

POPULISM AND MYTH IN THE RHETORIC OF ELIZABETH WARREN

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ABSTRACT

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This study sought to understand the strong resonance of Elizabeth Warren's rhetoric among Millennials and many liberal democrats. The three texts selected each received an inordinate amount of attention, particularly via social media and later by the popular press. As no rhetorical studies had been done about Warren, I drew from the remarkable body of literature concerning populist rhetoric and the paranoid style. Framework in place, the analysis of Warren's rhetoric revealed the presence of the major traits of populist rhetoric, but also made it clear that the core suasive power of her message came from a communitarian variant of the American Dream myth.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Rationale

On April 16, 2009, a sixty year-old gray headed Harvard Law Professor sat across a desk from late night political satirist Jon Stewart to discuss her new role overseeing the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act and the Troubled Asset Relief Program (E. Warren 2009; O'Connor 2008). She possessed none of the professionally styled polish typical of Stewart's political guests. She looked very much as though she had just left one of her lectures. She spent four minutes playing the straight-man, then delivered a three-minute history lesson on United States financial regulatory policy with such clarity that Stewart commented, "that's the first time in six months to a year that I felt better. I don't know what you just did right there, but for a second, that was like financial chicken soup for me" (Stein 2009).

Elizabeth Warren began to shine on *The Daily Show* that evening. She returned to talk with Stewart and his audience annually, also appearing on Bill Maher's HBO talk show, *Real Time* numerous times ("Elizabeth Warren Interviewed by Bill Maher on Credit Card Legislation, Usury" 2009). Her position as chair of the Troubled Asset Relief Program had opened the doors necessary to give her national platform. It was, however, not cable programs that made her a political juggernaut. When she delivered an impassioned, brief stump speech at a private Massachusetts home in August of 2011, a cell-phone recorded video turned up on YouTube and went viral (E. Warren 2010; E. Warren 2011; E. Warren 2012; Camia 2011). She had, up to that point, not committed to a run for the Massachusetts Senate seat once held by Ted Kennedy, even though activists, particularly liberal blog *The Daily Kos*, had spent six months relentlessly appealing to her to throw her hat into the ring (Digby 2013). When the media picked up the story of the wildfire spread of the Andover speech, the national spotlight focused on the professor, and her decision was made. Warren swung into the political fray on mass and new media and accumulated an unprecedented war chest for her Senatorial run and ultimate victory in 2012 (Toobin 2012). Barely a month after being sworn in, another You-

Tube video, this time of her questioning bank regulators from her seat on the Senate Banking Committee, reached millions of views, an unheard of feat for a congressional committee proceeding (E. Warren 2013b). Six months later, her fiery speech from the Senate floor, chastising those politicians who shut down the government in September of 2013 also became an online sensation (E. Warren 2013d).

What lifted Warren out of obscurity and into the national spotlight? How does a sixty-four year-old grandmother and academic become "wonder woman" to a generation of twenty-somethings (Traister 2011)? Warren is no mere upstart demagogue with a microphone. Her message has influence across party lines, as demonstrated by her co-sponsoring the 21st Century Glass-Steagal act with Senator John McCain. Her rhetorical prowess has sparked analysis of her chances for the oval office, and some believe she could redefine the Democratic party (Dayen 2013). Elizabeth Warren's rhetoric is reshaping the civic conversation in the United States in the aftermath of the Great Recession.

To attribute this change to a mere shift in tone or style profoundly misses the mark. This is a rhetorical sea-change, a reversal of a message that defined a president. In Warren's view, Obama's famous declaration "we are not as divided as our politics suggests" could not have been more brutally and terribly wrong (Obama 2008; O'Malley 2012). Hope increasingly seemed a fantasy in the face of the 111th Congress with its obstructionist politics and partisan brinkmanship unseen in this country since before the Civil War (Haidt and Hetherington 2012). The iconic image of Obama as the face of hope became a caricature. Anger eclipsed hope, and Warren's voice, her crystal clear message of outrage, replaced Obama's inspiring tone as the voice of change (Traister 2011).

The focus of this study is to ascertain how someone as unlikely as Warren could rise to political superstardom. She ill-fits any preconceived mold of what an ideal candidate should look like. A small, be-speckled, unglamorous, grandmotherly figure, she spent her professional life in academia, and yet her message has become the *cri de coeur* of an increasingly vocal part of the Democratic party.

Every obvious criterion that should account for her success does not apply. Warren's message is all that remains to explain her political celebrity.

Justification

Accounting for this change, for the significance of this moment in American political history, presents an important challenge, one that can best be understood in terms of rhetoric. The first of Warren's speeches to arrest national attention was the Andover stump speech, a viral video that made her a national presence. The second speech to reach viral status via YouTube was the Senate Banking Committee hearing, remarkable in that it exists as an online video at all. Finally, Warren's speech from the Senate floor in protest of the government shutdown, also with well over a million views on YouTube, stands out as the most viewed video by a congressperson about the shutdown. These speeches not only provide insight into Warren's message, but represent three individual texts that achieved wide-spread circulation entirely through grassroots effort. An analysis of these texts can reveal the source of her rhetorical power.

In the next section I consider existing literature on Warren and her rhetoric. I then develop a methodology for approaching Warren's rhetoric. I will then chronicle the events and experiences that have shaped and defined her from her childhood to the present. Finally, I will analyze Warren's rhetoric to discover what precisely makes her message resonate.

Review of Literature

To date, no studies of Warren's rhetoric have been published in the discipline. In fact, no published studies of Warren exist in any discipline beyond analysis of her published work in bankruptcy law. The popular press, however, has been very vocal about Warren and her rhetoric. Media reports on these speeches fall into three categories: cursory analyses of the rhetoric, discussion of audience response, and accounts of the events and campaigns that provide the context for the speeches.

As the number of articles about Warren increase, the media agree on one point: her message is what makes her unique. Described as "approachable," "easily understood," "compelling," and "highly effective," the way in which Warren crystallizes very complex issues into easily understood yet still factually valid arguments continually sets her apart from her ideological brethren ("Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011; Benen 2011; Camia 2011; Traister 2011). This is not happenstance, but meticulously planned and polished argumentation. Warren prefers not to speak at all until she can express herself with this trademark clarity (Zengerle 2011). Another common descriptor of Warren's speaking is "brutally honest." During her tenure as TARP overseer, she pulled no punches against anyone, regardless of political affiliation ("Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). Her now famous unrelenting interrogation of Obama's Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner likely cost her chairmanship of the consumer protection agency that she first proposed (Toobin 2012). It is this impolitic unflinching integrity that has positioned her as a crusader reformer.

The number of column inches devoted to discussing Warren's rhetoric increases nearly daily, but the analysis stops at a laundry-list of descriptors. It remains shallow and incomplete, failing to explain how her rhetoric works and why it is so compelling. To a lesser extent, media also describe the reaction of Warren's audience to her rhetoric. The monicker "rockstar" gets thrown around perhaps too frequently (Connaughton 2013). Warren has fans who behave towards her in a manner usually only seen with celebrity (Traister 2011). Jon Stewart famously declared he wanted "to make out" with her, while a twenty something young man proclaimed "wonder woman wishes she could be Elizabeth Warren" (Andrews 2011; Traister 2011). Very clearly, she has supporters across the age spectrum, but the high numbers and fervency of Millennials who rally around her deserves particular attention (Beinart 2013). This particular cohort already outnumber the baby boomers and have very different agendas than any generation before it (Taylor and Keeter 2010). The media have taken note of this, and using polling data and analysis have considered what this demographic could mean for

Warren's political future. The media do not, however, account for the hows and whys of the lure Warren's rhetoric has for the Millennial generation.

Finally, of the three types of reporting, the popular press most successfully describes the historical and contextual factors that so deeply influence Warren's message. From her beginnings in academia, she began a lifelong crusade on behalf of what she considered to be an endangered middle-class, and press reports sketch out the events that shaped a nascent political power (Digby 2013; Andrews 2011; Borosage 2013a; Zengerle 2011; "Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). Beginning with her appointment as an overseer of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, media attention surrounding Warren increased substantially. The essence of her message, some thirty-years in the crafting, perfectly suited a public struggling to emerge from the greatest economic calamity since the Great Depression.

There is a critical gap in all of the literature. The existing literature provides useful data, but only explains to a point. Under all of it is the single burning question: why does Warren's rhetoric resonate so powerfully with her audience? It is an important question importance, and one that can best be answered through a rhetorical analysis.

Methodology

The first step in my analysis will be an inductive thematic description. Drawing on categories similar to those found in Karlyn Kohr Campbell's *The Rhetorical Act*. This analysis will seek to identify the recurring motifs that appear throughout her remarks. Of the categories proposed by Campbell, the Warren texts most clearly sort into purpose, audience, persona, tone and strategy

The terms of the inductive analysis will follow the definitions set forward by Campbell (Campbell 1982, 24). Purpose constitutes the thesis, the core argument, and the desired response by the rhetor. Audience will represent the rhetor's target as well as the audience that is constituted by the rhetorical act itself. The role adopted by the speaker, in this case a crusader, will be defined as "persona." "Tone" will describe the attitude and posture of the speaker toward the topic as well as the

target and constituted audiences. Finally, the way in which the rhetor adapts all of the above elements to overcome the rhetorical problem and its obstacles will be referred to as the "strategies."

Warren's purpose never faltered or strayed: a restoration of justice, of fairness. She sought a leveling of the playing field, specifically a return to the more stringent regulation of the financial industry under Glass-Steagall from the Great Depression until the 1980s. In the Andover speech, she spoke of a neglected social contract, in which infrastructure created a foundation upon which entrepreneurship could be built (E. Warren 2013c). This contract had been violated by monied interest, who should "take a big hunk of [their profits] and pay it forward to the next kid who comes along," but instead tried to hoard their wealth and power. During the Senate Banking Committee hearing, her sole question focussed on a miscarriage of justice, where robber barons earned billions by violating the law with no repercussions while the Department of Justice made examples of ordinary Americans who were subject to litigation solely through the unscrupulous actions of those barons (E. Warren 2013a). Finally, in the speech on the Senate floor, she again lauded a government built upon fairness, protecting all citizens from the malfeasance of a small but exceedingly powerful sect of elites (E. Warren 2013e).

Identifying the audience of Warren's speeches is a more difficult task. The physical audience varied by each speech: in Andover, a small group of potential supporters; the Senate hearing, a few regulators; the Senate floor speech, her fellow Senators. However, what made Warren such a fascinating and critically important figure for study is how a larger audience actively chose her. This phenomenon took place via social media, specifically videos of the speeches were uploaded to YouTube then circulated by other social media services such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Upwards. Warren's audience was not merely a phantom "people," but a real, active people who were by their own volition constituting themselves as her audience. In general terms, the majority of active users of social media belonged to the Millennial generation (Taylor and Keeter 2010, 28). At first blush, a group of 18-30 year-olds as the active cheering section for a sixty-something professor seems out-

landish. However, Warren's message aligned itself rather well with this particular generation. No group had been hit as hard as the Millennials by the Great Recession, with nearly half of them moving back in with their parents (Taylor and Keeter 2010, 12). They were the best educated generation in the country's history, and the most under-employed (Taylor and Keeter 2010, 10). They were equal in number to the Boomer's. By 2016, they will constitute 35 percent of the electorate and their political clout will only grow with each election cycle (Zogby 2013). Sixty-three percent of Millennials believed their country did not give citizens an equal chance, and almost three quarters of them believed the system was rigged to favor the wealthy (Brotter 2012). Warren could not have manufactured a more perfect audience for her message. While Millennials were her most important audience, her message clearly resonated with liberals of all ages.

Warren's rhetorical persona also possessed unusual characteristics. Although she was a grandmother, a long-time academe, a tenured professor of business law at Harvard, and a self-professed policy-wonk, none of these particularly shone through in her rhetoric. No doubt the power of her message originated in her vast expertise in financial law and the striking clarity of her message came from decades of teaching college students, but above all of this, Warren sounded less professor and more crusader (Zengerle 2011). She spoke as though she were the people's appointed champion, the voice crying out in the wilderness (Borosage 2013a). In the Andover speech, the repeated phrase "the rest of us" was defined by the negative, the wealthy and powerful businessperson (E. Warren 2013c). In the closing moments of the committee hearing, Warren positioned the failure of the government to prosecute Wall Street banks with the "very thin grounds" upon which the USAG is "squeezing ordinary citizens," and closed with the sympathetic phrase "That just seems wrong to me," an artful alignment with the persecuted people (E. Warren 2013b). The speech against the government shutdown had many similar statements. The "anarchy gang" was opposed to "We the People." "The American people" opposed anti-government ideologies (E. Warren 2013e). The language throughout the speech was inclusive. "We" was used forty-four times. "Us" and "American people"

appeared six times each. Warren used "our" thirty-four times. The word "people" was used twelve times, as was "together," and always as the implied "we." Warren cast herself in the role of *vox populi*. In each speech, she spoke for the people, as defender of the social contract, as the guardian of justice, and as the advocate of the people's government.

Warren's purpose and her persona deeply influenced the tone of her rhetoric. Passion permeated every word (Borosage 2013b; Kantor 2010). Perhaps "conviction" might be the more apt term. In the speeches under analysis, her fervor was difficult to miss. The ability to communicate the fire of her cause and yet maintain an emotional levelness made Warren's tone particularly interesting. The amalgam of terms that best fit her tone and style would be "passionate rationality," a measured, calm but ardent manner of speech. In Andover, she launches into her view of the social contract with a strident "No. There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own." As she questioned federal regulators, she refused any attempt to deflect her key question which she repeated to every regulator present "tell me a little bit about the last few times you've taken the biggest financial institutions on Wall Street all the way to trial?" Terms often used in relation to Warren's rhetoric by the media were "informed" and "hard-hitting" (Borosage 2013a; "Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). All of these characteristics added to the force of her message, but none of it would matter were the message not accessible and understandable ("Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). She managed to distill complex and expansive ideologies into language that anyone could understand.

Together these elements constituted the overall strategy of Warren's rhetoric. She spoke passionately on a topic about which she obviously knew a great deal. She never came across as detached or frantic. Her ability to translate exceedingly complex issues into accessible and memorable language unquestionably laid at the heart of her appeal. In all, the artful way she held opposing characteristics in tension might be the most significant part of her ethos. Fierce but fair, fiery but self-possessed, expert but accessible, Warren created a compelling ethos with such precision that opponents and imitators may have an exceedingly difficult time duplicating her style and strategies.

The inductive analysis makes several aspects of Warren's rhetoric clear, and from it I will then identify a larger rhetorical pattern. For example, it is clear that the three speeches function as part of a larger narrative in which most Americans have been harmed by the greed of others, and as such, I anticipate finding all of the components that constitute a story. Warren's rhetoric clearly had a protagonist in the people. Either explicitly or implicitly, a villain was always present and often foregrounded. The central conflict was a fight about economic fairness. The tone of her rhetoric was also important in that she brought a rational stridency to her speaking, which also contributed to her persona as crusader. It was a compelling mixture that had increasing sway over a growing audience, including many Millennials, a demographic of increasing political significance. The newest generation to come of age defied expectation and charted significantly differently than those that came before (Miller 2013). The enigma of the Millennials added importance and interest in discovering how Warren's message worked.

The three speeches mentioned earlier were clearly critical texts. It seems likely that they all belonged to the larger narrative. Warren's rhetoric had a protagonist, an antagonist, a central conflict, and central arc. In each of the three speeches, the people were the hero. She referenced them as a holistic group with pronounced attributes, such as honor, a strong work ethic, honesty, integrity, and nobility of character. It was an idealized image of citizenry made even clearer by the ongoing presence of the villain, in this case an exceedingly powerful, wealthy and corrupt financial sector comprised of the world's largest banking and investment firms referred to with the short hand of "Wall Street." For Warren, these men and women were the perpetrators of the financial crisis of 2008, whose unchecked greed and power systematically dismantled the regulatory safeguards that had prevented their reckless behavior and thus protected the average, hard-working people. They used their accumulated wealth and power to corrupt the U.S. Government and its officials, bending them to their purposes. For Warren, the line between good and evil could not be more sharply defined. This was a Manichean conflict, and she was the people's crusader.

The battle was for control of the economy and ultimately the government. These were the stakes, and the fervor with which she engaged her enemy consistently drew the national spotlight, particularly via social media. The

In what follows, I explain the relationship between the textual analysis and the external audience data by uncovering the rhetorical theory that best matches these patterns. As should be clear after even a brief review, Warren is using populist rhetoric and to considerable affect.

Populist Rhetoric

The concept of "populism" as a mode of political discourse is at once familiar but exceedingly difficult to define. To proceed with the claim that Warren is in fact using populist rhetoric, I will review literature in rhetorical and political studies in the attempt to find a principled definition.

Ernesto Laclau argued that populism would slip away by the simple act of defining it. As the focus shifts from the ideal to the characteristics of specific movements, those minutiae caused populism itself to disappear (Laclau 1977, 143). Part of its analytical slipperiness comes from the absence of a "heart" of values (Taggart 2000, 3-4). Populism holds no true political affiliation; it can be found in reactionary conservatism to Marxism. Arguably, populism is more naturally an adjective, a descriptor of an ideology rather than an ideology itself (Taggart 2000, 4). In a massive work, Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, assembled essays from experts of numerous disciplines including politics, economics, cultural studies and history. However, despite its prodigious scope, the book was considered by many to have failed in its task, offering nothing approaching a consistent or systematized definition of populism (Ionescu 1969; Taggart 2000, 15).

Despite these challenges, scholars have published numerous studies of populist rhetoric, as an important and recurrent type of public discourse. Pulitzer prize winner Richard Hofstadter's "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," if not the seminal work is arguably the most important in the study of populist rhetoric (Hofstadter 2008 p.xiii). Hofstadter identified a style indicative of a feeling

of persecution and elaborate conspiracy theories that defined such rhetoric. He distinguished this style from clinical paranoia, which involves an individualized feeling of persecution, instead addressing a cultural paranoia. Whereas in the paranoid style, a group feels a general persecution, that an entire way of life was being undermined (Hofstadter 2008, 3-4). As one of millions being conspired against as opposed to the isolated individual, the spokesperson was somewhat "more rational and much more disinterested," and likely to equate his or her agenda with unselfishness and patriotism which gave rise to righteous indignation on behalf of the masses (Hofstadter 2008, 4).

Hofstadter noting the pejorative nature of the term "paranoid," embraced it because in his view the style "has a greater affinity for bad causes than good." He went on to acknowledge, however, that "sound" issues could be expressed in the paranoid style, observing that "style has to do with the way in which ideas are believed and advocated rather than with the truth or falsity of their content" (Hofstadter 2008, 5). He also noted the recurrence of the mode of expression throughout history, and that it was "all but ineradicable" (Hofstadter 2008, 6).

The paranoid style consists of three contentions. First, a conspiracy exists, operating for more than a generation (Hofstadter 2008, 25). Second, the government has been overrun by these conspirators (Hofstadter 2008, 25-26). Finally, the agents of the conspiracy have co-opted "the whole apparatus of education, religion, the press and the mass media" (Hofstadter 2008, 26). From these contentions, the paranoid spokesperson sees the conflict in "apocalyptic terms" (Hofstadter 2008, 28-29). Good and evil exist in their absolute forms, and a "renegade" will arise as living proof of redemptive possibility, a "born-again" savior who can bring revival (Hofstadter 2008, 34-35).

Hofstadter's work established a narrative pattern consisting of a recurring type of villain and an epic struggle cast in biblical terms. What was oddly absent in the paranoid style was the hero in the story. He referred to the renegade and the spokesperson but never to whom the renegade returned, and for whom the spokesperson spoke. One possible explanation was that "the people" were the true hero in populist rhetoric. In 1975, Dr. Michael McGee focused entirely on the rhetorical

construct of "the people," a frequently used but never clearly identified figure in public discourse (McGee 1975, 236). McGee explained "the people" as a political force, but moved away from the Marxist frames of the bourgeoisie and proletariat of earlier theorists to more general terminology (Laclau 2005). McGee argued that the rhetorical power of "the people" was in the psychologically powerful appeal of inviting the audience to view themselves in a heroic light (McGee 1975, 239). A collective fantasy, the rhetor cast himself or herself as the voice of the people. Despite the terminology, "the people" should not be dismissed. In public discourse its a source of extraordinary suasive power (McGee 1975, 240). Extending the concept into narrative, the appeal of the concept becomes clearer. The deliberate vagueness of this "hero" allows the auditor to readily visualize himself or herself in this larger-than-life role.

In an apparent fulfillment of Laclau's warning, a number of critics focused on specific instances of populism, building theories that were ill-suited to application across numerous examples (Lee 2006, 357). Burkholder's work on populism in Kansas, and Gunderson's study of the Calamity Howlers both provided tremendous insight into those populist movements, but focused so tightly on these examples that they did little to advance a generalizable model (Burkholder 1989; Gunderson 1940). Without a more standardized method of analysis, the unique genus of populist persuasion fell into the same analytical category as pornography: we know it when we see it.

However, Dr. Michael Lee's 2007 essay on populism offered just such a method. Built upon a century of academic study, he noted recurring themes in scholarship to create a more "portable" model. Lee's "populist argumentative frame" consisted of four essential attributes: a well defined heroic public; a vividly detailed villain; "The System," an amalgamation of power centers within a culture; and finally an apocalyptic confrontation as the vehicle to revolutionary change (Lee 2006, 358). These traits were situated within a democratic system of government that had been co-opted and corrupted by exceedingly wealthy and powerful elites, who had warped government to their personal ends, effectively cutting the people out of their own governance.

Historically, the populist argumentative frame has been employed by liberal and conservative groups alike. Lee's frame eschewed political ideology to focus on recurrent elements, providing insight into "the consistencies and contours of a sustained political language with roots located in the nations founding" (Lee 2006, 356-357). Regardless of ideological alignment, populist rhetorics share core characteristics. It is a language of brutal pessimism about the present system, and an inextinguishable hope for a recreation of a simpler past. Once the distractions of political party labels are removed, the narrative becomes clear, and the figure at the center of the action is the hero.

For populism, the hero is a romantic condensation of the attributes of a people as a whole, an everyman possessed of virtue and terrible purpose. The synecdochic "people" are portrayed as "ordinary, simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans" (Lee 2006, 358). Lee's frame provides a starting point to analyze and understand the rhetoric of Elizabeth Warren. However, undergirding all of these elements is a foundation of extraordinary suasive power, which gives populist rhetoric its peculiar strength and prominence in American political discourse: myth.

Hofstadter, McGee, and Lee all referenced the mythic inner workings of populism, but none identified the myth (Hofstadter 2008, 51-52; McGee 1975, 243; Lee 2006, 362). I argue the narrative used in populism is the American Dream myth, and it is, in part, from this sacred and ubiquitous secular myth that the genre draws its power. However, what populism does differently than other genres is to argue that the myth, the dream itself, is endangered in the status quo, thereby placing it at the center of a struggle. The people must defeat a powerful enemy, otherwise, the Dream, and its promise to all of a better life, will be lost. The explicit expression of this promise, and the term "the American dream," first appeared in John Truslow Adams' 1931 work, *The Epic of America*. He defined it as:

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary

and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams 1932, 214-215)

The populist American Dream myth is not concerned with the individual attainment of a better future, *per se*, it is the struggle to secure that potentiality. In the American Dream myth, the boon is a better life through hard-work and enterprise. In the populist American Dream, the boon is the myth *itself*. In other words, populism is the war *for* the American Dream myth.

While the American Dream myth has undergone multiple permutations throughout the nation's history, in each the people of the myth possess the same virtuous character as presented by populists. Populism is a story of how injustice threatens the people. Part of the extraordinary rhetorical power of myth is its culturally constitutive function. For a story to define a culture, it must be not merely widely known, but pervasively believed (DeSantis, 479). To draw from the myth is to draw power from that knowledge and from "a charter of belief, a storehouse of adjustive responses, a kind of cultural furniture, and a language of argument" (Georges and Georges 1968, 230; Placher 1988, 171). If the American Dream is the bright and hopeful story, populism is the dark sequel.

The villain in populism accomplishes two important things. The first, and most critical function of the antagonist is to sharpen and stabilize the image of the people, providing the negative definition of the hero. The enemy in populism unyieldingly hoards power and wealth. This character helps create stark boundaries around the identity of the people (Lee 2006, 359).

In other expressions of the American Dream myth, the hero occupies center stage. Regardless of its iteration and focus, be it Fisher's view of a materialistic American Dream versus a moralistic version, or Rowland's and Jones' individualistic and communitarian dreams, the emphasis remains with the hero and how he/she can achieve that better, brighter tomorrow (Fisher 1973; Rowland and Jones 2007). DeSantis compiled a list of eight themes identified as recurrent in American Dream

mythology, and each holds forth a promise of achievement, from equality and religious freedom to the ability to grow wealthy (DeSantis, 240). Populist rhetoric focuses on powerful elites who threaten the sanctity of the Dream, and evokes the people not as solely recipients of the promise, but as its valiant defenders.

The second function of the antagonist is to create conflict within the story, setting the stage for a great battle. A struggle between good and evil for the sake of the Dream emphasizes values not present within other iterations. Summoning forth the patriotism, self-sacrifice, honor, duty, and courage of the heroic people, populist rhetoric employs the virtues of the Dream myth itself to shore up the citizenry for battle. For many populist movements, the American Dream has been destroyed because of the extraordinary wealth and power of elites who corrupted the system for their own ends. Without a villain, the dream is not threatened. As Harry Boyte explains, populism is defined by "the conviction that an elite has dishonored a historically, culturally, or geographically constituted people, its memories, origins, common territory, ways of life" (Lee 2006, 359).

The system, the combined power centers within the culture, provides the battleground for this Manichean conflict. As defined by Lee, "the 'system' is an amalgamation of sites within the national political and economic order in which power is distributed, governed, and managed" (Lee 2006, 360). In effect, each site provides necessary civic machinery for attaining the American Dream, however, for the populist, elites have corrupted these mechanisms. Wherever the system should ensure justice and equanimity, elites have warped it to ensure their own power and wealth grow while the people's diminish. For example, in the People's Party, populist Lawrence Goodwyn argued that "inside-the-beltway elites co-opt the deliberative processes on which the nation was founded" (Lee 2006, 360) Only the people can reclaim them.

For populists, the people must confront the enemy in an apocalyptic, zero-sum mythic battle that will determine the fate of the exceptional nation. "The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and mate-

rial ruin" ("Populist Party Platform (1892)" 1892). Taken together, these elements indicate that populism has the form of narrative, however, it is the type of narrative that is the critical distinction. Populism's power and resonance with specific audiences come from the most powerful stories of all: myths.

Lee's model provides a principled and robust framework with which to analyze and understand the efficacy of Warren's rhetoric. However, the contextual factors that have influenced and shaped Warren and her audience must first be closely examined.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical and Contextual Factors

As each of Warren's speeches belonged to a larger narrative, three decades of historical and contextual stimuli created that story, producing a consistent and compelling rhetoric. In this chapter, I will discuss the events of her life that most impacted her and her message in three timeframes. First, Warren's childhood played an important part in her ideology regarding equality and economics. Warren's early academic work on bankruptcy law became a "Damascus Road" experience for her, and gave birth to her narrative. Then, the years she served as a policy advisor to elected officials facilitated Warren's development of a populist rhetoric. Finally, the disastrous economic meltdown of 2008 and the collapse of bipartisan cooperation marked the beginnings of her political career and catalyzed her emergence as a populist political figure.

The daughter, the debater, and the professor

In the mid-1940s, Donald Herring planned to stake out his claim on the American Dream with the money he and his wife had scraped together to open a car dealership (Kantor 2010). The dream was dashed when a business partner ran off with the money. Herring turned to what work was available to support his wife and three sons in Oklahoma, a state still reeling from the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression (Toobin 2012; Kreisler 2007). In 1949, their fourth and final child, Elizabeth, was born (Kantor 2010). She grew up with stories of cataclysmic droughts, friends and families fleeing west to find work, and the spare life of privation (Kantor 2010; Kreisler 2007). Warren has described her childhood as teetering on "the ragged edge of the middle class, kind of hanging on at the edges by our fingernails" (Bierman 2012). She says she started working at the age of nine. "Family across the street had a new baby. New baby had colic. I was in business. For thirty-five cents an hour, I would have rocked that baby all night long" (Toobin 2012).

Donald Herring, a largely self-taught pilot, worked as a civilian instructor during the war, but when his business partner stole his life savings, it would be the beginning of a series of setbacks

for the family (Kantor 2010). He took a job as a salesman for Montgomery Ward in Oklahoma City, moving the family to nearby Norman, hoping the children would attend and graduate from the University of Oklahoma, minutes from their home (Bierman 2012). The plans of the family came unraveled when Donald suffered a heart attack. Forced to take a job at half the rate of pay, his increasing medical expenses forced Pauline, his wife, to work in the catalog department at the local Sears department store (Scheiber 2013). The family car was repossessed, replaced by a much older and more run-down vehicle, and Warren and her father silently agreed he would drop her off a block away from her high school so that no one would see how hard times had become for the Herrings (Packer 2013). Pauline's entry into the work force was a "a sign of failure." "I knew to my bones he was humiliated by what he couldn't do," Warren said. "My mother made it clear that he had failed" (Bierman 2012).

As a high school student, Warren found a place to belong, a ticket to college and consequently a means of escape. The debate program, composed of the brightest and most motivated students, allowed her to travel all over the state. Preparation for competition consumed her school nights and most weekends (Bierman 2012). "It is a very intense experience," said Karl Johnson, an attorney in New Mexico who partnered with Warren to win a state championship. "She had a remarkable ability to distill arguments to their core," Johnson said, a talent he still noticed some forty years later. "I have seen her give some of the greatest first affirmative rebuttals in my life" (Bierman 2012). At the age of 16 she graduated high school and was named Oklahoma's top debater, a prize that included a full-ride scholarship to George Washington University (Andrews 2011).

She studied and debated at GWU for two years before marrying her high school sweetheart, Jim Warren. The couple moved to Houston where Jim took a mathematics positions with NASA (Kim 2010). A visit to Oklahoma reunited Warren with members of her high school debate team (Kreisler 2007). They persuaded her that she should attend law school, and around her daughter's second birthday, she enrolled at Rutgers Law School in New Jersey, where the couple moved for

Jim's work (E. Warren; Andrews 2011). After graduation, an unexpected opening resulted in Warren working as a substitute lecturer for her alma mater. Another transfer relocated the Warren's to Houston again, where she accepted a tenure track position (Kreiser 2007). After she and Warren divorced, Jay Westbrook, a professor at the University of Texas law school, on the recommendation of a colleague who had seen Warren teach, invited her to join the faculty there (Andrews 2011; Toobin 2012). She moved her family to Austin, where her research would take a turn that would change the course of her life.

In 1978, Congress passed legislation that altered the bankruptcy code in the U.S., making it easier for companies and individuals to file bankruptcy. Warren looked for information about the effects of the change but found no reliable reports (Toobin 2012). She and two other academics, Teresa Sullivan, a sociologist and the group's expert at test design, and Westbrook, began to compile data on who filed for bankruptcy in this country and why they filed (Kreiser 2007). For a decade they combed through courthouse records all over the country, interviewed judges and lawyers and sometimes the debtors themselves (Traister 2011; Zengerle 2011). The trio compiled and analyzed the data, publishing their findings in a landmark 1989 book titled *As We Forgive Our Debtors* (Sullivan 1989). What they found defied expectation.

"I set out to prove they were all a bunch of cheaters," Warren said. "My take on this, my thrust, what I was going to do, is I was going to expose these people who were taking advantage of the rest of us by hauling off to bankruptcy and just charging debts that they really could repay, or who'd been irresponsible in running up debts" (Kreiser 2007). The bootstrap ideal that hard work and determination vouchsafed a person's achievement of the American Dream, an ideal the researchers personally believed as did most of the country, proved to be false in the face of their research (Sullivan 1989; Scheiber 2013). The results of the study would fundamentally alter her political views, and create the theme for the rest of her career, both in academia and politics. "These were hardworking middle-class families who by and large had lost jobs, gotten sick, had family breakups," Warren

stated. "There was no option to bankruptcy except to just stay deep in debt for the rest of your life; they would never pay these debts off" (Kreisler 2007). "Bankruptcy is a middle-class phenomenon," said Westbrook. "Previously, people had thought it was for day laborers and housemaids" (Toobin 2012). The leading causes were job loss and divorce followed by illness and an inability to make mortgage payments (Andrews 2011).

The revelation of her research very likely impacted her all the more because of her childhood. "I watched Obama get completely obsessed by health care reform . . . and realized it was all about his mother on her death bed," said a longtime Warren friend. "For her, it was her father" (Scheiber 2013). "I learned early on what debt means, how vulnerable it makes people, what the security of owning a home means," Warren said (Scheiber 2013). The study altered her ideology and the course of her work, but at the time, the findings did nothing to compel her to enter the public sphere. "It changed my vision, but it certainly didn't make me want to talk about it in any public sense," she said (Kreisler 2007). That impetus would come five years later.

In 1994, Congress created a commission on bankruptcy, to overhaul the laws for the first time since 1978, and President Bill Clinton appointed former Oklahoma Senator Mike Synar as head. Synar, who had debated against her in high school, asked Warren to guide the group as none of the political appointees were bankruptcy specialists (Kreisler 2007; Andrews 2011; Toobin 2012). At first, Warren declined, citing her profound distaste for politics, but Synar assured her he would shield her from that part of the commission. Synar was soon after diagnosed with brain cancer, and died within months (Kreisler 2007). For Warren this was a wakeup call. "I just looked around and said, look, either I step up or nobody does. And that's when I waded into the thick of it and started taking much of my research and translating it much more into public policy: here's what we need, here's why we need it, here's how it connects up with the policy decisions that we have to make" (Kreisler 2007). In 1995, the same year she became the Leo Gottlieb Professor of Law at Harvard, she joined

the committee, and her political education began (E. Warren; Kreisler 2007; "About the NBRC" 1997).

The financial sector sought a tightening of the laws, making it harder for companies and individuals to file bankruptcy, and it fell to Warren to challenge them (Zengerle 2011). Some of the senators on the committee had accepted large sums of money from credit card companies; an army of lobbyists descended on the members to influence the outcome. The reality of Washington differed sharply from that of the citizenry (Kreisler 2007). And so, the reality of these families' lives had to be reshaped to tell a politically acceptable story, that bankruptcy is the fault of these families who are in financial trouble (Kreisler 2007). "I wish that story were true," Warren said, "but the data are not just close on this question, the data are just overwhelming on this question, that that is just simply not the truth. (Kreisler 2007)

From that point forward, Warren began to challenge the narratives of those she perceived as warping reality with a counter-narrative of a desperately struggling middle-class against whom the American economic system was "rigged" (Stein 2009). She published books on the topic and continued her academic pursuit of factually disproving the belief that the system only worked against the lazy and idle (Zengerle 2011; Toobin 2012).

Sought out by Hillary Rodham Clinton in 1997 to explain the true stakes behind another proposal to alter bankruptcy code, Warren laid out the story of the dwindling, struggling American middle-class (Toobin 2012). By the conclusion of the lengthy meeting, the professor felt as though the average family had an advocate in Clinton. One of Bill Clinton's final acts as president was to veto the bill. However, after Rodham Clinton won a Senate seat for the state of New York, the bill resurfaced to be put before a Republican Senate, House and Presidency. (Kreisler 2007) Clinton supported the bill, influenced, by Warren's reckoning, by the extraordinarily powerful financial sector of New York. "If Hilary Clinton couldn't resist the pull, the demands, of a well-financed lobbying group like that, then who would?" Warren asked. "Would there be a single senator or a single

representative left to be there to do the people's business?" Clinton ultimately denounced the bill, but it still passed. Warren applauded the change in position, but had seen first hand the power of the financial lobby (Kreisler 2007; Zengerle 2011; Toobin 2012; Andrews 2011).

The loss of the decade long "Bankruptcy Wars," as she called them, brought tough lessons (Toobin 2012). "Bankruptcy is a complicated law to explain, and most people don't see themselves as potentially future bankrupts," she says. "It was easier for [the financial industry] to keep the fight on a bumper-sticker level" (Zengerle 2011). Drawing on her skills as a debater and her time as a professor, when the next battle arose, she entered the fray with her trademark succinctness (Zengerle 2011; Bierman 2012). A former student described her teaching style at Harvard as "Socrates with a machine gun," while her second husband, Bruce Mann, referred to her as a grandmother who could make grown men cry (Kantor 2010). She brought that complete rhetorical arsenal to her next foray into public life. The economic crisis of 2008 sent Mrs. Warren back to Washington.

The Great Recession

In the summer of 2007, the world's third largest bank, PNB Paribas, blocked withdrawals from three of its hedge funds because of what it called a "complete evaporation of liquidity" leading to several central banks flooding the markets with capital (Elliott 2012). The housing market bubble in the United States had already begun to burst, and the financial market was "up to its eyeballs in investments linked to the American housing market" (Tully 2006; Elliott 2012). By March of 2007, the sub-prime mortgage market, mortgages targeted at people with blemished credit ratings who would otherwise be unable to finance a home, had collapsed, causing foreclosures to skyrocket, and twenty-five sub-prime lenders to exit the industry, announce staggering losses, put themselves up for sale, or declare bankruptcy (Hovanesian and Goldstein 2007; Trejos 2007). The extent of the disaster would take time to discover. As home values fell precipitously, so did American securities tied to the real estate market creating an international credit crisis (Trejos 2007; Glass 2008; Elliott 2012). The global financial sector became a powder keg that would explode with the September 2008 an-

nouncement that Lehman Brothers Holding, LLP would file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history (Mamudi 2008). What followed would be the near collapse of the banking industry, and the second largest man-made economic disaster of all time. The crisis would cost tens of millions of jobs and wipe out an estimated \$50 trillion of wealth out of the global economy ("Stephen Schwarzman: 45 Percent of World's Wealth Destroyed" 2009).

A financial calamity of this magnitude resulted in no end of finger-pointing as people around the world sought to find the responsible parties. In the words of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission:

The Commission concluded that this crisis was avoidable. It found widespread failures in financial regulation; dramatic breakdowns in corporate governance; excessive borrowing and risk-taking by households and Wall Street; policy makers who were ill prepared for the crisis; and systemic breaches in accountability and ethics at all levels. (Angelides 2011 pp.xv-xxvii)

The exhausting complexity of the crisis served as a warning. No single party carries all the blame.

Many, but not all, consumers fully understood the risks they were taking with exotic mortgages, but took them anyway. Many, but not all, mortgage companies became application factories with no regard for the qualifications of the borrower. Many, but not all, commercial banks falsified documents to make billions in profits. The breakdown in corporate governance and regulation enabled the creation of massive global banking conglomerates, and failed to sufficiently scrutinize the industry.

Elected officials raked in campaign contributions from Wall Street and turned a blind eye to wrongdoing. All of these parties and more share blame for the disaster.

The destruction wrought by the disaster demanded a solution. The crisis resulted in the loss of \$16.4 trillion in American household wealth (Isidore 2011). "I think the absolute decline in household wealth resulted in a decline in confidence about the future," said Barbara Whitehead, director of the Templeton Center for Thrift and Generosity (Isidore 2011). Consumers reached, in some cases too far, for the dream of home ownership. Banks capitalized on this desire, and shadow

banks fed off of both. It all came at a great fiscal and personal cost. As of March 2014, only 61 percent of Americans believed home ownership signified the American dream, a drop of 18 percent. The Great Recession had materially changed, for many Americans, the American Dream itself. In the years following the collapse, Warren would focus on finding a solution.

From oversight to office

Immediately after Lehman Brothers announced its insolvency, governments around the world jumped into action to attempt to curb the collapse of the world economy (Elliott 2012). In November of 2008, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid appointed Warren to chair the Congressional Oversight Panel, a group who would oversee the implementation of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, a \$700 billion bailout of America's financial industry (O'Connor 2008). Neil Barofsky, inspector general for oversight of the big bank bailouts said of Warren "she was Harry Reid's pick for the TARP oversight board. It was a bit politicized, and I think there was a real question mark going into the change of Administrations about whether, once Obama and Geithner took over she would be as aggressive as she had been. That question was very swiftly answered, because she was still a relentless advocate for the taxpayer" (Toobin 2012). When she found that the U.S. Treasury Department's description of where the hundreds of billions of TARP dollars were going and to what effect was "very skewed toward the positive and often incomprehensible." Warren became relentless (Andrews 2011). She appeared on national television programs criticizing the opacity of the Treasury's dealings, and the infamous huge bank bonuses awarded after the largest financial institutions accepted billions from the government. "She was particularly scathing about the difficulties of the Administration's program to help homeowners avoid foreclosures," Barofsky recalls (Toobin 2012). "We only have three months left with hundreds of thousands of families facing foreclosure," Warren told Geithner at a 2010 TARP committee hearing. "Is it time to rethink whether or not a mortgage-foreclosure-prevention program that is based on a group of servicers whom you describe as having done a 'terrible job' is a program that perhaps should be redesigned?" (Nasiripour 2010).

As she and the committee gathered data on the state of the American economy, Warren began to champion the creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) (Mogilnicki, Malpass, and Warren 2013, 557). The proposed organization would consolidate Federal regulation and mandate simpler and clearer banking documents, mortgage contracts, and credit card applications. Following the announcement of the agency's proposed creation, one of the most powerful business lobbies in the nation, the United States Chamber of Commerce, announced it would "spend whatever it takes" to block the CFPB, a far from idle threat as \$1.3 billion was spent on lobbyists to fight financial reform from 2009 to 2010 (Andrews 2011). The powers arrayed against Warren included everyone from Wall Street, to the Republican Party, to members of Obama's inner circle, particularly Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, and former Chief of Staff William Daley (Andrews 2011; Nasiripour 2011). Emanuel reportedly told Nevada Democrat Bob Nelson, when discussing whether the Obama administration would nominate Warren to head the CFPB, "we don't like her either" (Nasiripour 2011). Wall Street regarded her as "the Devil Incarnate" (Andrews 2011). What made Warren particularly dangerous is she knew what she was talking about. A former congressional staffer described the power of Wall Street in Washington as partly built on the fact that the esoteric jargon of finance could only be effectively understood by Wall Street itself, but Warren understood. "She understands the information as well as the top players in the business," said New York Democrat representative Carolyn Maloney, a knowledge she deployed consistently and mercilessly (Andrews 2011).

In July of 2010, as the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act, of which the CFPB was a part, became law, Republicans and lobbyists stridently opposed Warren as the new agency's chief, claiming she would be an "overzealous regulator" (Nasiripour 2011). Believing Warren had no chance at confirmation in the Senate, President Barack Obama nominated Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray in a July 2011 press conference with Warren at this side (Sutton 2011). Others believe that Warren's continued pressure on Geithner during TARP hearings, particularly given the major role he

would play in appointing a head for the new bureau, destroyed her chances at the position (Toobin 2012). Cordray took the position on a recess appointment in January 2012. At this point, Warren began to consider challenging Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown in the 2012 election. A month after Cordray's announced nomination to the CFPB, Warren's "stump speech" hit YouTube, and on September 14, 2011, she announced her candidacy.

Warren's visibility began to increase following her 2008 appointment to oversee the Toxic Asset Relief Program. She appeared on The Daily Show in 2009, and every year hence (E. Warren 2009; E. Warren 2010; E. Warren 2011; E. Warren 2012). Her unflinching pressure on the Obama Administration, including hearings that embarrassed both Geithner and the President, despite her desire to head up the CFPB, only endeared her further to progressives (Toobin 2012). Here was a woman who refused to back down knowing that it would cost her politically. The YouTube video, however, launched her into the public eye. When asked about the YouTube video of her speech in Andover and why it resonated so strongly with the public, Warren replied "because it was right. Because people said, 'Oh, that's something we haven't talked about.' If I state it in a way that helps other people state it as well, that's what advancing a conversation is about." (Zengerle 2011). Many in the press agreed. "There is no bigger star in the Democratic firmament than Brown's opponent, Elizabeth Warren," wrote Mark Warren in Esquire. "An Okie kid turned Harvard law professor, Warren is probably the most articulate populist in the country at the moment, and she describes in simple and powerful terms what has happened to working people and the middle class at the hands of the greedy class over the past thirty years" (M. Warren 2012).

Progressives seized upon the Andover speech. "In one week, Elizabeth Warren has eloquently expressed the case for progressive government that voters have been waiting years for," said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, as she urged Democrats across the country "study and emulate her message" (Camia 2011). MSNBC contributor Steve Benen stated that Warren expressed the social contract with a clarity and accessibility few Democrats have

ever achieved (Camia 2011). Benen went on to say that the video demonstrated why Warren has such a devoted base, and that if her story-telling methods were emulated by other Democrats "our discourse would be vastly less mind-numbing" (Benen 2011). Leftist blogger Greg Sargent enthused "as this video shows, Warren is very good at making the case for progressive economics in simple, down-to-earth terms. Despite her professorial background, she sounds like she's telling a story. She came across as unapologetic and authoritative, without a hint of the sort of defensiveness you hear so often from other Democrats when they talk about issues involving taxation and economic fairness" (Sargent 2011).

The rapturous response to the Andover speech extended beyond the media and her war chest expanded to over \$27 million in campaign contributions, a figure eclipsing any other campaign in Massachusetts history (Toobin 2012). The magnitude of that figure is less important than the story nested within the money. In the first weeks of her campaign, Warren raised \$3.1 million, 70 percent of which came from out of state donors, and 96 percent from donations of \$100 or less (Traister 2011, 32). "Elizabeth Warren did not end up in the Senate despite taking a hard-line approach to Wall Street; she was elected almost entirely because of it," said Kevin Roose, in an editorial in *New York Magazine* (Roose 2013). Her unequivocal condemnation of Wall Street had, in this instance, not damned her to obscurity because of a lack of campaign funds. It instead motivated people to support her, and her unflinching message, in vast numbers. "But she is [...] talking to Wall Street in a way it's not used to hearing from elected officials," continued Roose. "And it's making her a rising star in the Democratic Party. Bankers should probably stop griping, and start getting used to it" (Roose 2013).

"Our job is to let Elizabeth be Elizabeth," said Doug Rubin, "and to build a campaign around her." A former top adviser to Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Rubin became Warren's chief political strategist. "Normally when I talk to people who are thinking about running for office, it's all logistics: How much money am I going to have to raise? How much time will I have to be out

on the trail?" he said. "But she spent the first half-hour talking about why she wanted to do it, the issues she cared about. I was very impressed by that" (Zengerle 2011). Rubin is not alone in his admiration. Noam Scheiber of *The New Republic* argued that Warren's campaign, particularly her "prodigious" public relations efforts, "isn't that she's especially taken with the idea of media stardom. It's that she is relentlessly, perhaps ruthlessly, maybe even a bit messianically, focused on advancing her policy agenda. Everything else is merely instrumental" (Scheiber 2013).

Arguably the most powerful instrument at her disposal was her skill to find the core of complex issues and express them clearly and precisely, a skill she has continued to refine since the debate days of her youth. Her discourse, described as "palatable and understandable," "provocative and assertive," "informed and measured populism," "eloquent and appealing," continued to enthrall progressives and Democrats ("Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). President Obama incorporated the same ideas into a campaign speech delivered in Roanoke, VA on July 13, 2012, which would explode into controversy (Obama 2012). "If you have a business - you didn't build that," a line in the speech, was ripped out of context and became a primary attack against Obama and Warren by the Republican Party (G. Johnson 2012). The theme of the second day of the Republican National Convention in Charlotte, NC became "We built that" (Hertzberg 2012).

In the end, it all came down to which narrative, Brown's and the GOP's boot-strap narrative, or Warren's and the Democrats' social contract, appealed most to undecided voters. Polls showed very tight if not unpredictable races for both Warren and Obama up until election day (M. Warren 2012). Once the dust settled, Warren had unseated Brown by five percent of the vote ("US Senate - 2012 Massachusetts Election Results - Brown vs. Warren - Boston.com" 2013). Massachusetts' long Democratic tradition, the seat Brown won in 2010 formerly belonging to the iconic Edward Kennedy, likely played a factor (Cooper 2010). However, Warren became the state's first female Senator in Washington, while only four women have ever served the state in the House of Representatives. Brown's opponent in the 2010 election was also a woman.

Staying on message

Warren had built a political career dealing almost exclusively with the Great Recession and what actions were needed to prevent it from happening again. Within a month of taking the oath of office, Warren was already taking people to task about their involvement, or lack thereof, in the crisis. She was incensed that prosecutors had not gone after the big banks (Story 2011). Why had no top executives even been charged for their roles in such a massive economic crisis? The answers to that question were nearly as complex as the causes of the recession.

The Great Recession resulted in no end of finger pointing and blame passing. It is not surprising that the banking industry, whose woes dominated media reports, garnered the lion's share of the accusations (Norris 2013). Ignorance on the part of bankers, risky but not illegal behavior by others and an array of other excuses were important factors. However, other banking activities could not so easily be excused. On December 11, 2012 Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer announced that the DOJ would not pursue criminal charges against any individual from banking giant HSBC (Protest and Silver-Greenberg 2012). The decision met with outrage from multiple quarters because HSBC's criminal activities went beyond the pale, including money laundering for Mexican drug cartels, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Russian gangsters, and under the table deals with North Korea, Iran and Sudan to help them circumvent international sanctions (Taibbi 2013). "They violated every goddamn law in the book," said Jack Blum, an attorney and former Senate investigator. "They took every imaginable form of illegal and illicit business" (Taibbi 2013).

Failure to prosecute was a demonstration of the truth behind "too big to jail." "Had the US authorities decided to press criminal charges," said Breuer, "HSBC would almost certainly have lost its banking license in the US, the future of the institution would have been under threat and the entire banking system would have been destabilized." HSBC, then as now, ranks as the largest bank on the planet (Touryalai 2013). To pull its license would then remove the largest bank from the world's largest investment market (Protest and Silver-Greenberg 2012). To claim such an act would "destabi-

lize" the banking system would likely be a gross understatement. A week later, Breuer announced another settlement with Swiss-banking giant UBS, a self-admitted architect of an antitrust price-fixing scam that involved hundreds of trillions dollars (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013, 62). Part of the arrangement required a subsidiary of the company to plead guilty to one count of felony wire fraud, thus shielding the larger parent company and not endangering its charter (Protest 2012). "Our goal here," Breuer said when announcing the settlement, "is not to destroy a major financial institution" (Taibbi 2013).

The criminal activity did not stop with the economic meltdown of 2008. The London Inter-bank Offered Rate (LIBOR) is the interest rate that banks pay or expect to pay when borrowing money from each other (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013). If banks are confident about the health of the system, they report a low number. LIBOR was the second most important interest rate benchmark in the world, after the US Federal Reserve Prime Rate. LIBOR provided the interest rate index for a host of financial products such as student loans, financial derivatives, and perhaps most damningly ARMs (McCoy). US Regulatory agencies began an investigation of potential tampering with the rate, and in June 2012, reached a settlement with Barclays Bank (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013). In the end, every major bank in the world was implicated in the scandal, a systemic manipulation of a global interest rate standard that underpinned over \$350 trillion in loans and investments (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013; "Fixed Harmony; the LIBOR Scandal" 2013).

In May of 2014, the DOJ announced an arrangement with Credit Suisse that Attorney General Eric Holder touted as proof that the department was in fact tough on banks (Schoenberg and Voreacos 2014). The bank pled guilty to criminal charges of tax evasion having provided illegal tax shelters for wealthy clients (Eavis 2014). It was the first time since the crisis of 2008 that a banking giant faced criminal charges (Protest and Silver-Greenberg 2014). The details of the deal revealed the DOJ's new plan to try the world's largest banks without opening the companies to potential loss of the licenses. A five-person SEC committee voted unanimously to exempt Credit Suisse from that pos-

sibility (Kwak 2014). In essence, the company would plead guilty, pay several billion dollars in fines, but would continue to operate (Michael 2014). The DOJ expected to use this as a template for future dealings (Eavis 2014). This type of plea highlights one key issue with going after companies instead of individuals: companies can't go to jail (Norris 2014). Critics of the agreement claimed that the DOJ was still too soft on the big banks that played a large role in bringing about the Great Recession (Eavis 2014).

The Credit Suisse deal differed from earlier actions only in certain details. From the completions of the first investigations into banking malfeasance, the various regulatory agencies of the government pressed for settlements with the banks. As part of these agreements, the banks neither had to admit nor deny wrongdoing. Five years after the crash, the only change in policy was the banks had to admit guilt and pay the fine to avoid criminal trial. From the outside, it appeared to many that the watchdogs of Wall Street seemed to have been corrupted by the money-handlers they were supposed to keep in line. Accusations of corruption, incompetence, cronyism, and worse circulated through the press and amongst the public (Kaufman 2013; Eisinger 2014; Zamansky 2013).

A populist collision

Moving from oversight into public office, Warren entered a hostile political climate. Just as the Great Recession effectively jump-started her political career, another populist movement sprang up in the aftermath. However, the Tea Party was an ideological photographic negative of Warren and liberal progressives.

On February 19, 2009 from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, a live television broadcast would set off a chain of events that would have profound impact on national politics. Earlier that day, President Obama unveiled the \$75 billion Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan that would refinance millions of mortgages, including sub-prime mortgages, to help borrowers avoid foreclosure (“Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan Fact Sheet” 2009). In response to the announcement, CNBC financial editor Rick Santelli proclaimed that once again the federal govern-

ment had overstepped its authority forcing the American tax-payers to "subsidize losers' mortgages." In his rant, that went viral on the online media sharing site YouTube, he called for traders to hold a "tea party" and dump the derivatives into the Chicago River on July 1 of that year (McGrath 2010). Within 24-hours of its broadcast, the monicker "Tea Party" had been firmly and permanently seized by a conservative political caucus that would profoundly influence governance in the United States (Langman 2012). The people who made up the Tea Party movement armed themselves with vitriolic rhetoric and set their sights on politics at all levels (Berlet 2012). Angry at elites and consumed with an irrational fear that President Obama and all Democrats were socialists, the grass roots phenomenon became a major political force (Berlet 2012).

In less than one year, the Tea Party moved from obscure populism to a major political power. The mid-term election of 2010 provided the first battleground, and the casualties came from both parties. The extremists took aim not solely at Democratic Congresspeople but at any Republicans suspected of working with the President. A disturbing but illuminating moment occurred in Florida. Then Governor Charlie Crist, presiding over a state deeply hit by the housing market crash, endorsed the \$800 billion dollar stimulus package proposed by a newly elected Obama. The night before the congressional vote, Crist was photographed hugging the new President (Terris 2014). Marco Rubio then launched himself into a campaign against Crist for the Florida United States Senate seat, a move scoffed at by many as Crist had a 30 point lead in the polls (Drehle 2010). Rubio relentlessly cast his opponent as a dissenter, having been "co-opted" by Big Government. This scorched-earth strategy of attacking incumbent Republicans as "aiders and abettors" played out in numerous races across the country (Barstow 2010). Many long-standing and previously respected public servants were shown the door, as a new fundamentalist breed of Republican marched to Washington (Zeleny and Hulse 2010).

The resolve of the Tea Party to never compromise with the perceived enemy created a fear among mainstream Republicans. The message came through loud and clear: if you concede to the

enemy in any point, no matter how small, if you are perceived to possess any regard for the President other than hatred, you will be voted out (Klein 2013). During the campaign, Indiana Republican Senate candidate Richard Behney told Tea Party supporters that if they didn't win the Congress "I'm cleaning my guns and getting ready for the big show. And I'm serious about that, and I bet you are, too" (Barstow 2010).

When the 112th Congress convened for the first time on January 3, 2011, an inevitable course had been set. The House of Representatives had reverted to Republican control, and Democratic margin in the Senate had dwindled ("2010 U.S. Midterm" 2010). The Tea Party caucus was a major power. The brinkmanship of this new faction found no clearer demonstration than in the showdown over the United State Government's debt ceiling. The far right argued that the ceiling should not be raised and thus allow the government to go further into debt (Story 2011). This position came under fire not merely from the left, but from financial institutions and publications ("The Struggle Continues; Raising the Debt Ceiling" 2013). To fail to raise the ceiling would, for the first time in the country's history, force the government to default on its debt ("The Generation Gap and the 2012 Election" 2011). GOP representatives refused to increase the ceiling without extending the controversial tax decreases enacted by former President George W. Bush ("Elizabeth Warren's Appeal" 2011). Ultimately, President Obama reached an agreement with the House Republicans which left the tax breaks in place, but the damage had been done (HertzbergHendrik 2011). The midnight-hour agreement caused Standard & Poor to decrease its credit rating from the highest, AAA, to AA, citing specifically the inability of the Republican controlled House of Representatives to compromise and work effectively as a governing body. It was the first time in U.S. History that the nation's credit rating had been lowered (Goldfarb 2011). The effect sent the world stock markets into decline. The most shocking and damning statement in the entire affair came from Senate Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell: "Some of our members may have thought the default issue was a hostage you might take

a chance at shooting. Most of us didn't think that. What we did learn is this -- it's a hostage worth ransoming" (Avlon 2012).

Conclusion

The historical and social forces that shaped Warren's life and her message provide important insight into her rhetoric. In this section, I have chronicled her difficult childhood and the toll that economic hardship had on her family and herself. Second, I examined Warren's academic career which ignited her passion to defend the American middle class. Third, I presented her political progression from a reluctant committee member, to financial oversight of the federal government's multi-billion dollar bail out of a failing global banking system, and the events that led to her successful run for the Senate. Finally, I discussed the political climate and the gridlock between Democrats and Republicans she faced as a new Senator.

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis

The Andover Stump Speech, the Senate Committee on Banking hearing, and the Government Shutdown speech varied widely from each other in terms of form, but each seamlessly fit into the larger and very consistent narrative Warren had been crafting for more than a decade. In attempting to account for the resonance of these speeches, the idea of narrative becomes key, as each speech presented heroes and villains and a dire conflict. For this reason, Lee's populist argumentative frame is the strongest analytical tool available. In what follows, the four elements of Lee's frame will be applied to all three speeches. I will also isolate the characteristics of the Communitarian American Dream myth in Warren's speeches.

In the first section, I argue that Warren consistently framed the American people in heroic terms just as Lee's model suggested, and show how this frame directly related to the Communitarian American Dream myth. Second, I will demonstrate that in the three speeches Warren presented a villain who worked against the people to do great harm, and explain how this antagonist marked a unique facet of a Populist American Dream. Next, I examine Warren's perspective on the state of the institutions and structures that constituted the American system, and her plan to restore it. Finally, I define the great battle in her rhetoric and explain why this element play a key role in adding to the resonance of the story.

The Heroic People

The protagonists of populism are the American people, and in populist rhetoric they embody specific characteristics: they are "simple, honest, hard-working, God-fearing, and patriotic Americans" (Lee 2006, 358-359). Defining the people as collectively noble is the first component, because if the audience cannot identify themselves as this hero the message's power is diminished. The rhetor must weave together this vision of the heroic people for his or her audience so that they as "a group

of individuals, reacts with a desire to participate in that dramatic vision, to become 'the people' described" by the speaker (McGee 1975, 239-240).

Values, which Lee described as "intersecting images of the Biblical virtues of the 'meek' and the ideal Horatio Alger citizen," distinguish the hero of populist rhetoric from other types of heroes. Rowland and Jones, drawing from the work of Northrop Frye, describe a "romantic hero" within the American Dream myth who possesses none of the super-human grandeur of larger-than-life heroes like Achilles or even the American founders, but is, instead, "an ordinary person made great by the values he/she shares with other Americans" (Rowland and Jones 2007, 427). Further, for the attainment, the realization of the American Dream, the hero of the story "must be an ordinary person, who accomplishes great things because his/her actions are motivated by values he/she shares with other Americans. The ordinary person in a sense becomes extraordinary, not because he/she is inherently heroic, but because he/she fully enacts the values at the heart of the American Dream" (Rowland and Jones 2007, 431). Thus, the heroic people of populist rhetoric and American Dream mythology are so closely paralleled as to be synonymous.

In this section, I demonstrate recurrent themes within Warren's rhetoric that portrayed the people as heroic. I also argue that she placed deliberate and important emphasis on the collectivity of the people, de-emphasizing the lone wolf, ruggedly individualistic ideal of the prevailing American Dream myth of the past three decades. This plurality, I contend, demonstrates not only the populist nature of her rhetoric but also her use of the Communitarian American Dream myth as the suasive engine behind her message and its appeal.

Warren referred to the American people in a number of ways. "We," "together," and other collective nouns comprise the bulk of her references to the people, and from within that larger grouping other ideas coalesce. First, she portrayed the people as hard-working and industrious. In the Andover speech, she mentioned the achievements of the entrepreneur. "Now look, you built a factory and it turned into something terrific, or a great idea - God bless. Keep a big hunk of it" (E.

Warren 2013c). In context of the rest of the speech, this generic businessperson has accomplished great things and should be proud of the accomplishment. However, this was also a specific instance of her deliberately de-emphasizing the individual and focusing on the community as a whole. "There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own" (E. Warren 2013c). The success of the individual only occurred "because of the work the rest of us did" (E. Warren 2013c). The collective will and effort of the people created the infrastructure upon which the greatness of the nation grew. Education, transportation, security, all of these allowed individuals to attain greatness, but only came to be because of the largesse of the people. Out of societal effort, the new prodigies will emerge, "the next kid who comes along" (E. Warren 2013c). From the Senate floor, she restated these productive traits: "We are a nation of innovators and entrepreneurs, growing small businesses and thriving big businesses" (henceforth, passages from the Senate floor speech will be referenced only by paragraph number from the official transcript of the speech on the Senator's website)(E. Warren 2013e, 13). Echoing the social contract of the Andover speech, she continued to press the idea of success predicated on communal involvement. "We all decided to invest in public education so that businesses have skilled workers and a kid with an idea can create the next breakthrough company. We all decided to invest in basic science so there is a great pipeline of ideas to create our future" (13). Hard work, entrepreneurship, and creativity remained prominent values in both the Andover and Senate speeches, but she consistently counter-balanced these individualistic traits with community.

This was Warren's social contract, and her explanation as to how it works. The government was not an independent force, a shadowy organization which stifled the people. It was the people, and it accomplished a great many things on their behalf, because "nobody in this country got rich on his own" (E. Warren 2013c). In broad terms, a social contract is a transactional exchange. The people give up rights for the benefits afforded by a collective. In nature, humans have absolute freedom, freedom to kill, to steal, etc. These "rights" are surrendered to the community in exchange for protection from others exercising the same rights. The details and implications vary by philosophical

model, but Warren stated her view very succinctly. The people surrendered part of the fruits of their labor in taxes to a democratic government to create the infrastructure of modern society. In the speech she cited several examples: police, highways, education, and so forth. From this societal foundation, individuals had the opportunity to innovate, to build businesses and attain wealth. However, the efforts of the collective engendered that opportunity. If the entrepreneur failed to pay back into the government for the maintenance and advancement of the infrastructure, he or she violated the social contract. The social contract reappeared in the Senate floor speech as well. The people created a better world together. "But our people succeed, our country succeeds because we have all come together to put public institutions and infrastructure together" (13). She listed the accomplishments great and small: safer medicines, safer streets, safer cars, and better education (16). In Warren's view, this was a recurring and deliberate act of the people, and a testament to their work ethic. "These achievements aren't magic. They didn't simply occur on their own or through dumb luck. In each instance we made a choice as a people to come together" (14).

It was an elegant and effective expression of an idea that many struggled to express. Some attacked the Andover speech as "pro-government" which it assuredly was, but others attacked it as "anti-business," a charge that exposed the roots of a mythological conflict. Examination of the text yielded no "anti-business" message, per se. Warren expressed an iteration of the American Dream myth that conflicted with what has been the dominant version for the past thirty years. The Communitarian American Dream held that the combined work and effort of the American people allow individuals to attain the dream of a better future (Rowland and Jones 2007, 434). The most famous recent proponent of this myth was Barrack Obama (Rowland and Jones 2007, 434). The individualistic variant of the myth had been dominant since Ronald Reagan (Rowland and Jones 2007, 432). In his version, the American Dream could be attained through individual effort, ambition, and drive (Rowland and Jones 2007, 432-433). In his first inaugural address, Reagan famously stated, "It is no coincidence that our present troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion

in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government" (Reagan 1981). Thus began an era of deregulation and what would evolve to become an "anti-government" attitude. Twenty years later, Grover Norquist's vision of a government small enough that he could "drown it in a bathtub: demonstrated the extreme to which many conservatives had taken Reagan's original ideas (Liasson). In contrast with this view, in the Senate speech, Warren equated the government with the people, a rhetorical algebra that reframed the debate. "In our democracy, government is just how we describe all of the things that 'we the people' have already decided to do together. We all decided to pass laws and put cops on the beat so that no one steals your purse on Main Street or your pension on Wall Street" (13). By her reasoning, the government could never be viewed separately from the people, and to do so would not be merely anti-government but against the people.

Using an interesting strategy in the Senate speech, Warren spoke of the failures of the people, and in so doing humanized the hero, carefully avoiding creating a paragon. "People make mistakes, ideas fail, and sometimes we get things wrong" (22). However, she immediately transmuted this fallibility into the admirable trait of resilience. "But our response isn't to give up. Our response isn't to sit back and say: I told you so. We aren't a nation of quitters. Our response, the American response, is to fix it, to make government work better. We constantly redesign and reimagine and improve on what we do together" (23). She efficiently embraced the imperfect and by juxtaposing it with a no-quit, hardworking attitude, the heroic people could overcome any obstacle. This also suggested the creativity and inventiveness of the people to solve problems not as individuals, but as a group.

Warren almost exclusively referred to the American people using plural or collective nouns such as "democracy," "together," "families," and "we the people" in all three speeches. In her speech on the eve of the 2013 government shutdown, the most frequently used words were: we, government, our, together, people, democracy and nation. She also forwarded her definition of government as "all of the things that 'we the people' have already decided to do together" (11). She then outlined the three functions of government as she saw them. "Our government has three basic functions:

provide for the national defense; put in place rules of the road, such as speed limits, and bank regulations that are fair and transparent; and build the things together that none of us can build alone--roads, power grids, schools--the things that give everyone a chance to succeed" (12). She reified her primary political agenda, economic regulation, as well as the Andover social contract, but perhaps most importantly, she very succinctly laid out the Communitarian American Dream myth.

The interchangeability between "the people" and democracy drew the battle lines in the government shutdown crisis of 2013. Warren positioned herself with the people, and by extension democracy. Republicans, the Tea Party and the "extremists" that were defined as being opposed to the people's democracy (24). She also made it clear which side she believed would win. Regardless of the extreme tactics of those who would disempower the people, democracy would prevail, the people would emerge victorious. Populism would win the day.

Ionescu and Gellner noted the protean nature of populism, and its seemingly contradictory forms. One group could employ it to advance a conservative to reactionary agenda, while another could forward a liberal or progressive ideology. However, in American populism, recurrent values such as hard-work, patriotism, integrity surfaced again and again. Americans have long used terms such as "democracy," "we the people," "America" and "the United States," among others, interchangeably as sources of great pride and emblems of American Exceptionalism. After a decade of hawkish jingoism, a "thoughtless nationalism," Warren challenged how we defined patriotism and Americanism, by repetition of the plural over the singular (Robbins 2013).

As she defined the heroic people throughout these three speeches, Warren employed the values that scholars look for as part of populism. The hard-working, industrious, creative, generous, resilient people were mentioned again and again in her rhetoric. The particularly interesting aspect of how she presented the hero was the ubiquitous "we." In none of the speeches does she refer to specific individual examples. In the Senate speech she goes so far as to talk about a completely anonymous public. "We don't know who they are, but there is no question that there are Americans alive

today, Americans who are healthier, Americans who are stronger, because of these and countless other government efforts--alive, healthier, stronger because of what we did together" (17). The only references to a generic individual came in the Andover speech in the form of the business person who may have forgotten the invaluable contributions the people made to his or her success. She also referred to a hypothetical "new kid," a future entrepreneur assured of a bright future because of the people, twice: once in the Andover speech and once on the Senate speech (E. Warren 2013e, 13). The role of the hero in Warren's populism, the star of the American Dream she advocated, was played by all of the people, and not any specific one person.

In this section, I have shown the noble attributes Warren ascribed to the American people, setting the stage for a romantic secular myth into which the people could envision themselves as the protagonist. I have demonstrated how this portrayal of the people as hero complies with Lee's model of the populist argumentative frame. I have also shown the extensive degree to which Warren emphasized the people as plural, collective, and "together," and how that togetherness, the prioritizing of the common over the individual good, revealed the Communitarian American Dream myth at work within her populist rhetoric.

The Villain

In populism, the antagonist serves several important rhetorical functions (Lee 2006). The first is to provide definition by the negative, in other words the hero and the villain help define each other more clearly. The second, also a Burkean concept, is to provide the scapegoat for societal ills. In Kenneth Burke's analysis of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, he argues that the cohesion of the German nation and the international Jew created a "point-to-able form of people with a certain kind of 'blood.'" The villain in Hitler's ideology was concrete, visible, and very real to the German people, and as he extolled the virtues of his people, he contrasted them with the vices of the enemy (Burke 1941, 191-220). The more noble the people looked, the more evil the enemy became, the contrasts serving as a kind of rhetorical feedback loop resulting in the Nazi doctrine of the Aryan super race and the ani-

malistic Jew. The identity of the people solidified and stabilized in the presence of the enemy. In the words of Stuart Hall:

Identity is always...a structured representation that achieves its positive only through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself. It produces a very Manichean set of opposites. (Hall 1991, 20)

This process must occur in populism for the crisis to have any sense of urgency. If either the people's or the enemy's identity are perceived as "malleable, negotiable, or unstable" the crimes of the enemy appear less egregious (Lee 2006, 359). Harry Boyte defined populism as "the conviction that an elite has dishonored a historically, culturally, or geographically constituted people, its memories, origins, common territory, ways of life" (Boyte 1986, 8). If the people are constituted by values such as simplicity, hard-work, honesty, and patriotism, the enemy must be signified by their opposites. In the Gilded Age, populists opposed men of extraordinary wealth, such as J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, seeking to destroy their monopolies and break up their "hoard" (McGrath 2010). For Elizabeth Warren, the villain was as clear and dangerous as the robber barons.

The villains working against the people in her narrative were the financial industry, and many Republicans and Tea Party members who she referred to as "the anarchy gang" (7, 8, 18). According to her remarks on the Senate floor, the big Wall Street banks are "rule-breakers," "cheaters," thieves who steal "your pension on Wall Street" (21, 13). As the authors of the financial collapse of 2008, these financiers actively stripped away laws and regulations that would have protected the people from their power-mongering and greed. The Andover speech was a response to wealthy elites who opposed her progressive policies as "class warfare"(E. Warren 2013c) Warren's answer was succinct "No. There is nobody in this country who got rich on his own"(E. Warren 2013c). As she refuted arguments against corporate taxation and increased income tax for the wealthy, 1,350 individual lobbyists swarmed Capitol Hill to fight for additional tax cuts, with Wall Street dominating the effort (Holland 2014). She spoke in response to those who she believed manipulated the system to es-

cape paying their due back to the people. Each of these charges against the wealthy and powerful had one common core: they were acts of selfishness. This vice contrasted sharply with the selfless togetherness of the people.

The other antagonist, defined in the senate speech as, a "small minority" who rail against government with "thinly veiled calls for anarchy in Washington," "the anarchy gang," were a group of conservative Republicans, many of whom belonged to the Tea Party (5, 6, 7). From the moment she started speaking, these elected officials became the "other," that which was not the people writ large. They, too, bore the guilt of extreme selfishness in her rhetoric. Having caused the government shutdown in 2013, they were "throwing a major wrench into a fragile economic recovery" (2). Because of their actions, "nearly a million federal employees are sitting at home for no reason, and other public servants are working but not earning a paycheck" (3). The welfare of the people was deeply threatened. "Cancer patients are being turned away from clinical trials at the NIH. Veterans' benefits are at risk. Basic nutrition services for pregnant women and new moms will be disrupted. Small businesses won't be able to get federal loan guarantees" (3). It was an effective list not just of wrongs but of contrasts. Public servants working without pay, the ill needlessly suffering, the nation's selfless warrior-heroes denied their due, and women and children denied basic sustenance, provided effective snapshots of what the American people look like, particularly those that deserved our compassion. The reckless selfishness of the "anarchy gang" caused all of this hardship.

Warren continued to condemn the selfishness of these Representatives who brought calamity on the people. "We all know how we got here. For years now we have heard a small minority in this country rail against government. From their rhetoric, you'd think they believe that the government that functions best is a government that doesn't function at all" (4-5). Framing them as "minority," Warren began to build toward her expression of people qua government, and using the negative definition to ensure the House Republicans would play the foil. Their "attacks on government are abstract, but the consequences of this shutdown are real" (21). Because of their selfishness, the people

suffered due to "less accountability for cheaters and rule-breakers, less opportunity for our children, cracks in the foundations that businesses need to succeed, and a tilted playing field that limits opportunities for all of our people" (21).

Warren spent a great deal of her Senate floor speech repeating how "the anarchy gang" were separate, against the people, extremist, and dangerous:

It is not an accident that the desire to shut down government is confined to one extremist faction of one political party of one chamber of Congress of one branch of government. It is not an accident that this extremist faction must resort to absurd hostage tactics--threats to turn off the government, threats to default on our debt, threats to tank the economy--to force their views on everyone else. It is not an accident that this faction is doing everything in its power to make government appear dysfunctional. In a democracy, these hostage tactics are the last resort for those who can't win their fights through elections, can't win their fights through Congress, can't win their fights for the Presidency, and can't win their fights in court. (24-25)

Their ravenous desire to shut down the people's government reflected the fact that "their extremist views have left them disconnected from the experiences of the American people" (27). She then switched to a list of hortatory negatives further alienating the House Republicans from the people. "We are not a country of anarchists. We are not a country of pessimists and ideologues whose motto is 'I got mine. The rest of you are on your own.' We are not a country that tolerates dangerous drugs, unsafe meat, dirty air, or toxic mortgages. We are not that nation, we have never been that nation, and we will never be that nation" (30). She very effectively used the identities of the heroic people and the villainous "anarchy gang" against each other to sharpen the contrast and deepen the divide between the two. She went on to pile the blame for government inadequacies on the House Republicans. "You can do your best to make government look like it doesn't work when you stop it from working. You can do your best to make government look paralyzed when you paralyze it. You can do

your best to make government look incompetent through your incompetence and ineffective through your ineffectiveness" (28). Following this line of reasoning, Warren again placed the people as government in tension with the anti-government/anti-people villain, who's selfishness had blinded them and made them destructive to the people.

At the time of her first hearing as a senator, that of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, no high level banking executives had been charged by the Department of Justice with any crime due to their activities that caused the Great Recession (Eisinger 2014; Orol 2013; Grim 2013). Warren's certainty of their criminality was unshakeable as she questioned government regulatory agents. "We face some very special issues with big financial institutions. If they can break the law and drag in billions in profits, and then turn around and settle, paying out of those profits, they don't have much incentive to follow the law" (E. Warren 2013a). Her relentlessly repeated question throughout the hearing was simply "tell me about the last time you took a Wall Street bank to trial?" (E. Warren 2013a). In light of the rest of her rhetoric, the criminal activities of the villains were made all the more egregious by the failure of the system to hold them accountable. The enemies of the people disregarded the laws of the nation and the social contract. They were, by their actions and the lack of reprisals, above the law.

From Warren's perspective, the bankers' illegal actions not only brought about the economic collapse of 2008, but many of their firms received billions of dollars in support from the taxpayers. Disregarding the law not only allowed them to "drag in billions in profits," they went on to take in billions of government funds to mitigate the damage of their malfeasance (E. Warren 2013a). During the Senate speech, Warren referenced the bailout, and the estimated \$14 trillion loss in American wealth because of the crisis (19). She broke down an incomprehensibly huge number into terms that not only could the people comprehend, but used the people as the direct referent. "That is \$120,000 for every American household, more than 2 years' worth of income for the average family. Billions of dollars in retirement savings have disappeared, millions of workers lost their jobs, and mil-

lions more families lost their homes" (19). The "cheaters and rule-breakers" had not been held accountable (21). The influence of the villains made our markets unsafe with "toxic mortgages" (30). Warren framed these villains in this populist myth by how their deeds harmed millions of ordinary citizens.

During her opening remarks before she questioned the government regulators, Warren made it clear she was not solely seeking the prosecution of the big banks,. "It's also the case that every time there is a settlement and not a trial, it means that we didn't have those days and days and days of testimony about what those financial institutions had been up to" (E. Warren 2013a). The opacity of the world's largest banks had long been a source of contention, a problem that extended beyond the bank's loan portfolios. It involved "almost every aspect of bank activity, much of which involves complex investment and trading not merely lending," according to Kevin Warsh, and ex-Morgan Stanley banker and a former Federal Reserve Board member (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013). Warren had by this point established her goal of breaking up the monolithic global banks, but here she addresses another concern. Even the proposed 21st Century Glass-Steagall act did not address the problem of opacity, or "the mischief that opacity enables" (Partnoy and Eisinger 2013). The secrecy, the impenetrable wall which the financial elites had erected around themselves, contributed to the lack of accountability, the sense of being above the law, which Warren vehemently opposed and which she framed as the behavior of an enemy. In the months following the bankruptcy of Lehman Bros., and the ensuing crisis in which the government funded billions of dollars in aid to the largest banks in the world, the phrase "too big to fail" became a common shorthand in the media to describe banks of such immense scope and power that if they failed, the global economy would come unraveled (Touryalai 2013). In a clever turn of phrase, the hearing became known by her statement "I'm really concerned that Too Big to Fail has become Too Big for Trial" (E. Warren 2013a). Taking the banks to criminal trial would yield those "days and days and days of testimony" that would tear down that wall (E. Warren 2013a).

In her view, the regulators not only failed at holding the banks accountable, but the corrupted system encouraged criminal activity. The logical progression of the populist mythic frame in this situation was that these enormously wealthy and powerful corporations used their resources to alter and corrupt governmental mechanisms that were aimed at preventing unlawful practices and protecting the people. In this view, the elites paid off the watchdogs. What is particularly interesting was that no one in the room appeared to disagree with her assessment. The regulators scrambled to justify their actions, never once taking issue with the underlying assumptions. It would appear that Wall Street was in fact guilty. The villain had no defenders. As for "the anarchy gang," Warren's Senate speech emphatically cast them as antagonistic to the people, deliberately working to break the government and blocking any attempts to repair it. In both situations, the adversaries had knowingly and with forethought set out to sabotage and corrupt the government, the system that rightfully belonged to the people.

Positioning the people and the villains in this way speaks to the distinguishing trait of the American Dream myth as presented in populism. Warren consistently foregrounded the enemy, pulling them out of the shadows and into the public eye. Thus, a substantial part of her rhetoric focused on the villain. Just as Gilded Age populists cast the robber barons as the key threat to their American Dream myth, so too does Warren. The explicit presence of the villain, pitted directly against the people varies from other American Dream myths, in which a foe does not dominate the narrative. The populist American Dream revolves around the villains, and how and why the people should defeat them.

In this section I have revealed the antagonists in Warren's rhetorical narrative and the methods she employed to cast them as such. I have demonstrated her tactic to create a Manichean duality between the people and the enemy, using definitions of the heroes and villains to sharpen the contrast between the two groups. I have also shown how the prominence of the enemy in her rhetoric coincides with a primary trait of populist rhetoric, and how this characteristic separates populist

American Dream myths from other variants. With the main players in place, Warren began to construct the agon.

The Broken System

The front line of populist conflict is "the system" which Lee defines as "an amalgamation of numerous sites within the national political and economic order in which power is distributed, governed, and managed" (Lee 2006, 360). In the view of populists, at one time, the system adhered to the principles set forward by the founders, an ideal of pure justice, however "demonic forces of almost transcendent power" have infiltrated and corrupted it, bending it to serve their own ends (Hofstadter 2008, 29). Just as finding "point-to-able" identities for hero and villain is key in setting up the populist narrative, so to is establishing a concrete prize over which the opposing sides must fight. Again, construction of the identity of the system occurs in the positive, the things that the system is supposed to do for the people, and the negative, the wrongs of a warped and corrupted system. In 1892, at the height of the People's Party movement, Ignatius Donnelly spoke to the perceived systemic problems in the United States at that time:

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. . . . They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds [sic] from the millionaires. ("Populist Party Platform (1892)" 1892)

The prose may be more ornate, but the underlying message mirrored Warren's rhetoric. Both Warren and Donnelly measured the present against a better, more democratic, past.

In this section, I reveal Warren's rhetorical battlefield, the federal government, and her position that this system is broken in its present form. Through analysis of her questioning during the Senate banking committee meeting, I show what for Warren is a two-fold sin: the enemy broke the law, and the system let them get away with it. I also analyze the Senate floor speech and reveal the

interplay she employed to accomplish three things: place blame for the broken system with the antagonists, establish equivalency between the people and the system as it should be, and use the principles of the Communitarian American Dream myth to cast her vision of a repaired system.

Throughout her speeches, Warren worked from a premise of a broken system. In the committee hearing she stated: "You know, I just want to note on this, there are district attorneys and U.S. attorneys who are out there every day squeezing ordinary citizens on sometimes very thin grounds, and taking them to trial in order to make an example, as they put it" (E. Warren 2013b) During the Senate speech, she argued that the government shutdown, caused by House Republicans, "is throwing a major wrench into a fragile economic recovery" (12). These were but two examples of a large problem with the system.

The Senate Banking Committee hearing focused almost entirely on confronting the malfunctioning parts of the government, in the form of regulating agencies. As she spoke to representatives from the Security and Exchange Commission, and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, she persistently challenged their policy of imposing fines on individuals and companies guilty of wrong-doing, instead of prosecuting them in the criminal courts. "I appreciate that you say you don't have to bring them to trial. My question is, when did you bring them to trial?" (E. Warren 2013b). Thomas Curry, head of the OCC pushed back: "We primarily view the tools that we have as mechanisms for correcting deficiencies. So the primary motive for our enforcement actions is really to identify the problem, and then demand a solution to it on an ongoing basis" (E. Warren 2013b). He defended his agency's record, which oversees national banks and federal thrifts, by noting they had a "fairly fair number of consent orders," and did not have to pursue a trial. "We have not had to do it as a practical matter to achieve our supervisory goals" (E. Warren 2013b). His answer was unsatisfactory for Warren, who then turned to Elisse Walter, chair of the SEC, who also avoided answering Warren's question. "As you know, among our remedies are penalties, but the penalties we can get are limited. And we actually have asked for additional authority -- my predecessor did -- to

raise penalties. But when we look at these issues -- and we truly believe that we have a very vigorous enforcement program -- we look at the distinction between what we could get if we go to trial, and what we could get if we don't" (E. Warren 2013b).

The men and women who faced the Senators questions were the final line of the system, the first defense of the people against unethical activity by the world's largest financial institutions. In Warren's view, Wall Street banks were profiteers, and should be held to the full letter of the law. None of the regulators she interviewed had acted on behalf of the people to prosecute this behavior. Prosecutors across the nation had "made examples" of individual Americans, while multi-billion dollar banking concerns never faced trial at all (E. Warren 2013b). While they doled out harsh "justice" against the people, they failed to do so to those most guilty, who had caused such hardship for the people in the first place. Warren contrasted the tolerance shown to massive firms and the extremely rich with the intolerance shown for the people, highlighting the inequality and injustice of a system designed to protect the equality of the people and ensure justice was met. As a final coda to drive home her point, the Senator concluded with the line that made the video famous.

A concurrent theme throughout populist discourse is the idea of an unfair, unbalanced, un-leveled playing field (Lee 2006, 360). Prior to the February hearing, Warren emphatically argued that this sort of injustice had become the status quo. "The system is rigged. Look around. Oil companies guzzle down billions in profits. Billionaires pay lower tax rates than their secretaries. And Wall Street C.E.O.s--the same ones who wrecked our economy and destroyed millions of jobs--still strut around Congress, no shame, demanding favors, and acting like we should thank them" (Toobin 2012). She reiterated this belief during the Senate speech. "The consequences of this shutdown are real: less accountability for cheaters and rule-breakers, less opportunity for our children, cracks in the foundations that businesses need to succeed, and a tilted playing field that limits opportunities for all of our people" (21). She also revisited the core argument of the committee hearing by referring to the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation's report of the causes of the financial crisis of 2008,

"regulators could have and should have used their existing tools to prevent the crisis. Republicans and Democrats, a bipartisan group, found strong agreement that--you better believe it--government matters" (20).

The government shutdown, the failure of the regulatory agencies to hold the financial industries accountable to the law, all signaled a system that had been brought low by the groups that Warren consistently portrayed as enemies of the people. Using her algebra of the interchangeability of "the people" with "the government," during the Senate speech, she challenged those who would thwart the people. The government existed so that the people could "put in place rules of the road, such as speed limits, and bank regulations that are fair and transparent" (12). She contended that the people stood with her ideology of an equal playing field, as they had enacted institutions "that give everyone a chance to succeed" (12). "We all decided to pass laws and put cops on the beat so that no one steals your purse on Main Street or your pension on Wall Street" (13). It was an interesting choice of phrase, in that she implicitly equated the activities of the banking industry with a mugging, a violation of the people. She also equated the regulators with police men, and by implication, policemen who had failed to do their jobs.

Some of her intimations were more subtle. She listed and praised specific federal agencies, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission, for valuable services they performed to protect the people. However, as she referenced specific examples of these public services, making sure medicines were "antibiotics and not baking soda," that cars have "effective brakes," and ensuring "that babies' car seats don't collapse in a crash and that toasters don't explode," Warren created a list of actions the government had taken to protect the people from unscrupulous and dangerous corporations (16). She presented all of these examples in support of her core argument that the people's government worked and those who railed against it were at best deluded and worst traitors. From her perspective, the system served to ensure the safety and happiness of the people, and by stripping away these protections, big busi-

ness and "the anarchy gang" actively sought to harm the people. "When was the last time anyone called for regulators to go easier on companies that put lead in children's toys or for food inspectors to stop checking whether the meat in our grocery stores is crawling with deadly bacteria or for the FDA to ignore whether morning sickness drugs will cause horrible deformities in little babies?" (7). Again, her very deliberate phrasing cast the government in the best possible light, her examples presenting a worst case scenario against which no right-minded person would argue. To do so would be to advocate for "horrible deformities in little babies" (7).

Those who brought about the shutdown belonged to this wrong-headed camp of anti-patriots. Their political agenda was "throwing a major wrench into a fragile economic recovery" (2). The debt-ceiling debacle of the previous year had resulted in "the idiotic sequester--drastic, across-the-board spending cuts that have crippled Meals On Wheels, Head Start, and investments in medical research" (3). Now, they had returned to their destructive methods, holding "the country hostage because of some imaginary health care boogey man," Warren's reference to her opponents repeated and increasingly desperate attempts to repeal or neuter the Affordable Care Act (9). As she worked from point to point, Warren built an argument that the House Republicans themselves did not actually believe their own ideology. After the shutdown had begun, they "almost immediately turned around and called on us to start reopening parts of our government. Why did they do this? Because the boogey man government is like the boogey man under the bed. It is not real. It doesn't exist. What is real and what does exist are all the specific important things we as Americans have chosen to do together through our government" (10).

Warren spent a considerable amount of time during the Senate speech carefully defining the system in both the positive and negative. She frequently referred to all of the good and noble aspects of the system, at nearly every point equating it with "we the people." "We have already chosen to do these things together because we all know we are stronger when we come together" (29). Shutting down the government from this perspective equated to shutting down the people. Her statement

"when this government reopens, when our markets are safe again, when our scientists can return to their research, when our small businesses can borrow," continued this line of reasoning (29). Attacking the Tea Party and other conservatives who supported the shutdown, she indicted their efforts. "From their rhetoric, you'd think they believed that anytime 'We the People come together to improve our lives, the nation is committing some terrible wrong'" (5). Again, she positioned her opponents as against the people.

Her use of the negative to define the system was more complex. The flaws in the system she presented had more to do with "the anarchy gang," and less with the system itself. They advocated a "bizarre vision of a future without government," which the American people did not want and "don't support" (6). She attacked their anti-government claims, accusing them of being the cause of their own complaints:

You can do your best to make government look like it doesn't work when you stop it from working. You can do your best to make government look paralyzed when you paralyze it.

You can do your best to make government look incompetent through your incompetence and ineffective through your ineffectiveness, but sooner or later the government will reopen because this is a democracy and this democracy has already rejected your views. (28)

It was an elegant move, particularly when considering the logic of Warren's narrative. Equating the people and the government made for very stirring oratory, but had she impugned the governmental system itself, she would also have challenged the quality of the people. She sidestepped this problem by persistently using populist ideals. The people were noble. The enemy was evil. The system belonged to the people and once the enemy had been defeated, the system would once again reflect the heroic people. As it stood, any defect or deficiency in the government could and should be attributed to the villain. "It is not an accident that this extremist faction must resort to absurd hostage tactics--threats to turn off the government, threats to default on our debt, threats to tank the economy--to

force their views on everyone else. It is not an accident that this faction is doing everything in its power to make government appear dysfunctional" (24).

Several times during the Senate speech, she assailed her opponents' "anti-government" position as a paranoid crusade against an imaginary foe. "The anarchy gang in the House can dump on their make-believe version of government all they want" (18). They feared a "boogey man government," an "imaginary healthcare boogey man," and "a make-believe government" (9, 10, 18). In Warren's reality, "what is real and what does exist are all the specific important things we as Americans have chosen to do together through our government. In our democracy, government is not some make believe thing that has an independent will of its own. In our democracy, government is just how we describe all of the things that 'we the people' have already decided to do together" (10). She went on to reiterate the social contract she presented in the Andover speech, "our country succeeds because we have all come together to put public institutions and infrastructure together" (13). The government could not be separated from the covenant, because the achievements of the people in building their government came about when "we made a choice as a people to come together" (15). The villains believed the government stood in their way, but "the American people know that government can work and believe government should work" (18). Every time "the anarchy gang" succeeded in forwarding their agenda they backpedaled because "when the real government fails to live up to the high expectations we have all set for it, politicians in both parties rush to outrage" (18).

The communitarian dynamic of Warren's rhetoric stood out very clearly during this speech. "We have already chosen to do these things together because we all know we are stronger when we come together" (29). She uniformly phrased government and democracy as being part of the people as whole, while claiming her opponents were unconcerned with "we the people." "Like all the reckless and extremist factions that have come before it, their day will pass and our democracy will return to the important work we have already chosen to do together" (31). Her lines of reasoning and her definitions of terms did not fluctuate in any of these speeches. The people came together to create

the system which would give them collective voice and collective action. Therefore, the villain, who by definition would be against the people, would also be against the system. Warren pulled no punches in accusing the villains of her narrative of deliberately trying to damage and circumvent the system. She also made her belief clear that if the enemy were vanquished, the system would be restored.

In this section I have established the role of the system in Warren's rhetoric, its state of present corruption and its rightful condition as the instrument of the people. I have also confirmed the deeply communitarian nature of her message as she defined the battleground from which the people must drive away the enemy. In this way, I further revealed the populist nature of Warren's rhetoric and the American Dream myth that gave it such power and appeal.

The Coming Conflict

The fourth and final element of Lee's frame is the foretelling of a coming "apocalyptic crisis," a "zero-sum portrayal of a mythic battle" that will restore the system to its former glory.

"Restorationism" is the rhetorical production of historical simplicity. The revolutionary era in this regard is not a series of contingent choices, vigorous debate, and consequential errors; rather, the populist argumentative frame harkens back to a simpler period when the political stars had aligned to reveal unmistakably just principles. Hence, populists become systemic revolutionaries battling present perversions on behalf of past principles. (Lee 2006, 362)

If Warren used populist rhetoric, to what "simpler period" and to which "unmistakably just principles" did she wish America to return? At the heart of her populist vision was a return to strong regulation of the finance industry, made particularly clear by her co-authoring of the proposed 21st Century Glass-Steagall Act. In her questioning of federal regulators, she fought for equality under the law, that private citizens would not be unjustly "made examples of" and that Wall Street banks would face criminal charges at trial (E. Warren 2013b). The timing of Warren's rise also played a factor. She took the oath of office in 2012, four years after the economic meltdown, and at the begin-

ning of Obama's second term. Her agenda was no mere referendum on the policies of the Obama administration, but an indictment of it. "I'll just be blunt, I thought the whole fight was 2008," she said. "We'd put sensible people in place, we'd write sensible rules, and we'd spend 50 years rebuilding America's middle class" (Scheiber 2013).

For Warren, this is a very old battle, one she has fought for nearly 30 years. Throughout the 1990s, she warned of the disintegration of the middle class, of the growing gap between wealthy and poor, and the dangers within the financial system which grew with each regulatory law repealed. From this perspective, her apocalypse occurred with the financial crisis of 2008. Her move from scholarship and consultancy into politics proper represented the recognition that she needed to act in this mythic battle. She made her view clear:

There are two visions for America and how to build that future. The Republicans have made their vision clear. They have said, 'I got mine. The rest of you are on your own.' . . . They said, 'What we want to do is just cut taxes again for those who've already made it, leave more money for those who've already got it, cut regulations for those who are out there and building those successful businesses.' What they say, in effect, is if you leave lots of money with the wealthiest and most powerful, the rest of you will be able to feed off the scraps. That's their vision for how to build the future. That's not our vision. It's the wrong vision for America. (Scheiber 2013)

This vision of an apocalyptic struggle over the American Dream, came through in Senate speech as well, when she accused the Republicans of being "pessimists and ideologues whose motto is 'I got mine. The rest of you are on your own'" (30). Her references to an inequitable "playing field," and failure to prosecute "cheaters and rule-breakers" in the speech also supported this perspective (21).

The social contract presented in the Andover and Senate floor speeches, played an important role. It was fair to assume she advocated altering the tax code so that corporations and the wealthy would have to pay their fair share back into the system. "The next kid who comes along" in both

speeches would never arrive based on her view of the status quo as severely restricting opportunity and skewing the odds in the favor of those who had already "made it" (E. Warren 2013c)(13).

For Warren, victory would assure the people a return to the prosperity of post-World War II America. Defeat would herald the continued erosion and ultimate extinction of the middle class, as the ultra-wealthy grew richer. A strong argument can be made that Warren herself represented the first victory for the people. Her extraordinarily successful fundraising efforts for her senatorial campaign proved that candidates can be elected without the deep, deep pockets of the financial sector. Her rising political star, and the popular resonance of her first senate committee meeting demonstrated the power of her message with the people. Her message of tougher actions against Wall Street resonated even with some Republicans. Pollster Celinda Lake reported that support for increased regulations of the banking industry had no regard for party lines. More than 80 percent of respondents favored the exact type of agenda Warren advocated (Scheiber 2013). She consistently argued that problem here was the vast influence of Wall Street. The same poll showed voters agreed with her by a 68 to 26 percent margin.

Before Warren interviewed regulators during the committee hearing, no criminal action had been taken against banks or bank managers. She did not stop asking the same questions after the meeting ended. Afterwards, Warren wrote to the OCC asking if the agency had analyzed the cost of settling with the banks without requiring admissions of guilt. When the OCC admitted they had not, she wrote the SEC, the DOJ, and the Federal Reserve with the same question. The SEC had not required admissions of wrongdoing from any of the firms they settled with, as such an admission would open the firms up to further litigation from private investors who had been negatively impacted by their illegal business practices (Scheiber 2013). A few weeks after receiving the letter from Warren, SEC Chairwoman Mary Jo White wrote back to the senator stating she was "actively reviewing" the issue (Scheiber 2013). The following July, White announced that the SEC would be requiring admissions of guilt in the future. "In the interest of public accountability, you need admis-

sions in some cases. Defendants are going to have to own up to their conduct on the public record," she said. "This will help with deterrence, and it's a matter of strengthening our hand in terms of enforcement," said White (Stewart 2013). The line from Warren's questioning to this change in policy was "exceedingly direct" (Scheiber 2013). These actions on the part of previously reticent regulators could and likely should be viewed as an attempt to finally answer the Senator's key question during that hearing.

Warren's challenging of the regulators in February was perhaps best summarized as a throwing down of the proverbial gauntlet. So long as she remained in a position of authority, she would continue to fight for systemic changes that would not allow Wall Street to continue withholding the American Dream from the people. Whether a truly apocalyptic war between the forces of good and evil takes place remains to be seen. However, Warren was already fighting as if the war were here, and the electorate had noticed.

"Too big to fail" did not go away during the economic recover. In fact, it got worse. As shadow banking firms teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, many were bought up by commercial banks at fire sale prices to help stabilize the industry.

The top 20 banks currently control 62 percent of U.S. deposits, up from 46 percent in 2003 and 38 percent in 1998, according to research analysts at Barclays Capital. Perhaps more astounding is their finding that the total market cap of the top 25 banks is 17 times larger than it was in 1990 and 20 percent bigger than it was before the financial crisis. (Farr 2014)

A Washington Post poll showed that 80% of American believe the government and banks had not done enough to prevent another crisis (Clement 2013). Warren's contention that the bipartisan committee that studied the causes of the Great Recession proved that "you better believe it – government matters" was not met with real world changes that could sufficiently protect the people from another economic disaster (20). Many battles remained for Warren to fight.

Conclusion

The whole of Warren's populist agenda showed every sign of remaining relevant for the foreseeable future, and the junior Senator had no end of kindling to throw on the fire. "The anarchy gang" remained a threatening force in the house, and with mid-term elections approaching in late 2014, could become an even greater threat. The game remained largely rigged by Warren's standards, and no high-profile bankers sat in jail cells. Because of this lack of change, however, the resonance of her rhetoric would doubtless continue. Given her 30 plus years in this fight, so long as the people of Massachusetts elect her, Warren will no doubt keep fighting this war.

In this analysis, I have established the populist nature of Warren's rhetoric via application of Lee's populist argumentative frame. The heroic people, the greedy villain, the corrupted system, and the battle to reclaim it are all distinctly present in her message. I have argued that the elements of the Communitarian American Dream myth are also to be found throughout her rhetoric. The themes of cooperation, unity and success stand out in all three speeches. Finally, I have contended that the presence of these mythic properties is not confined to Warren's rhetoric, but gives populist rhetoric as a whole its extraordinary suasive appeal and its continued resurgence in American political discourse generation after generation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

When Elizabeth Warren stood in that anonymous living room in Andover, Massachusetts, just days after she had been passed over to lead the agency she had fought hard to create, she took two minutes to express a communitarian social contract to a small group of people. Within days, her succinct, cogent, and compelling case for how America should function had spread to millions of people across the United States. Over the next two years, she repeated this pattern: a message that would explode into massive circulation due to social media. The Harvard professor had struck a chord.

Warren gave clear voice to the anger and fear left over from the economic crisis four years earlier. She became the icon of a leftist, progressive, populism which rejected the individualistic myth that dominated the nation for thirty years. In three different speeches, Warren used the forms of populist rhetoric to transform events that otherwise would pass unnoticed by the people into internet sensations, garnering millions of views and considerable buzz on social media networks. The narrative she told portrayed the American people as heroic. In Andover, she cast them as noble, hard-working, resourceful, creative, honest, and the progenitors of the American Dream itself. In her questioning of federal regulators in the Senate Banking Committee hearing, she depicted the people as deeply and egregiously wronged. In her remarks on the Senate floor, the people were democracy itself, a collective force that tore down great obstacles and built up a great nation. It was a role to which a significant section of the populous could relate, and therefore visualize themselves as this hero.

The wrongs perpetrated on the people came at the hands of unimaginably powerful elites, who used duplicity and dishonesty to steal from ordinary people to further fill their already overstuffed coffers. In Warren's tale, the financial industry created the economic disaster of 2008. Their rampant greed and flouting of the law cost hard-working Americans trillions of dollars. The social

contract she laid out in Andover showed the wealthy and powerful as the beneficiaries of the hard work of the people, who now refused to pay back into the system that enabled their success. They broke the law with no fear of reprisal, and Warren demanded an accounting for this miscarriage of justice as she interrogated the regulators who let them get away. She also took to task the "anarchy gang," a group of conservative Republicans and Tea Partiers who fought for smaller government and forced its shutdown, from the floor of the Senate, berating their fringe ideology which had alienated them from the people. It was a compelling story, with clearly defined white-hats and black-hats, embroiled in a struggle for the ages to restore the American Dream to the people, or to keep it forever out of reach.

Warren spoke of how the people must fight to wrest back control of the system from these villains, how the people could end their scheming and hoarding and restore order and justice to a nation badly shaken by economic hardship. In the Senate Banking Committee hearing, she repeatedly pressed members of the SEC and OOC to answer a simple question: why had none of the regulators taken any of the massive Wall Street banks to trial? It was a question they could not effectively answer. From the Senate floor, she spent the bulk of her speech defining and lauding the system as it should be. The government should have been the instrument of the people as a whole, the means by which they overcame problems too big to solve on an individual level. The system should protect the people from the unscrupulous actions of those who would substitute poison for medicine, spoiled food for fresh, and a rigged playing field for a fair one. The system could be restored when its despoilers had been driven from the halls of power.

This process of restoration, of curbing the undue influence of the powerful and corrupt, was the battle for her and those who identified with her narrative. Just as the people joined together to govern, they must join together to defeat the elites who seized the American Dream, holding it for themselves, and denying access to all others. This was the battle Warren had fought for three decades, and it was a battle she would fight for the foreseeable future.

In the Andover speech, the Senate Banking Committee Hearing speech, and her remarks on the Senate floor during the 2013 government shutdown, her narrative did not change. The players' roles were set, and would not waver. The heroes were the heroes and the villains were the villains. This absolutism was another trait common in populist rhetoric. Undergirding her rhetoric, the Communitarian American Dream myth sought to displace the Individualistic American Dream myth in the hearts and minds of Americans. The power of myth, its sacred story can move people to do extraordinary things. This inherent suasive power strongly contributed to the far-reaching resonance of her message with her audience.

The populist argumentative frame and the Communitarian American Dream myth taken together provide a compelling explanation of the efficacy of Elizabeth Warren and her message. However, populism imposes restrictions on Warren and the actions she can take while in the political arena.

Implications

The analysis of Warren's populist rhetoric reveals three important implications. The first deals with the populist form and the challenges it poses for the creation of sound policy. Secondly, the resonance of Warren's message with a substantial portion of the Democratic party granted her sufficient political clout to be an agenda-setter for her party, and thus the 2016 presidential race. Finally, I will argue that the rhetoric that created Warren's political career is also likely to limit it.

Populism and Policy

Five years into Obama's presidency, progressives were lining up behind Warren, confused and angry that the economy as a whole was recovering, but not for them (Pareene 2013). Six years after the 2008 crisis and the wealthiest Americans were wealthier than they were before the crisis. "The top 10 percent of earners took more than half of the country's total income in 2012, the highest level recorded since the government began collecting the relevant data a century ago," (Lowrey 2013). Obama's handling of the fallout from the Great Recession left a significant number of leftists dissat-

isfied and deeply questioning if he could or would significantly reform the finance industry and bring key players in the disaster to justice. In this view, the President was "bringing a butter knife and a library book to a gunfight with Congress again and again," ("The Politico 50 Survey" 2014). The reaction to Warren was quite different. "We've already seen with Elizabeth Warren on the Senate Banking Committee, just her aggressive questioning of regulators, of how they're doing their job, caused huge changes," said Mike Konczal, a fellow at the Roosevelt Institute (Ernst 2013).

Warren demanded criminal prosecution of banks and bankers, and policy that would bring dramatic changes to the financial sector, in both the committee hearing and the Senate floor speech. Her "aggressiveness" strongly resonated with angry progressives, but basing political decisions on that anger can be exceedingly dangerous. The absolutism of populist heroes and villains and the conflict necessary to maintain the overall narrative does not afford much room for compromise and pragmatism. In this way, populism propagates idealistic purity, and an environment where compromise is anathema. As such, it can lead to an oversimplification of highly complex problems, producing poor policy. Hofstadter explained this problem with particular cogency:

Under the heated surface of our political rhetoric, therefore, there exists a certain sobriety born of experience, an understanding that what sounds good on the banquet circuit may not make feasible policy, that statements, manifestos, and polemics are very far from pragmatic programs; that these have to be *translated* into programs for the solution of our domestic and foreign problems; and that even then these programs have to undergo still further modification in the legislative mill before they can become reality. [Emphasis in original] (Hofstadter 2008, 103-104)

While Warren's populism created a great deal of emotional energy on the left, it did not address the very real and pragmatic concerns that limited the governmental response to the crisis. According to many economists, "too big to fail" did not signify cronyism and coddling regarding government's

actions toward the financial sector, but an inescapable reality that sharply restricted the actions taken by regulators and U.S. attorneys in the years following the collapse (S. Johnson 2013).

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke stated "September and October of 2008 was the worst financial crisis in global history, including the Great Depression." Of the thirteen "most important financial institutions in the United States, twelve were at risk of failure within a period of a week or two," he continued (da Costa 2014). Had the newly elected President Obama disregarded the pragmatic course bailouts and restricting government enforced changes to the banking system, there is a strong argument that the situation could have been much worse. When asked why the crash of 2008 did not result in a depression as severe as the Great Depression, Jeffrey Shafer, a former Federal Reserve and Treasury official responded "the outcome was not as disastrous because the policy responses were quite different," (Egan 2014). Had Obama refused to sacrifice ideological purity for the exigencies of the crisis, the outcome could have been disastrous, and yet, it was this very compromise that created Warren's audience.

This disconnect between populism and pragmatism appears to be inherent in the form. Warren aggressively interrogating regulators and her anger over the concept of "too big for trial," strongly resonated with an audience that shared that same response to the situation. They, like Warren, believed that "it just isn't right." Her approach was captivating to an audience filled with righteous indignation. Problematically, none of the very real considerations and constraints that had defined Department of Justice policy during the crisis were taken into account.

The reticence of the Department of Justice to criminally prosecute banks or the upper management of banks came about after a hard lesson learned years earlier. When U.S. Attorneys went after responsible parties in the Enron scandal of the early aughts, one key player was accounting firm Arthur Anderson (Nanda 2010 p.605; Johnson 2005). The DOJ won a guilty verdict against the firm which folded shortly thereafter, putting tens of thousands of people out of work (Beltran 2002; Alexander 2002). Repeating that process when faced with double digit unemployment would have

been dangerous if not reckless. Perhaps the best example of why regulators and the DOJ had not brought any Wall Street bank to trial came just three months before Warren's famous Senate Banking Committee hearing.

The December 2012 announcements by the DOJ that no criminal charges would be filed against HSBC or UBS, especially in light of their flagrant disregard for the law, no doubt figured heavily in Warren's questioning of banking regulators. Had any individual American laundered money for Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and North Korea, they would have been tried for treason. However, two of the world's largest banks got off with fine. It was a travesty of justice, but the consequences of criminally prosecuting the firms and their high level managers could have been significantly worse. Going to trial would have cost both banks their charters, and thus two of the largest banks on the planet would be shut out of the world's largest economy at a time of perilous instability (Protest and Silver-Greenberg 2012).

These exigencies were and are profoundly distasteful on almost every level, but as the gross misconduct of the financial sector became clearer and clearer, Obama had two courses he could follow. He could give into righteous indignation and demand that the Justice Department bring the Wall Street banks and bankers to trial, or he could swallow the bitter pill that to seek justice in these cases could trigger a market collapse orders of magnitude worse than what had already occurred. Had he embraced the uncompromising posture that would please the audience that so readily embraced Warren, the satisfaction of watching the villains who wrecked the economy brought to justice would likely last until the bottom fell out of the world markets. There is precedent for this. When Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Paulson refused to bail out Lehman Brothers Holding in September of 2008, he was praised by reporters and pundits alike for letting the investment bank lie in the bed it had made (Cho and Writers 2008). The admiration lasted up until the Dow fell off a cliff, and the Great Recession had begun. Then, he was criticized for not preventing the disaster (Kaletsky 2008).

The central conflicts that drive populist narratives are zero-sum games, and while the ideological purity of the fight may cater to an audiences' sense of injustice, it makes for poor governance. "Compromise is difficult, but governing a democracy without it is impossible" (Gutmann and Thompson 2012, 25). Warren's populist rhetoric followed this pattern. Breaking up the banks and jailing the bankers was powerfully appealing to Americans still struggling to climb out of the crater left by the 2008 crash, but as the exigencies of the situation demonstrated, the risk of sticking to the ideal and ignoring the practical.

The Warren Wing of the Democratic Party

The popularity of Warren's message strongly influenced the Democratic party. She had shaped the conversation and promoted the issues that will likely dominate the race for the Oval Office in 2016 (Pareene 2013). Several pundits referred to "the Elizabeth Warren Wing of the Democratic Party," and *The New Republic* Senior Editor Noam Scheiber observed "It's hard to look at the Democratic Party these days and not feel as if all the energy is behind Warren" (Borosage 2013a; Scheiber 2013; Eskow 2013). With Democrats' disapproval of the banking industry rising five fold since 2007, and their dissatisfaction with the influence of corporations increasing from 51 to 79 percent, the compatibility of Warren's populist rhetoric with much of the Democratic Party becomes apparent (Scheiber 2013). For as long as the left view the economy as a rigged game, Warren would likely continue to profoundly shape the national discussion.

For many liberals and progressives, the sharp-spoken professor became the "soul of the Democratic Party" and a real threat to Hillary Clinton's rumored 2016 presidential bid (Scheiber 2013; Beinart 2013). "If you went into a lab to design a candidate who might successfully take on Clinton, that candidate would probably look a lot like Elizabeth Warren" (White and Haberman 2013). Her rise from obscurity to a potential dark horse candidate was because of her rhetoric. She was "capable of taking the often chaotic populist messages from groups like Occupy Wall Street and

Anonymous and turning them into a clear narrative of average folks fighting powerful entrenched interests" (White and Haberman 2013).

Warren rose so quickly in public interest and popularity that she rivaled Clinton and President Barack Obama in approval ratings ("National (US) Poll - August 5, 2013 - Christie, Clinton Are Hottest | Quinnipiac University Connecticut" 2013). Her concise and unflinching rhetoric replaced the heartening and optimistic tenor of Obama's rhetoric in the hearts and minds of a significant portion of his support base. Whereas, Obama rode a wave of hope to the Oval Office, four years later, Senator Elizabeth Warren was the primary politician atop a tsunami of frustration, disappointment and populist anger (Beinart 2013; Zengerle 2011).

As to running for the White House, she firmly and repeatedly denied any such ambitions (Borosage 2013a). Yet, she had already left her mark on the upcoming campaign. The clearest implication of her rhetoric on the Democratic Party platform was an increased emphasis on financial regulation and reform. With Hillary Rodham Clinton's run for the White House all but assured, this priority shift represented a very serious obstacle for Clinton. The Clintons had developed and maintained strong relationships with the financial sector, who provided substantial donations to their various campaigns (Beinart 2013). Those ties may be more harmful than helpful for Democrats for the foreseeable future.

In confronting this situation, Clinton would have to very carefully examine whether or not she could afford to fill her war chest with Wall Street contributions, and would likely need to address the same concerns that constitute Warren's rhetoric. Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee stated, "I think it's mutually exclusive to be a real hero for reform and accountability and to have a strategy that relies on Wall Street" (Scheiber 2013). Another activist argued, "unless there is some major public break by Hillary Clinton with this disreputable crowd, then everybody will have to think long and hard before they support her as president. We do not need yet another administration packed full of Wall Street-friendly politicians" (Scheiber 2013).

Given the fervent support behind Warren, it would not be surprising to see Clinton attempt to adopt some of the Senator's populism to appeal to progressives (White and Haberman 2013). In that way, Warren's message could continue to shape the debate on United States economic policy for years to come.

Were Clinton to take up a populist stance it would signal the potential end of the Clintonian ideology of fiscal conservatism and social liberalism which dominated the Democratic Party for twenty years (Beinart 2013). Led by Warren, progressives and much of the Democratic Party made it clear that they would not vote for a presidential candidate that would cater to financial elites. At the same time, it will not be easy for Hillary Clinton to embrace Warren's views.

It's ABOUT THE ECONOMY

Warren's rhetoric launched her political career. Enough anger and resentment remained with the American people years after the economic crisis of 2008 to create a loyal, outspoken and dedicated audience for her. However, the scope of her rhetoric falls entirely within the realm of economics. The *dramatis personae* of her narrative included only the heroic people and the elites who broke the economic system, and the conflict of the story remained focused on that single issue. The Andover speech and her comments from the Senate floor dealt with the egalitarian community-based economic ideal as the proper ideological orientation for economic policy. The banking committee hearing focused on bringing economic outlaws to justice. The importance of economic issues, particularly after such a devastating event as the Great Recession, is self-evident, but it is not the only problem in the world. Crises in Gaza, the Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and many other issues fell outside of her core message, but remained crucially important issues for the government (Beinart 2013). Warren remained nearly silent on such matters, staying "relentlessly on message" (Ernst 2013). Her rhetoric made her a very popular single-issue politician, but a single-candidate issue nonetheless.

As to a run for the presidency in 2016, Warren repeatedly made it clear she had no such aspirations. She signed a petition with fellow Democrats urging Clinton to run (White and Haberman

2013). Sticking to the agenda and message that had brought her thus far appeared to be her only goal. Given her extraordinary experience and knowledge of financial law in the United States, literally her life's work, and the consistency of her message over the course of 30 years, ambitions for a presidential run seem unlikely. However, even the mention of a Warren bid for the presidency seemed to strike fear in the hearts of Wall Street bankers. "The nightmare scenario for banks is to hear these arguments from a candidate on the far left and on the far right," said Jaret Seiberg, a financial services industry analyst at Guggenheim Partners. "Suddenly, you have Elizabeth Warren screaming about 'too big to fail' on one side and Rand Paul screaming about it on the other side, and then candidates in the middle are forced to weigh in" (White and Haberman 2013).

In this regard, the Senate may be the perfect place for her to serve. She has changed and likely will continue to change the national conversation about these issues. Her rhetoric and its power with many Americans did not go unnoticed by politicians or the press, but single-issue politics work with audiences undivided by other issues. If she had been required to take stands on numerous other issues, each stance would, to some degree, chip away at that audience, the common area of support shrinking with each new issue. Warren's adamant refusal to consider a bid for the presidency likely indicated her awareness of the limitations of her message, and she appeared to have no qualms with those constraints as they aligned with her stated goal as a public servant.

There could, however, be one scenario in which Warren would run and win the White House. As a single-issue candidate, should that issue become so overwhelmingly pressing that it eclipsed all other issues for most of the populace, Warren would be the ideal candidate. The impetus for such a political change could probably only come about with another economic crisis brought on by the finance industry. Were this to occur, her populist rhetoric would no doubt gain an even larger audience, and likely an even more devoted and angrier following.

Conclusion

The stratospheric rise of Elizabeth Warren from the halls of academia to political superstardom presents a fascinating case of the extraordinary power of rhetoric when infused with myth. This be-speckled grandmother and self-described policy wonk profoundly impacted the Democratic Party and the national discourse regarding the issues at the heart of the economic crisis of 2008. Few politicians can claim to have "fangirls," but Warren could. For those who embraced her populist narrative, eager to take on the heroic role of a people fighting unimaginably powerful and corrupting forces for the future of their nation, every battle the sharp-tongued Oklahoman fought endeared her to them further. Whether Warren's great war against the titans of Wall Street will end in victory or defeat, only history can judge. However, the manner in which her populist rhetoric draws upon myth to create a narrative of crisis, her message has already had an impact. The devotion of her followers will no doubt inspire other politicians to adopt her message as their own, a change amongst her peers of which she had given every sign of approval and encouragement. Perhaps the most important concern for the future of her political career is not whether she runs for the presidency, but whether she succeeds in reshaping how many Americans view, and participate in, the American Dream.

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