capture how Tea Partyists assign meaning to race relations and give an oversimplified description of how race pertains to the TPM.

Burghart and Zeskind (2010), relying upon a survey of websites and media sources, argue that NTPOs such as FreedomWorks, Tea Party Patriots and Tea Party Express are populated by numerous people with histories of racist leanings. Further they argue that even if the TPM does not focus on race, it offers an attractive target for cooptation by white supremacists and nativist militia members.

The authors’ analysis overlooks several important points regarding the Tea Party Movement. First, the analysis implies that the NTPOs are the predominant and prevailing component of the Tea Party movement, which, as I have argued, is an oversimplified description. The TPM is not, as some have described it, a hierarchy with elite groups orchestrating pseudo-grassroots supporters or “Astroturf” (e.g. Di Maggio 2011). Rather, the movement consists of different autonomous components—both elite and grassroots—linked through dense networks. Second, the authors describe six NTPOs that have varying influence and effects (some extremely limited) on the overall movement. For example, while including Tea Party Patriots and FreedomWorks, which have vast memberships and grassroots presence, they also include Tea Party Express, a PAC formed by two Republican political consultants based in California. The organization, which did run several national bus tours with Tea Party-aligned candidates, is little more than a fundraising operation and cash cow for the founders’ political consulting firm (Roth
Burghart and Zeskind themselves described it as having no desire to build up a membership or have a grassroots presence. Yet they focus on the Tea Party Express as a site of an early racial controversy indicative of grassroots sentiment. In 2010, Mark Walker, a spokesman for the organization was ousted after refusing to recant an offensive, racially-charged blog post. Third, the report completely ignores the influence of Americans for Prosperity (AFP), the Charles and David Koch-sponsored organization, which the authors describe as "ancillary" to the movement. Far from ancillary, AFP has been, along with FreedomWorks and Tea Party patriots, the most engaged and effective NTPO in the Tea Party Movement. Aside from AFP's support for voter identification laws, which many outside the group regard as voter suppression laws, the professionally run organization has been relatively successful in remaining free of racial controversy. Finally, Tea Party Express was viewed negatively by my consultants. My consultants generally made it clear that their LTPGs were not directly affiliated with any NTPO. Moreover, on the few occasions when Tea Party Express came up in interviews, the consultant stated that the organization lacked bone fides as a true part of the movement.

Parker and Barreto (2013) and Parker (2010), employing quantitative methods, present results from surveys of Tea Party supporters’ inclinations toward racism, as measured by existing scales, and toward “authoritarianism” as defined by social psychological models (Adorno et al. 1950; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005) and Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al. 1994). This work, which argues that the TPM is motivated by animus toward Barak Obama primarily because of his race (Parker and Barreto 2013:34), is often cited as the primary support for racism in Tea Party Movement. Among their findings, they show that Tea Partyists, more so than Republicans in general, believe that the problems of black Americans are rooted in personal/moral failings such as individual responsibility and motivation. My
research complicates the picture, as I have found that my consultants attributed the roots of the crisis in America to the decline of personal/moral qualities in Americans as a whole not just Black Americans. Along these same lines, Skocpol and Williamson (2011), one of the most accurate and well respected source on the Tea Party, point out that Parker's data itself also shows the same findings as mine: Tea Partyists hold a negative view of the personal/moral qualities of most Americans, whites included (Skocpol and Williamson 2011:68).29

More significantly, the ability to capture a clear picture of the racial sensibilities of Tea Partyists is clouded by how Parker and Barreto characterize a Tea Party supporter. In their wording of the survey questions, anyone with a positive impression of the TPM is considered representative of the Tea Party and is given the unsupported label of “true believer.” Such a vague dataset raises two serious concerns. First, the authors are generally gauging an audience or “issue public” (Converse 1964; Warner 2005), rather than engaged members of a social movement. The surveys included people who had had no actual, engagement with people directly involved in the movement. Such general criteria for “true believers” are likely to be highly contingent on the political atmosphere at the moment of the survey. Most prominently, Parker and Barreto’s second survey was conducted in the first three months of 2011, a period of time, directly after the entry of the dozens of Tea Party supported candidates who won election in the Tea Party wave election of 2010- a, possibly the, high water mark of Tea Party support. The survey concluded before the 2011 Tea Party-inspired threat of government shutdown in April of that year, which eroded much of the Tea Party’s support (Zernike 2011). These methodological shortcomings make it difficult to grasp accurately what Tea Party activists of the

29It should also be pointed out that negative attitudes toward blacks’ personal/moral qualities are not restricted to conservatives. As recently as 2012, the General Social Survey found 41% of white Democrats felt Blacks “lack the motivation to pull themselves out of poverty” (Silver and McCann 2014).
degree of engagement I was interviewing espoused. Given the empirically suspect basis for their statements, the strong conclusions offered by Parker and Barreto that the Tea Party movement was primarily motivated by racism are unwarranted.

I maintain that the LTPG component of Tea Party Movement at the time of my research was not driven by what Etienne Balibar (1991) terms “auto-referential” racism, where Tea Partyists see themselves as representatives of a superior race; neither did they express “hetero-referential” racism, where Tea Partyists see blacks as evil or inferior. Rather the collective identity of Tea Partyists valued a narrative of American that was unremarked by them as distinctly white, and characterized by the cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995) mentioned in Chapter 2. This perspective favors a classical liberal ideology and ignores the enduring structural and individual racial bias in America.

Political Scientist Joseph Lowndes (2012) remarks on changes in the contemporary conservative movement regarding race in the post-civil rights movement era. His primary argument is that the conservative movement of the 1960s was forged in partial opposition to the civil rights movement. Barry Goldwater, the Republican Presidential candidate in 1964, and Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972 each attempted to exploit white resentment of the extension of rights to blacks for political gain, as did Ronald Reagan with his reference to “states’ rights” in his 1980 speech in Philadelphia, Mississippi (Black and Black 2002: 216). However,

30 Also critiquing the impression that racism is the primary driver of the movement, Lowndes does not dispute that individuals with racist leanings most likely populate different aspects of the TPM. In fact, he writes that he would be more incredulous if a modern, conservative, populist movement emerged without attracting a number of racists. But the presence of isolated racist signs and utterances in a wide ranging decentralized movement only goes so far in explaining the presence of racial animus in the TPM.

31 His speech included the following lines: "I believe in states' rights. I believe we have distorted the balance of our government today by giving powers that were never intended to be given in the Constitution to that federal establishment.” He continued by pledging to "restore to states and local governments the power that properly belongs to them" Reagan was advised against delivering that speech in Philadelphia because the discourse was similar to that used by segregationists in the 50s and 60s and because Philadelphia was the site where three civil
Lowndes believes that white populist anger is now directed at the state. During the time of my research, there was no large-scale, organized black social movement against which conservatives might rally. Also, open and coded racial appeals across issues of employment, crime, housing and education have less affective appeal in the post-civil rights era. Lowndes believes this is partly due to the presence in popular culture of popular black athletes, politicians and other celebrities who have prominent roles in American culture. Finally, although my data do not fully support this claim as it did with the Lowndes first point, He writes that welfare reform and the full realization of the prison-industrial complex have reduced the potency of welfare and crime as raced discourses animating conservative action.

THE TEA PARTY AS A VERSION OF WHITENESS IN THE UNITED STATES

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Tea Party figured world provided an interpretive frame for assigning meaning to their concerns. Its foundation rested upon the idea that Americans-black and white-had turned their backs on the morality, responsibility and patriotism of the founders. Their vision of America to a large degree relies upon an idealized and white American past and a cultural identity espoused especially by Americans who happen to be white.

The concept of “whiteness” rests on a perspective that to understand the perpetuation and legitimization of racial inequality is too explore whites’ understanding of themselves instead of a racial other (Hartmann et al 2009). “The focus is on the identities, ideologies, and norms that privilege whites, are not always understood or even explicitly realized by those who benefit from them, and on the ways that these taken-for-granted assumptions can mystify, legitimate, and ultimately perpetuate systems of racial inequality.” The Tea Party is an especially useful space to investigate the presence of an identity in American political culture that has not been explicitly

rights workers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1964.
recognized in hegemonic discourses as a raced identity. Even more importantly the “whiteness” of understandings and practices of the American Right are not generally recognized or remarked upon in American political culture as “belonging” to whites. Frankenberg (1993) discusses three main characteristics of whiteness. The first is the taken-for-granted or normative nature of being white, where whites have no acknowledgment of possessing any racial identity. Second, whites are unaware of the privileges that come with this race (e.g. McIntosh 1989), what Lipsitz calls the “value of whiteness” (Lipsitz 1998) or what Paul Street terms the “white fairness understanding gap” (Street 2001). Related to both is the third characteristic, “colorblindness,” in which whites are colorblind when it comes to racial inequality. They may see blacks as disadvantaged, but attribute the lack of success to individual effort and the distinctive characteristics of black culture. Hence the lack of awareness regarding white privilege is related to an unawareness of structural, institutional and interpersonal racism.

I will focus on discourses of colorblindness in the balance of this chapter, but prior to that I want to focus on how whiteness, “a sense of self and subjectivity unaware of its own social foundations” (Hartmann et al. 2009), is particularly manifested in the figured world and collective identity of my Tea Party consultants. Whiteness takes new forms under different conditions and in relation to specific places and identities (Hartigan 1997). Frankenberg (1993) terms these “social geographies” which may be racially marked physical environments, or conceptual frameworks (such as figured worlds) “which frame and limit what we see, what we remember and how we interpret the physical world” (Frankenberg 1993:54). The TPM constitutes a unique social geography which illustrates a specific articulation and reproduction of whiteness.
Melanie Bush (2011) investigates mechanisms by which whiteness is reproduced on an everyday basis. As will be discussed in the section on colorblindness, the structural aspects of American society that create racial and class inequality are rarely articulated. This mystification is exemplified by the first moments of the Tea Party Movement as Rick Santelli bellowed about “losers” who “bought more house than they could afford.” This perspective and many descriptions of the sub-prime mortgage crisis, ignore conditions such as the combination of predatory lending practices and the segregation and isolation of minority communities that led to people of color experiencing a majority of foreclosures in the housing crisis (Rugh and Massey 2010).

American whiteness, Bush writes, is also anchored in the concept of a common American experience. Balibar (1991) writes that racism is inherently implicated in nationalism due to its creating of a unified “people” at the expense of diverse others. And as noted in Chapter 2, nationalism and patriotism aim to resuscitate and celebrate the nation’s founding myths and the heroes celebrated in the portrayals of school texts. There is, to Tea Partyists, an unquestioned greatness in the American founding story and in the character of the founders. Tea Partyists fear that the greatness of founding myths and heroes will be or has been, forgotten or ignored. In such as sensibility, contesting the very foundation of that narrative does not make sense. Yet, for many Americans, it is contested. It may be difficult to assign high moral rectitude to those founders espousing democracy and equality while holding slaves and restricting the franchise to white, male, property holders. Bush also mentions the different experiences regarding the meaning of and the ability to reach the “American Dream”, a level of comfort and security achieved through hard work and responsibility. The gender, racial and class systems in America have handicapped the ability of reaching such an ideal by many. Yet a critique of these structural
features by those not achieving the dream is seen as un-American, ignorant of the myriad possibilities, and ungrateful.

Bush also maintains that whiteness is reproduced through what she terms “the regulation of discourse.” There are boundaries for acceptable discussion of “poverty and wealth, justice and democracy, structure, agency and the possibilities for the future” (Bush 2011:207). This regulation of discourses is mediated through the education system, the justice system and, of particular importance in this dissertation, the media. Generally, popular media polices the portrayal of racial inequality in America. "When diversity is shown, it often portrays blacks as assimilated or involved in interracial friendships that mask racial inequality" (Bush 2011: 131). This gives the indication that there must no longer be a racial problem in America. As discussed previously, conservative media is a key source of cultural resources for the figured world of the Tea Party. These media typically downplay racial inequalities or exacerbate tensions for ideological purposes (Jamieson and Cappella 2008; Street and DiMaggio 2011). We are reminded also of the concerted effort by conservative media from the outset of his presidency to show Barack Obama not as incompetent, but as foreign and un-American, with paternity, citizenship and values outside American society.

In a passage that appropriately captures the dilemma of the Tea Party with regard to racial inequality, Bush writes "If as a nation, all people cannot count on freedom, justice, equality and opportunity, then the ideologies that say that these are the reasons the United States is special are undermined"(Bush 2010:113). Blindness to these contradictions of the narrative of American exceptionalism is significant for the very foundation of the cultural world of the Tea and their evaluation of American society. Not only are contradictions invisible, but they must be invisible for the Tea Party to be possible.
COLORBLIND RACISM

Though white privilege may be invisible to them, Tea Partyists must nonetheless confront representations of themselves as racists. The concepts of white identity and the invisibility of white privilege rest upon an ideology that is “putatively fair, meritocratic and universal” (Hartmann, et al. 2009). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) argues that a new race ideology has emerged in the United States since the 1970s, which he attributes to the post-Jim Crow historical conditions in the United States. The claims that blacks and other minorities are subordinate categories of persons, both biologically and socially, has been replaced by a "colorblind racism" which claims that contemporary racial inequality is the outcome of non-racial dynamics.

“Whereas Jim Crow racism explained blacks’ social standing as the result of their biological and moral inferiority, colorblind racism avoids such arguments of intrinsic inequality. Whites rationalize minorities’ contemporary status as the result of market dynamics, the “natural” desire of minorities to live with people similar to themselves and blacks imputed cultural limitations” (Bonilla-Silva 2014:2).

Omi and Winant (2014) argue that colorblind ideology and the neoliberal governance each required the other for their success. Colorblindness had its start with the “reverse racism” discourses that emerged in the 1970s. These helped to promote a perspective of “race neutrality” based on the assumption that blacks and whites both could be and in some cases were victims of discrimination. This further obscured for many, any ideas of structural racism. Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s as an anti-statist reaction to both the 1960s minority-based new social movements and the expanded government programs of the Great Society. Colorblind ideology was seen as a way to cleave the white working class from the New Deal coalition that included among others, minorities. Simply, colorblindness undermined the salience of structures of
inequality that marked protests of the 1960s and their demand for state policies of redress. Together with neoliberal ideologies, colorblind discourses softened any opposition to the dismantlement of state efforts to redress race- and class-based forms of inequality.

Bonilla-Silva describes colorblind racism as characterized by the use of several interpretive frames. As I will show, these frames are useful in explaining Tea Party members’ outlook toward race. However, my data point to some specific variation and elaboration of Bonilla-Silva’s theory that helps to explain colorblind racism in the context of current conservative populism.

**Abstract liberalism frame**

“Abstract liberalism” ignores structural racism, instead focusing on the ideas of choice and individualism as determinants of success. This perspective relies upon the classic liberal tradition of equal opportunity, in which success is understood as a function of effort on an equal playing field. This is a key frame underlying the common resentment we hear from Tea Partyists such as Darrell.

The government is giving money to people that don't need it or deserve it. No responsibility. People are going out and buying drugs and alcohol and big screen TVs. [they are] taking it from people that are working out there--working 40 or 50 hours a week or just barely making it.

Or Paul,

We believe that the progressives are hurting people not helping. Though conservatives may be more tough love, the point is that there is a better life out there. But if I talk about people taking care of themselves, I am termed a racist. It would be hard to find conservatives that wouldn't care about giving people a better life. My vision is that people should be empowered.

And while the abstract liberal perspective is often described as misguided in the context of supposedly overly generous public assistance, I also witnessed it being deployed in regard to criminal justice. Although local Tea Party groups are also spaces of cultural production in a
wider Tea Party network, they are continually influenced by discourses, symbols and practices brought into the group from media and other sources. These may end up supplementing the Tea Party figured world.

There were many instances when Tea Party groups hosted speakers such as candidates, officeholders and representatives from NTPOs or local conservative organizations. During one meeting of the Greene County Tea Party, North Carolina, Associate Supreme Court Justice Paul Newby, in the midst of his reelection campaign, was the invited guest. During a question-and-answer period, one audience member asked when the state was going to "start executing people again." Though capital punishment had not been exercised in North Carolina since 2006, the North Carolina legislature in 2009 passed the "Racial Justice Act" which prohibited capital punishment in cases where race was determined to be a contributing factor in the conviction and/or imposition of capital punishment. Justice Newby’s response, which elicited applause and verbal affirmations from the audience, illustrates the abstract liberal perspective.

Now the problem is that you have this Racial Justice Act that was passed by not this legislature, but the prior legislature. It was very controversial then. It's as if race were relevant to any of this. I have discussions with people who say that there are too many black people in prison. I don't disagree with that, there are. But they are not there because they are black. They are there because they committed a crime. (Audience loudly agrees) I have not yet seen a situation where the dead person cared what color the person was that killed them. I mean, they are dead. That is the fallacy with this whole idea of hate crimes and all this kind of stuff. I mean, it's either a crime or it's not a crime. If you killed somebody, it's wrong. It doesn't matter what about them you didn't like.

Justice Newby articulates the Tea Party and conservative belief in personal responsibility and ignores the basis of the Racial Justice Act, specifically that blacks are disproportionately wrongly convicted and disproportionately sentenced to die. Speaking in a small, rural Tea Party group,

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32 A repeal of the Racial Justice Act was passed by the Republican controlled North Carolina legislature in 2013 and signed by Gov. McCrory.
Newby’s authority and cultural capital draw on the premises of abstract liberalism and powerfully overwhelm any ideas of structural racism that some audience members may hold, instead making a link between colorblind racism and the Tea Party figured world.

**Cultural Racism Frame**

Tea Partyists’ racial perspective is not simply that institutional and structural racism do not exist, but that continued racial inequality is partially due to unfortunate, inherent qualities of black culture. Bonilla-Silva introduces the frame of “cultural racism,” which uses culturally-based arguments to make broad essentialist characterizations of blacks and other minorities (see also Ryan 1971). Bonilla-Silva describes this as “blaming the victim” and is related to the “culture of poverty” theory, which he traces back to the work of anthropologist Charles Lewis (1960). The contemporary legacy of the “culture of poverty” is that “minorities’ standing is the product of a lack of effort, loose family organization and inappropriate values” (Bonilla-Silva 2014: 88). To this view, conservative populism, such as that of the Tea Party, has added an important variation on Bonilla-Silva’s cultural racism: the role of government. To Tea Partyists, these cultural aspects are not assumed to be inherent or primordial but rather the effects of “big-government” progressives. This reflects the continued influence of argument made decades ago by Charles Murray in *Losing Ground* (Murray 1984) to the effect that government social programs create a culture of entitlement and dependency that does more harm than good. Returning to Darrell, “Blacks are the same as us but their culture and environment made them dependent. It’s the liberals who are racists because they don’t think blacks are smart because they just continue to bribe them into voting Democrat.” In other words, they would be like us in terms of values and success if they hadn’t become ensnared in a Faustian bargain by the Democratic Party.
Darrell’s argument also includes an important corollary within the Tea Party: the Republican Party is falsely demonized as the enemy of African-Americans. I noticed that some of the people I interviewed were puzzled as to why blacks supported the Democratic Party when it was typically Southern Democrats who stood in the way of the civil rights movement. Chris makes both of these points:

I feel that liberal ideology is detrimental to the economy but they also say “those evil Republicans are going to repress you and go back to the 60s with fire hoses.” Republicans have been more supportive of the black community than Democrats! Democrats prolonged Jim Crow and segregation. They were the ones responsible. Welfare has made the black community realize [think] that Democrats support them more. It is plantation politics, a politics of dependency.

Explicit in this perspective is that the Democrats not only demonize the Republicans, but have succeeded in bribing the poor and specifically blacks into voting Democratic because of generous public assistance benefits. This perspective was articulated in the 2012 presidential campaign when Republican nominee Mitt Romney declared that 47% of Americans don’t pay taxes, feel entitled to government largess and consequently, will never vote for a GOP presidential candidate. As Darrell, explains,

The way the Democrats do it is they say that if you vote for us we will give you stuff. If you vote for Republicans, they will take your free stuff away. That's basically it. That's why we have ghettos in all the cities. All these people are on welfare and they have all this free money and it's just ingrained in them as they grow up that if you want to keep getting the free stuff, you vote Democrat. If you vote for Republicans, they're gonna take that money away from you. It's a plan. They got the black vote and the minority vote. These people were suckered into this. It is hard to take things away from people once you have given it to them.

More than just “bribery”, however, Tea Partyists see a strong degree of group censorship perpetrated by liberal blacks upon blacks who support conservative causes. Conservative

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33 Many seemed unaware of the defection by many southern democrats to the Republican Party after the signing of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. They would probably be surprised that both Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond began their political careers as Democrats.
commentator Ann Coulter put it memorably when defending black Republican presidential
candidate Herman Cain. “Our blacks are so much better than their blacks because [they] have
fought against probably [their] family, probably [their] neighbors…That’s why we have very
impressive blacks” (Fox News video 2012). Darrell also referencing Herman Cain, connects this
censorship directly to why the Tea Party has trouble attracting Black members.

Because they will be called Uncle Tom if they side with it [the Tea Party]. I just heard
this guy talking about it the other night. The guy that bought the pizza place (Herm
Cain, who formerly was CEO of Godfather’s Pizza) - brilliant guy. He says he goes to
black churches and people whisper to him that they really like what he's saying. He
asked them why they are whispering. They said that they don't want other people to
know-- people that agree with Obama. I feel sorry for this guy, I feel bad for him and
Alan West.\(^34\)

In a similar manner, Chris continues.

If you ask a number of small business owners who are Black, they get it. They know we
don't have an environment in which you can succeed. But we have a government saying
we have to go and get those conservatives, because it's your right to live in dependency.
It's a cultural thing. The decline of the black families since welfare and the 60s; [the
decline of] coherent two-parent families and a father figure in that community. That's
not white people's fault that black fathers are leaving. I think there's some recognition to
that in their community. They are part of what is responsible for the deterioration of
their culture.

These utterances, which typically exclude any reference to institutional or structural
racism (or class-based disadvantages either), portray my Tea Party consultants as blaming the
liberal welfare state and the Democratic Party for maintaining a virtual “plantation” that keeps
blacks tied to dependency. This also reaffirms the Tea Party figured world, especially the
emotional affect and fundamentalism which stresses the wickedness of their progressive
opponents. Progressives are not simply espousing a different ideology in the marketplace of
ideas; they are actively destroying the very moral foundation of American cultural identity.

\(^{34}\)Alan West was a former Florida congressman and Tea Party favorite.
Those blacks that “get it” are the business owners and those that are closest to the practices of classic liberalism and who have rejected the plantation politics of progressives.

**Naturalization of Difference**

Many of my consultants saw blacks as purposefully segregating themselves from whites, reinforcing the naturalization of racial difference. Bonilla-Silva references that whites may explain away racial difference as natural and nonracial “because they [blacks] do it too” (Bonilla-Silva 2014:76). Returning to Darrell, this perspective is reinforced by his own experiences.

> When we had picnics (held by his employer), the blacks would all go and sit at their own table. Weird. All day long you work with these people, but when they got in the group, they would all sit at their own table. They didn't have to do that… Anyway, they perpetuate this racism themselves they didn't have to sit by themselves. I don't know, it's weird. They want integration, integration. Okay, you're integrated. But then when you go have a party you go and sit at your own table. Now what are you doing that for? We work with you all day long and you say that you're my buddy. But when there's a group of you, you also get your own table.

Darrell was noticeably frustrated by that memory. He believed that the TPM was a movement for all Americans, but the obstacle to blacks joining the TPM was their own collective identity. Adding to his earlier frustration regarding blacks’ apparent unquestioning loyalty to the Democratic Party, race relations become another aspect of life in today’s United States that he can make sense of in the figured world and that supports the main tenets of his political identity--distrust toward liberals and government.

The earlier-mentioned idea of social pressure and fear of the “Uncle Tom” label have a deeper meaning when considering the strong emphasis on individualism held by Tea Partyists and their loathing of concepts of “collectivism.” One Tea Party group organized a reading group to discuss conservative-oriented books. One book was Austrian-school economist, Frederick
Hayek's book *Road to Serfdom* which critiques the idea of collectivism--what Hayek equates with the idea of "community."

If the "community" or the state are prior to the individual, if they have ends of their own independent of and superior to those of the individuals, only those individuals who work for the same ends can be regarded as members of the community. It is a necessary consequence of this view that a person is respected only as a member of the group, that is, only if and in so far as he works for the recognised common ends, and that he derives his whole dignity only from this membership and not merely from being man (Hayek 2007:162).

In conversations with me, Tea Party members often implied that blacks were focusing upon their group membership or their black collective identity instead of individualism. Robert applied Hayek to the black community in his county.

There are 2000 black registered Republicans in this county. I think that's an amazing number. Who would have thought? Then there are a whole lot of unaffiliated. There is so much social pressure for conformity to the black community. The use of that word, 'community.' In the book club, we read Hayek's, *Road to Serfdom*. What he is saying is the conformity of a group into a certain ideal. Not a geographic community or a cultural community but a community-. When we think of community, we think of the neighborhood or the town where we live. Liberals use that community to identify an ideology. And there is a lot of pressure for blacks to conform to the black community.

The relationship of group rights versus individual rights has been an important component of conservative discourses about race in the US since the emergence of the neoconservative movement in the 1960s. Neoconservatives rejected white supremacy ideologies and Jim Crow practices because they contradicted the egalitarian values of American culture. However, they were equally opposed to the growing demands for cross-race equality that was emerging from the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. As Omi and Winant (2015) argue:

Equally problematic was the fact that blacks and other people of color questioned the legitimacy of reforms based on the principle of individual equality and rights, calling

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35 Though often thought of as a movement focused on foreign policy, the original neoconservatives were former moderate leftists who were equally motivated by a rejection of the domestic New Left and Black Power movements (Horwitz 2013).
instead for a radical collective equality. Both nationalist positions and Marxist/social
democratic tendencies were oriented toward "group rights"-autonomy programs à la
"community control" and redistributionist schemes such as a Marshall Plan for the
inner cities (Omi and Winant 2015:198).

To the neoconservatives, group rights were as much an anathema to democracy as was Jim
Crow. To demand group equality as an outcome of policies was in conflict with the
neoconservatives’ opportunity based vision of American culture. As Omi and Winant write, the
neoconservatives were opposed to individual or “negative” discrimination such as denial of
service at restaurants. Yet, to go beyond that into say, affirmative action, would be committing
“positive” discrimination. Being opposed to racial code words and Jim Crow while ignoring the
structural racism that continues, the neoconservatives of the late 60s and the Tea Partyist of
today could argue that they are opposed to discrimination but also opposed to anti-discrimination
policies based on ideas of group rights to equality.

Many Tea Partyists were resigned to the fact that blacks’ collective identity prevented
blacks who shared Tea Party values from participating in the movement. Sharon, cofounder of
the Franklin county Tea Party, believed she had truly done her best to reach out blacks in the
community. Sharon was friends with Dr. Ada Fisher, the black Republican Committeewoman
representing North Carolina on the Republican National Committee who happened to reside
nearby.

I've discussed it with Ada. Black candidates did come to our meetings (as speakers). I
got with Ada and she gave us some names. I got the names of conservative black folks
and I've made calls and wanted to go to their churches and ask if we could get
involved when they're doing cooking or reunions and we just never got any response.
We have reached out. I guess they don't trust us. I don't know.

Dr. Fisher offered a rather prejudiced explanation of blacks’ aversion to conservatism
when I heard her speak at a later Franklin County Tea Party meeting.
The Tea Party and the Republican Party says that we are a party of limited and smaller
government. Minorities hear that and say they're going to take away my benefits. The
Tea Party and the Republican Party say we believe in less taxes. Poor and minority
people don't pay taxes anyway. They don't care whether you cut them or not because
they're not paying them. The Tea Party and the Republican Party say that we believe
in free enterprise. They don't understand what free enterprise means because you have
reality TV, football players, and all those people making big bucks.

In a sense, Dr. Fisher is actually giving a crude and essentializing comparison of whiteness to
blackness, arguing that it is not social pressure excluding black from the TPM, but that the two
groups are hailing from different cultural worlds.

Interestingly, the understanding that social pressure prevented blacks from joining the
movement was strengthened when black supporters did participate and especially when they
stressed their “Americaness” or whiteness instead of their black social identity. One supportive,
group was the Frederick Douglass Foundation, a black conservative organization which
describes itself as “a national Christ-centered education and public policy organization with local
chapters across the United States which brings the sanctity of free market
and limited government ideas to bear on the hardest problems facing our nation." I was able to
observe a speech given by the FDF's co-founder Timothy Johnson, who at the time was also the
Vice-Chair of the North Carolina Republican Party. The most interesting aspect of Johnson’s
address to the Burgoyne Tea Party was the manner in which he attempted to divest himself of
one of the primary aspects of contemporary black identity-- historic links to Africa.

The other thing that I want make sure people know is that I am not an African-
American. I am from Cleveland Ohio and I'm an American. (Applause) I've never
been to Africa, I didn't lose anything in Africa, and I have no intention of going to
Africa. So when you see me and point me out, you can say there's a black guy over
there. That's okay. Just don't say there's an African-American because I am not
African-American. This is my country. (Applause). I'm a Christian and I'm an
American and last I checked, that is a majority in this country.

Johnson’s confident approach and the ramrod bodily hexis of a former military officer affirms an
idealized American--Christian, disciplined and successful. Johnson also doubles-down on his claims of Americaness. As related to me by one of my consultants, at one presentation by Johnson, he asked a member of the audience when and from where their family had emigrated. After the audience member explained that his family emigrated from Germany during the wave of immigration at the turn of the 20th century, Johnson responded that his family came over in the 1600s and in addition he had spent several years defending his country in uniform, concluding with a direct and pointed observation that he was more American than many of them.

The figure of the Black Tea Partyist is the black person who disregards his racial identity and embraces an Americanism that is Christian and champions independence and success. It is more than coincidental that the most favorite blacks icons of the Tea Party are Herman Cain (corporate CEO), and Alan West (highly decorated veteran). Retired pediatric Neurosurgeon Dr. Benjamin Carson’s status among Tea Partyists skyrocketed when he publically rebuked President Obama in his presence. In effect he was rejecting his racial affinity with the President and criticizing the Affordable Care Act employing themes of moral decline.

This presence of highly successful black people who “get it” justifies interpretations that resonate with the colorblind frame of the Tea Party figured world. They cannot see themselves as racists. On the contrary, they are the ones that see the oppression. The government and liberals have created racial difference and more significantly, moral pathology.

CONCLUSION

During the period of my field research, Tea Party detractors commonly derided the movement as motivated by racism. Yet Joseph Lowndes asks an astute question: How do we "understand a movement that expresses the anti-statist discourse born of the racial logic of the modern right and which demonizes a black president but which emphatically disavows racial
motivations, appropriates icons and narratives of the civil rights movement and successfully backs prominent candidates of color?" (Lowndes 2012: 161). This question becomes less puzzling through the engagement made possible by ethnographic research. Interacting with and observing Tea Partyists and the networks in which they participate discloses the identities upon which these conflicting position make sense in the figured world in which Tea Partyists exist.

Bonilla-Silva’s book on colorblind racism is entitled *Racism without Racists*. This title is an accurate description of race and the Tea Party Movement. The Tea Partyists I spent time with were not racist in the sense that they were motivated by hatred toward blacks. Instead, many of the cultural resources of the Tea Party figured world are based on pieces of the hegemonic understanding of America that is most ignorant of America’s unequal racial society. Yet, it is a movement that implicitly supports policies that perpetuate structural violence upon the poor and people of color; it supports racist policies of libertarian economics stressing limited government and the shredding of specific components social safety net. At the same time, most of my consultants truly wanted to share their social movement with people of color.

I maintain that this can be explained by the “foundational” principles idealized by the TPM, ones they consider to have been exemplified by the nation's founders and are gravely lacking in America today. These principles are based in a morality indicated by success in the market as tied to the qualities of individualism, achievement and responsibility inherent in classical liberalism. This perspective privileges the individual and naturalizes a misguided impression that there is equality of opportunity. The classical liberal perspective ignores the

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36Lisa Disch (2012) argues that Tea Partyists have supported racialized cuts to the welfare state by supporting middle class social insurance programs like Social Security and Medicare while calling for huge cuts in programs directed toward the poor and people of color, such as SNAP benefits and TANF.

37In fact Parker and Barreto themselves show that 65% of Tea Party “supporters” “approve of Barak Obama as a person” (Parker and Barreto 2013:208).
invisible forms of power, such as structural violence, institutional racism and implicit bias which have no meaning in such a world. To them American greatness was achieved by people who overcame barriers and were successful, George Washington as well as Frederick Douglass.

Tea Partyists see, at the root of this decay, a powerful cultural hegemony of the liberal welfare state that negates individual agency and strengthens what they see as an artificial and destructive senses of black collective identity. This supposed cultural hegemony is driven by progressives, who are guided by the desire to maintain power and continue a failed ideology of collectivism. In the figured world of my Tea Party consultants, the state and the progressives maintain the plantation, driving the destruction of American cultural identity for blacks as well as whites.
Chapter 6
Local Tea Party Groups as Communities of Political Practice

The following two chapters will illustrate a core argument of this work: LTPGs are central components of the Tea Party Movement. Chapter 6 will show the variation across Tea Party groups, the importance of their varying memberships and the significant impact these groups have on the political culture. In the present chapter, I will describe the spaces created by the LTPG’s, where the figured world of the Tea Party provides the context for new, agentive individual and collective political identities.

In Chapter 2 I described the emergence of the Tea Party figured world in early 2009. Many of my consultants sought out the movement in those early months and participated in protests and rallies in which they began to feel a part of a large, widespread collectivity. For many of my consultants, a sense of true belonging to a large, action-oriented community became palpable on September 12, 2009, during the Taxpayer March on Washington D.C. Organized by several National Tea Party Organizations, FreedomWorks, Tea Party Patriots, ResistNet and Glenn Beck, (Brown et al. 2009), approximately 75,000 participants (Markman 2009) marched from Freedom Plaza to the west front of the United States Capitol where a rally was held with speakers and music. As I learned, a large number of my consultants had attended and considered the experience a watershed moment. One consultant when asked about the experience said,

I was overwhelmed. As we walked toward the Capitol, people were converging from everywhere. It was like 9/11 when people knew something dramatic was going on and so they hugged and got close with people. It must've been like this when World War II ended. We met people we didn't know but we right away knew them well because we were there for the same reason. We had surmised in our guts (that) we had to do something with other people of like minds to say to Washington, to all of our leaders ‘you've gone too far with this. We're at a precipice. We're walking too close to a
precipice like lemmings.’ We turned around and looked back and couldn't imagine all
the people down the mall on side streets, surrounding the tidal pool… next to having a
baby, it was the most exhilarating time in my life-- crying, singing, [and] saluting the
flag.

None of my consultants who attended could actually remember--or in many cases even hear--
what the speakers said because the impact they felt was, as related to me, being part of a large
group. All indicated an emotion of relief and validation that there were thousands of other
people like them, with the same concerns, fears, and values. A crucial aspect of movement
building, people from different backgrounds were able to recognize their feelings in the
expressions of others (Morgen 2001). For them, the TPM had transformed from isolated, small,
tentative marches in local settings or scenes on television, into a sense of a real tangible public of
like-minded citizens across the country.

This event suggests that the political identities emerging in the context of face-to-
face contact were more substantial than simple political affinity as explained by framing theory
(Flesher-Fominaya 2010) or by identification with the TPM as part of a media audience. At the
rally, people built relationships, performed the figured world with others and were left
transformed by the experience. This materially grounded type of activist identity is not self-
fashioned simply by watching Fox News or listening to Rush Limbaugh. As McAdam (1988)
points out in his interviews with “Freedom Summer” activists, anyone who has been moved by
participating in collective political activism is likely to understand the feelings of belonging and
ownership imparted by the experience and the strong desire to relive it. By enacting and sharing
an identity with others, the potential for activist mobilization increases (McAdam and Paulson

The early Tea Party rallies that preceded the formation of the LTPGs were constituted in
a similar manner to what Juris (2012), researching Occupy encampments, terms a “logic of
aggregation” made possible by “actors qua individuals” mobilized through online social networks. The general assemblies and the democratic, consensus-based decision-making bodies acted to increase solidarity, yet Juris maintains that groups constituted in this manner were under constant pressure of disaggregation due to the precarious existence of the camps. Studying more enduring yet heterogeneous global justice groups in Madrid, Flesher-Fominaya (2010) found their assemblies were primary spaces not only for building solidarity, but also for fashioning collective identities.

After the Taxpayer March on Washington and other smaller rallies nationwide, individuals returned to their communities looking for local groups in their own areas, or if not finding one, forming their own. These newly energized activists wanted to put the ideals from the march into ongoing practice through educating others, advocating for their positions and engaging in what many called, “fellowship” or the sharing of concerns, experiences and goals. These emerging local Tea Party groups were autonomous and lacked any overarching formal organization similar to the groups Flesher-Forminaya observed.

In order to understand collective identity formation in autonomous groups, special attention must be given to the assembly since, in the absence of a formal organizational framework and external resources, the continued existence of the project initially depends on the success or failure of the dynamic generated therein. (Flesher-Fominaya 2010: 384).

My research in LTPGs showed these spaces to be dynamic, enduring spaces of interaction and activity. Of utmost significance, these spaces did not attract efforts to dismantle them as the Occupy encampments did. They were less vulnerable to pressures for disaggregation and were, I argue, central to the expansive, ongoing success of the movement.

Unlike the large rallies, locally-situated Tea Party groups provided submerged or what Hetherington (1998) terms “marginal” social spaces where political identities can be fashioned
and performed. In the terms of social practice theory, these groups created “local spaces of practice” (Holland and Lave 2001) where others sharing their concerns meet, talk, and discuss experiences, issues and meanings. In these spaces of practice, participants grow into the figured worlds performed in such spaces (Holland et al. 1998:83; see also Virchow 2007). Importantly, those who became part of Tea Party groups further developed sensitivities and sensibilities as well as senses of self, attuned to the figured world that they were performing. More than simply assuming an affinity toward a specific ideology or applying an interpretive frame, these emerging Tea Party identities, as with other movement identities, developed as embodied dispositions focused on political action (Melucci 1996, Polletta and Jasper 2001, Taylor and Whittier 1992).

In their most basic sense, LTPGs are communities of political practice that bring people into a local social space in which new and existing discourses and symbols circulate and certain dispositions and identities are cultivated. In the aftermath of the initial boost of enthusiasm, these groups were crucial in consolidating the movement, keeping people connected in face-to-face encounters with other activists, and putting into local practice the circulating messages of the wider movement. The local groups became primary sites or spaces where the figured worlds of the TPM were being performed and acquiring localized geographic and historical particularity.

In the balance of this chapter, I will highlight the importance of the submerged space of the LTPG using the concept of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) to build upon earlier theorization of spaces of identity formation in social movement studies. I will then describe the workings of some typical Tea Party LTPGs and the circulation of the cultural resources that are used to fashion local Tea Party identities. The next section will discuss how the figured world is generated, contested and animated by new resources. Finally, the forging of
these identities occurs as a process which also includes internal tensions, disagreements and the setting of boundaries regarding what may be said and done.

AUTHORING SELVES

After its first year of existence, the Hawthorne County Tea Party held an election for new members to their "executive committee," a group designed to guide and promulgate policy and activities for the group. Members’ names were put into nomination at a prior meeting, giving other members time to consider them. At the next meeting the candidates were asked to stand up and say a few words about themselves. Their utterances were more than just expressions of interest and qualifications, but were small performances of the symbolic and discursive components of the Tea Party. These individuals were claiming their membership in the movement through evoking several different components of the Tea Party figured world such as historical narratives, indignation and fundamentalist sensibilities.

“I saw some names of people I respect, so it must be a good outfit. I came to the protest. I believe in four cornerstones: limited government, fiscal conservatism, free markets, and national defense. I want to make sure the so-called Republicans do what they say.”

Another evoked American history and the responsibilities of citizenship through a historical anecdote familiar to most Tea Party members. “I love my country and I love what this movement stands for. We need to keep those guys [politicians] accountable and if I'm in I will give it 110%. There is a story from the constitutional convention. After the constitution had been drafted and signed, Benjamin Franklin was asked by a woman, ‘what have you given us.’ He replied, ‘a republic, madam, if you can keep it’.”

The next to speak highlighted how the Tea Party discourse is continually informed and built upon through media such as talk radio. “I have never been politically active but with the
current regime in office, I had to get active.” His use of "regime" is most likely appropriated from Rush Limbaugh, who throughout the Obama presidency, employed that term whenever referencing his administration. Though the term by definition means a ruling government, it is commonly used to refer to a government that is foreign, illegitimate or despotic. One typically does not hear references to the “British regime”; one does hear references to the “Iranian regime”.

And finally, two evoked the image of flinty, idealized citizenship by articulating the cultural politics of the TPM through values and beliefs that in their views had made America exceptional. “I'm not a poet, I believe in God, family and country. We need to turn this country around. I am a realtor. I believe in free enterprise. I work on commission which means no work, no pay.”

“Freedom is granted by God. I'm a strong believer in the Second Amendment. I believe in extreme limited government. I was raised in a conservative family and my grandparents grew up in the Depression so they had the right values.”

Melucci (1995) defines collective identities as “action systems,” where participants collectively construct meanings, devise strategies and negotiate a collective “we.” Together, they define the limits and possibilities of the conflictual stance they take while activating relationships that articulate the meaning of being together and the goals they seek (Melucci 1995:43). Such a collective “we” emerged in the utterances of the Hawthorne members as they articulated what they saw as the meaning of Tea Party conservatism.

Individually, each appropriated discourses, symbols, texts and values of others, both media and other members, and “authored” themselves within the space of the Tea Party movement (Bakhtin 1981; Holland et al 1998; Holquist 1990; Lachicotte 2002). Based upon the
premise that selfhood is socially constructed (e.g. Mead 1934; Voloshinov 1986), individuals did not enter the groups as fully formed Tea Party members, rather movement actors “pin down” (Lachicotte 2002) a sense of self through dialogue and in practice with others. As we saw with Darrell in Chapter 2—not exactly sure what to do at his first protest--Tea Partyists are orchestrating multiple and manifold voices identifying what a Tea Partyist is and does. This dialogue occurs, of course, with others in the LTPG. But it also occurs with imagined others, such as relatives from the depression era with the “right values” and even opponents (e.g. Satterfield 2002) such as “so-called Republicans” and those who the realtor believed get paid for no work. Lastly, these voices include the other components of the TPM such as the conservative media, as in Limbaugh’s use of “regime” and the Ben Franklin quote.38

**LTPGS AS COMMUNITIES OF POLITICAL PRACTICE**

Groups provided spaces where the authoring occurs and where small groups collectively explore and fashion what it means to be a Tea Party member. These processes forge a political style which creates durable identities within boundaries and, as I shall show, relations of power. The local groups I participated in were all organized by a core of 2 to 4 individuals who were already acquainted either as neighbors, through churches or prior political activity. Though LTPGs were independent of each other, their meetings, at least at the start, followed a reasonably similar pattern. Local group meetings were typically held once a month in a large public space. In some cases these spaces were rented meeting halls such as an American Legion post, but most commonly, meetings were held in large restaurants. In several counties the meetings were regularly held in cavernous 1970s-era family-style seafood restaurants that dot the North

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38 Though that individual may have discovered that quote independently and on his own, the quote is nonetheless familiar to many Tea Party participants especially those who watch Glenn Beck, who employed the story in both his book Glenn Beck's Common Sense: The Case Against an Out-of-Control Government, Inspired by Thomas Paine (Beck 2009) and on his TV program.
Carolina landscape. These restaurants were typically very large and able to seat 100 people easily in open spaces where a speaker could be heard throughout the room. Meals were typically very inexpensive, featured deep-fried seafood, and as always in such restaurants, accompanied by complementary hushpuppies. Often the meeting would begin with an hour of mealtime before the actual program started.

There was a wide range in the number of attendees at a typical local group meeting. At some locations, the meetings were regularly attended by at least 100 people. Other LTPG, primarily in rural counties would have meetings of 20 to 30 regular individuals. Occupations, age and class positions also varied across different LTPG. The Burgoyne County Tea Party, with attendance of over 100 was typically made up of middle-class retirees. While the Adams County Tea Party, in a more rural location, tended to be younger with the average age below 60 and made up primarily of working-class individuals.

All of the local groups I attended began their meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and prayer. One group, not wanting to appear sectarian, did not use the word prayer, substituting the term “invocation” or “meditation.” In that group, the invocation was often grounded in historical terms and themes and had a less sectarian tone resembling more the “civil religion” Robert Bellah (1967) describes. For example, one week the invocation was a reading of the prayer that Franklin Delano Roosevelt read over the radio on the occasion of the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944. Other groups reflected the strong correlation between southern Tea Party supporters and evangelical Christianity (Hood et al. 2015; Jones and Cox 2010; Clement and Green 2011) . The prayers were a blending of political and religious themes, typically ending with “in Jesus’ name” and often contained historic or patriotic themes and calls to action. The following were voiced in three different groups.
I will pray for the President because the king’s heart is in the Lord’s hand. Obama may have his agenda but there is a sovereign God that rules this universe.

We come to you as a needy nation and a needy people. We put our trust in parties and politicians and governments and we are poorer for it. We need a revival that takes us beyond political parties that demonstrates your power and glory. We pray that they will look to you that it will speak to them.

Your creation is perfect. Our stewardship has not been so. We pray for guidance. We pray for an awakening and the stirring in our leaders, national state, and local. We are not necessarily asking for it to be our way but we are asking them to open their hearts and have it be your way.

One prayer delivered by a member at the Hawthorne County included a nostalgic reference that was probably prior to his own memory, yet nonetheless related back to earlier idealized times that participants often draw upon for their ideas of change.

We need to put feet on our prayers; we need to talk to these elected representatives, we need to write the letters, we need to make them understand what we’re here about and what we want to see done. But I pray most of all that we put you first in everything that we do and say and not put ourselves out there to get the praise and the honor for the work that we do. But that we all move in the same direction to turn this country around and set it back how it was back in the 40s. I realized that there were some things that were missing in the 40s, but there were a lot of good things too. I pray that you will guide us and direct us and help us in every way that we can and we will acknowledge you in Jesus Christ name I pray, Amen.

From those commonalities, Tea Party local group meetings typically then engaged in the primary activity of the meeting. The activity might have entailed planning political actions; reporting from specific committees formed to do certain tasks such as monitoring county commissioners or following legislation; or communicating with other Tea Party groups. Sometimes a group engaged in open-ended conversations on social and political topics. Often Tea Party groups had a scheduled speaker who could be a local office holder, an organizer from a national political organization, a candidate running for office and sometimes members of other Tea Party groups discussing strategies that they had successfully employed.
Learning about political issues was seen by members of several groups as a significant role of their group. In a discussion with Tanya, she said almost without thinking, that her group was there to inform.

WW: what does the Hawthorne Tea Party do?
Tanya: Education
WW: How so?
Tanya: We want people to know where to go to find out-because you have a lot of people [that] find out about issues by what they see on TV or just hearing somebody talk. We want to educate people. This is where they go. If you have a problem with something that's going on, come to the meetings and speak out and tell them how you are feeling. That's what we're trying to get across to people that they have a voice and that we want to make a difference.

The idea of separate spaces for social movement activity is well pursued in social science (e.g. Hirsch 1990, Melucci 1989, Morris 1984, Scott 1990, Taylor 1989, Taylor and Whittier 1999). Hetherington (1998) draws attention to the relationship between such spaces and identity, referring to the liminal spaces described by Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1974) where “alternate social ordering emerges.” Such spaces provide social centrality for the groups, but also serve as sites of identity production through the performances of symbolic acts (Hetherington 1998: 103). Polletta (1999) creates categories of different types of spaces, what she terms “free spaces,” which she defines as “small-scale settings within a community or social movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies mobilization” (Polletta 1999:1). Within these spaces, she writes, people exchange information and explore ideas and “mobilizing identities.” In an attempt to organize these different types of free spaces she creates three categories. The indigenous type is the pre-existing, enclosed, institutional spaces that become sites for mobilization, what Melucci would term “submerged spaces.” This includes for instance, churches during the civil rights movement (Morris 1984). Trans-movement spaces are those
where different groups and individuals converge from different geographic areas such as the large Tea Party rallies that drew many people from widespread locales. The third space was pre-figurative such as the Occupy encampments where participants worked to prefigure the society that the activists hope to build, “modeling relationships that differ from those characterizing mainstream society” (Poletta 1999:11).

Futrell and Simi (2004) respond to what Polletta admits is the neglect of right-wing movements in the free space concept and also further develop the concept of identity formation within sequestered spaces of difference. Citing their research among American white-power groups, Futrell and Simi reshape Polletta’s three conceptions into two, believing that trans-movement and indigenous spaces both tend to be pre-figurative. “…[M]embers’ prefigurative practices nurture, reflect, and sustain collective identity within both the dense, isolated activist networks of a movement’s indigenous spaces, and in the transmovement spaces that draw members from across movement networks” (Futrell and Simi 2004:21). They found that within domestic and submerged spaces, members and children were socialized into a white supremacist identity through circulation and reinforcement of practices, beliefs and narratives. The identity, in short, is learned, not simply the logical expression of sentiments already formed before group participation.

Futrell and Simi however, write of enculturation and little of the negotiated and emergent quality of identities formed in social practice. This omission is problematic as such spaces are often dynamic. In his analysis of a British grammar school culture, Paul Willis identifies informal groups as having "a relative suspension of individual interests and a commitment to the reality of the group and its aims" (Willis 1977:124). These groups, though in certain respects reproduced the social and cultural forms with which they were familiar, were also found to be “creative, using
discourse, meanings, materials, practices and group process to explore, understand and creatively occupy particular positions in the set of general material possibilities” (Willis 1977:59). Similarly Charles Price (2009), discussing the ethnogenesis of Rasta in Jamaica, counters some scholars who argue that Rastafarians are loners and individualists. He describes Rastafarian associations and “Rasta Yards” -- spaces of “communion, identity and culture work, and even activism” (Price 2009:196). In these spaces the Rasta develop their knowledge of self and others in exploring the implications of their participation in what it means to be Rasta. “My narrators develop their Rasta identity primarily through interiorized conversations with oneself and participation in dialogue and interaction” (Price 2009:169).

Anthropologist studying cultural processes in schools, workplaces and the performance of skilled cultural practices such as midwifery, have developed the concept of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) to account for the dynamic process of learning and producing in collectives. The concept elucidates the relationship between knowledge/action and identity. As with free spaces, communities of practice are related to aggregates of people coming together around common endeavors. Particularly, in cases where communities of practice form in “free spaces,” they are able to produce new activities and meanings in the course of the mutual endeavor (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, Westermeyer in press). Developing the theory further, Holland and Lave (2001) focus on the locations of these communities in “local spaces of practice” that are embedded in larger contexts and processes such as the many organizations and media reproducing the circulating cultural resources associated with the Tea Party figured world. Participants augment and extend the meanings of Tea Party membership by continually acquiring and repurposing new frames, discourse,
symbols, narratives and practices as audiences of conservative media and as the recipients of information from other organizations and personalities.

A detailed description of some typical Tea Party groups will illustrate their workings as communities of practice. The first example focuses on the performance of the figured world in a local Tea Party group; the second section will illustrate the introduction of new information in the LTPG from outside that bolsters the emotional characteristics of Tea Partyists, and the third will describe the negotiation of meaning and boundaries within Tea Party groups.

**LTPGS PERFORMING THE FIGURED WORLD**

The Burgoyne County Tea Party (BCTP) clarifies the importance of local Tea Party groups in providing spaces for the realization and production of individual and collective identities. The BCTP also illustrates the mix of local and trans-local components that constitute the movement. Through strong leadership, organization, and by attracting others with similar moral certitude and unique talents, the BCTP was the most vibrant Tea Party group of the eight I studied.

One of the first Tea Party groups in North Carolina, the Burgoyne County Tea Party’s (BCTP) initial rise and subsequent success were due to the work of three retirees, all women, motivated by the Tea Party’s initial message and their dissatisfaction with the local Republican Party organization. Sue, the chairperson, and her two friends organized a taxpayer protest to coincide with the initial national protests on April 15th, 2009. Hearing through Fox News of protests being organized nationwide, they connected with organizing resources on Internet sites provided by the TV channel and by the NTPO, FreedomWorks. After the initial protest at their community post office surprised them by drawing an attendance of nearly 1000, they initiated regular meetings and organized multiple activities.
The group’s main regular activity was the monthly dinner meeting held at an aging, family-style restaurant. Close to 100 people regularly attended the meetings, where the group reported on and planned activities, listened to speakers and circulated information picked up, for the most part, from conservative media and local politics. Through the everyday happenings of the BCTP, we see activities that marked performances of the figured world of the Tea Party: emotional displays of indignation and solidarity; deployment of assumed historical legacies of patriotism as an interpretive frame and as defining qualities for everyday practice; and insistence on political and economic fundamentalism most vividly displayed in steadfast adherence to what participants considered the literal meaning of the US Constitution.

The BCTP meetings I observed, from beginning to end, were places where the figured world came alive and a site where people realized and performed the identity of a supporter of Tea Party politics. I was first struck by the use of history and patriotism embedded in the language of the Tea Party group. Meetings began with the Pledge of Allegiance and a Christian prayer interwoven with political themes. Part of being a BCTP member was memorizing the preamble of the US Constitution. The first time I met Sue, the head of the BCTP, I told her I had heard of her Tea Party group and was very interested in having the group as one of my research sites. She eyed me suspiciously and then asked, "Do you know the preamble to the U.S. Constitution?" Having learned the preamble as a youngster, I surprised myself by reciting it almost perfectly. Sue said the words with me, and I was slightly uncomfortable at her slow, deliberate delivery, which indicated that the words had much deeper meaning for her than for me. At the BCTP meetings the recitation, which occurred during every meeting and many events, assumed a similar ritual tone, said in a manner similar to what I was used to in
intonements of the “Apostles’ Creed,” a Catholic liturgical statement listing articles of belief and faith.

In a prior chapter, I described two Burgoyne members who regularly dressed in Revolutionary era attire for public events, a Tea Party practice that also illustrates Tea Partyists’ attachment to American history. As Brad explained to me, "it draws attention back to the basics of what the Tea Party stands for." Brad and others were attempting to use symbols to revive forgotten ideas and themes they felt were crucial to the nation’s greatness. The decline of American exceptionalism they contended flows from the rejection of founding principles. The Tea Partyists attempted to draw attention to historical principles and combat their neglect in contemporary America by re-signifying objects representing those principles and attributing to them the power to evoke those principles.

This re-signification or re-interpretation according to the horizon of meaning supplied by the figured world is also indicated in practices surrounding the U.S. Constitution. As already mentioned, the Burgoyne group put great stock in the Constitution. At the event where I demonstrated my bone fides and intention of good faith to Sue, she was participating in a protest outside a public high school where on that Saturday, the Mexican consulate from Raleigh was issuing ID cards to Mexican nationals- most of whom lacked proper immigration documentation. Just as our conversation concluded, a second carload of BCTP members arrived at the protest. Sue gathered her group together and as I learned was customary on their many road trips, they gathered together to say a prayer. The nine people gathered around Sue and bowed their heads. Sue began a simple prayer thanking the Lord for their safe passage on the 60 mile drive. As Sue led the group she raised her right arm above her bowed head clutching her pocket sized copy of the U.S. Constitution. “Our group is small” she said, “but we represent thousands who say no to
this infringement of these rights guaranteed to us by these United States and that we pledge to you, dear God, that we will do what it takes to uphold this Constitution and restore our beloved America. God bless America. Amen.” In a brief conversation with Sue later, she told me how tragic it was that people were using fraudulent documents in order to gain the ability to illegally vote, and that it was going on right there in front of her a few dozen feet away.

At this early point in the research I was a bit perplexed. The prayer seemed odd and didn’t make much sense to me, and she seemed to me to be obviously misinformed about what was going on in the high school gym. After spending hours in BCTP meetings and interviewing Sue, I understood that she was framing her opposition to undocumented workers, through the belief that allowing them to vote defiled the Constitution by allowing some to enjoy the rights guaranteed by the document without upholding their responsibilities to obey the law. For Sue and others in her group, the Constitution epitomized American values and democratic citizenship. They used the Constitution as a lens to evaluate government programs, and to judge people (like me).

Additionally, the Burgoyne group had developed a core political activity around the distribution of pocketsize United States Constitutions to the general public. While such distribution was a common practice in the other LTPGs I observed, the BCTP outpaced them all by distributing in their first year and a half, over 30,000 pocket Constitutions at polling places, holiday parades, their own rallies and even in everyday interaction outside of Tea Party events.39

39 BCTP purchased pocket constitutions for approximately $.35 each from the National Center for Constitutional Studies (NCCS), a small foundation dedicated to educating citizens on what it maintains are the biblical foundations of the United States’ founding documents. There were many sources from which Tea Party groups procured the many different versions of the pocket Constitutions I saw during my fieldwork. NCCS was not affiliated with any of the elite NTPOs. Its versions of the Constitution, which I believe reflected the religious views of BCTP members, contained additional pages with quotes from the founding fathers, some of which focused upon religious themes as well as information on purchasing some of the organization’s other materials.
To BCTP members, the foundation for restoring core American values was having its citizens read, understand and embrace the words of the US Constitution.

Embedded in all these practices and dispositions was a shared mood, or an "emotional collective" which Virchow (2007) defines as activity-spawned emotions which integrate supporters, shape a worldview and attitude and encourage followers to get more fully engaged. As mentioned in Chapter 2, social movements, including the Tea Party, are successful partially due to their effect in channeling inchoate fears toward specific threats and targets (Gamson 1992) and finding spaces where the emotions made possible by the movement, can be expressed and shared. This emotional mood was sometimes generated within the group by its members’ utterances drawing attention to an especially noteworthy news item, and at other times through media emanating from outside sources such as YouTube videos. One example was a song by a relatively unknown country singer named Bruce Bellott whose recording, entitled "We Ain't Going Away" (Bellott 2010) included the lyrics:

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You can talk all day till you’re blue in the face
We don’t buy your lies.
Sit on the scene till you come clean, and
Buddy, you better get it right.
TWO! THREE! FOUR!
We Ain’t Goin’ Away!
We Ain’t Goin’ Away!
We the People are Talkin’
And we got somethin’ to say!
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The song, by way of an easily sung tune and lyrics, relates to mistrust of politicians, the frustration caused by political powerlessness and the theme of movement perseverance. It created powerful moments of solidarity as the group sang the song together. Playing the song and an accompanying video showing individuals at Tea Party rallies mouthing the words, became a regular part at BCTP meetings for several months. The video also became an unofficial Tea
Party anthem among many groups across the nation, making Bellott a minor celebrity in Tea Party circles⁴⁰.

The LTPGs, as described in this case of the Burgoyne group, create spaces where the figured world comes alive for Tea Party supporters. The US Constitution is not simply referenced, it is used as an artifact that mediates one’s political identity by being emulated, quoted and distributed. In addition, emotions of patriotism and indignation are sung about, shared and validated. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this committed group of people was ready and willing to volunteer their time and energy to make the group effective through multiple political activities from speaking at the legislature to attending rallies to electioneering to appearing at local government meetings.

INVIGORATING THE FIGURED WORLD

The participants in LTPG's, as part of a wider network, often introduced fresh stories and issues picked up from media and their own personal networks. These included videos, news items, letters to the editor and even their own personal opinions introduced through announcements or everyday interaction. And, as mentioned, LTPGs also hosted speakers at their regular meetings. Though sometimes the speakers were from NTPOs such as Americans for Prosperity or Heritage (Foundation) Action, more often they represented more locally situated groups and individuals. These small organizations that exist outside the TPM saw the LTPGs as ways to access high propensity voters, further their goals and in some cases procure funds.

For instance, I watched a presentation by the North Carolina organizer for a flat tax organization several times during my research as he visited different groups. There were also

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⁴⁰On several occasions in other groups, this same, and sometimes even more intense affect was achieved by playing the 1992 hit by Lee Greenwood “I’m Proud to be an American.”
presentations by local officeholders, religious figures and former members of the military such as
former Navy SEAL and Obama-critic, Ben Smith, and former Marine and Fox News analyst,
Col. Bill Cowan (who later married one of the members of the Adams Tea Party). In the most
basic sense, the speakers were introducing or framing new information on political issues and
dispositions within the meaning system of the figured world.

One of the most interesting talks I observed was designed to enhance an anti-liberal
emotional disposition by framing the liberal perspective in a pathological and conspiratorial
manner. One of the reoccurring practices of American right-wing populism beginning with the
early 19th century Anti-Free Masons (Berlet 2000:7 Hofstadter 2008) is the demonization of
opponents. Similar to “othering,” the goal is to figuratively define an enemy and place that
enemy outside the circle of wholesome mainstream society. A common tactic is to paint enemies
as a foreign conspiracy perpetrated by individuals with psychological and moral defects. I
referenced this early in Chapter 2 regarding the media-generated fears of Barak Obama. A
particularly effective presentation was carried out at a meeting of the Revere County Tea Party
by Greensboro political consultant, Tim Daughtry, who at the time was one half of a team of
psychologists who had formed a political consulting firm named Concord Bridge.41 The purpose
of his firm was to advise candidates on political communication. He gave a similar presentation
in a breakout session at the 2010 North Carolina GOP convention, had given talks at numerous
Tea Party group meetings as well as appearing on the Glenn Beck’s news website, The Blaze.
The Concord Bridge website reads:

"Our workshops are designed to help mainstream activists and candidates understand
the strategy and tactics of the far left, to understand why our normal responses to those
tactics are ineffective, and to learn and practice more effective skills. As a foundation,
we use methods from sports psychology to help participants stay calm, focused, and

41The name Concord Bridge itself is a reference to patriotic and historical themes. A bridge in Concord,
Massachusetts was the site of the first shots of the American war for independence.
confident under the stress of political exchanges. Only from this calm and focused stance can mainstream activists recognize common leftist tactics, avoid getting trapped in a defensive position, and seize the political offensive."

The title of the talk was "Liberal Minds, Liberal Methods: How to Break Their Grip on Power." Daughtry as a psychologist presented his ideas using scientific discourse and framed his argument to display conservatism as normative, yet repressed by a liberal elite. Conservatives, though a plurality of Americans (Saad 2014), is presented as a minority which is oppressed by the hegemony of the liberal welfare state. Relying upon Gramscian terminology, Daughtry claims liberals dominate the cultural institutions and that the only way to win is through "a long march through the institutions."

Daughtry began by painting conservative views as the mainstream ideological position in American society. Conservatives’ lives are devoted to the traditional occupations of the ideal citizen. "We want to raise a family, go to work, mind our own business. We will cooperate with each other when it is in our mutual interest.” Mainstream conservatives play by the rules but their problem is that conservatives “confuse civics with politics,” meaning that conservatives don't fight, they defend and debate. As Daughtry sees it, “if you are debating, you are defending ‘normal’; If you are defending normal, then you have already lost.”

To Daughtry and many conservatives, America is a population of good people adhering to traditional values. However, a small minority of liberals has seized control of the country through altering the culture, the institutions and the ways of thinking and knowing. “What is culture?” he asks.

Well if you want to understand water, don't ask a fish. It's just what there is; the way things are. By changing these assumptions liberal thought gets infused into every day thinking. If you grow up in a school that teaches us that Franklin Roosevelt got us out of the depression by spending money, then that just looks normal, doesn't it? There was another depression a few years earlier where the government didn't do anything and we were out of that within a year. And they don't realize it that we could've been
out of the one right now two years ago without the stimulus plan. But the idea of
immersing people in Marxist thinking was brilliant if you think about it. You don't
consciously decide. Do you remember the moment you decided to stand for the
Pledge of Allegiance? You don't decide. It's just what we do.

He then continues by employing the Gramscian concept “war of position”(Gramsci, et al. 1972).

Culture is just what we do…Marxists realize that you take over a country through
immersion not conversion. That's a critical point. You don't have to convert anyone to
radical left-wing thinking. You actually come in under the radar. If you subvert the
culture, you subvert the government that rests on that culture. This is accomplished
because the real Americans are not constantly political. Conservatives are engaged in
living not politics; we do not stay to protect our institutions after the election. We are
the summer tourists; liberals are the locals. When we win election, the next day our
students are taught by the ones that lost the election.

The conspiracy of cultural Marxism is a common trope in some corners of conservatism.
Emerging as an explanation for the rise of "political correctness", Jay (2010) traces its origin
back to a 1992 article in the journal Fidelio published by the Schiller Institute, an organization
affiliated with political extremist Lyndon LaRouche, who began on the left and moved right.
Conservative authors such as David Horwitz and Michael Lind have circulated the account
which is also vividly portrayed in the documentary "Agenda: Grinding America Down"(Bowers
2010), which was shown in several of the Tea Party groups I observed during my fieldwork.42

The account claims that “Cultural Marxists,” have made a concerted effort throughout the
second half of the 20th century to undermine the culture of the United States. Daughtry
explained to his audience that Gramsci and other Marxists "realized that middle-class countries
didn't fall to revolution's-only agrarian ones did.” Their solution then was to seize the
institutions. Yet Daughtry stresses that this is not conspiratorial thinking. "It was in the open in

42A similar conspiracy story, put forward by Glenn Beck and familiar to many Tea Partyists, is the accusation that
the Obama administration is employing the strategy outlined by Cloward and Piven (1966) to overload social
welfare programs in order to spur crisis which would then lead to more social welfare programs higher taxes and
eventual socialism.
the early 1900s, and if you didn't read Marcuse when you were in college in my day you were not sophisticated.”

Daughtry's talk then continues on this theme by attributing the dramatic changes in society and culture to the concerted effort of a sinister group from foreign shores working to undermine the nation.

Many of those of the Frankfurt school came to America and taught at the New School at Columbia University (sic). Their first target was the School of Education. If you want to infect an entire community with a virus, infect a teacher. I'm not saying that your child's teacher is a Marxist. I'm saying that your child's teacher and textbooks were taught by somebody who was taught by somebody who was taught by a Marxist. The ideas have been embedded in the curriculum.

Next, Daughtry shifts from conspiracism to portraying the left as psychologically abnormal compared to mainstream America. Aho (1994) writes of creating enemies through "mythmaking" (Aho 1994:29) relying upon historical or biological accounts which legitimize the "evil" of an enemy and demonstrate that it is inevitable and predictable. Through a disease, development or evolution, an enemy is in possession of some flaw which explains the evil.

Different from explanations of how cognitive science may explain certain political outlooks (Lakoff 2012, Haigt 2012), Daughtry lays out the liberal worldview as a pathology-a result of poor parenting and incomplete childhood development. He argues that a child will grow up with a healthy personality through “average” parenting. However if a child is the object of "fawning or spoiling," he will develop a narcissistic personality. With good parenting a child will grow up as a responsible and cooperative member of society. With poor parenting,

The world is a dangerous place. It's like the training wheels came off too soon or they never came off at all. They never learn to make it on their own. Either way the world is a threatening place. And here's the punch line, they are totally dependent on others for survival and approval….What did they do with that fear and insecurity? It comes out as anger and resentment….The hole they are trying to fill is a spiritual hole. No earthly power can fill it. You cannot make them happy. They are striving for power, blaming, accusing criticizing, their inability to handle disagreement is all because of a
hole inside of them that we cannot solve for them. That leads to the insatiable desire for power over others. If you can't make it on your own, the only path is to manipulate and control others.

By being framed in this way, the stances of liberals are depoliticized. The liberal perspective is based on an illness or defect of character as opposed to the conservative perspective which is common sense and normative. Moreover the liberal, as a maladjusted child, is to be managed, ignored, or marginalized.

Daughtry is an example of how the spaces created by local Tea Party groups are settings where the circulating discourses of conservative politics meet, fill in, and further animate the figured world of the Tea Party. The power of perceived expertise coupled with scientific discourse provides material useful for the fashioning of subjectivities (Dumit 1997). Furthermore, Daughtry adds new urgency to the Tea Party’s goals. The extra-constitutional expansion of government, the increases in dependency and the rejection of tradition and morality are not simply the result of actions of people holding a few differing views. Nor are they simply un-American and akin to foreigners. They are emotionally, spiritually and dangerously abnormal. They present an existential threat to America. Daughtry’s presentation fills in the figures of those whom the Tea Party is up against. More broadly, it helps to better understand the processes of demonization that I argue are instrumental in the greater polarization of American politics—a polarization that contributes to making the TPM possible.

DIFFERENCES, BOUNDARIES AND CONTENTIOUSNESS

Thus far, this chapter has portrayed the LTPGs as operating relatively free of differences and disagreements. But Tea Party groups were not free of tensions. The introduction of new information and dispositions, as well as the different trajectories people take into social movements, can lead to groups being sites of contestation over its meanings and practices
(Wolford 2008). For instance by the end of my fieldwork many of the groups had organized “conceal and carry” classes, which is the instruction required in order to acquire a permit to carry a concealed firearm. Seeing the permits as a display of support for the 2nd Amendment, several of the Tea Party groups I observed organized these workshops. Possessing a permit became a popular goal for many members. This desire was not shared by all. In one conversation with Sue of BCTP, she seemed troubled that though many members were pursuing the permits, because of a traumatic experience which involved a firearm, she did not want one. The experience struck me because she looked at the permit as having become a near obligation of BCTP membership and she was noticeably torn.

In Chapter 2, I mentioned the desire to “shut it down” during the congressional budget stalemate in 2011. Several members of the Burgoyne and Greene County Tea Party felt that shutting down the government was a needed remedy and a true means to shrink the government. Everyone did not share these sentiments as several members made it clear to me and to other group members in meetings. They argued that a government shutdown would have unforeseen effects and most likely hurt people, damage the economy and lessen American standing in the world.

Practice theory emerged in order to build a better understanding of the dynamic relationship between structure and agency (Ortner 1984). As noted, individuals find meaning in the Tea Party through reflecting on their own lives and how those lives make sense in relation to the Tea Party figured world. And, as shown, their lives vary greatly. Human interaction creates the performances of the figured world in the LTPGs. Yet those performances always have an unfinished quality as individuals continually respond to new and emerging actors and circumstances. Taylor and Whittier (1992) and Melucci (1995) write how social movement
participants continually negotiate the meanings of their political identities--the new ways to think and act in their collectivity. This happens as people collectively work out the symbolic meanings of the social movement with one another (Allen et al 2008; Taylor and Whittier 1992), and, often, through dialogue with opponents (Satterfield 2003). Holland et al. (2008) write that movements should not be seen as unified actors but as multiple sources of discourses competing to inform every day actions of participants (Holland et al. 2008:97). This negotiation can take several forms most commonly through the informal talk that occurs between Tea Party group members.

Political Scientist Katherine Walsh (2004) writes that casual talk about politics among informal groups is the means for people to develop a collective perspective that is rooted in “social identity.” Her research showed that the conversations among a group of men who met for coffee in a Michigan convenience store were a primary means for the development of opinions and perspectives on political issues. In the case of the LTPGs, there were often instances where groups discussed and spoke of issues and the meaning of the TPM.

One of the most interesting negotiations I witnessed over meaning occurred in a meeting of the Adams County Tea Party. The leaders of that group placed a high value in informal discussions and deliberations over issues and meanings. At one meeting they decided to break the attendees up into small groups at each of the large white folding tables in the aging American Legion hall where the meeting was held. The table at which I was sitting was made up of eight people, three women and five men who came from noticeably different perspectives. The facilitators asked people to discuss what they believe were the main challenges facing America. The ensuing conversation illustrated the different conservative identities which typically come
into play within the Tea Party groups I observed. It also showed the tension between how senses of political dislocation animated activism for some and reinforced crippling cynicism in others.

The first to talk was a man in his late 70s who began by saying that the Republicans and Democrats are both complicit and the biggest problem was “sending jobs overseas and bringing foreign people in to do the jobs in America so that the lower man has no money and as a result the government has no tax revenue.”

Next to speak was Randy, a fixture at the Adams County Tea Party who was known for his strongly expressed views of various insidious intentions of government formed from his membership in the John Birch Society. Randy claimed that America had become a nation defined by corporate fascism and guided by the Bilderberg group, a secretive meeting of European and American government and economic elites held yearly to discuss trans-Atlantic cooperation. He believed that there is little that can be done by regular people to change the country as long as it is being controlled by a transnational conspiracy of global corporations.

A female member of the group then speaks up saying that she heard the Bilderberg group mentioned on the Sean Hannity Show and that he claimed the conspiracies surrounding the group were "nonsense."

Randy responds that that is what should be expected from the mainstream media because they are "controlled opposition.” Randy continues with information gleaned from the website, infowars.com which is produced by the right wing talk radio host, Alex Jones. Randy continues that very little can be done in America as long as powerful, multinational corporations and their political servants are running the country from an invisible and unapproachable perch.

The older man who initially spoke, mentions the problem with imported workers and how "illegal immigrants" are receiving “food stamps.” In these first few minutes of the table’s
discussion, the conversation is dominated by the more negative perspectives articulated by Randy and the older gentleman.

However, Steve and David, leaders of a Tea Party group in neighboring Greene County, stepped in to redirect the conversation back to more hopeful topics. Steve was a leader in his county’s Republican organizations years before. He chimed in quickly trying to direct the conversation in a more positive direction. "We have to look at realistic choices.” David adds, "It’s easy to get discouraged and feel that there is nothing that can be done. But we forget it is ‘we the people.’ When we unite together we can get things done." Steve then responds directly to Randy that both parties do not reflect the feelings of most Americans, only the Democrats are becoming "communist.” "We need to get good people into (Republican) primaries and get them elected.”

Another gentleman then joins the conversation. Diverting the topic toward Christian fundamentalism and millennialism, he predicted end times in which the emerging “beast” as mentioned in the biblical book of Revelations, will be "electronics.”

At that moment a younger man in his late 30s asks whether the group has a Facebook page. In what seems a direct reaction to the prior statement, he argues that the group and the movement are in need of attracting young people. "I am putting that on my agenda: I want to get some young people involved and get them some knowledge. The reason there are no young people here is because they don't have any knowledge of what's going on." He then punctuates his statement with his own biblical reference from Proverbs 29:18 "'because where there is no vision, the people perish.' Just one or two [young people] will do. They text and post things.” A common concern among many Tea Party groups is their inability to attract younger people and so several members at this point chime in with agreement.
The man mentioning end times replies, “The colleges are controlled by liberals. You drive down the road here and you will see some little Toyota with an Obama sticker on it and some little girl with her painted toenails up on the dash. She's smoking a cigarette and drinking a Mountain Dew. Kids are not smart enough to believe.”

Undeterred the younger man replies, “there is a young person's group that I know about. Time to try to get some information to them.”

Steve agrees, ”We need to get young people involved. That's one of the problems isn't it? How do we educate them?"

David then says that we need to find out what it is about their culture that attracts them and go there. “You are going to have to go to where they are if you can reach them.”

This brief exchange illustrates the contentiousness of the spaces formed by local Tea Party groups, where different visions of America and political empowerment meet. Randy’s position, informed by the John Birch society, represents a segment of conservatism, a fringe segment nonetheless, that still claims adherents including listeners to Alex Jones. Examples of conservative populism also emerged where people see that power is put in the hands of corporate and government elites. The first man who attempts to assign blame for the lowering of people's income, places that blame at the feet of government that has enabled jobs to be sent overseas, and cheap labor to be imported. Another man placed blame upon the rejection of God by citizens and government. The importance he puts on the much-anticipated second coming articulated a hope for change that rests on the intervention of God. Yet he also believed that humans have enabled the bad state of the country through their reliance upon and fetishizing of technology. On

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43Alex Jones was the primary source for the spread of the conspiracy theory surrounding the Jade Helm military exercise in the southwest US in the summer of 2015. Jones’s claim, that the exercises were a cover for a federal take-over of the state of Texas, were so prominently circulated, that several U.S. Senators and the Governor of Texas addressed it.
the other side, in opposition to those who paint pictures of hopelessness, we see those energized by their Tea Party experiences. Steve and David were trying to capture the discourse of taking power back in spite of the political class’s corruption. Their desire was for the slow incremental change that will eventually restore the country through careful organizing and the cultivation of conservative candidates.

The scene also discloses another source of conflict. To some degree the conflict within this meeting was generational. The younger man, enthusiastic about finding young people and knowing that with knowledge young people will realize the TPMs importance, directly confronted a fear of technology. In his account, young people have embraced and taken advantage of social media and so it is an actual means by which the Tea Party can be successful with younger generations. He highlighted the generational divide through his own elaboration of the importance of technology. For the younger man “electronics’ will bring new people in through social media. For the older man, electronics are actually going to be the platform for the Antichrist.

And finally, the discussion in the small breakout group discloses unique subject positions that vary across LTPG’s, which will be further discussed in the following chapter. The Adams County group was primarily composed of working-class individuals. The first quotes regarding the working man were effective illustrations of working-class populism and is a position some would identify with those on the left. Secondly, as explained below, this exchange was most likely gendered. Since the social fields that affect local spaces of practice are characterized by disparities in power and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991), these sites are charged by the assignment of position and struggles over social identification (Wortham 2006, McDermott 1993). LTPGs become spaces where the meanings of inequalities are reproduced, and viewpoints
silenced or self-censored. The men at the table did all of the talking. Of the three women present one made a single statement while the other two remained silent throughout. This was quite different from other LTPGs such as the Burgoyne County Tea Party where Sue and other women were the drivers and leaders of the group. In fact women were the primary or co-founders of five of the eight LTPG's with which I participated.

Other local Tea Party groups were more clearly negotiating the boundaries between what the group will do and not do. The Franklin County Tea Party's meetings were typically attended by 50 to 75 people in a large seafood restaurant. The group was involved in very few activities outside of the meetings during the time of my fieldwork. Previously, during the 2010 election, many of the members did become involved in supporting a local Republican candidate to the state House of Representatives. That candidate won narrowly upsetting the Democrat who held the seat. Since then however, the group was rarely involved in any activities aside from their monthly meeting or setting up a table at their county fair or float at their Christmas parade. This low level of activity, did not sit well with Jack, a newer member of the Franklin County group.

Jack was a transplant from New Jersey who had been involved in an extremely large and active Tea Party group there. He often related to other members of the Franklin group the level of energy, emotion and activity that was present in his former group. Jack saw the Franklin group as too timid and too unwilling to actually press for change. "You folks need to play politics and throw a few bombs. We need to try to put things on the agenda and when we are refused we need to draw attention to it." Jack's idea was to suggest that the local school district sponsor an essay contest for students based upon their impressions of the United States Constitution. Believing that the school district would reject their proposal, Jack argued that it would then be time for
them to protest and create a controversy around what should be considered an un-controversial act--having students write about the nation's founding document.

Jack’s proposal was met with a lack of enthusiasm with many arguing that downtown protests of more than one person were "banned." In later interviews it became apparent that many were more comfortable volunteering for candidates or being involved in less confrontational political activities. Part of this was due to the fact that being based in a small town, some members were acquainted with many of those they would be confronting. Though Tea Party groups often contained political neophytes, they often also, at least in small southern towns, included local citizens with long-standing ties in the community-some reaching back generations. Such citizens, as opposed to newcomers, were sometimes more hesitant to adopt a confrontational style.

Sometimes the boundaries on group discourses and activities were more implied and enforced through silence or redirection. The Hawthorne Tea Party included an elderly man who attended each meeting and never missed an opportunity to warn of the dangers of teaching evolution and how it was corrupting unknowing youth. The man would get quite emotional seeing it as a rejection of Christianity and a "dag dastardly deed.” He often brought up this concern in a group forum where his statement did not necessarily require a response. His declaration was often simply met with silence, though at one meeting, people tried to redirect the man to bring up these concerns with family members. The chair of the group related to me his frustration and his anxiety about these clearly religious concerns. He felt that such utterances would harm the group’s ability to recruit new members, who could be deterred by the overtly Christian themes in a movement that supposedly focused upon strictly fiscal matters.

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44More than likely, large protests required a permit.
Along the same lines, one member, an early participant in the Hawthorne group, would as part of the program, give a short history "lesson" which was often based upon interpretations of history that linked events to divine intervention or signs that God favored the American nation. For example one history lesson described the Dunkirk-like retreat of George Washington’s army from Brooklyn Heights across the East River in 1776, arguing that the persistent fog that hid the evacuation from the British was proof of God's intervention. Eventually the chair of the group asked the member to discontinue those stories.

As compared to boundary setting, the proffering of support for discourses voiced in the Tea Party meetings was even more complex. Sometimes there was a noticeable silence in instances when I expected people to challenge some statements. On one occasion at a Franklin Tea Party meeting, an “expert” on Islam gave a presentation that was dangerously inaccurate in its description of Muslims, for instance claiming that all Muslims must kill those of other faiths who do not convert to Islam. The noticeable silence gave credibility to the outlandish and intolerant claims even though the group’s co-chair later apologized for his talk and regretted inviting him. In any social field such as that in play for the Tea Party group, the perceived value and possession of symbolic capital may lead some individuals to ignore what a speaker has to say (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1991). Simply, “does this person have the credibility to say these things?” Or, it may lead some individuals to self-censor and not voice their reservations about what another is saying. These effects of symbolic capital may lead to the propagation of sometimes incorrect or even harmful information. Many issues come into a group and as seen in the Adams County episode above, the fringe is given a voice equal to the mainstream. People may be polite or not feel able to adequately argue a point. Or, at other times a closed network of Tea Partyists may circulate and build support for falsehoods in a kind of collective process that
Julian Sanchez called “epistemic closure” (Sanchez 2010). The introduction of unchallenged falsehoods may lead to Tea Partyist (and, of course, other exclusive groups in general) to appear “out of touch” and extreme. This often occurred with discourses originating on the Internet but also with misinformation from more mainstream conservative media such as Fox News. For example, while Texas was evaluating its public school history curriculum, Gretchen Carlson on the Fox News morning show mistakenly claimed that Texas was considering not teaching any United States history prior to 1877 (Stutz 2010). I heard the point mentioned in several Tea Party groups and though corrected later by Fox, it persisted and few questioned the obvious absurdity of the claim. The claim made sense in relation to the wider Tea Party narrative of American society turning its back on America’s founders.

CONCLUSION

During the period of my fieldwork, the LTPG's were crucial for forging, mobilizing and retaining everyday Tea Party activists in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. The groups provided the spaces where the figured world of the Tea Party was not only performed, but also "invigorated" and “enlivened” on a continual basis through the introduction of new information supplied by the media, through participants’ own stories, and through visiting "circuit riders" such as Tim Daughtry. However, just as LTPG's are not the unwitting extensions of elite conservative groups like Americans for Prosperity, neither did the groups uphold a unified set of discourses, positions, and practices. As shown in Chapter 2 the Tea Party movement addressed many different types of concerns held by participants. The next chapter discusses how those unique personal histories and social positions led to differences regarding what the Tea Party means and how to practice membership. Tea Partyists holding different meanings regarding the movement lead to LTPGs with widely varying characteristics. The next chapter, extends the
discussion of LTPG's by discussing the variation among groups and the forms of political activism, if any, that the groups engage in.
Chapter 7
Local Tea Party Groups as Movement Actors in Local Politics

INTRODUCTION

This chapter completes the argument that local Tea Party groups play a central role in the Tea Party Movement. The prior chapter described the inward workings of the Tea Party communities of political practice including the creation of sites where the figured world and associated identities are created, learned and performed, the means by which new material invigorates the communities of practice and the ways in which boundaries, support, silence and dismissals are negotiated. That chapter spoke little to the externally oriented political actions of local Tea Party groups. The Tea Party fits the conventional definitions of a social movement as an organized group of people that engage in contentious political activities (Diani 1992; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004). All of the LTPGS that I researched to some degree or at some point in their history were involved in some form of outward political activity.45 Some groups stopped being active after the success of the 2010 elections. Yet, three of the groups with which I participated remained politically active and actually increased the intensity of their political activities. In all three of these cases, the political activity was undertaken primarily in local political arenas. Although these arenas are fairly invisible to national media coverage, they are political fields that

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45I will however discuss one group where the outward activity was more of what is considered social service or charitable work. Nonetheless the activity was still to some degree aimed at addressing problems in the world. Croteau and Hoynes (2013) claim a social movement is distinct from a charity because the social movement addresses underlying problems, not the symptoms or surface effects. I have argued that any outward activity aimed at improving lives of the disadvantaged is inherently political (Westermeyer 2009).
can have direct and pronounced effect upon people's everyday lives through such issues as property tax rates, transportation and land-use decisions.

The spaces of practice created by the LTPGs could be thought of as multiple, very loosely connected centers of leadership, high energy and enthusiastic cooperative activity. Beyond providing such gathering places, however, these sites, as alluded to in the last chapter, constituted a space in which many individuals developed and realized an activist political identity. Newcomers to political activity acquired political skills such as speaking, organizing and lobbying. They learned the intricacies, inter-relationships, and decision-making practices of their local governments and of local Republican Party organization. Since the LTPGs collectively approached the public environments, newly forming activists were supported in the very acts of protesting, questioning officials and so forth.

In this chapter, I will discuss how LTPGs act as movement actors. Social practice theory, with its focus on local spaces of practice as potentially independent sites of cultural production encourages attention to spatial variation. Thus, the sites of action, the actions undertaken and the longevity of each group’s activism varied. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the significance of both leaders and members in the types and success of activism. To a substantial degree, the character of each related back to the organizers’ motivations and political biographies. The second section will discuss two general forms—or degrees of activism—the LTPGs in my study assumed. And the final section will discuss how LTPGs did not simply appropriate issues from elite organizations and media, but at times actually generated their own issues which then gained significance within the wider conservative movement.
LEADERS AND MEMBERS

The initial organizers of each group, had a substantial influence on the early direction of the groups. I will not argue that the leaders necessarily dictated the subsequent form of the group, but that their backgrounds and motivations to some degree influenced the style that the group developed and displayed at least initially. The process of movement formation, as detailed in Chapter 3 was triggered by the resonance of the Tea Party Movement frames with people’s sense of unease regarding the direction of the nation. And as noted in Chapter 4, these concerns were not uniform, but rather the product of different biographies. The primary organizers guided by their own biographies, often set the initial tone as they brought people together in their first meetings and provided a direction for their group’s initial activities. And their direction was often related to their own experiences with politics. The following two examples will show the influence of initial organizers and the personal histories they brought to the movement.

*Sue and the Burgoyne Tea Party*

In the prior chapter I described the Burgoyne County Tea Party and how they performed the Tea Party figured world in their monthly meetings. As mentioned, Sue and several of her friends founded the group, though at least during my time with them, Sue was the hands-on center of the group. Youthful in her mid-70s, New Hampshire transplant, former elementary school teacher and mother of grown children, Sue remembers sewing for the Red Cross as a child during the Second World War, seeing her generation as enduring sacrifice in order to give the next generation new-found opportunities. Though generally conservative her entire life, she had become strongly aware of her conservatism a decade earlier as she rejected the increasingly liberal principles emerging in her church. She tells me, “I had been an unconscious conservative and [then] became a conscious conservative.” Upon moving to North Carolina and becoming
involved in the local Republican women's club, she was disappointed that the group, and the local GOP did not seem to her to be sufficiently conservative nor facilitated in a democratic manner.

I asked Sue to describe her vision should the Tea Party be successful. Articulating common Tea Party themes, she replied:

Conservative, constitutional principles are taught…There is a president who is running a transparent government and understands what its responsibilities and limits are. The judiciary gets it, and that they don't get to change the Constitution whenever they want to. There is also a sense of patriotism that you can feel in communities all across the country. People are not afraid to put up a flag. People are proudly saluting the flag. People want to learn about our heritage. Parents wake up to how much importance there is in birthing a child and giving the child principles.

In this quote, we hear familiar Tea Party themes of limited government, constitutional literalism, patriotism and removing the stigma associated with expressing love for the country. However, we also catch the gendered and generational reference to moral guidance one would expect emerging from her memories as a teacher, parent and a childhood of sacrifice.

Those influences that she drew upon to shape her identity as a Tea Partyist also helped her steer the group in its early days. I already mentioned some of the common internal practices of the Burgoyne County Tea Party such as saluting the flag and reciting the preamble of the US constitution. They were also one of the most politically active groups of the eight I followed. Sue's vision of conservatism was strongly influenced by becoming consciously conservative and her disappointing experience with the local GOP. As a result of her rejection of the local Republican party practices, the group’s members all-but seized and transformed the local GOP. The Burgoyne County Tea Party’s active, committed members became Republican captains of a majority of the voting precincts in Burgoyne County influencing the direction of the county party
Burgoyne Tea Party members out-organized the local GOP establishment by developing a political organization which was not simply more ideologically explicit, but that more successfully involved citizens in political activities such as protests, grassroots lobbying and electioneering. As part of the state structure of the Republican Party, their influence in the county party eventually had broader effects, leading to Tea Party-inspired, state-level convention fights over platform language and senior statewide party officeholders. Skocpol and Williamson (2011) write that the TPM contributes to the ideological hardening of the Republican Party. The sources of this hardening they argue, comes from each of the different components of the movement. Considering the work of the Burgoyne LTPG, we also see how this hardening may start almost imperceptibly at the precinct level and work its way through the party hierarchy.

Beyond those activities, the group organized their own electioneering campaigns. Burgoyne Tea Party members actively worked the polls including early voting sites, during elections. In 2010 and 2012 the group sent out questionnaires to all the candidates seeking their positions on a number of issues relevant to the Tea Party. Members then consolidated answers onto a simple leaflet which would then be distributed to voters as they entered the polling places. The group maintained a schedule and map to ensure that as many of the polling places and early voting sites were covered as possible.

Additionally, Many BCTP members wrote and read political commentaries on airtime provided to citizens by the local AM talk radio station. The group seized on this opportunity as a

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46 Today precinct organizing in many parts of the nation often takes place in the three to six months before general elections then going dormant again until the next election cycle. So unlike earlier times when there were long-term precinct captains in most constituencies, today many are not. At the time of my research, the member in charge of tracking voter registration and precinct organizing declared to me that 72% of the precincts in Burgoyne County were headed by BCTP members and 60% of the county Republican Party officers were members of BCTP.

47 One of Sue’s cofounder/friends would leave the group early on because she disagreed with Sue on strategy. The friend believed the group should be working more closely with the local Republican Party than against it.
cost-free way to express their political views and recruit new members. Often members practiced their commentaries at BCTP meetings and encouraged others to write and broadcast their own. The few presentations I heard included themes which from conservative media, but one given local voice and color by citizens of the County. The BCTP also fundraised thousands of dollars to place several self-designed, Tea Party-themed billboards along North Carolina highways prior to the 2010 and 2012 general elections.

The Burgoyne Tea Party was a beehive of political activity. During my research one could feel Sue's imprint on the group, yet there were many different leaders and coordinators working on many different activities. From the start, members began to take responsibility for a host of activities. Sometimes these activities were collectively decided upon such as who would become a precinct captain, other times they were independently launched by members, such as a man, who took it upon himself to videotape meetings and events and create a Vimeo channel. A year after completing my fieldwork Sue stepped down as chair and a member of the second level leadership took her place. As of this writing, the group is still functioning, involved in activism, and holding their monthly dinner meetings.

*Dale and the Pierce County Tea Party*

Fifty miles away, the LTPG had a very different form. Dale was the founder of the Tea Party in Pierce County, a primarily rural, agriculturally-based county that prior to the 1990s had substantial textile and furniture manufacturing sectors. Its largest city and county seat is a town of 20,000. I was initially struck by Dale’s vision of his Tea Party group as one that wasn’t “hollering and carrying signs.” At the time, his claim struck me as a rejection of a defining Tea Party characteristic. It was after speaking with Dale and observing the development of his group that I started to realize his and the other members’ devout fundamentalist faith was influencing
the style and practices of the Tea Party group. Dale became an evangelical Christian in the late
1970s and embraced his faith with missionary zeal. At one point he and his wife ran an
unlicensed home for runaway girls, scouring the streets of Greensboro for homeless teens to
feed, clothe and minister to.

Unlike Sue, Dale's vision of the Tea Party seemed to be informed by different
conceptions and emotions. When I initially asked him what the Tea Party was to him, he
responded, “The Tea Party is the same--all it is is ‘Taxed enough already!’ That's all it stands for.
We are living today where one party is either ‘tax and spend’ or ‘borrow and spend.’ The
‘borrow and spend’ is where we're at today.”

To Dale, the primary threat to America was much greater and deeper than ‘tax and spend’
or the immediate threat to the Constitution by President Obama and progressives. "Every
movement revolves around the sitting president. Obama just happens to be the sitting president
that is making bad decisions and getting bad advice.” To Dale, American decline is manifested in
the secularization of society and the breakdown of the post-war nuclear family. Further, whereas
many Tea Party members including Sue would champion the restorative powers of the
Constitution as the key to American revival, Dale’s hope was placed firmly in Jesus Christ. At
one group meeting, Dale complained, "I don't know what's going on in our country. But I do
know that we need to start inviting people into our churches and letting them get the gospel of
Jesus Christ. The Constitution is not gonna fix what we got. There is nothing that any man has
written that's going to fix our country. We are morally bankrupt." American decline emerges
from the removal of God from people’s lives, government and public schools. Often the rejection
of God was undertaken by government, which after inserting itself into more and more areas of
public life, removed faith in the name of multiculturalism and “political correctness.”
Unlike Sue's group which focused on patriotic and political concerns, the Pierce County group traced American decline more directly through the Tea Party frames of morality and individual responsibility. Moreover, the Pierce County Tea Party also differed from many Tea Party groups in the activities that they undertook. In the year that I attended PCTP meetings, I never once saw the group engaged in externally oriented contentious politics. The events and activities were based largely in faith and charity with distinct working class concerns. As Dale told me early in my fieldwork,

> We want our group to be a community organization. We want to help people. We collected supplies for the schools. On October 2 we had a big fundraiser with Children's Miracle Network. And I want to see some kind of a support system for seniors that have to make a choice between food and prescriptions. We can only do that if we have the numbers and people that put others before themselves. If you put yourself before others you will never get anything done except fight with your ego.

During my fieldwork I never saw any work done on behalf of seniors. However Dale and some members did organize a school supply drive and a "buy American" fair where a dozen vendors selling their made-in-America products set up stands in a vacant lot.

Since Dale formed his group in the summer of 2010, over a year after Sue and her friends, it seemed that to Dale, the Tea Party was a vehicle upon which he could impress and organize around his religious interpretations of the Tea Party. This resulted in a unique style practiced in the PCTP group. At one meeting, Dale had so combined the spiritual and the political, that he conducted a type of "altar call," which after having participants close their eyes, he invited them to raise their hands if they wished to make a new spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ after the meeting. This group style, I believe, alienated some people and preventing the group from growing quickly. However, it also attracted a consistent core who shared this understanding of American decline and style by which the group operated. Diane, for example, the strongly devout person that we met in Chapter 4, was an early and regular attendee at PCTP
meetings. By the end of my fieldwork, the group meetings were well attended, and while the religious tone seemed diminished, had morphed to some extent in that the meeting space had become a forum which candidates would visit seeking support. At that point, nonetheless, the group still didn’t engage in any contentious politics and it didn’t seem as though Dale was really interested in doing so.

These two examples show how different motivations coupled with strong and charismatic personalities, may have a strong effect on the type of action that the LTPGs takes. The groups often attract a group of people who are able to relate to the primary organizers, creating a strong relationship between the members and leaders. Dale and Sue both attracted people like themselves-social conservatives in Dale’s group and middle class, retired conservative Republicans in Sue’s. Conversely, these styles can repel many would-be Tea Partyists. The unique style of the Pierce County group focusing upon Christian fundamentalist themes repelled some would-be members. At the meeting where Dale did his altar call, one first-time visitor pointedly asked about the outward political activity that he expected from a Tea Party. Dale’s response was non-committal saying, “We could do that if people want.” But he quickly moved on to another topic without asking the group as a whole if and what political activity they would like to engage in.

Although it is easy to say that the leaders were the ones that made all the difference in the local groups, my research among several groups showed the dynamics to be more complex. In many cases the leaders were a means of building solidarity and focusing energies facilitating very effective activism. However, in the most active groups there was a second level of leadership below the primary organizers. The groups that were most active and energetic were characterized by multiple centers of activity. In the Burgoyne group, there were a few people
who coordinated the precinct work; another who proofed members’ radio commentaries before they were read on the radio; and another, a woman, who handled the collection of petitions that were to be delivered to policymakers. In the Pierce group, there was no such second tier. Dale and his wife organized the limited activities the group undertook. In the monthly meetings, people mostly listened and agreed and were given few opportunities to do more.

**Hawthorne County and Group Synergy**

As suggested by the Burgoyne group, the primary organizers, while initially setting a tone, were often joined by many other individuals with their own personal concerns. Another example of the atmosphere made possible by extensive leadership and active members was the Hawthorne Tea Party the week after the 2010 general election. The 2010 election was, for the national reach of the TPM, its high water mark.\(^{48}\) In what the President himself would call a “shellacking”, Republicans gained 63 seats and a majority in the House of Representatives, increased their majority by 6 new seats in the U.S. Senate and gained 680 seats in state legislative races. This was the largest midterm election gain for any party since 1938.

Many members of the Hawthorne group had participated in electioneering activities, primarily handing out “voter guides” at polling places identifying “conservative” candidates on the ballot. The first 30 minutes of the meeting was allotted to an open forum facilitated by the electioneering coordinator (a member of the second tier of leadership) where members talked about their experiences in the election activities. Members shared stories of meaningful incidents that happened. With pride, members spoke of being thanked for what they were doing and described how people would take their leaflet to the polls and carefully bring it back so it could be given to someone else. Some told about opponents showing disdain or admonishing them for

\(^{48}\) I’m going to make the point later that the influence of the TPM at the local level continued to increase after the 2010 national victories.
campaigning too close to a polling place. Seeing this as proof they were unsettling liberals and progressives, their resolve stiffened and their energy increased. People spoke, laughed and shared experiences and unlike the generally accepted image of Tea Party people as earnest, these people were having fun. They also were performing identities as political activists. To many in the room these senses of themselves as political activists would have been out of the question a year earlier.

In my own experience of training many directors of political fund-raising canvasses--essentially small, localized political activist groups--I noticed certain periods when a canvas staff achieved a certain atmosphere of high morale, engagement and activity. A canvas director always strove to achieve that level, but often was left frustrated, faced with canvass offices that trudged along with little energy, low morale and high turnover. When the energetic atmosphere formed, the actual amount of work that the director did declined dramatically because members of the staff would volunteer and easily accept delegation to additional campaign activities. This achieved a goal as important as knocking on doors: the development, enculturation and training of new activists. Watching the levels of activity in the Hawthorne group that evening and on my very first visit to the Burgoyne group, I remember being struck by how much they reminded me of successful canvas offices twenty years before.

AUDIENCES AND ACTIVISTS

Members in seven out of the eight groups I worked with were involved in electioneering before the 2010 election (Pierce being the only relatively inactive group). This included making phone calls to voters and/or leafleting at polling places. Three of groups did not organize their own activities, but rather invited candidates to speak who would recruit members for their own campaign activities. Four of the groups organized campaign activities within the LTPG.
resounding victories in 2010, the groups where the members volunteered on the campaigns of politicians were unable to maintain the commitment and energy and settled into groups that simply met, interacted among themselves and did very little outside political activism. Three of the four groups that organized their own activities, maintained a high level of activity—Hamilton, Burgoyne and Adams. Those three groups, primarily because of a strong core of active members, continued to grow and develop new forms and targets for political activism.

Simply, each group seemed to settle into one of two types, what I term “audiences” and “activists.” An audience group had two main characteristics. First, the group meetings were predominantly educational, in which info was presented to the group and there was low degree of interaction. Second, there was an absence of a second tier of leadership. In other words the leaders—the two or three primary organizers—were carrying out most of the activities of the organization. In some of these groups, the leaders either due to their own time commitments or personal styles, could not seem to move their groups onto more activist footings.

It is nonetheless important to note that an audience group is still important in the broader Tea Party movement. Even without involving themselves in externally oriented, local contentious politics, these groups still circulated and repurposed the cultural resources that served to invigorate the figured world. Simply these were large groups of high propensity voters who were going to use the interpretive frame of the Tea Party during elections in evaluating issues and candidates. Through visits by elected officials and other organizers who often sought out these groups, these members were nonetheless educating themselves regarding politics and

49 The Hawthorne Tea Party was not able to retain the energy and activism I witnessed that night after the election.

50 One exception was the Revere County Tea Party, which though not engaged in outward political activity, was nonetheless full of excitement. The group met weekly and typically had many activities such as the talk by Tim Daughtry in the previous section, classes on understanding the US constitution and films.
political activity in their local community and nationwide. Many could be drawn upon as foot soldiers in later campaigns. Conversely, they were also educating candidates on the issues most important to the most ardent conservatives in their constituency. Finally the groups were still sites in the Tea Party network, where information was continually circulated to other Tea Party groups and individuals.

As for “activist” groups: in the last months of my fieldwork, with no general election on the horizon, three of the eight groups--one third of the groups that I worked with--were engaged in ongoing, activism. The meetings were interactive and though presentations occurred, they were not the only activity. Often a microphone would go around the room with people giving updates on activities such as in the first vignette in the first chapter of this dissertation where members spoke of disaster planning, essay contests and videoing Van Jones. The leaders did work of course, but other members did many of the other things and were empowered to initiate committees and activities on their own.

In the Burgoyne County group, the group in Hamilton County and the Adams group described in the next section, activism became important activities of the Tea Party figured world. Lave and Wenger theorized communities of practice in the context of “situated learning” (1991) where, in this case, political knowledge was gained through the co-participation of novice and experienced activists in local political settings. These activist groups were ongoing workshops of political socialization where members learned practical political skills including setting up phone trees, organizing rallies, speaking at legislative bodies and electioneering. Those LTPGs would have small yet significant effects on their local political culture and elections and transform their members into experienced dedicated advocates, protesters and campaigners.
For example at the Hawthorne group’s post-election meeting I mentioned earlier, I spoke with Patricia, a smartly dressed woman of 70, who said she had handed out leaflets at the early voting sites. I asked if she had ever done anything like that before. With a chuckle and a smile, she huffed “No! I can’t believe I did that.” She continued, telling me that because of the candidate forums held during the group’s meetings she learned more about how “government budgets” worked. For instance, she mentioned that because of the group-sponsored debate between school board candidates, she better understood the budgeting and financial priorities for the county school district.

Patricia’s experience is central to understanding a key aspect of the importance of these local Tea Party groups. Patricia was motivated early on to become involved with the Tea Party and sought out the local group. Through that participation, she had the opportunity to do something that was outside of her comfort zone, have a small influence on a historic election and also become more versed in the workings of her government. This sense of efficacy, reinforced through regular face-to-face meetings of the LTPG’s, make these groups of regular citizens potent political actors in their local political cultures.

Hamilton County Tea Party

The Burgoyne group was predominantly middle-class and applied pressure to different levels of government important in their area. The LTPG produced a figured world that emphasized patriotism, the Constitution and their particular style of activism. The Hamilton County Tea Party, the second of the three “activist” groups, assumed a different form that was strongly influenced by the class position of the members and the political landscape of their county. Their unique skills, backgrounds and sense of their own cultural capital provided the
context for a more instrumental approach to activism and a bitter conflict with their local county government.

The Hawthorne County Tea Party was formed in late 2009 by four people who attended the same Sunday church service. After the service, they would meet over coffee and donuts to talk about the issues of the day. They were becoming more and more troubled by the direction of the country as President Obama’s healthcare reform was nearing passage.

The true drive behind the formation of the group was Sandy, an energetic, upper-middle class stay-at-home mother of two in her late thirties, and Robert, a small business owner in his mid-forties. I have already mentioned how Sandy in Chapter 2 grew concerned after seeing the exchange between Barak Obama and Joe the Plumber. Sandy was motivated further by Tea Party inspiration, former Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin.

In December of 2009 I went on a business trip with my husband and took Sarah Palin's book [*Going Rogue*] with me. What I got out of the book is that if Americans would just take care of their little piece of America, their own backyard. If they got involved locally and cleaned up the corruption, the good old boy network and found out where their tax money is going. If everybody took care of their little city or county, oh my gosh, we would see such a difference. I was so inspired by that because I think a lot of times people feel very helpless watching the news. They see all these huge national issues in Washington DC in these politicians; these things that you will never be able to get your hands on to do anything about. And every couple of years you get to vote. But local was all of a sudden, "gosh, I think there are politicians who do stuff locally." But I didn't really know. I had never been to a city Council meeting or a county commission meeting, never. I had never been in the building; I didn't know where they were downtown, the whole 9 yards. So I thought that we needed to do something. We have to do something on this local level. The one friend I have had these political conversations with at church was Robert.

She began attending the local Republican women's club meetings. Yet she became disillusioned quickly. It became apparent to her that a relatively young, energetic newcomer was going to have limited influence on reinvigorating an entity that had for years been more of a social arrangement for older members of the local conservative establishment, whose biggest
activities were fund-raising dinners for the local GOP. “So Robert and I decided that we needed to sit down and have coffee and decide what we were going to do.” Robert agreed about the importance of the local political field and together Robert and Sandy they pulled together some friends and people Robert knew from the local GOP and a few who Sandy met at the women’s club.

Later on, maybe a month, we had a meeting at night, there were six of us there. We talked about what we could do and we decided that nationally we couldn't do anything and we didn't think we could do anything statewide. But locally, let's look at it. Who controls the government locally? Six people on the Board of Education—there are 11 board members and you need six. Six County commissioners and five on the city Council… So, in our conversations we figured that all we needed were 17 people that could change the dynamic of the County. So let's start there. So we agreed that that's what we could do. 17. So all of a sudden it was smaller. Instead of it being just too big for one little me, it didn't seem very big.

Their first target was their county government. Their reasoning went as follows: Hamilton County is one of the larger counties in North Carolina and its county seat is one of North Carolina's 10 largest cities. There is a sizable Democratic voter registration majority including a very prominent black middle class and a black political elite. The county-level legislative body, the County Board of Commissioners had the most direct impact on people's lives through their control over property tax rates and how those funds are spent.

The Hamilton group was made up of mostly middle-class and upper-middle-class professionals and retirees. The membership was overly represented by people in finance, consulting and marketing, many of who would form a dedicated second level of leadership who coordinated different activities. There was for example, a city council committee, an outreach and membership committee, a school board committee and a committee to liaison with other Tea Party groups.
Hamilton members’ first activities were preparing and making comments to the commissioners during the public comment period at the beginning of the twice-monthly county commissioner meetings. The purpose of these short, three-minute presentations was to draw attention to different aspects of spending that the group deemed wasteful or unnecessary. The comments read by participants often held a modest degree of conceit and disrespect toward the Democrats on the commission and especially the chair, a politically powerful African-American real estate broker. The commission meetings were always broadcast live on local television, often reported on in the local daily newspaper and in a free weekly which gave the group sympathetic coverage. Members of the group recorded the comments themselves and began circulating video clips of each other's presentations through social media such as Facebook and a YouTube channel.

The production and circulation of these videos was the focal point of a unique space of practice created by the group. Though the group did have meetings occasionally, such as the scene portrayed at the beginning of Chapter 1, much of their interaction was done either in small groups at the county commissioners meetings and through the exchange of videos and comments over Facebook, e-mail and the organization’s YouTube channel. The county commissioner meetings were an event where the members would go and meet and talk and where the three-minute comment periods were the primary activity. I would hear members ask each other "are you speaking tonight?" Some would and some would not. For some there was no difficulty writing and presenting a three-minute presentation. For others it was something new and challenging. More accomplished speakers would work with new members, helping those craft comments that would be concise and compelling. Sandy, herself a political neophyte when she
began, became a very effective speaker with comments that were hard-hitting and aggressive with an underlying tone of contempt toward the commissioners.

The group had no illusions that their comments were actually going to change the commissioners’ minds on policy. As Sandy put it,

But my audience is not really the commissioners but the group that is going to view these videos. These videos are designed to get people to the tipping point a little bit quicker. The commissioners already know how many people are on the disability roles. They already know what's going on with the federal mandates and who gets help and who doesn't. So my mission is for the people. It's for the people that are on the Facebook page. We have 700 people on our e-mail distribution list.

Due to the class positions of the members they developed a style which reflected their own sense of privilege, entitlement and symbolic capital. It’s customary for Tea Partyists to complain about the problems presented by elected officials and typically fight for replacements to many in office. Many Hamilton members, being quite privileged, had the outlook that they actually could do the job better than those in office. This disposition came out through the utterances regarding the group’s outlook toward governing, which they equated to running a business. In one comment before the county commissioners over school district funding, one of the group’s members, a retired executive, justified his argument for budget cuts in this way:

I ran multibillion-dollar enterprises for 40 years. My last 10 years I spent turning around financially troubled companies. Really tough stuff. On the school board there is a lot of money that's being wasted...The administrative staff of Hamilton schools needs to be cut by 50%. This is a strategic imperative...They need to cut $20 million out of their budget to maintain their fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers.

The Democrat chair of the commission, over time built up greater and greater contempt for the organization due to their constant complaints and accusations. On more than one occasion he lashed out at the group for their sense of privilege. “You're not the only smart people here. We have a brain too. And we have concerns too. Just because we’re not doing it the way you want it to be done doesn't mean were not doing it. People are elected on the schoolboard by
people who trust them to do the right thing. Just because you don't like it, doesn't mean they're wrong.”

At one point in late 2010, after months of repeated challenges to the commission, one Democratic member suggested sarcastically that since the group was so well-versed in taxes and spending, maybe they should come up with their own budget to back up their words. The group accepted the challenge with enthusiasm. They organized themselves into several working groups to analyze different areas of the budget including human resources, transportation, general services and healthcare (but not law enforcement). Members researched budget items and visited different county agencies to discuss their budgets and responsibilities. The group claimed to have found over $70 million in savings, more than enough to offset the planned increase in property taxes.

Seeking a means to present their findings, the group discovered that the ornate room where the commissioners met was also a room that could be rented. They reserved the room and invited the county commissioners to attend. Four of the eleven County commissioners (not including the chairman) attended and in a brilliantly executed act of spatial power politics, the commissioners were placed at tables below the dais where those giving testimony usually set. Members of Hamilton Tea Party placed themselves just in front of the dais, higher than the commissioners. Due to those spatial arrangements, for a few hours that spring night, it looked as though the Tea Party was driving the agenda of Hamilton County.

After the event, unsurprisingly, the commissioners ignored the group’s budget suggestions and passed their own budget which was finalized behind closed doors at the home of one of the commissioners. Regardless of the defeat, which most members expected, the group
recruited new members and began monitoring and speaking at meetings of the school board and the city council for the Hawthorne County seat.

Though they didn’t change the Hamilton County budget, The Hamilton LTPG achieved several important goals. First, the group earned a degree of “standing,” or in Bourdieu’s terminology, the symbolic and cultural capital necessary to participate in that political field (Bourdieu 1991). Because of their constant presence, people saw them as representing an ideological position and an aggressive style that was absent-even from the county Republican Party. Second, though many members were quite privileged, many translated their personal skills—for better or worse—to public policy and policy making. In words that I heard Ralph Nader once use referring to the politically active, they became “full-time citizens.” They taught this expertise to new, less experienced members. Finally, the members, to a degree, opened up the “black box” of governing, realizing their own sense of possibility in the political arena. As one member related to me, “I had a feeling that I may be just as smart and capable as the people on the dais, but now I am positive of it. We are as smart as they are and could do their jobs if we had to. I didn't really feel that way before.” And, as with Patricia earlier and many other consultants, he feels empowered and confident that he knows about civic issues and can tell people about them. He feels the people can come to him and that he is a resource. "It makes me feel good to be able to help them with issues". 51

51As a post-script, in 2010, the newly established Tea Party-fueled Republican majority in the North Carolina General Assembly reformed the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners, eliminating two seats and reapportioining districts. This allowed conservatives to gain a two seat majority on the commission in 2012. Two HCTP members ran for seats on the commission in 2012—one successfully.
THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF NEW GRIEVANCES

These examples show the ability of these LTPGs to develop new repertoires of action. However, groups also develop new grievances, often not included in the original Tea Party concerns of taxes and spending. Figured worlds, as mentioned, include interpretive frames, allowing people to evaluate and act upon many different issues and situations. They “distribute people by relating them to landscapes of action.” (Holland et al. 1998:41). The associated collective identities, while acting as interpretive frames, are also characterized by the dynamic re-articulation of variegated meaning and relationships across different political and social fields (Gregory 1999:11). “Freedom” and “Liberty”, key documents such as the Constitution, and allusions to ever-creeping government interference in everyday life, evoke these worlds as the relevant horizon of meaning against which to read recurring as well as newly encountered political situations.

Tea Partyists continually encounter new issues that may resonate with the Tea Party figured world. The most obvious example was the importance of the Second Amendment to Tea Partyists at least in my area of North Carolina. Though the second amendment was not one of the initial Tea Party issues in 2009, the underlying theme of constitutional protections and the arbitrary actions of government easily adhered to Tea Partyists existing concerns. A second issue was Common Core, a set of national education standards developed by 48 state governors that set a minimum curriculum for primary and secondary education. The issue was fairly uncontroversial until its early implementation when it became identified with the Obama Administration, by conservative politicians, media and NTPOs as providing another example of heavy-handed government actions interfering in local, community issues. The issue became quite important to local Tea Partyists and resulted in several previously-supportive Republican
officeholders becoming strong opponents of Common Core due to pressure exerted by Tea Party groups, large conservative organizations and talk radio personalities (Wallsten and Layton 2013).

Sometimes however, LTPG's bring entirely new issues themselves into the Tea Party network. One of the most unique I’ve encountered was the "Green Tea Coalition" in Georgia in 2013. The founder of the Atlanta Tea Party Patriots, a local Tea Party group, joined with the state chapter of the Sierra Club in an effort to promote the home ownership of solar panels (Martin 2013). The Sierra Club wanted to make it easier for consumers to install solar panels; the Tea Partyists saw Georgia Power's monopoly and their refusal to purchase electricity produced by home solar panels as anti-competitive. Interestingly, their successful effort to open up the market ran into a roadblock. Americans for Prosperity, a major national Tea Party organization, have mounted strong opposition to solar power. The Green Tea effort did not catch on with other local groups. Nonetheless, the Atlanta Green Tea coalition joined forces once again when The Atlanta Braves planned to build a new stadium in the suburbs of Atlanta (Terbush 2013).

I have shown that LTPG's can have effects on policy and their local political cultures. The Burgoyne group altered their county party structure which to some degree influenced the party organization statewide. Their activities introduced new discourses and perspectives to the community through the radio commentaries and the electioneering they undertook. The Hamilton group also inserted new conservative discourses into their county's politics using a unique style of interacting with the County Commissioners that directed attention to county finances.

In both cases, this activism circulated through the network of local Tea Party groups in the state. Sue learned some of her tactics through workshops that were organized by Americans for Prosperity. She was sought after for her experience to speak at larger Tea Party events and often gave advice to the organizers of other groups. The Hamilton group continued to circulate
videos and improve the quality of their production (Sandy's preteen son became an accomplished video editor). As mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 1, one of the group’s videos of Van Jones discussing social justice went viral, appearing on the Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly shows on the Fox News Channel. And in all of these cases new individuals were brought into the Tea Party Movement who developed senses of themselves as Tea Party activists burnishing new senses of their own agency.

The Adams County Tea Party: The Instigation and Enactment of New Issues

In at least one instance, local Tea Party groups did develop new issues and conflicts that not only circulated to other LTPG's but actually became major issues in the wider national conservative political universe. The issue, which I watched evolve locally, regarded Agenda 21, the United Nations-sponsored nonbinding, voluntary plan for sustainable development originally drafted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The purpose of Agenda 21 was to create guidelines for sustainable development for national and local governments (ICLEI 2013). Against the horizon of meaning of the Tea Party figured works, the narrative of Agenda 21 was read, beginning at the local level, as an international conspiracy to deprive America of its sovereignty. That reading emerged and circulated within Tea Party circles quickly in 2010. My research found little mention of Agenda 21 prior to that year and those references were in small, obscure libertarian and conspiratorial online sources (e.g. Strzclczyk and Rothschild 2009).

In early 2011, a newly elected firebrand county commissioner in Carroll County, Maryland who had campaigned on the Agenda 21 threat, led a successful effort to withdrawal the county’s membership in ICLEI, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, which he viewed as the localized incarnation of Agenda 21. Word spread through social media, and in the coming months LTPG's in municipalities nationwide would flood meetings of local
government boards and commissions loudly opposing ICLEI, land use ordinances and transportation projects (Whittmore 2013). Yet, outside of the profession of city and regional planning, these disruptive actions were fairly submerged, not taken up by NTPO's or major broadcast media.

I was able to observe the Agenda 21 narrative develop within the third activist group, the Adams County Tea Party, located in a small rural county in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The county is anchored by Dixon, a picturesque community popular to tourists for its preserved early 20th century downtown. The Adams County Tea Party (ACTP) included a small yet highly committed group of people. Regular meetings rarely included more than 30 individuals but were typically as mentioned in the previous chapter, characterized by free-flowing and guided discussions on local and national issues amongst the members. The group had been very active since its launch in early 2010. They held candidate forums during the 2010 campaign season and many of the members volunteered for GOP candidates for the county commission, helping contribute to the victory of three candidates who formed a new conservative majority on the board. The group continued pressuring the county commission after the election successfully organizing for property tax reductions.

I first heard of Agenda 21 at an ACTP meeting in November of 2010, where Paul, who had been researching the dangers of sustainable development, warned the group of Agenda 21 as "a danger that Glenn Beck isn't even talking about." Some members voiced skepticism to me regarding the conspiratorial nature Paul claimed for Agenda 21, yet he continued to speak of it at meetings, supplying more and more information he gleaned from the Internet including the emerging protests by local Tea Party groups in other states. The issue was finally discussed on
the Glenn Beck Show in the early summer of 2011. Later that summer, the fight against Agenda 21 came to Adams County and ACTP mobilized to oppose it.

As rural economies transition away from local manufacturing and agriculture, more and more rural North Carolinians commute to cities, precipitating the need for regional transportation planning. When a representative of the nascent regional transportation planning authority came to Dixon for an information session before the city council, ACTP members saw what they considered to be an Agenda 21 inspired effort as a real and present danger to the picturesque southern town. On the evening of the presentation, the representative was peppered with questions that he told me later were new, unexpected and rarely germane to the regional authority’s scope. Over the course of an hour he was asked point blank how the regional authority would infringe upon local sovereignty, promote forced social equality and impose onerous regulations that would consolidate housing and force the city to fund and build transportation hubs and greenways. Unfamiliar with the questions and also the meanings of “sustainable development” held by Tea Party members, the soft-spoken representative was left to answer limply with "I'm not aware of that restriction" or "there is no plan for that by the consortium.”

As a result, two members of the city council were noticeably more confused than when they arrived at the meeting and less certain about joining the regional authority. One council member, a conservative who was already skeptical, became a stronger opponent of sustainable development, offering enthusiastic support and credibility to the Tea Party members’ interpretation of the issue. The group then circulated information about the meeting through social media to other Tea Party groups in the state including a link to a local newspaper article, written under the headline "CITIZENS BLAST SUSTAINABLE-COMMUNITIES PLAN AT
MEETING”. The ACTP not only had a pronounced effect on the hesitation of the city to participate in regional governance, but they also contributed to propelling the narrative of the dangers of Agenda 21.

The discourse of the Agenda 21 scheme circulated among North Carolina Tea Party groups, emboldened members and helped push the issue in more and more counties. Later in my research, the Burgoyne County group would protest land-use ordinances in their county, framing the policies as the creeping influence of Agenda 21. More broadly, it has also led to planning professionals re-examining the usual practices of citizen participation in light of the new forms of protest and organizing undertaken by Tea Party groups (Trapenberg-Frick 2013, Whittmore 2013). The circulation of and credibility given to the Agenda 21 fear by Tea Party members in local groups helped push the issue into the national conservative political consciousness. Glenn Beck released a dystopian novel on the topic of Agenda 21 in 2012. By the summer of 2012, in addition to resolutions passed at the North Carolina Republican Convention, the Republican National Committee, at their convention, passed a platform plank opposing Agenda 21. Though opposing Agenda 21 furthers the Republican goal of less environmental regulations and gives the impression of heeding the grassroots, the rise of the Agenda 21 narrative is still remarkable. In the course of a year, the Agenda 21 threat had grown through social media from a fairly negligible concern inhabiting a small corner of conservatism to an issue which was embraced by the national level GOP.

CONCLUSION

This and the prior chapter illustrate several dimensions of the importance of the local Tea Party groups in relation to the other two components of the TPM. The different components of the Tea Party have produced a multilayered figured world evoked by symbols, narratives and
emotional displays. Nonetheless the LTPGs did not simply reiterate the cultural resources produced by the more elite segments of the movement such as Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks or Fox News. While these sources are important in generating the materials by which local Tea Party activists invigorate the figured world, the local groups appropriated, repurposed, altered, and combined these wider discourses and images into unique styles. And though many of their practices were fairly consistent, there were many differences. Most dramatically, the Pierce group under the strong tutelage of Dale, envisioned an entirely different meaning of the Tea Party and how it can be a tool to further political change. Nonetheless, for participants, the LTPG's provided an easy avenue where people could be a Tea Partyist and share that experience with others. Moreover they were often transformed by the experience. They were not only able to forge a collective identity which helped to assign meaning and alternatives to the political landscape, but many developed identities as political activists with the support of the solidarity and instruction provided by other group members.

The ethnographic examples showed some of these groups to be ongoing, vibrant centers of activism. Some of the groups, as the excitement of the resounding victories of 2010 died down, were unable to maintain a similar level of energy and political activity, but they did maintain a networked collection of conservative citizens. Other groups took active contentious roles in their local political arenas. The Adams group changed the conversation regarding regional transportation planning. At the same time they actually contributed to the development of new conflicts to invigorate the agendas of the national groups and the media. The Burgoyne group chose to engage in electioneering and seize the party organization. They were active at several different levels from local party organization to trips to Washington D.C. The Hamilton
group focused exclusively on their local government with practical, immediate prescriptions of what county government should and should not do.

Finally, many of the groups proved to be workshops for democratic citizenship. Experienced political activists found a new venue for engagement, while those with no experience in politics were able to learn skills, whether it be public speaking or learning the intricacies of the county budget. Although these groups were small, they often successfully inserted themselves into political decision-making forums. North Carolina counties are small and in such municipalities, several loud protesters at the county commission meeting can have an effect and be noticed as indicated by the Adams County group. Furthermore, several dedicated precinct walkers can make the difference in local and state house elections where winners and losers are often separated by just a few hundred votes. Though the Tea Party declined in national influence after the 2010 election, many groups showed that at the municipal level, LTPG’s continued to build growing political organizations that were exerting a strong influence on their local governments, elections and policy-making.

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52There are 100 counties in North Carolina; California, occupying three times the area and with four times the population, has 58.
Chapter 8
Conclusion: The Importance of Face-to-Face Groups in Social Movements

In May of 2014, a video circulating online showing United States House of Representatives Majority Leader, Eric Cantor of Virginia, being booed and shouted down at a town hall-style meeting held to elect the seemingly inconsequential chair of the 7th District Republican Committee (Portnoy 2014). Reminiscent of resistance to Agenda 21 at the Dixon City Council meeting and suggestive of the Burgoyne Tea Party’s seizure of their local GOP organization, this small-scale drama in Virginia turned out to be a harbinger of the powerful congressman’s primary election defeat the following month at the hands of a "Tea Party" candidate. Media commentators on this nationally covered political upset declared that national-level Tea Party organizations did not contribute to Cantor’s defeat (Goldmacher 2014) attributing it to "local conservative activists," though not mentioning the nearly 80 local Tea Party groups in the Commonwealth (Tea Party Patriots 2014).53 Five years after the emergence of the movement, the Tea Party is still represented as elite groups and media personalities.

In these pages, I have presented an analysis of the significance of local groups of Tea Party activists in the success of the wider movement. Presenting the complexities of LTPGs as a link between everyday-citizens and elite components hopefully problematizes over simplified characterizations of the structure of the Tea Party Movement. Is it the machinations of elites or a spontaneous eruption of conservative populism? As illustrated by a close examination of the local groups that have emerged, it is both. The Tea Party groups were organizationally autonomous; they had no formal ties to the NTPOs such as Americans for Prosperity. Even so,

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53Talk radio host Laura Ingraham also drew attention to the race and made a speech at a meeting in the district.
the groups often repeated and localized elite and Fox News-generated discourses incorporating them into their members’ collective political identities. Nonetheless, the LTPGs can validly be portrayed as grassroots activism because of the energy, morale and drive they generated in the meetings and activities and because of the innovations they collectively generated and fueled. Finally, as links in a wider network, the LTPG's I observed were productive, contributing new themes and domains of action into the wider Tea Party Movement and conservative universe.

Still, NTPOs and conservative media were crucial aspects of the movement as well. Fox News and FreedomWorks were instrumental through circulating the initial frames and cultural resources, such as the video clip of Santelli’s rant. They continue to circulate new stories and threats at the time of writing. To date, these entities have been given the most scholarly attention. Aside from some previously mentioned exceptions (e.g. Skocpol and Williamson 2012), everyday Tea Party participants are often not regarded as agents, but as mouthpieces for the discourses presented by the elite groups. Yet as the prior pages show, the everyday Tea Partyists were actors in the movement, in the wider political culture and in the construction of their own political identities.

Furthermore, this analysis also demonstrates the complexity and agency of the tea Partyists and the groups that they form. Kaja Trejak (2013) is one of several anthropologists of the American right attempting to dispel what she terms the "Koch brothers fallacy: the tendency, widespread particularly among various parts of the left, to view any and all [strongly conservative] movement dynamics as sinister plots devised by the conservative billionaire brothers and imposed upon duped, or bought participants from above. If this analysis had stopped at Chapter 3 which outlined the effective framing of the Tea Party movement in those early months (where most Tea Party analyses in fact ended), we would miss the deep and
complex personal and interpersonal relationships and processes that make the Tea Party movement so effective.

First, at the personal level, there was widespread and active “identity work” being undertaken by every day political actors. Possibly due to the depth of their fears regarding the future of America, a wide assortment of individuals were able to link their complex life histories and experiences to the meaning of the Tea Party movement. And many were transformed by the experience. Many of my Tea Party consultants will never look at public life the same again. Others have become more directly active in the political sphere from running for office to managing conservative political campaigns.

Second, there were powerful dialogic and collaborative processes with in the local Tea Party groups. As shown in Chapter 5, meanings were negotiated (not without tension), and the results of that negotiation led to a decentralized social movement with unique, localized particularities. These groups were characterized by movement and action, where new information and cultural resources were continually being introduced, accepted and rejected. These groups and individuals exploring new territory injected dynamism and improvisation into the social movement.

Accordingly, small interpersonal groups continue to be important components of social movements even as computer and information technology (CIT) become the standard equipment of contemporary social movements. The nearly contemporaneous emergence, yet dissimilar outcomes of the Tea Party Movement and the Occupy movement invite further research and comparison on the relationship between the digital social networks and actual co-presence in the two movements. While the Tea Party, as with Occupy, has organized large gatherings as well as taken advantage CIT such as social media, the TPM has more successfully transitioned to
widespread, locally situated, ongoing, face-to-face meetings and activities important for maintaining group cohesion and enabling the ongoing formation of political subjectivities fitted to local areas and to individual biographies. I argue that while subjectivity may be fashioned within movement networks (Juris 2008), Occupy needed and lacked the “free” or “marginal” spaces mentioned in Chapter 5 where the process of collective identity and movement building occur. Granted, the general assemblies and the encampments were such spaces. However, when those spaces were shattered by authorities, few of the small organizations re-formed under new, safer conditions.

Of course, the seemingly greater longevity of the TPM cannot be solely attributed to its greater success at generating enduring local groups. Although the media to a degree effectively circulated the powerful Occupy slogan, "we are the 99%," the conservative broadcast media remains unprecedented in its ability to circulate consistent conservative discourses and images across a range of media sources (Jamieson and Cappella 2010). While there is little research on conservative media as active organizers, rather than simply reporters and framers of public perceptions, of social movements (Walgrave and Manssens 2000), it is clear that popular media have played a very different and much more significant role for the Tea Party than for Occupy.

These observations, nonetheless, add an important corollary to the literature on networked movements showing the continued importance of direct, recurring personal interaction alongside CIT in movement success. An example is demonstrated on the American left by the continued effectiveness of the organization formed around the 2004 presidential

54Hervik (2011) is an excellent illustration of the possibilities of such research.

55Any comparison with Occupy, of course, would also need take into account Occupiers’ different goals such as its prefigurative focus, not to mention its rejection of institutional and bureaucratic politics in place of demonstrating alternative democratic practices.
campaign of Howard Dean, which as I mentioned in the introduction, relied upon a centralized campaign organization supplemented by local face to face chapters around the nation. The successor organization of Dean’s campaign apparatus, Democracy for America, effectively uses computer networked activism and is a loud, prominent voice in the liberal netroots. Yet, despite its primarily online presence, today, more than a decade later, there are still 25 local groups that meet regularly and act as effective local community advocacy groups (Charles Chamberlain, DFA Executive Director, personal communication). The rise of Twitter and Facebook, and even listservs for that matter, have revolutionized protest and social movements. Some organizations, like MoveOn.org, essentially operate very successfully on-line and have enduring activist memberships. However, my research suggests that face to face organizations offer an enduring and powerful space for the sharing and development of the repertoires and activist subjectivities. Possibly that form may be more amenable to the older, less tech-savvy individuals who constitute the Tea Party rank and file.

Social Movements, Electoral Politics and Political Anthropology

In a fairly recent piece in the political science journal, Perspectives on Politics, social movement theorists, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow (2011) challenge scholars to look more closely at the relationship between electoral politics and social movements. Many of the social movements studied by social scientists are considered outside of electoral politics. In fact, one of the definitions of social movements is that they are "extra-institutional," working outside of institutional politics because those avenues are blocked or the institutions are unable to adequately address grievances. However, the authors argue that social movements and electoral politics are often linked indirectly. For example innovations introduced by social movements are

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56The two were initially joined in the project by Charles Tilly, prior to his untimely death.
often taken up by institutional political actors. McAdams and Tarrow maintain that the internet
tactics of the alter-globalization movement were drawn upon by the online organizing of Howard
Dean’s 2004 presidential campaign. These tactics were then subsequently taken up by the
successful Obama presidential campaign in 2008. Or in my experience, GOP platform
committees appropriated the Agenda 21 narrative that had circulated among LTPGs. Social
movements are also reactions to elections such as the “green revolution” in Iran in 2009 and of
course, the Tea Party Movement itself. The authors also speculate that the broad trends in party
control of the White House (Democrats 1932 to 1968; Republicans 1969 to 2008) were greatly
determined by social movement organizing (i.e., the labor movement in the former and the
Christian right in the latter). And finally, they see social movements often as actors in the splits
within major political parties such as the collapse of the New Deal coalition as southern whites’
feld the Democratic Party after the civil rights movement. The present research works toward the
aim of the two authors to bridge the “casual indifference” between scholars of cognate
disciplines of political contention.

However it is easy to miss the most important effects of social movements upon electoral
politics that are both unique and apparent in the TPM. First, dramatic proliferation of
ideologically-oriented broadcast media such as Fox and talk radio is reducing the relevancy of
political parties and their ability to control the electoral process and the direction of policy.\textsuperscript{57}
Second, the rise of new media technologies is further eroding the formal structure of political
parties through the easy connection and mobilization of activists and the multiple and dizzying
variety of sources for political information. In other words, social movements like the Tea Party,

\textsuperscript{57}In an interview regarding the 1994 Republican electoral sweep of Congress, conservative direct mail pioneer
Richard Viguerie said Rush Limbaugh was a savior. “Every day, Limbaugh would give us our marching orders, if
you would” (Jamieson and Cappella 2010).
in addition to media and other online sources, are changing the structural characteristics of American institutional politics where political parties no longer have the power to conceptualize and focus the broad ideological terrain of American political culture.

Anthropological study of the Tea Party movement, including this dissertation, offers a vivid example of how anthropology can contribute to the study of American politics. Anthropology, especially political anthropology, offers an important perspective that is typically lacking from perspectives offered by political science and sociology. In a decades-old article on political anthropology, Abner Cohen (1969) argues that the main contribution of anthropology to the study of politics is the exploration of the relationship between symbolism and relations of power.58 Cohen argues that symbols are used to provide and maintain the social order. “Symbols are systematized together within the framework of dynamic ideologies, or worldviews, in which the symbols of the political order are integrated with those dealing with the perennial problems of human existence: the meaning of life and death, illness and health, misery and happiness, fortune and misfortune, good and evil” (Cohen 1969:217). In 2009 conservative Americans, fearful and concerned, were unsatisfied by the direction the nation was taking, and additionally unsatisfied by the manner in which conservative political leaders were framing and addressing those concerns. Cohen continues that in times of change, new symbolic forms, which can provide better solutions to the current problems of the group, are sometimes adopted. As we've seen, the Tea Party figured world, a new practical and symbolic formation, allowed people to link the movement's new configuration of symbolic meanings to their own problems, concerns and biographies. This new symbolic configuration however, was not simply deployed through media and at the grassroots level. Components of figured world rather were appropriated by

58Edmund Leach (1954) in a foundational work of political anthropology, makes a similar point.
institutional political leaders on the far right, intensifying and giving new life to the half-century old schism between conservative and establishment Republicans.

Tea Party symbols--the Constitution, emotional displays, uses of historical figures, the lack of compromise and the outlook about American decline--have become organizing certitudes by a significant faction of the Republican Party. The Tea Party didn't necessarily create the schism in the GOP, but gave it form and reconfigured the relations of power that characterize it. Often these Tea Party-aligned lawmakers are more advocating the symbols created by the Tea Party movement than actual public policy. These cultural resources become integrated into the wider political system most vividly displayed by the willingness of GOP lawmakers to shut down the government in 2011 and 2012 or the open revolt of many "Tea Party conservatives" toward the leadership of Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker of the House John Boehner. Simply, the TPM, as shown, applies political power on policy making decisions through the actions of everyday citizens, media and advocacy organizations. Yet an equally pronounced if not greater effect has been achieved through the appropriation of the Tea Party political style by political leaders. That political style, characterized by a lack of compromise or any desire to work with the President Obama, has had a dramatic effect upon governing as illustrated by the near absence of any substantial legislation emerging from the 112th Congress.

Five years after “Santelli’s rant”, local Tea Party groups are still relatively submerged in the national political media coverage (Carr 2014) and as mentioned earlier, relatively overlooked in social science research. However, the people-centered, engaged approach of ethnographic methods uncovers the importance of these groups to social science research. LTPGs provide important workshops for democratic citizenship, where everyday citizens fashion agentive political identities at the nexus of locally situated communities and powerful, elite-produced
discourses. The Tea Partyist is seeking change, is being changed by the experience and experiencing the same inspiration and despair as activists chasing different horizons.
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