

From Seattle to Wall Street:  
Counter-Hegemonic Protests and Hegemonic (In)Security

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## ABSTRACT

MATTHEW D. PAFFHOUSE: From Seattle to Wall Street: Counter-Hegemonic Protests and Hegemonic (In)Security  
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In this paper, I analyze the neoliberal ruling class' reaction to counter-hegemonic protests in order to shed light on its perceived security. This analysis is grounded in a neo-Gramscian theoretical framework, and is conducted through a comparative analysis of two counter-hegemonic movements: the 1999 'Battle at Seattle' and the 2011 Occupy Wall Street. To provide argumentative clarity, I have devised a categorization of hegemonic reactions to counter-hegemonic movements. This categorization is based on a division between the different actors constituting the neoliberal ruling class, and whether their dominant responding strategy is 'strong' or 'weak,' with a strong response indicative of greater insecurity, and the latter security. The three ruling class actors analyzed are the corporate media, the government, and the police and security apparatus. Based on the change in response to the two protests, I conclude that the perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class has decreased since 1999.

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## **Introduction**

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has quickly spread across the United States since the first protest was staged in New York City on September 17, 2011. The scant coverage provided to it by the mainstream media makes one assume that the protests are of little significance. The truth of this assumption, however, is challenged by the manner in which the state has responded to the demonstrators, often using violent force. This seeming contradiction suggests that something deeper is at play.

At its core, OWS is a movement that challenges the core objectives of neoliberalism: the profit motive and the unfettered freedom of markets; this is the difference between it and other recent protests that have been lauded and not condemned by the corporate media.<sup>1</sup> In the language of Neo-Gramscianism, OWS is a counter-hegemonic movement to the hegemonic, neoliberal historic bloc. If so, this contest can be analyzed as a battle in an ongoing war of position for the support of society.

The issue under investigation in this thesis is the perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class. It is my contention that the reactions of the ruling class in a war of position provide clues to its perceived security. In other words, the harsher the response to the protests, the greater the perceived insecurity, and vice versa.

To provide argumentative clarity, I have devised a categorization of hegemonic reactions to counter-hegemonic movements. This categorization is based on a division between the different actors of a ruling class, and whether the dominant strategy of their response is 'strong' or 'weak'. For the purpose of this paper, I limit my analysis to three actors of the neoliberal ruling class: the

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the Arab Spring, Tea Party and Russian election protests.

corporate media, government, specifically the political elites, and the police and the security apparatus. In order to provide context and to determine whether the security of the ruling class has increased or decreased over time, I apply this categorization to two similar protests that took place twelve years apart: the WTO protest in Seattle in 1999 and OWS.

In the following section, I flesh out the Neo-Gramscianism framework that guides my analysis. I then provide the methodology that structures my argument and proceed to justify its categorizations. Section four is an explanation of the case studies, with sections five and six the analysis of them through the lens of said categorization. Afterward, I discuss the results and then conclude by offering thoughts on a potential research agenda and areas to which it can be applied.

## **The Fundamentals of Gramsci's Thought**

The fundamental concept from which Gramsci constructed his theory of social formation was hegemony. At its minimum, hegemony can be considered a form of social and political leadership that is socially consented to and not violently coerced. Although the hegemonic ideology is socially consented to, it is still engineered and promoted by a specific group, or ruling class. The supremacy of a ruling class manifests itself in two ways: as “domination” of political leadership and as the “intellectual and moral leadership” of social norms (Gramsci 1971: 45).

When an ideology has cemented itself as hegemonic and the ruling class has assumed political leadership, the structure of society is said to be an historic bloc (Ibid). An historic bloc is the connection between the two superstructural levels of society: the one that is concerned with private activity, called civil society, and the one of political society, called the State (Gramsci 1971: 12). The structure of the hegemon is dependent on the form and content of the historic bloc; through it, all the other parts of society are bound together in a relationship that recognizes homogenous norms of politics, economics and culture. Once the historic bloc has been cemented and the norms of society reflect the ideology of the ruling class, social consensus legitimizes its discourse. Notwithstanding this, coercion is always an active method of controlling society, and if the occasion calls for the mask of consent to fall away, it becomes the primary method of hegemonic maintenance (Gramsci 1971: 125).

Hegemony is not produced easily and therefore requires the ruling class to continually transform into supporters opposing subordinate groups who champion an alternative ideology. This is accomplished through a passive revolution, one of the conceptual cruxes of Gramsci's historicism. A passive revolution is the process of revolution-restoration, whereby social forces seek to

accommodate and transform other social forces to their ideology (Ibid: 58). This can be practiced by both the prevailing hegemon, as well as opposing subordinate groups waging a war of position, described below.

The primary method by which a ruling class conducts a passive revolution is trasformismo. According to Robert Cox (1983: 166-67), “trasformismo can serve as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can thereby obstruct the formation of class-based organized opposition to established social and political power.” Gramsci provided as example two periods after the Risorgimento.<sup>2</sup> In the period immediately following Italian unification, individuals of the democratic opposition were incorporated individually into the conservative moderate class. In the second period, whole organizations and political parties were transformed from opponents to supporters of the moderate class (Ibid). The conversion is a result of adjusting the hegemonic ideology to accommodate the opposing perspective, though it requires the latter to accept the conditions of the former.

The logical inverse of hegemony is counter-hegemony, which is an existential challenge to the existing social order, whereby contrasting social forces and alternative ideologies organize as counter-hegemonic forces in order to replace the hegemonic historic bloc (Worth 2002). This challenge is waged in two phases. The first is a war of position, wherein the subordinate group attempts to sunder from the hegemon the support of civil society by garnering public support for the counter-hegemon, while simultaneously casting doubt over the efficacy of the hegemon.

The Zapatista’s “Other Campaign” launched in 2005 in Chiapas, Mexico is an example of a war of position. Rather than seeking to overthrow the state or contesting electoral politics and risking subversion to the dominant ideology, the Zapatista’s have called for the enactment of a new national constitution that would ensure autonomy for Mexico’s 57 distinct indigenous peoples and bar the privatization of public resources and other neoliberal moves (Ross 2005; Holloway 2005). Instead of

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<sup>2</sup> The movement for the unification and independence of Italy, which was achieved in 1870.

confronting the hegemon over its policies, the Zapatista's are appealing to society by creating awareness of their situation and by offering a solution that partially bypasses hegemonic control.

Once enough social support has been mobilized, the next step is to initiate a war of movement. This is a frontal assault on the hegemon that has the goal of toppling and replacing it. If the attack on the hegemonic state is premature, however, the ruling class would regain dominance as the institutions of civil society reassert control (Cox 1983: 165).

### *Neo-Gramscianism*

Gramsci developed his theory with an almost exclusive focus on the national context. In combination with the ontological dominance of the state in International Relations (IR), this prevented his notion of hegemony from contributing to the discipline. Not until Robert Cox (1981) challenged mainstream theories for their lack of a critical perspective, did the door open for Neo-gramscianism. The essence of his critique was that problem-solving theories did not recognize that they are the product of particular social conditions. This ignorance contributes to the problem of the power-knowledge nexus, in which control of power produces knowledge, which then legitimizes power (Devetak 2009). Cox and other critical theorists argued that it was imperative for academics to recognize this, and to produce scholarship that surmounts the established bias by aiming for social emancipation.

A second concern of his was ontological. At the time, the 'third debate' had simmered down to the difference between relative and absolute gains, and constructivism had yet to shake up the discipline (Wæver 1996). With a state-centric ontology, mainstream theories defined hegemony as a particular configuration of the balance of power in an anarchic system, in which one state has a preponderance of global power and influence (Donnelly 2009). This narrow focus on the state is not only ontologically myopic, but combined with the problem of the power-knowledge nexus, conceals from analysis the principal actors of Gramscian hegemony. Neo-gramscianism remedies this by broadening the scope of analysis to include social forces. Hegemony is "an order within the world

economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries” (Cox 1983: 171).

### *Neoliberalism*

In one of his seminal works, Cox (1987) demonstrated the existence of cyclical periods of hegemony and non-hegemony over a two hundred year period as evidence for the existence of international hegemony. According to him, global hegemony stems from forces within a powerful economic state, or as a result of a crisis in the previous mode of production that allows counter-hegemonic forces to replace the former global order. The inception of neoliberalism can be found in a mixture of the two.

Following World War Two, Europe and North America settled into a period known as embedded liberalism (Ruggie 1982). This hegemonic order was characterized by Keynesian economic policy coupled with the expansion of the welfare state, built upon wage moderation and high rates of economic growth. This historic bloc had exhausted its potential, revealed after Keynesian economic policies were unable to redress the effects of the Arab Oil Embargo and the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, leading to a long and severe period of economic stagflation.

At the same time as the embedded liberalism era, a cohort of counter-hegemonic intellectuals had been championing neoclassical economics, which would come to be known as neoliberalism. At the forefront of this movement was Friedrich von Hayek, an Austrian economist who taught at the University of Chicago. In Gramscian parlance, he was the organic intellectual of the budding counter-hegemonic movement. Von Hayek passionately campaigned for neoclassical theory to replace Keynesianism as the dominant economic theory. His paper, “The Intellectuals and Society,” outlined his dual-pronged strategy for a war of position. First, the right had to nurture intellectual stars to rival the prominence of right-aligned scholars such as Keynes. Second, the right must gain control of the

incubators of ideas and the future -- universities, institutes and the media -- to ensure that neoclassical economics would be disseminated through their halls (Von Hayek 1949).

This war of position was successfully waged through the Mont Pèlerin Society (Carroll 2007), the Trilateral Commission (Gill 1991), the Bilderberg Group (Van der Pijl 2010) and through conservative think tanks and academic institutes in the United States (George 2007). These organizations created and disseminated the “common sense” message of neoliberalism that Cox (1987) argues is necessary for an ideology to become the global norm of production. Artz (2000) revealed its success on the media, where even second-tier international media organizations participated in neoliberal hegemony by repackaging the hegemonic discourse in culturally familiar terms.

In combination with the decline of embedded liberalism, a war of movement was launched within the United Kingdom and United States with the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who initiated a wave of neoliberal policies that rolled back the influence of the previous era of embedded liberalism, including: the privatization of national industries, the deregulation of the market, the reducing of personal and corporate tax rates, the support of free trade, and the attacks on unions; all of which placed a renewed cultural emphasis on individualism and consumerism. These policies, along with the commodification of virtually everything - labor, the environment, even genetics - are the core characteristics of neoliberal governance (Harvey 2005; George 2007).

As mentioned above, the ‘common sense’ of neoliberalism is disseminated by a set of powerful international organizations that constitute the global civil society that forms the basis of the neoliberal historic bloc, including *inter alia*, the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the G8, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg Group.<sup>3</sup> Another

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<sup>3</sup> The Bilderberg Group was founded in 1954 as an annual conference of the world’s business and political elites. Its meeting is traditionally shrouded in secrecy. Although the widespread belief is that an international ‘ruling class’ convenes to discuss global rule, it is much more likely an elite global forum to at least reach consensus on the pressing issues and, more specifically, to push for free markets. For more information, see (Van der Pijl 2010; Bilderberg 2011).

Similar to the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, founded in 1973, convenes the leading political and corporate elites of the trilateral regions (North America, Europe and Japan) “to bring together experienced leaders within the private sector to discuss issues of global concern at a time when communication and cooperation between Europe, North

source of uniting the ruling class is through elite networks (Carroll *et al.* 2010). According to the author, corporate boardrooms and politically appointed positions unite the ruling class by ensuring that political and corporate leaders share a common interest and convene at the same table to discuss how to achieve those interests.

The limits of electable discourse in neoliberal countries have been narrowed so that they no longer exceed the objectives of neoliberalism. The ‘Third Way’ movements of the 1990s that brought to power Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder are illustrative. Each of these leaders guided their party to electoral victory by shifting their economic positions to the right, in favor of neoliberal policies, particularly the deregulation of the finance industry, reductions on the welfare state and increased labor market flexibility (Munck 2005; Faux 1999; Blair and Schroöder 1999). Although this consolidated the hegemony of neoliberalism both domestically and internationally, it also set in motion the alienation of large tracks of society and sowed the impression amongst many that the electoral process is no longer representative of the demands of society, a common feature in both of the protests discussed below.

### *Neoliberal Counter-Hegemony*

Unlike the ruling class, opposition to neoliberal hegemony has been described as fragmented and amorphous (Harvey 2005; Carroll 2006; Gill 2001). According to William Carroll (2006), the unity of the ruling class is predicated on the simple fact that the sole driving force of neoliberalism is capital accumulation and the profit motive. This singular objective allows it to make alliances of convenience with other social forces that do not impinge on its core objective, such as that between neoliberals and the Christian Right in the United States and Canada (Tetzlaff 1991; Carroll 2006).

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America, and Asia were lacking” (Trilateral Commission 2011). It meets several times a year and though more open than the Bilderberg Group, much of its activity is conducted behind closed doors.

On the other hand, opponents of neoliberalism are contesting a myriad of related and unrelated issues, fragmenting their energy and unity. Instead of a united opposition contesting the essence of neoliberalism - the profit motive - the left has fractured into a variety of NGOs and other organizations, each seeking to achieve a particular and specific end, such as that of ending child labor and human trafficking, or favoring economic redistribution. Increasingly, these organizations are tasked to fill the vacuum left by the hollowing out of the state, a process that David Harvey (2005) has called 'accumulation by dispossession.' Here, the victories of the welfare state, won during the embedded liberalist era, are once again being privatized to open new avenues of capital accumulation. Harvey argues that these organizations are inadvertently harming the potential of counter-hegemony by accepting neoliberalism's basic propositions, most prominently the devolution of responsibility to address social ailments to the private sector (Ibid: 174). By combining postmodern insights with a critical realist perspective, Carroll (2006) argues that this is an example of cultural fragmentation through a purposeful 'divide and conquer' strategy. The essence and operative force of cultural fragmentation is ideological diversification, the elaboration of non-commensurable subcultural discourses that disable subaltern groups from understanding one another and constructing solidarities.

What has emerged as a counter-hegemonic movement is thus a collection of different social actors, each contesting a specific issue, sometimes individually and other times in loose collaboration. Writing after the first large counter-hegemonic protest in Seattle in 1999, Stephen Gill (2000) has coined this movement the 'post-modern prince.' The name is derived from Gramsci's *The Modern Prince*, in which he argued that the Communist Party should be the leader of the socialist revolution. Instead, the current era of globalization and the myriad of problems it engenders make it impossible for a single party to lead a counter-hegemonic movement, argues Gill. The postmodern prince is a form of counter-hegemony, characterized by an amorphous and leaderless structure that is simultaneously contesting a myriad of global issues: environmental, social and political.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A significant criticism of this form of counter-hegemony is expressed by John Sanbonmatsu (2003: 154), what is missing from counter-hegemony "is an effective leadership willing and able to organize the scattered and isolated movements of the

Nevertheless, its primary target is neoliberalism: “specifically resisting those that seek to consolidate the project of globalization under the rule of capital” (Gill 2000: 138).

Neoliberal governments have assumed a protective rather than a compensatory role. According to Carroll (2006: 13), a protective role for government entails “insulating capital from regulations that impede profitability, and also insulating key state agencies from popular will – as with the autonomization of central banks and the creation of arrangements like NAFTA and WTO.” These international organizations, alongside international treaties, have been used to push neoliberal reforms on willing and unwilling states through a process Stephen Gill (1998) calls, ‘The New Constitutionalism,’ a process whereby international agreements sidestep the checks and balances of national politics. These maneuvers have successfully insulated the neoliberal expansion from popular democratic choice and have forced opposing subordinate groups to voice their concern and promote change in alternative ways.

One concrete form this opposition has taken is the World Socialist Forum, which takes place at the same time as the World Economic Forum (Waterman 2004). The other and much more visible form this has taken is the so-called anti-globalization protests that have taken place at *inter alia*, the G8, NATO and the WTO summits since Seattle in 1999.<sup>5</sup> It is in these protests that the seeds of a united opposition to neoliberalism have taken root. The popular slogan in Seattle, “Teamsters to Turtles” signified the union of labor and environmentalists, and provides an example to Harvey’s exhortation that “[t]he divide-and-rule politics of ruling-class elites must be confronted with alliance politics on the left sympathetic to the recuperation of local powers of self-determination” (Harvey 2005: 203).

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powerless into a coherent whole. ... So long as many on the left continue to refuse leadership and to neglect a strategic orientation, i.e., a sense of a meaningful alternative to the present order, and the concrete objectives necessary to get there, social movements will continue to lurch from crisis to crisis.”

<sup>5</sup> I say ‘so-called’ anti-globalization protest in following with Noam Chomsky (2005). He argues rightfully that the ruling class has managed to successfully misrepresent the protestors at global fora as anti-globalization, when in truth they are seeking to promote an alternative version of globalization.

Although understanding the reasons and causes for the formation of social movements and contentious politics is a growing field (Tilly 2008), less attention has been given to how the authorities and ruling class respond to them. Having now described the neo-Gramscian framework that guides this analysis and having outlined the broad parameters of neoliberalism, I can now begin to analyze this issue. First, though, a brief explanation of the methodology of the research.

## **Methodology**

As stated in the introduction, the issue under investigation in this essay is what the reactions of the neoliberal ruling class to counter-hegemonic protests indicate about its perceived security.

Specifically, I aim to chart the change in perceived security by examining protests from two different periods of the neoliberal hegemony: one during the more benign and prosperous economic climate in the late 1990s and one that has taken place in the last year, shortly removed from a deep recession and possibly in an interregnum before another.

For this analysis, I have devised a classification to facilitate understanding, by deconstructing the type of reaction and the actor responding. Let's first look at which actor of the ruling class can respond to the protests. Although more than three actors compose the neoliberal ruling class, the corporate media, government, specifically the political elites, and the police and the security apparatus are the most visible and intimate actors involved with responding to political protests, and thus are those that I analyze.

Gramsci believed that control of the media was essential to the manufacture of hegemony, even more so than the existence of a dedicated political party. "It is the newspaper grouped in sets that constitute the real parties," observed Gramsci (Gramsci 1977, in: Morton 2007: 207). In other words, although the media does not set the agenda of hegemony, it most certainly sets the parameters of social discourse and consequently shapes it. Moreover, its presentation, or lack thereof, of counter-hegemonic forces has an equally potent influence on the shape of social discourse. Corporate control of mass media poses a great barrier to counter-hegemony. It has produced a democratic deficit of vast scope by severely limiting the type and extent of possible discourse (Chomsky 1989). The media, particularly the corporate media, has rarely wavered in its allegiance to the capitalist class (Fox 1988).

The second actor of concern is the government and the political elite. As explained above, both the political right and left in the United States ascribe to a common message that does not fundamentally challenge neoliberal policies. This is most pronounced in the highest levels of government, particularly the head of state. The State, represented by the political elite, is the political leadership half of the neoliberal hegemon, and examining its reaction to the protest is therefore of central importance.

The police, and in general the security apparatus, is the last actor from the neoliberal ruling class to be analyzed. Although the majority of the people constituting these forces are not necessarily neoliberal, they nevertheless require to be analyzed because they are the ones charged with protecting both the State and civil society, the two superstructural foundations of the neoliberal historic bloc.

The reaction of these actors to the counter-hegemonic protests are divided based on their dominant strategy, of which a 'strong' and a 'weak' response has been identified. A strong response is indicative of a heightened sense of insecurity, whereas a weak response is associated with a greater sense of security. Each responding actor has a pair of potential responses.

Coverage framing is the weak response of the corporate media. This strategy materializes in a variety of forms, though all share the common objective of coloring the public's perception of an event. In a general sense, this can be either a positive or negative effect, though for the purpose of this paper I am concerned with negative portrayals. In a comparative discourse analysis of two newspapers coverage of the Seattle protest in 1999, Solomon (2000) found that the corporate media actively portrayed the event in favor of capital by focusing on the few violent acts of the protestors, while largely ignoring the protestors' effort at disseminating an alternative narrative to neoliberal globalization.

The strong response of the corporate media is coverage denial. Intuitively simple, this is when the corporate media simply does not cover an event, or hides its coverage in difficult to locate places. Illustrative of this is the near global media and cultural invisibility of the International Confederation

of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the world's largest international labor organization (Waterman 2004: 315).

Analyzing the government follows the same formula as the corporate media. In other words, I am looking for the public response of high-ranking officials to the counter-hegemonic protest, which I call podium politics. A strong response is to act ignorant of the protest by not publicly responding to them. A weak response is to use the protest to further a different end or narrative than what the protestors intended. In other words, the officials frame the protests in a manner conducive to their interests, not the interests of the protestors.

The most visible, and often the most contentious, responding actor is the police. Dividing their response between a strong and a weak form requires more nuance. It is necessary to make a distinction here between routine enforcement of law and the 'stretching' of it. The former is congruent with a weak response, in that it does not violate day-to-day social expectations. The latter, on the other hand, challenges the belief in a just and fair security apparatus and is thus considered to be a strong response. The distinction here can take several forms; most important is the use of force against protestors. The well-known state monopoly of violence is often not exercised in normal protests, for example, those that do not target the core objectives of the neoliberal agenda, such as social issues like abortion. Therefore, if the police use what would be considered an excessive amount of force against the counter-hegemonic protest than it would employ against a less (perceived) dangerous protest, it can be categorized as a strong response. If, on the other hand, its response is similar to that of other protests, it is considered a weak response. Finally, if the government employs anachronistic and esoteric laws to punish protestors, this, too, is considered to be a strong response.

	Ruling Class Actor		
Dominant Strategy	Corporate Media	Government	Security/Police
Weak	Coverage framing	Podium politics	Enforcement of law
Strong	Coverage denial	No podium politics	Stretching of law

This information is summarized in the table above. Although this is primarily a descriptive paper, I nevertheless offer one hypothesis based on the methodology and classification described above: The stronger the response of the neoliberal ruling class to the counter-hegemonic protest, the greater its perceived insecurity. Conversely, the weaker the response, the higher the sense of security.

## Case Studies

Before the individual analyses of the protests, I must first describe why I have chosen to examine these specific cases. As mentioned above, I am looking at how the reactions of the ruling class have changed to counter-hegemonic protests over time. I therefore must stay within the same era of a prevailing hegemon, in this case, neoliberalism. Although I use neo-Gramscianism as a theoretical framework and am analyzing an international hegemon, I nevertheless limit my analysis to protests in a single country, the United States. This is for two reasons. First, it is the birthplace and principal actor supporting and spreading neoliberalism in the international system, and thus its actions deserve significant attention. Second, it is more fruitful to analyze a single country in order to see the change in perceived security over time. Although the classification could be applied to a comparison of protests in different countries, this analysis is less consistent than an analysis of two protests in a single country.

The first protest examined is the 1999 'Battle at Seattle,' in which counter-hegemonic protestors disrupted and temporarily shut down the WTO ministerial conference. This protest occurred during the waning years of the longest economic boom in capitalist history. The second protest is the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in the United States on September 17, 2011. In contrast to the Battle at Seattle, OWS has come on the heels of the deepest recession since the Great Depression, with the potential for another looming on the horizon. Given the changing economic climate, these protests form a good laboratory for studying the change in perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class.

The content of the protests are similarly conducive for analysis, as both challenge the same issues: the neoliberal objective to maximize profit and the failure of representative democracy to

listen to and address alternative social development models. Both are also examples of the aforementioned postmodern prince.

The last issue to be discussed is the ownership and political reputation of the analyzed newspaper, the *New York Times (NYT)*. The *NYT* is the largest internet circulation and the third largest print circulation paper in the US, and is considered to be the national newspaper of record (Encyclopædia Britannica 2012).<sup>6</sup> Although it is a public company, the majority of voting shares remain in the hands of its founding family, the Ochs-Sulzberger's. It has been described as having a progressive bias, a slightly left-of-center publication (Rasmussen Report 2007).

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<sup>6</sup> The Wall Street Journal, which has the second largest circulation in the United States, is not a general circulation newspaper; it aims primarily at financial elites, "middle management...startups and Internet-based companies," says Anne Stuart in *CIO Magazine* (December 15, 1999-January 1, 2000). USA Today, the largest circulation newspaper, has news reports that are so brief that it is not possible to sustain lengthy scrutiny.

## **The Battle at Seattle**

The ‘Battle at Seattle’ occurred from November 29 to December 4, 1999, outside the WTO summit. It has been credited with starting the wave of large counter-hegemonic protests that have since occurred regularly outside meetings of the international elite.

Four main actors converged in Seattle for the WTO meeting: the WTO attendants, the police and security apparatus, the registered protestors such as the AFL-CIO and the major environmental organizations, and the unregistered protestors, such as the Direct Action Network (DAN)<sup>7</sup> and the Black Bloc anarchists. It is essential to note here that according to the protestors who sought to disrupt the conference, the other protesters, led by the AFL-CIO, were considered to have accepted the conditions of neoliberalism and were considered to be “silly putty in Clinton’s hands” (Whitney 2009: 1).<sup>8</sup> In other words, and as has been argued elsewhere (Collombat 2007), these groups had accepted the conditions of neoliberal hegemony, and thus are not considered to be counter-hegemonic.<sup>9</sup> I therefore do not analyze their actions as counter-hegemonic; I do, however, differentiate the demands of, and concessions granted to, these groups from the ruling class from those of the disruptive, counter-hegemonic protestors.

In terms of strategy, the WTO wanted the conference to proceed without disruption, the registered protestors wanted to march and protest outside of the meeting, the counter-hegemonic

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey St. Clair, author of the book, *5 Days that Shook the World*, about the Battle at Seattle, called “the big environmental groups and big labor...silly putty in Clinton’s hands, willing to swallow, and at times, even defend every betrayal, from NAFTA and the destruction of welfare to logging in ancient forests” (Whitney 2009: 2)

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Collombat (2007) makes the point that the AFL-CIO is funded by the United States government and has long held a militant anti-communist stance.

protestors wanted to disrupt and shut down the meeting, and the police wanted to allow the registered protestors to march while preventing the counter-hegemonic protestors from disrupting the conference<sup>10</sup> (De Armond 2000). Ultimately, the counter-hegemonic protestors succeeded in their objectives, aided by an unorganized and ineffective police force (Ibid). As the *New York Times* reported on the outcome: “Global trade talks ended late tonight in complete failure, with the United States abandoning any effort to put together a new round of global trade talks” (Kahn and Sanger 1999). With that said, let’s analyze how each ruling class actor responded to the protests.

### *Corporate Media*

I limit my discourse analysis to articles published in the *NYT* between November 29 and December 6, for a total of ten articles, including editorials. This range captures the immediate pre-meeting coverage as well as the two day aftermath of the conference. It can therefore be concluded that the corporate media did not respond strongly by denying coverage; rather, it responded weakly through subtle, coverage framing.

The opening line of Thomas Friedman’s (1999) editorial captures the essence of the *NYT*’s coverage: “Is there anything more ridiculous in the news today than the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle? I doubt it.” The negative framing of the coverage took five forms: (i) carrying on with the Thatcherite adage that ‘there is no alternative,’ (ii) an implicit and explicit support of the ‘common sense’ of neoliberalism, (iii) presenting the protestors message as *reform* of neoliberalism rather than a protest *against* it, (iiii) failure to present the perspective of the unregistered protestors, and (v) a negative description of the protestors versus a positive description of the conference delegates.

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<sup>10</sup> The overall strategic goal of the Direct Action Network was to “shut down” the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle (De Armond 2000)

Margaret Thatcher said that there was no alternative to neoliberal policies as she systematically instituted a multitude of neoliberal reforms, and this message has been a common theme of its advocates since. The coverage of the *NYT* continues this message, best captured by this post-conference proclamation, “Yet the need for it [globalization] to continue as the main vehicle of international economic progress still stands” (NYT 1999a). Yet this ignores the fact that the majority of the protestors are not contesting globalization, but only the specific neoliberal form of it (Ruckus Society 1996). As Noam Chomsky (2005) and others have pointed out, this misrepresentation of protestors being opposed to globalization has been a deliberate act of the neoliberal ruling class in order to discredit the counter-hegemonic protesters (Olson 2009; Gill 2000; Carroll 2006). This theme of categorizing the protestors as anti-globalization and not anti-neoliberal is continued by Friedman, who seeks to remind the reader that, “Every country and company that has improved its labor, legal and environmental standards has done so because of more global trade, more integration, more Internet -- not less” (Friedman 1999). Instead of recognizing the multiplicity of ‘shades’ of globalization, Friedman paints a black and white picture where one side represents progress through neoliberalism, and the other regression through anachronism.

Another method of coverage framing is the paper’s tacit acceptance of the ‘common sense’ of neoliberalism, and its implication that in order to affect change, one must transform oneself - i.e. *trasformismo* - to its conditions. “You make a difference today by using globalization -- by mobilizing the power of trade, the power of the Internet and the power of consumers to persuade, or embarrass, global corporations and nations to upgrade their standards” (Friedman 1999); and not, accordingly, by changing the rules of the game, the ‘common sense’ of life. The message to be gleaned from the paper is to accept the ‘common sense’ of neoliberalism, for example, by “agree[ing] with the W.T.O.’s goal of free trade, as this page does” (NYT 1999b).

The coverage portrayed the agenda of the protestors as *reform* of neoliberalism, not as a protest *against* neoliberalism. “To help enhance the W.T.O.’s legitimacy through reforms on secrecy, labor rights and the environment. That is what the demonstrators demanded” (NYT 1999a). This statement

ignores, however, the actual demands of the counter-hegemonic protestors, who sought a radical realignment of trade priorities that would replace the profit motive as the guiding force of globalization with a more humane and ethical alternative (Ruckus Society 1996).<sup>11</sup>

This negligence to represent the ideas of the counter-hegemonic protestors runs deep in the coverage. Throughout the ten articles, not a single individual involved with the disruptive protestors was interviewed. In contrast, eleven trade, WTO or American officials, six Seattle residents, one representative of a large corporation, and three spokesmen for the registered protestors were interviewed.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, neither the officials nor the *NYT* made an effort to address or even represent their concerns. President Clinton did, however, nimbly respond to the demands of the registered protestor in mid-conference by changing tact after hearing that “[e]nding the secretive ways was a common demand among many protesters here and became a top priority for the Clinton administration” (Kahn and Sanger 1999); as well as “In another bid to show that he was listening to the protesters who gathered for the meeting, which ends Friday. Mr. Clinton announced two initiatives to help the poorest nations, mostly in Africa” by “mak[ing] it less expensive for African nations to purchase and distribute drugs that fight AIDS” (Sanger 1999). This is *trasformismo* at work: modifying the hegemonic discourse in order to transform potential counter-hegemonic forces into supporters, without changing the fundamental narrative of neoliberalism; in other words, the changes offered were a *reform* of neoliberalism rather than a departure *from* it.

Nevertheless, the coverage did not spare the registered protestors when they were generalized with the counter-hegemonic lot, particularly from being affixed with the violent tag: “The disruption of violent protests;” “occasionally violent street protests” (Kahn and Sanger 1999); “If the violent

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<sup>11</sup> The six values of this alternative are: Be inclusive, Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing, Let People Speak for Themselves, Work Together in Solidarity and Mutuality, Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves and Commitment to Self Transformation. To see more, visit: <http://www.ruckus.org/article.php?id=551>

<sup>12</sup> The private industry person interviewed was from Dupont Corporation; the three registered spokesmen were from the Sierra Club, Public Citizens Global Trade Watch and an unidentified organization; the officials were: President Bill Clinton, US trade representative Charlene Barshefsky, another unnamed American official, Seattle Mayor Paul Schell, WTO President Mike Moore, WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell, the British trade representative, Munir Akram, Pakistan's representative, Nacer Benjelloun-Touimi, Morocco's representative, Brazil's trade negotiator, Celso Amorim, former head of the International Trade Commission Peter S. Watson,

demonstrations and disruptions of the meeting's opening day today are any guide” (Olson 1999); and “malicious protesters” (NYT 1999a). This is rather biased coverage, to be sure, given that the official and academic conclusion was that the violence was heavily instigated and conducted by the police (De Armond 2000; Gill 2000). This denigration is not unexpected, however. Seen from the vantage point of the protestors, “the Washington Post and the *New York Times* are the keepers of ‘official reality,’ and in official reality, it is always the protestors who are violent” (Gill 2000).<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being portrayed as perennially violent, the protestors’ ideas and opinions are not considered even remotely effective. The following is a brief, yet telling, synopsis: “These anti-W.T.O. protesters -- who are a Noah's ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions and yuppies looking for their 1960's fix” (Friedman 1999); and, “Mike Moore, the director of the W.T.O., describes his opponents as nothing more than protectionists launching an assault on internationalism” (Klein 1999). The protestors cannot even seem to understand how the “expansion of trade and investment...promotes the general welfare” (NYT 1999b).

The language shift used to describe the protesters and the delegates was also different; for example, the delegates “arrived,” whereas the demonstrators “descended on the city” (Olson 1999); and the delegates “argued” while the “protesters shout[ed]” (Klein 1999).

Finally, the coverage drove home the message that neoliberal values are not only normal and inevitable, they are worthwhile and will soon return, especially consumption. One shop owner, whose business was down 80 percent, said, “I just want things to get back to normal;” while another, ““lost a lot of business this week,’ said John Balogh, manager of a juice stand at the City Centre shopping plaza” (Verhovek 1999). After the protest, “downtown streets were reclaimed this weekend by Christmas shoppers” (Ibid). And, no need to worry, ““When the Seahawks make the playoffs...everybody will forget about the W.T.O.”” (Ibid).

This analysis has made it clear that the *NYT* responded to the protests in a weak manner, by negatively framing its coverage. I next discuss the political response to the protests.

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<sup>13</sup> Posted on [<http://www.peoples@post4.tele.dk>] (Gill 2000).

## *Podium Politics*

This section analyzes the response of key political figures to the protest. I have selected two figures to examine based on their political affiliation and involvement with the protest. President Clinton is analyzed as the representative of the State aspect of hegemony and John Sweeney, President of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., as the representative of civil society.

As described above, Clinton had already aligned himself with select facets of the protest, in an attempt to diffuse the situation. His decision to co-op certain elements of the protest movement is evident in his sudden zeal for increasing the transparency of the WTO. “‘What they are telling us in the streets is that this is an issue we’ve been silent on.’ Mr. Clinton told the ministers from 135 members of the World Trade Organization...’[a]nd we won’t be silent anymore” (Sanger 1999). At lunch the following day, he said, “I think it’s imperative that the WTO become more open and accessible...If the WTO expects to have public support grow for our endeavors, the public must see and hear and, in a very real sense, actually join in the deliberations. That’s the only way they can know the process is fair, and know their concerns were at least considered” (Sanger 1999). In other words, we should not reject the system and fashion a new one, but rather accept it so long as reforms can modify its shape, a proposition that exemplifies *trasformismo*.

Mr. Clinton also used the power of the podium to reassure developing countries that his emphasis on human rights and labor standards would not amount to protectionism. He said, “I freely acknowledge that, if we had a certain kind of rule, then protectionists in wealthy countries could use things like wage differentials to keep poorer countries down,’ by arguing that “you’re not paying your people enough;” instead, it would be important to “write the rules in such a way that people in our position, the wealthier countries, can’t do that, can’t use this as an instrument of protectionism” (Sanger 1999). His goal was to walk the proverbial tightrope: pleasing his labor constituency, while simultaneously pushing for free trade. An adroit politician, Clinton responded to the protests and

succeeded in furthering his own *interpretation* of neoliberal expansion, rather than recognizing it for what it was: a protest *against* neoliberalism.

Speaking alongside Clinton at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in 2000, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney warned of the consequences of not heeding the voice of the protestors. He called for “new global rules, democratically developed” to constrain “growing inequality, environmental destruction, and a race to the bottom for working people,” warning that if such rules were not forthcoming, it would generate “an increasingly volatile reaction that [would] make Seattle look tame” (Union Labor News 2000). Although Sweeney’s exhortations are congruent with the demands of many of the protestors, the fact that he spoke at Davos indicates his acceptance of the basic conditions of neoliberalism, and the limits of how much change and new rules he actually supported.

In an article in the January 30, 2000 *Washington Post*, Sweeney makes his acceptance of the conditions of neoliberal hegemony even clearer. “Global nongovernmental organizations raise fundamental concerns. Now it is important for the NGOs to go from opposing what is to proposing what can be” (Sweeney 2000). Like Clinton, Sweeney did not seek to replace the system, but rather to reform its operations. Furthermore, he warned that “Leaders of the global institutions face a legitimacy crisis that cannot be solved by better public relations. Their institutions will become more accountable, or more irrelevant” (Ibid). In this instance, Sweeney redirects the fundamental critique of the WTO and neoliberalism - the profit motive - toward an acceptance of it, so long as the process is transparent and democratically accountable, deftly ignoring the difference in capability the neoliberal ruling class (united and well stocked with capital) has against the fragmented and under resourced opposition (Harvey 2005).

In summary, both Clinton and Sweeney used the protests to further a specific *interpretation* of neoliberalism rather than recognizing them as a protest *against* neoliberalism. Specifically, the criticism of the profit motive gets lost in the post-protest calls for reform of transparency and accountability.

## *Police and the Security Apparatus*

An image of a Starbucks being vandalized by a group of anarchists, known as the Black Bloc, came to symbolize the violent actions of the demonstrators. This image was splashed across television and print media campaigns, with the notable exception of the *NYT* (Whitney 2009). The question in this section, however, is not whether the media portrayed the protestors as violent, which has already been discussed, but whether the police used heavy-handed tactics that exceeded social expectations and contributed to the minimal violence committed by the protestors.

The first point to establish is what tactics the police employed. In their actions to contain the protest, police used a myriad of weapons, including tear gas, concussion grenades, plastic bullets, pepper spray and police batons (De Armond 2000). Over 600 people were arrested in the course of the protest; in a later deal between the police and the organizers of the protest though, nearly all of them were released without charges on December 4, the last day of the conference (Verhovek 1999). The number of demonstrators present varies, with the Seattle police providing the low estimate of 40,000, with the upper range estimated at 100,000 (Shah 1999). Either way, this is a significant number of arrests relative to the number of protestors, especially considering that, as aforementioned, the majority of the violence was conducted and instigated by the police, not the protestors (De Armond 2000). Moreover, the violence and tactics of the police were egregious enough to marshal the support of the local population in favor of the protestors, ultimately leading to investigations into the police operation and the eventual resignation of the Seattle Police Chief.

To provide context, these figures need to be compared to a similarly large protest that was not counter-hegemonic in orientation. The closest comparison is the 2003 anti-Iraq war protest that took place in New York City, on February 15, 2003. Although the protest was against a war launched by a neoliberal state, it was not targeted at neoliberal policies or its ideology, but rather at neoconservatism, or military imperialism. Protest attendance estimates here range from 300,000 to more than a million (BBC News 2003). Like the Black Bloc anarchists at Seattle, the march also had

a group of protestors that broke away from the march and vandalized the city (Ibid). In total, there were between 275 (police figure) and 348 (protest organizers) arrests. The number of arrests is comparatively miniscule, given that there were at least triple the number of demonstrators. Furthermore, the police did not use tear gas, concussion grenades or police batons against the protestors. In other words, the reactions of the Seattle police to a much smaller protest than that in New York were considerably more violent, and can therefore be considered to have exceeded the social expectations of what was warranted; a point affirmed by the citizens of Seattle when they sided with the protestors against the police (De Armond 2000).

The strong response of the police cannot be denied, yet it was not the desire of the ruling class for the police to proceed in this fashion. On the contrary, the police were perhaps the most criticized group in the aftermath of the protest. Britain's top trade representative said, "[that] was the most incompetent police operation I have ever seen" (Sanger 1999). Other American cabinet officials were irate that the police ignored the messages provided to them for months: "We even sent them a tape of a violent demonstration at the W.T.O.'s headquarters in Geneva," said one. "And when we got here, we looked out the windows and were astounded to discover they hadn't even put up barricades" (Sanger 1999). In the RAND report, the American government think tank even blamed the resulting violence and disruption of the conference on a disorganized police force (De Armond 2000). Even the *NYT* got in on the blame game: "the police seemed unprepared to respond properly to either the thousands of protestors who gathered peacefully or the small number who went on a rampage" (Verhovek 1999). Given this information, it can be concluded that the government did not intend to strongly react to the protest, but rather that the strong response was the fault of the police force disorganization.

In sum, the reaction of the neoliberal ruling class suggests that it was not overly concerned about its security. The corporate media responded weakly by negatively framing its coverage, but did not react strongly by denying coverage. The government also reacted weakly by joining themselves to the protestors, so as to further their own interpretation of neoliberalism, rather than recognizing it as a

protest against neoliberalism. Finally, although the police did react strongly with violence, this was not a calculated maneuver, but the result of a disorganized police operation. These reactions suggest that the neoliberal ruling class did not feel significantly insecure at the time of the counter-hegemonic protest. This issue is revisited and compared to the Occupy Wall Street movement after its actors and responses have been individually dissected.

## **Occupy Wall Street**

The Occupy Wall Street protest began in New York City on September 17, 2011 in New York City, after having been proposed by Canadian magazine, Adbusters, on July 13 (Adbusters 2011).<sup>14</sup> Like the Battle at Seattle, OWS fulfills Gill's definition of the postmodern prince, with its leaderless structure and wide array of issues being contested. Notwithstanding this, the protest can be considered counter-hegemonic, as the most important issues raised are opposed to neoliberalism: regulation of the financial industry, reduced financial and corporate influence in politics, and income equality through fair taxation (Occupy Wall Street 2011). Although the movement contests a myriad of issues, the fundamental objective of reducing the importance of the neoliberal profit motive is ubiquitous in all its campaigns, including, for example, in its call to action against the corporate control of food supply: "to challenge the corporate food regime that has prioritized profit over health and sustainability" (Occupy Wall Street 2011b). Although the protest began in New York City, it expanded in the following month to cities throughout the United States; then, on October 15, around the world. Although the majority of the occupation camps have been cleared by the authorities, OWS continues to have a strong internet and mobile presence through traveling groups of activists.

### *Corporate Media*

As a result of OWS having lasted far longer than the Battle at Seattle, it is necessary, given the constraints of space and the aims of this paper, to reduce the timeframe for the media analysis. The

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<sup>14</sup> Adbusters (2011) says about itself "We are a global network of culture jammers and creatives working to change the way information flows, the way corporations wield power, and the way meaning is produced in our society.

period analyzed is September 16 to October 2. This timeframe works well because the incipient stage of a protest is when the media has the greatest influence on its success or failure, determined largely by the delivery of information, or lack thereof, to the public. This period also includes the October 1 Brooklyn Bridge march, in which nearly 700 demonstrators were arrested, out of a total of 1500 people; this event was the one that catapulted the protest into the public spotlight (Ross Sorkin 2011).

The dominant strategy of the *NYT* was to strongly deny coverage. In its first two weeks, a total of twenty articles appeared on the electronic version of the newspaper. This figure is inflated, however, by the inclusion of fourteen articles from the paper's City Room, its online New York City blog service. Strip them from the count, and the number of articles drops to six. Of those six, two are individual columns dedicated to regional issues, Ginia Bellafante's *Big City* (just New York City) and Jim Dwyer's *About New York* (covering the state of New York). Of the four remaining articles, one was a two paragraph reader submission and another was an opinion article; this leaves two articles that appeared in the national news. On September 20, Keith Olbermann of Current TV, an internet news station, decried this absence of coverage by asking, "Why isn't any major news outlet covering this? ... If that's a Tea Party protest in front of Wall Street ... it's the lead story on every network newscast" (Olbermann 2011). Disregarding the City Room Blog, Bellafante's September 23 article was the first to pick up the story, a week after the protest had begun (Bellafante 2011b). Of the two national articles, one detailed an instance where police egregiously pepper sprayed four innocent women, an event widely condemned by activists and city councilman; the other article followed this and described the historical response of police to protests. Neither article attempted to uncover or describe the purpose of the demonstration.

On October 1, over 1500 demonstrators attempted to march across the Brooklyn Bridge, without having first registered to do so, resulting in nearly 700 arrests (Ross Sorkin 2011). This event produced several hundred viral youtube videos and brought the protest increased internet and non-traditional media coverage, thereby putting pressure on the corporate media to begin its coverage. By extending the range to October 2<sup>nd</sup>, ten additional articles are available for analysis. Of these, four

were from the City Room, two were op-ed's, two were national articles, one was Bellafante's column, and the last was from the *NYT's* Dealbook and Investment Banking columnist, Andrew Ross Sorkin. In total, when not including the City Room Blog or reader's submissions, the *NYT* published eleven articles on the protest, six of which came in the first two days of October; a low figure, considering the protest targeted the financial industry and took place in the financial and media capital of the US.

In order to place these numbers in perspective, it is necessary to compare the amount of coverage the protest received to other, non counter-hegemonic protests. First, the Tea Party, a similar structured, though differently aligned, social movement. By contrast to OWS, the Tea Party is a social group that aligns relatively well with the neoliberal ruling class, exemplified by four of its fifteen non-negotiable beliefs: "reducing personal income taxes is a must, reducing business income taxes is mandatory, government must be downsized and intrusive government must be stopped" (Tea Party 2012). Although the Tea Party did not have a sustained demonstration like OWS, it did have an initial launch day on April 15, 2009, wherein the largest protest in Atlanta drew approximately 15,000 people, while most of the other 750 protests recorded considerably lower attendance. Between April 15 and 16, the *NYT* published seven articles on the protest, only four less than it provided to OWS, despite OWS lasting more than two weeks longer than the Tea Party protest .

The Russian election protest of late 2011 provides another comparison. The protest, organized against the perceived authoritarianism of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his United Russia Party, began on December 5, expanded significantly on December 10 and has continued through, as of this writing, March of the next of the next year. Attendance estimates on the largest day of demonstrations, the tenth, range from 25,000 (police) to 60,000 (protest organizers). In the two-week period from December 4 to December 18, a total of thirty-three articles were published, considerably more than the eleven for OWS for the same length of time. It is thus evident that the *NYT* strongly responded to the protest by denying coverage commensurate to what was given to non-counter-hegemonic protests.

Let us now determine how the *NYT* chose to frame its coverage of *OWS*. To do so, I analyze all of the articles, excepting those from the City Room Blog, using the same timeframe described above (Sep. 16 - Oct. 2). The general framing delegitimized the protestors in the eyes of the public. What follows are several examples of this portrayal. “A default ambassador in a half-naked woman who called herself Zuni Tikka” (Bellafante 2011b). One wonders how difficult it would have been to find a better dressed individual to interview as the “default ambassador” of the movement. “This presumably was the opportunity to air societal grievances as carnival...not easily extinguishable by street theatre,” and, “The group’s lack of cohesion and its apparent wish to pantomime progressivism rather than practice it knowledgeably is unsettling in the face of the challenges so many of its generation face” (Ibid). These edicts beg the question, why is this called a carnival and not a Tahir Square, and why is it a “pantomime” of progressivism and not the real thing? Perhaps the most delegitimizing description began: “the protestors would first be meeting at Bowling Green Park for a program that included yoga, a pillow fight, and face painting;” in the article’s conclusion, after questioning its long-term efficacy, “we’ll have to see if plans that included a pillow fight turn into a political fight” (Blow 2011). Furthermore, the paper continually emphasized the unusual and eccentric protestors rather than describing its intellectual supporters: “A man named Hero was here. So was germ. There was the waitress from the dim sum restaurant in Evanston, Ill. And the liquor store worker. The google consultant. The circus performer. The Brooklyn nanny.” The authors of the article conveniently failed to mention that intellectual heavy weights Noam Chomsky, Joseph Stiglitz, and Naomi Klein had voiced their support for the protest (Kleinfield and Buckley 2011).

The coverage also sought to diminish the goals of the protestors, even when they were not opposed to neoliberalism. “But what were the chances that its members were going to receive the attention they so richly deserve while carrying signs like “Even if the World Were to End Tomorrow I’d Still Plant a Tree Today?” (Bellafante 2011b). Moreover, their actions were portrayed as inconsistent and troublesome; the protestors were “rabble rousing” and “their politics zigzag wildly” (Ibid). They are “ideologically vague and strategically baffling” (Bellafante 2011a) and “the members

of Occupy Wall Street seem unorganized and, at times, unformed” (Goldstein 2011). It is questionable why these words were a better description than, say, passionate, inspired, motivated and indefatigable.

In short, the coverage portrayed the protestors as a collection of socially undesirable people, with no strategy, who have pillow fights, but no final objective. This narrative, of course, is quite the opposite of what can be gleaned from visiting the Occupy or Adbuster websites, though the *NYT* chose not to publicize this available and relevant information.

### *Podium Politics*

The government reacted both strongly and weakly to OWS. As with the corporate media, government officials largely avoided responding to the protests for the first several weeks. At a time of economic turmoil and unusually high partisanship, officials presumably feared alienating the public. Most of the early responders, such as US House Representative Peter King (R-NY), were critical in their appraisal:

“[W]e have to be careful not to allow this to get any legitimacy. I'm taking this seriously in that I'm old enough to remember what happened in the 1960s when the left-wing took to the streets and somehow the media glorified them and it ended up shaping policy...We can't allow that to happen.” (King in Miller 2011)

Neither did the Democrats rush to embrace the protests. It took President Obama nearly three weeks to issue a response (Memoli 2011). Once he did, he leveraged the protests in order to accomplish three tasks: (i) in terms of policy, to push for higher taxes on the rich, (ii) to redirect the message of the protestors as a complaint against the present state of the economy, and (iii) as a way of differentiating his policies from, and criticizing, the Republican Party.

On October 7, in his first and only direct comments concerning OWS, Obama said the protests reflect a “broad-based frustration about how our financial system works” and that the “anger and

frustration” of the protestors should be taken as support for his proposed Buffet Rule<sup>15</sup> and the Dodd-Frank Act, an act of legislation, previously passed, that increased regulation on the financial industry (Obama 2011). Instead of addressing the very systemic concerns of the protestors, including their concern that his policies have exacerbated an unequal concentration of wealth, he associates their anger only with his plan for a tax on the wealthiest of Americans (New York City General Assembly 2011). He did say, however, that “we have to have a strong and effective financial sector in order for us to grow” and that he “used up a lot of political capital” in bailing out the banks in order to prevent an “economic meltdown” so that “banks stayed afloat” (Obama 2011). What he does not address is the protestors’ belief that there are alternative ways to saving the economy and promoting growth other than a myopic focus on the financial industry and corporate profits (New York City General Assembly 2011).

The next theme of President Obama’s response was that the protestors were concerned only with everyone playing by the rules, not with the actual rules of the game itself.

"American people understand that not everybody's been following the rules. These days, a lot of folks doing the right thing are not rewarded. A lot of folks who are not doing the right thing are rewarded...That does not make sense to the American people. They are frustrated by it, and they will continue to be frustrated by it until they get a sense that everybody's playing by the same set of rules and that you're rewarded for responsibility and doing the right thing as opposed to gaming the system" (Obama 2011).

This comment again misses the message that the protestors are against the system, not merely the rules of the system.

Finally, Obama also used the protests as a differentiator against his Republican political opponents. The “financial sector with the republican party in congress fight us every inch of the way, and now you get these same folks saying we should roll back these very reforms and go back to the way it was before the crisis.” This ignores one of the core complaints of the protestors: that the government is ineffective, unrepresentative, and overly partisan.

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<sup>15</sup> The Buffet Rule is an increase of taxes on those earning more than one million dollars a year.

Republican leaders, meanwhile, tried to embed the narrative that the OWS protestors were initiating a class war, sometimes even as the surrogate of Obama. Herman Cain, former Republican presidential candidate, said that OWS was “planned and orchestrated to distract from the failed policies of the Obama administration,” admitting, however, that he “didn’t have facts” to back up his assertion (Cain 2011). When asked about the protests, Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner said, that he “understand their concerns, and I frankly understand that we have differences in America. We are not going to engage in class warfare. The President is out there doing it every day” and when asked if he believed this was happening, he responded: “The President’s clearly trying to do it and its wrong” (Boehner 2011).

Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor also criticized the movement and its class warfare implications, but goes a step further by criticizing the actions of the protests, likening them to a mob: “If you read the newspapers today, I, for one, am increasingly concerned about the growing mobs occupying Wall Street and the other cities across the country. And believe it or not, some in this town, have actually condoned the pitting of Americans against Americans...” (Cantor 2011). This quote is interesting on its own, but is more so when compared to his assessment of the Tea Party in 2010, of which he has been an ardent supporter: The “Tea Party is an organic movement. This is not some movement that started in Washington. It’s about the people. And that’s what, I think, the message from this election is about. Get the government in D.C. working for the people again and not the other way around...They represent and reflect the frustration that Americans have at what’s going on in Washington” (Ibid). This seeming contradiction in his assessment of the two similar social movements is a prime example of how the power of the podium is used to praise and bolster movements that favor neoliberalism, while condemning and attenuating those that oppose it.

In summary, it took both political parties over two weeks to issue official responses to the protests, even though a significantly large number of people had been arrested and the movement was expanding across the nation. This calculated maneuver, suggested by Peter King’s quote warning of the consequences of providing it with legitimacy, can be taken as a strong response to the protest.

Furthermore, once they did initiate responses, both parties sought to weave their own narrative into the intention of the protest, thus framing its presentation in a weak manner.

### *Police and Security Apparatus*

The police and security apparatus responded strongly to OWS through several methods, including a systematic dismantling of the occupied camps around the country, as well as with tactics used to clear the camps. First, the former. Analyzing the clearing of occupy camps involves the difficult task of balancing whether the eviction violated the constitutionally protected freedoms of assembly and speech against the legal right to clear it based on *inter alia*, sanitary, health, and safety reasons. Making the examination more difficult is the absence of a comparable social movement that also set up camps as a sign of protest. One approach to this analysis is to look at whether the closing of the camps was done in a coordinated manner by the political elite. In an interview with the BBC on November 15, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan made allusions to such an agreement when she admitted she had been on a conference call with eighteen other mayors, from around the country, who were dealing with the same Occupy situation (Quan 2011). It is interesting to note that between November 13 and November 30, nearly all of the Occupy camps, including those in New York, Oakland, Los Angeles, Berkley, Portland and Seattle, were cleared, in direct accordance with the comment made by Mayor Quan (Stelter 2011).

The evictions were often conducted with intimidating force and rapidity. Ken Montenegro, a legal observer with the National Lawyers Guild, reported that over 1400 police, not including sheriff deputies, converged on Occupy LA the morning of November 30 with equipment normally reserved for military affairs (Democracy Now 2011). This is not surprising, as in 2011 alone, the Pentagon has given over \$500 million worth of military equipment to police departments across the US (Carlson 2011). Similar scenes of heavily armed and forceful police arresting and dismantling encampments were reported in Philadelphia (Ibid), New York and Oakland.

The tactics that the police used to clear the camps have been questioned for their reliance on force. In the cities just mentioned, 292 people were arrested in Los Angeles during the eviction, 52 in Philadelphia and over 200 in New York City (Occupy Arrests 2012). Arrests were not limited to the evictions, however. There were nine days where a single city had over one hundred arrests, with the nearly 700 arrested in New York City on October 1 and over 400 on January 28, in Oakland, topping the list. Overall, as of February 17, 2012, there have been at least 6,557 documented arrests in 111 US cities (OccupyArrests 2012). Although not perfect, a comparison with the Tea Party is contextually helpful. By November 11, 2011, OWS had been ongoing for forty days and had 2,511 arrests; by that same day, the Tea Party had been going for 989 days without yet having a single protestor arrested (Ireporters 2011). Extend that time frame to February 17 and the numbers become even worse: 6,557 versus 0. This alarming difference in police response makes sense only if the conduct of the demonstrators was equally different in terms of illegality and conduct; the corporate media's portrayal of the two would seem to confirm this. The veracity of this claim is dubious, however, as an examination of the actions of the protestors' shows otherwise.

One prominent Tea Party Organization has sent out tactical advice to its national audience on how to disrupt public speaking engagements of Democratic politicians: "rock-the-boat early in the Rep's presentation...yell out and challenge the Rep's statements early.... to rattle him, get him off his prepared script and agenda...stand up and shout and sit right back down" (Tea Party Patriots 2009). Although this is not an illegal practice, the conduct certainly falls outside of expected social decorum. The conduct of Tea Party protestors after the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act passed in 2010 is an even clearer indictment of negative and even illegal behavior. After the bill passed, Tea Party protestors greeted Democratic House Representatives with spitting and racial slurs, later hanging an effigy of freshman Democratic Representative Frank Kratovil outside his window; yet, no one was arrested nor accused of being an angry mob, as Eric Cantor described the Occupy protestors (Fang 2009). On the other hand, the New York General Assembly of the Occupy Wall Street movement has repeatedly and specifically said that it is a non-violent movement that does not

condone violence of any sort; yet, its members have repeatedly been arrested under anachronistic laws, such as illegally wearing a mask in the street, a law normally left unenforced (Occupy Wall Street 2012).

The images of violence by police against protesters in OWS are numerous enough that it does not need substantial expounding. Images and videos of police pepper spraying, tear gassing, and using concussion grenades went viral on the internet, though less so in the corporate media. These tactics are, of course, legally allowed when their use is *required*. With few exceptions, however, the OWS protestors' actions have been non-violent and undeserving of such harsh response. Thus, for some it has been difficult to square the use of force by police against the circle of the mostly non-violent protestors. Even the *NYT* has questioned its forceful response, when in the early phase of the movement, police pepper sprayed four women who had already been contained by the police and were not, nor ever had been, resisting the police (Goldstein 2011). Police repeatedly arrested masses of protestors on dubious charges; for example, due to wearing a mask outdoors while not at a masquerade party, surely a charge no Halloween reveler has ever been held to (MSNBC 2011). The most notorious and egregious act was when a police officer pepper-sprayed a line of students at the University of California, Davis, who were sitting down with arms linked (Kennicott 2011). The police believed it was appropriate to respond with military grade pepper spray to a line of passive OWS students, but not even to arrest a group of Tea Party protestors who were spitting, screaming racial slurs, and hanging effigies of US Representatives.

These, and many other similar acts, are representative of the violent tactics employed by the police and the 'stretching' of the law to subdue protestors. The strong response of the police is even more evident when compared to the number of arrests between the Tea Party and OWS, and the presumable national coordination to close down and restrict the Occupy camps. Suffice it to say, the United States has not seen this sort of police response since the anti-war protests of the 1960s and 1970s, another organized movement that had challenged the ideological structure of a hegemon.

## Discussion

Understanding the perceived security of the ruling class of a hegemon sheds light on several relevant and related subjects. In order to gain a foothold to these insights, it is necessary to have a systematic method of investigation that not only describes a static level of security, but also reveals a more kinetic interpretation of how and in what direction the perception of security changes. Such an analysis grounds the sweeping concepts and arguments of neo-Gramscianism in empirical data, and in so doing, gives analytical life to its otherwise esoteric concepts. The categorization and analysis of this paper were designed with this in mind; in other words, to not only improve our understanding of the security of a hegemon, but also to illuminate how such concepts materialize in practice. This section aims to apply the analysis of this paper to this objective. First, though, a coherent discussion of how the three actors constituting the neoliberal ruling class responded to the protests in Seattle and OWS.

As can be seen, the perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class has decreased from the 1999 WTO protest in Seattle to the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in 2011. The corporate media, represented by the *New York Times*, went from a weak response of coverage framing to a strong response of coverage denial that, once it could no longer be maintained, returned to coverage framing. Moreover, the framing took on an increasingly hostile form, going from questioning the ideals and practicality of the Seattle protestors (such as Friedman's article lambasting their goals as "ridiculous" and "flat-earth advocates") to one that resembles a presidential campaign full of character attacks, but short on substance (the half naked demonstrators enjoying their pre-protest pillow fights).

This change in strategy was mimicked by the political elite. Personified by Bill Clinton and John Sweeney, the government was quick to respond to the Seattle protests, if only to transform the message to fit their specific interpretation of neoliberal globalization, instead of recognizing it as a critique of neoliberal globalization. This strategy exemplified trasformismo in two ways: through the individual transformation of Sweeney, the leader of labor and the putative opposition to neoliberalism and through the transformation of the social movement, by separating the conservative wing from the more radical protestors.<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, it took several weeks for any prominent politician in the US to respond to OWS, even though the movement had become a national phenomenon and a contentious subject of discussion. Trasformismo was abandoned as a strategy, as the protestors had no individual leader that could be converted. Furthermore, Obama was more obdurate than Clinton regarding concessions granted to the mass of protestors. Whereas Clinton offered to modify the modus operandi of neoliberalism by making it more transparent, Obama did not offer any concessions to the protestors, siding with their demands only when it aligned with a policy aspiration of his own, the Buffet Rule. Clearly the response of the government and political elite progressed from a weak to a strong form, evidenced by the lack of response to WTO demonstrators, followed by an OWS abandonment of trasformismo.

The police reacted strongly to both protests by using excessive force and violence compared to social expectations, and through ‘stretching’ the law in order to stymie their growth. Additionally, the number of arrests in the protests for those who were otherwise not committing crimes, or at least not ones commensurate with their punishment, is ballast for a strong response verdict. The difference between the two reactions is that after Seattle the police were widely held accountable for the violence and heavily criticized by the media and political elite, leading to an extensive investigation and numerous resignations, including that of the Chief of Police. By contrast, the even harsher

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<sup>16</sup> This process was nearly identical to how the Italian authorities reacted after unification, as the ruling class waged a war of position for the support of society by first transforming the leaders and then the political parties of the opposition.

reactions of the police to OWS have been largely disregarded and even, at times, defended. This different appraisal of the police response, from Seattle to OWS, is the third indication that the perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class has decreased considerably.

These conclusions confirm my empirical claim that the perceived security of the neoliberal ruling class has decreased from Seattle to Wall Street. This change is logical, as the tactics of the counter-hegemonic forces have also progressed, from single event protests (Seattle) to a sustained occupation of the commons (OWS). This more assertive war of position has been met with a more coercive than consensual response from the ruling class. Instead of manufacturing consent, the corporate media and the political elite have attempted to manipulate an intended direction for society, by not allowing the opposing perspective to be heard or even reacted to.

This insecurity has manifested itself in several political bills and decisions that I will mention only briefly here. Two recently passed acts – the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011 and the Federal Restricted Buildings and Grounds Improvement Act of 2011 – have come under harsh criticism from civil liberty organizations, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (2011). The former turns the US into a military battleground and allows for the indefinite detention of suspected terrorists (not defined), who will be subject to a military instead of civilian trial. Though it was introduced to Congress in May 2011 and President Obama promised to veto it, after OWS had reached its physical peak, he signed it into law on December 31.

The latter is a modification of a previous act that now allows for the arrest of individuals who ‘knowingly’ (no longer willfully) disrupt the activities of an event where the President, Vice President, or secret service protected individual is present, or where “events of special significance” are being held. This act has commonly been regarded as the anti-occupy bill, as it greatly extends the potential capacity for the federal government to restrict protests. It should be noted that the *NYT* did not report at all on the latter, nor did it ever place its coverage of the NDAA bill on its front page, essentially tucking the bill away from national discussion.

In a clear expression of insecurity, the federal government recently changed the location of the G8 summit from Chicago to Camp David. Prior to the switch, the summit was scheduled to occur concurrently with a NATO summit in Chicago. Although the move was not announced as a reaction to the fear of protests, it is not difficult to assume this is the reason, as these meetings are scheduled years in advance; such a sudden and late cancellation can't help but raise a reflective eyebrow or two.

## **Conclusion**

Analyzing the reactions of the ruling class of a hegemon to counter-hegemonic protests is a novel method of determining the self-perceived security of that actor. But what other avenues of research can this framework be applied to? One possibility is to extend the research by looking at the strategies of the protestors, and the counter-hegemonic forces in general, in order to gain a better understanding of the state of contest between a hegemon and a counter-hegemon. By combining an analysis of the perceived security of the former with a study of the strategies of the latter, one could make determinations on whether the contest was in a war of position or transitioning to a war of movement. A prisoner's dilemma between the two social opponents would be a particularly good analytical tool to further understand how the contest for social support is being waged.

Improving the thoroughness and applicability of the classification offered here is also an avenue of research. Comparing two sets of counter-hegemonic protests would be one particularly good approach for this. For example, one might find consistencies in how the ruling class reacts to counter-hegemonic protests that would suggest a general trend for how the sense of security changes, and in response to what sociopolitical stimuli. A comparison of the 1960s and 1970s anti-war protests against the two examined here would be one such possibility. Such an analysis would be instrumental in determining whether this classification has breadth beyond this empirical paper.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this paper does not address the question of why the perceived insecurity of the ruling class has increased. Is it the result of a single, harsh crisis? Is it more systemic, for example, a result of declining profit margins and capital over accumulation? Or has neoliberalism simply exhausted its potential (Gramsci 1971)? These questions are always important to ask, especially during periods rife with social contention and an uncertain outcome.

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