

The Tea Party Movement and Entelechy:
an Inductive Study of Tea Party Rhetoric

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Abstract

On February 19, 2009, CNBC journalist Rick Santelli's fiery outburst against the Obama Administration on national television gave the Tea Party Movement (TPM) its namesake. Soon after rallies were organized across the U.S. under the Tea Party banner. From its inception in 2009, the TPM became an essential player in U.S. politics and pivotal in flipping control of the Senate and House to the Republican Party during the 2010 midterm elections. The movement faced controversy on both sides of the political spectrum for its beliefs and fervent stance against compromising with political adversaries. Researchers argued that the TPM was an example of Richard Hofstadter's Paranoid Style. Others claimed that the movement's rhetoric, member demographics, and political success demonstrated it was outside the boundaries of the Paranoid Style. To better understand the nature of the TPM, this project conducted an inductive study of TPM rhetoric from 2009-2013. By using texts from TPM speeches as well as TPM bloggers and commenters online, this study examined the rhetorical development of the movement and its symbolic trajectory. It was found that TPM advocates relied on a myth of return, which portrayed the movement as being the voice of the silent majority and representative of the founding values of America. While the themes and examples used by the movement changed over the years, the overarching message continued to focus on an us versus them mentality. Overall, the symbolic trajectory of the TPM raises questions about the typically adaptive nature of social movements and suggests that the TPM became entelechialized early in its development and throughout 2009-2013.

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Chapter One: Paranoia and the Tea Party Movement in American Politics

Though a relative newcomer compared to other political groups, the Tea Party's impact on the political sphere cannot be understated. Their success during the 2010 midterm elections demonstrated that the Tea Party was more than a small group of fringe conservatives (Miller & Walling, 2012). Tea Party candidates defeated Democrats and establishment Republican nominees alike around the country. In total, 60 House seats were won by Republicans along with 10 gubernatorial races, making the 2010 elections the most successful midterm election for the Republicans since 1938 (MacAskill & Harris, 2010). The rise of the Tea Party reshaped the political landscape and became a bulwark against President Obama's progressive policies.

While the Tea Party brought success to Republicans after their defeat in the 2008 election, it also created significant rifts within the GOP. Those rifts culminated in the defeat of Eric Cantor in the 2014 Republican primaries by a relatively unknown Tea Party candidate. This was a rude awakening for Republican leadership and demonstrated the power of the Tea Party. Former Congressperson Vin Weber described the loss as an "earthquake" for the GOP (Costa, Vozzella, & Fahrenthold, 2014). Tea Party members weren't simply a new addition to status quo politics, but a disruptive element that some Republicans referred to as "foolish childishness" (Foster, 2013a).

The success of Donald Trump has been linked to the advent of the Tea Party as well. After their initial political victories, the Tea Party felt that the Republican Party was not doing enough to stop President Obama's political agenda. Republicans such as Paul Ryan, who was initially billed as a leader among the Tea Party, became traitors in the eyes of many Tea Party members (Steinhauer, 2016). It was in part this perceived betrayal by "establishment"

Republicans that led to the popularity of Donald Trump as a political outsider who could clean up Washington D.C. and implement Tea Party ideals (Edsall, 2016; Reynolds, 2016).

Many pundits and academics have explained the Tea Party as merely a manifestation of what Richard Hofstadter called the Paranoid Style. Krugman (2009) described the rise of the Tea Party and its connection to the Paranoid Style arguing that it almost seemed that Hofstadter's writings were "based on today's headlines." Parker and Barreto's study of the Tea Party placed its identity firmly in the pseudo-conservative description offered by Hofstadter in his original writings on the Paranoid Style and demonstrated a clear link with other right-wing populist movements, such as the John Birch society and the movement that supported Goldwater (2013).

Hofstadter's Paranoid Style is more than a rhetorical strategy. Instead, it is a psychological state that permeates the members of a group. The Paranoid Style is described as a "way of seeing the world and one's self" (Hofstadter, 1965, p.4). A key element is a sense of status anxiety on behalf of the participant; a belief that their values and lifestyle are at risk of being destroyed (Hofstadter, 1965, p. 29). This state of fear can create a powerful worldview which often disregards rational reasoning and leads members to believe there is a vast conspiracy threatening to destroy the world as they know it (Hofstadter, 1965).

Scholars who associate the Tea Party with the Paranoid Style often cite the demographic make-up of the movement as proof of the relationship. There is, in fact, a distinct generational difference between Tea Party members and the electorate as a whole, since many of the members of the movement are Baby Boomers (Parker & Barreto, 2013). Tea Party voters are predominately white suburban males who believe that they have been marginalized in the current political environment (Parker & Barreto, 2013). This status anxiety was amplified further because of the economic situation in 2009. As Williams explains:

White men, in particular, got pushed out of nearly half of all jobs lost during the downturn, and blue-collar white men lost about a third of those disappearing jobs. That is a key shift in this recession white men, notably working-class white men, being hit hard and concerned that their needs are not a priority in Washington. A top White House official told me recently that working-class white men are going through today the kind of economic pain, and the social breakdown that comes with it, that black men went through in the recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s. (Williams, 2010)

It is this sense of marginalization that is crucial to Hofstadter's Paranoid Style. The anxiety created by the changing political landscape fueled the paranoid feelings of Tea Party members (Parker & Barreto, p. 4-8, 2013). Hofstadter argued that the rise of the Klan in the early 1920's, Goldwater in the 1960s, and the John Birch Society all were inexorably linked to the status anxiety created by the shifting social world and the sense of loss felt by movement members (1965). Considering how dire the economic situation was during 2009-2010, a significant sense of status anxiety among a large portion of the population seems inevitable. This sense of loss of place in the social fabric of America was arguably the key to the spread of the Tea Party around the nation.

Since its inception in 2009, the Tea Party has played an important but misunderstood role in United States politics. Tea Party members have been described as racists, anti-intellectual, and referred to by the prominent conservative pundit David Brooks (2010) as the "flamboyant fringe" of the conservative movement. Many saw the Tea Party as a regression in U.S. political discourse. Paul Krugman (2009) described the Tea Party as "Republicans that are refusing to grow up."

Another essential element of the Paranoid Style is the prevalence of conspiratorial rhetoric in the movement. Polling data has demonstrated that “birtherism” was a popular conspiracy in the Tea Party (Condon, 2010). In addition, conspiracy theories concerning President Obama’s religion and college background have found vastly more support among Tea Party members than the general population (Parker & Barreto, 2013). Most importantly, Tea Party members often portrayed liberals and intellectuals as part of a vast conspiracy to overthrow the founding values of America with their progressive political views (Parker & Barreto, 2013; DiMaggio, 2011).

While the Tea Party reflected many of the characteristics associated with the Paranoid Style, it seemed too simplistic of an explanation by itself to account for the Tea Party’s rise and influence. Scholars argued that the Tea Party cannot be fully explained by Hofstadter’s Paranoid Style alone. For example, the qualitative studies of Skocpol and Williamson on the Tea Party highlighted the diverse educational and class background of the Tea Party as evidence of a movement that existed beyond the scope of Paranoid Style (2013). The study demonstrated that many of the more radical opinions ascribed to the Tea Party were on the fringes of the group (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). This line of reasoning indicates that the Tea Party might not fit the guidelines of Hofstadter’s Paranoid Style since status anxiety doesn’t pervade all members of the movement.

Moreover a focus on the Paranoid Style by its nature labels movements as an irrational and abnormal event in politics, but this does not adequately describe the advent of the Tea Party. As Savage argued:

it is both problematic as well as theoretically limited and reductive to classify the Tea Party as a simply reactionary and irrational form of “abnormal” politics in its

embodiment of the “symptom,” whereas the common populist discursive structure of this political formation, taken together with overwhelming evidence of its institutional presence and effects, in actuality, reveals something about the normal trajectory of modern politics. (p. 580, 2012)

Hofstadter’s initial description of the Paranoid Style treated the movements it was applied to as fringe and radical groups which had little lasting impact on the electorate. This cannot be said for the Tea Party; its expanding influence provides an important rationale to explore Tea Party rhetoric further.

In addition, scholars and pundits alike have described the Tea Party as a mainstream response to the politics of the day. David Brooks (2010, p. 3) remarked that “If they [Tea Party] succeed, their movement is likely to outgrow its crude beginnings and become a major force in American politics. After all, it represents arguments that are deeply rooted in American history.” Courser argued that while some elements of the Tea Party are extremist, the rhetoric and values of the movement focus on issues common to traditional movements such as a feeling of frustration with existing political organizations or a lack of representation (2011). This implies that the Tea Party is not merely following a paranoid delusion, but instead has an underlying logic similar to more traditional movements.

Other scholars point out that Hofstadter’s Paranoid Style has been used to unfairly attack conservative movements in the past. For example, Hofstadter’s original writings took place during a period when many extreme liberal movements were prominent, yet he failed to discuss these movements (Lemann, 2014). Lemann went so far as to cast the Paranoid Style as politically one-sided and dismissive of populist reasoning (2014). Arguing that neoliberal movements would not fall under the categorization established by Hofstadter’s Paranoid Style. Horwitz

(2013) claimed that critics who use the term Paranoid Style are just labeling movements they disagree with as irrational.

Moreover, the Tea Party is well known for being leaderless, and some critics claim that this characteristic makes it distinct from the Paranoid Style. In his analysis of the Tea Party, Courser argued:

What makes the Tea Party movement distinctive is not its conservative character but rather the lack of political skill and organization amongst its adherents.

Popular movements for inclusion in the political process are nothing new in America, but the Tea Party represents a departure in that its members are a loose confederation that seek no specifics, desires only protest, and seems to have rejected the idea of organization as a principle of enacting political change. These distinct features make the Tea Party something new in American politics: a protest movement without significant organization or leadership. (2011, p 44)

The lack of organization and the Tea Party's use of protest against existing political systems has been noted by various scholars (Horwitz, 2013; Savage, 2012; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). Courser (2011) specifically takes aim at the blanket application of the Paranoid Style to the Tea Party. The assertion that the Tea Party is a manifestation of racism, paranoia, and populist ideology disregards the context surrounding the movement (Courser, 2011; Horwitz, 2013; Savage, 2012).

Hofstadter's link between conspiracy rhetoric and the social psychological elements of Paranoid Style also presents a distinct problem in relation to the Tea Party. As Horwitz described:

The problem with the social psychological approach...is that it makes it easy to label as irrational and reactionary those political actors and behaviors with which the research happens to disagree.... Moreover, formulaic conspiratorial reading of events are not just the property of the right wing. (2013, p. 165)

Horwitz's criticism highlights an important issue concerning the one-dimensional nature of existing Paranoid Style research in relation to social movements. This becomes particularly important when considering the claim by other scholars that the Tea Party represents a mainstream viewpoint in U.S. politics (Savage, 2012; Courser, 2011). All of these arguments suggest that it is too simplistic to treat the Tea Party as merely a contemporary example of the Paranoid Style.

In summary, while the Tea Party fits many of the characteristics of Hofstadter's Paranoid Style, the longevity, organizational structure, and the political impact of the Tea Party suggested a need to examine the rhetoric of the movement on an indepth level. Because of the Tea Party's importance in recent U.S. politics, it is necessary to analyze the movement to understand how it was able to spread. In the rest of this chapter, I layout the existing literature surrounding the Tea Party and explore the history of the movement. Next, I provide an explanation of the inductive methodology I used to study the rhetoric of the Tea Party. Finally, I briefly summarize the other chapters of the project and explain the reasoning behind the selection of events used to trace the trajectory of the Tea Party's development between 2009-2013.

Literature Review

There have been numerous studies written on the Tea Party and its relation to the Paranoid Style. In the following section I first discuss the existing literature concerning the rhetoric of the Tea Party. After that, I briefly examine framing studies about Tea Party rhetoric. Finally, I explain how the Tea Party originated and spread across the electorate.

Studies of the Tea Party

The vast majority of the existing literature on the Tea Party focuses on questions of movement development, membership, structure, and the integration of new technology like social media. Multiple authors have done in-depth qualitative analysis of the Tea Party movement including the ideology and demographic makeup of the movement (Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). Others have focused on the debate concerning the importance of the movement (Savage, 2012; Courser, 2011). While informative, the studies above have not taken a detailed look at the rhetoric of the Tea Party and its relation to the Paranoid Style.

The examination of the Tea Party as it pertains to the Paranoid Style is divided and incomplete. Some authors have concluded that the Paranoid Style is alive and well within the Tea Party (Parker & Barreto, 2013). Other scholars agree that there is an element of the Paranoid Style present in the Tea Party, but argue that it does not explain the spread of the movement (Courser, 2011; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). There have been rhetorical studies of the Tea Party, but they have mainly focused on specific events or leaders and not its larger movement (Lemuel, 2010; Neville, 2010; Spiker, 2012).

Critics of labeling the Tea Party as a social movement have often fixated on the “astroturfing” done by business leaders, like the Koch brothers, in the creation of the Tea Party (DiMaggio, 2011; Zernike, 2010b). Astroturfing is the process of funding and developing micro-

movements with the intent of portraying them as authentic grassroots organizations (DiMaggio, 2011). For some scholars, astroturfing and the use of media framing to create these faux movements means that existing movement literature cannot be applied to the Tea Party (DiMaggio, 2011).

Lemuel's (2010) study highlighted rhetorical elements of the movement. The author argued that the Tea Party represented a pseudo-movement that "synthesized rhetoric" through the use of calculated rhetorical choices and use of narrative (Lemuel, 2010, p. 113). By examining the 2010 National Tea Party Convention, Lemuel (2010) suggested that two rhetorical strategies, prophetic discourse and conspiracy rhetoric, heavily influenced speakers at the event. Prophetic discourse was used by speakers to describe the 2008 economic recession as a religious event brought on by the failure of the "sleeping" audience to act (Lemuel, 2010, p.50). In this view, conspiracy rhetoric was often used to construe opposing viewpoints as being part of a larger plan to destroy the founding principles of America.

While Lemuel's study provides important information regarding some of the strategies employed by Tea Party members, there are two reasons why it does not fully answer the questions asked by this study. First, Lemuel focused primarily on notable leaders of the Tea Party such as Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin while disregarding other types of discourse such as blogs. Blogs played a key part in organizing the Tea Party and arguably are important in understanding the rhetorical patterns of the movement (Branson, 2011). Next, while the National Tea Party Convention was an important event in the movement, it is still only a single event in the larger history of the organization. Leaders such as Glenn Beck later distanced themselves from aspects of the movement and, in turn, the rhetoric of the Tea Party evolved.

Neville in 2010 discussed how the historical event of the Boston Tea Party was reshaped by the modern Tea Party and became a centerpiece of its ideology. In the case of the modern Tea Party movement, the rhetorical significance of the Boston Tea Party was redefined (Neville, 2010). Neville argued that Tea Party members no longer recognized the rationality at the heart of the Boston Tea Party and instead saw articulate, reasoned, rhetoric as illegitimate (2010, p. 87). The Tea Party was “defined by its inarticulateness” and used the destructiveness of the Boston Tea Party as a justification for their actions (Neville, 2010, p 88). Members of the movement saw themselves as defenders of the values of the U.S., regardless of the actual historical connection between the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution (Neville, 2010, p. 89).

While the Boston Tea Party clearly plays an important role in the rhetoric of the modern Tea Party, Neville’s (2010) study does not exhaust the study of Tea Party rhetoric. Thus while Neville highlighted how the Boston Tea Party had been reworked into the modern Tea Party, it provides an insufficient explanation for the success of the movement.

Spiker (2012) focused on prominent female leaders of the Tea Party movement and their use of rhetoric. She observed that Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann focused on anxiety concerning the economy as well as the “erosion of American values” to create a lightning rod for their supporters’ anger (Spiker, 2012 p. 10). Spiker suggests that one of the aims of the rhetoric of Palin and Bachmann was to negotiate the tension between conservatism and feminism. By framing the situation facing Tea Party members as a life or death struggle for survival, female leaders of the Tea Party movement were able to carve out a niche in conservative politics (Spiker, 2012 p. 10). Spiker’s (2012) study, while useful, is not broad enough to provide a cohesive understanding of Tea Party rhetoric as it focuses on Governor Palin and Representative

Bachmann. In addition, this approach does not encompass the entirety of Tea Party rhetoric. Thus, a more in-depth study of Tea Party rhetoric is needed to explain the movement.

In sum, there has not been sufficient study of Tea Party rhetoric. There has been little analysis of the rhetoric of the movement as a whole. While the ongoing debate concerning whether or not the Tea Party is a social movement is necessary for those interested in movement studies, this distinction is not relevant to my project. In addition, although astroturfing has clearly played a part in the spread of the Tea Party, it does not account for the resonance Tea Party rhetoric has had with the mainstream population (Courser, 2011). Hofstadter's original focus concerning the Paranoid Style was to examine the psychological element associated with the circulation of conspiracy and apocalyptic rhetoric in national politics (1965). As noted, the Paranoid Style is not sufficient to explain the Tea Party; this provides justification for the further study of the group.

Framing

A number of researchers have turned to framing theory and media studies to understand the Tea Party. Authors have examined how the media contributed to the rise of the Tea Party (DiMaggio, 2011), its perceived persuasive influence in different U.S. populations (Wilson & Burack, 2012), and the Tea Party's strategic shaping of the rhetoric surrounding important U.S. domestic policy initiatives (Skinner, 2012).

DiMaggio's (2011) concluded that the Tea Party is not a social movement because of its reliance on media framing and public relations events to generate a public outcry. During the early days of the Tea Party, many of the original organizers were paid by lobbying bodies with direct ties to business organizations and the Republican Party (DiMaggio, 2011, pp 100-1). Media outlets helped to solidify the grassroots label through their reporting and provided

legitimization of the Tea Party's origin (DiMaggio, 2011, p 37). In addition, DiMaggio argued that the rhetoric circulating inside of the Tea Party and distributed by media outlets represents an example of the propaganda model of public opinion (2011, pp 127-129). The claim is that framing played a key role in all movement rhetoric. Whether or not framing played a role in the development of the Tea Party doesn't speak to the rhetorical problem examined by this project. If anything, DiMaggio's finding demonstrates a need to study the rhetorical elements used by Tea Party groups. If DiMaggio's propaganda claim is correct, it is the critic's job to understand the rhetorical message used by the Tea Party.

Wilson and Burack (2012) used framing theory to explain how Christian conservative groups and Tea Party members developed a political relationship by reframing fiscal concerns as moral ones. Initially, Tea Party leaders tried to stay away from social issues. As the Tea Party continued to grow, Christian and Tea Party groups began to reframe their rhetoric, in order to "build bridges and alliances" through the creation of an external threat to their respective groups (Wilson & Burack, 2012 p. 177-1779). One of the frames often employed by Christian leaders was to connect President Obama and Democratic leadership to the "spread of Sharia law throughout the world" (Wilson & Burack, 2012 p.184). While this study does highlight a particular attribute of the Paranoid Style concerning the construction of external threats, it focused only on a small portion of the Tea Party and limited its examination to frames, not a broad rhetorical analysis. With that in mind, the potential importance of framing in constructing external threats is relevant to my examination of Tea Party rhetoric.

Skinner's (2012) framing study examines the success of Tea Party arguments against the Affordable Care Act (ACA) during the run-up to the 2010 U.S. midterm election. Skinner found that media coverage inadvertently circulated paradoxical arguments such as "keep your

government hands off my Medicare,” and increased the spread of Tea Party rhetoric (Skinner, 2012, p. 609). Skinner (2012) concludes that the media’s reliance on neo-liberal reasoning made it difficult to discuss issues of ideology with the American public. This study, though useful, only focuses on the portrayal of Tea Party rhetoric by the media and is thus insufficient to explain the rhetorical strategies employed by the movement.

The previously mentioned studies demonstrate the possible role that framing played in the spread of the Tea Party over the course of its history. While useful, these studies do not focus on Tea Party rhetoric specifically. In addition, these studies looked primarily at media reporting. Thus more research need to be done concerning the Tea Party’s rhetoric in order to understand the growth and development of the movement.

The Rise of the Tea Party

The origin of the Tea Party is often credited to Rick Santelli’s February 19, 2009, appearance on CNBC concerning the implementation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). During the broadcast, Santelli proclaimed “We’re thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July” in protest to the perceived handout by the government to “losers.” His harkening to the Boston Tea Party and the patriotic symbolism it represented was quickly broadcast around the nation by Fox News and other outlets (Zernike, 2010a). Both Sean Hannity and Glen Beck dedicated time on their shows to replaying clips of Santelli’s speech in order to bring attention to the issues surrounding TARP.

In fact, Santelli’s comments were by no means the beginning of the Tea Party. The election of President Obama and the credit freeze of 2008 had already started to create movements around the country. Three days before Santelli’s CNBC outburst, a rally was held in Seattle proclaiming the founding of the Seattle Sons and Daughters of Liberty in a bid against

what members saw as runaway spending and an intrusive government (Zernike, 2010a). As news spread, groups all over the country began to organize around the new Tea Party and its fiscal conservative ideology.

The rise of the Tea Party in 2009 led to a decisive victory for Republicans in the 2010 midterm elections (Miller & Walling, 2012). Democrats had written off the Tea Party as a radical right wing movement that didn't understand the economy and as irrational in regards to their self-interest (Krugman, 2010). In 2010, the Tea Party rallied white middle and working class voters to elect extremely conservative members of Congress (Miller & Walling, 2012).

The success of the Tea Party during the 2010 midterm elections was a key steppingstone to greater power for its members at a local and national level. Many supporters saw the victory as evidence of change to the political system, led by newly elected Tea Party members. As one freshman Senator put it "They are carrying the Republican Tea Party Rebellion straight into the heart of the world's most exclusive club" (Dinan, 2011). This result put the Tea Party and establishment Republicans on a path towards confrontation.

Initially, the GOP welcomed Tea Partiers into its ranks with open arms. Conservative pundit David Brooks, an initial encourager of the movement turned critic, saw a chance for the GOP to incorporate the Tea Party into the Republican ranks (2010). Instead, the Tea Party pushed the GOP further to the right on numerous issues and continued to oppose compromise with Democrats (Parker & Barreto, 2013). One of the best examples of the tenuous relationship between establishment Republicans and the new Tea Party was the Debt Ceiling crisis of 2011.

The issue of raising the debt ceiling, an event that had for years been a formality, turned into an economically dangerous situation during the summer of 2011 after pressure from Tea Party members forced GOP leaders to stop negotiation with President Obama (Fahrenthold,

2011). Tensions ran high as freshman Tea Party Senators and Representatives balked at Republican establishment leaders' attempts to negotiate with President Obama. Senator John McCain described the situation as "Bizzaro" and labeled Tea Party leaders as naïve, going so far as to compare their worldview to a *Lord of the Rings* battle between good and evil (MacAskill, 2011). While the 2011 crisis was resolved, it foreshadowed the difficulties that lay ahead between GOP leaders and the Tea Party.

The debt ceiling crisis came at a cost for establishment Republicans and Tea Party members. Obama's 2012 victory in the general election has often been directly connected to a public backlash against the Tea Party and its Republican compatriots (Zelizer, 2012). The GOP establishment particularly blamed freshman Tea Party members in Congress for its defeat and, over time, increasingly began to distance itself from their policies (Cillizza, 2012). Speaker of the House John Boehner was quick to remove Tea Party members from key committee seats, and other establishment members blamed Tea Partiers for losses in key states such as Indiana (Cillizza, 2012). These actions further eroded the ties between the GOP and Tea Party members and set the stage for the 2013 government shutdown.

On October 1st, 2013, the United States government was forced to close its doors for the first time in seventeen years. At the center of the government shutdown was freshman Texas Senator Ted Cruz and the Tea Party. Rush Limbaugh called Ted Cruz's efforts a "battle for America's soul" and Cruz was said to be the savior for America (Weinger, 2013). The tensions between the GOP and the Tea Party had never been higher. Moderate Republicans lined up to criticize the brash tactics of the group. Senator John McCain openly scolded his party, stating that they should "stop this foolish childishness" and went so far as to agree with President

Obama that the shutdown should never have occurred (Foster, 2013a). Some pundits even called the Tea Party tactics a “suicide” (Foster, 2013b).

The shutdown was widely unpopular with the American public and set the stage for a fight between establishment Republicans and Tea Party members. Initial polling showed that 55% of Americans blamed Republicans for the government shutdown and the Tea Party saw a significant decrease in support overall (Balz & Clement, 2013). In response to criticism from establishment Republican politicians, prominent Tea Party members began organizing primary campaigns against what they called Republicans In Name Only (RINOs) (Agee, 2013).

Traditional GOP leadership and Tea Party members continued to square off through 2013 and 2014. The defeat of Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor by a relatively unknown Tea Party candidate was unprecedented in modern politics and demonstrates just how large the rift between the Tea Party and establishment Republicans had become (Krugman, 2014). The Tea Party was no longer another group of conservatives under the umbrella of the GOP, instead it had grown to aggressively oppose the Republican establishment.

This section provided a brief look at the growth of the Tea Party from 2009 to 2014 and described the spread of the movement over that period. In order to understand the inner workings of the Tea Party and how it spread it is necessary to examine the makeup of the movement. In the next section, I review the demographics of the Tea Party and the values endorsed by many of its members.

The Demographics and Values of the Tea Party

The fiscal responsibility spark that began the Tea Party in 2009 still plays a key role in the identity of its members. The efforts by the U.S. Government, such as TARP, to stem the recession were used as a rallying cry by Tea Party members against what they saw as “rewarding

bad behavior” (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013, p. 7). Tea Party members felt betrayed by government bailouts and viewed themselves as a movement to revolutionize the political landscape away from irresponsible spending (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). Consequently, the Tea Party’s views on fiscal conservatism were front and center during the 2011 Debt Ceiling debate as well as the 2013 government shutdown (Caplan-Bricker, 2013; MacAskill, 2011).

Researchers have often questioned the authenticity of the Tea Party's concern for fiscal responsibility. DiMaggio’s (2011) analysis of early Tea Party organizations, attempted to demonstrate that many leaders in the party were more focused on business regulations and private interests than outright fiscal conservatism. Other scholars argued that the lack of outrage against the G.W. Bush Administration’s rampant spending demonstrates a clear lack of authenticity by Tea Party members concerning fiscal responsibility (Parker & Barreto, 2013, p. 251). Instead of being the centerpiece of the Tea Party, fiscal responsibility might only have been a vehicle used by the movement to attract members for its other concerns. Williamson, Skocpol, and Coggin (2011) noted that many members of the Tea Party were grappling with a generational identity crisis. The public acceptance of gay marriage and LGBT rights threatened the identities of many Tea Party members (Williamson, Skocpol, & Coggin, 2011). Some Tea Partiers interpreted changes in society, such as the increasing number of immigrants and the perceived invasion of the government into the private sector, as a direct attack on their social identity.

The generational identity crisis located at the heart of the Tea Party movement becomes evident when examining the demographics of the organization. As Skopol and Williams described, the Tea Party reflects a generational divide between the mainstream and an aging population (2013, p. 204). Over 75% of Tea Party members are 49 or older, and 29% are over 65

(Ashbee, 2011). In addition, 86% are White and only 1% identified as Black (Montopoli, 2012). Nine in ten agreed that the best days of America were in its past, compared to the national average of four in ten (Montopoli, 2012). Tea Party members were also more likely not to support LGBT rights and disapproved of political correctness (Parker & Barreto, 2013). While these statistics provide an overview of the difference of opinion between Tea Party members and more mainstream parties, one issue that was particularly important was race.

The Tea Party's view on racism is reflective of the group's disconnect with mainstream society. From its inception, the Tea Party has often been labeled as being a political guise for racism. The NAACP at one point issued a statement labeling the group a racist organization due to rhetoric from Tea Party leaders, as well as widely televised racist comments that occurred at numerous rallies over the course of 2009-2010 (Travis, 2010). In response, scholars argued that while there are some racist members in the Tea Party, the movement is not inherently racist (Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). Many Tea Party members don't identify race as being a significant social issue in the U.S. (Skocpol & Williamson, p. 69, 2013). In fact, many Tea Partiers see the label of racism as evidence of a larger conspiracy against conservatives by liberals and the elite in an attempt to discredit the party (Skocpol & Williamson, p.68-69, 2013).

An important part of understanding the Tea Party is understanding the symbolic purpose of the name. The name itself is symbolic of the ideology and worldview of the movement. Taken in homage to the patriots of the Boston Tea Party, many members of the group see themselves as guardians of the founding documents of the nation (Wilson & Burack, 2012). The founding of the group after the 2008 election was seen as an attempt to "take back the government" and return it to the people (Wilson & Burack, 2012). Utilizing symbols from the founding of

America allowed the movement to create a cohesive narrative about fighting government tyranny. In the same way that Bostonians were taking a stand against unfair taxation, the Tea Party saw itself as taking a stand against unfair government encroachment in their lives. Even the formation of the party carries symbolic importance as the grassroots nature is at times seen as a direct similarity to the Patriots during the Revolution.

The Tea Party used the Founding Fathers and documents of America history as a form of political justification. For example, the government shutdown of 2013 was seen by many Tea Party members as a patriotic revolt against the status quo. Most pundits labeled the government shutdown as a major blunder by the Tea Party and predicted it would harm them in the 2014 midterm elections (Avlon, 2013; Coy, 2013). Some Tea Party members saw the shutdown compromise not as a sign of defeat or a chance to reflect, but as a rallying cry for a new revolution. As one Tea Party blog writer stated:

It starts now the same way it started over 200 years ago. We do the jobs that need to be done. We don't allow ourselves to be bossed around, spied on, or ripped off by know-nothing swindlers. We know the answers. We've known them for centuries. Government rests on the consent of the governed. If you don't approve, stop consenting. (Ellerman, 2013)

The previous blog highlights the view that many Tea Party members had concerning the 2013 government shutdown; these were not negotiations with a friendly neighbor but were instead a battleground between worldviews. Simply put, many Tea Party members saw themselves as protectors of the founding principles in a battle for America's soul (Wilson & Burack, 2012).

The values of the Tea Party reflect a combination of different ideologies and societal perspective that makes it difficult to identify a single viewpoint within the movement. This

research will be useful in analyzing the rhetoric of the Tea Party. In the next section, I explain the methodology that I used to conduct comprehensive examination of the movement.

Methodology

In my study I used an inductive method to analyze the Tea Party's rhetoric. Inductive methods utilize an audience-centered view of the rhetorical situation in order to reveal strategies that dominate the rhetorical practices of the group. Researchers must gather representative texts to develop a cohesive understanding of rhetorical strategies, symbols, and themes. Inductive methods have been used in the past to examine genres (Jamieson & Campbell, 1982) as well as narratives (R. C. Rowland & Strain, 1994) and involve the researchers immersing themselves in the object they are studying. This immersion helps reveal patterns, practices, and other elements that would otherwise have been missed through other means of study.

In order to explain the rhetoric of the Tea Party, I employed a three-step process. First, I considered the historical and political context in which the Tea Party operated. This was done by examining the political situation at key moments in its development, such as the government shutdown of 2013, as well as studying public opinion data at the time. After establishing the rhetorical situation, I conducted an inductive descriptive analysis of representative rhetoric to identify the key themes and strategies of the Tea Party. Only after the themes and strategies were found was I able to identify the underlying pattern in the rhetoric and able to explain its relevance to the Tea Party as a whole.

A descriptive analysis was used to review in full detail the rhetoric of the Tea Party. I focused on five general categories: Themes, Persona, Strategies, Narratives, and Ideology. Themes describe a pattern or series of responses that form the central message of the rhetor. Usually, themes are developed strategically by a group or person over the course of a text. In the

case of the Tea Party, a theme of anxiety and anger permeated elements of the movement (Lemuel, 2010). By examining Tea Party rhetoric over the course of its history, it is possible to track how the themes of the movement evolved over time.

Persona is the role adopted by the rhetor (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). The structure, use of pronouns, and argumentative elements of a speech can indicate to a critic the presence of a persona. Different personas provide rhetors with advantages and disadvantages depending on their rhetorical situation. For example, some Tea Party leaders have been seen to adopt a prophetic persona in their rhetoric (Lemuel, 2010). In addition, a given persona might be specially adapted or maladapted to a potential theme or strategy.

Strategies are a plan of action designed to overcome the obstacles facing a speaker (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 169). Strategies include but are not limited to linguistic devices, arguments, appeals to credibility, and appeals to values or needs (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). For example, a critic might observe that a rhetor employed scapegoating strategies during a time of crisis in order to focus anger towards a specific group of people while deflecting it from themselves. Strategies often contain a variety of rhetorical elements that are used in concert to achieve the goal of the rhetor. The complex nature of strategy means that a single rhetorical text cannot contain all of the important movement strategies. Thus, in order to discover the strategy of the Tea Party, it was necessary to compare a variety of texts to determine what strategies were employed by the movement.

Narratives are stories that are used to frame and explain the world of the rhetor. These narratives can range from simple morality plays to complex foundational myths that touch on key values of society. The Tea Party used a variety of narratives in the movement, ranging from foundational myths to underdog stories concerning the common person (Neville, 2010; Parker &

Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Spiker, 2012). For example, narratives involving the Boston Tea Party have been used by movement members draw a direct line between the founding of America to the modern Tea Party (Neville, 2010).

Finally, ideology refers to a worldview defining problems in the political world and the proper policy for addressing those problems. For example, fiscal conservatism has been a hallmark of Tea Party doctrine since its beginning and has influenced many of the policies supported by the movement (Zernike, 2010a). Narratives and ideology are often closely related. In regards to the Tea Party, narratives concerning the founding of America have often been linked to the ideology of fiscal conservatism and vice versa.

Using these categories, I sifted through the rhetoric of the Tea Party in order to piece together an overarching description of its rhetoric elements. By examining how Tea Party rhetoric reacted to the ongoing political situation and documenting the different themes, arguments, narratives, persona, and ideologies used by the movement, I identified the underlying patterns that energized the movement's rhetoric.

It was not enough, however, to identify the patterns in the rhetoric of the movement. In order to explain its influence in American politics, it was crucial to explain how the rhetoric responded to and then influenced public opinion. Bitzer (p.58, 1992) argued that "the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse." This means that only by understanding the exigency, audience, and constraints can a scholar explain the reasoning of a given text (Bitzer, 1968).

The decentralized nature of the Tea Party provided a particular rationale for employing an inductive approach in this project. The Tea Party movement was rooted in a diffuse structure with a variety of smaller group existing inside it (Zernike, 2010a, p. 40-41). In order to

understand the rhetorical practices of the Tea Party, it was necessary to examine a wide selection of texts. One of the reasons that the Tea Party spread so effectively was its reliance on technology and social media (DiMaggio, 2011; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Zernike, 2010a). Organizations such as Freedom Works, Tea Party Express, and the Tea Party Network provided a digital platform for members to find others near them. Oftentimes Tea Party members used the Internet as their way of fighting back against the mainstream media who they believed were corrupt and arrayed against their interests (Branson, 2011).

Blogs of Tea Party members were central to examining the rhetoric of the Tea Party. In fact, the Tea Party base has been very active on online social media platforms (Wilson & Burack, 2012). Many of the original Tea Party gatherings were organized through social media or 3rd party blogosphere websites. This highlighted the need for texts that expanded beyond speeches and to include electronic messaging such as blogging.

To develop an understanding of the Tea Party and its rhetoric it was necessary to gather representative texts of the movement. Given the grassroots nature of the Tea Party, it was important to gather texts reflecting its bottom up structure. As mentioned previously, blogs played an important role in understanding the movement and its rhetoric. Also, it was important to consider how the Tea Party developed over time. To account for this, I identified three time periods that were important in the history of the Tea Party: implementation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program of 2008 during the spring of 2009, the 2010 midterm election, and the 2013 government shutdown. Each of these events represented a significant point in the development of the Tea Party and provided a rich set of rhetorical texts to examine.

Chapter Preview

In chapter two, “The Birth of the Tea Party Movement,” I examined the negative reaction by Tea Party members to President Obama’s implementation of the 2008 TARP act. Arguably this event was the spark that brought the movement to the national stage. Understanding the initial rhetoric of the Tea Party was critical for understanding the development of the movement overall.

Chapter three, “The Tea Party Movement and the 2010 Midterm,” reviewed the rhetorical practices of the Tea Party in the 2010 U.S. midterm elections. The midterm election put the Tea Party center stage in American politics and provided it with a presence in Congress. The rhetoric leading up to the election played a key role in galvanizing Tea Party members into action.

Chapter four, “The Tea Party Movement and the 2013 Government Shutdown,” studied the rhetoric of the Tea Party during 2013 government shutdown. Prominent Tea Party members such as Ted Cruz played a crucial role in the shutdown and enjoyed sweeping popularity within their Tea Party communities. Yet, the general public and establishment Republicans overwhelmingly turned against what was seen as the Tea Party’s obstructionism. The shutdown provided an opportunity to understand how rhetorical strategies worked with one audience but failed with others.

Finally, in chapter five, “Entelechy, The Tea Party, and the Donald Trump Presidency,” I summarized the study’s findings and explained how they contribute to research on a broader scale. Specifically, I discussed how Tea Party rhetoric related to other ongoing movements and campaigns in American rhetorical history such as the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

Chapter Two: The Birth of the Tea Party Movement

While the election of Barak Obama is often seen as the catalyst for the creation of the Tea Party (Barreto, Cooper, Gonzalez, Parker, & Towler, 2011) it was the advent of the Great Recession which set the stage for the rise of the group (Danziger & Bartels, 2013). In particular, the passage of the Troubled Asset Relief Fund (TARP) in the Fall of 2008 by the U.S. Congress provided early members of the Tea Party movement (TPM) with a powerful talking point that defined the beginning of the movement (Zernike, 2010a). Rick Santelli's famous February 19, 2009, rant, which was aimed at the TARP program, has since been cited as the beginning of the TPM (Parker & Barreto, 2013).

In reality, while Santelli's rant is a visible starting point for the Tea Party, it was by no means the beginning of the movement (Zernike, 2010b). Groups such as Freedom Works began to organize rallies after the 2008 election and into early 2009, which became the basis for the movement (DiMaggio, 2011; Zernike, 2010a). The press coverage following Santelli's comments provided early Tea Party Bloggers and self-described grassroots media strategists, such as Michael Patrick Leah and Freedom Works, the opportunity to brand their efforts under the Tea Party banner (Zernike, 2010a). These online efforts led to the some of the first Tea Party rallies, with over 40 events occurring within two weeks of Santelli's comments (Gainor, 2014; Zernike, 2010a).

Initial political reactions to the TPM by the traditional political establishment were mixed. Many saw the Tea Party as a simple rebranding of traditional Republican values and an attempt to "AstroTurf" a political movement (DiMaggio, 2011; Krugman, 2009a). Pundits argued that Republican politicians and corporate-backed political organizations, like FreedomWorks, were attempting to create the illusion of a grassroots movement by sponsoring and administering rallies in order to drum up support against President Obama (Krugman, 2009a;

Smith, 2009). Others predicted the end of the movement soon after its inception in 2009, arguing that the values of fiscal discipline and fairness were simply a vehicle for Republicans to rehash arguments from the 2008 election cycle (Gerstein, 2009). Many portrayed the Tea Party not as a new movement, but as a group of Republican voters who didn't want to accept the election results of 2008 and "can't seem to grasp basic budget math" (Gerstein, 2009).

Over the course of 2009, three events highlighted the development of the TPM's rhetorical strategies. The first was the April 15 Tax Day demonstrations, which featured speakers such as fiscal conservative Republican Senator Rand Paul and many self-proclaimed Tea Party bloggers. The Tax Day demonstrations represented the TPM's organizational progress since the comments by Rick Santelli (Jenkins & Shawn, 2009; Smith, 2009). The second event examined in this chapter is the Fourth of July demonstration put on by Tea Party organizations around the United States. The patriotic symbolism of the Fourth of July was used by movement members as an opportunity to strengthen the supposed connection between the movement and the founding of the United States (Streitfeld, 2009). The final event was the Freedom Works rally held in Washington D.C. on Sept. 12. This rally featured prominent speakers such as former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey, Republican Senator Jim DeMint, and multiple Tea Party organizers and bloggers. Besides the influential speakers who attended, the organizer of the rally, Freedom Works, was recognized by many as a key driving force for developing the blogosphere related to the movement (DiMaggio, 2011; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Zernike, 2010a). The Freedom Works rally, in many ways, represented a culmination of the Tea Party in 2009 and arguably set the rhetorical groundwork for the future of the movement.

In this chapter, I argue that the rhetoric of the TPM reflected a mythic/ideological system in which the nation was portrayed as needing a new founding that returned to the original

principles of America. First, I discuss the role of foundational myths in society and explain how they undergird ideological systems. Second, I demonstrate how Tea Party speakers portrayed the movement as being part of a larger mythic narrative, which called for a return to the foundational values of America. Finally, I examine how the TPM framed the financial crisis as an example of the betrayal of American values and a step toward the decline of America as a nation.

Myth and Ideology

Myth shapes how believers view the world. Kenneth Burke described myths as sacred and unimpeachable truths (1950). Malinowski argued that myths are a “reality lived” for those who believed them and often serve to ground a society in a system of beliefs (1971). Some theorists argue that stories possessing mythic form, such as in contemporary science fiction in film, should be treated as myth, while others believe that the term myth should be limited to stories that have the form and also are treated as sacred and “true” in society (Rowland, 1990; Rushing, 1990).

The key to resolving this conflict is to recognize that myths are “true” stories for their believers. They provide an avenue for followers to transcend the normal world. In many ways, a myth is connected with the perfection of an ideal and, for members, it can be used as a grounding for one’s identity (Rowland & Frank, 2002). When a believer becomes connected to myth, his/her worldview is fundamentally based on its underlying truths and believers of a myth will often disregard factual evidence that runs contrary to the myth (Rowland & Frank, 2002).

Religion and myth are intricately related. Theology is steeped in mythic narratives and relies on the transcendent power of the mythic form to establish principles and rules for followers (Rowland & Frank, 2002). For Christians, the narrative of Jesus Christ’s life, death and ascension form the basis of their belief in God and Christ’s divinity. Similar mythic narratives can be found in Judaism, Islam and a variety of non-Abrahamic religions.

Many of the myths that form the basis of society are secular in nature. For example, the American myth of the frontier and the foundational myth of America as a “shining city on the hill” are secular myths supporting grounded values. The transcendent nature of myth is similar whether it is religious or the secular. The central element of the myth that is present in both is that believers see the story as true and transcendent.

Foundational myths are myths that are central to a group’s identity. Societies often ascribe sacred meanings to the stories, values and principles associated with their origin. For example, the foundational myth of America plays this role in the U.S. Sacvan Bercovitch identifies this myth in stories that he calls the American Jeremiad. These stories describe a chosen people who turned away from the founding values and principles that brought them greatness (Bercovitch, 1978). Only through admitting their mistake and returning to the secular values of their founding can the audience attain their former glory. Concepts embodied by the American Jeremiad, such as individualism, freedom and the American Dream, are key to foundational myths and central to American identity (Bercovitch, 1978). Speakers from Ronald Reagan to Abraham Lincoln galvanized their audiences into taking action on a variety of issues by using elements of myth that can be traced directly to the founding (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990; Rowland & Jones, 2005). As I argue later, the Tea Party used the founding of America as a call for a return to the values and concepts that made America great in the form of the myth of return.

Myth of Return

Myths of return are defined by three key elements. First, the myth of return tells a story of a once powerful or great people who have lost or been stripped of power (Roy & Rowland, 2003). Members of the society are told that if they return to the values of their founding the

society will recover its identity and return to greatness. Next, a powerful and “perfectly evil” villain with great power must exist to oppose the “heroes” (Roy & Rowland, p.231, 2003). A weak villain would not satisfy the narrative, as there would be no desperate struggle to defeat the “evil” that threatens society; the struggle to regain the identity lost is in itself part of the “medicine” that allows the believer to reclaim their values (Burke, 1950).

The myth of return is a powerful example of how foundational myths undergird a society’s ideology and political movements. This type of foundational myth focuses on a return or rebirth of a nation via the principles and values present during its founding (Roy & Rowland, 2003, p.237). While not necessarily religious in nature, foundational myths often play a key role in the ideologies and values that compose a society. Rowland and Roy’s (2003) examination of radicalized Hindu nationalism provides a detailed example of how a myth of religious/nationalist return can be used to create a frighteningly deadly narrative. Hindu Nationalists relied on a mythic narrative, which portrayed the root of India’s problems as being caused by “bad Muslims” and the abandonment of key Hindu values by the government (Roy & Rowland, 2003, p. 233). Hindu nationalists argued that only by returning to traditional Hindu values and defeating the powerful Muslim agitators could India be reborn into a great nation (Roy & Rowland, 2003). This interpretation of the Hindu myth was used to justify acts of violence against the minority Muslim population, even though traditional readings of Hindu beliefs advocated against violence.

The myth of return also represents one of the dangers that foundational myths can pose to society. Kenneth Burke’s analysis of Nazi rhetoric provides a stark picture of the dire consequences that a nationalistic/religious myth of return can cause (1950). Burke points out that the loss of dignity felt by the German people after World War I was connected to a larger

societal loss of identity. A myth of return's power relies on the audience's desire to reclaim their identity through a return to the values that once made them great (Roy & Rowland, 2003). In the case of Nazism, this was done through Hitler's interpretation of the Aryan race as chosen people and use of the Jewish people as a scapegoat for the problems that befell Germany during and after the war. While the case of the Nazis is an extreme example of the myth of return's power, it illustrates the power that mythic forms can have in a society. In the case of the Tea Party, the scapegoat is the progressive left, which is embodied by President Obama, Liberals and Progressives.

Myths are transcendent stories; ideologies are inherently tied to myth and form a connection between reality and the sacred narrative. The values and principles that myth embodies serve as an underlying guide for how a believer should function in society. Ideology, unlike myth, is directly connected to reality by its ability to describe the way a society is and could become (Rowland & Frank, 2002). In many ways, ideology is like a map as it provides believers with a clear path toward what they think will be a better future (Rowland & Frank, 2002). Ideology works with myth to provide definitions for the roles of members in American society, and myth provides the transcendent values and principles which form the basis of an ideology.

The use of historical references and analogies to the nation's founding by the TPM was part of a myth of return that described the movement as a modern version of the American Revolution. Fiscal discipline, limited government and traditional American values were key planks in the platform of the Tea Party and common topics at their rallies. Tea Party leaders portrayed their movement as inspired by the values and ideals of the founding of America (Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). For Tea Party members, the answer to

the crisis facing America was to return to the principles that made America great. In the next section, I demonstrate how this framing of founding values and traditions by the TPM represents a myth of return.

Patriotism, Founding Fathers, Myth and the Tea Party Movement

Tea Party members employed a series of rhetorical strategies to reframe the founding of America and the TPM as connected events. In a myth of return, a movement states that a nation or other group can achieve greatness by returning to the principles that undergird their society and were responsible for its original greatness (Roy & Rowland, 2003). In doing so, the TPM sought to create not only a justification for its actions, but a sense of purpose and righteousness in their cause. Leaders described the movement as a new generation of patriots. Tea Party rhetors often did this in three ways. First, the founding documents, fathers, and principles were treated as sacred and instrumental in America's greatness. Second, the TPM framed its platform as a return to the founding principles. Finally, speakers often adopted a persona of modern patriots with a connection to the original patriots of the American Revolution.

Connecting the Foundation to the Tea Party Movement

Tea Party leaders often described the founding as an inspired act. For example, Darla Dawald (2009) stated, "I believe in the people that are here and what you stand for. God gave us the right to freedom, and god and our forefathers made way for us to be one of the greatest countries on earth. And nobody is going to take that from us." Kim Simac (2009), a Tea Party Blogger, portrayed the founding documents as inspired by God, claiming, "This faith in God and his almighty seat overall must have resonated across the land as each and every Preamble, of each and every state's own constitution, gives tribute and honor to God in their very first sentences." This shows a clear linkage between religion and the founding. A similar sentiment

was common at rallies and marches for the movement. The Constitution and Founding Fathers were prominently displayed in the form of pocket constitutions, cardboard cutouts, and slogans (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013, p. 48). From bags of tea to tricornered hats, members of the movement symbolized their association with the founding both physically and philosophically.

The Constitution was treated as a sacred text by members of the TPM. As former Majority Leader Dick Armey explained, “the one thing they knew above all other things is that when they wrote that constitution was that liberty was a gift given to mankind and mankind alone by the lord god almighty and it is the duty of the government to protect it” (2009). By associating the Constitution with God, and in turn the values enshrined in the document, the founding was portrayed as a sacred event. In a way, the movement was attempting to make use of two mythic systems at once: the secular myth of the founding of America and the mythic narrative of Christianity.

By labeling values from the Constitution as divinely inspired, TPM advocates drew a stark contrast between “good” American values and the “evil” mainstream, which had taken hold of modern America. Aspects of the left and mainstream were often cited to claim that a degradation of morals and values was occurring in America. For example, Al Gerhart asked:

Did you ever wonder about the Hollywood movie stars, why some fall apart under the stress, sometimes ruining their lives with drugs or alcohol? It is the anxiety that eats into their guts, the real anxiety that comes from not earning what is given to you. Lately, we are anxious and troubled with the current state of our country. We are troubled because we have not earned our freedoms, we know that what is not earned is easily taken away. It has been there in the back of our minds, unspoken, but now we are awakening. (2009)

Hollywood and other entertainment centers have often been associated with a moral decline by conservative groups. The example used by Gerhart demonstrates how members of the Tea Party saw the country in a state of moral decay, and the Tea Party movement was portrayed as a return to the values enshrined in America's founding.

The ideals of the founders also were used to draw a sharp contrast between the TPM and its opponents. For example, Doug Reich said:

America was founded upon the spirit of individualism - the idea that each individual is independent, the owner of his life, free to pursue his own happiness. In stark contrast to the Founders spirit of individualism, Obama stands for collectivism, the idea that one's life belongs to the state and that morality consists of sacrifice and duty. (2009)

Individualism and the Founder's spirit were positioned as diametrically opposed to President Obama and modern "collectivism." In this case, the original values were used to frame the crisis facing modern Americans as a government that has grown tyrannical and morally bankrupt, much like the British Empire in the 18th century. In this narrative, President Obama was a modern version of King George the Third. Edward Cline, a Tea Party member, saw a direct comparison between the British Crown and the modern situation in America as well, stating:

The Crown's response to the Boston Tea Party was to legislate the Coercive or Intolerable Acts as punishment. Today, the current administration, in partnership with Congress, has passed and continues to pass, a Medusa's head of acts vastly more extortionate and repressive than the original Coercive Acts, and the Tea Parties have been a response to them. (2009)

British tyranny and its symbolism were common devices for the TPM. For example, Paul Stevens stated: "Today, the politicians in Washington are the redcoats. Today, our future liberties

are as much at stake as the colonists who formed ranks atop the hill overlooking Boston” (2009). Whether using metaphors or explicit historical references to the Revolutionary War, TPM leaders drew stark comparisons between the modern crisis facing America and the founding of the nation.

TPM rhetors urged their audience to return to the values of the founding documents and fight against what they saw as liberal tyranny, Doug Reich said, “we must wage a moral and intellectual battle to rediscover the American spirit and the morality implied by the Declaration of Independence; we must recapture the spirit of individualism, self-reliance, and limited government. We must fight, not just against Obama's vision, but for our own vision” (2009). Blogger Llyod Marcus described President Obama as “the Evil Empire” and analogized the situation as similar to that between David and Goliath (Marcus, 2009b). The Tea Party described itself as fighting for a new revolution against the collectivist values of President Obama. In the same vein, Chris Amado stated:

Today we say “enough!” Today we determine to stand against any further erosion of our great nation with every ounce of our beings. Today we begin to retake America for those who live here, and who are yet to be born, that they may have a great land in which to live life, enjoy liberty, and pursue happiness. (2009)

Part of the power of a myth of return is its ability to provide a clear route through which the “greatness” of the society can be reclaimed (Roy & Rowland, 2003). In the case of the TPM, that path is through a reenactment of the revolution that created the nation. Amado’s last sentence demonstrates how some members of the TPM saw themselves as patriots of a new revolution.

The Tea Party's reimagining of the founding and its connection to the movement is particularly obvious in the persona of the patriot. TPM speakers often took on the mantle of a modern patriot. Republican Senator Rand Paul stated at a 2009 Tax Day rally:

About two hundred years ago, Sam Adams and a bunch of rabble-rousers, kind of like this crew here, got together and brewed some tea in Boston Harbor. They were quite mad about a few things, and Sam Adams famously said, "It doesn't take a majority to prevail, but it takes an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in the minds of men.

Senator Paul's comments illustrate how the TPM related itself to the original patriots and the founding fathers. Members of the movement pointed to a present crisis to rally the "silent majority" (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013).

Other Tea Party members saw the original revolution as a grassroots movement. Matt Kibbe stated:

Looking forward, the strategic significance of these tea parties cannot be understated... It is important to remember that the original Tea Party, a defining moment in the quest for American independence, was not simply a spontaneous uprising of colonial discontent. It was that, but it was also a carefully coordinated protest against British tyranny that required leadership from Sam Adams and organization from the Sons of Liberty. (2009)

Kibbe's description of the American Revolution as an organized and irate minority. It suggested that organizing groups, such as Freedom Works, followed the example set by Sam Adams and the Sons of Liberty. By framing these organizations as direct descendants of the original Revolution, it served to further legitimize their role in the TPM.

Tea Party leaders also drew on other important American historical texts. State of Georgia Representative, Tom Graves, stated at the Freedom Works rally that: “This is a government of the people by the people for the people. We will not stand to be a people of the government by the government or for the government.” In alluding to the Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the TPM argued that the Nation faced as great a crisis as during the Civil War. In the next section, I examine how the Tea Party used the goal of fiscal discipline, traditional American values and societal anxiety to portray the modern crisis facing America as a direct result of the country turning away from the founding values of America.

Ideology and Crisis

Since the beginning of the TPM in early 2009, the need for fiscal discipline was a unifying theme of the movement (Brooks, 2009; Good, 2009; Jenkins & Shawn, 2009; Streitfeld, 2009). While the sincerity of the TPM's fiscal conservative ideological roots has often been called into question (Barreto et al., 2011; DiMaggio, 2011), fiscal discipline was a cornerstone of TPM rhetoric. The financial crisis became a prominent ideological tool which members of the movement used to highlight the decline of traditional American values.

TPM members referenced fiscal discipline in several ways. First, speakers used colloquial terms such as “Main Street vs. Wall Street,” as well as metaphors and analogies concerning typical daily life decisions to explain the economic dysfunction that caused the Great Recession. Rick Santelli's (2009) rant concerning the debt crisis provides a salient example of the response by the Tea Party to the Great Recession: “This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? Raise their hand!” Here, Santelli relied on the common logic that people should not be responsible for the irresponsible decisions of others. The absurdity of having to pay for another's

mistake was used to frame the response by the U.S. Government as unreasonable. Santelli's argument relied on the seeming reasonability of his logic, but was persuasive only as long as the analogy between an individual's everyday fiscal decisions and the U.S. government is established.

Government budgets are not the same as family budgets, but for members of the Tea Party, the federal deficit further evidence of the folly of government policy under President Obama. The failure of the system was often demonstrated through the use of kitchen table examples, such as:

Last fall, the government hurriedly decided to spend eight hundred billion dollars in a so-called "emergency bailout" of the banks. Try to get your mind around that number.

That's eight hundred thousand million dollars. Of that money, three hundred and fifty billion is currently unaccounted for. Yet just let any one of you short the IRS by \$3.50 on your 1040 and see how quickly the government comes after you, demanding answers and charging penalties for every day it takes you to make good on the amount. (Adamo, 2009)

Here, the TPM attacked bailout banking to highlight the absurd disparity between the treatment of typical citizens at the hands of the IRS and the big banks. Also, the supposed unaccounted money was used to imply a double standard by the government. In reality, 93 percent of the funds distributed by the Federal government were accounted for in mid-2009.

Comparing U.S. fiscal policies to everyday life decisions was common for the TPM. For example, Rand Paul (2009) often attributed the lack of fiscal discipline to a larger decline in the U.S.'s strength overall. "For 40 years, we've lost our manufacturing base in this country. We are losing the strength that we once had as a country because we want the easy way. We want

\$20,000 on our credit card personally we can't pay. We want a trillion dollars in our deficit that we can't pay." Representative Paul drew a causal relationship between the shrinking manufacturing base of the U.S. and lack of fiscal discipline. The comparison between credit card debt and governmental spending created a powerful analogy between deficit spending and the loss of the manufacturing base. Credit card financing was a significant issue in 2009, with the majority of U.S. households averaging close to \$10,000 in debt (Sherman, 2009).

Pundits from both political parties discussed the threat posed by a diminishing manufacturing sector to the American Dream in 2008 and 2009 (Lynch, 2008; Kemp, 2009). The Tea Party believed that the key to renewing the American Dream was to return to its revolutionary roots. Doug Reich, a Tea Party organizer, said:

We must wage a moral and intellectual battle to rediscover the American spirit and the morality implied by the Declaration of Independence; we must recapture the spirit of individualism, self-reliance, and limited government. We must fight, not just *against* Obama's vision, but for our vision. (2009)

Here, President Obama and the historical founding of the United States were painted as diametrical opposites. Therefore, Obama must be fought in order to reaffirm the values of the American Revolution.

The Tea Party often portrayed the financial crisis as an example of the ongoing moral decline occurring in America. Chris Adamo, an active member of the Wyoming Tea Party, stated:

Instinctively, we all understand the consequences of fiscal irresponsibility among elected officials, as they increasingly ignore any constitutional limits on their actions. This, combined with the cultural and social collapse that has been unfolding for the past several

decades, signify a course on which America simply cannot continue. In countless areas of our national life, the “unthinkable” is relentlessly visited upon us, as a new “morality” is put into place by a counterculture that is intent on dismantling the cornerstones of our heritage, all too often abetted and funded by the extra-constitutional actions of politicians. If left unchecked, they promise to erase every precept of the traditional morality and goodness that stood as guardians of our nation’s former greatness. (2009)

The Tea Party argued that the economic crisis was tied to a failure to live by the values embodied in the Constitution. TPM members consistently labeled excessive government spending as a violation of the Constitution and, in turn, a departure from traditional American values (Coker, 2017; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). The violation of the Constitution was portrayed as moral betrayal of the American people by those in power.

TARP was just one of the many policies Tea Party members focused on in regard to fiscal discipline. Bailouts and Obamacare were also used by some advocates to demonstrate the declining moral state of America. For example, Edward Cline, a self-described Tea Party member wrote:

It is time for Americans to understand that it is not merely a political fight they have on their hands, but a moral one. They must reject the moral code that asks them to live for the sake of other men - what else could TARP, or the takeover of General Motors, or of the tobacco industry, or of the energy industry, of the insurance industry, or of the health care business mean, but for you to sacrifice your right to your life and your money and property for the sake of others and proudly, loudly proclaim the selfish virtue of individual rights, which has been the source of all the wealth and prosperity that we enjoy but which Obama and Congress seek to destroy through socialist redistribution. (2009)

For Cline and others, the economic actions taken by the U.S. Government officials were not merely economic in nature but represented a dramatic attack on morality and even the value of life itself in America. These policies were portrayed as a fundamental shift away from the thinking that originally guided the nation during its founding.

The economic principles of the Tea Party were often connected to larger themes of morality and the foundations of American society. One blogger compared the actions of the U.S. government to a new version of slavery:

We believe there is but one market the free market that, if allowed to run unfettered in a free society, can provide all men and women the opportunity to use the results of their work to better themselves, their families and their communities. We know that public bailouts, no matter the intention, foster dependence, which in turn fornicates with servitude and begets slavery. For this reason alone, we would rather walk than drive a car made by any government! We would rather be paupers than be made rich by “public” money! We would rather drop dead than be cared for by Nurse Fed! (Manning, 2010)

The blogger’s statement represents a belief that many Tea Party members held concerning the relationship between a healthy society and a free market. The TPM portrayed the expansion of government spending to support the U.S. economy as something inherently immoral and contrary to the values of a free society. The connection between fiscal discipline and morality was an important point for the TPM, and formed a key part of their political narrative concerning the decline of American society.

The treatment of fiscal conservatism as a moral issue was not a new development in America. In 1964, Barry Goldwater made similar arguments (Krugman, 2009b; Rachman, 2011). In the 1990s, House representatives Dick Armey, Newt Gingrich and others attempted to reframe

Republican discourse toward a moralistic and exclusionary trajectory (Rowland & Jones, 2001). In the following section, I examine how the use of anxiety, anger and community loss were employed by TPM speakers to frame the crisis facing the country as a consequence of abandoning America founding values.

Anxiety and the Founding Values

While fiscal discipline has often been identified as the primary topic of early Tea Party rhetoric (Brooks, 2009), one of the larger undercurrents of the movement was a theme of anxiety (Barreto et al., 2011; Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). During the inception stage of the TPM, anxiety over the state of the nation and a perceived loss of American values became a hallmark of Tea Party rhetoric. Members of the TPM felt as though their values were being dismissed by the political elite.

Multiple studies have examined the angry and anxious nature of the Tea Party movement. Some argued that the anxiety was the result of a generation gap and a feeling of loss tied to the pace of modern events (Barreto et al., 2011). Others identified the cause of the anxiety as a simply an after effect of the 2008 presidential election (DiMaggio, 2011, Brooks 2009).

One of the most common forms of rhetoric that referenced anxiety focused on the loss of mainstream America. For example, Tea Party Blogger Ward Dorrity said:

Take a good long look at what's happening now in America. Then dare to turn around and take another look. If what they're saying doesn't square with what they're doing; if it looks like there's a concerted effort to destroy our once Constitutional Republic and replace it with... something else - then you're probably right. None of what's happening today makes any sense. (2009)

The blogger in this example expressed an enthymematic appeal based on anxiety about societal loss. During this time, the U.S. economy was reeling from over 2.6 million jobs lost in 2008 leading to significant financial hardships for the average American worker (Hall-McClatchy, 2010; Uchitelle, 2009), which created an economic situation in which anxiety was common. The economic crisis was used to infer a larger threat to society concerning an attack on the values of America itself.

The line “something else” references another prevalent theme in TPM rhetoric during 2009, an Us vs. Them dichotomy between TPM members and the left. In this case, “something else” invites audience members to imagine the “enemy” threatening America’s values as Liberals, Democrats and Republicans In Name Only (RINOs). Many Tea Party members wrote about the feeling of losing their nation. For example:

To change America, you must realize that My America is no longer the mainstream. Obama's America is the mainstream. Obama, Barney Frank and Nancy Pelosi's vision, that freedom is the problem and government coercion is the solution, is preached in virtually every university classroom, on every television network, and in every newspaper in this country. (Reich, 2009)

Here, Reich’s reference to “My America” draws a clear line between the “real” America and liberal vision propagated by institutions of learning as well as the media. The description of Obama’s America as mainstream America portrays traditional America as under siege by corrupted liberals. One Tea Party blogger described President Obama’s view of American’s future as a threat to the Constitution. After listening to President Obama’s September 9 speech on healthcare reform, Joseph Ashby stated:

The “shape the future” phrase explains Obama’s mindset in a way his other 5,500 words couldn’t. Underneath it all, the speech wasn’t really about insurance, medical care or bipartisanship. The address was about a misshapen idea that, when espoused, changes the president from a citizen protector of Constitutional rights to a despotic destroyer of those rights; all in the name of “shaping the future.”(2009)

The final line of this passage is illustrative of a conspiratorial theme that is common in Tea Party rhetoric. Political commentators and researchers saw conspiracy rhetoric as a defining characteristic of Tea Party rhetors (Edsall, 2016; Krugman, 2009b; Rachman, 2011; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). Conspiracy theories in America have a long political history and have been used by a variety of political movements (Oliver & Wood, 2014). In the case of the TPM, conspiracy theories included the claim that “he [Obama] is a secret Muslim” (Krugman, 2009b) and the perception that the mainstream media (MSM) were conspiring against the Tea Party. Here, the blogger created an us vs. them narrative in which the Tea Party was the only movement fighting for common sense and American values against liberals, media sources, universities and mainstream Republicans.

Tea Party bloggers and speakers also accused the media of ignoring the movement. Michelle Malkin (2009), a popular Tea Party blogger, blamed media bias for lack of coverage. Paul Shlichta (2009) referenced another case of lack of coverage: “I hope this was an accident, a fluke that can be rationally explained. If not, then our news is being censored beyond the wildest excesses of the Soviet Union. And Google, which has already stooped to co-operating with China in similar censorship, may be a co-conspirator.” In his post, Shlichta reported that Google had a “100:1” ratio of articles covering a speech by President Obama compared to the Sept. 12 rally (Shlichta, 2009). Others characterized the media as misreporting the extent of the

movement; observing that, “A million people showed up in Washington DC for the Sept. 12 Taxpayers Rally. The media reported 70,000” (Marcus, 2009a).

The media was often attacked during the Sept. 12 Freedom Works rally. Speakers cited the event as proof of the authenticity of the TPM and that it was clearly not an AstroTurf movement (Krugman, 2009b; Pelosi, 2009; Smith, 2009). Organizers from Freedom Works often began their speeches at the rally with a statement such as, “A lot of people thought we couldn’t pull it off, we showed them didn’t we?” (Dawald, 2009). Former House majority leader Dick Armey (2009) stated: “What did they say about us? We weren’t real.” Tea Party Express, a co-organizer of the rally, portrayed those critics calling the movement “Astroturf” as being an example of “Astroturf” themselves;

To those shameless liars on the Left who are smearing and demeaning the tea party movement and calling it Astroturf, we say this: YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED! It is not the tea party supporters who are showing up with professionally printed signs from Obama’s political wing – no, that is the astroturfing efforts that YOU have engineered. (Tea Party Express, 2009)

Here, the TPM claims that leftist protesters did not represent real Americans and that only the TPM was an authentic representation of America’s majority.

President Obama’s administration often was portrayed as being out of touch with America. Ann Kane, a TPM blogger, commented on President Obama’s former Chief Strategist David Axelrod’s characterization of the TPM as unrepresentative of the American people:

It appears Axelrod doesn’t understand the concept that for each person who shows up to a protest like this one, there are likely hundreds more back home who agree, but were just too busy with their families and homes to make the trip. To say the least, the American

citizens who attended Saturday's rally and march represent millions more. That tells me, "We're right!"(2009)

Tea Party blogger David Moran made similar comments:

The master of astroturfing doesn't think much of the turnout in DC for the 9/12 protests. Obama advisor David Axelrod is quite dismissive of the massive outpouring of disgust at his boss, saying, it doesn't represent "the mainstream". "Instead of calling opponents to your policies liars, and tools of the insurance industry," maybe you could acknowledge that their principles require them to reject your big government solutions to our health care problems. (2009)

The criticism of the TPM by members of the Obama administration as used to undercut criticism of the TPM and served as evidence of the administration's divergence from the values represented by the Tea Party.

The Sept. 12 rally in Washington, D.C., provided TPM leaders with a platform to reaffirm their view that the Tea Party was not only a grassroots movement, but comprised of authentic American citizens. During a multi-month and country-spanning bus trip, the organizers of the Tea Party Express made numerous stops to tout the authenticity of the movement. They stated after one such stop, "Today, like every other day of this tour, we have been greeted by real, everyday Americans who have shown up with homemade signs in their hands, and a passion and love for this country in their hearts" (Tea Party Express, 2009). Other speakers stressed the makeup of the movement to highlight its authentic nature. Richard Moore, a Tea Party blogger, stated:

Never have so many gathered in one space for one purpose with one common thread love of country and protection of freedom. Anne and I were proud to have

been a part of the historic moment. From California to Maine, we met so many wonderful Americans, all of whom exhibited such patriotism and such passion for this important cause. The gathering was one of great civility and courteousness, though assertive and determined to send America's message Hear us now and save our country. While reflecting upon the massive attendance numbers, it is as one gentleman said to me, "It matters not the count, the message has been sent." The march is a beginning; the work continues. We all have an important part to play in America's future. (Moran, 2009b)

As is evident, Tea Party leaders often focused on the homegrown elements of the movement in order to reaffirm its authenticity.

The demonization of the media by Tea Party members also insulated the movement from outside opinion. Criticism of the TPM by the media was used to further reinforce the narrative that traditional America was under attack. Even though studies have shown that the majority of press coverage during the initial growth of the Tea Party was positive, surveys of Tea Party groups found that upwards of 61 percent of members believed the media was biased against them (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011; Gardner, 2010).

The us vs. them binary of the Tea Party also was reflected in a description of the nation as under siege. For example, Al Gerhart claimed:

If we do not take a stand, these politicians will destroy the very fabric of our great country. The liberal agenda and globalization has gutted our industrial base, once we were the arsenal of democracy, generations of Europeans and Asians owe their freedom to America might and the sacrifice of our selfless veterans. Will we be able defend liberty again? Will we even have liberty here at home? (2009)

Gerhart focused on the perceived loss of traditional values that once made America great.

Others portrayed the situation facing America as part of an ongoing crisis threatening the very foundation of the nation. Kim Sirmac stated: “Daily we watch, in horror, and in disbelief, as step by step the dismantling of our country is taking place. The writing is on the wall, and in my opinion, it is testimony to complete ignorance if you do not see exactly what is occurring” (2009). John Manning, a Tea Party member, described the situation facing the nation as in the early stages of a tyrannical government:

Yet today, we hear again the rattling and clanking of the Chains of Tyranny. The chains we hear are held not by foreign powers. Dreadfully, it is those among us, many of whom are our elected leaders, who possess the chains and toil endlessly to cast them across our backs. Now heavier and longer, the Chains of Tyranny have been wrought with new links apathy masked by complacency, socialism fueled by internationalism, cults of undeserved celebrity and a reckless belief in the equality of results. (2009)

Similarly, Paul Stevens stated: “No other country can compare to the American way, to the American spirit, to the American people. We must stop the tyrants in Washington and elsewhere from changing our way of life to satisfy some misguided diversity or politically correct guideline. We must be the rattlesnake, uniquely American” (2009). The examples above painted a very bleak picture concerning the future of “traditional America” and created a demarcation between the TPM and the Obama Administration. In this narrative only the TPM could save the country from the evils of liberalism and globalization.

By identifying threats to “Traditional America” and casting the TPM as protectors, the rhetors laid claim to the founding ideals of America in the face of a mounting crisis. Often Tea

Party members portrayed their movement and ideology as inspired by the founding documents and Founding Fathers of the nation. The name Tea Party is itself a direct reference to the Boston Tea Party and provides an obvious, yet important, example of the movement's reliance on America's founding narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the Tea Party relied on a myth of return. Rhetors attempted to create a connection between the American Revolution and the modern political climate, with their movement as the modern reincarnation of the patriots of the foundation. TPM described the political situation of 2009 as a point of constitutional and moral crisis. The crisis was constructed in two ways. First, fiscal discipline was a key theme used by many advocates to criticize the Obama Administration and was often connected to a supposed moral degradation of traditional American values. Second, Tea Party members focused on a sense of loss and anxiety about modern America, portraying movement members as being disconnected and forgotten by their government, as well as society at large. Over the course of the next chapters, I will examine how these, and other trends, changed during the 2010 mid-terms and 2013 government shutdown.

Chapter Three: The Tea Party Movement and the 2010 Midterm

The 2010 midterm election cycle demonstrated the political power of the Tea Party Movement (TPM) had gain after its founding in 2009. Republican candidates supported by the Tea Party won over 60 seats in the U.S. Congress and numerous state races, helping produce the largest victory for the Republican party since 1938 (Harris & MacAskill, 2010). The strength of the TPM was evident even before the midterm election, as traditional Republican candidates were defeated in party primaries by TPM-backed candidates.

Some scholars argued that the TPM was able to nationalize the race (Aldrich, Bishop, Hatch, Sunshine Hillygus, & Rohde, 2014). Political pundits suggested that the TPM's success was a symptom of corporate-backed astroturfing, while others saw the movement as an authentic surge of activism by working-class American who wished to rein in the Obama Administration (Brooks, 2010; Krugman, 2010). Other observers cited the Democratic party's lackluster campaign strategy as the primary cause for the TPM's victory (Best, 2010). Regardless, the TPM made its mark on U.S. politics during the 2010 midterms.

For the Tea Party, three events in 2010 were of particular importance in its development as a movement. The first was the February 5-6th National Tea Party convention, which hosted speakers from across the movement. It also featured a keynote speech by former Republican vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin (Rucker, 2010). Palin's standing within the TPM was important, as many saw her as the unofficial leader of the group at the time (Jonsson, 2010). Despite this, the organization of the convention caused significant controversy in the TPM. Tea Party candidates, such as Michele Bachman and other TPM organizing groups, withdrew from the event due to a perceived "Republican hijacking" of the movement (Pilkington, 2010). The controversy surrounding the first National Tea Party Convention represented a growing tension between the TPM and Republican Party that became increasingly evident throughout 2010.

Second, Glenn Beck's rally to Restore Honor on Aug. 28 in Washington D.C. was a focal point for TPM groups in the period leading up to the midterm elections in November. Beck's rally was maligned by mainstream Republicans at the time, but embraced by TPM groups (Zernike, Hulse, & Knowlton, 2010). While the actual size of the rally was a point of contention between TPM groups and the media (Montopoli, 2010), the gathering was described by members of the Tea Party as an awakening concerning the crisis facing America (Chaddock, 2010). Essentially, the rally provided a national focus for the issues that the TPM emphasized going into the midterm elections and influenced group rhetoric as November approached.

Finally, the midterm election campaigns represented an important achievement for the TPM. As previously mentioned, the TPM was widely successful during the 2010 midterm elections. I have selected campaign speeches from multiple Tea Party-backed candidates as well as blog posts from TPM members in order to examine the TPM's rhetoric during this period.

In this chapter, I argue that during 2010 the TPM's rhetoric continued toward an entelechial symbolic trajectory. Advocates for the TPM relied on a myth of return and perpetuated a narrative which described America as at the precipice of a crisis which threatened to destroy the country. During this period, there were examples of TPM members calling for reform of the movement. While reformative rhetoric was present, I argue it became subsumed by the overwhelming entelechial trend found throughout the movement in 2010.

The chapter is divided into four sections in order to highlight the evolving rhetoric of the TPM in 2010. First, I discuss how the concepts of entelechy and a symbolic trajectory are relevant for understanding the development of the TPM. Next, I examine the entelechial development of TPM rhetoric during the first National Tea Party convention. After that, I review the TPM's rhetoric leading up to Glenn Beck's rally and his attempt to influence the symbolic

trajectory of the TPM. Last, I show that how TPM candidates during the midterm election continued to develop an entelechial symbolic trajectory.

Entelechy and Symbolic Trajectory

Aristotle described entelechy as the biological progression of an object from immature to maturation, as in the biological progression from an acorn to an oak tree (Burke, 1966; Lindsay, 1999). Burke transferred this concept into the symbolic realm as a means to explain the human tendency to take a symbol system to its “end point” (Jones & Rowland, 2001; Lindsay, 1999). He argued that the symbols used by a person create a “terministic compulsion” to take the symbol from its conception to its logical end (Burke, 1966; Jones & Rowland, 2001). Burke pointed to the example of Nazism as evidence of the power entelechy can have on a symbol system. The myth of return in Hitler’s Germany embodies the power of entelechy and the consequences that flow from an idea taken to its end point.

While entelechy is a key part of Burke’s explanation of the function of symbol systems, it is not always applicable to the rhetoric of a movement. Not all acorns become full grown oak trees and similarly, not all symbol systems are taken to their entelechial conclusion. In order to evaluate whether a worldview is entelechial, it is important to examine the symbol system’s development.

One way to understand why some symbol systems develop in an entelechial manner while others do not is to focus on the symbolic trajectory of the movement. Critics define symbolic trajectory as an attempt to uncover where symbols originated, how they develop and gained popularity, or why they were discarded (Griffin, 1984). Symbol systems do not merely appear at random but are created over a long period of time. Scholars in the past have used the

concept of symbolic trajectory to examine how movements adopt/develop different rhetorical patterns over time (Jones & Rowland, 2001).

The concept of symbolic trajectory is particularly important when tracing entelechy's role in the symbol system of a movement. Not all social movement rhetoric is extended to the end of the line. Therefore, critics must examine whether or not rhetoric is extended over time in a way that takes it to its logical extreme (Jones & Rowland, 2001). Only through careful observation of the movement's rhetorical trajectory, can entelechial patterns and assumptions become traceable.

Next, I will discuss the TPM's rhetoric at the first National Tea Party convention in early February of 2010.

National Tea Party Convention

At the beginning of 2010, two important events for the TPM occurred. First, the special Senate election for Massachusetts in January became an electoral victory for the movement (Powell, 2010). The election of Republican Senator Scott Brown was directly tied to support from TPM members (Burns, 2010). Second, galvanized by its electoral victory, TPM members prepared for the first National Tea Party convention in early February. The event featured speakers from around the country and a keynote address by former Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin. At the time, Palin was portrayed as the unofficial leader of the TPM by members of the movement and press at large (Jonsson, 2010).

During the early months of 2010, two themes were continually present in the rhetoric of TPM advocates. First, the TPM often employed an us versus them narrative based on a myth of return concerning the founding values of America. As discussed in chapter two, a myth of return often responds to loss of identity. In the case of the TPM that identity loss came from a supposed societal disconnect with the founding principle of America (Roy & Rowland, 2003). Second,

TPM advocates portrayed America as being embroiled in a moral crisis which threatened to destroy the country. Over time, TPM members extended both themes in an entelechial manner.

Us versus them

The TPM's us versus them narrative directly connected the movement to the founding values of America, while describing Washington politics as being antithetical to the constitution. During her speech at the National Tea Party convention, Sarah Palin often commented on the historical connection of the movement to the founding. In one instance, she stated:

But when the work of Washington violates our -- our conscience and when the work and efforts in Washington, D.C., violate our Constitution, then we will stand up and we will be counted.... We have a vision for the future of our country, too, and it is a vision anchored in time tested-truths: that the government that governs least, governs best.

Moreover, that the Constitution -- the Constitution provides the best road map towards a more perfect union. (Palin, 2010)

TPM advocates often drew a connection between their movement and the founding of America. Another TPM member claimed that the electoral success of early 2010 was analogous to the American Revolution, "The Tea Party movement has returned home, to its roots, to secure a powerful electoral victory in Massachusetts. If there was any doubt on that cold December day about what the colonists were fighting for, they have now been laid to rest on this cold January morning" (James, 2010). Others characterized the TPM as members of George Washington's army at Valley Forge, arguing that the movement needed to prepare in order to succeed in battles to come (Ryun, 2010a).

Building on its historical connection to the founding of America, TPM advocates argued that the movement represented the concerns of the majority of Americans. In one example, Palin connected the TPM movement to the average American when she stated:

The soul of this movement is the people every day Americans who grow our food and run our small businesses, teach our kids, and fight our wars. They're folks in small towns and cities across this great nation who saw what was happening and they saw and were concerned, and they got involved.... And if that sounds like you, then you probably to are feeling a bit discouraged by what you see in Washington D.C. (Palin, 2010)

These comments reflect a common theme in the TPM movement that portrayed the American majority as being the typical members of the movement. In a similar view, advocates characterized the TPM as in a struggle to restore the voice of the American people. As one blogger claimed, "The Tea Party movement is fighting President Barack Obama for the hearts and souls of American voters. And it's winning.... The Tea Party movement represents the anger many Americans have toward Washington" (Darling, 2010). Here, the us versus them narrative was clearly present and cast the TPM as representative of the American majority while the Obama Administration was characterized against the will of the people.

While TPM advocates described the movement as being supported by the American people, members portrayed its opponents as a threat to the American way of life. One TPM blogger claimed, "The Left is out to destroy all that is America. Behind closed doors, in secret meetings, they use our money to bribe and intimidate our legislators into voting in favor of overwhelmingly unpopular and unconstitutional bills" (Epanminodas, 2010). Similarly, TPM advocates argued Democrats were attempting to undermine the legitimacy of the movement by using unethical tactics against it. As Sarah Palin explained:

Opponents of this message, they're seeking to marginalize this movement. They want to paint us as ideologically extreme and the counterpoint to liberal intolerance and outrageous conspiracy theorists aimed at our own government and unethical shameless tactics like considering a candidate's children fair game. (Palin, 2010)

Democrats were characterized as being antithetical to American values and conspiratorial manipulators of its governmental system. One TPM advocate went so far to argue that Democrats represented members of society actively seeking to destroy the values of the American public, “We know that appointing tax cheats, pro-pedophiles, Marxists, communists and socialists into government positions is not a good way to garner support from the American people” (Bennett, 2010). These statements highlight the extremist and entelechial nature of most TPM rhetoric.

In addition, TPM advocates often argued that the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) demonstrated that Democrats were actively subverting the American Constitution. As Seth Brown, a TPM blogger explained:

Simply put, it was a perfect storm of liberal leadership imposing their will on not only a center/right American public but also the numerous centrist Democrats currently serving in the United States Congress. We know this is true by the amount of arm-twisting, deal making, and parliamentary tricks it took to get to the necessary 216 votes in the House and 51 votes in the Senate. If we were to be honest, we could even go so far as to say that three people flexed their political muscle and overrode the will of the people of the United States of America. (2010)

The strident attack on liberal leadership in the previous statement highlights the efforts of some TPM members to broaden the scope of the movement to possibly include elements of the Democratic Party who disagreed with party leadership.

TPM rhetoric often painted Obamacare and the Obama administration as firmly against the Constitution and will of the American people. For example, one TPM blogger stated:

The oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution is the most essential aspect of the office of the presidency.... But in the recent "Health Care Summit," President Obama revealed that he may not be as dedicated to the oath that he took as his predecessors were.

(Clemente, 2010a)

Obamacare was often compared to the abuses that preceded the American Revolution. TPM blogger Brett Farley analogized Obamacare to the taxes levied on the colonies that sparked the revolution, "Not unlike the taxation without representation that sparked the Revolution, we are besieged by a political class in Washington hell-bent on taxing us despite our representation. It is a class beholden to anything but the Constitution" (2010a). One TPM advocate claimed that President Obama hated America itself, "Obama is singular among presidents, in that he doesn't seem to mind projecting disdain for the idea of American exceptionalism" (DeCovnick, 2010). The entelechial nature of these statements is clear and demonstrate how the TPM continued to rely on an us versus them narrative throughout 2010. The TPM was portrayed as the legitimate voice of the American majority, while their opponents acted against American values and their interests.

Moral Crisis

In addition to the TPM's extensive use of an us versus them narrative, advocates argued that the country was at a proverbial crossroads or crisis point that threatened the nation. In a

myth of return, rhetors claim that a crisis threatens the survival of their society and only by returning to its founding values can they overcome the crisis (Roy & Rowland, 2003). The impending crisis becomes the motivation for society to reform its ways. Without a threat to society, there is no reason to return to its founding values.

TPM advocates argued that America faced a moral crisis that threatened to destroy the country. As Sarah Palin explained:

The problems that we face in the real world require real solutions. And we'd better get to it, because the risks that they pose are great and they're grave. However, as Barry Goldwater said: "We can be conquered by bombs but we can also be conquered by neglect by ignoring our constitution and disregarding the principles of limited government." And in the past year, his words rang true. (2010)

TPM members portrayed the financial crisis facing America at the time as a direct result of drifting away from the founding values. Palin continued, "While people on Main Street look for jobs, people on Wall Street they're collecting billions and billions in your bailout bonuses.... And everyday Americans are wondering: Where are the consequences? They helped to get us into this worst economic situation since the Great Depression. Where are the consequences?" (2010). The government's response to the Great Recession, was seen as being antithetical to American values and the American majority. Palin claimed, "They keep borrowing, and they keep printing these dollars, and they keep making us more and more beholden to foreign countries, and they keep making us take these steps towards insolvency. Now what they're doing in proposing these big new programs with giant price tags, they're sticking our kids with the bill. And that's immoral. That's generational theft. We're stealing the opportunities from our children" (2010). These examples show how the TPM portrayed the financial crisis, and the actions taken

by the Obama administration, as the result of American society drifting away from its founding values.

In order to address the moral crisis facing America, TPM advocates argued that the nation had to return to the founding values. As one TPM blogger explained:

We are at risk of being deprived of life, liberty, and property, in the cause of government imposed "equality," and they insist that this is the principle upon which America was founded.... We need to get ourselves organized against this thing before it's too late. We need to not only stop, we need reverse this lunacy in a very big way.

(Epanminodas, 2010)

The crisis was portrayed not as a choice by the American majority, but a result of the federal government straying from its founding values. Another TPM blogger echoed this sentiment claiming, "It is up to us, folks. We all need to help. We must now flex our political muscles as free and proud Americans. In the end, if we do it correctly, we will get back to where we have always been as a center/right nation a nation dedicated to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans" (S. Brown, 2010). TPM advocates also portrayed the inception of the movement as an attempt by the American majority to rekindle the nation's foundational values. As one TPM blogger explained, "In the memory of Madison, we members of this American Majority, the Tea Party, the Post-Party movement for the republic rekindle the spirit of the Framers in working to bring to a screeching halt the irregular passion of interested men keen on hurling this experiment in liberty into the abyss of despotism" (Farley, 2010a).

In the early months of 2010, TPM rhetoric continued to follow an entelechial symbolic trajectory as advocates relied on an us versus them narrative and identification of a moral crisis that demonstrated the need to return to the founding values described in their myth of return. I

will demonstrate in the next section that the trend towards entelechy continued to intensify in the TPM as the midterm election neared. Importantly though, I will show how Glenn Beck's rally in late August demonstrated a possible Reaganesque revision to the TPM's rhetoric, but ultimately did not affect the entelechial trajectory of the movement.

Rally to Restore Honor

In the time leading up to Glenn Beck's rally to Restore Honor, TPM advocates continued to rely on a myth of return. Entelechial in nature, the TPM's rhetoric embraced an us versus them rhetoric that disassociated Democrats from the founding values and framed America as at a moral precipice. The rally to Restore Honor featured elements that could have been used to reform the symbolic trajectory of the TPM.

Us versus Them

Central to the TPM's us versus them rhetoric was the belief that American governance no longer reflected the will of the American majority. As one blogger explained, "the current administration's agenda for a socialist remaking of America has left a large percentage of Americans wondering what has happened to their government and why does it not act with the usual predictability that Americans have come to expect and to rely upon" (Simmons, 2010). TPM leaders explained that the rise of the movement was in response to the US government adopting policies that went against the founding values of America. In a similar view, TPM blogger argued:

The American people are awakening, via tea party protests and the growth of 9.12 groups, because I believe that deeply engrained in the American people are the beliefs of the Founders with regard to human nature and government. The protests we've seen over

the last two years are a natural reaction to the false god of statism being foisted upon them, and not just by the current administration and unpopular Congress. (Ryun, 2010b)

Other advocates claimed that the movement was a mandate by American citizens against Democrats and the expansion of governmental powers. As one TPM blogger stated, “Why has this activism developed? Because of citizen rage at the unprecedented number and variety of power grabs by the Obama Administration and the Pelosi/Reid Congress. Our nation has seen nothing like this before” (Blackwell, 2010). Similarly, in the week before Beck’s rally, TPM advocate and former House Majority Leader Dick Armey (2010) claimed, “Congress didn't listen to the people in September 2009 at the 9/12 Taxpayer March on DC. They didn't listen in November when the people showed up by the thousands for Rep. Bachmann's House Call. They haven't listened to your phone calls, emails, letters and faxes over the past three months since the Senate passed their version of Obamacare.” These statements demonstrate that the TPM’s believed their movement reflected the will of the American majority and portrayed the existing government as having ignored the voices of the American people.

In addition, TPM advocates continued to argue that progressives were on the wrong side of history regarding the founding values of America. As one TPM advocate claimed:

The Founders’ views on man and government were diametrically opposed to the progressives: they knew man is not essentially good, nor should a government made by man, and ruled by men, have great centralized powers. Why? Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Number 6 that: “Men are ambitious, vindictive and rapacious,”.... Nor did the Founders view centralized power, even government, in the most positive of lights:

Washington would write, “Government is not reason; it is not eloquent; it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.” (Ryun, 2010b; emphasis imagined)

This excerpt illustrates how TPM members continued to contrast the founding values of America and the rhetoric and policies of progressives. In a similar view, another TPM advocate compared 2010 to the beginning of the Revolutionary war, “When the founding fathers gathered in 1776, they did not merely declare the independence of the colonies from their British oppressors. They declared the independence of all individuals from the unlawful intrusion of overreaching government. And that declaration forever altered the course of human history” (Clemente, 2010b). The author’s phrasing, comments concerning Obamacare, and prior post history characterizing President Obama as a tyrant, demonstrate how the TPM attempted to draw a direct correlation between the US government of 2010 and the English crown during the Revolutionary War.

In the lead up to Glenn Beck’s rally, many liberals claimed that Beck and the TPM movement were inherently racist and that holding a rally on the 47th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech dishonored his memory (Zernike, 2010b). In response, one TPM advocate argued that King’s speech was anathema to Leftist ideals:

For the practitioners of victimology and grievance politics, King's dream is deadly. If we hold these truths to be self-evident, then special privilege should be given to no person.

That strikes at the heart of the leftist coalition, which is held together by common goal of extending special benefits to small groups of "grieved" parties. (Gee, 2010)

The entelechial nature of this statement is clear and further illustrates how the TPM rhetoric continued to draw clear lines of distinction between the movement and its opponents leading up to Beck’s rally.

Returning to the Founding

The Restore Honor rally was characterized as a call to return to traditional American values. As TPM blogger Rick Moran (2010) explained, the rally was a wakeup call to America, “Will history see this as the last gasp of America as she once was, as she was meant to be? Or will it be recorded that this was the moment when we turned things around and began a revival of conservative values and traditions?” The statement illustrates the power of the myth of return in TPM rhetoric.

In the days leading up to his rally, Glenn Beck often discussed the moral crisis facing America at multiple pre-rally gatherings. Beck emphasized that a lack of traditional values was the cause of America’s overall decline:

That's the problem in our country. We have a shortage of character. We don't even know how to teach it to our children anymore. We're running low on personal responsibility. We've got a loss of integrity, a loss of shame in this country, a loss of principles and values. We've lost our way because we have lost God....We've lost our honor. We must restore our honor first, our principles. (Beck, 2010a)

Similar to prior TPM rhetoric, Beck argued that America was at a crossroad in history due to the loss of social values. As he explained, “Principles and values that should be universal, but I think in most cases now, it seems in our country, they are non-existent.... We're entering our last exit, last exit. We need to get off this highway” (Beck, 2010a). Throughout his pre-rally addresses, as well as the rally itself, Beck attributed the greatness of American to the traditional values of its foundation.

In addition, Beck argued that ignoring the ongoing moral crisis facing America would have very negative consequences for the US and the world. He explained, “Make no mistake, the

flame of freedom is dwindling. The shining city on the hill, the sun is setting. If you don't want it to go out on our watch, then you must stand in the blaze.... And just like every other struggle in history, in fact, every struggle in American history read Lincoln, King, Washington they were fighting evil” (Beck, 2010a). This quotation highlights the continuing entelechial symbolic trajectory of the TPM; and demonstrates that Beck made use of the same us versus them dichotomy and myth of return employed by other members of the movement. Beck continued, “Reagan said, for whatever reason, God made America free. And he wasn't throwing clichés out when he said once a country loses her freedom, those people will never get it back again. That if freedom is extinguished here in America, there is no place on the face of the earth for the world to run to” (Beck, 2010a).

Reformative rhetoric and the TPM

While much of the TPM's rhetoric was defined by an entelechial symbolic trajectory, there are some examples of a more inclusive and reformative elements in the movement. For example, some TPM members believed that Democrats as well as Republicans could believe in returning to the founding values. As one blogger explained, “Some will happen to run as Republicans, but dare I say, even as Democrats in some locations but it is only this originalist worldview (shared by the Founders) that will turn our country around and put us back on the path of prosperity and freedom” (Ryun, 2010b). Similarly, another TPM advocate argued all Americans favored fighting government corruption and special interests, “Americans know our federal system of governance has been co-opted by corrupt relationships between power-craving politicians and special interest entities seeking special favors – left, right and everything in between. Politicians are more interested in their perks and power than in good policy” (Abram, 2010).

While the days leading up to the Restore Honor rally were filled with politically charged TPM rhetoric, the event itself was portrayed by its organizers as a non-political event. Glenn Beck asked attendees to “leave political signs at home” and to donate to American veterans organizations (Hohmann, 2010). Many participants couldn’t clearly describe what the rally was about and struggled to explain its meaning (Zaitchik, 2010). Of the labels used to describe the rally, the term revival was often used by organizers and participants alike to explain the tone event (Hohmann, 2010; Zaitchik, 2010).

Beck’s keynote rally address focused on a return to traditional American values and specifically a return to God. He said, “This day is a day that we can search the hearts of America again and it has nothing to do with politics. It has everything to do with God, everything turning our faith back to the values and the principles that made us great” (2010b). Throughout the first half of his address, Beck examined pivotal moments in American history, such as George Washington during the Revolutionary War and Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I have a Dream” speech, to explain how the traditional values of America, and particularly the role of God, led to America’s greatness (2010b).

Beck claimed there was a direct line between the traditional values of America, such as individual freedom, with trust in God and American greatness. As he explained, “Abraham Lincoln found God in the scars of Gettysburg. He was baptized and gave the Second Inaugural. He looked to God and set men free. America -- America awakens again” (Beck, 2010b). Also, Beck analogized biblical stories with the traditional values of America:

It's the same story throughout history, all of mankind's history. Man finds himself in slavery and then someone appears to wake America up.... It happens the same way. It has since the burning bush, Moses, freedom, and then they forget. They wander until they

remember that God is the answer. He always has been and then they begin to trust. (Beck, 2010b)

For Beck, individual freedom and salvation were connected to God and are an underlying message throughout the address. Importantly, Beck's statements attempted to highlight a need for individual reformation and redemption by returning to the founding values.

According to Beck, America was "at a crossroads," and in order to move forward the entirety of the country needed to reflect on the founding values of America (2010b) as he explained:

We've had a soft life. The poorest among us are still some of the richest in the world.... And yet we don't recognize it. Instead we've grown tired. We've grown weak. We're dividing ourselves. There is growing hatred in the country. We must be better than what we've allowed ourselves to become. We must get the poison of hatred out of us. No matter what anyone may say or do. No matter what anyone smears or lies or throws our way or to any American's way, we must look to God and look to love. (Beck, 2010b)

It is important to take note of the use of "we" used throughout Beck's speech. In a movement where an entelechial symbolic trajectory is present, the term "we" often implies "they" and is issued to further enact an us versus them narrative (Jones & Rowland, 2001). In this passage, Beck's did not divide the American people into lines of us versus them, but spoke broadly concerning the ideals of all Americans. Beck made similar points multiple times during his speech. For example, he said "We must defend those that we disagree with, but are honest and have integrity." Beck continued, "The Lord will always send a people wake up calls. And he has been sending us wake up call, after wake up call, after wake up call. And it has been through the

Republicans and the Democrats. It's all of us, all of us" (Beck, 2010b). Clearly, in this instance, the TPM was portrayed as open to all American who were committed to the founding values.

Beck's use of an all-encompassing "we" became more obvious as he characterized the crisis facing America. He explained:

I ask you, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, Americans. We are all Americans. We all must realize how nice we have it here, despite all of our problems. We must recognize the great things that we have done, while noticing as well so we can learn from the lessons all of the bad things that we have done. Know them so we never repeat the same mistake. (Beck, 2010b)

Beck's message was designed to create guilt among all of Americans for the situation facing the country. In a similar tone, Beck argued that it was possible to return to traditional American values without emphasizing political differences. He claimed, "We must not have fear and we must not get lost in politics.... We can disagree on politics. We can disagree on so much. These men and women here don't agree on fundamentals. They don't agree on everything that every church teaches. What they do agree on is God is the answer" (Beck, 2010b). The uniting value that undergirds American society for Beck was its viewpoint that the founding values of America were directly connected to belief in God. Through this belief, Beck argued that the country could heal its wounds, and be united regardless of political allegiances once again.

While Beck's keynote speech at his 2010 rally was less divisive than other TPM rhetoric, the myth of return that was evident in his speeches supports an entelechial symbolic trajectory. Beck attempted to reach out to members of both political parties, but his religious myth of return narrative was in other ways just as entelechial as other TPM rhetoric. In the next section, I demonstrate that the us versus them narrative and a myth of return concerning traditional

American values continued to be prominently featured in the rhetoric of TPM backed candidates during the 2010 midterm elections.

Midterm Election Rhetoric

During the 2010 election cycle, TPM supported candidates continued to advance the common phrases and ideas associated with the movement. Many candidates referred to a myth of return based on traditional American values and fiscal common sense associated with the founding of the nation. Also, candidates often described the TPM as an attempt by the majority of Americans to take back control of the government and return power to the people. Some TPM supported politicians at times portrayed the TPM as being a more inclusive movement, but these statements made up the minority of TPM rhetoric during the 2010 midterms. Importantly, the continued use of the themes I described previously reinforced the movement's entelechial symbolic trajectory.

American Greatness and a Return to the Founding

A belief in American exceptionalism and the importance of the founding values was center stage for many of the TPM candidates during the 2010 midterm elections. Candidates often spoke of the greatness of America and its principles in their rhetoric. TPM backed Republican candidate Rand Paul explained, "America is exceptional because we embraced freedom, because we enshrined it in our documents and because we have lived and fought for the principles of freedom" (2010). In a similar statement, Republican candidate Marco Rubio stated, "Americans believe with all their hearts, the vast majority of them, and the vast majority of Floridians, that the United States of America is simply the single greatest nation in all of human history, a place without equal in the history of all mankind" (Rubio, 2010). By themselves, these statements expressed sentiments common for both political parties, but the historical narrative

cited by the candidates and the values associated with it reflected an entelechial worldview in which the nation was under grave threat.

Candidates often said that the crisis America faced was the result of forgetting the values of the founding. Republican candidate Mike Lee explained, “When people forget the Constitution, they become the very people the document aimed to limit in the first place. They started asking if they could but not if they should.... Tyranny comes from a king, or an elected official or an elected president who thinks he's a king" (Duncan, 2010). Similarly, Rand Paul stated, “Do we wish to live free, or be enslaved by debt? Do we believe in the individual, or do we believe in the state? American will be great again if we return to our values” (2010). These statements continued in the entelechial pattern present in earlier TPM rhetoric concerning a perceived crisis in America and the tyrannical nature of the Obama Administration.

In addition, some argued that the American government no longer served the American people and that the TPM was needed to reclaim the country. Republican candidate Christine O'Donnell claimed, “We have to unite for the greater good for what is right in America. And a united Party, a united ‘We, the People,’ can win back our country” (O’Donnell, 2010). Similarly, Republican candidate Nikki Haley stated, “this movement was never meant to be about a person, it was never meant to be about an election, this movement was about how we take our state and country back” (Haley, 2010). To the TPM, the crisis facing America was a fight to restore the American people to power in their own government.

During the campaign cycle, some described the TPM as present-day patriots of the American Revolution. Mike Lee explained:

Our caucuses were reminiscent of Tea Party gatherings around the state and across the nation. Those gatherings were in turn reminiscent of the original Boston Tea Party....

We the people have recognized, as the founders did, the type of national government we don't want. But it isn't enough to protest against what we don't want, we must be willing to fight for what we do want! (Lee, 2010)

In a similar statement, Ron Paul claimed, "What you have to do is you cut government back to its Constitutional size. That's what you need. I believe that's what the Tea Party Movement is all about: cutting it back to size, believing in the Constitution" (2010). The TPM was described not only as champions of the founding values but as modern versions of the heroes who fought in the Revolution.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how TPM rhetoric throughout 2010 quickly became fully entelechialized. Members of the movement relied on a myth of return, which claimed America was on the brink of destruction because its people had strayed from the founding values of the country (Zernike, 2010a). The Tea Party continued to develop an us versus them a narrative that portrayed the TPM as being akin to a new founding movement which would restore American greatness by returning to traditional values.

The political rhetoric of any given movement normally evolves overtime. Yet, the TPM developed a strictly entelechial symbolic trajectory with little if any change. While there were some elements of reformative rhetoric in 2010, as I demonstrated these were still coupled with traditional TPM entelechial rhetoric. One explanation for this lack of development is that the TPM had already taken its rhetoric to the end of the line. The call to reject compromise by TPM advocates supports the view that an entelechial crystallization of the movement's beliefs already had occurred.

In the next chapter, I demonstrate that at the time the 2013 government shutdown occurred, TPM rhetoric continued along an entelechial symbolic trajectory that disallowed compromise with establishment Republicans and Democrats alike.

Chapter Four: The Tea Party Movement and the 2013 Government Shutdown

On Oct. 1, 2013, the United States government was forced to close its doors for the first time in 17 years. Republican Senator Ted Cruz and the Tea Party Movement (TPM) were at the center of the government shutdown that focused on ending the Affordable Care Act (ACA) also known as Obamacare. Conservative talk radio host Rush Limbaugh hailed the efforts of Senator Cruz and the TPM as a “battle for America’s soul,” while TPM leaders described Cruz as the savior of America (Weinger, 2013). The shutdown became a rallying cry for the TPM movement against the perceived threat of governmental tyranny by the Obama administration and Obamacare (Kane, 2013).

While some Republicans and the TPM hailed Cruz as a hero, much of the general public disagreed with the rationale behind the 2013 government shutdown. During the 17-day crisis that followed Senator Cruz’s filibuster calling for the repeal of Obamacare, public opinion in the United States turned against the GOP and Tea Party. Polls from both Gallup and NBC/WSJ showed seven in ten Americans agreed with the statement that the GOP was “putting politics ahead of their country” (Avlon, 2013). The Tea Party’s popularity dropped to its lowest level since its inception, with only 26 percent of Americans holding a favorable view of the group (Sullivan, 2013).

Moderate and even some conservative Republicans criticized the tactics of the TPM as well. Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner attempted to dissuade Tea Party members from using a government shutdown to oppose Obamacare (Dionne, 2013). A number of conservative pundits claimed that the Tea Party’s tactics were a form of political “suicide” by the TPM (Foster, 2013b). Senator John McCain stated that the TPM should “stop this foolish childishness” and went so far as to agree with President Obama that the shutdown should never

have occurred (Foster, 2013a). Yet, the TPM continued to oppose calls for compromise from fellow Republicans.

At this point, some members of the conservative blogosphere began to distance themselves from Senator Cruz and the TPM. A blogger at Powerline, a popular right-wing blog, challenged Cruz's claim that he was representing the American people and condemned his tactics concerning the government shutdown (Johnson, 2013). Republican Representative Paul Ryan, a successful TPM candidate in 2010, did not support the shutdown (Bohan, 2013). Even Senator Mike Lee, a staunch Tea Party supporter, was originally against the shutdown and only joined at the eleventh hour (Rogers, 2013). In summary, Cruz and the Tea Party were characterized as uncooperative renegades by the establishment Republicans, instead of revolutionary patriots fighting for the rights of Americans.

Business leaders and economists also criticized the TPM's government shutdown, viewing it as catastrophic for the United States. Economics editor Peter Coy of Bloomberg News stated that: "The Tea Party is all too good at brinkmanship. The true believers are winning their battles in Washington. It's the rest of the country that continues to lose" (2013). Some economists even called the TPM's proposed policy reforms "impossible" and a potential catalyst of another economic recession (Shepherdson, 2013).

In this chapter, I argue that the rhetoric of the 2013 shutdown demonstrates that the TPM continued to develop in an entelechial symbolic trajectory. While establishment Republicans tried to compromise with their Democratic counterparts, TPM advocates viciously attacked the mainstream GOP for betraying the American people (Lauter, 2013). Tea Party members, such as Republican Senators Mike Lee and Ted Cruz, portrayed Obamacare as a threat to the very values of America and the future of the U.S. (Weinger, 2013). The TPM's narrative cast Obamacare as

a pivotal battle for the soul of America, in which the TPM was the only hope for the survival of liberty (Limbaugh, 2013a). In the aftermath of the 2013 shutdown, the TPM's rhetoric disregarded criticism entirely or reinterpreted criticism as a reinforcement of the movement's existing beliefs.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I explain how the 2011 debt crisis and the 2012 primary election strained the tenuous relationship between the GOP and the TPM, leading up to the 2013 shutdown. Second, I examine the TPM's rhetoric towards Obamacare, the Obama administration, and establishment Republicans during the shutdown and show how it continued to build on existing entelechial trends in the movement. Last, I discuss the aftermath of the 2013 shutdown and argue that the TPM's response continued to demonstrate an entelechial symbolic trajectory.

2011 Debt Crisis and 2012 General Election

The 2013 government shutdown was the product of a larger struggle between GOP leadership and the TPM that began in the 2010 Midterm election. In early 2010, David Brooks, a prominent Republican pundit, predicted that the movement would "be the ruin of the party, pulling it in an angry direction that suburban voters will not tolerate." (Brooks, 2010) Yet, Republicans were rewarded in 2010 with one their strongest electoral victories in recent history in part because of the TPM (Harris & MacAskill, 2010). Of those new Republicans elected, five of the six Senators and 39 of the 63 Representatives were backed by the TPM (*New York Times*, 2010). However, as 2011 progressed, the ties between the TPM and the GOP began to fray.

The 2011 Debt Crisis provided a significant test for the GOP and its relationship with the TPM. During the summer of 2011, Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner and Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell engaged in a series of negotiations with

President Obama and other members of the Democratic leadership concerning the U.S. debt ceiling (MacAskill, 2011). TPM representatives in the House and Senate, put pressure on GOP leadership to use the debt ceiling as a negotiation tool to force Democrats to make concessions on Obamacare and other issues (Cillizza & Blake, 2011). Speaker Boehner was forced to tuck between establishment Republicans, who feared a debt ceiling crisis would become a PR disaster for the party, and the TPM who threatened to split from the GOP (Latimer, 2011). Many TPM members did not believe that defaulting on America's debts would cause economic problems for the country and insisted that the GOP not compromise with Democrats (MacAskill, 2011). While the 2011 debt crisis was solved before the government missed the debt ceiling deadline, the event highlighted the growing rift between the GOP and TPM (Williams, 2010).

The difference of opinion between establishment Republicans and the TPM was further exacerbated due to Republican losses suffered in the 2012 election. Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney was distrusted by many TPM voters due to what they saw as moderate leanings and the perception that he had supported a healthcare plan as Governor of Massachusetts that was similar to Obamacare (Bai, 2012; Zeleny & Rutenberg, 2012). Romney's choice of Republican Representative Paul Ryan as a running mate was seen as an attempt to appease the conservative block within the Republican Party and the TPM (Zeleny & Rutenberg, 2012). Yet, many TPM members saw the ticket as firmly part of the Republican establishment and not representative of TPM values.

While Romney's loss can be attributed to a myriad of factors, his inability to juggle the demands of the conservative TPM and moderate voters proved to be a significant issue. During the Republican primaries, Romney took staunchly conservative positions on a variety of issues important to the TPM, positions contrary to his previous views, in order to emerge as the

presidential nominee for the party (Arkedis, 2012). When the first debates of the general election occurred, many voters were confused when Romney moved to the center on a number of key political issues. Independents, as well as TPM voters, were concerned with Romney's abrupt change in tone as the general election campaign continued. Conservative voters supported Romney, but his inconsistent political leanings were seen by some as a significant factor for his inability to resonate with moderate voters nationwide (Rogowsky, 2012). Establishment Republicans later cited Romney's loss in the 2012 election to President Obama as further evidence that the TPM had harmed the GOP's electoral chances (Cohen, 2012).

After the general election, the TPM was criticized by establishment Republicans who accused the movement of playing a role in the loss of seats in both the House and Senate. Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock, two Tea Party candidates for Senate who lost elections in Republican-leaning states, were cited by establishment Republicans as examples demonstrating the negative political impact of the TPM's "extremist" mindset to Republican electoral prospects (Rudin, 2013). Other Republicans argued that the TPM's ideology made it difficult for the GOP to attract support from the youth and minority voters in key swing districts (Harris, 2012). While the TPM helped strengthen the GOP in 2010, the 2012 election cycle showcased the negative effects of the GOP aligning itself with the TPM.

The end of 2012 was fraught with Republican infighting between establishment Republicans and the TPM. Establishment Republicans described the TPM as at a crossroads and said the movement needed to "grow up" (Cillizza, 2012). Mike Murphy, a GOP strategist, believed that "some kind of war" was on the horizon between the two groups (Gray, 2012). One anonymous Republican strategist explained: "What I worry about is that the fiscal cliff/debt ceiling negotiations become like TARP, which is what started this [brinksmanship]."

We get a deal that is good for the country, but our base goes crazy and it gets them all ginned up again" (Cillizza, 2012).

The 2011 debt ceiling crisis and 2012 general election set the stage for the TPM's revolt against Republican leadership in 2013. Tea Party leaders in Congress were encouraged by their perceived political success in 2011 to continue employing similar tactics and were infuriated with GOP leadership after the reelection of President Obama. The vilifying of the TPM by Republican leadership after the 2012 election further emboldened TPM representatives to use aggressive tactics to oppose the implementation of Obamacare in 2013. In the next section, I demonstrate how the TPM's portrayal of Obamacare, the Obama administration, establishment Republicans, and a perceived moral crisis facing America during the 2013 shutdown showcase the entelechial symbolic trajectory of the movement.

Obamacare and the 2013 Shutdown

Since its passage, TPM candidates described Obamacare as an attack on free markets, traditional American values, and the antithesis of small government principles (Micciche, 2011). Obamacare was a key issue in the 2012 election in both the presidential race, as well as the race for Congress (Klein, 2012). Jenny Martin, National Coordinator for the Tea Party Express, described Obamacare as "a cancer in our government" and promised that the TPM was "going to rip it out" ("Tea Party rallies in Washington against ObamaCare," 2012). With the defeat of Romney, many newly elected TPM representatives, such as freshmen Texas Senator Ted Cruz, turned their full attention to fulfilling their campaign promise by working to repeal Obamacare at all cost in 2013.

The TPM attacks on Obamacare, the Obama administration, Democrats, and establishment Republicans during the 2013 shutdown demonstrate an entelechial symbolic

trajectory. First, I look at how the TPM precluded any possibility for compromise by using an us versus them mentality to attack Obamacare and the Obama administration. Second, TPM advocates often argued that the stalemate in Congress was the fault of President Obama, and not the result of the movement, a viewpoint which ignored the movement's significant role in the shutdown.

Since its inception, the core of the TPM narrative focused on an impending threat to America and its values. As mentioned in previous chapters, a myth of return played a key part in the TPM's rhetoric, in order to create a sense of urgency via threats to American values. In 2013, that threat to American values was embodied in the TPM's rhetoric about Obamacare and the Obama administration. As one blogger explained: "At this moment in American history, no issue is more important than stopping Obamacare. Obamacare is destroying America. People are losing jobs, losing wages, paying more for insurance premiums, or losing coverage altogether.... Quite simply, Americans are living in fear of this law" (Fleming, 2013). TPM members saw Obamacare as a threat to every aspect of American life and the existence of America itself.

The sentiment that Obamacare represented a fundamental threat to the American dream was widely shared by TPM representatives in Congress. Republican Senator and Tea Party supporter Marco Rubio emphasized this point during Senator Cruz's filibuster against Obamacare, saying:

I think it is time we realize that one of the leading threats to the American dream is the policies that are being pursued at the federal level, policies that are undermining the free enterprise system. Here is why that is important--because the only economy, the only economic system in human history that rewards hard work, sacrifice, and merit is the American, free enterprise system.... That is the story of free enterprise. That is why it is

startling that over the last few decades, federal policies have contributed steadily to undermining the free enterprise system. (2013)

TPM members viewed Obamacare as a threat to the American dream and its associated values. Senator Cruz spoke in a similar tone when he claimed, “The greatest travesty of what is happening with Obamacare is a generation of young people are being denied a fair chance at the American dream” (2013).

For some TPM advocates, Obamacare represented more than a simple degradation of American traditions; it was a war against America itself. As one blogger explained:

Without rules, there is no order. Without order, there is chaos and crisis. When there is chaos, there is opportunity to direct newly-disordered people into whatever the controlling forces desire. In our constitutional history, nothing is more disordered than an American president who daily promotes chaos in open warfare against his own country's founding principles. (Brown, 2013)

As in prior years, the TPM emphatically attacked Democrats and moderate Republicans for supporting laws that in their view violated the Constitution. Obamacare was portrayed as an attack on the founding principles of America, such as limited government. The entelechial nature of these statements reflects an us versus them worldview, with those in support of Obamacare, undermining America and the TPM acting as the saviors of the American people and their values.

Another example of the entelechial extension that occurred during the 2013 shutdown can be seen when the TPM claimed that Obamacare would promote governmental tyranny and the disenfranchisement of average Americans. Senator Ted Cruz explained during his filibuster that drastic action was needed to confront the threats that Obamacare posed:

Yet, D.C. does not listen to them [Americans]. The Democrats in this body tell America: Obamacare is great. Obamacare is terrific. I am sorry you lost your healthcare, but Obamacare is terrific. The Republicans in this body, sadly more than a few of them, say: We will take lots and lots of symbolic votes against Obamacare, but there is nothing we can do. If every Republican senator stands together and votes no on cloture this Friday or Saturday, there is something we can do. We can stand and say: We are listening to the American people. This law is not working and people are suffering. (2013)

Cruz's comments again highlight the divide between establishment Republicans and the TPM. One TPM blog described the efforts of establishment Republicans to support cloture during the shutdown as, "classic Washington bait-and-switch," explaining that "The American people want strong, decisive action that will actually make a difference. Show votes are great for politicians; actual defunding is great for the rest of us" (Tea Party Patriots, 2013). Similarly, another TPM blogger stated that, "It is time the GOP Senators unequivocally stand shoulder to shoulder with their colleagues in the House and stand firm in the fight to protect the American people from Obamacare" (Martin, 2013).

The TPM also argued that establishment Republicans and the Obama administration had ignored the plight of hard-working Americans. Obamacare was portrayed as an elitist attempt to usurp rights from average Americans. As Senator Cruz explained:

If you are just a hard-working American, if you are just trying to provide for your family, if you are just trying to do an honest day's work, make your community better, raise your kids, set a good example, then the message this President has sent--and sadly the message the Senate has sent--is you don't count. We are going to treat everybody else better than you. Obamacare is against the will of the people. (2013)

In presenting this message, the TPM often used metaphors, analogies, and kitchen-table descriptions of average American life to associate their positions with daily life. As one TPM commentator explained in a discussion regarding the government shutdown, “If I have defaulted on my Visa and ask for an increase in my credit line, knowing I have absolutely no way to pay back my obligation...do you think my request will be honored?” (Galt, 2013). Members of the TPM relied heavily on their life experience as means to justify the need for a government shutdown to eliminate Obamacare. These statements further demonstrate the TPM’s reliance on the us versus them rhetoric as an extension of the movement’s entelechial symbolic trajectory. The TPM otherized not just those in support of Obamacare, but any Republicans or conservatives who didn’t support the movement’s all or nothing approach during the shutdown.

Obama and the Government Shutdown

The TPM often used the government shutdown’s effects on the American public to portray the Obama administration as elitist and fundamentally un-American. Multiple TPM members noted barricades put up in Washington D.C. due to the shutdown and compared them to the Berlin Wall:

While the fences keeping World War II vets out of the WWII Memorial and Vietnam War vets out of the Vietnam Memorial... are a very real tactic of deprivation by the Obama administration, the tactic also stands as a towering metaphor. In the last few days, some, echoing Ronald Reagan's words in Berlin, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" stood outside the WWII Memorial saying, "Mr. Obama, tear down this wall."...These walls which stand between Washington and Americans are Obamacare. (Mainwaring, 2013)

Another TPM blogger stated, “Now thousands of Americans are saying, ‘Mr. Obama, tear down these barricades.’ They have become a symbol of the dictatorial style that has emerged over the first term of the President and now demonstrate it for everyone to see in the first year of his second term” (Caruba, 2013). Others said the shutdown was needed to protect liberty itself from the Obama administration. Jeffrey Brown, a TPM blogger, claimed that, “No American president has acted so overtly to punish Americans for the impertinence of seeking order. No prior president has acted to deprive them of the exercise of the benefits of citizenship for which they have paid dearly to a government designed to serve the country rather than own it” (2013). The TPM viewed the negative effects of the shutdown as the result of a vindictive President disconnected from American and its citizens, not as a result of their own actions.

While the shutdown was caused by Tea Party, the movement’s advocates framed the shutdown as the result of President Obama’s intransigence. Senator Mike Lee stated:

The American people do not want Obamacare, and they are demanding that Washington act to protect them from the harmful effects of this unaffordable and unfair law. The president’s response has been to ignore them, allow the government to shut down, and then use his power to inflict as much pain as possible on the people by closing national parks and monuments, stopping payments to veterans, and cutting off cancer research.

(Lee, 2013)

TPM advocates saw the shutdown as an act of government coercion by President Obama. Rush Limbaugh similarly attacked the Obama administration’s actions during the shutdown when he stated, “What we’re dealing with here is just blatant, flat-out corruption, and it’s right out in the open” (Limbaugh, 2013b). Another TPM blogger described the administration’s actions as, “Clearly, this is blackmail. This is a naked shakedown” (Moseley, 2013). In one instance, a TPM

blog claimed that, “It was feared that the “shutdown” would be toxic to House Republicans. Instead, Obama is pushing a scorched earth campaign, designed solely to torment Americans into accepting runaway spending and unconstitutional authority” (Tea Party Patriots, 2013b). Solely blaming the Obama administration for the shutdown ignored the TPM's involvement in the actions preceding the shutdown, and also extended the us versus them entelechial trajectory of the movement.

Some TPM members described President Obama's actions during the shutdown as that of a tyrant. TPM blogger Michael Bargo (2013) explained, “This [shutdown] is a manifestation of President Obama's autocratic style of rule. He clearly does not feel any compulsion to obey the guidelines of the Constitution or the institution of the House.... President Obama is making his own choices and taking advantage of the Constitution's reliance on a president who has respect for the Constitution and the integrity to adhere to tradition.” Similarly, the supposed unconstitutional tactics of the administration were described as an attempt by Obama to divide the American people and pit them against one another. As one TPM member stated, “In progressive politics, in Radical Suit Theory, in the presidency of Barack Obama, the ancient concept of the scapegoat is turned from an act of purification and unification into a sordid political trick to divide one group from another. Ordinary Americans are already paying dearly for this. In the future they will pay more” (Chantrill, 2013). These comments reflect the movement's us versus them entelechial trajectory.

Entelechial symbolic trajectories often develop out of a myth of return concerning a crisis facing the nation. The TPM used a myth of return to highlight Obamacare as an example of an ongoing moral crisis facing America. Many TPM advocates claimed that American greatness was directly tied to its founding values and that Obamacare was antithetical to those values

(Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Zernike, 2010a). Senator Cruz explained:

Far better that we get back to our founding principles, far better that we get back to what has made America great, which is our free enterprise system--a robust, free enterprise system that encourages small businesses to grow and to prosper, that encourages people working a job as a janitor to work hard and get a promotion and climb that ladder, to pay their own rent, to pay for their own food for their kids, to work and to advance. Limited government (is) key to American dream; Obamacare destroys that. (2013)

The TPM believed that Obamacare eroded the greatness of the nation and threatened founding values. One TPM blogger stated, "Obamacare represents everything wrong with our bureaucratic, out-of-control government.... This is a direct assault on individual liberty and the Constitution" (Fleming, 2013). To TPM advocates, the shutdown was a fight for the values and very soul of America.

Liberalism was a common target of TPM advocates during the 2013 shutdown. Some argued that liberal policies degraded the country and put it at risk of collapse. As one blogger explained:

Why wouldn't liberals keep pushing their agenda? Why wouldn't they believe their policies could work? We make their irrational ideas work for them. We prove them right. Every time we open our doors in the morning and go to work on the day's business, no matter what the obstacle.... we make their policies rational. Every day, I press on with my small business and eight employees. If my cash flow shrinks... I work harder.... No liberal policy is rational. No liberal proposition ever makes logical sense. Yet, we press

on despite smaller margins, higher regulations, higher taxes and further vilification by the American Left. (Moore, 2013)

The TPM saw liberals as directly attacking American values. As another blogger stated, “Under decades of liberalism, America has fallen into decay. Obama's administration showcases the effects of unchecked liberalism better than any other, with things like the big powerful malevolent government, reverse discrimination, rampant poverty, and the list goes on” (Jackson, 2013). One TPM commenter accused President Obama and the Democrats working to actively destroy the nation, stating, “The Liberal/Marxist agenda is to teardown America and open it (and her people) to takeover-economically, socially, morally and politically. They will lie, accuse, demagogue and destroy any way they can to get what they want-total power & control” (Waterson, 2013). In a similar view, a TPM commenter argued that Obama and Democrats were Marxist traitors attempting to destroy America:

I suppose to someone like Reed, Obama, Pelosi and other MARXISTS, we TEA PARTY/American PATRIOTS are Anarchist's working to thwart their LIES, TREACHERY, SUBVERSION, and HIGH CRIMES against America, the American People and the Oath of office they took to DEFEND THIS NATION AND ITS CONSTITUTION! It really boils down to good vs evil, and it is EASY to see who is under SATAN'S INFLUENCE and DOING his works. (David, 2013)

TPM members often argued that the movement was all that stood against America's destruction at the hand of Democrats:

2014 is the window of opportunity which will never open again as our beloved country swoons into third world status of a banana republic if the progressive globalist agenda is not stopped. It is increasingly clear that the treasonous liberal Democrats of the Left will

not be stopped by the GOP. The TEA Party is the only political entity that can save America. (Rivers, 2013)

The entelechial and delusional nature of these comments illustrate how TPM rhetoric concerning Obamacare became increasingly divisive and allowed no room for compromise.

The statements I have cited also make clear that many TPM member's believed they represented "real" Americans. From the beginning of the movement's founding in 2009, TPM leaders spoke of an awakening of the silent American majority (Zernike, 2010a). The TPM portrayed progressives as a fringe minority, whose policies were illegitimate and anti-American. As Craig Andresen, a TPM blogger, explained:

We have allowed yes-men in government costumes to rob us of our very identity as Americans. The worst part is, we've asked for it. At times, we've even applauded it. But if it wasn't clear before, it is now: the system is killing us. This "reasonable, middle ground" between freedom and socialism isn't reasonable at all. We've allowed George Orwell's nightmare to come true....If the elected leaders aren't governing as limited-government classical liberals in the vein of our Founding Fathers, then what good are they doing? (2013)

TPM advocates argued that the government no longer served the people and threatened to destroy liberty. In a similar view, a TPM blog stated, "History has shown big spenders as the ones who have taken the country hostage, again and again, by threatening government service" (Tea Party Patriots, 2013c).

Some TPM members argued that the movement was being targeted by the Obama Administration because it represented the concerns of the American people. As one TPM commenter stated, "The current administration has not confronted the American people's

concerns; instead, it has bashed a faction of the Republican Party [Tea Party] who are standing up for the American people” (Heather, 2013). Another blogger described the efforts against the TPM as an attack on liberty itself, “Why must the Tea Party and patriots be destroyed? We are the only vestige of Liberty standing up to the complete implementation of tyranny. And based on the legislation passed to continue spending unabated, tyranny is winning” (DeGerolamo, 2013b). The TPM’s efforts were portrayed as the last hope for America against the threat posed by Democrats. Given this worldview, it is understandable that the TPM saw no ground for compromise on Obamacare. What is less clear is how the TPM could view the market oriented ACA and the pragmatic tendencies of the Obama administration as a threat to liberty. It was their entelechial perspective that led to this worldview.

The TPM attacked Democrats for their unwillingness to compromise on Obamacare. Republican Senator Rand Paul, explained during Senator Cruz’s filibuster that:

When the American people said they want dialog between Republicans and Democrats, how do we get there? We have to stand for what we believe in, so they will come and talk. Does it mean we are going to get 100 percent of what we want? No. But if we do not stand for what we believe, how will we have any dialog? How will we get to compromise? (2013)

In a similar statement, Senator Cruz (2013) claimed he was against the shutdown, remarking, “We should not shut down the government. We should fund every bit of the government, every aspect of the government, 100 percent of the government, except for Obamacare.” Obamacare was seen by the TPM as a clear violation of not only the Constitution, but the will of the American public. Any support of Obamacare was thus an attack on America values and indicative of a larger moral crisis that was afflicting the country. In this mindset, the only

reasonable action available to Democrats was to concede to the demands of the TPM, a view that illustrates the entelechial nature of Tea Party rhetoric.

On Oct. 17, the shutdown ended without affecting the rollout of Obamacare, resulting in a dire political situation for the GOP and TPM. Before the shutdown took place, many Republicans and TPM representatives agreed that it would not accomplish anything, which proved to be true (Fahrenthold & Zezima, 2016). Consequently, after the conclusion of the shutdown, public confidence in the GOP and TPM plunged to new lows (Balz & Clement, 2013). While the response of establishment Republicans' was to deflect blame for the political disaster towards the TPM, many members of the TPM did not see the shutdown as a failure. Instead, TPM advocates either called the shutdown a victory or downplayed the overall impact. In the next section, I discuss how the TPM justified the shutdown.

Rationalizing the Aftermath

Overwhelming evidence makes it clear that the TPM efforts during the 2013 shutdown undermined their credibility with the public. Yet, despite public opinion data demonstrating a major negative effect on attitudes about the TPM, the TPM framed the shutdown as a victory for the movement (Tumulty, 2013). As one blogger explained, the TPM perceived itself as successful because "a small faction of rational fiscal conservatives was able to scare the majority ruling elite in both houses of Congress and the White House until they trembled in fear" (Meckler, 2013). The entelechial nature of the statement is obvious.

Some TPM members saw poor polling numbers concerning the Tea Party as confirmation of their identity as Patriots on the frontlines of a new American revolution. As one blogger stated:

Here's a very important set of facts about the Revolutionary War that every person who would call themselves an American should know. During the Revolutionary War, only

THREE percent of the people actually fought against Great Britain. Only TEN percent of the citizens actively supported that three percent. Approximately TWENTY percent considered themselves to be on the side of the Revolution, but they did not actively participate....Three percent. That was all that was required to make the "great experiment" a reality. (DeGerolamo, 2013a)

In the view of many supporters, the TPM was the modern equivalent of the heroic patriots who fought in the Revolutionary War. Others also described the shutdown in relation to revolutionary times. One TPM blogger explained:

As I stated, we are in a war of two opposing ideas.... We, the Tea Party are the instruments of real change in D.C..... Patriots, I wish to send out a clarion call to stand strong in your commitment to preserving the freedoms we have left and restoring those we have lost. Also, it is vitally crucial that you remain loyal and defend our representatives Sarah Palin, Ted Cruz, and Mike Lee with every fiber of your being. Without their courageous voices championing our mission, the battle for America is easily lost. (Marcus, 2013)

The TPM described the conflict that led to the shutdown as a life and death struggle for America, in which the Tea Party embodied foundational American values.

TPM advocates also attempted to rationalize the polling data from the shutdown by claiming that it was inaccurate. One TPM advocate stated:

Most polls, at least, most polls that are publicly reported are full of sampling glitches, biases, "push" questions in which the wording suggests a favored response, straw-men questions in which one side's position is misrepresented, and other flaws.... For political reporters and commentators, polls are a crutch. They are discussed to fill the column-

inches or the time that ought to be used for reporting and analysis of the issues themselves. It's time to start giving polls the respect they deserve and not one ounce more. (Allen, 2013)

Using this reasoning, the importance of polling data was dismissed. Other TPM supporters attacked the media. One TPM blogger stated that "our liberties can be slowly undone by the Democrats and the media who continue to do a number on the American people" (Thunder, 2013). Many members of the TPM believed that the mainstream media was biased against the TPM (Wilson & Burack, 2012). As another TPM commenter explained, "The problem isn't the Tea Party[;] it's the liberal media and the Democrat cheats who suppressed the vote and allowed the idiots to continue shoving government garbage down our throats" (Terry, 2013).

Other TPM members dismissed the backlash from the shutdown as evidence that the American population had yet to wake up. In 2009, TPM advocates described themselves as the reawakening of the American public (Zernike, 2010a). In 2013, the aftermath of the shutdown was described as another wake-up call for Americans and Republicans. As one supporter explained:

How long will we stand for this? Will more Americans finally wake to the fact that our country is being stolen in broad daylight by a bureaucratic class we are paying to destroy us? Will we have the courage to address this with friends, neighbors and relatives who are part of this destructive army? Will the feckless Republican leadership recognize a winning issue when it stares them in the face? In reality, it doesn't matter if the first few questions to the government hirelings are ever answered. But if we don't answer the last few correctly, the grandest of all larcenies will continue, unabated. (Wright, 2013)

In this way, the shutdown was portrayed as a reminder of the threat to the republic and supported the view that the TPM must work that much harder to spread its message.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the TPM's rhetoric during and after the 2013 shutdown continued to developed in an entelechial trajectory. The TPM used the debate about Obamacare to reinforce its belief that the America government had disregarded the founding values of the nation. TPM members saw the shutdown as part of the defense of foundational values and against the perceived tyranny of the Obama administration. Additionally, the TPM continued to demonize Democrats and progressives to create an us versus them dichotomy. The TPM also defined establishment Republicans as Republicans In Name Only (RINO's) due to their willingness to compromise with the Obama administration.

In the aftermath of the shutdown, some mainstream conservatives distanced themselves from the Tea Party, but for many TPM members the shutdown reinforced their worldview. Leaders of the TPM even claimed that the shutdown was the start of a new revolution (DeGerolamo, 2013a; Marcus, 2013).

The 2013 government shutdown and the backlash against the TPM in its aftermath influenced the 2016 election cycle. The TPM did not collapse, but instead focused on defeating establishment Republicans and replacing them with their representatives. One result was to push the Republican Party towards more extreme positions. Paul Krugman observed after the defeat of Republican Majority Leader Eric Cantor by a Tea Party-backed primary challenger that, "what we're looking at is a party that will be even more extreme, even less interested in participating in normal governance, than it has been since 2008. An ugly political scene is about to get even uglier" (2014). In the final chapter, I discuss the overall findings of this project and argue that the

election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016, in some ways, represented the culmination of the TPM's symbolic development.

Chapter Five: Entelechy, the Tea Party, and the Donald Trump Presidency

At its inception in 2009, the Tea Party Movement (TPM) was branded as a small, some would say anti-government, grassroots movement that believed the Obama Administration was acting in a tyrannical fashion and had overstepped the Constitution (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Zernike, 2010a). Initially, Republican and Democratic pundits viewed the TPM as a response to the growing economic crisis and a populist movement. Critics claimed the movement's initial popularity was created by AstroTurf political organizations that used existing social anxiety due to the great recession and other cultural shifts to attack recently elected President Obama and other Democrats (Barreto et al., 2011; Smith, 2009). Regardless of the movement's origin, by 2010 the TPM had become a part of the American political landscape.

Pundits described the TPM as animated by Richard Hofstadter's paranoid style. Paul Krugman (2009) argued that the paranoia of the movement was dangerous, "The point is that the takeover of the Republican Party by the irrational right is no laughing matter. Something unprecedented is happening here and it's very bad for America." Some researchers on the TPM supported the claim that the movement showed the telltale signs of the paranoid style (Parker & Barreto, 2013). Others contended that the movement was more diverse and politically reasonable than had been portrayed by pundits (Skocpol & Williamson, 2013).

This project examined the rhetoric of the TPM over an extended time period in order to explain its continuing evolution as a movement and the rhetorical constellation of argumentation strategies it used. Using an inductive research method, rhetoric from TPM leaders, bloggers, commenters, and other movement sources was examined from the TPM's inception in 2009, through the 2010 midterm elections, and the 2013 government shutdown. These periods were chosen due to their importance to the TPM's development as a movement and their likelihood of showcasing changes in its rhetorical patterns.

In most cases, movements adopt different rhetorical patterns and characteristics over time to react to the changing political and social landscape (Griffin, 1984). Resistance to a movement's agenda would normally require its members to change their tactics to succeed. Yet this project found that many TPM leaders and members continued to employ similar strategies throughout the movement's development regardless of the political and public fallout that occurred.

Instead of adapting to the changing political environment, TPM rhetoric quickly became entelechialized and reminded so throughout 2009-2013. The movement relied on a myth of return, which portrayed America as being threatened with destruction if it did not return to its founding values (Beck, 2010b; Lee, 2013). Leaders of the movement used the financial crisis and Democratic political initiatives such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare, to claim that the US government no longer represented the American people (Andresen, 2013; Gold, 2013; Lord, 2013). Also, the TPM relied on an us versus them narrative and historical analogies, comparing contemporary conservatives to the patriots of the revolution (Epanminodas, 2010; Kane, 2009; C. M. Mascaro, Novak, & Goggins, 2012). Members of the movement were told any compromise with Democrats or establishment Republicans betrayed the founding values and documents of America.

While the TPM's defeat during the 2013 shutdown was initially seen as the beginning of the end for the movement, in actuality it was a foreshadowing of things to come. The defeat of establishment Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in 2014 by a Tea Party candidate was seen by many as evidence of the Republican Party's inability to control the movement (Costa et al., 2014; Krugman, 2014). In addition, critics have agreed that the TPM played an

important part in the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016 (Gervais & Morris, 2018; Jacobs, 2015;; Pew Research Center, 2019).

In this chapter, I first provide a summary of the project's finding concerning the entelechial characteristics of the TPM. Second, I discuss the implications of the TPM for U.S. politics, and the movement's role in Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Finally, I explain how this line of inquiry could be further developed in future projects.

Summary

Central to the findings of this study was examining the symbolic trajectory of the TPM from 2009 to 2013. Identifying a symbolic trajectory requires the critic to uncover where symbols originated, how they developed and gained popularity, or why believers discarded them over time (Griffin, 1984). Critics have used the concept of symbolic trajectory to explain how movements developed different rhetorical strategies, symbols, and narratives over time (Jones & Rowland, 2001).

The symbolic trajectory of a movement is particularly important when it is shaped by entelechy. The presence of a single entelechial statement does not necessarily mean that the movement has been entelechialized in its entirety (Jones & Rowland, 2001). To determine if a movement possesses an entelechial symbolic trajectory, a critic must examine the rhetoric of the movement over time to determine if it developed towards what Burke called the end of the line (K Burke, 1966). In this case, the TPM quickly became entelechialized and developed an anti-government perspective.

For example, while the founding of the TPM was initially tied to fiscal responsibility, this rhetoric was often combined into a larger narrative concerning the status of American citizens in modern society and the need to return to the values of the founders. Fiscal responsibility was

framed in terms such as everyday household budgeting and the federal government was described as following a different set of rules than average Americans (Adamo, 2009; Cruz, 2013; Galt, 2013; Palin, 2010). Essentially, fiscal responsibility was used as an example of Washington's increasing ignorance and disconnection with the values of the average American, reflecting the movement's fundamentally anti-government perspective.

The TPM's rhetoric concerning fiscal responsibility was combined with a myth of return narrative in which members of the TPM claimed that the nation's greatness was connected to a mythic foundation upon which society was based. By returning to its founding values, society could reclaim the former greatness. One part of the myth of return is the presence of an opposing force that threatens to destroy society. A powerful and "perfectly evil" villain can create a situation where members of the society fear for society's continued existence (Roy & Rowland, p.231, 2003). A weak villain would not inspire a society to reclaim its founding values; the struggle against strong opposition is central to motivating the society to overcome the crisis. Negotiating with such a villain becomes impossible as compromise would be seen as antithetical to the founding values.

In addition to having a powerful villain threatening society, a myth of return is based on a sense of loss. In the view of the TPM, the greatness of America had over time become lost due to the country rejecting its founding values. Members of the TPM routinely portrayed their cause as directly connected to the Revolutionary War and imagined themselves as modern-day revolutionaries fighting to restore traditional American values (Clemente, 2010b; DeGerolamo, 2013a; Farley, 2010b; Marcus, 2013).

The TPM described the Obama Administration's response to the 2009 Great Recession and Obamacare as proof the government no longer represented the will of the American people

(Brooks, 2009; Cruz, 2013; Darling, 2010; Lee, 2013; Reich, 2009). In addition, the TPM portrayed itself as the legitimate voice of the American people in a society whose government no longer represented the interests of the population (Andresen, 2013; Armev, 2009; Farley, 2010b; Marcus, 2013; Palin, 2010; Zernike, 2010a).

The end of the 2013 shutdown was initially seen as a turning point for the TPM. Establishment Republican Party leaders seemed to have awakened to the dangers of the Tea Party Movement's ideology-laden rhetoric. One reporter described the TPM's shutdown defeat as "Democracy is self-correcting" and claimed the TPM had self-destructed (Feldman, 2013). Another reporter explained the establishment Republican response to the TPM after the 2013 shutdown as, "establishment Republicans, corporate CEOs and Wall Street moguls stand appalled at the Tea Party monster they helped to create" (McLean, 2013). Elections in November of 2014 saw establishment Republicans endorsing center-leaning Republicans over TPM counterparts resulting in multiple defeats for the movement.

Despite the aftermath of the 2013 shutdown, the TPM did not exit American politics. In 2014, the TPM dealt establishment Republicans a significant blow when a TPM candidate defeated Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in a primary election (Costa et al., 2014). Paul Krugman described Cantor's defeat as proof that the TPM could not be reined in by establishment Republicans and as a sign that in 2016 the Republican Party, "will be even more extreme, even less interested in participating in normal governance, than it has been since 2008" (2014).

The TPM's rhetoric between 2009-2013 reveals that the movement followed an entelechial symbolic trajectory in which the ideology and rhetoric of the movement quickly became extremist and stayed there. While issues such as fiscal responsibility and small government

were part of the TPM's ideology, these topics were intertwined with a myth of return that made compromise with Democrats or establishment Republicans almost impossible. Also, members of the movement believed that the TPM represented the majority of Americans, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. Finally, the 2013 shutdown showed that a core constituency of the movement was unwilling to accept verifiable facts that contradicted the TPM's beliefs. Instead, criticism was simply ignored or dismissed as being biased. Terms such as Republican in name only (RINO) were popularized to describe those the TPM believed betrayed its cause either by compromising with Democrats or speaking out against the movement itself (Agee, 2013). The TPM became insulated and calcified around a myth of return and ignored observable data that went against their worldview (Balz & Clement, 2013). The incompatibility of the TPM worldview with mainstream leaders in both parties led the TPM to oppose compromise.

In the next section, I outline the implications of these findings. After which, I discuss a series of future projects connected to my research.

Implications

While the TPM's symbolic trajectory changed little over the period studied, there are three implications that can be drawn from its rhetorical consistency over time. First, the TPM's development suggests that public reason has little influence on movements with an entelechial worldview. When confronted with information contradicting their beliefs, members rejected observable data from non-partisan as well as conservative sources in favor of the TPM's worldview. It is important to note that members of the TPM are by no means uneducated, polling data suggests that on average a TPM member was more educated than the typical American and at least 26% of self-identified members had their bachelor degrees (Isquith & Parker, 2014;

Zernike & Thee-Brenan, 2010). The key point is that public reason had little influence on a worldview that was entelechialized.

The second implication of this study concerns how a movement maintains an entelechial worldview after the initial circumstances that created it no longer exist. Prior research concerning movements that manifested entelechial trajectories, suggested that “in normal times in a democratic society, ideologies are unlikely to be extended to the end of the line because at some point the public will view the symbolic extension as excessive and move in the opposite direction” (Jones & Rowland, p. 77, 2001). The initial rise of the TPM arguably was in response to the Great Recession and Obama’s election. However, in 2013 the TPM maintained its entelechial perspective despite the fact that the recession was over and the economic recovery well on its way (Weller & Ungar, 2013).

I suggest that the TPM maintained its entelechial perspective despite changing circumstances because of its supporting myth. The TPM’s initial rallying cry was not simply a message advocating fiscal responsibility and small government, but a narrative which argued that the crisis facing America was because of a turning away from its founding principles (Coker, 2017; Parker & Barreto, 2013). Its mythic underpinning helped the TPM maintain its ideology despite the changing political situation.

Finally, the rhetoric of the TPM between 2009-2013 laid the rhetorical foundation for Donald Trump’s presidential campaign in 2016. The TPM worldview was focused around a perceived loss of status and representation in the government on behalf of average Americans (Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013; Zernike, 2010a). Examination of TPM rhetoric made it clear that the movement relied on a myth of return narrative which portrayed the

Obama Administration, Democrats, and establishment Republicans as threats to modern America. This message was similar to the that of the Trump campaigns.

The slogan “Make America Great Again” is a clear example of how a myth of return used by the TPM became the center for Donald Trump’s campaign. The phrase reflects a worldview that believes that America has fallen from greatness, and its wording is emblematic of a myth of return narrative. The greatness being restored is the same as in the TPM’s view of returning to the founding values of America. Also, Trump’s slogan of “drain the swamp” was similar to the TPM’s view that those in power had become corrupt and were disenfranchising the voices of the American people. Unsurprisingly, polling data suggests that the TPM was one of the largest bases of support for Trump in 2016 and during his presidency (Gervais & Morris, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2019). While the hyperbolic and at times contradictory nature of Donald Trump’s rhetoric seemed shocking, this study provides insight for how Trump has maintained such a strong base of support.

Future Research

The rhetorical patterns of the TPM and the movement’s role in American politics suggest several potential areas for future research. The most obvious research area concerns the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency. Polling data, as well as qualitative research, has demonstrated that the TPM has essentially fused itself to the Trump administration (Pew Research Center, 2019). What remains to be examined is how the 2016 Trump campaign was able to bridge the gap between the TPM and Donald Trump during the Republican primaries and then the general election. For example, it would be important to examine why Senator Ted Cruz, one of the Tea Party leaders of the 2013 Shutdown, was unable to attract sufficient TPM voters during the Republican primary to win the nomination. Instead, TPM members chose Donald Trump, who

had once been a member of the Democratic party and a supporter of various well known Democratic politicians including the Clintons (Kurtzleben, 2015).

Research identifying the proto movement that led to the Tea Party also would be valuable. It is clear that by 2009 the ideology of the TPM already was calcified. It is not clear where the entelechial nature of the movement came from. Critics have pointed to the John Birch society, the campaign of Senator Barry Goldwater, and the efforts of some conservatives in the early 90s as forerunners of the TPM (Krugman, 2009; Parker & Barreto, 2013; Skocpol & Williamson, 2013). An examination of some of the original organizing forces of the TPM might shed light on the intellectual roots of the movement.

Finally, while the TPM's use of blogs and online forums for organizing members is not a new phenomenon, the extensive use of these forms of new communication systems by the TPM does present important area for future research. During my research, I often found that commenters would defame other posters or members by accusing them of being trolls when posting information contrary to movement positions. Even long-time contributors could be summarily removed from a group or website and ostracized for seemingly innocuous contributions. The ability of the TPM to essentially remove once well-known members while maintaining its larger rhetorical narrative is an important development that merits study.

Conclusion

This project examined the rhetorical development of the TPM to understand how the movement evolved from an initial message of fiscal responsibility and small government to one that rejected compromise with Democrats and establishment Republicans at all costs. By examining the rhetoric of TPM leaders and members in 2009, the 2010 midterm elections, and the 2013 government shutdown it became clear that the TPM quickly developed an entelechial

symbolic system. While fiscal responsibility was an important theme of the TPM, initially it was only a small part of a larger cultural narrative that claimed America was faced with an ongoing moral crisis that threatened its existence. In this worldview, compromise with the opposition became mutually exclusive with restoring America to its former greatness and avoiding its destruction.

Unchanging entelechial symbolic systems such as that of the TPM should be of concern to those who study political and social movements in democratic societies. Issues such as fiscal discipline and the proper size of a government are important, but the incorporation of such themes into an entelechialized symbol systems is worrying. Members of the TPM became calcified in their beliefs and were unwilling to acknowledge evidence-based appeals even from unbiased third-party sources. Compromise with opponents was considered unconscionable by the TPM, even if the consequence might be financial ruin (Coy, 2013). The support of TPM members for the Trump Administration's trillion dollar budget deficit highlights the seemingly contradictory nature of the movement and its willingness to discard issues that were once a key part of its identity (L. Mascaro, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019).

While the TPM as a movement has become seemingly integrated into President Donald Trump's political base, the 2020 presidential election will provide a chance to see potential development in the movement. A win for President Trump would likely do little to change what remains of the movement, but a defeat might spur revival of movement activities.

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